

HEBREWS 11 The Obedience of Faith

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.

Faith, as described in the bible involves content (the information /teaching/), an object (who we are trusting in), and the fruit of faith (biblical obedience- Rom 1:5). There is a head part, a heart part, and a hands part when it comes to faith.

Sadly, in our churchy culture, the head part is often given more weight. By that I mean that we can give the impression of being people of faith if we've learned the right terms and know how to repeat them. But biblical faith is more than that. It is not just knowing about God and Jesus, but it's about KNOWING God as evidenced by a life of trust in times of joy and trial.

EX: Getting a driver's license requires head knowledge and some degree of practice, but if you ace the written test and avoid the really bad mistakes in the driving part you can get a license. With very little real-life experience you are given the right to go out on the road with a vehicle to be a danger to yourself and others. My guess is that we all got our license with more head knowledge than real skill behind the wheel of a car.

It can be like that in the realm of church and faith. If you know the right answers and have avoided the big mistakes, you can fool people. You can then enter the community of faith ready to injure yourself and others. We can pretend that we are people of faith. That is what the AOH of Hebrews is warning against – pretend faith, shallow faith that isn't grounded in a true knowledge of Christ. That kind of faith won't hold up under pressure.

To encourage the original audience (and us) the AOH gives a series of examples or snapshots of what faith looks like when it is worked out in the lives of believers.

Heb 11 shows that Obedience is about living in the present as though the future has already arrived. – Tim Mackie

Does your life contain snapshots of this kind of faith – not in the same exploits, but in the posture of the heart?

While the display of faith may be different, the heart posture of faith is what is in view.

What is the posture of faith?

It CONSIDERS (the past); It Looks forward, and it shapes our lives today

Before we jump to those points, let's be clear about the full orb'd biblical view of Christian faith. It is NOT simply an agreement or assent to some basic facts, i.e. "I agree that Jesus lived, died and rose again". Nor is it merely saying those things and then adding, "He died for my sin." Faith is not LESS than that, but in its fullness, it is MORE than that. This is why the AOH gives us chapter 11 – to illustrate what faith is.

Biblical faith is seen as a gift of God that shows that a heart of stone has been turned to a heart of flesh.

When faith is activated in the heart it creates a God quake and becomes the regulating principle for every area of life. God generated faith changes how we live our lives. Biblical faith is so transforming because it involves a real sense of KNOWING God, not just knowing ABOUT God. ***A little knowledge OF God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about Him. - Packer***

Chapter 11 is a long illustration of the truth of 10:39

39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

The AOH has spent a long time discussing, exhorting and laying the groundwork for a faith, belief, trust, clinging to Christ that will endure.
He lays out the argument in those difficult passages we studied months ago about a “faith” that does not persevere, a “faith” that ends up rejecting Christ or falls away from Christ or tramples under foot the Son of God. Those are very sobering verses and realities.

So here at the end of chapter 10 and throughout chapter 11 he takes us on a tour of God’s Hall of Faith using OT believers to illustrate what the reality of faith looks like. He gives an OT survey of faithful men and women who faced trials and life and death issues by faith.

For some, the trial resulted in a glorious happy ending. For others the trial resulted in torture, death, chains and imprisonment, being destitute, afflicted, and ill-treated. No matter the outcome, all gained approval through their faith

When the AOH wants to highlight faith he does so by giving illustrations of faith in action, not faith in words only. There is a lesson here for us: statements of faith are easy and cheap; the reality of faith is more demanding and visible.

AS James put it, “faith without works is dead.” Remember the point from last week – **Grace and Faith are not opposed to EFFORT; they are opposed to EARNING.**

FAITH CONSIDERS

What DOES FAITH CONSIDER? Hebrews 8-11

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

v.8- 12 – Abraham and Sarah – “He remembered how God took him to a new land”. V. 11 “she considered him as faithful”. Her act of faith was in believing / considering God to be faithful.

Others demonstrated faith by winning battles and closing the mouths of lions, but she showed faith by thinking.

Don’t believe the cultural lie that religious faith is believing something when there is no evidence.

The AOH take the opposite approach. Sarah looks at the past and thinks about it and has faith to move forward in the future. Past experience leads to confidence. She does the mental math of her own experience with God.

v. 17-19 BY FAITH, Abraham – offered up Isaac by faith because he too did the mental math and believed for the future based on the past. V. 19 He “logizomai” – used logic. There was a THEO – LOGIC to the acts of faith of the people in Hebrews 11. Past evidence of God’s faithfulness moved them to acts of faith.

11:24-26 – FAITH CONSIDERS WHAT IS OF ULTIMATE VALUE ...Moses considered the reproach of Christ is better than the treasures of Egypt (we live in “Egypt” with its treasures of praise and worldly approval, success and gain. “Gain the world but lose our soul”)...He was “looking for the reward”

Biblical faith means that we take God into account when we are doing our mental math about a situation.

Faith is not the failure to think things through. It is based on what we know of God. Faith is what we have when we know there is good reason to believe that God will do what He has said.

We can believe because we can point to the resurrection. We can engage our hearts and minds in bringing the Word to bear in our lives.

The great danger before us is forgetting or ignoring what God has said in His Word.

The greatest danger to our faith today is not “the culture out there”. It’s not the people on FB, twitter, or a political party that you disagree with. The greatest danger to our faith is our own failure to take care of ourselves spiritually by letting our hearts be shaped by the Word.

If you don’t take care of your soul, who will?

Scripture tells us THE STORY, but the world and the accuser want to tell us A story, one that causes us to doubt the character and faithfulness of God. We need to make sure that we are getting THE STORY straight because we live our lives based on the stories we remember or tell ourselves. We live our lives based on the interpretations that we bring to our circumstances.

EX: KIDS – Think of Pilgrim re: WiNK lesson. Pilgrim represents all believers and he is learning that the life of faith is a journey. The faith life is described in the scripture as a “race” Heb 12:2; we are called to strive after God, to pursue righteousness, to be ready to take up our armor in the fight of faith, etc. Pilgrim meets different characters who tell him lies and stories to distract him and get him off the right path.

What story are you hearing or telling yourself? True stories of the gospel or the lies of the accuser? Lies of the accuser and the world sound like this:

“You are such a loser and failure. Nothing ever goes your way. If I can just get that job, that promotion, that spouse, that house, that car, that goal weight, that latest tech gadget, the approval of that person or group, final victory over that sin, THEN my life will be complete; I’ll be happy; I’ll be accepted and acceptable.”

The story of the gospel is that in Christ we have the forgiveness, acceptance, life, power, new heart, and new desires that we need to walk with God. Jesus is our righteousness and has brought me near to the Father. I’m going to face joys and trials and God will be with me in both.

What is the story you have on repeat loop? What is the story you go to as you seek to make sense out of life?

****IMPORTANT NOTE**

None of the examples of faith was perfect. Though they failed, their faith found approval with God. That is an encouragement to us to hang in there even when we are aware of our own failings. What matters most is that we, by faith, get up and continue in the race that God has before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus.

Considering / remembering is the FIGHT OF FAITH.. It is not automatic and there is no spiritual cruise control.

FAITH LOOKS FORWARD

13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Abraham looks forward to God’s city. Abraham “saw” something that other did not see and it moved him to obey. Abraham and the others cited from the OT were looking beyond this world. In their era they were looking for the same thing that we are looking for today. Just as they endured and obeyed by faith, we must do likewise.

We too have a city we can look forward to in the new heaven and the new earth. **Heb 13:4 “For we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”**

In the meantime, this in-between time, we can consider the promise that God is working, even in our trials, to conform us to the image of Christ. We can look forward to that even in trials and even in the face of death itself.

Eph 2 tells us that in this in-between time God is building US, His people, His church into a dwelling of God in the spirit, a holy temple. This is just a foretaste of the eternal city that God has for us.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Faith even looks forward beyond the moment of death.

As Christians we can do that. We don't have to fear or ignore death in the way non-believers do.

Faith doesn't deny the sadness of death, but it looks beyond death to the new city of God.

What is the future that you are looking toward? A certain lifestyle, or house, or family, or job??

FAITH SHAPES OUR LIVES TODAY

Faith is not a one-time event when we trust Christ for salvation. Christian faith is an ongoing reality. Professing faith in Christ is just the beginning, not the end of a life of faith. We don't exercise faith in Christ and then hit cruise control for the rest of our lives. Faith is something to cultivate in our lives all along our journey. Full-orbed faith combines the content of our belief, the willing embrace from the heart, and a trust in the personal God who revealed Himself to us.

EX: There are truths that we know with the head and could teach to others, but it may not be fully embraced until God brings us to a place where we must rely solely on Him. In those times we realize that our faith is more than a set of doctrines or trust in an abstract "force". The true personal God becomes truer to us as we lean into Him in fellowship and communion.

1 Peter 1: 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ

"Christian faith is verified by a lifestyle of enduring obedience." This does NOT mean perfection, but it is seen by direction.

Note how this faith is described in terms of shaping our lives:

v. 8 Abraham obeyed when he was called out. ** the word for "obey" comes from a form of "to hear". So obedience is really "hyper-hearing".

EX: we talk about someone getting "hyped up" for a game or some event, i.e. intense or excited. We'll obedience is "hyper-hearing". YOU KNOW YOU'VE HEARD and Believe WHEN YOU OBEY.

EX: parent to child - "Did you hear me?" i.e. IF you really heard, then you'll obey.

v. 17 Abraham remembers, looks forward and obeys when it comes to Isaac.

Chapter 11 gives snapshots of those whose lives were shaped by faith. They weren't merely hearers; they were "hyper-hearers", by Faith.

Their example is here to encourage us. Scripture teaches that at its core, faith is centered on Christ. We are to Consider Him, His life, His perfect obedience. We remember His death for us and how He conquered death. We look forward to the same Jesus who will come back to make all things new.

The gift of faith is one that we receive by grace. Now what? We enjoy it and we walk by faith each day.

We trust God in the daily trials and crossroads of faith.

Can you ID an area of your life where obedience makes no sense in light of circumstances, but can only be explained by faith in the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in your heart? Forgiveness, finances, generosity, service, repentance, risky radical faith.

Are there faith barriers you are confronting now that may seem crazy, but in the light of the coming new creation would make perfect sense?

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

Seek God's grace through prayer and feed your faith through His Word, keeping your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

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.

WHY COME TO THE TABLE? We come so that we might be "hyper-hearers" and coming to the table is one of God's ways of presenting the gospel to us.

WE COME BY FAITH IN THE PERSON AND WORK OF Christ.

Before you come, ask God to show you if there are areas of unfaith that you need to bring to him.

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, 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.

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