

January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## What is Faith?

Hebrews 11:1-3

The (human) author of this letter is unknown, although some say it was written by Paul, some say Apollos, some say Peter, but no one really knows. We do know it was someone chosen by God and led by the Holy Spirit (**2Peter 1:20-21**), "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

This letter was most likely written in the late 60's A.D., sometime before the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome.

Hebrews 11 has been called "The Hall of Faith" chapter, because it speaks of the preeminence of faith.

The intended recipients of this letter were first-century Jews whose religious practice and relationship with God had become works oriented, rituals, ceremonies and law keeping. Judaism had become a religion based on legalistic requirements and acts of piety that became more important than having faith in God.

The religious system of Israel had become corrupt, and was more like a cult than it was a relationship with God based on faith in God.

**Habakkuk 2:4**, "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith." Works are a by-product of saving faith; saving faith is not a by-product of works.

Since the time of Adam God has honored true faith; for the way to God (as far as it depends on us) is by faith, as Hebrews 11 repeatedly reveals through the saints who are listed here — it has always been by faith, and by faith alone.

Read **Hebrews 11:1...** The writer describes faith as "the assurance of things hoped for," and "the conviction of things not seen."

The Greek word translated faith here is *pistis* [*pis'-tis*], it means *God's divine persuasion leading to genuine belief; this faith is always a gift from God, and therefore distinct from human belief* (**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."

The first characteristic of divine faith is "the assurance of things hoped for." The people in Old Testament times lived before God the Son came to earth in the body of Jesus, as foretold in **Isaiah 7:14**, "the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel," which translated (**Matthew 1:23**) means, "God with us."

Old Testament believers were told of a coming Messiah, the Deliverer, who would take away the curse and punishment for sin, and He would sit as king over all of Israel. These people had a faith that provided them with a present assurance, based on genuine belief in something they would never see.

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In **John 20:29** Jesus appears to His disciples for the second time since His resurrection. Here He is speaking to Thomas who had not been present at Jesus' first appearance, the week before, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

I used to think this passage only spoke concerning future believers, like you and me, who haven't seen the risen Lord and yet we believe in Him; but you know, it also speaks concerning Old Testament believers, for they never witnessed His coming, and yet they believed what God had said concerning the coming Savior, Immanuel. They had true faith, absolute certainty that God would fulfill His promises to those who belong to Him.

The Greek word *hupostasis* [*hoop-os'-tas-is*], translated in **Hebrews 11:1** as *assurance*, is also used in **Hebrews 1:3**, where it is translated to mean "exact representation," speaking of Christ's likeness to God. This type of *assurance* refers to the very essence, the real thing, the genuine content, as opposed to a mere image or reflection, i.e., this faith is the real deal, with assurance that brings conviction and steadfastness concerning a realized hope in God through Christ.

The second characteristic of faith is "the conviction of things not seen." This expresses a heart and soul response to the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, God's Son, Lord and Savior. A person with genuine faith from God has faith in God, and even though they cannot see God, they will seek to live in a manner that pleases God.

Recipients of God's unconditional love and eternal forgiveness will desire to please Him, to live out their faith, doing what pleases God, and although good works don't produce salvation, genuine salvation always produces good works (**Ephesians 2:10**), "For we are His [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

God provides everything we need (**2Peter 1:3**), "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence."

How we live is expressive of the genuineness of our faith in Jesus Christ. A lack of good works in our life may be evidence of dead faith; salvation is not made effectual by good works, but good works give evidence of God in our life (**2Corinthians 5:17**), "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

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**1Corinthians 2:1-5**, "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

**James 2:14-17**, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that [faith]? Faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself."

Genuine born-again believers will be doers of the Word, not just hearers.

**James 2:18**, "But someone may *well* say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'" **26**, "For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

Read **Hebrews 11:2...** By true faith (**Hebrews 1:1**), "the assurance of things hoped for," and "the conviction of things not seen," men of old were approved, fully accepted by God, because their faith was genuine.

Since the beginning of time men, women, and children of age have had faith in God; believing what He has said through the prophets, recognizing His sovereign authority over all He has created, and agreeing with the conscience He has placed in us that we might distinguish good from evil.

The saints who lived before Christ's coming had a substantive assurance based on an internal conviction that what God has said is absolutely true; and so they were saved through faith in God and their lives demonstrated that they were indeed children of God, just as we who believe today are.

**John 1:11-13**, "He [Jesus] came to His own, and those who were His own [the Jews] did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Read **Hebrews 11:3...** Remember that the author of Hebrews is writing to Jews, and even though orthodox Judaism teaches that Jesus is not the Messiah, they do believe that God created the worlds [lit. *the universe and everything in it, including the Earth*] out of nothing that was physical or visible.

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Jews believe, as Christians do, that God is, always was, and always will be, the Creator. He is the great I AM, the Preexistent Eternal One: Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, God over all!

Believing that God created everything out of nothing is based solely on faith, the faith we have been talking about today: "the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," by which the men of old, and the people of today, gain approval with God.

Through faith we understand that everything that has been made has been made through the Word of God.

**John 1:1-5**, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He [God the Son] was in the beginning with God [the Father]. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness [can] not overcome it."

**John 1:14**, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

**18**, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*."

Any attempt to explain the origin and creation of the universe, life on earth, salvation and condemnation, heaven and hell, or the nature of God, apart from the revelation of God Himself, is a foolish attempt to describe that which is incomprehensible, without having any true knowledge of it.

When Job came before God, God was not impressed, (**Job 38:2**), "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? **5**, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, who set its measurements? **16-18**, "Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you understood the expanse of the earth? Tell Me, if you know all this. **22-23**, "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of distress, for the day of war and battle?"

Job's response is the correct one, when coming before Almighty God, Creator, Sustainer, Lord, Savior, and Judge over All (**Job 42:2**), "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted." **5-6**, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes." Through the "eye" of Job's faith he understood and believed in God, causing him to repent. We all must enter into a relationship with God by humbly acknowledging and repenting of our sin, at the same time trusting/believing God for salvation.

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**Hebrews 11:6**, "And without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

**1Corinthians 2:9-16**, "As it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him'. To us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual [*having God's Spirit*] appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ."

**Romans 10:9-10**, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. **13**," Whoever will call on the name of the Lord [for the forgiveness of sins] will be saved." **17**, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

**1John 5:11-13**, "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

**2Corinthians 13:5**, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?"

Have you repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus Christ to save you? If you have, you will desire to know and to do that which pleases God. Do you have saving faith? If you have any doubt at all, simply ask God to forgive your sins, right now, right here. Jesus died as full payment for all of your sins; He then rose from the grave to demonstrate that He is the resurrection and the life, so that everyone who believes in Him will live in heaven forever!

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