

Hebrews 10:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

Analysis

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. Continuing the Habakkuk 2:4 quotation, this verse contrasts faithful endurance with apostasy. "The just shall live by faith" (ho de dikaios ek pisteōs zēsetai, ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται) became a foundational Reformation text. Ho dikaios (ὁ δίκαιος) is the righteous one, justified person. Ek pisteōs (ἐκ πίστεως) means from faith, by faith, out of faith. Faith is both the means and the sustaining principle of the righteous life.

Paul used this text to prove justification by faith alone (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11). Hebrews emphasizes the complementary truth: genuine saving faith perseveres. The faith that justifies is the faith that endures. "Shall live" (zēsetai, ζήσεται) includes both present spiritual life and future eternal life. Faith sustains both.

"But if any man draw back" (kai ean hyposteilētai, καὶ ἔὰν ὑποστείληται) describes apostasy. Hyposteilētai means shrink back, withdraw, retreat. This is not temporary stumbling but permanent retreat from faith—the opposite of endurance. "My soul shall have no pleasure in him" (ouk eudokei hē psychē mou en autō, οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐν αὐτῷ) indicates divine displeasure. God takes no pleasure in apostasy; it invokes His wrath, not His favor.

The contrast is absolute: faith leads to life; apostasy leads to divine displeasure

and judgment. There is no neutral position, no middle way. Either one perseveres in faith and lives, or one draws back and faces God's wrath.

Historical Context

Habakkuk's context involved Judeans tempted to compromise with Babylonian idolatry to preserve life and property. God's message: the faithful will survive by trusting God; those who compromise will perish despite temporary earthly gain. The principle applies to every generation: genuine faith perseveres through trials; false profession falls away when tested.

The Reformation made this verse central to justification theology. Luther's discovery that "the righteous shall live by faith" revolutionized his understanding of salvation. Not human works but faith in Christ's work justifies. Yet Hebrews adds the necessary complement: saving faith necessarily perseveres. The Reformers distinguished between temporary faith (James 2:19) and saving faith (which works through love, Galatians 5:6).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that genuine saving faith necessarily perseveres affect your assurance of salvation?
2. What is the difference between temporary struggles with doubt (which all believers experience) and permanently drawing back from faith?
3. How can you encourage fellow believers to persevere in faith without creating paralyzing fear or false security?

Interlinear Text

ο δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται καὶ ἐὰν
G3588 Now the just by faith shall live but if
G1161 G1342 G1537 G4102 G2198 G2532 G1437

ὑποστείληται οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχή μου ἐν αὐτῷ
any man draw back no pleasure G3588 soul my in him
G288 G3756 G2106 G5590 G3450 G1722 G846

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 3:11 (Faith): But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

Romans 1:17 (Faith): For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 (Faith): Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Psalms 85:8 (Parallel theme): I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.

Psalms 147:11 (Parallel theme): The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

Isaiah 42:1 (Parallel theme): Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

Ezekiel 3:20 (Righteousness): Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

Matthew 13:21 (Parallel theme): Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

Matthew 12:18 (Parallel theme): Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.

1 Thessalonians 2:15 (Parallel theme): Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

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