

HEBREWS 11 FAITH – vs Unbelief

The Christian life is a life of faith

Those who have come to Christ understand that faith is central to our lives. We also know that our faith is not a feeling or wishful thinking. Our faith is grounded in the historic events and person of Jesus Christ.

Let's be honest and admit that the whole realm of faith is a bit mysterious and for some of us it is scary. For some of you, or for people you are talking with about faith issues, faith is absurd. AT least they think that your Christian faith, a historical Biblical faith is absurd.

There have been some recent very public statements by news pundits or opinion pieces in "important" newspapers (Chuck Todd; NYT) that have poked fun of people who hold to some standard historical biblical truths. Typically those outlets ignore issues of faith, but they've felt the need to bring out the long knives. And their arguments and comments are not based so much on a reasoned logic as on personal dislike. The comments are really attempting to mock rather than to engage in a real conversation.

<https://townhall.com/columnists/gregoryrummo/2020/01/01/mr-todd-noahs-flood-is-not-a-fairy-tale-n2558758>

<https://albertmohler.com/2020/01/13/briefing-1-13-20>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/10/opinion/sunday/christianity-religion-hell-bible.html>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/shall-saved-universal-christian-universalism-david-bentley-hart/>

That said, we might all admit that there are issues in our own belief system that we know sound strange or even bizarre. The series "Stranger Things" doesn't compare to some of the passages of scripture. I say that as one who loves and affirms the teaching of the Bible, but I'll admit that it does push me out of my natural comfort zone.

Faith, in the biblical sense, is not natural to us. We don't come to it easily. If you are here this morning and you're not sure about this faith, God, Jesus, church stuff, welcome to the club. We've all been there or are there now to some degree.

Even if we say that we "have come to faith" in Christ, we admit that our faith will ebb and flow in the course of our lives.

Hebrews 11

1 Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **2** For by it the men of old gained approval.

3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. **4** By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. **5** By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

6 And 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 seek Him.

I must say up front that this message will have a broad topical focus rather than a specific set of verses.

Let me be clear about the issue of faith, and our faith specifically as Christians. My intent this morning is not to question our "faith", but rather to put you at ease as you grow in your faith. Don't hesitate to talk to people about Jesus because you're afraid they may ask that question that will stump you or confuse you. The Bible does not avoid investigating the faith. It invites it.

While the issues of the gospel involve more than just evidence, they don't involve less than that.

Evidence that Demands a Verdict has been a great help to believers over the years. The same is true of The Case for Christ – written by one who sought to disprove Christianity.

<https://faithit.com/lee-strobel-testimony-the-case-for-christ/>

Like all of us who are now Christians, his story begins with unbelief. What is unique about him is that he tried to use science and facts to DISPROVE the resurrection of Christ. He ended up proving the case for Christ and coming to faith.

Unbelief is nothing new. It is the starting point for all of us – at least unbelief when it comes to the things of God, Christ, and salvation in Jesus.

The interesting reality is that we all live by faith in something, even if our faith is in nothing.

EX: French neighbor: “Thank you for the invitation. I know you have to do that because it is your job, but we don’t believe in what you teach.”

“Oh, that’s interesting. Someday I’d love to talk to you about your faith beliefs.”

“We don’t have faith beliefs”

“Well in that case I’d love to talk to you about what you don’t believe in”

That led to a series of conversations about “faith issues”. My goal was to ask simple questions and LISTEN to understand his “faith position”.

Unbelief is not new. Before the Horsemen of Modern Atheism- Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris et al, you had Pontius Pilate and Twain, Bertrand Russell etc.

Pilate, standing in the very presence of Jesus, asked the question, “What is truth?”

Mark Twain

There are those who scoff at the school boy, calling him frivolous and shallow. Yet it was the school boy who said, Faith is believing what you know ain't so.

-Following the Equator, Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar

C.S. Lewis, remembering his own life as an unbeliever, spoke of the pleasure he found in that state of mind in which *“there was nothing to be obeyed, and nothing to be believed except what was either comforting or exciting.”* [In Downing, The Most Reluctant Convert, 46]

MIRACLE ON 34th Street has a puzzling and frustrating phrase...

<https://aleteia.org/2017/11/24/does-miracle-on-34th-street-needs-a-lesson-on-faith/>

The frustrating phrase comes when Susan asks her mother why she should believe Mr. Kringle is Santa Claus when he didn’t get her what she wanted for Christmas. “That doesn’t make sense, Mommy.” Doris answers, “Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to.”

If you’re like me, your initial reaction to that statement is negative. “That’s an attack on my faith...Christian faith is not some crazy blind leap of faith or a leap into the dark. It has a solid foundation – the person, work, and Resurrection of Christ.”

...Nicholas Senz...

Faith does not oppose reason. Faith perfects reason. Faith accompanies reason. Faith complements reason to allow reason to move further. The way of faith is not a leap in the dark, but rather a leap in the light.

On the other hand, as we read Hebrews 11 last week, we saw the faith exploits of those who were indeed doing what “common sense” would tell them not to, i.e. Noah, Abraham, Daniel, etc.

Common sense may have said, “No”, but their knowledge of God enabled them to act by faith. Their faith was built upon something real – the FAITHFULNESS OF God.

The author of Hebrews is writing to encourage those who believe in Christ to keep on believing and looking to Christ.

In Chapter 11 he gives a long list of those who DID great exploits, but he notes that they did them BY FAITH. This means that the foundation and the focus of their hearts was the object of their faith – God HIMSELF. They did not simply “have faith in faith” or have faith in themselves.

This is no Disney, “Look within yourself” kind of faith. The AOH is clear that we need to look to Christ. FRIENDS, THIS IS ALSO WHERE WE FIND OURSELVES in our own spiritual journey.

As I’ve mentioned earlier in this series, the temptation for us as is to move toward “tabernacling”, which was the practice of the original audience of Hebrews. What do I mean by that?

We start polishing our resume to present to God. We overplay what we’ve done for him, or what we’ll do for him, and we underplay His grace for us and toward. In the process we underplay God’s holiness and His provision for us in Christ. Unintentionally, but functionally, we deny the finished work of Jesus when we start adding things to him.

Biblical faith in Christ is receiving and resting in Christ alone as He is offered in the gospel. We CAN’T rest in Christ if we think that our efforts are gaining merit with God or must gain merit.

Jesus + something = Nothing (no REST)
Jesus + nothing = Everything (Rest for our hearts)

You may be thinking, “The examples we saw last week were examples of those who DID something. Are you now saying that we make no effort; that we do nothing.” YES AND NO

Faith and grace are NOT OPPOSED TO EFFORT; they ARE OPPOSED TO EARNING. They are opposed to merit. The enemy of faith isn’t effort; it is unbelief.

The obedience of faith does involve effort on our part, but it is not meritorious. It doesn’t gain us a righteousness before God. All the righteousness we’ll ever have or ever need comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

FEAR IS A SIGNAL TO STEP OUT IN FAITH.

When you encounter life situations or commands of scripture that might be fearful and demand courage, then you know it is a time to step out in Faith. Don’t be paralyzed by fear. Let the fear motivate you toward exercising your faith.

EX: Jesus to disciples in the boat during a storm – **“Where is your faith?” Luke 8:25**
That is the question that our fears should raise in our own minds.

EX: Pro-Life Sunday – the Pro-Life message is a message of faith and hope. We affirm the sanctity of life because God is the author of life. He says it is sacred, and He can be trusted. Women of OT faced difficult pregnancies by faith. They believed that God was faithful. The Pregnancy center seeks to promote that same biblical view of life and faith.

Hebrews 11 gives us a big bold panorama of what faith looked like in the examples of men and women from the OT. But beware of thinking that faith is only at play in those big, daring, exciting situations.

My fear in reading Hebrews 11 is for us to think, *“I’m glad that I’m not called to show my faith is some big bold act – following God to a land he hasn’t shown me yet, sacrificing a child, shutting the mouths of lions, having a baby at age 99, etc”*

Let’s not be fooled into thinking that the life of faith only deals with super-sized decisions of life and death.

Daily marriage and family issues ARE issues of faith – Eph 5, 6

A failure of faith may not sound too serious and from our perspective it wouldn't be, but as people of faith we don't live by 'our perspective'. We live by the perspective of God's Word and Romans 14:23b gives us a penetrating look at the failure of faith.

...Whatever is not from faith is sin

The biblical perspective is that faith is at play in every area of our lives and in fact, 'whatever is not from is sin.'

That little phrase takes away our lists of "do's and don'ts" and expands the boundaries of what becomes a candidate for sin.

That phrase shows us how faith and sin are both issues of the heart and remember that God looks on the heart above all else.

Anything, any act, any spoken word, any effort or attitude which is rooted in a lack of trust in God is sin, no matter how moral it may appear to men. - Piper

EX: service, evangelism, giving, prayer i.e. "good religious things"

This is a helpful guide for daily decision making... "Can I do this or that, say this or that, spend this now, eat, drink, swallow, smoke, or look at this now?"

Can you do it by faith in God? Can you do it in good faith from a heart of trust in God?

The context of Romans 14 is one of a debate between those who ate meat and those who didn't. The tendency was to judge each other so Paul writes to help them see that the bigger issues are faith and walking in love. Paul wants them, and us, to know that the issue of sin is not simply defined by the act itself, but it must be defined by its root. An act may or may not be sinful according to whether it springs from a heart of love by faith.

Faith functions on the belief that what God says is better than what we may "feel" or desire at any given moment.

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

AS we see in the examples of Hebrews 11, their faith was demonstrated as they trusted God to construct a future that would be better than what they could build for themselves. These characters were not perfect in faith. They made mistakes and made choices that showed how they were not trusting God, yet they are commended for their overall faith.

Hebrews 11 and Romans 14:23 show that unbelief is at the root of sin.

11:6 – without faith it is impossible to please God – or we might put it this way – unbelief is what displeases God in every sinful act. Unbelief displeases God because it is an insult to the honor of God.

Moses, an example of great faith, was also an example of how the disobedience of unbelief shows a lack of reverence for God. In Numbers 20 God told Moses to "speak to the rock" and water would come out. But Moses took his staff and struck the rock twice. NBD, right? WRONG

v.12 "Because you have not believed me to treat me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." This is another sermon for another time, but notice the connection between unbelief and dishonoring God.

That principle applies to us as well. Our “little areas of unbelief” where we trust in our own agenda rather than what God has revealed is an insult to the honor of God. That’s why “whatever is not from faith is sin.”

That’s why “6 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 seek Him.

So how do WE live by faith? Hebrews 11 points to Hebrews 12

Jesus, the Example

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who always acted out of faith, who always trusted the Father to build a better future.

And we trust in Him alone and rejoice that the better future includes all who come to him BY FAITH.

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