

Hebrews

Hebrews 11:1-6 – Faith Is

October 11, 2009

- I. **Hebrews 10:39-11:6** . . . But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. [11:1] 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. [4] By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. [5] By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. [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.

II. Prayer

III. Faith Is

- A. **Hebrews 10:39** . . . But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.
1. We Christians are children of God and people of faith – not because we have the “Christian” label, but because we have Christian faith. It is this kind of faith that pleases God, and this kind of faith that keeps us faithful to the end of our lives – if we will persevere in living by that faith to the end.
 2. Since we all live by faith – Christian and non-Christian alike, what differentiates Christian faith from natural faith?
 - a. Christian faith is faith in the existence of God, in the supremacy of God, in the self-revelation of God, in the revealed will and word of God, in the judgment of God on sin and sinners, in the blessings of God on righteousness and in eternal reward for righteous living, in Christ being the son of God (God in human flesh), in the saving work of Christ from the penalty of sin in his death and resurrection, and in the love and mercy of God toward repentant sinners.

- b. Christian faith is faith in God's longing for a reconciled, intimate relationship with us, in grace and strength from God for godly living, in the provision and protection of God for daily living, in the Bible being the word of God, in the promises of God, in the second coming of Christ, and in the resurrection from the dead unto eternal life with God.
- 3. Now consider:
 - a. We can see what God has made. We can read what He has recorded in the scriptures. Yet we cannot see God himself or quantify Him with some means of measurement or touch Him with our hands so as to scientifically prove His existence.
 - b. We can read the Bible and generally understand what we are reading. Yet the author behind the human authors cannot scientifically be proven to be God.
 - c. Christ was seen – by thousands before his death and by hundreds after his resurrection. Yet no one could see where he was while his body was in the tomb or where he went when he ascended into the heavens. And even now, we can't see him sitting at the right hand of God interceding for us. And we can't see the Holy Spirit – which he guaranteed would be given to his followers once he returned to heaven.
 - d. We can read about Christ's return, the great judgment following his return, and the new heavens and new earth made by God for all who belong to Him. But the reality is, we have not yet seen Christ return. We have not yet seen the judgment seat of Christ. In fact, we cannot see beyond the grave, or see into even the tiniest bit of heaven.
 - e. Yet Christian faith holds all these things to be just as true and just as real as what we can see and touch and measure.
- 4. What is my point? The same point God is making here in **Hebrews 10:39** through the end of **Hebrews 11**.
 - a. Though we cannot see God, and though we have not as yet seen or experienced all that He says will be – faith in God and in the words of God to the degree that we then proceed to live according to our faith is the kind of faith that does three essential things for us.
 - (1) First, it pleases God – and in pleasing God we gain His approval. **We often call this saving faith.**
 - (2) Second, it inspires us and gives us the inner confidence and conviction to remain obedient to God's will and word

to the end of our days here on the earth. **God calls this living by faith.**

(3) Third, it brings us into a personally experienced intimate relationship with God – such as Moses had in the Tent of Meeting. **God calls this knowing Him.**

b. Now faith in God and the things of God which as yet cannot be seen, quantified, or touched – may seem irrational or insane to many of those around us.

(1) Yet God takes the final verses of **Hebrews 10** and all of **Hebrews 11** to show us that this faith in the unseen is the kind of faith that gained approval for the saints before Christ.

(2) And in our day, it is the kind of faith that is essential to being saved and going on from there to live by faith so that the sum of our life as a Christian is pleasing to God.

5. And so we come to **Hebrews 11:1-2**.

B. **Hebrews 11:1-2** . . . 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.

1. **Verse 1** is not a full definition of faith. Rather, it is a description of faith's great characteristics in relation to the subject at hand – which is faith in the yet unseen that drives obedience to the will and word of God and drives perseverance in living the Christ-like life to the end of our days here on the earth.

2. **Verse 2** shows us that the Old Testament believers entered into a meaningful and acceptable relationship with God the same way we do – by faith. **Consider:**

a. The requirement to obey God was the same for them as it is for us.

b. The requirement to love God with all our being was the same for them as it is for us.

c. The requirement to live up to what we know about God and what we have learned from God – not for a day or a week or in one area or in several areas but rather in a whole-hearted, whole-life way for the rest of our lives – was the same for them as it is for us.

d. God's expectation that we pursue fellowship and intimate communion with Him was the same for them as it is for us.

- e. And without any question, trusting in God's self-revelation, His revealed will, and His promises of what will be – in spite of what we cannot see, measure, or touch – was the same for them as it is for us.
 3. The point here is that the very same faith that gained the Old Testament saints approval with God gains us approval with God. So keep this truth in mind as you read the rest of **Hebrews 11** and learn its lessons.
- C. **Hebrews 11:3 . . .** 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**.
1. Let me say this just a bit differently. By faith we understand that the entire universe was created and formed by the "words" of God so that what we now see did not come from anything that was ever or could ever be seen. In other words, God did not use anything that was to create what is.
 - a. Now you may be thinking that this is a great verse for fighting the evolutionist and the scientist.
 - b. Maybe it is, but that is not God's purpose here.
 2. What God is doing here is using creation to show that Christian faith accepts as fact what God says is true – even though what God says is true cannot be seen or validated or proven in some empirical way at the present time (i.e., by means of scientific experiment or observation).
 3. So you see, when we believe that God created all that we can see by speaking it into existence – in other words, when we accept as fact that He created what does exist from what does not exist – we are acting on the kind of faith that has always been and always will be required to please God and gain His approval.
 4. Therefore, the point here in **verse 3** is that the kind of faith that has no doubts about God speaking the universe into existence is the kind of faith required for salvation and living according to God's will and word the rest of our days.
- D. **Hebrews 11:4 . . .** By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

1. This verse is in reference to the story about Cain and Abel recorded in **Genesis 4:1-15**. To better understand the point God is making here in **Hebrews**, we need to clarify a few conclusions gained from the story in **Genesis**.
 - a. First, we can easily conclude from the **Genesis** story that neither Cain nor Abel had offered a sacrifice to God before this incident.
 - (1) This means neither of them had any personal experience or empirical evidence as to the results of such a sacrifice.
 - (2) In other words, they were sacrificing by faith in what they had heard God say about the need or wisdom of sacrifices, or faith in what their folks had said God said about sacrifices.
 - b. Second, we can conclude that both boys had the same information about sacrifices. Why is this a reasonable conclusion? In **Genesis 4:7**, God told Cain that if he did well – or if he did what he knew was the right thing to do – his sacrifice would be accepted. If you read the story, you will see that God said nothing to Cain about what kind of sacrifice would be accepted. Instead, He implied Cain already knew what kind of sacrifice was expected from him.
 - c. Finally, we can easily conclude that Abel believed in what God had revealed about such sacrifices – and acted accordingly. On the other hand, Cain did not believe in what God had revealed, and he acted according to his unbelief.
 2. So why is this story referenced here in **Hebrews 11**? God is giving us an example of **saving faith**.
 - a. You see, Abel's faith was a one-time act in relation to a blood sacrifice. And Abel acted on his faith before knowing by experience what the outcome of that faith would be.
 - b. This is the same faith we are to exercise in relation to salvation. And just as Abel's faith gained him good standing with God and the recognition that he was righteous in the sight of God, so saving faith in Jesus Christ does the same for us.
- E. **Hebrews 11:5** . . . By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

1. The story of Enoch is contained in four verses, but those verses reveal a lot about him. **Genesis 5:21-24** . . . Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah. [22] Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. [23] So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. [24] Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.
2. As Abel is an example of saving faith, so Enoch is an example of living by faith over the long haul of life. And should any of us question the reasonableness of God's expectation that we live by faith until we die, notice that Enoch lived by faith for 300 years. Imagine that!
 - a. Now I am confident some of us would find great comfort in making sure all of us understood that Enoch could not have lived a sinless life for 300 years. As for my view on this, I don't doubt that he sinned along the way.
 - b. But as many of us know from raising children or living with a spouse or living with brothers and sisters or being in the workplace – there is a world of difference between the person who is so generally good and loving that we hardly notice his failures and the person who is so generally difficult or whinny or angry or controlling or emotionally insecure or whatever else that we hardly notice the good that he does.
 - c. You see, Enoch, in spite of his humanity, lived by faith in such a way as to not only please God for 300 years, but please God so much that God took him home to heaven without Enoch having to pass through the portal of physical death.
3. What is the important point here? We not only need faith for salvation, we need the same kind of faith for daily living, that is, for living, day in and day out, in such a way that our thoughts, desires, attitudes, choices, words, and behavior are pleasing to God. And what kind of faith do we need? We need the kind of faith that acts on God's will and word without seeing God and without seeing the results of our faith before acting on it.

F. **Hebrews 11:6** . . . 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.

1. We have just read that Abel and Enoch pleased God by faith – that is, by believing in His existence, listening to His voice, living

according to His will, obeying His commands, and drawing near to Him so as to have a personal relationship of intimate communion and companionship with Him.

2. Here in **Hebrews 11:6**, God is simply reinforcing that great truth. In spite of what we may think or what someone teaches, no one can please God apart from the kind of Christian faith we have been talking about today.
3. **Here is why! Your thoughts, words, and deeds are a mirror of what you believe.** This means that the way you live, day in and day out, is a living testimony to what you believe. If your faith is in someone other than God or in some way other than God's way, it will show up in how you live – and your life will not be pleasing to God. The faith that pleases God is the kind of faith that compels you to live as God would have you live.
 - a. The greatest theological education or a complete knowledge of all God's attributes does not please God – but humble obedience to His will and the pursuit of intimate communion and companionship with Him does.
 - b. Being able to teach others all there is to know about God – both the obvious and the mysterious – will not gain you God's approval – but humble obedience to His will and the pursuit of intimate communion and companionship with Him will.
 - c. As God puts it in **James 4:7-8**, the way to please Him is to submit to His rule and will as your normal way of life. Resist the devil when tempted to rebel against God or ignore God or forget God. And finally, draw near to God and He will draw near to you – just as He did with Adam and Eve in the Garden during the cool evening hours.
4. The final point I want to make about **verse 6** is this: To please God with our faith we must – like Abel and Enoch – put faith in what we cannot currently see, touch, or prove true in some scientific or empirical way.

IV. Conclusion

- A. When we are willing to accept as fact what God says about Himself and how we should live – and then live accordingly – we are living by faith. And when we are willing to pursue an intimate relationship with Him – as Enoch did – we are living by faith. And when we are living by faith, we are pleasing to God.