

24. Understanding the Importance of Faith

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the fact why there were many Jews that rejected the sacrifice of Christ even though they had seen His miracles and heard His teaching. We also saw that the writer of Hebrews gave encouragement to those who were suffering for their faith and boldness in speaking for Christ. The writer now builds on that instruction to remind the Jewish Christians about the faith that was shown by many individuals in the Old Testament.

To help the Jewish Christians understand that faith, the writer began by giving a definition and illustration of the meaning of faith. Hebrews 11:1-3 says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” The word translated “substance” means *confidence, firm trust or assurance*. Hebrews 3:14 uses this word when it says, “For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.” The writer wanted the Jewish Christians to have a full assurance of their salvation.

This verse also gives a second definition of faith when it says that faith is the evidence of things not seen. The word translated “evidence” means *a proof or conviction*. The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is in 2 Timothy 3:16, where we read, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Here, it is translated by the word reproof because all Scripture is profitable to convict or convince people of their sin. Faith is that inward proof or assurance that God has given us salvation and eternal life even though we have not yet seen that eternal life.

Throughout the Old Testament, many people had given clear evidence of that confident assurance that God would give the eternal life that He had promised. The word that is translated “elders” is used frequently of older men or the leaders of the people. In 1 Timothy 5:2, it is used to speak of the older women. In this verse, it is used to speak of the faith of the Old Testament saints including both men and women as we see in the chapter. The Old Testament clearly spoke of the faith of the people mentioned in this chapter.

In addition to the faith of the Old Testament saints, we are also reminded that it is through faith that we have understanding about the way that the creation came into existence. It is through faith that we can understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God. John 1:1-3 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” We believe by faith that the Father willed the creation, the Son spoke the worlds into existence by the Word of His mouth and the Spirit moved on the face of the waters.

True believers accept, by faith, the fact that God the Son created the world with things that are not seen. Hebrews 1:3 says, “Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our

sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Here, we see that Christ now holds all things together by the word of His power. Mankind cannot see the power of God but only the results of that power and the creation is one of the results of that power. However, mankind must accept that fact by faith. That is why we should expect that those without faith will try to explain the creation in some other way.

We are given two illustrations of faith that happened before the flood. Hebrews 11:4-5 says, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found, because God had taken him’; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” God could not talk about the faith of Adam and Eve because they had seen and talked with God. However, their faith is shown by the fact that of their first two sons, one chose to show faith and the other did not have faith.

God had shown Adam and Eve that blood had to be shed to provide a covering for their sins. Genesis 3:21 says, “Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.” The fig leaf coverings that Adam and Eve had made for themselves did not work. As a result, God chose to kill one or more animals to provide an animal skin as a covering for them. We do not know exactly what Adam and Eve taught their first two sons. However, we do know that when those two sons offered a sacrifice, Abel offered an animal sacrifice by faith as a covering for his sin. In contrast, Cain brought the fruit of the ground as an offering to God. That offering of fruit actually provides us with the first example of idol worship. Cain offered the result of his own efforts as a tiller of the ground as a sacrifice, instead of a blood sacrifice as a covering for his sin. As a result, God did not accept the offering of Cain. God accepted the blood sacrifice of Abel and declared him righteous. His faith still speaks today.

Enoch is the second illustration of faith, before the flood. Genesis 5:24 says, “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.” Enoch was the first person to be taken off this earth without dying. Later in the Old Testament, a similar thing happened to Elijah. However, here in Hebrews we have a fuller explanation of what happened to Enoch. We see that God took Enoch away so that he did not experience death. His body was never found, because he never died. We see that the reason God took Enoch without death was due to the fact that he pleased God. A few verses earlier, in Hebrews 10:38, we read, “Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” The fact that Enoch walked with God showed that he lived a life of faith. The fact that Enoch pleased God was the result of the fact that he lived by faith. God could have pleasure because Enoch walked by faith and lived a life of faith.

However, when faith is lacking, it is impossible to please God. Hebrews 11:6 says, “But 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 diligently seek Him.”

In order for a person to come to God, we see that a person must believe that He is. In Exodus 3:13-14, God answered the question of Moses. Those verses say, “Then Moses said to God,

‘Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you,” and they say to me, “What is His name?” what shall I say to them?’ And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.”’” Both Enoch and Moses had to choose to come to God because they chose to believe that God is the true God. In the New Testament, Christ made it clear that the only way to come to the Father is through Christ. John 14:6 says, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

We also see that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. God told the people of Israel through Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:13, “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” The Lord offers a wonderful reward to all those who will search for Him with their hearts. Paul told Agrippa, in Acts 26:18, that the Lord had sent him to the Gentiles “‘To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’” In this one verse, we see that God rewards us in five ways. He opens our eyes. He turns us from darkness to light. He turns us from the power of Satan. He turns us to the power of God. He forgives our sins. He gives us an eternal inheritance. These five things all happen as a result of true faith.

Hebrews 11:7 goes on to say, “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” We see that Noah also demonstrated true faith when God warned him about the coming flood. Genesis 6:8 says, “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Then, Genesis 6:17-18 says, “‘And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark--you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.’” Noah received grace because he had true faith. As a result, he and his family were preserved while the rest of the people of the earth were destroyed by the flood.

Noah showed his faith by his obedience as he built the ark. In fact, Noah also warned others about their need for faith. 2 Peter 2:5 says, “And did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.” As a result of faith, Noah became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. Each of these examples of faith, from the early chapters of Genesis, provide an opportunity to teach our physical and spiritual children about faith and help them learn to explain to others the importance of having true faith. We read that Noah became an heir of righteousness because of faith. Christ also places His righteousness on each of us at the moment of salvation. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how to explain the importance of faith.