

## Hebrews 11:4-7

### Examples of the Faith of Abel, Enoch and Noah

What is faith? Upon whom or what is my faith focused? Do I have faith in God? Do I live by faith? What is my faith producing? In what ways is my faith changing my daily life?

The faith in view in Hebrews 11 is faith in Jesus Christ so as to receive eternal salvation or eternal life.

John Owen said, "This faith is that whereby the 'just shall live;' that is, it is a divine, supernatural, justifying, saving faith, the faith of God's elect, the faith that is not of ourselves, but is of the operation of God wherewith all true believers are endowed from above" (*Hebrews*, p. 214-215).

What is faith? "True faith—created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel—is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything that God reveals in His Word is true, but also a deep-rooted assurance that not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation. These are gifts of sheer grace earned for us by Christ" (Heidelberg Catechism, answer 21).

Faith begins with a sense of need. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God" (Matthew 5:3). All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible Update 1995 unless otherwise noted. The sense of poverty is an utter spiritual destitution, helplessness. It is the absence of pride, self-assurance, self-reliance. There is a sense of utter nothingness and utter dependence upon God. This is always where true biblical faith begins.

The writer of Hebrews underscores this sense of need. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is the Christian's true "world view." It is faith focused in Jesus Christ. "Faith is the confident assurance which the believer has because God has provided conviction about unseen realities," writes Homer Kent, Jr. in *The Epistle of Hebrews: A Commentary*, p. 217).

The key to understanding this whole chapter is the conviction that God would raise the dead. Resurrection faith underlies this chapter. The God who raised the dead is the One who makes these promises and fulfills them. "He [Abraham] considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead . . ." (Heb. 11:19a).

Faith begins with "things hoped for;" it begins with that sense of need. Do you want it so badly you hunger and thirst for it? The Holy Spirit creates that sense of hunger and dissatisfaction within the heart.

The greatest enemy is the attitude of self-satisfaction.

In whom do we place our faith? "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" (Hebrews 11:6). Everyone is born with an inner sense that God does exist. I have always been amazed to observe children whom you would think would be incapable of getting hold of the concept of God's existence, yet they have no difficulty believing that God exists. Where does this come from? God created man and woman in His own image. In the image of God He created them. People have to be educated to not believe in God's existence. What is our response to the operation of the Holy Spirit bringing us to vital faith in Christ? In the examples before us, "The best way to grow in faith is to walk with the faithful" (Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition*, vol. 2, p. 318).

### **By Faith Abel**

Cain and Abel wanted to worship God (Gen. 4:1-15). They are pictured in Genesis 4 bringing their offering to God. Man is never satisfied without God's presence in his life.

Cain and Abel represent two different approaches to a relationship with God. The account implies that they had prior information on how to approach God. However, Cain's attitude was sinful. He chose to believe a lie, and he was rejected.

I hear people saying one way is just as good as another; we are all going to the same place. It does not matter what you believe as long as you believe in something. I regret to inform you, but all roads do not lead to heaven. Some will take you to an eternal hell.

"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" (Hebrews 11:4).

The emphasis is on Abel's faith.

"God looked with favor on Abel and his offering" (Gen. 4:4). Abel was a righteous man. He had a right relationship with God. That was his testimony. The writer of Hebrews tells us Abel offered unto God a "more excellent" sacrifice than Cain. It was offered "by faith." But I think it was an offering that looked forward to the greater sacrifice of the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. It foreshadowed the offering of Christ for our sins. The writer of Hebrews has already told us "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." That has been the emphasis of the whole book. Jesus has offered a better sacrifice.

John Owen says, "The faith of Abel was fixed on God not only as a Creator, but as a Redeemer. . ." His faith "testified in the kind of his sacrifice, which was by faith and blood . . . . The way of atonement, which was to be by blood, the blood of the promised Seed."

From the context what made Abel's offering superior to Cain was an offering of the "firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions." The record in Genesis reads, "Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell" (Genesis 4:4-5). What was offered up to God was just as

important as how it was offered. Abel's offering included the "fat" portion, which in the eyes of that generation was the very best portion of the animal. I am convinced Abel's offering was a slain animal and was a bloody sacrifice. I think Hebrews 9:22 and the manner in which the author of Hebrews has developed his thesis up to this chapter leads to that conclusion. Genesis does not specifically say Abel's offering was a bloody sacrifice; however, God slew animals and made coverings for Adam and Eve. I think instructions were probably given by God regarding substitutionary sacrifices at that time. Abel presented his offering by faith in response to revelation from God as to the offering He wanted.

How did God testify of Abel's righteousness? John Owen suggests God testified that is He judged, esteemed, and accounted him righteous; for otherwise God is no respecter of persons. Whomsoever God accepts or respects, He testified him to be righteous, that is, to be justified and freely accepted with Him. Abel was not made righteous, he was not justified by his sacrifice; but therein he showed his faith by his works" (*Hebrews*, p. 218).

Kent observes that Genesis speaks of Abel's blood crying out to God for vengeance, in Hebrews it speaks to us of the importance of faith in God. Philip Hughes says, "The simplest sense remains the best sense namely, that Abel by his example of faith and righteousness still speaks to us today, even though he has so long been dead" (*Hebrews*, p. 457). Martin Luther said Abel "is more alive than ever! So great a thing is faith! It is life in God."

"Our persons must be first justified, before our works of obedience can be accepted with God; for by that acceptance He testifies that we are righteous," writes John Owen.

### **By Faith Enoch**

"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. 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" (Hebrews 11:5-6). Compare this with Genesis 5:21-24.

Enoch did not die; he was "taken up" into heaven. The word *metatithemi* "taken up" means "removed" or "transferred." He changed places. He was moved from one place to another, from earth to the presence of God in heaven.

If Enoch had died a normal death like his contemporaries the Genesis record would have read the like other in his day. He lived some many years "and he died." But that is not what it says. "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). Here again, the simplest interpretation is the correct one.

"Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death" is the conviction of the writer of Hebrews. To "see death" is a normal expression to experience death. Moreover, "and he was not found because God took him up" is a sudden supernatural removal from this earthly experience. He was not to be found anywhere. He just disappeared because God removed him from the earth.

Enoch is a beautiful Old Testament type of the Christian believer who will be caught up to be with Christ when He returns. Those believers who are alive will not experience death, but will be changed in the twinkling of the eye. The apostle Paul wrote: "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Enoch pleased God and God took him up into heaven. Enoch walked with God by faith. His example is still before us to this day. The just or righteous one shall live by faith is a theme both in the Old and New Testament. God will reward the faithful just as He did Abel and Enoch. There is a direct relationship between their faith and their reward. Without faith it would have been impossible for Enoch to please God.

"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" (Hebrews 11:6).

Upon whom or in what is your faith focused? Hebrews rules out self-help pop psychology, word of faith movements, new age movements, etc. The focus is faith in God through Jesus Christ. We who deserve nothing look to Jesus who merited everything for us. The good works we produce is that which He works in and through us to His glory. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). God rewards His works and gifts that He is working in us. "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Martin Bucer wrote in 1512, "all the good that God does to us and the eternal life that he gives us still remain the results of His grace alone, so that no one should boast of himself, but only of the Lord (Phil. 2:13; Rom. 6:23; 11:5f, 36; 1 Cor. 1:29f)." No one states it better than the apostle Paul. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:33-36). That is the person who walks by faith in a way that pleases God!

The rewards are never earned; they are all of grace. The rewards are not in payment for service rendered. They are the result of making ourselves available to Him to do in and through us all that He chooses to do. They are His blessings on the believer who walks by faith.

### **By Faith Noah**

"By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7). The testimony of Noah is recorded in Genesis 6:9-9:29.

Noah received divine instruction regarding God's future plans. He continued to believe in the promises of God for at least 120 years! He had probably never seen a drop of rain, and definitely not a cataclysmic flood. He had never seen a super ocean going cargo carrier. Everyone else was making fun of him. He had no experiences to base his faith upon, however he trusted God and inherited a new world after the Flood.

Noah persevered in faith and that same faith condemned the world of unbelief. It was by that same faith he "became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." "To be an heir of this righteousness is to be the recipient of that righteousness which God imputes to those who trust Him, and denotes also the fact that enjoyment of the full inheritance is yet future," writes Kent (*ibid.* p. 122). The apostle Paul's passion was that he "be found in Him [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:9). His righteousness is a declared righteousness that is imputed through faith in Christ. It is an alien righteousness. It is the righteousness of Christ that is credited to him through faith. The inheritance is the righteousness that Christ provided through His death and resurrection (2 Cor. 5:21). The Bible clearly declares "no one in any age is saved except through faith in Christ, and on the basis, either anticipated or fulfilled, of his mediatorial work. Christ, indeed, is supremely and uniquely the Heir: He it is, and none other, whom the Father has 'appointed the heir of all things.' Noah and every other heir of righteousness is so only by virtue of having been made one with Christ, the sole Heir, by faith" (Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 464).

"This is gratuitous justification by the righteousness of Christ imputed unto us by faith; he was made the 'heir' of this righteousness; that is, by gratuitous adoption. Whatever we receive upon our adoption belongs unto our inheritance. The righteousness of faith is the best inheritance, for thereby we are manifested as 'heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ'" (John Owen, *Hebrews*, p. 222).

In obedient faith Noah survived the flood with his wife and sons. The Flood that became the means of salvation for Noah was also the destructive judgment of God upon a depraved world.

Noah's testimony condemns the world to this day. Jesus used Noah's experience and testimony to declare a sudden coming day of judgment when He returns. "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark" (Matthew 24:37-38).

Jesus made it very clear, "of the day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." A couple verses later He said, "Therefore, be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. . . . For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think he will" (vv. 42, 44).

When He comes will He find faith? What is your personal relationship with Jesus Christ? There will not be a second chance. That is why the Holy Spirit pleads with you now to place your trust in Christ. If you do not know Christ as your Savior you will face Him as your Judge.

There are some funny ideas about faith floating around in the media. Faith is not positive thinking. It is far from the name it and claim it, word of faith movement. As we shall see in Hebrews eleven be very careful when you hear false teachers claiming promises of the land of Israel and applying them to Christian wealth and prosperity in our day. It is a false interpretation and application of the Old Testament. The specific promises to Abraham are not the promises to Christians no matter how far you stretch the application.

"It is by faith the convicted and repentant sinner is saved (Acts 16:31). It is by faith that Christ dwells in the heart (Eph. 3:17). It is by faith that we live (Gal. 2:20). It is by faith that we stand (Rom. 11:20; 2 Cor. 1:24). It is by faith we walk (2 Cor. 5:7). It is by faith the Devil is successfully resisted (1 Pet. 5:8, 9). It is by faith we are experimentally sanctified (Acts 26:18). It is by faith we have access to God (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:22). It is by faith that we fight the good fight (1 Tim. 6:12). It is by faith that the world is overcome (1 John 5:4). Reader, are you certain that you have the 'faith of God's elect' (Titus 1:1)? If not, it is high time you make sure, for 'without faith is impossible to please God'" (A. W. Pink, *Hebrews*, p. 675).

God in His saving grace has done everything that needs to be done for you to be saved. It is not automatic and it is not universal. Not everyone will be saved. It is not automatic even though it is of grace. What must you do to be saved? Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailor, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

With the lives of all these men God was pursuing an intimate love relationship with them. He took the initiative to invite them to join Him in what He was doing. He communicated with them and pursued a personal relationship with each. When He had them ready He invited them to join Him to accomplish His eternal purposes. Their testimony of faith in God lives today.

"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" (Hebrews 11:6).

When He comes, will Jesus find us trusting Him? How do we please Him? It is by walking with Him in faith. It is a moment by moment, day by day experience. It is learning to commune with Him throughout the day. It is to pray continually in silent prayer, and open communion with Him.

The evidence of that faith is the fruit that it produces. There will be works because faith always produces works.

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