

## ***Faith: a foundation for perseverance*** (Hebrews 11:1–3)

The rich examples of faith presented in Hebrews 11 are to encourage the believer to persevere (cf. 10:36–39 and 12:1). To introduce the chapter the author summarizes the challenge for the believer: to endure, you need a faith that accepts unseen realities as revealed by God to be true.

### **I. *Faith described by its results (11:1):***

***Faith makes the promises of God real to us and gives divine affirmation of the unseen.***

#### **1. *Faith is “the substance of things hoped for” (KJV).***

The “things hoped for” are the future benefits of eternal salvation, such as eternal glory and rest. In understanding the relation of faith and hope, having the right hope is important.

The faith which is needed to endure gives “substance” to the things hoped for. Faith neither creates what we hope for nor does it make those things happen, but rather it makes the things hoped for so real to us, that it motivates us to act upon them. Although hope deals with the future, it is a present anchor for the soul (6:19) and through it we draw near to God (7:19).

#### **2. *Faith is “the evidence of things not seen” (KJV).***

In the context those things which we cannot perceive with our physical senses include things future (like the flood for Noah, v.7), things past (like creation, v.3), and heavenly things (like even God Himself, v.6).

The faith which is needed to endure gives “evidence” or “proof” about those things which are not seen (cf. John 8:46 for the use of the cognate verb). Such faith endures trials and yields the “evidence” of spiritual realities in such things as joy, perseverance, and comfort (cf. 1 Peter 1:8; Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 1:5–6).

Though we are called to be faithful, faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) which He produces as we abide in Christ. Ultimately, it is through Christ in the believer that such faith is possible.

### **II. *Faith affirmed by its history (11:2):***

***Faith in the word of God has a history of divine approval.***

1. The “ancients” or “people of old” are much the same as the “forefathers” (1:1), godly men and women like those who will follow in this chapter.
2. Such people of faith gained approval by their faith or were commended because of faith. God commended them, sometimes in their lives, but most importantly for us, through the Scriptural record as we have in chapter 11. The faith of a Roman centurion and the commendation by Jesus is a New Testament example of commended faith (Luke 7:1–9).

It is helpful to study Scripture and observe how God commended faith. Some examples are obvious (like the faith of Daniel), others are surprising but encouraging (like David being forgiven after repenting of his sin, Psalm 51, cf. Psalm 32).

### **III. *Faith illustrated by fundamental practice (11:3):***

***Faith is foundational to our very thinking about the universe.***

1. The readers’ own understanding of creation, based on Genesis 1 though much richer, is an example of such faith. God spoke and the universe came into existence and continues sustained by the Son for His purposes, both the present world which we see and the ages to come (cf. 1:2–3). By faith believers accept the written record and the physical evidence in creation for a Creator and therefore worship the Creator rather than anything created (cf. Romans 1:20).
2. The author apparently gives this personal illustration of faith (in distinction to those of the “ancients” which follow) to show that the readers already lived with such faith. Though yet unseen, the “hoped for” was as certain to happen as the creation that surrounded them because God has spoken.

To endure the trials of life you need a faith in the promises of God that is so certain that it motivates you to faithful action. Such faith grows by the Spirit of God through the Word of God as His fruit is produced in the believer. What God has spoken, He will do, as certain as the universe which He spoke into existence.

*Questions for further thought and discussion:*

- What do you hope for? Which hopes are biblically based and which not? How will a strong faith in biblically based hopes help you through your current trials?
- Who are your favorite biblical characters? How was their faith commended by God?
- How have you already shown faith in the “unseen things” of God?