

Faith

Part 1: Substance

In the world today the definition of faith has become more of an obscure term for believing in whatever a person feels like than trust and obedience to the word of God. A popular philosophy teaches that we should be able to “attend the church of our own choice,” and “believe whatever makes us feel good.” Contrary to such teaching the faith that pleases God is very specific and should result in a specific outcome. He shows us that there are, in fact, three elements to “the *faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3). These the elements will be discussed in three parts.

The Substance of Things Hoped for

In Heb. 11:1-6 the Hebrew writer clearly defines faith for us. The first description of faith is “*the substance of things hoped for.*” One may ask, how can faith be a substance? The truth is, faith is not a substance in the manner that a desk or chair is substance. Rather, it is the grounding or basis upon which our hope rests. When we live by faith we live in such a way that heaven is not only a dream, but a reality. Notice, “*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them...*” (Heb. 11:13). When we have this faith the promises of God become as substance upon which we can confidently set our hope, assured that we will receive that hope.

“*By faith Abraham obeyed...For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (1:8, 10). This spiritual city was so real to Abraham that He was willing to give up everything in order to dwell in it. It was the substance upon which his hope rested.

Let us now qualify this by pointing out that only those things which God has promised are included in this faith. That is to say, we can hope for many things but the faith that pleases God has confidence only in those things specifically promised by God! Some may hope to go to heaven only after a short time of suffering in purgatory, but there is no substance in that for God has not promised it. Some people have the hope of living on a perfect earth after Christ comes, but this hope is also vain (Ezek. 13:6). You see, there is only one faith (Eph. 4:5), therefore there is only one hope that God’s people may have. Only when our faith has confidence in the truth and when that confidence drives us to do all we can to attain our reward may we say that our faith is the “*substance of things hoped for*” (1 Pet. 1:13).

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Part 2: Evidence

In the previous lesson we discussed the first aspect of faith which the Hebrews writer gives in Hebrews 11:1: “*The substance of things hoped for.*” In this article we will discuss how faith is...

“*The evidence of things not seen*”

The Greek word used for “evidence” in this passage is *elengchos*. This word can be translated in two different ways: 1. The evidence or proof presented as in a trial to convict or acquit 2. A person’s conviction in the evidence that has been presented. How do we know which of these meanings applies to Heb. 11:1? We must look at the context. In the scriptures we find that the literal evidence of “things not seen” (definition 1) have been presented to us by God in numerous ways. “*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead...*” (Rom. 1:20). “*Neverthe-less He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness*” (Acts 14:17). Not only do the heavens and all creation provide ample evidence of the things not seen, but God has also revealed these things to us through His word.

There are thousands of evidences that prove God’s authority and that the Bible is His word. These can be summed up in three categories: fulfilled prophecies, superior knowledge of the universe, and absolute control over nature. Within these three areas God has proven, not only His authority, but His faithfulness as well. Since all of God’s prophecies have been fulfilled, if He says something is true, then we know it is true. Having given us the evidence necessary to know that God’s word is true, He has proceeded to reveal details to mankind concerning the spiritual realm (heaven, angels, etc.). Having God’s testimony of these invisible things recorded in the word, we have the ability to put confidence in them. Therefore, in the context of Hebrews 11:1 the testimony of God is our evidence and our faith is our confidence in that evidence. In this manner our faith is the “*evidence of things not seen.*”

Many people who have never been to London have *confidence* that it exists because of the many testimonies of people who have been there. Abraham had confidence that there was a city made by God, even though he had not seen it. This is faith.

Now, we must also qualify this principle according to God’s standard. We are told in Romans 10:17 that “*faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*” Therefore, the faith that pleases God (Heb. 11:6) is that faith which puts confidence only in things revealed through the word of God. That is, our faith is “*the evidnece of things not seen*” ONLY if it believes in that which is revealed by God.

There are many who believe that a second world exists where men who have died are now dwelling until Jesus comes back to purify the earth. God has not revealed this to us by His word, therefore to put faith in it is futile. There are many who believe that every person alive has a guardian angel. We know there are angels, but God has not revealed to us that we have “guardian angels.” Therefore, to put faith in that is to go beyond what is written.

This is the reason God has been so clear about not going beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6), not going beyond the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9) and not adding to or taking away from the word (Rev. 22:18-19). The moment we go beyond the revelation of God for our faith we sever ourselves from the confidence we can put in what we believe. Many people today teach that we can believe whatever we want. But remember, if God did not speak it, we cannot believe it. Otherwise we will fail (2 Pet. 2:1-4, 12; 2 Thess. 2:11).

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Part 3: Diligence

The third aspect of faith that we will discuss in this series is one that is not mentioned in Hebrews 11:1, but in verse 6. In Hebrews 11:5 the writer mentions how that “*by faith...Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death.*” The Hebrew writer goes on to prove that Enoch accomplished this “by faith” because “*without faith it is impossible to please (God)*” (vs. 6a). Also in verse 6 the Hebrew writer says that the faith that please God is that which: 1. Believes God is, as we discussed in our second article. For God is not seen and faith is “*the evidence of things not seen.*” 2. The faith that pleases God is that which believes that God is a rewarder. The rewards of God are what we put our hope in, as we discussed in the first article. However, what we cannot fail to see in this passage is who, exactly, God will reward.

There are many people in this world who claim to have faith in God, but their faith does not move them to DO anything. They do not add to their faith according to 2 Peter 3:5-7. They are not growing in it or becoming strong in it. Indeed, they are not seeking God at all; they just believe that He exists. The faith that pleases God, however, is that which believes God “*is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*” What else can we conclude then, that every “faith” in this world that does not drive a person to diligently seek God is not a faith that pleases God!

Let us consider the comments of M.E. Patton on this principle. “Obedient faith: The eleventh chapter of Hebrews well illustrates the fact that only obedient faith saves. Read it carefully. Notice that the expression ‘by faith’ is followed by a verb of action in every instance which shows that obedience is inherent in the word ‘faith’ - it is ‘conjoined with obedience’” (Answers for our hope, pg. 247).

The faith that pleases God is one that puts all confidence in spiritual things and in the promises of God and causes one to pursue those things with all diligence. Does this describe your faith? Are you “*diligently seeking*” God? Are you obedient to His word (Mark 16:16)? Why not start today?

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