

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
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Hebrews 11 v 6

"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"

In the preceding chapter the Apostle tells us that "the just shall live by faith: but if any man", any professor of faith, professor of Christ, "draw back, My soul" says God, "shall have no pleasure in him". "Then went back many of His disciples and walked no more with Him". That is said of the disciples of Christ who, hearing Him preach spiritual things, saying "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you". They said "This is an hard saying, who can hear it?" that is, who can believe it? and they went back. "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him." To the Galatians the Apostle Paul says "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" and later in that same epistle he says to them "Ye did run well, who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world". Such scriptures are very solemn and set before us the painful truth, that many professors of Jesus Christ do not hold out to the end. They start well, grow quickly, make a great profession, a fair show in the flesh, but do not hold out to the end. If the tender fear of God is in us, it will move us to cry to God "Hold Thou us up and we shall be safe". "Leave us not neither forsake us". "Be not silent to us, lest if Thou be silent to us we become like them that go down into the pit". I think exercised people generally have two things before them. One is the day of their death and the other is, "Have we a title to heaven? Are we fit to die? Have we reason to believe that when we die we shall die in that way that is pronounced 'blessed' "? "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord". Some do draw back and in them God has no pleasure. Who here of any standing in grace, and having had acquaintance with, perhaps, a certain number of people, has not seen some draw back? It is very solemn. I have

witnessed this sad thing. It is a searching question. It penetrates at times deeply whether we, having professed Christ, shall hold out. It is a great matter to die well, but you must live well to die well. What is it to live well? To live a life of faith on the Son of God, such a life as is celebrated in this chapter in the remarkable instances given. They lived well, they lived in trouble, they triumphed over sin and the devil. They lived through persecution, they endured stoning. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins and dwelt in dens and caves of the earth, and some were sawn assunder. They lived well, they lived a life of faith on the Son of God and did not draw back unto perdition. There is an eternal blessedness revealed in Holy Scripture and there is an eternal perdition revealed in Holy Scripture and to one of these two places we are travelling. If we profess the Lord Jesus, it will be this, "He that endureth to the end the same shall be saved". And with many it will be "Lord, Lord, we have taught in Thy Name and in Thy Name done many wonderful works, and then He will profess unto them saying I never knew you". This faith the Apostle speaks of in the first verses of this chapter. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". Things spoken, revealed, given and received by faith, have a substance in the heart, a reality in the mind. This every believer has some knowledge of. The land of promise was a real place to Abraham when God said "Get thee from thy country and from thy father's house into a land which I will show thee". Isaac was a real child in Abraham's faith when the Lord said to him he should have a child. He believed the Lord and Isaac was real to him 20 years before he appeared. So faith in a child of God, when the Lord reveals something to him, that something has a substance in his conscience, his heart. His faith gets hold and he believes God. And it is evidence too, an evidence about which you could never argue with a worldly person. You stand on a particular ground and he stands on another ground and you have not a common ground on which to stand and argue. Tell him of spiritual things, tell him of Christ appearing to you, of the blood of atonement applied to you, of a promise given to you and you just speak a language of which he has no understanding. All you could say if you had a spiritual feeling at the moment would be, may the Lord give you what I humbly trust He has given me. This faith is a wonderful thing then, as bringing reality into the soul and giving an evidence of a thing not seen, a truth, yea of a Being, the Being of God. And this is wonderful and it leads one to say this to

you, in the form of a question, Has God ever been real to you? Have you ever, on the ground, not of human argument, not of human understanding, but on the ground of faith, said "I believe in God. To me He is real. I see Him in a way that I cannot describe, but He is real. I have evidence of this in a sense of power, a sense of attraction, a sense of repulsion, a sense of guilt, a sense of hope in the mercy of God. He is real to me and I have evidence." Look at this, fancy will leave us one day, imagination will cease in our brains one day, theories will die to us one day, forms and ceremonies will perish to us one day, then only reality will live, and that will be, while we live, by faith. By this faith the elders obtained a good report, a report not of their persecutor, but of God. He gave them a good report and we read it this morning. "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" If a child of God meets an evolutionist, the wisest thing for the child of God to do is to confront him with this Scripture. If you have faith just say this "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" and this was done by the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ, later incarnate. This is the best of all sciences, this is the ground and form and framework of everything. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God". If we believe this, the first and second chapters of Genesis, will occasionally have a singular beauty and form and conviction and weight to us. They are wonderful chapters, listen to them. God has written them, written them for our learning "that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope". "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh". What was the testimony that God gave to Abel? A testimony we may well put to our own conscience. This was it. The Lord accepted his sacrifice. Have you been accepted at the throne of grace? Have you felt in your consciences that you were accepted of God, when you mentioned the Person, the blood, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus? Have you gone to that throne, depressed, guilty, burdened, weak, troubled? Have you left it consoled, feeling a real hope that God had accepted you in the beloved? That is the testimony. Ten thousand tongues might sing your praises as a benevolent person, as living according to truth, and your soul might be lost. But if you get this testimony, this

witness in your own soul, though you might be persecuted, though the devil would show his hatred, though he would seek to ensnare you, and in some way destroy you, still this will stand, God testifying to this great truth, that Abel had faith, that that faith took blood to Almighty God, and that God accepted that blood, the sacrifice. Abel was accepted in that. If led by the Spirit, you will never go to the throne of grace without the blood of Christ as the language of your faith. It will be - Look on the sacrifice of Thy Son and accept me in that sacrifice. No fear of rejection when true faith makes that plea before God.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God." There were communications made to Enoch. We are told about his prophesying in the Epistle to Jude. Then the Apostle comes to make this great declaration for a text "But without faith", - therefore Enoch had faith - "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".

There are two or three very striking points in this text, and the first is the impossibility of any person pleasing God without faith, a striking word. Not able to please Him. The ground and reason of that is this, that man is a sinner. Sin is in us by imputation, is on us by our own personal transgression, and that being so, no man can give God any pleasure who goes to God on the ground of anything he may have done, no matter what it is. Sacrifice, giving all your goods to feed the poor, your body to be burned; if you have not faith God would not be pleased with what you did. He would no more accept the offering than he accepted the offering of Cain. That is very solemn, very searching, very dividing. What will not God accept me if I weep, offer my tears, if I repent of my sins, if I cut off wicked things, if I remove the excrescences of ungodliness in conduct, will He not be pleased with me? No! You will do all those things if you have faith, but doing them will not be pleasing to God as they are acts of your own. Think of the awfulness of God not being pleased with you. According to Scripture, as I read it, there is no middle way. Either acceptable to God or rejected by Him. Does it ever come to your heart

and mind, that God is displeased with some people, that He will not accept them, that He frowns on all they do because it is sin, and that unless they go to Him in another way, and another Name, with another plea, they never can give Him any pleasure, and never will He turn away from them His eternal displeasure? What a thing, the displeasure of God. An affectionate child is afflicted, if the parent for some reason, some wrong thing in the child, is displeased and shows his displeasure. A poor sinner can only be under the displeasure of God as he stands in himself, and I would just bring that to you, the awfulness, the terribleness, of God's displeasure, and the endlessness of it, if there be no sacrifice brought that is acceptable to God. The second thing that strikes one is this, that faith believes in the Being of God. My brethren this is the ground and the reason of worship, the Being of God. I cannot explain it, I do not know it, I do not understand it, no man can, and the Scripture tells us this in that great word of the Apostle to Timothy, concerning God, where he says "He dwelleth in the light that no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see." That light is to us a pavilion of darkness. The created eye of man can never look into that light, the infinite depths of God's being, the perfection of His being, the eternity of His being, the infinite wisdom, the immensity, the omnipotence, the omnipresence, the omniscience of God. We use terms which do not convey to us naturally any proper impression of that divine being. You may think about Him, but you will never understand Him. I think, at times about God. The best thing is to think by faith. The only correct way of thinking, the only good way of thinking, the only way that will bring us right before Him, is to think by faith. God give us the grace of faith to think of the Divine Being. But why? Because the only blessedness an immortal person can have and enjoy is in this God. The only remedy for sin was devised by this God, is revealed by this God, is made known to any person by this God. Therefore the first of all to a child of God is this Being. He must believe that God is. Now if "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" I may, with great propriety, press this question on you, as I would do it on myself, namely has God ever had, so to express it, a Being, a reality, in our hearts and consciences? Religion may very easily be without any realisation of, or belief in, the being of God. It is difficult for a man to express this truth, particularly difficult for

me, I have so little understanding, even so little faith. But it is here before us; we must believe that He is. Does not this give unbelief a peculiar malignity? Does it not make unbelief a peculiarly awful sin? If you can only please God by belief that He is, how you must displease Him when you doubt that He is, when you question Him, when you think there is nothing in Him to give you pleasure, when there is no attraction in Him to you, when there is no wish in you to know Him. How dreadful unbelief must be. O what a sin it must be in the sight of God. Unbeliever, the Lord convince you of your sin, and give you to find, to believe, that you have an immortality, an immortal soul, and one day your body will be immortally joined to your soul and then what? If you die in unbelief, you die having never given God any pleasure, you die having never given God any pleasure. And if you never give Him the pleasure that faith gives Him, He will give you a real understanding of His wrath. There will be a solemn infliction of His anger. May you be brought to think of this, consider your position, consider your immortality, consider your guilt, consider the way in which you live, consider that you have to die, and to stand before this awful Being. I do not wonder that Daniel speaks thus "the great and dreadful God" nor that Jacob felt about Him in that same way when awaking out of his dream and perceiving that God had been with him and was there - "How dreadful" said he "is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven". O religious person, possessing perhaps a light religion, it won't do! It won't stand you in good stead when you enter into eternity. This is the best thing and the only thing in the beginning that can usher you into the presence of God and give Him pleasure, namely a belief that He is. He is eternal, the eternal God. Eternity is what we cannot understand, but it is predicted of God, it is declared of Him "The eternal God". Omnipotence brought this world into being. He said "Let there be" and it was so. Infinite wisdom was concerned in creation. With omnipotence it brought forth everything in order and beauty. Omniscience belongs to God, is a necessary thing in Him. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see Him? saith the Lord." What an awful thing omniscience is, looking into your heart, into my heart, into our secret thoughts, thoughts we would never think of uttering to the nearest and dearest we have. These are naked and opened unto

His eyes. Omnipresence. You cannot run away from Him. Said the Psalmist it was too high for me to understand. If I go, flee from Thy presence, if I take the wings of the morning, Thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, Thy hand leads me there. If I say surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Omnipresence. O sinner, this God is around you, this God sees you. May you believe it. All your schemes, all your plans, all your thoughts, all your impatience of God, impatience of His providence, these things are naked and opened unto His eye. How many in this little congregation could say this morning, could protest to Almighty God, saying "I believe in God?" It is a great thing to say, a great profession to make. "I believe in God" A good Scotch minister said in preaching once that anyone in his congregation that could say that was a miracle, and I would repeat it, every person in this congregation who could rise in his spirit, and humbly, solemnly, protest to God that he believes in Him, every such person is a miracle, for unbelief is natural to us. Then one more word here, if you believe in God you give Him pleasure. If you cannot please Him without faith, then you can please Him with faith. Why does faith please Him? Because it gives Him the credit of being what He is, and I am disposed to say that that does please God, if you render to Him the glory due to His Name. If you render eternity to Him, it is rendering the glory due to His Name. If you render to Him the glory of His eternal love, then you give Him pleasure. If you render to Jesus Christ the glory due to Him as the only begotten Son of God incarnate, you give God pleasure. If you render to Christ the glory due to His righteousness, to His Name as the Lord our Righteousness, you give Him pleasure, and if you render to the glory of that fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, you give Him pleasure. Faith pleases God. This puts true religion on a very high plain. You say I want to know about my feelings. You have got right feelings, if you have got this faith, and they will come out some way, in some manner. The bottom is faith, the ground is faith, faith that secretly moves in your spirit, faith that protests against unbelief in your mind, faith that enables you to obey Paul when he says in this Epistle, "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God". You will be afraid of unbelief. Sometimes you will be as much afraid of unbelief as you are of the devil. It is such a devil in your mind, such an evil, such a plague, such a pollution, such

hardening of heart. You will be afraid of unbelief. O faith gives God pleasure. I would like, if I might be enabled to press this on you, because it will take you out of yourself at times. You will say, looking at yourself, I can never be pleasing to God. Looking at your thoughts, you will say I must be most obnoxious to Him. And if you have faith, it will say to you now go to Him. Do not try to cover these evils. Go and confess them to Him and plead the blood of Christ and He will take them away from you. Faith gives Him pleasure. When you read the Scriptures and faith gets hold of them as the very Word of God, then that faith pleases Him, for "He has magnified His Word above all His Name". O this blessed Book, I wish I loved it more. I wish I believed it more explicitly and I wish you all did. This blessed Bible. You will please God if you believe it. But faith may be weak. Do not try the nature of your faith by its strength. You will make many a mistake and false step if you do. If you try and test and seek to prove that you have got faith by its being strong, when you find it weak, what a stumbling it will be to you. But how am I to look at my faith? Look at it in its direction, its acting. Is its direction God? That is good. Are its directions Christ-ward? They are good. He may say to you one day "O thou of little faith", but then you will thank Him for acknowledging little faith. You will thank Him that he is not displeased with little faith. The Apostle has a beautiful word in the Galatians, O it was useful to me many years ago - "Against such" he says speaking of the graces of the Spirit, among which you will find faith, "against such" he says "there is no law" Now there is a law against a bad thought, there is a law to kill you for any lust and pride and covetousness and evil, and murder, but if you have got a little faith, a little hope, and love, there is no law against that. 'Tis a beautiful word. O it was like a sun to me "Against such there is no law". I say again, look at your faith in its object, its direction. What would your faith be, what would you do if you could? "I'd clasp Him", says a sinner, "in my arms, the Antedote of death". "Must believe that He is." O bless God if we are made believers. O bless God if we are made miracles, miracles of saving grace, giving this great grace to us, faith. See how it was tried and failed in Peter as to its acting but not as to its being. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not". But as to its motions towards Christ, well it suddenly stopped. But then the prayer of Christ prevailed and a look, given to Peter, by an injured Saviour brought faith back again

in its acting, and he went out and wept bitterly and that is what you do as you are led. As you are left to sin, and as you are led by grace, faith will always come to the top. "Must believe that He is". Then hang here dear friends, look at this, build here, wait here, hope here, believing that there is a God in heaven. I thought of saying a word about the manner of the subsistence of God in the Trinity. This is revealed. It is one of the things revealed, not a secret thing. We may not understand many of the revealed things, but revealed things belong to us. Secret things, that is things not revealed, we are not to pry into, but the Trinity is revealed, not for our understanding; the man that professes to understand the Trinity knows nothing about it. He who understands God is God, but a believer in God, a sinner, a believer in God, will believe in the revelation of God in Three Persons, bearing three essential, beautiful Names, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. These Three are One. O what a mercy that God has been pleased to reveal this mystery and what a mercy that He has been pleased to give some people faith to receive this mystery. Begin to reason about the relationships in the Trinity and you begin to doubt them and end in denying them. If you have faith to believe them and say now there is no analogy, though it is used, there is no direct analogy between a father and a son in this life and the relation of Father and Son in eternal relationship. The terms are used but when you come strictly to look into them, you will find you have to leave off, you have to give it up, and I believe it is here where numbers of men have stumbled, when they have tried to reason about it, and because naturally a father is prior to a son, therefore they have denied the sonship of Christ. I only name this; it is for faith not for reason. This is a comfort if we can receive it, namely that from the days of the Apostles, not to go back to the Old Testament - you will find the same truth there - but go back to the days of the Apostles, and come along the history of the Church of God to this day, and you will find that all the people of God have received and held this mystery, the substance of Three Persons in the Trinity, the Father the Son and the Holy Ghost and these Three are One in nature. Hold that, One in nature. "Must believe that He is". Trinitarians! O what a mercy it is to be a Trinitarian! Really to hold fast this great, this grand, this mysterious truth! "There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost and these Three are One". And as in nature, One, so in purpose and working.

These Three are One in purpose, which you have singularly, beautifully expressed in the 1st of the Ephesians. "The purpose of His grace" What a purpose! "The good pleasure of His will" What a will! And to believe this is very well. "Must believe that He is". O has God helped us, taught us, enabled us constrained us to believe in this? What a favour to have in your soul a persuasion that what the Spirit caused the Apostle Paul to write, indeed from Genesis to Revelation, is just true.

Never reason more about it
Only take Him at His Word

Here is a sea of glass my friends. Can you stand upon it? It is revealed in the Revelation that some stand on the sea of glass. May we stand on it. I believe in God Almighty. What numbers say it today in their rounds of service but a favour if we can say, I believe in God the Father Almighty, I believe in God the Son, I believe in God the Holy Ghost. And, as I have said, One in nature, so One in purpose and One in working. Now in working, what did the Father do? Sent His Son. "Herein is the love of God manifested toward us in that He sent His Only Begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him". Did you ever, as it were, by faith see the eternal Son of God coming from the bosom of the Father and remaining there always to declare His Name? "In the fulness of time God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" What was the Son's work? What did He do? O said He, as it is recorded in the Psalms "Lo I come, in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will O My God". And what did that mean, but that He went to the very end of the law in all its requirements, and met it, that He laid down His life by divine commandment. "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life. I have power to lay it down of Myself and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father". He died willingly; lovingly He died. Died vicariously, so that His death affects all given to Him to save. Now what did the Holy Ghost do? He prepared the ^{body} ~~human nature~~ was born of the virgin Mary by the mighty overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, as Luke informs us, and that Divine Spirit filled the ^{body} ~~human nature~~ of Christ without measure, and that same Holy Ghost works today in the hearts of the election of grace, giving them life

from Christ, working the work of faith with power in them that the Name of the Lord Jesus shall be glorified in them, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now dear friends, this is to be believed. "Must believe that He is", that He is in the particulars I have just hinted at. I do not pretend to have dealt with them, other than giving hints. Who can do much more? Living tongues are dumb at best here. To speak of an eternal Being, is all but impossible to a poor man, and yet this Being is believed. His Being is believed. In the way in which He has revealed Himself, He is believed. In the things He has spoken, He is believed. In the things He has done, He is believed. In the things that shall be hereafter which He has revealed in Holy Scripture and which the Spirit takes and shows to sinners, in those things also He is believed.

There follows the third particular on which I cannot now enter, namely that "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" This I must leave for the moment. Now look just at this point. Have you got faith? God grant there may be a good answer to the question.

AMEN.