

Saving Faith
SERMON
By
Everett C. DeVelde

August 6, 2012

TEXT: Hebrews 10:32 - 11:6

PROP: Faith is an absolute essential to pleasing the True and Living God and it issues in a godly manner of living seen in obedience to the law of God.

Hebrews 10:32-11:6 (ESV)

³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. ¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³ 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. ⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

3 Πίστει νοοῦμεν καθηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὸ βλεπόμενον γεγονέναι.

A story is told of a husband and wife who were experiencing grave doubts concerning their faith in God. This couple had grown up in the church where the congregation was urged to place their faith in God. In this modern technological

age the couple felt that it was rather ridiculous, even foolish to believe in a God they could not see. Modern highly educated people simply don't waste their time and efforts on things that cannot be proven or for which, as they believed, there was little or no evidence. Now they came to their pastor for help.

The pastor thought of presenting the great teleological and ontological apologies for the existence of God but he decided upon a course of utter simplicity. He posed the following question: What is the logical alternative to faith that God exists? Of course the alternative is that God does not exist. Now the assertion that God does not exist also requires faith to believe, because there is relatively little evidence to support this contention. That there is a God and that there is no God, both, require faith. In addition, on the side of the existence of God, there is a great abundance of evidence. To use modern terms, the odds are greatly in favor of those who believe that God exists. That was the pastor's argument.

It seems to me that this is a rather weak argument for believing in God. Many argue that it is logical and rational to believe that God exists or that there is obvious design in the physical universe therefore a creator God must exist. A lot can be said in favor of Intelligent Design such as the impossibility of something coming from nothing or the impossibility of order coming from chaos. However, such arguments are weak because they do not inform us of the attributes of God only that a divine being must exist. One cannot know from such a line of reasoning that God is a Triune being; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I wish to consider a much different approach to the problem of faith. I want to obtain from our text in Hebrews the biblical view of faith, namely the nature of saving faith, its importance and the godly life that flows from it. Now Webster defines faith as follows:

- Allegiance to duty or a person
- Fidelity to ones promises
- Belief and trust in and loyalty to God
- Belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion
- Firm belief in something for which there is no proof
- Complete confidence
- A system of religious beliefs believed with strong conviction.

This of course is a very general definition of faith and as such it leaves us with some serious questions such as allegiance to whom; belief and trust in

which God; belief in the doctrines of which religion; upon whom or what can we place our complete confidence; which religious beliefs shall we believe with strong conviction? Jude writes, "*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*" (Jude 3, ESV) Here we understand that **the faith** is the entire Christian doctrine as it is comprehended in the Bible. Paul writes, "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" (Galatians 2:20, ESV) To say that Jesus is the Son of God to the Hebrew mind is tantamount to saying that Jesus is God. Similarly to say that one is a son of the covenant is to say that one is a covenanter or that a son of a prophet is a prophet. One who has faith in this sense therefore believes that Christ is God, that He loves me and that He died for me. **Here, faith is a deep trust in Christ for salvation.**

Without saving faith there is no point to any other form of faith. The whole of Christian doctrine is of no use to the one who in the end loses his soul. And what gain is there by giving a lifetime of allegiance or firm belief in a false God, in that which is but wood hay and stubble? In the end false Gods will be cast into hell for eternity along with those who believe in them. We must be certain that our faith is placed in the True God, and that the doctrines we adhere to are the truth else we may as well play the atheist, the fool who says there is no God. But there is yet another aspect to faith.

In Hebrews 10:38-39 we read, "*but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.*" *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*" (Hebrews 10:38-39, ESV) **Here faith yields or produces a way of life, for the righteous one lives by faith.** Faith in this sense produces a manner of living that is preservative. It is a manner of life that characterizes those who believe in the True God and who adhere to the whole counsel of God in the Bible. The psalmist expresses it thus, "*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*" (Psalm 1:1-3, ESV) Such a man is preserved by the life style that is produced by his faith.

According to our text in Hebrews, faith is belief in things that have never been experienced or seen. But faith is confident assurance of that which is being

hoped for, an inner conviction of that which is not being seen. Now hope is a subjective thing, which is to say that what we hope for has not yet come to pass or it is a thing which cannot be seen. The Christian hopes for forgiveness, which is a thing we cannot see and forgiveness is based in the atonement made by Christ through His death on the cross which we have not seen. *“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”* (Hebrews 9:27-28, ESV) None of this have we seen. We were not present at the Cross and His second appearing has not yet occurred. Yet the essence of saving faith is that we confidently believe these things. *“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”* (1 Peter 1:8-9, ESV)

We may have never seen these things but God has promised them. *“For, ‘Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay;’* (Hebrews 10:37, ESV) And again, *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”* (Hebrews 10:23, ESV) Discouragement will destroy hope, and we *“- have need of endurance, so that when (we) have done the will of God (we) may receive what is promised.”* (Hebrews 10:36, ESV) So then, *“- faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* (Hebrews 11:1, ESV)

We were not present when God created the earth, nor have we any understanding of the way in which He brought forth the earth and the rest of the universe. An example of faith consists in a genuine belief that God created all that exists from nothing, by the word of His power, and all very good. In order for God to do this, we must assume that the True and Living God is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. The gods on Mt. Olympia did not have the power to create all that is from nothing. Neither did Buddha or Zoroaster or Baal or any other so called god have such power. If we cannot genuinely believe that the universe came to pass at the command of God who created from nothing, then the validity of our faith is called in question. We may in fact be placing our faith in the wrong God.

It is very important to believe, to have faith in the True God, so much so that it is impossible to please God apart from faith that He exists and that He is active in His universe. In Hebrews 11:6 we read, *“- without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”* (Hebrews 11:6, ESV)

We cannot believe in the deist's god for he is away on business. He is not active in his universe. The deist's god is not ruling and governing all His creatures and all their actions. A number of men who were instrumental in the formation of our country were deists, for example Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

Since the scriptures teach that the True and Living God is triune, that He is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and that these three are one God the same in substance and equal in power and glory; if we are to please the True and Living God, we cannot place our faith in the God of the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witness for these are not triune. For the same reason, neither can we believe in the Humanist's god, or the Unitarian's God. We must believe in the God of Scripture and we must believe that He is active, that He rewards those who seek Him, in order to please Him. We cannot be saved if we are under the displeasure of God. We cannot be saved if we are His enemies. Therefore, true faith, **saving faith, is vitally important** to us. It is more important than anything else that we place our faith and trust in YAHWEH the great triune Lord of hosts.

Belief in the unseen is not belief in something for which there is no proof. We need not be resigned to existentialism, to a blind leap of faith in a sort of God, for which faith the odds are better than for a faith that there is no God. The Lord tells us, "*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*" (John 3:8, ESV) We may not be able to see God but we can certainly see the results of His work. Sinners are in fact converted, many of them, a great host of them. Great enemies of God have been turned to faith in the Triune God.

The very "*heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*" (Psalm 19:1, ESV) So much so that the ungodly and unrighteous who suppress the truth in unrighteousness have no excuse. We have never seen electrons, a very small part of an atom, yet we know their mass and electrostatic charge and we are certain of their existence. We can describe them in their quantum mechanical glory. We know they exist, having never seen them, by the results of their existence. Just so, **it is not a blind faith that pleases God but an informed faith. A faith that is informed by the data of Scripture and the world around us which God has made.**

Faith, then, believes in the unseen and it is impossible to please God without it. We have not seen Christ but many people have and have informed us in the pages of the Bible of the Christ in whom we are to believe unto salvation. And we have not seen heaven where Christ is now and from where He will come to judge the world on the last day. However, if we are ever to see Christ as He is,

face to face; if we are ever to realize the blessed hope of eternal life in heaven, we must believe that the True and Living God exists, and that He rewards those who seek Him. As Paul told the Philippian jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." This is faith that saves.

Such faith brings certain results. It produces a godly life. The quality of our faith in the triune God can be seen in the quality of our life, measured in terms of God's law. Speaking to people who lived in a society that believed in all sorts of gods, James wrote, "*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?*" (James 2:19-20, ESV) It is not enough to say I believe in God or to be a non-atheist. Saving faith produces a godly manner of living.

By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. Cain offered the meal offering which was quite valid. His was the (מִנְחָה) *minecha* of Leviticus chapter 2. The offering of Abel was also a valid sacrifice. He offered the (חַטָּאת) *chatath* or sin offering. Abel's was better in the sense that God wanted them both to make a sin offering. By faith Abel obeyed God but Cain did not. Enoch walked with God. Thus he obeyed God and his faith was found pleasing. Noah built the ark against all the wisdom and advice of his day. He obeyed God and was found pleasing becoming an heir of the righteousness, which is according to faith. Abraham left Ur by faith and with his eyes on eternal life in heaven he offered Isaac as a sacrifice. In this manner Abraham proved his faith. (James 2:21) Isaac and Jacob obeyed God openly worshipping YAHWEH in full view of a great civilization that worshipped any number of false gods. Moses suffered the reproach of Christ considering this to be greater riches than the treasures of Egypt thus he serves as a model for Christians to endure such reproach. Joshua proved his faith at Jericho, and Rahab who proved her faith by hiding the spies and sending them out of Jericho another way.

"And what more shall I say?" writes Paul, "For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world

was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” (Hebrews 11:32-40, ESV)

These are our witnesses, my friends. You say you have trouble believing on Christ for salvation. You say you doubt the existence of God. As you sit in your science classes and hear the testimony of the world's great scientists and engineers that all that is here came from a big bang and evolution, are you inclined in your heart toward their humanism and doubt the Bible? You see, we are in a sort of race. It is very difficult to run by faith in a direction that is contrary to most of humanity. Look at the witnesses! They had faith in YAHWEH but at great cost. Don't tell me that you are not affected by sin or by the opinions of great Americans or great world leaders in science and medicine or whatever it is. We are easily entangled by these things. Television is by far the greatest influence on the ethics and morality of civilization today. The great majority of television programming is contrary to the kingdom of Christ. And we **are** affected by it.

How can we run this race with endurance? Paul writes, *“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.”* (Hebrews 10:36, ESV) *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Hebrews 12:1-2, ESV)

We can run this race with endurance if we fix our eyes on Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith. If we consider Jesus, who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, we will not grow weary and we will not lose heart. So look to Jesus as your savior and Lord. Look to Jesus as your example for living. So shall we be in God's presence if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving and resting upon him alone for salvation and out of a true sense of our sin turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience, running with endurance the race that is set before us.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace. (481)