

HOW TO HAVE FAITH

by Randall Price

People tell us to have faith, but what is faith? How do you know if you have it? Will it do what you hope it will do? What is faith? We live by it everyday without even thinking about it. You got up today believing that your clothes would be in your closet, that breakfast would be served in the cafeteria, and that there would be a speaker here this morning. You did all of this up till this moment without questioning any of it. Yet, someone could have stolen your clothes, the cafeteria could have burned down, and I might not have shown up. Thieves, fires, and no-shows happen every day - they just don't happen to us. You also take risks when you exercise this faith without thinking. For example, you go to doctors whose names you may not even know, receive prescriptions you can't read, take it to pharmacists you've never seen, and take the medicine he gives you without understanding what's in it. You do all of this without examining the credentials of the doctor, questioning the validity of the prescription or the accuracy of the pharmacist or investigating the effects of the medicine. You could be killing yourself, but you never think about it twice! You simply trust that things are as they should be, and this is the experience of faith. But the kind of faith we use every day is not sufficient when it comes to the big decisions of life. Take buying a car for instance. I know a girl who went to a dealers to buy a used car. When asked what kind she wanted she replied, "yellow." They brought her a yellow car and asked her if she wanted to test drive it and she said, no, I trust you. Not many of us would buy a car that way! What college you go to, what career you pursue, who you will marry - these are not things that you blindly accept - you study the benefits of each college, you study toward a career, and you think long and hard about the person with whom you hope to share the rest of your life. One of the most important decisions we will ever make will be where and with whom we will spend eternity. Yet, many people never question their faith or that in which they trust. However, if we are going to make spiritual decisions - life or death decisions - that count for both time and eternity we should be sure we understand what kind of faith God accepts.

When we look at the meaning of faith in the Bible we find that the word in the Old Testament is a word we already know. The Hebrew word found there is "amen," the word we use to usually end our prayers. It has the idea of "so be it," but the basic idea is "to establish" or "make firm." For this reason it is used in the Bible of pillars that support buildings. Without such support everything would fall down around our heads! The New Testament takes this word and gives a definition of faith. In Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." If something can be assured it is because something is there to be assured. So, faith is first of all an understanding that that in which we have faith is real and not an illusion, a dream, a trick. This is why throughout the New Testament the writers challenged people to first examine the evidence of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. Luke, one of the Gospel writers said at the beginning of his book: "... having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order ... so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught" (Lk. 1:3-4). Does you confirm the reality of the things you believe before you believe or is your faith like that of the little boy who was once asked what faith was on a television program and said: "Its believing something you know isn't so!" No, real faith is faith in real things - it understands that what Jesus Christ came and did was a historical fact, not fiction. But biblical faith is more than this. We see this again in our passage in Hebrews 11:1 in the words "the *conviction* of things not seen." The word "conviction" literally means "to stand under." Faith is not trying to create reality, but an assurance that rests securely in that in which it hopes. It is a conviction that the historical facts of faith are not just true in the same mundane way as the American or Texas history you have to learn in school, but truth that God has revealed for a purpose - the by which we can know Him personally.

But real faith is still something more. It is not just knowing, even being convinced, that something is true, but accepting it as true for you. Not true for the church, not true for a preacher, not true for your parents, not true for your friend, but true for YOU. Let me illustrate. There was once a famous daredevil named Blondin who regularly thrilled audiences by walking a tightrope stretched across Niagra Falls with a man riding on his shoulders. One day just as he was about to start across, he asked a man in the audience if he believed that he could do it. "Yes," the man replied you can do it! He then asked him if he were sure that he could do it. "Yes, I'm really sure that you can do it!" "Good," said Blondin, "because my regular man isn't here today and I need you to ride over on my shoulders." Now the man was faced with the real issue of faith - he had said that he had believed, but was he willing to stake his life on it? You see, faith is not faith until its all you're holding onto. Do you remember when you were a little kid and your father or mother was teaching you to swim. The first step was to get you into the water. I can remember going through this with my own kids. I would get in the water and hold out my arms and say "jump!" Although my kids were at first afraid, soon trust in me replaced that fear and they jumped, believing that I would catch them.

This brings us to the final question of faith - the object of faith itself. Our faith is only as good as that in which it is placed. That is why we must make sure that our faith is in something that can do for us what it promises to do. No matter how much you may trust your parents, your religion, your church, your rabbis, priests or preachers; you know and I know that you cannot trust them to give you eternal life when you die. They may be able to help you here in life, but they can't help you afterward, for they too must die. The problem is not that they don't want to, the problem is that they have no power. The only One who can do that is God Himself, who came here as a man to die in our place and pay the penalty for our sins. He proved He has the power to give us life beyond death because He Himself conquered death and lives forever. He did what He promised he would do, and now He can do for you what he promised He will do - give you eternal life if you believe. But some may say, I don't know if I can do that, my faith is not strong enough. Let me answer that by a little story. A young boy had waited for the first big freeze of winter so he could get back to the practice of ice-skating. Now that the big one had come, he ran down the snow-covered slopes and to the lake glistening with a newly-formed layer of ice. Confidently he ran out on the ice, but only a few feet out the ice cracked and he fell in up to his waist. What went wrong? He had really believed that the ice would hold him. The problem, of course, was not with his faith, but with the object of his faith - it was not firm enough to hold him. After a couple of more freezes he returned to the lake at the instance of friends. But because of his previous experience he was afraid to trust himself to the lake again. Yet, he reluctantly ventured out again, nervous and trembling as he went, but do you know what?; despite his faltering faith the ice held up firm. You see, it is not the strength of our faith that matters, but the strength of that in which we place our faith. A weak faith may receive a strong Savior, for salvation does not depend on our power but His!

Let me put this all together for you. If I take this chair and ask you if it will hold me up what will you say? I can study this chair and know that it is solid and strong. I can watch other people sit in it and come to the conviction that it is able to hold me up. But it will never hold me up until I do what? Until I sit in it. Even if I am not so sure, but I still take a seat and it is a strong chair, it will hold me up. Now let me ask you the all important question. Have you set your life in Jesus Christ to hold you up forever? You can understand what to do by taking each letter of the word faith and remembering this phrase **F**orsaking **A**ll **I** Take **H**im. That is what you must do. Forsake every other thing in which you have put your trust and trust only in Him. Faith in Christ is not faith, until He's all your holding onto, but He is able to hold you forever and never let you go all the way through eternity. Let us pray.