

## The Biblical Definition of Faith

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Tuesday, 31 March 2015 15:50

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

Hebrews 11:1 is probably the most concise definition of faith found in the Bible. It is considered the classical definition of faith. Faith is both the substance of things hoped for and the evidence that things exist that are not yet perceived with the senses.

### 1. Faith Is Substance

The New Testament was written in *Koinē*;[common] Greek. The Greek word translated "substance" in Hebrews 11:1 is *hupostasis*, literally, "that which stands under." The derived meaning is "that which has real existence, the basic essence, the actual reality, the substance of something" [Hobart E. Freeman, ThD, *Faith* (Claypool, IN: Faith Publications, n.d.), p. 3]. It is a condition of the human heart that is as real to God as the thing we asked for will be to us when we receive it. It is the exact image of the thing for which we ask (*hupostasis* is translated "image" in Hebrews 1:3). When we receive what we have prayed for the image is replaced by the actuality

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### 2. Faith Is Evidence

The Greek word translated "evidence" is *elegchos*, which basically means "conviction." John writes,

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him,  
1 John 5:14-15, KJV

The existence of the God-kind of faith in the human heart is the evidence that what we have prayed for exists. Faith, based on the Word of God, is the evidence—not what we see or don't

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see—not good or bad circumstances. Faith is not based on human feeling but rather it is based squarely on the fact of what God says. The evidence is not found in the feeling, rational, visible or sense realm.

### 3. What Faith Is Not

*Faith is not mere human hope.* Faith is based on the Word of God alone. Human hope may be based on the sands of wishful thinking or human desire, rather than on the rock of the Word of God. Doubt and hope raise the question, "What shall I do?" Faith says, "I have done!" The common phrase, "I am hoping and praying" is incorrect. "I have prayed and am believing" is more scriptural.

*Faith is not natural human faith.* In order to function in life, we must exercise a natural faith. We have faith in natural laws such as gravity and inertia and assume that they will work the same every day. If the universe were unpredictable and untrustworthy, chaos would reign and life as we know it would be impossible. We trust inanimate machines. By turning an ignition key, flipping on a light switch, boarding an aircraft, we exercise faith in machines. We trust vegetables and animals—we assume they will perform according to our past experience. We trust other human beings. We trust our surgeon, our spouse, our pilot, etc. However, *faith in God is supernatural—a gift from God*. We will examine the nature of faith in God in the next chapter.

*Faith is not mental assent.* John Wesley warned in his time that there was a dangerous substitute for faith that he called "mental assent." He was caught in this dangerous trap and only escaped after failing as a missionary in America. Faith is of the heart (human spirit) and not merely the head (human reason). Simply agreeing that God exists and that his Word (the Bible) is true is not Biblical faith. James states that demons believe in this manner and tremble in fear of judgment:

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.  
James 2:19, KJV

*Faith is not a psychological attitude.* Mere positive thinking may have some good results, but it is not Biblical faith.

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*Faith is not sight.* Faith is not based on mere sensory perception or human reasoning. Paul says,

We live by faith, not by sight  
2 Corinthians 5:7, NIV

### 4. Attributes of Faith

*Faith thanks God beforehand.* If a husband tells his wife that he has placed a hundred dollar bill in her purse for her birthday, she thanks him immediately. Why? Because she trusts him. She knows it is hers before she sees it. Jesus says,

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Mark 11:24, NIV

God does not answer biblical prayer with "No" or with substitutes. Paul says,

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are `Yes' in Christ. ....

2 Corinthians 1:20, NIV

*Faith will endure to the end.* Abraham waited 25 years for Isaac to be born. Caleb waited 40 years for his land. Noah waited 120 years for his physical salvation. Faith does not look at the calendar, but to Christ. Hope may last a few minutes or a few months. Faith will endure until it is replaced by the thing for which we are believing. D. L. Moody said,

Faith that fizzles out at the finish, had a flaw in it from the first.

**Conclusion:** Dr. Freeman concludes:

Faith is not hope. Faith is the means by which we receive those things we hope for. Neither is faith sight. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. Faith can only operate in the realm of the invisible concerning those things we hope for and do not yet see. Faith cannot exist in the visible realm. When the things we hope for are manifested to our sight, then faith, the invisible "substance," having done its work, is supplanted by the visible substance, that is, the things we hope for. When the actuality comes into view, then the image (faith) vanishes.

Hobart E. Freeman, *Faith*, p. 4

Biblical faith is an absolute requirement for answered prayer. The writer of Hebrews states,

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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.

Hebrews 11:6, KJV

Notice that one must believe that God exists and that he rewards—answers prayer and helps—those who ask. How do we receive this type of faith? Let us now go to Chapter 2.

Chapter 1, of my eBook, *How to Get Your Prayers Answered*.

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