

The Meaning and Means Of Faith

Hebrews 11:1-3

Introduction

We will pitch our tents in Hebrews 11 for a while. The chapter is rich. It begins with an explanation of faith (vv.1-3; 6); both the nature of faith (v.1) and the necessity of faith (vv.3;6). The writer of Hebrews will then appeal to the great examples of faith; both who they were (vv. 4a-32); what they did (vv.4-33); what they endured; and what they received. The chapter serves as an illustration of the lessons of chapter 10 verses 32-39; how God has been faithful in the past (vv.32-34); and how God will continue His care and concern (vv.35-39). The just shall live by faith (v.38). This whole chapter is dedicated to that profound statement; and demonstrates how men and women in times past have done the impossible by faith; walked by faith; lived by faith; worshipped by faith (v.4); sometimes wandering (vv.8-10); sometimes waiting (vv.11-12). But always triumphing.

There is no mention of the failures of the Old Testament saints in Hebrews 11. Why is that? Perhaps the reason is found in Hebrews 10:17; *“Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more”!* Imagine a time when your faith is remembered and your failures forgotten! Now in these first three verses the author will speak of the wisdom of faith (vv.1-2) and the warrant of faith (v.3). The author gives both an explanation of faith (vv.1-3) and examples of faith (vv.4-32). There is a reason this chapter is called God’s Great Hall of Fame (faith)!

The key to greatness with God is faith! This is the person who sees the Lord with the eyes of faith; and believes God with the heart of faith; and worships God with the mind of faith; and walks with God with the feet of faith. Our faith rests solidly on the Lord Jesus Christ; he is the object of our faith and the author of our faith. No wonder the writer begins with a description of faith!

The Meaning Of Faith (v.1)

Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV)¹Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

What is faith? According to the Bible faith is not wishful thinking. Faith is not a substitute for explanation. The word “substance” means assurance and evidence means proof.

Faith is **not**—imagination—faith is not—deceptive.

The writer of Hebrews has used a form of the word substance in chapter 1:3; “who being the brightness of His glory and *the express image*(same word) of His person”; and in chapter 3:14; “For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our *confidence* (same word) steadfast to the end.”

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The word substance (*hupostasis*) means foundation, title-deed—and guarantee—and evidence (*elegchos*) means conviction—so then faith—is more than belief—it goes beyond belief—and is an act—of the mind and the heart—and the will. Our mind and our heart believe something and our conviction is that it is true!

The writer of Hebrews incorporates “assurance” and “proof” in the discussion of faith! The writer of Hebrews wants the reader to know that our faith is rooted and grounded in “the most solid possible conviction” (*The MacArthur Bible Commentary*; John MacArthur p.1868). “True faith is not based on empirical evidence but on divine assurance, and is a gift of God” (Eph.2:8)” (see again p.1868). Does that mean a complete absence of evidence? No. I think it means that the most compelling evidence is God’s assurance.

Faith is not concerned with faith—but with with what faith trusts! Jesus is its object (Acts 20:21); “Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”. If Christ is faith’s object—than the Spirit is faith’s power. Faith is not a force—and your words are not the container of the force. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace. . .(v.24) and those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (v.25) If we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit”.

The verse itself is written in the style of Hebrew poetry (used in the book of Psalms). The Hebrew poet will often use two parallel or nearly identical phrases to state the same thing. Faith is the assurance that the thing God has said in His Word is true. Faith is the assurance that God will act according to what He has said in His Word.

In the Bible’s definition of faith—faith is believing in God—and believing that God speaks—and believing that what God says is true.

Williams translates this verse; “Now faith is the assurance of the things we hope for, the proof of the reality of the things we cannot see”.

William Barclay translates this; “Faith means that we are certain of the things we hope for, convinced of the things we do not see.”

Dr. J. Oswald Sanders says; “Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen.”

In another time—the great servant and saint Matthew Henry wrote about these verses; “Faith and hope go together; and the same things that are the object of our hope are the object of our faith. It (faith) is a firm persuasion, and expectation that God will perform all that He has promised to us in Christ; and this persuasion is so strong that it gives the soul. . .possession. . .of those things. Believers in the exercise of faith are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Christ dwells in the soul by faith; and the soul is filled with the fulness of God”.

Faith is a knowledge of what is real—possessing what is real—experiencing what is real.

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Faith incorporates trust and possession—we possess what God says (the Bible); we have confidence in what God says; we live our lives having confidence that what God says is true.

Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible.

The Reward Of Faith (v.2)

²For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

Now the author makes certain we understand the reward of faith; “For by it (faith) the elders obtained a good testimony.” What was their reward? God’s approval. God is pleased when we not only believe in Him—but we trust Him. In the book of James (chapter 2) we read that true Bible faith is not dead—it reveals itself in love (vv.1-13) and works (vv.14-26). Faith isn’t simply believing the historic facts about Jesus and Christianity—but saving faith—is the kind of faith that saves! James writes; “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!”

Who are the elders? The men and women who lived in times past—and believed God and followed God and trusted God. They turned away from the world—from its pleasures and false promises and followed God. These are the men and women who like the song—were willing to abandon it all—for the sake of the call. **And their faith in God pleased God! God accepted their faith and honored them** (*see The Preacher’s Outline and Sermon Bible; Hebrews/James p.127*).

With God’s approval comes God’s rewards. Testimony is speech—offered in support—in this case it is God’s good testimony.

1 John 3:11; “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (v.12) He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” Faith is the act of believing—and the faith—is the truth believed.

The writer will give us a list of some of these heroes and we will look at them in the weeks ahead. All will have their faith put to the test. All will reach out and grasp something—someone unseen and find Him real! Jesus is real.

At the close of his will Patrick Henry stated: There is one thing more that I would like to leave my family—Christian faith. With that they would be rich did I not leave them one shilling. Without that they would be poor had I given them the whole world.

The Necessary Understandings Of Faith (v.3)

³By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

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Note the relationship between faith and understanding. By faith “we understand”. The word ‘understanding’ (*noeo*) means to perceive with the mind—here it means to understand in such a way that you come to the conclusion that something is true. The worlds (*aiones*) means ages—framed is *katartizo*—“to arrange or set in order” to adjust—we might even say fine tuned! God has framed or designed—or arranged—the ages—their duration—the age of Adam—the age of Noah—the age of Abraham—the age of Moses—and of Christ. Here it could mean the material universe—and all time!

Think about what is being said. The Bible teaches that God created the Heavens and the Earth (Gen.1:1). For the person who says—“that’s your assumption”—the Bible plainly says that God created the Heavens and the earth. The Christian faith begins with a fact that is true. God did create the universe. Not just any god—but the God of the Bible. The universe is not self-created—but created by God. The Bible teaches that God did not fabricate the universe from pre-existing materials but spoke the universe into existence.

“Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee” (Neh. 9:6). Job—“He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing”(Job 26:7). Psalm 33:6; “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth” (Psalm 33:6).

The Bible teaches that the universe is real (in Hinduism the universe is an illusion).
The Bible teaches that mind precedes matter. It takes a mind to conceive, design and build.
The Bible teaches that the universe and this planet—has its origin in the purposes of God and the plans of God.

The Christian has four strong sources that demonstrate the origin, purpose and end of all things.

1. **We can observe the universe around us.**
2. We can read the Bible the written revelation of God.
3. We can hear the Lord Jesus Christ, the living revelation of God.
4. We can experience the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the lives of others.

According to the Bible—a self-existent God created the universe. There are two broad categories; a thing unmade—and things made. In the category of unmade things—is the One, true, living, self-existent God. In the category of made things—lies everything else.

The things we see are made by God. When an unbeliever looks at the world—they must ask—why is there something rather than nothing? How did nothing become something? How did something become mind?

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We weren't here in the beginning. The Bible says, "In the beginning God created the Heaven's and the earth." The universe screams design. Design demands a designer. The Bible says that God created the universe. Jesus Christ says that God made the world. The Holy Spirit bears witness in the Believer's Heart that the claims of the Bible are true, the witness of Jesus Christ is true.

We understand that God exists and that He created the Universe. God created us in His own likeness and image. An invisible God—made the visible universe—with things unseen.

What is the writer saying? Why does he say this—now—after the meaning of faith (v.1) and the reward of faith (v.2)? Faith is more than simply believing something—faith has power—and that power is evidenced in Creation! God spoke—and the worlds came into existence.

The testimony of the Bible is that God speaks—and that when God speaks we are invited to believe that what God says is true! This is the big idea—when we believe what God says—the power of God accomplishes something in our lives.

Warren Wiersbe: "The same Word that acted in the old creation acts in the new creation" (Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament; p.707).

Bible Faith Is Based On Facts And Acts

Everyone has faith—and exercises faith. The issue is what will you trust—who will you trust.

Historical biblical Christianity is a credible faith—based on assurance and evidence. In the book; *Many Infallible Proofs* (p. 7) we read; True Christianity, as set forth in the Bible, is a credible faith and not one based on emotions, superstitions, or groundless belief. Christianity is founded on truth that can be tested and is for the thinking person. Followers of other religions can quote their texts and give glowing testimonies of how their religions make them feel, because their beliefs are based on feelings rather than historical facts. It is quite possible to be devoted and sincere about some religious belief but wholeheartedly believing a lie does not make it true. Even if beliefs bring comfort, if they are not true, will they ultimately help or harm us?

Christianity alone is based on verifiable historical truth. The Bible says in Romans 1:20 that no one has any excuse for disbelief in the one true God because God makes Himself known through His Word, the Bible. God repeatedly challenges us to examine and test these claims. Each person is responsible to investigate the Bible's claims of authenticity. His eternal destiny depends on it."

Conclusion

The Bible teaches us how we can have a relationship with God. It involves four interconnected and related things.

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1. We must recognize that we have a problem with God. Paul in the book of Romans wrote; “No one has real understanding” “no one is seeking God.” All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong” (Rom. 3:11). What does it mean to recognize our problem? We acknowledge we have turned from God. We admit we don’t have the resources to decide for ourselves what is right—and what we need. The Bible puts it this way; You “were once far away from God. You were his enemies separated from him by your own evil thoughts and actions” (Col.1:21).

2. We must realize that Jesus Christ is the only solution to our problem with God and our problem of sin. When people sin the Bible says, “they earn what sin pays—death” (Rom.6:23). Our problem with God has earned us the death sentence—separation from God. We cannot solve the problem. We can’t become alive—because we are already dead in trespass and sin. We can’t try harder to be good. Jesus did not come to make bad people better—Jesus came to make dead people alive. Romans 8:11 says “The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you.” Jesus is our only solution.

3. We need to respond to Christ’s offer to redeem us. We need to be given new life. And Christ will give us new life—when we agree with Jesus—about what He says—is our problem—and the solution He offers—Himself. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

“You will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am who I say I am, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26). Do you really believe this? Are you convinced that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, the only way to salvation, the only solution to your problem? Will you commit your life to him? He is ready to raise you from death to life.

4. You can rely on God to live in and through you. You may be dead to God because of your sin, but he is ready, as it says in Colossians 2:14; “To (cancel) the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ’s cross”.

Pray this prayer; if it truly reflects your convictions—your faith—you can begin a new life in Christ.

Dear Lord—God;

“I have a problem—a real problem—and I recognize that problem. I have sinned against you. I have gone my own way in life. I realize that Jesus is the only solution to my very real problem.

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I ask you to forgive me all my sins. I want to turn from my old life and embrace a new life in Christ. I want to have a forever friendship with you. I respond right now to Jesus Christ's offer to rescue me from death, forgive my sin and give me life. I trust Jesus as my Savior and Redeemer. Right now I believe you will transform me and make me your child.

I rely on you—to transfer me from death to life. You said in John 11:25 that I will receive eternal life by believing in you and I will never perish. I believe and rely on you to transform me right now. Thank you for doing what you said you would do. Thank you for making me your **forgiven child. Please live your life in me and through me. I pray these things in Jesus name.**

Now you have something to celebrate!