

## **THE NATURE OF SAVING FAITH – HEBREWS 11**

Hebrews 11 is the premier chapter in the Bible on FAITH. The reason it is so significant is because it demonstrates that not only is FAITH essential, but that it must be the right kind of faith. It shows us what the right kind of faith looks like. In effect, this chapter illustrates the nature of a true saving faith.

There is a kind of faith that doesn't save. Even the demons believe but they are not saved (Ja. 2:19). Hebrews 11 illustrates the nature of a saving faith that pleases God and that without this kind of faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Therefore, the importance of this chapter cannot be overstated.

The writer of Hebrews, at the end of chapter 10 wraps up the warning section in verses 38 and 39 by saying that the just shall live by faith which is a quote from Hab. 2:4. He then went on to say in 10:39 that "we (the true believers) are not of those who draw back (apostatize) to perdition, (eternal destruction) but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

True believers will not apostatize. They may backslide. They may compromise. But they will not completely abandon the faith. A true saving faith perseveres. It endures. This is the test of genuineness! The nature of a saving faith that endures is then illustrated in chapter 11.

Hebrews 11 is called the "***The Hall of Faith***" chapter as it gives example after example of true God-honoring faith. There is a definite connection between the strong emphasis on the PERSON and WORK of Christ in chapters 1-10 and then the FAITH chapter that builds on it in chapter 11. Hebrews is outlined in this way:

**Hebrews: Faith in Christ** (theme)

Chps. 1-7 The **PERSON** of Christ

Chps. 8-10 The **WORK** (New Covenant) of Christ

Chps. 11-13 **FAITH**

At the end of the day, it all comes down to the issue of FAITH. There are ultimately unbelievers and believers. Everyone is in one of those two camps. The writer of Hebrews has spelled out the truth of Christ at great length – now as we come to Hebrews 11 the issue is will people believe it?

## Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV)

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

“There is scarcely any verse of the New Testament more important than this, for it states what is the nature of all true faith.” – **Albert Barnes**

This verse does not give a formal definition of faith but rather a description of what faith does. In fact, the entire chapter serves to illustrate the nature of faith without a formal definition. In effect it defines faith according to the history of faith as seen in the lives of those who exercised it.

The words faith, believe, and trust are used interchangeably. In verse 6 we see that without faith it is impossible to please God. True faith is the first thing a person ever does to please God. Everything in terms of a saving relationship with God starts with FAITH.

Faith is simply taking God at His Word. Faith is always connected to God's Word (cf. Gen. 15:6; Rom. 10:17; 1 Jn. 5:9-10). But again, Heb. 11:1 is more descriptive of saving faith than the defining of it. It describes the nature and character of faith.

When it says that “***faith is the substance of things hoped for***” the Greek word translated in the NKJV as “***substance***” can have a couple of different nuances. And the problem is that both senses are used in the book of Hebrews so it remains unclear as to what the exact nuance should be.

One nuance of the word “***substance***” is seen in Heb. 1:3 where it is translated as “***person***”. There it says Christ is the “express image of His ***person***”. So, the idea with this nuance is the idea of “essence” or “exact reality”. Christ is the exact essence of God. Faith is the ESSENCE of things hoped for.

The other nuance of the word “substance” is found in 3:14 where it is translated as “***confidence***” or “***assurance***”. Thus, faith is the confidence or assurance of what is hoped for in accordance with the Word of God.

The word “substance” literally means “***that which is placed under***” in the sense of foundation or support.

The nuances may overlap here. Faith is the substantial foundation that lays claim to the promises of God. Everything builds on this reality of faith. And of course, this faith foundation is the basis of our confidence or assurance.

Faith connects us to the reality of what is hoped for – to the future fulfillment of God’s promises (cf. Rom. 8:24-25).

The idea of hope is “**a certain expectation**”. Faith makes this hope a reality. Faith takes God at His Word in what He has promised and expects it to be fulfilled. Thus, faith is the substance – the foundation of what is hoped for.

Faith is the basis that makes it a reality and thus is the platform of our assurance. Faith is what we build on. It is the foundation or as the NKJV says “**faith is the SUBSTANCE of things hoped for**”.

Without faith a person builds on nothing. Vanity of vanities – all is vanity. Sadly, this is where most people live. They have no real support, no real foundation, no vital faith, in their life. Those who have no faith foundation are headed for the bottomless pit. That is where people with no foundation end up!

**Substance/Hupostasis** = “that which stands under” (Faith)

**Apostasy/apostasies** = “that which stands away” (No Faith)

Furthermore, he says that faith is “**the evidence of things not seen**”.

The word “evidence” is found only in one other place in the NT; namely in 2 Tim. 3:16 where it is translated as “**reproof**”. It means proof, or to prove, or to convince.

Faith is an “inner conviction” that is proof or evidence that the person believes in things not seen but which God has clearly revealed to be true. Faith believes God for what is not seen. It simply takes God at His Word by faith. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:7, “we walk by faith, not by sight.” (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17-18).

In John 20:29 Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

In 1 Pet. 1:8 Peter says of Jesus...

**1 Peter 1:8 (NKJV)**

**8** whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

Forgiveness of sin, our eternal inheritance, Christ's intercessory ministry, the promise of Christ's coming, kingdom blessings, are all presently invisible. But Faith sees them as present realities.

Faith is the present essence of future realities. It makes future realities real to the heart now. Faith lives in view of what is not seen. It lives in light of unseen spiritual realities simply because it takes God at His Word.

"A.W. Pink (An Exposition of Hebrews [Ephesians 4 Group], p. 652) uses the analogy of two men standing on the deck of a ship, looking in the same direction. One sees nothing, but the other man sees a distant steamer. The difference is, the first man is looking with his unaided eye, whereas the second man is looking through a telescope. Faith is the telescope that brings the future promises of God into present focus. Faith enables us to see the unseen world that the natural man cannot see." – **Pastor Steven Cole**

Faith never rests on what man says. Rather it rests squarely and only on God's Word. Faith is not a matter of "feelings" which are like the wind – subject to change. Faith is not merely positive thinking which amounts to faith in me or my assertions.

Biblical faith always has God and His promises as its object!

Faith is the basis of what we expect God to do, and it is evidenced in trusting God for things that are unseen. There are many things that God has promised which we don't have yet and which we don't yet see, but faith already counts them as reality. Faith says, "God said it and in my mind that settles it".

**Note:** Behind all God-honoring faith is the work of the Spirit. Apart from the Spirit no one ever comes to faith on his own (cf. Rom. 3:11; 1 Cor. 2:14). God is always the initiator! There is this mysterious tension between God sovereignly working in our hearts and human response and human responsibility. Both are true. Also, faith is not in a vacuum. God gives ample evidence and reason to believe. There is always sufficient light given by God which calls for faith (cf. Ps. 19; Rom. 1).

This entire chapter of Hebrews 11 emphasizes a faith that one lives by. The just shall live by faith (Heb. 10:38-39). This is the essence of Paul's emphasis in Romans 1:17 as well.

**Romans 1:17 (NKJV)**

**17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

"One might well ask, of course, at this point, just what is faith? And so the 11th chapter [of Hebrews] is his exposition of what is faith; and it's a beautiful answer, it's a marvelous exposition of faith in the lives of ancient saints." -**S. Lewis Johnson**