



# The Faith Once Delivered

*A Trilogy of Faith through Doctrine, Practice, and Clarity*

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About This Preview

This complimentary preview offers four sample chapters from *The Faith Once Delivered*, a forthcoming work calling the church back to clarity, conviction, and the historic apostolic faith. Readers are invited to explore the book's biblical foundation and theological depth as part of AFBCC's mission to strengthen believers in truth and practice.

## Prologue: A Means to an End

To be spiritual, R. C. Sprout once wrote, “is only a means to an end, not the end in itself.” That single line exposes both the confusion of our age and the clarity of the gospel. We do not pursue spiritual disciplines for their own sake. We do not cultivate faith as a private virtue or a moral achievement. We seek Christ because *He is the end*—the inheritance, the promise, the life held in trust for us by God Himself.

Everything Jesus promised is true because God cannot lie. Every promise secured through Christ is being held for us—kept, guarded, preserved—like a holy trust awaiting the day we are united with Him. This is not metaphorical language. Scripture speaks of an inheritance “kept in heaven for you,” guarded by the power of God. Our future is not fragile. It is legally, covenantally, eternally secured.

And yet the mystery of faith is this: the trust God holds for us is mirrored by the trust He awakens *in* us. The Holy Spirit quickens the heart, and what springs to

life is faith—*sola fide*, faith alone, as Luther insisted. But the Reformers were equally clear: the faith that justifies is never alone. It is always accompanied by *fides viva*—a living, breathing, active faith.

James says it plainly: “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.” Works never substitute for faith. They never complete what Christ left unfinished. But they reveal something essential: the heart's direction. True faith expresses itself because it is alive. It bears fruit because it is rooted in Christ. Our actions become the visible proof that we seek the end that lies beyond this world—the inheritance already secured for us.

This is where many stumble. We are tempted to treat our spiritual efforts as ends in themselves, or to imagine that the end justifies the means. But the gospel reverses the logic. We are already justified. Our spiritual practices are not attempts to earn God's favor; they are the living evidence that we belong to Him. They are the means by which our lives align with the holy inheritance we have been given.

“Into Your hand I commit my spirit,” David prayed.

“You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth.” That is the posture of faith—not striving, but entrusting; not earning, but receiving; not proving ourselves to God, but resting in the God who has already claimed us.

This prologue is the doorway into the four chapters that follow. They are not the whole book—only a glimpse, a foretaste, a testing ground for those who want to understand the anatomy of living faith. But if these chapters awaken something in you—if they stir hunger, clarity, or conviction—then the full twenty-two-chapter journey awaits.

Faith is a means to an end. Christ is the end. And the Spirit is the One who carries us there

# Chapter I

## **The Muddled Mind: How Faith Became Distorted**

Faith is a word that feels familiar to nearly every Christian. It appears on church signs, in worship lyrics, in testimonies, and in everyday conversation. Yet beneath this familiarity lies a quiet crisis: most believers cannot clearly articulate what faith actually is. They know it is important—central, even—but they struggle to define it beyond vague impressions of trust, sincerity, or spiritual feeling. This gap between usage and understanding is not merely academic. It is pastoral. It shapes how Christians live, pray, suffer, and understand the gospel itself.

The modern church did not arrive at this confusion suddenly. It is the result of decades—indeed, centuries—of subtle shifts in how Christians think about God, the self, and the nature of spiritual experience. Faith, once understood as a rich, doctrinally grounded

response to divine revelation, has been thinned into something far more fragile. It has become subjective, inward, and often indistinguishable from emotion or optimism. The result is a generation of believers who speak confidently about faith but possess little clarity about its substance.

J. I. Packer's warning about "muddle-headed" views of faith was not an exaggeration. He saw what many pastors and theologians have since confirmed: contemporary Christianity often treats faith as a psychological state rather than a theological reality. Faith becomes a feeling one must generate, a mental posture one must maintain, or a leap one must take without evidence. In some circles, faith is reduced to the power of positive thinking. In others, it becomes a heroic act of the will. In still others, it is little more than emotional sincerity. Each of these distortions carries a piece of truth, but none captures the biblical whole.

Part of the problem is that modern culture prizes individual experience above objective truth. We live in an age where authenticity is measured by how deeply

one feels, not by how clearly one understands. This cultural air has seeped into the church. Faith becomes something intensely personal, almost private—an inner conviction that resists definition. The more subjective faith becomes, the less anchored it is in the character of God and the work of Christ. And the less anchored it is, the more fragile it becomes.

Another contributing factor is the rise of therapeutic spirituality. In many Christian contexts, faith is presented as a tool for emotional well-being. It helps us cope, feel hopeful, and manage life's pressures. While faith certainly brings comfort, reducing it to therapy strips it of its doctrinal depth. Faith becomes a means to personal peace rather than a response to divine truth. It becomes something we use rather than something God gives.

Anti-intellectualism has also played a role. In an effort to make Christianity accessible, some traditions have downplayed the importance of doctrine. Faith is portrayed as simple, intuitive, and unburdened by theological reflection. “Just believe,” we are told, as

though belief requires no content. But faith without knowledge is not biblical faith. It is sentiment. It is sincerity without substance. And sincerity, however earnest, cannot sustain a life of discipleship.

Revivalist traditions have contributed their own distortions. In many revival movements, faith was equated with decision—an act of the will, a moment of commitment, a choice to trust. While decision is certainly involved in faith, reducing faith to a momentary act obscures its ongoing nature. Faith becomes something one does once rather than something one lives by. It becomes an event rather than a posture.

Finally, the rise of experience-centered Christianity has reshaped how believers think about faith. In many churches, the measure of faith is the intensity of one's feelings during worship or prayer. Faith becomes emotional certainty. Doubt becomes emotional discomfort. Assurance becomes a mood. This approach leaves believers vulnerable, for emotions fluctuate. When feelings fade, so does confidence. Faith becomes unstable because it is tied to the instability of

the human heart.

These influences—cultural, therapeutic, anti-intellectual, revivalist, experiential—have converged to create a doctrinal fog. Faith is spoken of often but defined rarely. It is celebrated but not understood. It is assumed but not examined. And what is assumed is eventually lost.

The purpose of this chapter is not to condemn the church but to diagnose its condition. Before we can reform our understanding of faith, we must first recognize how deeply our assumptions have been shaped by forces other than Scripture. We must acknowledge that our confusion is not merely the result of poor teaching but of a broader cultural drift that has subtly reshaped our theological instincts.

If the church is to recover a robust, biblical doctrine of faith, we must begin by clearing away the fog. We must name the distortions, trace their origins, and understand their impact. Only then can we rebuild a vision of faith that is rooted in truth, anchored in Christ,

and capable of sustaining the Christian life.

# Chapter II

## The Roots of Confusion

The modern church's confusion about faith did not appear overnight. It is the result of a long drift — a slow, subtle reshaping of categories, assumptions, and expectations. Faith, once understood as a rich, doctrinally grounded reality, has been thinned into something sentimental, volitional, or experiential. To understand the crisis of faith in our time, we must trace its roots.

The first root is **the loss of theological clarity**. For much of church history, faith was defined with precision. Theologians distinguished between knowledge, assent, and trust. They emphasized the *object* of faith — Christ — rather than the quality of the believer's inner experience. As B.A. Gerrish observes that the Reformers understood faith not as a human achievement but as “the empty hand that receives Christ.” That clarity has eroded. In recent generations, doctrinal precision has been replaced by vague

spirituality. Faith is spoken of as “believing in yourself,” “trusting the journey,” or “having hope.” These phrases sound uplifting, but they are theologically empty. When the church loses clarity, culture fills the vacuum.

A second root is **the rise of expressive individualism**. In a culture that prizes authenticity, autonomy, and self-expression, faith becomes a deeply personal, inward, and subjective reality. People speak of “my truth,” “my journey,” and “my faith experience.” Faith becomes something one constructs rather than something one receives. The authority shifts from Scripture to the self. The measure of faith becomes sincerity rather than truth. This cultural shift has profoundly shaped the church’s understanding of faith, often without being recognized.

A third root is **revivalism**. Revivalist movements emphasized the moment of decision — the walk down the aisle, the raised hand, the repeated prayer. Faith became synonymous with choosing Christ or committing one’s life to Him. While God used these movements in powerful ways, they also introduced a subtle shift: faith

became an act of the will rather than a response to grace. The focus moved from Christ's finished work to the believer's decisive moment. Over time, this emphasis reshaped the church's understanding of faith itself.

A fourth root is **the therapeutic turn in modern Christianity**. As psychology and self-help language entered the church, faith increasingly became associated with emotional well-being. Faith was presented as a path to inner peace, personal fulfillment, or emotional healing. While the gospel certainly brings comfort, it is not therapy. When faith is reduced to emotional benefit, it becomes sentimental rather than theological. The believer begins to measure faith by how they feel rather than by what God has revealed.

A fifth root is **the decline of biblical literacy**. As Scripture has become less central in the life of the church, misunderstandings about faith have multiplied. Without the biblical categories of revelation, covenant, promise, and union with Christ, faith becomes detached from its foundation. It becomes a free-floating concept that can be shaped by culture, preference, or personal

experience. The less we know of Scripture, the more confused our understanding of faith becomes.

A sixth root is **the fragmentation of the church's teaching**. In an age of podcasts, social media, and online influencers, believers are shaped by countless voices. Some are faithful; many are not. The result is a patchwork theology — bits of sentiment, bits of self-help, bits of Scripture, bits of pop psychology. Faith becomes whatever the loudest or most compelling voice says it is. Without a unified, biblical vision, confusion is inevitable.

Taken together, these roots reveal why the modern church struggles to define faith clearly. The problem is not merely intellectual; it is cultural, historical, and spiritual. Faith has been reshaped by forces outside the church and by trends within it. The result is a doctrine that is often assumed but rarely examined.

If the church is to recover a biblical understanding of faith, it must first recognize how far it has drifted. Only then can we rebuild a vision of faith

that is grounded in Scripture, centered on Christ, and  
worthy of the God who calls us to believe.

# Chapter III

## Recovering Faith by Recovering God

If the modern church is confused about faith, it is because it is confused about God. Every distortion of faith is ultimately a distortion of God's character. When God becomes sentimental, faith becomes sentimental. When God becomes therapeutic, faith becomes therapeutic. When God becomes a projection of our preferences, faith becomes a projection of our desires. Faith cannot rise higher than its object.

This is why the first step in recovering a biblical doctrine of faith is not to analyze ourselves but to behold God as He truly is. Faith is not generated by introspection. It is awakened by revelation. It is not strengthened by looking inward but by looking upward.

The church's confusion about faith is therefore inseparable from its reluctance to face the fullness of God's character — especially those attributes that modern sensibilities find uncomfortable. Among these is the attribute Scripture refuses to hide: **the wrath of God.**

To understand faith rightly, we must understand God rightly. And to understand God rightly, we must not turn away from His holiness, His righteousness, or His wrath. These are not peripheral truths. They are essential to the gospel and foundational to the nature of faith.

What follows, then, is not a digression but the necessary beginning of the remedy. If faith is trust in God, then we must know the God we are called to trust.

## **The Wrath of God and the Nature of Faith**

### **Knowing God as He Is**

Scripture does not invite us to imagine God according to our preferences or to soften His attributes to fit modern sensibilities. It reveals God as He truly is — holy, righteous, merciful, sovereign, patient, and just. As Ronald Nash writes, a divine attribute is “a property which God could not lose and continue to be God.” A. H. Strong similarly describes God’s attributes as the

essential characteristics by which He makes Himself known.

Among these attributes is one that many Christians avoid: the wrath of God. Yet Scripture presents God's wrath not as a blemish on His character but as a necessary expression of His holiness. Wrath is God's settled, just opposition to all that is evil. It is His refusal to tolerate what destroys His creation and defies His glory.

To understand faith rightly, we must understand this attribute rightly.

## **What Scripture Teaches About God's Wrath**

The biblical witness is clear and consistent.  
God's wrath is:

revealed against all ungodliness (Rom. 1:18)

stored up for the day of righteous judgment  
(Rom. 2:5)

present upon those who reject the Son (John  
3:36)

provoked by Israel's rebellion (Deut. 9:7–8)  
executed by Christ at the end of the age (Rev.  
19:15)

This wrath is not impulsive or emotional in the human sense. It is not divine irritability. As the *Moody Handbook of Theology* notes, wrath is “the deep-seated anger of God against sin,” arising from His holiness and righteousness. Because God is holy, He cannot overlook sin. Because He is righteous, He must judge it. God's wrath is the necessary expression of His goodness.

## **Why Wrath Matters for Understanding Faith**

A diminished view of God's wrath produces a diminished view of faith. If God does not judge sin, then faith becomes an unnecessary sentiment rather than a saving response to divine truth. Faith is not trust in a sentimental deity who shrugs at evil. Faith is trust in the God who is both merciful and just, gracious and holy, patient and righteous.

**Faith rests on the character of God. If we distort His character, we distort faith itself.**

Faith is not merely intellectual agreement; it is the surrender of resistance. It is the turning of the heart from rebellion to trust, from self-rule to God's rule. Isaiah describes the rebellious heart as "afflicted and wounded" (Isa. 1:5). Resistance to God produces misery, not freedom. Faith is the movement of the soul toward the God who judges rightly and saves mercifully.

**Human Anger vs. Divine Wrath**

James reminds us that "human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (James 1:19–20). Human anger is often rooted in fear, pride, or self-protection. It is reactive, unstable, and self-centered.

God's wrath is the opposite:

holy, not impulsive

just, not vindictive

measured, not chaotic

rooted in righteousness, not insecurity

Romans 12:19 instructs believers to relinquish vengeance precisely because God alone judges rightly: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.” Faith trusts God’s justice rather than asserting its own.

## **The Wrath of God as a Pastoral Reality**

Understanding God’s wrath is not merely a doctrinal exercise — it is a pastoral necessity. Millard Erickson is right: one’s view of God shapes one’s entire theology, life, and ministry. If we misunderstand God’s attributes — especially His holiness and wrath — we will misunderstand:

the nature of sin

the necessity of grace

the urgency of repentance

the meaning of salvation

the hope of final restoration

Good theology makes for good counseling because good theology reveals the God in whom we place our trust. A God without wrath cannot save. A God without holiness

cannot be trusted. A God without justice cannot be worshiped.

## **Wrath and the Glory of Christ**

The wrath of God magnifies the glory of Christ. The cross is not merely a display of love; it is the place where divine justice and divine mercy meet. Christ bears the wrath we deserve so that we may receive the mercy we could never earn.

This is why faith is not vague optimism. Faith is not emotional uplift. Faith is not spiritual preference.

Faith is trust in the God who judges sin and saves sinners.

## **Faith Rests on the Character of God**

The God who calls us to believe is the God who is holy, righteous, and just — whose wrath against sin magnifies the glory of His mercy in Christ. Faith rests on this God, not a softened version of Him. Faith trusts His justice, submits to His holiness, and rejoices in His mercy.

To understand faith rightly, we must understand God rightly. And to understand God rightly, we must not turn away from His wrath. His wrath is not the shadow of His character — it is the radiance of His holiness.

## **From Seeing God to Seeing Ourselves**

If faith rests on the character of God, then the recovery of faith must begin with the recovery of God as He truly is. We cannot understand what it means to trust unless we understand the One we are trusting. We cannot grasp the depth of grace unless we grasp the depth of God's holiness. We cannot appreciate the mercy of Christ unless we acknowledge the justice from which that mercy saves us.

This is why Scripture never separates the call to believe from the revelation of God's character. The God who calls us to faith is the God who is holy, righteous, and just — the God whose wrath against sin magnifies the glory of His mercy in Christ. Faith is not a vague spiritual posture. It is the soul's response to the God who judges rightly and saves mercifully.

**But seeing God clearly always leads to seeing ourselves clearly.**

The holiness of God exposes the unholiness of the human heart. The righteousness of God reveals the unrighteousness of our desires. The justice of God unmasks the rebellion we often hide beneath religious language. When Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, he did not congratulate himself; he cried out, “Woe is me.” When Peter glimpsed Christ’s power, he fell to his knees and said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.” When Paul encountered the risen Christ, he was undone before he was restored.

**A right view of God produces a right view of ourselves.**

And this is where the journey of faith must go next. If Chapter 3 reveals the God who is holy, Chapter 4 must reveal the human condition in light of that holiness. If faith is trust in the God who saves, then we must understand what we are being saved *from* — and what we are being saved *into*.

The recovery of faith requires more than

doctrinal clarity; it requires spiritual honesty. It requires us to confront the reality of sin, the depth of our resistance, and the ways we have misunderstood both God and ourselves. Only then can we grasp the beauty of grace and the necessity of repentance.

**We have seen who God is. Now we must see who we are.**

Only then will faith become more than sentiment — it will become surrender, dependence, and life.

# Chapter IV

## **The Human Condition: When Holiness Reveals Our Need**

The clearer our vision of God becomes, the clearer our vision of ourselves must become. Revelation always produces self-discovery. When Scripture unveils the holiness, righteousness, and justice of God, it simultaneously unveils the truth about the human heart. The light that reveals God's glory also exposes our need.

This is why every encounter with God in Scripture brings a corresponding awakening in the one who encounters Him. Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up, and immediately cries, "Woe is me." Peter witnesses the power of Christ and falls to his knees, confessing, "I am a sinful man." Paul beholds the risen Christ and is undone before he is restored. The pattern is consistent:

**A right view of God produces an honest view of ourselves.**

If Chapter 3 revealed the God who is holy,

Chapter 4 must reveal the humanity that is not. Faith cannot be understood apart from this contrast. Faith is not merely trust in God's promises; it is the surrender of a heart that has been confronted by the truth of its own condition. It is the movement from rebellion to repentance, from self-rule to God's rule, from blindness to sight.

Modern distortions of faith often arise because we have softened our understanding of sin. When sin becomes a mistake rather than a rebellion, faith becomes a preference rather than a necessity. When sin becomes therapeutic rather than moral, faith becomes a coping mechanism rather than a saving response. When sin becomes a cultural construct rather than a spiritual reality, faith becomes optional rather than urgent.

But Scripture does not permit such reductions. The holiness of God demands that we take the human condition seriously. The wrath of God, far from being an embarrassment to modern sensibilities, reveals the seriousness of our plight. It tells the truth about what sin is, what it does, and why grace is not merely comforting

but essential.

Faith begins where self-confidence ends. Faith awakens where self-rule collapses. Faith flourishes where repentance clears the ground.

To recover a biblical doctrine of faith, we must recover a biblical doctrine of the human condition. We must see sin not as a psychological inconvenience but as a spiritual rebellion. We must see ourselves not as wounded heroes but as dependent creatures. We must see our need not as a flaw but as the doorway to grace.

**The God who is holy has revealed Himself.  
Now we must face the truth about ourselves.**

Only then can faith become what Scripture declares it to be: the living, trusting, surrendering response of a heart awakened by grace.

## **The Holiness of God: The Trauma That Awakens the Soul**

When the holiness of God breaks into human awareness, something irreversible happens. The soul wakes up. Not gently. Not comfortably. But truthfully. Holiness is the light that exposes what darkness hides, the fire that purifies what sin distorts, the presence that unmask the illusions we cling to. It is the moment discipleship becomes real.

Every true disciple eventually discovers that following Jesus requires more than admiration, affection, or inspiration. It requires an encounter with the God who is holy. Not merely good. Not merely powerful. Not merely loving. But holy—utterly, terrifyingly, beautifully other.

R.C. Sproul captured this reality with a sentence that has become a theological landmark: **“The holiness of God is**

**traumatic to unholy people.”**

This is not poetic exaggeration. It is the consistent testimony of Scripture. Whenever God reveals His holiness, human beings collapse. Isaiah cries, “Woe is me! I am undone.” Peter falls at Jesus’ feet: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.” John, the beloved disciple, falls “as though dead.” Israel trembles at Sinai. The priests in Leviticus are consumed for approaching God casually.

Holiness is not merely a doctrine. It is a shattering experience. And it is the beginning of discipleship.



