

Faith

A biblical view



Dirk Hiemstra

Bible translation:

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in this publication are taken from the King James Version.

Any emphasis in the Bible text is my own addition, obviously.

Preface

The most quoted verse from the Bible is **John 3:16**:

¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Over the years, I struggled with the concept of FAITH, which is set as a condition in this verse. Through studying the Bible, I slowly but surely developed an understanding of what faith should mean from a biblical perspective. This book is intended to share the outcome of this study with anyone who wishes to benefit from it. It is also intended to encourage us to take a look into a mirror and consider whether we have TRUE FAITH as defined in the Bible.

It took many hours to get everything down on paper. I wrote and rewrote as necessary, and sometimes had to take a break, because writing a book takes a lot of energy. With the help of my dear wife, I went through the spelling and sentence structure once more so that I knew not only what I had written, but also that someone else had read it to check whether she understood it and whether the message came across.

Thanks to my dear wife for constantly reading, providing feedback and making corrections to my writing.

Above all, thanks to God. I am convinced that He helped me through His Spirit to get it all down on paper correctly.

Dirk Hiemstra

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Introduction

Habakkuk 2:4

*Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: **but the just shall live by his faith.***

Ever since Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the monastery chapel in Wittenberg, the foundation upon which the gospel has been built in Protestant circles is **faith**. For centuries, the Church of Rome and its leadership, the pope and the bishops, dominated most of Christianity. During this period, a theology based on works emerged, particularly those works prescribed by the Church. According to this theology, forgiveness and reconciliation could be received by performing these works. The prevailing concept of grace became linked to prescribed ceremonies such as the Eucharist, sacraments and confession. On this basis, the Church and its pope, as Christ's representative, appropriated the authority to grant absolution. By the time of Luther, the Church had even allowed people to purchase their way out of the so-called 'purgatory' with money with the so-called 'indulgences', shortening or even completely eliminating the time spent there, for themselves or even for family members. Luther, who was a theologian, discovered that this latter practice, in particular, was not consistent with what he found in the Bible. One of the verses he cited was from Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

*¹⁷For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, **The just shall live by faith.***

(Romans 1:17)

This became one of the key verses on which various Protestant movements relied during the Reformation, and it also formed the basis for later movements such as the Baptists, Evangelicals and

Pentecostals. In opposition to the large Roman Catholic stronghold, which continued to maintain a theology based on works, these various Protestant movements adopted a theology based on faith.

According to this theology, in order to be justified, it is no longer necessary to perform the prescribed works of the church, as it is assumed that faith in the sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient for salvation. One frequently quoted text is from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians:

*For by grace are ye saved **through faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **not of works**, lest any man should boast.*
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

In this particular passage, works and faith appear to be presented as opposites, with one seemingly excluding the other.

The question that has preoccupied me for years is: what is faith? Does believing that Jesus died on the cross for my sins mean that I am saved? Does it mean that, because faith is not based on works, I can sit back for the rest of my life and nothing more needs to be added? If I accepted Jesus at a certain point in my life, does that mean I can never be lost again, regardless of how I live my life? Or, as is the case in many Reformed churches, do I only need to answer “yes” to the questions asked when I profess my faith? Is professing a “choice for Jesus” really enough?

How likely is it that we are underestimating the importance of this issue, and that our understanding of faith does not align with biblical teachings? If that is the case, does it mean that we are wrongly assuming that we are saved? What about Jesus' statement in Matthew 10?

... but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.
(Matthew 10:22^b)

Does enduring until the end fall within the biblical concept of faith?

The best way to answer this question is to consult the Bible to see how it deals with the subject, and reflect on the text. It is of the utmost importance that we do this with an open heart and not only look at verses that confirm our ideas, but also dare to consider those that seem to tell a different story. Over the years, I have discovered that the truth lies in the interconnection between the various passages and that relying on individual verses can sometimes be very dangerous, because it can lead us to wrong conclusions, deceive, as it were. Therefore, I intend to consider the various angles as broadly as necessary, bringing them into harmony with each other to obtain a clear picture of what the Bible means by the concept of 'faith'. The connection between the Old and New Testaments is very important here, as are the connections and differences between the statements of Jesus and those of Paul and the other apostles. Ultimately, the Bible tells one story, and it is up to us to uncover it.

I want to challenge you to join me on my journey. You may face challenges unlike anything you have encountered before, and the easiest thing would be to close this book and stop reading. Paul challenges the Christians in the church of Corinth to examine themselves:

*Examine yourselves, **whether ye be in the faith**; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*
(2 Corinthians 13:5)

In our case, is it perhaps necessary to take this challenge seriously, to prevent us from, so to speak, 'going to hell in pursuit of an imagined heaven'? Are we deceiving ourselves, with all the consequences that entails? We must tackle this challenge with humility and prayer, and dare to look at ourselves honestly.

Definition

Next, we must look for Bible passages that define faith. Therefore, we must look for passages that begin with 'faith is'. One important example of this can be found in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

*Now **faith is** the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen
(Hebrews 11:1)*

In Hebrews 11 and the surrounding passages, an explanation of faith is provided and illustrated with examples from biblical history. Later in this book, we will examine the various aspects indicated here in detail to determine what faith is, how it can be applied in our daily lives, and what it ultimately achieves. Firstly, we will focus on the verse in question, as it has the character of a definition. Incidentally, it is the only verse I have found in the Bible so far with this quality; otherwise, we have to rely on examples and illustrations.

First, we will conduct a word-for-word analysis of this verse. It begins with the word 'faith', representing the subject of the passage; this is what it is about when we continue reading.

The next word to look at is the word “now” in the beginning of the sentence which can also be rendered as “so, therefore or moreover. “Now Faith is. . .” then becomes “so faith is,” with the word “so” connecting this verse to what precedes it. This definition does not stand on itself, but is presented within a broader context, which is indicated in earlier passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Earlier in the epistle, it is about what faith entails, here it is about what faith **is**, and these matters are therefore linked.

So, next up is the word "is". I have often heard people say, 'I believe,' but we must test such a statement against the criterion indicated in

the text — namely, what true biblical faith 'is'. Because, if it differs from what is stated in this particular text, we may doubt whether the statement accurately reflects the person's thoughts and actions.

The next word is 'substance'. To understand this, we need to dig a little deeper. In Greek, it is written as 'υπόστασις (hupostasis)' ¹. In Albert Barnes' commentary², I came across the following phrase concerning this word:

The word properly means "that which is placed under" (Germ. Unterstellen); then "ground, basis, foundation, support." Then it means also "reality, substance, existence," in contradistinction from what is unreal, imaginary, or deceptive (täuschung). ³

'Faith' is therefore the foundation upon which everything else is built. The word 'substance' alone does not fully capture its meaning, other translations translate it as 'assurance'. It is not, as we tend to

¹ G5287: ὑπόστασις (hupostase)

Thayer Definition:

- 1) a setting or placing under
 - 1a) thing put under, substructure, foundation
- 2) that which has foundation, is firm
 - 2a) that which has actual existence
 - 2a1) a substance, real being
 - 2b) the substantial quality, nature, of a person or thing
 - 2c) the steadfastness of mind, firmness, courage, resolution
- 2c1) confidence, firm trust, assurance

Part of Speech: noun feminine

² **Albert Barnes** (December 1, 1798 – December 24, 1870) was an American theologian, clergyman, abolitionist, temperance advocate, and author. Barnes is best known for his extensive Bible commentary and notes on the Old and New Testaments, published in a total of 14 volumes in the 1830s.

³ <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/bnb.html>