

Heb. 11:1-3 The Effects of Faith in the Soul of the Christian (part 2)

Today, we come to part two of a message I began last week. And we only touched on one truth: Faith is a substance. In other words, Faith is a real possession in the soul of the one who looks forward to the promises of God, and not only knows they will come pass, but also those promises and the things promised are already in our possession . . . by faith. I gave the example of bacon being cooked in the morning. From my bedroom, I could smell it. I knew it was there. I wanted it. And from a manner of speaking, it was already mine. A.W. Pink says, *“The confident expectation which faith inspires, give the objects of the Christian’s hope a present and actual being in his heart.”* In this kind of way, faith is a substance, a real present reality in the soul. Today, I have 3 more effects of faith in the soul of the Christian. 1) Faith is the evidence of things not seen; 2) Faith elicits the pleasure of God; and 3) Faith is understanding.

1. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. Look at the 2nd part of v. 1: Faith is: **“the conviction of things not seen.”** As I briefly noted last week, faith gives assurance, or “confidence” to our souls as we live in this life. The one who has faith in God’s promises, fulfilled in Christ, knows that God will do what He says. But, there is more to faith than mere assurance. The word we have in the ESV is “conviction” (ESV). This is not talking about the “conviction” we have by the Holy Spirit as to sin in our lives. This is more of a general term to mean that we are convinced something is true. The KJV translates this word as “evidence.” If we put these meanings together, we have the idea of someone being convinced of something because of evidence. In other words, one of the effects of faith in the soul is to bring assurance of the promises because of evidence.

Think of a courtroom. In order to establish justice, there must be evidence. Each case tries to demonstrate their case by evidence. At the end of a court case, the judge hands down a verdict based upon real evidence. And he/she is “convinced” of the decision. A good example where we see this same word is John 8:46. The religious leaders were speaking lies about Jesus. They said he was possessed by a demon, even though ALL the evidence was to the contrary. And he says to them: **“Which one of you convicts me of sin?”** In other words, *“look at the evidence of my works. I’ve demonstrated the truth that I am the Son of God.”* (See also 2 Tim. 3:16 “reproof”) In the same kind of way, this is what faith does. It knows God and his promises are true. God has proved himself. And the person of faith has confidence or “assurance” of the reality and certainty of divine things. Pink says that as a substance, *“faith is the hand of the soul that “lays hold of” the contents of God’s promises.”* And as evidence, *“faith is the eye of the soul that looks out toward God’s promises and represents them clearly and convincingly to us.”*

Now, for the non-believer, the person without faith, this does not make sense. Why? How can faith be the “evidence” of things that are not seen. All of us are taught that we know things by objective truth. In other words, the things we can see and touch and smell and know they exist by our senses. Even in the world of science we begin with a working hypothesis, which becomes a theory. And when there is enough evidence, it becomes a law. But, what about the things unseen? Like God Himself, who is Spirit. And what about all the properties of his nature, his omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, etc.? Or what about the person of Christ. History certainly proves he lived, he died, and even rose again. But, to believe things about his person . .

. two natures in one person . . . these are the things that can only be known by faith. And what about the heavenly, eternal promises, which are also unseen. These are the “things unseen” that are only known by faith. And faith itself is called evidence. Peter O'Brien says, “*Faith demonstrates the existence of reality that cannot be perceived through objective sense perception.*” By faith, we are convinced. By faith we believe eternal, unseen things!

Application: Why do you think Christians persevere in believing things that are invisible? It is because of faith, created by God for this purpose, to carry us through this life. KNOW THIS: No faith will carry us through the difficulties of this life, from the oppositions within and without, unless it works in us as evidence of the things unseen. This is one of the arguments of the author of Hebrews in cp. 11. Why would Abraham leave his home, his country, his culture, his family if He did not believe in the promise of God that he would one receive the things promised? Why would Noah build an ark after receiving God’s warning of things unseen? Why would Moses leave the riches of Egypt to be part of a nation of slaves? Why would Israel walk around Jericho blowing a trumpet? Why does someone today leave their country, their culture, their language, their family, etc. to share the gospel? Why? Because FAITH is their possession. And by faith, they were convinced of God’s promise to save. In the same way, so do we continue in this life.

2. Faith elicits the pleasure of God. Look at v. 2: “**For by it (faith) the people of old received their commendation.**” Who are the people of old? It was every person of faith from the beginning of the world before the time of Christ. And even now the same principle applies. In this regard, faith is always the means to take God’s people to heaven. But, my point is found in the words “**received their commendation.**” The KJV says, they “**gained a good report.**” The literal translation is the passive form of witness, literally “witnessed of.” This word is used 7 times in Hebrews. And in every case, we find a reference to biblical record. In other words, God records their faith for everyone know. And He approves. He is pleased with their faith and the works that follow. Look at 11:4-5: “**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. 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 (same word) as having pleased God.**”

Parents, if your kids have studied hard for an exam, or they worked hard over a period of time learning to play an instrument or develop a skill in sports? What do you say to them after looking at their faithfulness? You say, “**Great job! Look at what you’ve accomplished. I approve of your hard work and what you’ve done.**” As a parent you find pleasure in you child.

In the same kind of way God looks at our faith, which produces good works. And He is pleased. He gives us a good report. I think of the master in Jesus’ parable who says to his faithful servant: “**Well done, good and faithful servant**” . . . He is commended for his faith. (Matt. 25:21). Abel was obedient to God and offered an acceptable sacrifice. God was pleased. Enoch “walked with God” (Gen 5:24) and God was pleased. Literally, against ALL odds, Noah listened to God and spent many years building an ark, and preaching righteousness. God was pleased. Abraham left everything in obedience. God was pleased. By faith Sarah considered God faithful as he promised to give a Son. God was pleased. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be

called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. And God was pleased.

Question: How can God be pleased in the faith of a sinful person? For we know that **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Rom. 3:23). All the men and women of Heb. 11 were sinners. And we are sinners. So how can God be pleased with their faith and in turn be pleased with the sinner? Answer: Faith is connected to God's promise. It is like my bacon and mixing bowl illustrations last week (recall). You see, faith does not result in salvation if it is not connected to God's promise. For this is the purpose of faith. Faith is ACTUALLY and REALLY united to God's promise to save. Do you remember the first promise in the OT where God says He will save sinners? It was Gen. 3:15. After Satan's temptation the fall of Adam and Eve, God says to the serpent: **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."** This is the first promise of salvation. And I believe Adam and Noah and Abraham and the patriarchs, by faith, were continually looking and waiting for this salvation. And where is the promise fulfilled? Look with me to John 8:56: Jesus says to the religious leaders: **"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."** THIS IS FAITH! Abraham saw . . . THE PROMISE . . . in whom all God's promises are fulfilled.

Now, back to my question: How can God be pleased in the faith of a sinful person? We know the answer! God is pleased with faith because it holds onto the Son, the promised Messiah, the ONE who would have his "heel bruised." And, the ONE who would "bruise the head" or "crush" the head of Satan. This speaks of the cross. 2 Cor. 5:21 says: **"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** This is what we call the Gospel, the good news. This is what we believe. Jesus died. He lived a sinless life. And he laid down his life on the cross as a sacrifice. (This is the content of the Book of Hebrews.) And then, he rose again. Death could not hold the sinless Son of God. And those who trust in God's promise (the Son) have their sins forgiven. This is how God can be pleased in the faith of a sinful person. It is because Christ has become our righteousness. We give him our sin. He gives us his righteousness.

And "faith is the substance" (v. 1). The principle is still the same. In the OT, FAITH is united to the promise, which is Christ. In this way, God is pleased. This is why we read about Abraham Gen. 15:6: **"And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."** The righteousness that Abraham needed to be saved as was his already! How? Faith! Look at v. 2 **"For by it (faith) the people of old received their commendation."** They looked forward. We look back. But, all of us wait for the consummation of all things. And, through it all, FAITH Beholds God in the face of the Son (2 Cor. 3:18).

Truth: Faith "in and of itself" is not a work. "By faith we are commended." It is not by physical birth. It is not by works. It is by faith we are saved. There is no meritorious cause in faith. Nevertheless, faith is necessary. This means that faith, in and of itself" is not a work. Those things that follow are the result of faith. They are "works."

Application: God is not pleased with mere good works. He is pleased by works of faith; faith that looks to the promise, who is Christ. There are many people who do good works in this world. But, God is not pleased with them unless there is faith in Christ. If faith is not in Christ, it is not

saving faith. And God cannot be pleased unless the works are covered by the blood of the perfect Son of God. This is how God can say He is pleased with us . . . because we are found in Christ. God no longer looks at our sin. He looks at Christ. This is why Paul can say now, “We are seated in the heavenly places with Christ” (Eph. 2:6). If someone were to ask, “*Is God pleased with my faith? Or is God pleased with my works?*” We would answer “YES.”

Application: We must value a Christian not for his intellect, natural charms, social position, worldly success, but for his faith, which is always evidenced by obedience. You will always know a Christian by his fruits.

Application: God kept a record of their “faith” (OT saints) for us . . . now that we might live godly, faithful lives as we look to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. Brothers and sisters, we have the record of Scripture with people of faith, so that we might read and be encouraged by their faith . . . so that we endure . . . so that we have patience . . . so that we have endurance. Heb. 12:1-2 says: “**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 . . .**” And then v. 2: “**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.**” (See 12:1; 11:40). Let’s move on.

3. Faith gives understanding to things unseen. Through faith we understand the things unseen. Look at v. 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.** Our example here is creation, *ex nihilo*. God created all things seen and unseen out of nothing. And here, in this text, our author contributes this to FAITH.

It doesn’t take faith to look at the world and say, “*Yes, the world is here. I see this.*” But, it does take faith to look at the world and know, “*It came from somewhere.*” To believe that something comes from nothing goes against every class of logic and reason we’ve ever had. And then to believe God is the creator of it all, the ONE behind it all, the UNMOVED mover, this is faith. I think of the kid who says to his dad, “*If we were created by God, who created Him?*” Have you ever thought about this? Of course you have! This is the prime example of “things invisible, God HIMSELF in his essence.” And in truth #1 I’ve mentioned other things that are invisible in which faith gives understanding (Trinity, person of Christ, eternal promises, the soul of man etc.) To have faith is to have understanding, and then to believe them in spite of all things the world throws our way to convince us otherwise. This is why Christians are accused of circular reasoning, since there is no proof that God exists. (Now, I do believe there are proofs. And there is evidence. There are miracles. There is the unity of the Word. There is the power of creation. There is a reason we are moral creatures. But, this is the not the point of this text.) Here, it is FAITH that beholds and understands the unseen.

Now, the implication for this truth is that faith is a supernatural gift of God. Otherwise, how would such understanding come? We spent a lot of time here last week. But, let’s look at a couple passages. First, look over at John 16:14 where we see that the power of faith is connected with the giving of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, “**He (Holy Spirit) will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it too you.**” Simply put, this means that the Holy Spirit will

powerfully make Christ known (God's promise) to his people. How do you think John the Baptist knew who Jesus was as he saw him walking up the banks of the Jordan river? In John 3:27 John says, **"A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."** As Christians, we say by the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus is the Son of God. The world does not say this.

Look with me for a moment to 1 Cor. 2. Here, Paul affirms this principle. In vv. 1-5 he says, **"And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."**

Now, concerning the things unseen that faith beholds look down at v. 9: **"But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him'—"** And then in vv. 10-14: **"these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."**

At the end of the day, faith is a supernatural gift of God. And by the Spirit, through the means of faith, we are united to Christ (See John 14-16). Let me end with three quick applications.

Application: True Faith is Faith in Christ, in whom are all the promises of God. In Him, ALL God's promises are fulfilled! The OT saints looked forward to Christ and were saved. We look back to Christ and are saved. And all of us are saved through the person and work of Christ. This means that anything that falls short of belief in Christ in this world IS NOT FAITH, at least it is not true faith, saving faith. This means that all the ways the world uses the term "faith," outside of Christ is worthless to save. No one will receive the promises of God if they do not come through Jesus Christ.

Application: Faith in Christ results in confidence (assurance). A good picture for us is a foundation. The word "hypostasis" literally means "standing under." It is like the house built upon the rock vs. the house built upon the sand. The foundation of the rock keeps the house from being swept away. Another example might be the high ground during battle, which gives the one who possesses it, great advantage. In the same kind of way, faith provide a firm standing ground while we wait for God's promises. In this way, faith in Christ is like an anchor for the soul.

Application: Faith in Christ results in endurance. This is the context of the Book of Hebrews. Don't fall away! Don't drift away! Don't fall short! Press on! Endure! Persevere! Be patient!