



What is Faith?

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

Can anyone deny the importance of faith? The word most often translated faith is found 243 times in 227 verses in the New Testament. That doesn't count all the derivatives of the word that describe believers and the faithful. Further, **Hebrews 11:6** explains the absolute importance of faith when it says, "And without faith it is impossible to please him..." (ESV). So we talk about faith; we preach on faith; we sing about faith. But what is faith? Nothing else we learn about faith will ever help us unless we actually know what it is. And as most of us know, the place to go to define faith is **Hebrews 11**. We especially note **Hebrews 11:1**.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (ESV).

Discussion:

I. "Now faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for..."

A. Before we examine faith's part in this statement, let's notice it is connected to the things we hope for. What is our hope as Christians?

1. While Paul was on trial in **Acts 26:6-8**, he claimed he was on trial because of his hope. His hope was in God's promises to the fathers. Many of us have heard of these promises. We know that God promised Abraham that his offspring would be as the sands of the sea and as the stars of the heavens. We know God promised Abraham that his offspring would be made into a nation and given a land. But the promise in which Paul most hoped is repeated in **Galatians 3:8-9** (coming from **Genesis 12:3**), that in Abraham's offspring all the nations would be blessed. Paul further explains this in **Galatians 3:16**. Paul's hope, and ours, is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the offspring of Abraham, and our hope is in Him. Then as he wrapped up his argument in **Acts 26:8**, he asked why it was so hard to believe that God could raise the dead. What is our hope? That Jesus is the Christ; that He died and was raised from the dead as the fulfillment of God's promise, and that in Him we can all be blessed.
2. According to **Romans 8:18-25**, we hope for the creation to "be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (ESV). Further, we hope for "adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (ESV). This is not talking about the redemption of spiritual salvation, but the redemption of our bodies. That is, as **I Corinthians 15:35-44, 52-55** says, these mortal bodies will put on immortality and be redeemed, bought back by God.
3. **I Timothy 4:10** explains that our hope is set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people. That is, our hope is that God is and that God is a Savior, not just a judge.
4. **I Timothy 6:17** says our hope is that God richly provides us with all things to enjoy. That is, our hope is that God will take care of us when money and material goods will not.
5. **I Peter 1:13** says our hope is to be set fully on the grace of Jesus Christ. Thus we have hope that Jesus is gracious, forgiving, merciful.
6. By the way, let us understand what "hope" means in these contexts. It is not, as some suppose, wishful thinking. Look again at **Romans 8:18-25**, we see "hope" defined. In **vs. 19**, we see it defined as "waits with eager longing." In **vs. 23**, it is "we wait eagerly." In **vs. 25**, it is "we wait for it with patience." Biblical hope is not a simple desire, a wish, a positive attitude. It is an earnest longing, an expectation, something we wait for because we are convinced it is going to happen.

B. Biblical faith is connected to this hope. According to **Hebrews 11:1** it is the assurance of our hope.

1. The term translated "assurance" in the ESV, NASB, RSV ("substance" in KJV, NKJV; "being sure" in NIV) is the Greek word "hypostasis,"¹ which in turn is the combination of two words "hypo" and "histemi."
2. "Hypo" means under.² As we use it in modern words today like "hypodermic needle." That is a needle that punctures under the dermis or skin. Or "hypoglycemia" which is a condition in which your blood sugar level is under what it should be.
3. "Histemi" means "to cause or make to stand...to make firm, fix, establish..."³

¹ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5287&t=ESV>

² <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5259&t=ESV>

³ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2476&t=ESV>

4. “Hypostasis” is intended to draw a picture in our minds. I remember when I lived in Texas and we were building a new classroom wing to house the Bible classes of the congregation there. Before they could build the actual structure, they had to develop a foundation. First, they brought in dirt to raise the level of the ground to where the building could sit so it wasn’t in danger of flooding. But they still couldn’t build the actual structure at that time. Then they brought in this big drill that had a bell-housing on it. And they drilled holes into the ground that were about two or three feet in diameter at the top and at the bottom the bell-housing would open up and dig out a cone shaped section of the dirt. Then they fashioned some cast iron rebar into long square supports or legs and dropped them in the holes. Then they poured cement into these holes. Finally, they poured a cement foundation for the building over those supports. Only at that point did they erect the building. All of that cement, rebar, and foundation was the hypostasis of the building.
- C. What is faith? It is the support, the foundation, the substructure of our hope. It is what assures us that our hope is accurate and well-founded. It is the reason we are convinced our hope is more than wishful thinking. We believe what God has said, therefore we hope for it. That is, we eagerly wait for it and expect it.

II. “Now faith is...the conviction of things not seen.”

- A. “Conviction” in the ESV, NASB, RSV, ASV (“evidence” in the KJV, NKJV; “being...certain” in the NIV) translates the Greek word “elegchos,”⁴ which is only found in this passage and in **II Timothy 3:16** (there translated “reproof”). Perhaps the difference explained by Trench in his book on biblical synonyms most helps us understand what this word really means. He connects this word with “aitia,”⁵ which is used in passages like **Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; John 18:38**. He explains that “aitia” “is an accusation, but whether false or true the word does not attempt to anticipate...”⁶ Whereas “elegchos” “implies not merely the charge, but the truth of the charge; nay more than all this, very often also the acknowledgment, if not outward, yet inward, of its truth on the part of the accused...”
- B. We see from this a kind of judicial term. It is the word that would be used of the evidence, argument, or proof that convicted a criminal of his guilt. Yet, in this context it is talking about the proof that convinces us of something we did not see. We need to be very careful at this point. This verse does not say what we have so often claimed. We have very often gone to this verse to claim, “See, there is evidence for our faith.” While that statement is true (we do have evidence for our faith; it is not blind), that is not what **Hebrews 11:1** teaches. **Hebrews 11:1** teaches that our faith, our belief is the final proof that causes us to accept things that we did not see.
- C. Please note that biblically, accepting something on faith is not the opposite of accepting something based on fact as so many today want to make it. Accepting something on the basis of faith is not the opposite of accepting it on the basis of evidence. Rather, as **II Corinthians 5:7** also demonstrates, accepting something on the basis of faith is the opposite of accepting something on the basis of sight. All biblical faith means is accepting the truth of something that we didn’t see. It is understanding that seeing is not believing, rather believing is seeing. Allow me to share some examples.
 1. I have never seen the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France. Rather, I’ve heard testimony from those who have witnessed it. I’ve read about it in books and talked to people who have visited Paris. Because I accept their testimony, I believe it is there. I am convinced, even before traveling to Paris, that if I did, I would see the Eiffel Tower.
 2. I have never actually seen the earth revolve around the sun. But I am convinced that it does. This is truly intriguing, because my actual senses seem to suggest the exact opposite. From our vantage point of what we have seen, I think we would all have to admit that it sure looks like the sun revolves around the earth. It feels and looks like to us that the earth is stationary and the sun moves across the sky. But, scientists, astronomers, and mathematicians tell us that based on their formulas, the exact opposite of what it looks like is happening. I don’t have any reason to doubt them on this. Therefore, I accept their testimony, and I believe it. To be honest though, I don’t believe any of them have actually seen it either. Rather, they have faith that their formulas and measurements accurately represent the way things work in our universe. It seems to me, they accept this based on their faith as well. It seems to me the only way to actually see this would be to somehow step outside of our solar system and then try to watch what is happening here. Until then, we only accept this on faith.
 3. I’ll tell you another thing we all accept on faith—gravity. I’ve never seen gravity. Have you? I’ve seen the effects of what I believe is gravity, but I’ve never seen, touched, tasted, or heard gravity. I can’t box it up and send it to you in a package. But based on what some have measured and tested and also based on my own past experience, I am convinced if I drop something it will fall to the ground every time. Therefore, I won’t let go of a crystal vase in mid-air.

⁴ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G1650&t=ESV>

⁵ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G156&t=ESV>

⁶ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/trench/section.cfm?sectionID=4&lexicon=true&strongs=G1650>

- D. We must not be afraid of being people of faith. Everyone is a person of faith, even those who are afraid to admit it. It doesn't mean you are foolish to be a person of faith. We can't survive in this world if we don't act based on faith. We do a million things a day based on faith. Certainly, some faith is well-founded, and other faith is not. But everyone has faith. It is simply the final conviction that something is so even though we have not seen it.

III. Faith is what governs everybody's lives.

- A. Most often we stop at this point and say we've defined faith, but the definition in **Hebrews 11** really continues throughout the chapter. True biblical faith is merely a mental assent to something. It is a worldview that governs our lives. As **II Corinthians 5:7** says, it is something we walk by. It is something that directs our steps. The rest of **Hebrews 11** explains this.
1. **Hebrews 11:4**—Abel walked by faith when he offered a pleasing sacrifice.
 2. **Hebrews 11:7**—Noah had never seen a flood (had possibly never seen rain). Yet, he believed God and it caused him to build an ark.
 3. **Hebrews 11:8-9**—Abraham had not seen the land to which God was sending him, but by faith he went.
 4. **Hebrews 11:11-12**—Sarah had been barren and seen over and over again that she simply couldn't conceive. But by faith, she received the power to do so, because she believed the one who promised her it would happen.
 5. **Hebrews 11:17-19**—Abraham had not seen God raise anyone from the dead. But by faith, he was willing to sacrifice Isaac.
 6. And on the text goes.
- B. Faith is more than mentally accepting something. It is accepting it so much that we will put it to the test, if you will, and live based upon it. Consider our three earlier examples of faith.
1. I am so convinced that the Eiffel Tower is in Paris, France, that if I decided to go see it, guess what I would do. I would book a plane flight to Paris, France. I wouldn't start a worldwide search. I would go directly there. I would walk by my faith.
 2. I am so convinced that the earth revolves around the sun, that if I were wanting to travel through space, I would use the formulas our scientists have developed for space travel to avoid running into the sun.
 3. I am so convinced that gravity is real and will always work, that I do not let go of breakable things in mid-air. Further, I don't go jumping out of tall buildings or airplanes.
- C. The greater point we need to understand is that everyone is living by their faith. Even those who claim to live by fact live by faith. Even dyed-in-the-wool atheistic evolutionists live by faith. Not one atheist saw the beginning of the world. Not one has ever seen one species give birth to another. Not one has ever seen life come from non-life. Yet, they all believe it. And they all tell stories based on it. They dig up a bone in Africa and they place it on a chart that makes its way into a textbook that gets lectured on in classes all over. What is it that convinces these atheists of their story? Not facts. It is their faith. And their faith changes how they live and how they walk.
- D. If they are living by their faith, so are we. What does our life say about our faith? Isn't this the point of **James 2:18-19**? What we do, how we walk, how we live demonstrates the nature of our faith. The way you spend your money, the way you spend your time, the places you go, the actions you participate in all reveal your faith. When Abraham took Isaac to the point of death, he saw what kind of faith he had finally grown (**James 2:21-22**). When Rahab hid the spies, she demonstrated her faith in the God of the Jews (**James 2:25**).
- E. This leaves us with a question; what kind of faith do we have? What do we believe? Do we believe God is and that He rewards those who seek Him (**Hebrews 11:6**)? Or do we believe He isn't really there? Do we believe that He'll just reward anyone and everyone? Do we believe He rewards only those who attain perfection? Do we believe He rewards those who are good enough? Do we believe He rewards those who prove themselves worthy? Do we believe He rewards those who are better than everyone else?
- F. Faith is what governs our lives. So, we have to ask, what does our life say about the faith that is governing it?

Conclusion:

The truly powerful point for us is found in **Hebrews 11:2**—"For by it the people of old received their commendation" (ESV). That is, by faith the people of old received the commendation or testimony of God that they were righteous (see also **Hebrews 11:4**). Do you want God to testify that you are righteous? Then work on your faith. Increase your faith. Add to your faith. What do you believe?