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Being Approved

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 1 Kings 8:54-66; Hebrews 10:38; 11:2,5,39.

A little word about being approved. You see that these passages all bear upon that matter. The object which is in view, as you notice at the end of Hebrews 10, is that the Lord should have pleasure in us. The opposite is said of those who shrink back: "*My soul shall have no pleasure in him*"; so that what is here is the Lord's pleasure, the pleasure of the Lord, and that is very largely a key note through this whole letter. It would not do for me to say, 'the key note' because I have given you already a dozen 'key notes' to the letter to the Hebrews, but this is undoubtedly a key to the letter: the Lord's good pleasure in His own, and that which issues in His having pleasure in them. The object in view is in all that the Lord may be well pleased, that the Lord may approve, and in a sense Hebrews 11 gathers up the whole of the letter under that one thought.

You see, these Hebrew Christians were being urged all the way along by the apostle to go on, not to go back, not to stand still, but to go on, ever on to full growth. Full growth is God's object, and full growth is His satisfaction and that which causes His soul to take pleasure, and so Hebrews 11 gathers up all that and shows how all these saints of old time went on.

We just read the fragments in order to show the activity of faith. Faith was in action; faith was reaching out and reaching on, was always a faith in motion; faith expressed itself in some very definite form. Faith always has an object in view which it was straining to reach. In all their various ways and experiences there was nothing merely quiescent, inactive, passive about their faith. It was an active faith with an object in view. That is Hebrews 11, and then you notice that all that brings them to the place of divine approval. These had witness borne and that witness was the witness of divine approval. Enoch had witness borne that he was well pleasing to God through his faith. The

witness was God's good pleasure. They all had witness borne, and after all, that is the goal, that is the object. It does not say for one moment that in their lifetime they reached the end which they were seeking, it says on the contrary they did not. They did not come to the place upon which their hearts were set, they fell short of that. The letter as good as says that in the case of many of them, so far as time was concerned, generations had to pass before they reached the end of their faith. You think of the distance between Abel and the New Testament saints, and it says: "*And these all having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect*". They could not reach that end until we came in and they come into their fulness when we come in, and so there was all that time and he had to die with that space between his reaching out and his realisation, but the point was that he had become approved of God by the attitude and action of his faith. That is what God approves, not our success, but the earnestness of our faith, that God approves.

The apostle to Timothy wrote words which are as familiar as any: "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth*", literally, "cutting a straight line with the Word of God". That is the literal of the translation "rightly dividing". I put it like that because some people interpret that as meaning you put this bit there, and that bit there, and you chop the whole Word up into dispensational cubes - it does not mean that at all. It means cutting straight lines with the Word of God. That is being approved. Approved of God is having straight dealings with the Word of God, and that is exactly what these saints did. God had said, and they had straight dealings with what God had said, and they were approved of God. That is tremendously important for us all. That stands right at the beginning of our Christian life and experience and that applies all the way through, and that finds us at the end, for after all, what is the issue of the church, the Body of Christ, and for every believer, is not the amount of work they have done, the meetings attended, the addresses they have given, nothing to do whatever with the externals of Christianity as such; it is that they stand approved of God. And the Word says that the basis of divine approval is that faith which acts in relation to God, that believes God and acts out its belief in God. That is very simple. You could have nothing more simple as a statement, but as a test it does not always work out so easily. You see how it begins: "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for*", more literally "the giving substance to things hoped for". "The proving" of things not seen (Lit.) "Giving substance to things hoped for and the proving of things not seen". Now you can take that up and apply it to any stage of Christian experience. It stands right at the beginning.

You will call to mind there appeared in the morning papers the account of a wonderful new discovery, the discovery of an ultra ray to be applied in the photographic world and there were two pictures given in the paper. And in the paper that I had, one was of a church steeple and a crane, and the other was of a man. In the first case a camera was placed pointing in a certain direction, this ultra ray brought into play, and although in that direction, to the naked eye there was not to be discerned any sign whatever of that church, or of that crane, when the plate was exposed and developed there appeared upon it both the church and the crane. A photo taken of the unseen. In the other case, a man was placed in a dark room, the ultra ray which was just a red glimmer like a red hot wire, did not illuminate the room at all, to the naked eye no man could be seen, the lens was opened, the plate exposed, when developed there was a man. That is giving substance to things unseen.

God has a wonderful lot of things up His sleeve scientifically to upset man's arguments. He will have every tongue silenced in the end and in His infinite wisdom He will silence tongues with man's own instruments. But now, supposing that camera had been placed there and someone who knew the geography of that district and all that was in it came along and said: 'Now, three miles distant through that gloom there is a church and a crane'. The stranger might have said: 'Well I cannot see it

and I do not believe you', or: 'Well I believe that you are a trustworthy man and would not speak an untruth and although I see no such object, I take your word for it, but that does not get me very far, if I wanted the benefit of that church or that crane I would have to have something more than your word. Now, I believe what you say is true, but somehow or other before there can be any benefit derived that thing must be proved.' 'Well', says the other man: 'we will prove it, but I am going to ask you to act on your faith. Here is a camera and if you will just depress that little lever before long you will have the tangible proof in your hands of what I say.' The other one might say: 'Now you are asking me to do something. I quite believe you, but you might be making a fool of me'. 'Well', the other one would say: 'it is no use, I can prove nothing to you unless you act. I have given you my word, I know what I am talking about, I know I am perfectly certain, I have absolutely no doubt whatever that those objects are there. I am telling you the truth. You say you believe me, but to give substance to the things unseen, you must act, and you must not only accept my word and say you believe, but you must prove my word by acting. Put your finger on that lever and act.' The other man might go all that way, believe that far, and he might even perspire with trying to prove to the man that he believes his words, might say all sorts of things to the man about his veracity, trustworthiness and so on, but until he has acted in that faith, he has not given substance to the things unseen, but immediately he says: 'Now I do believe what you say and I am going to prove to you that I believe; that although I cannot see, I have no evidence to my senses whatever I am going to do that thing; I am going to run the risk of your laughing at me, but I am going to believe so utterly that I will do it.' And he goes and puts his faith into operation. Well, there it is, there is the evidence. It proves to be true. Faith in action has given substance to things not seen.

Now, you could not have a simpler word than that. I know you are thinking it is all too simple, but I say that is a truth which runs from start to finish in the life of Christians. You will never know the Lord in a saving reality, however often you may hear Him preached as Saviour, declared to be Saviour, and however much you may say: 'I assent, I agree, I believe what you say is true', you will never know and you will never be saved until you act on that faith and put yourself into an active relationship by faith with the Lord Jesus. You will notice that the completion of any transaction with the Lord, in which completion you come to enjoy the reality, the completion of that act or that transaction is some form of outward expression.

There are many who confess the Lord Jesus as Saviour, or accept Him as Saviour, who in that way give expression to their faith in Him, but the thing is not completed until they declare it. That is, they commit themselves, if you like, they involve themselves with the Lord. It is a great thing to involve yourself by faith with the Lord, and to say in effect: 'Now Lord, we stand or fall together', to involve the Lord in your faith. That is what the Lord wants us to do; to make a declaration without any feeling or seeing, or any sense whatever, to make a declaration of faith committing yourself and committing the Lord, and that completes the transaction. It completes the transaction for the sinner, in salvation. It completes the transaction for the believer. And you will notice if the enemy can get us to hold our peace and shut the thing up inside ourselves, and not give ourselves away, we never get liberty, never get out into real joy. The devil says: 'Well, we have heard that a good many times'. If he can shut you up in any new vital transaction with the Lord, and say: 'I will say nothing about it, it will manifest itself' - no. The Lord calls for open declaration. The Lord deals with us as those who still have bodies which He has given us. When the Lord saves us He does not take our bodies away at once, He does not make us disembodied spirits. He still allows us to have bodies which He gave us as instruments for an expression in a practical, active, literal way of what goes on inside, and He expects us to do that.

If He has given you a voice, and does not take it away when you are saved; He expects you to make a declaration of that. If He has given hands, He expects a declaration with those hands. That is why the

Lord has given us certain testimonies of a practical character. If the Lord wanted those testimonies only to be spiritual testimonies having no relationship whatever to this earth, something altogether away in the clouds, well, He would make us spirits at once when He saves us and let us do all our testifying literally as spirits, but He wants a testimony of this concrete form here on earth. "*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come.*" Eating and drinking literally the loaf and cup is a proclamation. It is not what you say then, it is what you do that is the testimony, and you do proclaim in this active, practical, literal, if you like, material way, "till He come". It is for the age.

One of our sisters is going to bear testimony held in literal water, held in a literal (not spiritualised) tank, before literal eyes. The Lord has not said: 'If ye do this thing spiritually, the other doesn't matter.' No! You see what I mean? Faith has got to give a very real proof along practical lines, unto the approval of the Lord, and if ever the Lord, speaks to you about any one of these things, or any other thing which requires a living, practical expression of obedience, carrying out, if ever the Lord puts that upon your heart, and you do not obey, you will know sooner or later that you have forfeited the approval of the Lord. You will know that the good pleasure of the Lord is not there, that His soul is not delighted. That is bound up with faith, and what we see beloved, is this, that what the Lord is looking for is not our interest in Christian work and the spread of the gospel, and all those things outwardly, that is not the main thing; the main thing for the Lord is that we should be approved along the line of an unreserved obedience of faith to everything that He has communicated or even hinted at in our hearts. When we stand in His presence, the Lord will not then take an attitude towards us on the ground of our having been at the Honor Oak Christian Fellowship Centre, attending all the meetings and conferences associated with the activities there, or any other place. The thing is, how much of the revealed will of God did you implicitly obey? 'How much of your faith in Me did you put into a definite form of expression?'

The challenge is that we may have the Word continuously and it may profit us nothing. "*Not being mixed with faith in them that heard it*". Now, what is it to mingle the hearing with faith? It is to act your belief in that Word. You say: 'I believe those messages we hear are the truth.' That is not good enough. To mingle faith with your hearing is not only to say "I believe it to be the truth", but to encamp upon it, to take an active position upon it, to appropriate and say: 'I am in that with all my heart, I am going to seek to work that out in the Name of the Lord.' Faith is something that commits us to action. So we may have heard all the messages that have ever been delivered, and we may have given absolute assent to them, and never have questioned their truth, and yet still be unprofited. We have got to act in faith; that for salvation; that for the going on unto perfection which issues in being approved, the good pleasure of the Lord. Having witness borne through faith. Now, this could take us on a long time and over a lot of ground., but we will apply it in one simple way. Do not let anything further said spoil what has been said. Has the Lord said anything to you at any time as to what His way is? Has He touched anything? Has He touched this? The question for you is not whether you obey the Lord on ninety points or ninety-nine points; the question is, on that point the Lord has touched, do you obey the Lord? The whole issue is to be approved of God, and to be approved of God means 'Lord, I have sought up to the hilt to be obedient to all the light You have given me. So far as I know, on no point where You have revealed Your will to me, made known Your will to me, have I been disobedient.' That is being approved.

Now I take the other illustration from the paper, of the man in the room. The Word tells the believer that Christ is in him, or in her. "*Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you*", says the apostle. And to Colossians: "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*". And the Lord Himself: "*I in them*". Now perhaps more often than not, you will not be thrillingly alive to that, at any rate, very few of you, or of us, will go right through our Christian life without sometimes having to exercise faith in relation to

that fact. You will be a most extraordinary Christian - I do not say you are an impossible one - if you do not have times when the fact that Christ is in you wants a lot of believing. Well, call that faith.

Now, we say so often: 'feelings make no difference, sight is not the question at all, faith is the thing that gives substance to the things unseen'. Yes, beloved, that is true to principle, it is active faith. Faith which is the active thing. Sometimes we have said: 'Alright, I will not disbelieve, I will blankly hold on although I cannot feel, I cannot see, I have no sense of it, I will hold on to the truth.' That is an excellent thing if we go that far, but very often for our deliverance just a little more than that is needed. It means acting upon. Oh yes, I have to go somewhere, I have to do something, and if one thing more than another is needed, it is that there should be a knowledge that the Lord is in me for this. I have not that feeling, that sense at all. Well, I believe He is, but I cannot go unless I have a manifestation - well, you will never go. It is as you go, that is, put your faith into action and count upon the Lord as in you to meet that situation, that you will find He is there. We have found that so often; again and again we have had to start out as though we had hardly ever known the Lord in our life, if ever we did have an experience of the Lord, well, it has gone; feels as though it's gone for ever. We have had to start like that as though alone, but have had to say: 'Lord, You are faithful, You are unchangeable. You are not like I am, subject to all kinds of variations of feelings and emotions and actions. You are the same yesterday, today and for ever. You abide faithful, there is no variation with You, no shadow cast by turning. You have said this and I take You at Your word and I am going on the strength of that, feeling nothing.' The wonderful thing is you have a good time! The Lord does come up to the occasion; it is just wonderful. When it is over you may just go back again and feel as dry as ever you did. He, the Lord, meets the occasion, you have connected your faith and the Lord has approved, and you know.

You see, faith, an active thing, brings divine approval and that is the ground of everything. It is the ground of salvation, it is the ground of sanctification, of service, of a walk with God, the consummation of the spiritual life - everything revolves upon that, believing God and acting your obedience. "*If any man will do His will he shall know...*" Faith like the faith now set before us here: "*By faith... so and so*", active faith in God. By such faith the elders had witness borne; Enoch had witness borne - they all had witness borne, they came to the place of divine approval. Now the Lord does not ask us to say: "Yes, Lord I believe what You say is true." The Lord comes back to us at once: "Prove it, give Me a proof, work it out, take an action on it, commit yourself." Not stand on the brink and say: 'Lord I believe that that water is so deep if I get in I would not sink.' "Well get in", the Lord says, "and prove it." Take the risks. The Lord does not want to mistake foolhardiness for faith. It is the object that matters. The object is not the thing we are seeking for ourselves, but the object is the glory of God Himself.