

Hebrews

What is Faith?

Hebrews 11:1-3

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INTRODUCTION:

Chapter 11 in Hebrews is a chapter that almost everyone is very familiar with. It starts with a verse that defines faith and follows with a section that has been given many different names such as "The Faith Chapter", "The Saints Hall of Fame", "The Heroes of the Faith", "The Honor Roll of Old Testament Saints," and many others.

What is Faith? Where does it come from? How does it manifest itself in our lives? Chapter 11 is going to expound on these questions.

All Stand and Read Scripture

11 Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the men of old gained approval.

³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Prayer

So...**What is Faith?** Faith in God means believing in and trusting in the greatest hope of all time—that God became man, lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death for your sins, and rose again to glory so that you could have eternal life by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Where does our faith come from?

Romans 10:17 (NASB95)

¹⁷ So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

How does faith manifest itself?

We are going to be given examples from saints from the Old Testament on how they lived by faith. Some of them were given promises directly from God. Others were told or read of future promises in the scripture. In either case they acted upon those promises and manifested their faith through their actions.

Now the recipients of this letter desperately needed to understand how faith manifested itself in their lives. Obviously, the bulk of those who would read this epistle written to Hebrews were believers. This would be a new kind of life for the Jews. For the first time in their life, through the gospel and salvation, they have come to understand that their relationship with God is not dependent on works but it is dependent on faith. That is a

radical new concept and it needs to be reinforced to them. And that is, in part, why this eleventh chapter is here so they can understand what a life of faith looks like by looking at examples of Old Testament saints in the past who lived by faith and received their glorious reward.

But it is more than just a chapter designed to encourage believers to continue to walk by faith. You will remember that through the first ten chapters the writer has been laboring to make one major point and it is this; that the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant. Right? That Christ is superior to every created thing. His sacrifice is superior to the sacrifices of animals in the old system. He is better than angels. He is better than the prophets. He is better than Moses, better than Aaron, better than Joshua. He is a better priest than all other priests. And he is from a superior priesthood, He is the mediator of a better covenant. He is permanently seated at the right hand of God, the real Holy of Holies.

So the message of the first ten chapters is this...“Put your faith in Jesus Christ, He is superior in every way to the Law and the prophets of the Old Covenant.” So now he wants to reveal to us what that faith consists of and how to live by faith. We will first look at the **Nature of Faith**.

I. The Nature of Faith.

The author starts us off with a basic definition of faith.

Hebrews 11:1 (NASB95)

11 Now faith is the assurance of *things hoped for*, the conviction of things not seen.

So the first thing we learn about faith is that it is having an assured hope in promises made by God that we have not experienced. It is having a conviction to act upon those assured hopes and promises even though they are invisible to us.

Our faith is a gift of God apart from our works.

Ephesians 2:8 (NASB95)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God*;

Our faith comes from God. And when God gives us this object of faith, it is the assurance of things hoped for. That is what it means to live by faith. It does not mean that we see something we want and try bring it into existence. It means that we put our confidence in something not seen, "**conviction of things not seen**".

So faith is achieved by believing with full confidence in the reality of something not yet seen or experienced. Faith gives present confidence to something that is promised for the future.

This is better than the best retirement plan ever made up by man. We have all lived long enough to know that it cannot compare to our "retirement in heaven" and they rarely provide what they promise anyway. True faith is very strong. It is a gift of God. It is the gift of God that allows us to trust the Scripture. And in trusting the Scripture, we trust the gospel in the Scripture and thus trust Christ as Savior. That is a package that we need to understand.

Faith then is that "**assurance of things hoped for**". And frankly, this is against the grain of all the things that work in a fallen world, is it not? First of all, it is against the grain of your own flesh. Is that not true?

So now that you believe these things and have put your trust in Christ. You are now living a life based upon promises for the future that you have not seen. Those promises have so much weight that they control your life. So what are you to do? You live your new life as a Christian battling against the flesh. This used to be your natural way of life. Our carnal self would suggest that it would be a lot easier to just say, "Forget it, I am just going to go with whatever I feel." It would be a lot easier, right? It seemed natural to me and, for the most part, I really enjoyed that life style. It is the life style that seemed natural for me. It is just how the godless Gentiles live, in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Can they all be wrong? Let what happens happen.

But you do not live that way. You avoid fleshly desires. You limit the earthly pleasures. You fight against your fallenness. You resist sin and run from it. Why? Because you understand that those things are only temporary and have no eternal reward. There is a desire to come before the Lord and bring honor to His name by the life you have lived. So you, literally, have changed the way you live because you have an assured hope for the future. You have this strong desire because you believe in the truth of God's word.

"**Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God.**"

ILLUSTRATION:

You are like a person trying to fight your way through a massive crowd of millions of people who are all going in one direction and you are going the other way and you are getting trampled in the process. You may be trampled by your family, you may be trampled by your neighbors and acquaintances or at your work. You may be mistreated here and there. You are being pushed back time after time from people going the other way. Yet at the same time you feel the responsibility as you work your way through this mass of humanity, going in the opposite direction, of grabbing them here and there and trying to turn them around. You want to bring them to the knowledge of Christ and get them on your side. What power this faith has!

But faith is not only an "**assurance of things hoped for**" it is also "**a conviction of things not seen**". This takes it a step further. It is our "conviction" that defines how you live. You can know something to be true, but until it becomes a conviction, you will not put it into action.

What would make you live against the grain of the world that seems so natural? What would cause you to abandon everything for something you cannot see and for promises that have never been fulfilled?

CONVICTION!

For example, borrowing from the chapter, what would make you build a boat in a desert because you were told it was going to rain when it had never rained in the history of the world? A conviction? Well, it would have to be more than just some kind of hope because you would have to spend 120 years building the boat. Can you imagine building a boat as Noah did for 120 years in the desert and dealing with the mockery of his neighbors? Some of you being mocked by your neighbors for just a few days is more than we want to put up with.

What put his faith into action? Because he was so confident in the what God had asked him to do that he became convicted to accomplish the task at all costs. That is what puts faith into action. This is the purpose of this chapter, to see how all of these people acted on faith. They believed in God and it bore conviction in their lives.

ILLUSTRATION:

If you think about it, we all live by faith in the human realm. We drink water. We eat in restaurants. We trust the surgeon. We go to the pharmacy and we shallow whatever the pharmacist gives us, even though we are clueless as to what is in the bottle. We fly along the freeway at a furious pace and we expect that when the arrow points this way, there will be an off ramp there for us to take. We trust the sign. We trust the people who put that signs there. That is natural faith.

But that is faith in things seen, isn't it? We trust these things because we have evidence from past history and experience that we can cautiously put our trust in these things. There is not one person on the planet today that can say they have seen the second coming of Christ, faced judgment, and experienced the glories of heaven. Not one. But there are lots of folks who have been to the doctor and been to the pharmacy.

But when we are talking about eternity, we are talking about the unseen. When we talk about the future and heaven and all that is there for us in the promises of God, we are talking about something that no one has experienced.

This is a supernatural gift. This is another kind of faith altogether, altogether. This is the way we live. We live on the promise given to us in the Scripture because we believe the Scripture is reliable. We believe it is reliable because the evidence tells us it is reliable and because the Spirit of God has planted in us a faith to believe in its trustworthiness.

So that is the nature of faith. Now let's look briefly at **The Testimony of Faith** which will be expounded upon throughout the rest of this chapter.

II. The Testimony of Faith.

Hebrews 11:2 (NASB95)

² For by it the men of old gained approval.

This is where the author introduces his next line of thought. He is going to help these Jews who have come out of a works system and may be struggling a little bit with this idea of salvation by faith by pointing to the fact that this is in fact how the saints of old gained approval.

As this chapter unfolds it will show us that the saints of old, both men and women, had nothing but the promises of God to rest on or hope for. There was no visible evidence that the kingdom promise will come true. There was no visible evidence that the Messianic promise would come true. They did not know **who** the Messiah would be let alone how Christ would become our ultimate sacrifice on the cross. The old testament prophecies were spiritually concealed to limit their understanding of what was to come.

Now we are on this side of the cross and we see how Jesus, as the prophesied Messiah, accomplished salvation for us. But we still have not experienced the second coming of Christ or seen and experienced the glories of heaven. But, if you are living by faith, you

have basically put your entire eternal destiny on the fact that the Scripture is reliable and that you can trust in the promises of God.

It was because of their absolute trust in God's promises that they were willing to act upon those promises. Faith is not simply one way to please God, it is the only way!

Hebrews 11:6 (NASB95)

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

And then there is, finally, **An Illustration of Faith.**

III. An Illustration of Faith.

Hebrews 11:3 (NASB95)

³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

The point being made here is something critical, not only to the Jews this letter was written to, but also to us. We live in faith that looks forward to what God has promised, okay? But this illustration takes us back and gives us a foundation for faith looking forward. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the Word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. That looks back at creation. Creation is things seen in the universe, made out of things unseen. God made the whole universe out of what? Nothing. What is seen was not made out of anything that was visible. So out of the invisible came the visible, out of nothing came everything. By faith we understand that God created it by His Word.

So we have an opportunity to place our faith in something in the past as a foundation to place our faith in something in the future. Our "**hope**" is not a wishful hope, it is an assured hope. Anybody with half a brain has to understand that the universe had to have had a starting point. There had to be a time when there was nothing and there had to be a creator. That time ended when God created the universe. By faith we understand how that happened.

ILLUSTRATION:

When you look at a house or a street, or your watch, you know that at some point it had to have been built. It did not appear on its own. Then why not a universe? God created us to instinctively know this.

Following is a passage that every person on this earth should know as to the evidence of God.

Romans 1:18-25 (NASB95)

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible

God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. ²⁵ For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The person who just understands that it happened does not know how. Only the person who puts his faith in the Scripture understands how. So by faith, through the Word of God, we understand that the worlds were created by God. Scripture says God created it, we live in it and we can see the evidences of His creation. This gives us a foundation for believing in the future.

CONCLUSION:

So faith in God means believing in and trusting in the greatest hope of all time—that God became man, lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death for your sins, and rose again to glory so that you could have eternal life by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

We receive that faith by reading and hearing God's Word. Our foundation for our faith is grounded on the creation around us that we experience every day. We have been given the understanding that it had to have been created by God.

Faith manifests itself by causing us to turn from worldly ways by being convinced that the promises of God is true and thus causes us to put our faith in action just as the saints from the old testament.

James 2:26 (NASB95)

²⁶ For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

True saving faith will result in a transformed life. That faith is demonstrated by the works we do. How we live reveals what we believe and whether the faith we profess to have is a living faith. Faith in Christ always results in good works.

Many profess to be Christians, but their lives and priorities indicate otherwise. Jesus put it this way:

Matthew 7:16-23 (NASB95)

New American Standard Bible 1995

¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷ So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So then, you will know them by their fruits.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’

What a Day That Will Be!