



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI † DEO † GLORIA

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

The Significance of Faith

Hebrews 11:1-3

January 24, 2010

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”

- ❑ One of the fastest growing religious movements in this country over the past one hundred years has been what is known as the Word of Faith Movement. Preachers within this movement teach that Christ’s atonement secured for genuine believers health, wealth and prosperity. They teach that we can simply “name it, and claim it.”
- ❑ Yet, leaders within this movement did not simply come up with their beliefs out of thin air; rather, they misinterpreted multiple passages of Scripture, in accordance with their personal desires. One such passage is Hebrews 11.
- ❑ In the King James Version of the Bible, Hebrews 11 reads, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for.”
 - Consequently, Word of Faith preachers, such as Kenneth Copeland and Benny Hinn teach that faith is a “material substance” (interpreting the word “substance” as meaning something tangible).
 - In fact, Kenneth Copeland states (based upon Hebrews 11:1), “Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force.”
 - Furthermore, Word of Faith preachers believe that the way the “substance” of faith is carried into existence is by words.

- Copeland continues, “The force of faith is released by words. Faith-filled words put the law of the Spirit of life into operation.”
- In other words, if someone believes something and speaks it, it comes into existence.
- The implications of this philosophy are profound. In fact, if true, it elevates the individual to god-like status; yet, reduces God to being held captive to our words. In other words, we can force the hand of God by speaking something into existence and forcing Him to obey what we have “created.”
- This is precisely why Word of Faith preachers say, “If you want something, speak it.”
- Yet, the Word of Faith Movement is yet another tragic example of how individuals have not “rightly handled the Word of Truth.”
- So what is the true meaning of this most important passage?

- I. **Faith is Assurance of Things Hoped For**
- II. **Faith is Evidence of Things Not Seen**
- III. **Faith is the Instrument of our Commendation**
- IV. **Faith Gives Understanding**

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I. Faith is Assurance of Things Hoped For
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- The word translated “assurance” in the English Standard Version is the Greek word *hypostasis*. This is an interesting word, because it can have several meanings depending on the context in which it is used.
- Philip Hughes, in his commentary on the Book of Hebrews offers four possible interpretations of *hypostasis* in 11:1.
 - 1.) The first possible interpretation for *hypostasis* is “**confidence**” or “**assurance.**”
 - This is the rendering in the English Standard Version.
 - According to this interpretation, faith is confidence and surety concerning those things that are hoped for, yet unseen.
 - This is how the word is used in **Hebrews 3:14**, “we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”

- We have absolute confidence in God and His promises such that we are sure about what is to come, although we cannot see it.
- Consider the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:7: “We walk by faith, not by sight.”
- Furthermore, in this context, faith is the assurance and confident that “**you have a better possession and an abiding one**” (Hebrews 10:34).
- Matthew Henry writes, “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 a kind of possession and present fruition of those things, gives them a subsistence in the soul by the firstfruits and foretastes of them; so that believers in the exercise of faith are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

2.) The second possible interpretation is that *hypostasis* can be rendered “**guarantee**” or “**attestation.**”

- This would be similar to the work of the Person of the Holy Spirit, who serves as a “down-payment” so to speak regarding our salvation:

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” Ephesians 1:13-14

- One commentator (Ceslas Spicq) writes, “Faith is a guarantee of the heavenly realities for which we hope; not only does it render them certain for us, but it envisages them as rightfully belonging to us; it is, in itself, an objective assurance of our definite enjoyment of them. Consequently, faith ‘takes possession by anticipation’ of these heavenly blessings and is a genuine commencement of the divine life.”

3.) The third possible rendering of *hypostasis* is “**foundation.**”

- In fact, the Greek word *hypostasis* is formed by the prefix *hypo* meaning “under” and *stasis* meaning “standing.”
- The idea, then, given this understanding we be that faith is something ***standing under something else***, such as the **foundation** of a building.
- This was precisely the interpretation that Augustine embraced, believing faith to be the sure foundation up which our lives were built. He believed “faith is the beginning which contains the certainty of the end.

- The late Anglican theologian J.C. Ryle wrote, “Faith is the root of a real Christian’s character. Let your root be right, and your fruit will soon abound. Your spiritual prosperity will always be according to your faith. He that believeth shall not only be saved, but shall never thirst, shall overcome, shall be established shall walk firmly on the waters of this world and shall do great works.”

4.) Finally, *hypostasis* may be rendered “**substance,**” “**nature,**” or “**essence.**”

- This is the way *hypostasis* is used in **Hebrews 1:3**: “[The Son] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his *nature*.”
- Philip Hughes, in his commentary on Hebrews writes, that “faith lays hold of what is promised and therefore hoped for, as something real and solid, though as yet unseen.”
- Writing in 1670, Thomas Manton wrote, “Faith substantiates or gives a subsistence to our hopes, and demonstrates things not seen.”
- It is difficult, given the context here, what rendering the author of Hebrews intends. However, like several other places in Scripture, it may be that he intends that they are all applicable.
- As Richard Phillips writes, “It seems that the writer of Hebrews deliberately chose a word that has a broad and rich array of meanings, all of which are to the point.”
- John Calvin writes, “The Spirit of God shows us hidden things, the knowledge of which cannot reach our senses... We are told of the resurrection of the blessed, but meantime we are involved in corruption; we are declared to be just, and sin dwells within us; we hear that we are blessed, but meantime we are overwhelmed by untold miseries; we are promised an abundance of good things, but we are often hungry and thirst; God proclaims that He will come to us immediately, but seems to be deaf to our cries. What would happen to us if we did not rely on our hope, and if our minds did not emerge above the world out of the midst of darkness though the shining Word of God and by His Spirit? Faith is therefore rightly called the substance of things which are still the objects of hope and the evidence of things not seen.”

II. Faith is Evidence of Things Not Seen

- This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used.
- The word translated “conviction” is the Greek word *elechos*, meaning “a proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested, conviction.”

- Intuitively, one would think that the more empirical evidence someone has for the existence of the God, the greater his faith would be. Yet, **Verse 1** indicates that the very possession of genuine faith is evidence “of things not seen.”
- John Piper, commenting on this Verse, states, “Faith – at least in part – is the spiritual seeing or perceiving of the fingerprints of God on the things he has made. Now the fingerprints of God on the thing she has made – the order, the beauty, the greatness, the ‘irreducible complexity’ (as Michael Behe says, in *Darwin’s Black Box*) - are the evidence that God made the world. But so is the seeing of these fingerprints a kind of evidence. It’s just the other side of the coin.”
- F.F. Bruce writes, “Physical eyesight produces conviction or evidence of visible things; faith is the organ which enables people to see the invisible order.” Therefore, this ability to see the invisible order (faith) is evidence for the things not seen.
- Consider the fact that a believer and a non-believer can look at the same sunset, the same snow-capped mountain range, and one sees the handiwork of an omniscient and omnipotent Creator; whereas the other sees pure chance.

I remember when I was in high school, one of the popular fads was a type of computer-generated design that had “hidden” pictures in it. If you stared at the design in the proper way, you would see a clear object emerge from the picture (unfortunately, I rarely saw the object). Well, if you asked someone, “How do you know the object is there?” they would simply reply, “Because I see it!” So it is with Biblical, saving faith.

- **Yet, this view of faith gives it an objective, rather than purely subjective, nature.**
- This is also consistent with the truth that **biblical, saving faith is a gift**.
 - **Ephesians 2:8-9**: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
 - **Philippians 1:29**: “For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,”
 - **Ephesians 6:23**: “Peace be to the brethren, and love with *faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.” [emphasis added]
 - **2 Peter 1:1**: “Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ:”

- In other words, saving faith is not born out of a conscience act of the will. Faith is not a decision I choose to make. Rather, faith is a gift. Do I exercise faith? Yes. Is it *my* faith? Yes. But it is from God. I exercise my faith in Christ because of a sovereign work of God’s grace in my life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

□ **NOTE: If faith were not a gift from God, it would not necessarily be evidence “of things not seen.” In other words, if faith were something that I did, then it would not be from God, and therefore would not be actual evidence, in itself, that He exists.**

- Therefore, it is the very presence of this saving faith that is evidence of “things not seen.”
- So when someone asks, “How do you know – what evidence do you have – that Jesus Christ is truly who He said He is?” A biblical response is, “Because I have faith.” For our faith did not come from ourselves, but from God.

III. Faith is the Instrument of our Commendation

- **Verse 2** states, “For by it [faith] the people of old received their commendation.”
- This truth runs parallel with the doctrine of justification by faith alone.
- According to **Verse 2**, the Old Testament saints were *not* commended by God because of anything they **did**; rather, it was by their **faith**.
- The world reveres what men can **do**; yet, God is not like men. In fact, as will be clear throughout this chapter, the world hated these men *because of their faith*; yet they “received their commendation [from God].”
- The Greek translated “received their commendation” literally means “were witnessed of.”
- In other words, God bore witness to the truth that the Old Testament saints (literally, *presbuteroi*), the elders, lived lives of faith.
- What is interesting here is that, in accordance with the Mosaic Law, a testimony is deemed true on the basis of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). Further, Verse 2 states that by faith “the people of old received their commendation” from God. Yet, it is because God is Trinity, three Persons, that this “commendation” or *testimony* is true and consistent with Mosaic Law – for it is on the basis of **three Persons** that the Old Testament saints were *commended*.

- A.W. Pink comments, “Let writer and reader learn to esteem what God does: let us value a Christian not for hi intellect, natural charms, or social position, but for his faith, evidence by an obedient walk and godly life.”

IV. Faith Gives Understanding

- Finally, **Verse 3** states, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”
- According to **Romans 1:19-20**, the created order is sufficient evidence to prove that God exists. In other words, it is natural to observe the cosmos with the physical eye and conclude that God exists. (However, it is only through a supernatural and sovereign work of the Holy Spirit that one will embrace Jesus Christ as the Son of God.)
- Yet, the focus in **Verse 2** is on two aspects of creation: (1) the agent of creation: the word of God; and (2) the origin of creation.

(1) the agent of Creation

- Verse 3 states, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God...”
- This Verse makes it clear that Word of God – the Son of God – Jesus Christ – was the agent of Creation. This Verse is consistent with Genesis 1 (...and God **said**, “Let there be light.”), with John 1:1 (“In the beginning was the Word...”) and Hebrews 1:2: “but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also *he created the world.*” [emphasis added]
- There are also at least two truths that stem from this first phrase of Verse 3.
 - ◆ First, **Biblical faith always has a particular object: Jesus Christ.** Biblical faith is never blind, wishful thinking. It is confident assurance knowing that what God has promised will come to pass.
 - **As we saw earlier, biblical faith is not the result of simply making up your mind that something will happen, and then believing in it strongly (in fact, this is often *irresponsible* rather than wisdom guided by faith).**
 - The object of our faith is clear: **the word of God**, the agent of Creation.

- ◆ Secondly, **by faith we understand** that the universe was created by the word of God.
 - The Greek word here for “created” (*katertisthai*) is a descriptive verb.
 - In this context it means, “to furnish completely or equip.”
 - According to F.F. Bruce, “[It] thus draws attention to the perfection of the total number of creative acts and sees the whole as a balanced and completed unity. It is the function of faith to discern this.”
 - Yet, another aspect of our *faith leading to understanding* is that it is only through saving faith that we can begin to understand the **WHY’s** of Creation.
 - The atheist biologist may be able to explain how a certain process occurs, but only the Christian can begin to understand **WHY**.

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(2) the origin of creation

- The final aspect of this Verse, however, deals with the **origin of the cosmos**.
- The author writes, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that *what is seen was not mad out of things that are visible*.”
 - ◆ What is fascinating here is that **the creation and origin of our universe cannot be explained by physical evidence which can be seen by the senses or repeated in a scientific experiment. In other words, without biblical faith, we can only speculate concerning the origin of the cosmos (and often violate logical rules at that!).**
 - ◆ The fact is that the physical, material universe cannot be eternal. There had to be a beginning.
 - ◆ Aristotle referred to this phenomenon as the “uncaused cause.” According to Aristotle, there could not be an infinite regress of finite causes. To put it in simpler terms, there had to be a First Cause that began time. Imagine thousands of standing dominoes in a row that are moving. Something had to cause the first domino to tip over (other than simply another domino!).

- ◆ Consider the theory of the “Big Bang.” Certainly this is the most prominent view of the origin of the universe. Yet, what caused the Big Bang?

- ◆ Apologist Ravi Zacharias writes:

“We have an ‘ontologically haunted’ universe – an uncased reality that exists which is unlike any other physical reality that we know. This has to be something more than physical...A strictly physical or natural explanation is not provable by the laws that govern a physical or natural universe...Something beyond a physical reality is needed to explain this universe.”

- ◆ Dallas Willard states, “The bang’ has stepped into a traditional role of God, which gives it a nimbus and seems to rule out the normal questions we would ask about any physical event.”
- ◆ Consider that it was through the Word of God that God created all things *ex nihilo* – “out of nothing.”
- ◆ A doctrine of *Creatio ex Nihilo* is the only doctrine that is biblically – and *scientifically* – possible! And only through genuine faith can someone embrace such a truth.

- J.C. Ryle wrote, “In walking with God, a man will go just as far as he believes, and no further. His life will always be proportioned to his faith. His peace, his patience, his courage, his zeal, his works – all will be according to his faith.”

Blessed Assurance