

Hebrews, Part 10

Having previously established the superiority of the High Priest of the New Covenant over those of the Old Covenant the author proceeded then to establish the superiority of the New Covenant itself over the Old. He then proceeded to establish the superiority of One Sacrifice of the New Covenant over the many sacrifices of the Old Covenant. He emphasized the inferiority of the many sacrifices to the One Sacrifice, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 19:4). The fact that these offerings were repeated daily was proof of their inadequacy to deal with the sin issue. They were merely a shadow of what was needed, a perfect sacrifice once for all. The New Covenant promised and delivered what the Old Covenant could only hint at.

To enjoy the benefits of the New Covenant, faith was called for. The believer was called to, “...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). The readers were urged to “hold fast” to this hope and encourage one another.

This was followed by a warning. “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries” (Heb 10:26-27). To abandon their faith in Christ and return to a system of “dead works” would be tantamount to being in perpetual sin because they will have “trampled underfoot the Son of God, and ... profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and ... outraged the Spirit of grace” (Heb 10:29). In such a state of sin and relying on a system that is no longer functioning and could no longer offer atonement for sin, this placed the apostate in a position from which there is no recovery. He then faces an angry God and severe chastisement. This is not a suggestion that the wayward believer has lost his salvation, for such is impossible.

The writer concluded the previous chapter with a note of encouragement. “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls” (Heb 10:39). “Preserve their souls”

means to save one's life and likely refers to avoiding the ultimate penalty of the "sin unto death" (1 John 5:16; Rom 6:16) facing those who abandon their faith in Christ.

We now continue our study with chapter 11, and the author will give examples of faith throughout history of those who trusted fully in the promises of God, including the promised Kingdom, even though all died before seeing fulfillment. Their faith was so profound that they held tightly to the promises through the worst of times and under the threat of death. His argument will be to look to these examples, all persons the readers would be familiar with, and see how their faith sustained them.

Up to now the Epistle to the Hebrews has been doctrinal; now it will get practical. Chapter 11 is often called the "faith chapter" because it gives so many examples of faith.

It is easy to make the Christian Life a series of rules. It seems simple to obey rules. But in this chapter, we are going to find people who take an altogether different route. They "walk by faith" and that is the way God wants us to walk.

What we will also see is that the absolute worst sin a believer can commit is that of unbelief. There is no sinful act a believer can commit today that God cannot forgive tomorrow – NONE. To assume so is to believe that when Christ, hanging on the Cross, said *tetelestai*, He was lying, and the judgment of all sin was somehow not complete. Something was missed. Unpardonable sin? An unbeliever can reject the testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning the free gift of salvation by faith and remain in unbelief; and for that sin, God has no remedy.

By Faith We Understand

Heb 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Verse 1 is a scriptural definition of faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

There are two ways you can be saved: The first is to live a perfect life without sin and present yourself to God as perfect in your person, and God will accept that. That is, of course, impossible, but that hasn't stopped most of this world from attempting to pull off the impossible.

The second way is by faith. Some think faith is a leap in the dark, an uncertainty, or some kind of game. If that is what it means to you, you have no faith. In its essence, faith is "the substance". The word is hypostasis, and means a foundation, what stands under anything be it a building, a contract, or a promise. Some translate this as "faith is the title deed of things hoped for...". "Evidence" is *elenchos*, from the verb *elenchō*, meaning to prove or conviction about unseen hopes and realities. Faith rests on a foundation and has conviction concerning what is believed.

To others, faith is a great mystery, some sort of sixth sense, some intuition into the spiritual realm, or a sesame to a new world. Faith to some is like belonging to a secret order into which you are initiated, and there are mystical works that God will accept in place of good works if you just believe hard enough. The prosperity gospel is built on this "believe hard enough" lie. The demons believe, but they are not saved.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "It is not thy hold on Christ that saves thee; it is Christ. It is not that joy in Christ that saves thee; it is Christ. It is not even thy faith in Christ that saves thee, though that be the instrument. It is Christ's blood and merit." That is what saves you. Faith is what lays hold of it.

Faith is not something added to good works, but many people today add their faith, like dressing on a salad, to their good works. That is not faith at all.

Dr. J. Oswald Sanders, the founder of the China Inland Missions, now called the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, said of faith, "Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen."

In a brief prologue, the author set forth three fundamental considerations about faith:

- Its basic nature
- The honor associated with it
- It's the way of seeing things.

Heb 11:2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

3 By 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.

It was because of faith that the Old Testament worthies, the “elders,” were commended. Their faith was a “good testimony” concerning who and what they were. Their faith was seen in their actions. We are saved by faith to walk by faith.

Faith is also a way of viewing all experiences since it is how believers see the “world” for what it is—a creation by God. The word is *tous aiōnas*, and literally means “the ages,” also rendered “the universe” in 1:2.

The belief in creation—the belief in a divine will manifested in the existence of the world is the necessary foundation for the life of faith in all its manifestations. Hence, this primary action of faith is declared first. By faith, we have the assurance that the world—history—is not the result of blind fate but is a product of the will of God. From that foundation of faith, we can also have victory just as the heroes of faith in the past were victorious.

The divine acceptance of faith.

In the first major movement of his exposition, the author stressed the theme suggested in verse 2. Faith wins acceptance and reward from God. If the readers are suffering a loss of faith because the Lord has not yet returned, the following Old Testament examples are designed to encourage them. These all persevered by faith even though the objects of their faith, whether temporal deliverance or ultimate sanctification, were not readily visible or even experienced in their lifetime. But they often saw their promises “afar off”. Faith sees the future as the present.

Faith at the Dawn of History

Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and through it, he being dead still speaks.

Able and his brother Cain brought offerings to God (Gen 4). Able's was acceptable but Cain's was not. As a farmer, Cain's offering was from the field, while his brother brought an offering from the flock, a blood offering. It isn't explained how, but it is obvious they had been instructed to make offerings to God because of their sinfulness. Only a blood offering was acceptable, a picture of the superior blood offering of Christ at the Cross.

Abel represents the righteous man referred to in 10:38, whose acceptance before God was based on a superior sacrifice. The point of using Able as an example is that like Abel, the readers found acceptance before God based on the better sacrifice of the New Covenant. Their unbelieving brethren, like Cain, found no such divine approbation. And even death does not extinguish the testimony of a man like Abel.

Heb 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 6 But 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 diligently seek Him.

Enoch, on the other hand, reflected the kind of life that pleases God since he walked with God by faith, a walk of faith, as the readers should also walk. If Christ had come in their lifetimes, the readers, like Enoch, would not have experienced death. In any case, they could only please God by continued confidence that He exists and rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

It is said that Enoch represents the future Church which is called to walk by faith. Enoch was "translated" from life to eternity without experiencing death (Gen 5:18-24) like the Church will eventually be removed from this Earth by the Rapture.

Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

There is a saying that Noah preached for 120 years and never made a convert. That isn't quite true. He didn't win any Babylonians but he did win his family. That God does reward those who seek Him is suggested by the career of Noah, who became an heir of righteousness by faith. What he inherited was, in fact, the new world after the Flood, as the readers might inherit "the world to come" (cf. 2:5). The reference here to Noah saving his household recalls the writer's stress on a Christian's salvation-inheritance. It further suggests that a man's faith can be fruitful in his family, as they share it. The believer should witness to his family, not by continually giving them the Gospel, but by living it before them.

Faithful Abraham

Heb 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

The worship of God leads to obedience to God, and that leads to work for God. It leads to doing the things God wants you to do. I am not talking about "being busy" for God. I am talking about the guiding of the Spirit's calling you to the work God wants you to do. There is a difference between that and "being busy" for God. God has something He wants you to do. You have been given at least one spiritual gift, and you are expected to exercise it. Think of it as a pilgrimage like the one Abraham was called to. And whatever the calling, God is obliged to supply you with whatever assets and abilities you need to execute that calling.

The readers should look forward to "the world to come" and treat their present experience as a pilgrimage a lesson enforced by the life of Abraham. This great patriarch lived like a stranger in a land he would later receive as his inheritance. So also would the readers inherit, if they, like

this forefather, kept looking forward to the city with foundations, a reference to the heavenly and eternal Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 21:2, 9-27). That is where the faithful believer will find his rewards associated with his service here on Earth.

Heb 11:11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

The writer here chose to introduce his first heroine of faith, one who was able to overlook the physical limitation of her barrenness to become a fruitful mother. Though her faith failed her at first because of her advanced age. She was sure she could not conceive and offered her servant to her husband to bear him a child. From that union came Ishmael, but he was not to be the child of the promise. Eventually, her faith was blessed, and she bore Isaac, the child of the promise. Since “she considered Him faithful who had promised” (NASB) so also should the readers (cf. 10:23). Her faith contributed to the startling multiplication of her husband’s seed, when old Abraham was as good as dead.

The Heavenly Hope

Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

The writer pointed out that people can still be living by faith when they die, even if they had not received the things promised. Faith looks to the future. By faith, the old saints saw the promised realities from a distance. Their life here on Earth was like a journey, and they looked forward to the end of that journey when they would find a “homeland”. These pilgrims refused to reverse course and return to the place they had left, choosing to press on

by faith. So too the readers should renounce the opportunity to go back to any form of their ancestral religion and should persist in longing for a better country expressed as a “homeland” and described as a “heavenly” one here. If they continued in the faith, like the patriarchs, they would be people with whom God would not be “ashamed” to be associated.

In a multiplicity of varied experiences, faith remains the constant factor by which these experiences are met and understood. Faith constitutes a Christian’s true “worldview” (cf. v. 3).

The Faith of the Patriarchs

Heb 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

The theme of testing emerges here as the writer returned to Abraham. The readers can learn from that supreme test in which the patriarch was called on to sacrifice “his only begotten son”. Though this seemed to contradict the divine promise, Abraham was able to rise above the trial and trust in the resurrecting power of God. This was, of course, a picture of God offering His only begotten Son, as a sacrifice. So also Christian readers must sometimes look beyond the experiences of life, in which God’s promises do not seem to be fulfilled, and realize that their resurrections will bring those promises to fruition.

The word translated as “tested” is *peirazo* and means to test for ascertaining quantity, or what one thinks, or how he will behave himself, to test one’s faith, virtue, or character. God knew exactly how Abraham would respond to this “test”. Thus, its purpose was not to prove anything to God. The test was to prove Abraham’s faith to you and me. Abraham’s testing was a testimony of his faith, a model for the readers of this epistle and for us to imitate today.

Heb 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

The patriarchs mentioned here likewise looked to the future in faith, Isaac trusting God to fulfill His promises to Abraham and his descendants and pronounced blessings on his own two sons Jacob and Esau regarding their future. So also did Jacob bless Joseph's sons, which was for him an act of faith in his old age.

It wasn't until the end of his life that we can say Jacob was a man of faith. Even before his birth, Jacob was trying to get the upper hand. He struggled at birth and came out clutching the heel of his twin brother Esau. He was a deceiver and a rascal all his life. He couldn't wait for his promised blessings but stole them from his brother Esau by a very deceptive method which forced him to leave home and live with his uncle Laban. But he became homesick and returned to the land. Later in his life, we see the sin he committed come home to him in the life of his son Joseph. Joseph's jealous brothers sought to take his inheritance and sold him into slavery. As Jacob had deceived, he was himself deceived into thinking Joseph was dead.

But God did transform his life. It was at the end of his life that the writer shows us his faith. He "blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped." This is the first example of obedience in his life. The important thing for the readers of the epistle to see is God can take any life and straighten it out. Where there was confusion and deception, if there is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can lay hold of Him. Faith was operative in Jacob's life, but he had to come to the end of his life to see it. The readers too were to maintain their worship right to the end of life, persevering in faith in the future that God had foretold.

Joseph had faith in a dream which was given to him, faith while he was in that pit, faith all the while he was in Egypt, faith that buoyed him up through all the adverse circumstances he went through, faith that ultimately resulted in great blessings in this life and beyond. Nearing death, Joseph expressed confidence that God would in the future deliver the Israelites from Egypt.

Similarly, all believers should, in genuine faith, have confidence in the future of God's people.

The Faith of Moses

Heb 11:23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

With this transition to the life of Moses, the writer began to focus on the way faith confronts opposition and hostility, a subject familiar to his readers. It was by faith that Moses was hidden by his parents and his life was preserved.

"Because they saw he was a beautiful child." That word "beautiful" is *asteion* in Greek and occurs in the NT only here and in Acts 7:20, which also refers to Moses. Delighted by the precious gift of a son which God had given them, they believed God had something better than death for this lovely baby. Not fearing Pharaoh's edict, they kept him alive, and God rewarded their faith with their son's illustrious career.

Moses was brought up in the palace and would have been the next pharaoh, but Moses had faith to choose what was right. In a classic presentation of the way faith chooses between the attractive but temporary pleasures of sin and the prospect of disgrace for the sake of Christ, the writer showed Moses to be a real hero of faith who understood the eschatological hopes of the nation of Israel. Likewise, the readers also were to accept "disgrace" and reject "the pleasures of sin," and they would do so if they, like Moses, anticipated their reward.

Heb 11:27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

Moreover, at the time of the Exodus, Moses was undeterred by fear of the king's anger. By keeping the Passover, which included the sprinkling of blood, the Israelites avoided God's judgment. In the same way, the readers should not be afraid of human wrath and should maintain their separateness (sanctification = set apart) from the surrounding world. They should persist in the worship experience made possible by the blood of the New Covenant. If they would do so, they would not fall under divine retribution. This is the faith to obey.

But when the children of Israel had their backs against the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army bearing down on them, did they have faith? No. The faith that saved them was that of Moses. He smote the water with his rod, and it was by his faith that the waters parted and the children of Israel were able to safely cross over while Pharaoh's army was destroyed when they tried to pursue.

By Faith They Overcame

Heb 11:30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. **31** By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

Jericho was the last place one would look for faith. It was a wicked and pagan city where Rehab practiced the oldest profession and was an unlikely woman of faith. By faith, she hid the Israelite spies sent into the city and saved their lives. She was herself saved by her faith when Israel eventually took the city and the others in high positions in the city perished – they died for just one reason, they did not believe God. Rehab did believe God. She expressed her faith in a very definite way. Like the other citizens of the city, she had heard about the Israelites when they crossed the Red Sea, but unlike the citizens of the city, she was sure that God was with them. “I know that the Lord has given you the land and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you” (Josh 2:9). Because of her faith, she was delivered while the others in Jericho were not.

The readers could also look forward to victory over their enemies. They could learn from the destruction of the Egyptians and the collapse of the walls of Jericho what triumphs faith can win over its adversaries. If, as seems probable, there were a few Gentiles in the church that received this letter, they could take comfort from the experience of the prostitute Rahab, a Gentile who was spared when Jericho was conquered.

Heb 11:32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again...

There were far too many heroes of faith for the writer to deal with them all in detail. Swiftly he mentioned the various accomplishments of some of them. At the climax of this list, he mentions women who received back their dead, raised to life again—a truly superlative victory of faith that does not allow death to defeat it (cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:17-37).

Heb 11:35 ... Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trials of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

In a swift transition of thought, the writer moved from faith's obvious triumphs to what seemed to be its defeats. But these defeats were only apparent, not real. Those who were tortured and refused to be released did so because they knew their sufferings would lead to a richer and better resurrection experience. So the readers might also endure suffering staunchly and expect reward in the future world. Indeed, all manner of physical suffering (vv. 36-37, 38b cite about a dozen kinds of persecution) has been endured by people of faith, as well as ostracism from their homes

and countries, a treatment that the readers might also have to endure. But in a lovely touch, the writer commented that the world was not worthy of those whom it banished.

The author closes this section with references to the many believers who have seen their faith victories in suffering. At this point, we are compelled to ask, “Why do the righteous suffer?”

1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

The ones who suffer are the ones who know what faith really is. It sustains them in the midst of their trials and tribulations, and their victories prove to themselves the real meaning and depth of their faith. And it is a testimony to those of us who follow that demonstrates the power of faith under the worst possible conditions. No, all Christians do not suddenly have all their problems miraculously solved after salvation to go on to lead a life of pleasure free of any suffering. Demonstrated faith through suffering is a believer’s testimony and will result in a greater resurrection experience and rewards in Heaven.

Heb 11:39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,

What promise did they not receive? That specific promise is His promise that He will raise them up and that there will be a kingdom, His Kingdom, established here on Earth. They did not receive that promise because God is still calling out a people to His name. The author then gives the reason they have not received the promise.

Heb 11:40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

In a concluding summary, the writer pointed out that the great heroes of faith he had spoken of had not yet realized their eschatological hopes. This fact shows that God had planned something better for them and us. It is

indeed “better for us” that the future hopes they strove toward be delayed, since only thus could believers enjoy the present experience of becoming companions of the Messiah who leads them to glory. As a result, the perfecting (cf. 10:14; 12:23) of the Old Testament worthies—that is, the realization of their hopes—awaits that of all believers.

What we have here is a “cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1). Many of them lived long lives which they lived by faith. They discovered that faith works and proved to those of us who follow that it works. Our ultimate reward for demonstrating our faith is yet future and will be realized in glory.

In the course of this study and understanding what the core problem was for these Hebrews, that the promised return of Christ and the establishing of the promised Kingdom had not then happened some 30+ years after the death of Christ, I wonder what they would say today, some 2,000 years later? And still no Kingdom! That fact and that we still believe, what does that say about our faith?