

11. Without Faith It Is Impossible to Please God

As the notes on the 10th chapter pointed out, chapter 10 is the centerpiece of the Hebrew letter. It instructs us on how to enter heaven and how to draw near to God. It is at this point that the writer proclaims that those who draw near must do so with a “sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” Heb 10:19-25 spells out how we achieve and maintain the reward:

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The 10th chapter concludes by turning again to belief and salvation in verse 39: “39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.” In all, the Hebrew letter uses the words *faith* and *believe* 37 times. Thirty of these uses occur in the 11th chapter, making it the great chapter on faith in the Bible.

What Is Faith?

Heb 11:1. 11 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for.

3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

This great chapter on faith begins with a link back to the statement in Heb 10:21-22, “22 let us draw near to God with a **sincere heart in full assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” Faith is being sure with nothing doubting. According to Paul in 2 Cor 5:7, “7 We live by faith, not by sight. This is the assurance that Peter spoke of in Acts 2:36, “36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” *Certain*, as used in verse one, marks the degree of our faith. What we do not see is not only possible, but it is probable; what we do not see is not only probable, but also certain. God from the beginning has displayed the evidence of this certainty. Paul wrote in Rom 1:20, “20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

It is by this faith that we understand that God created the universe by his command. This truth of verse 3 eliminates any view of creation other than God spoke it into being. This statement of fact is an eternal truth, which no one can contest from either nature or the Bible. The corner stone of our faith is that God created the heavens and earth and all that are in them.

Once we have accepted that God is creator of all things, it becomes necessary that we do his will. Such was the case of Abel and all those faithful who followed him.

Examples of Faith Teach Us about Faith

Our Faith Speaks for Us

Heb 1:4. 4 By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a

righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

It was by the kind of faith defined in verses 1-3 that Able offered a better sacrifice. By faith, he did what God commanded, and by faith, God commended him as a righteous man. Any one who thinks they can be faithful and not do what God commands, commits the sin of Cain, being so arrogant as to believe God must not be obeyed. The application of these facts apply forcefully to our modern religions where obedience to God takes second place to self-will. If we are faithful, we will learn and do God's will.

Without Faith It Is Impossible to Please God

Heb 11:5-6. 5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Enoch's great example of faith was that by faith, he pleased God by doing His will. In verse 6 the writer states another eternal principle: "And without faith it is impossible to please God." The reason this is true is that anyone who comes to God must believe that God exists and believe that he rewards us if we earnestly seek. First, we believe; and second, we earnestly seek him. There is no other way.

Our Inheritance Comes by Faith

Heb 11:7. 7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

That Noah believed God and built the ark made him an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. This righteousness is one that acts and does what God says to do. Perhaps, what is called for in this modern world is Noah's **holy fear** in the hearts of those who say that they believe in God but do not follow the will of God.

Our Promise Is the City with Foundations Designed and Built by God

Heb 11:8-12. 8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

Twenty-first century Christian, when God calls, do you obey and go? do you look forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God? John in Rev 21:2-3 describes the city, "2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

By his faith Abraham became the father of spiritual Israel. Paul asserted in Rom 9:7-8, "7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's

offspring.”

Now as the children of God, we receive the holy city. Heb 12:22-24 summarizes:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

We Must Be Living by Faith when We Die

Heb 11:13-16. 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

We, as these great examples of old, must be living by faith when we die. We must long for that better country, that heavenly country, that city prepared for us by God.

God Raises the Faithful from the Dead

Heb 11:17-22. 17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

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

22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.

What did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph have in common? They all believed in a promise of life beyond the grave. God can raise the dead.

Nothing Must Intervene with Our Faith

Heb 11:23-31. 23 By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

29 By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.

31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

Nothing must intervene with our faith—not riches and wealth, earthly power and prestige. Just as Moses, we must keep our faith and the practices of the faith as given by Christ, even though Christ is invisible to us. We must keep our faith as we pass through the Red Sea and Wilderness of our lives. We must choose the right and withstand the enemy,

By Faith We Endure

Heb 11:32-38. 32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

This cluster of heroes demonstrates that God's true children endure to the end.

All the Faithful under the Old Covenant Made Perfect Together with Us

Heb 11:39-40. 39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

No matter how great the feats of faith by these witnesses of the Old Covenant, they could not receive or even know what God had planned for us and for them together with us. Even the prophets spoke of the grace to come. Peter explains in 1 Peter 1:10-12:

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Paul adds in 1 Cor 2:7-10 that even the rulers did not know, otherwise they would not have crucified the Lord of glory:

7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him"—

10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.