

## The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 33      November 17, 2019

# Without Faith It Is Impossible to Please Him

## Hebrews 11 : 6

“Faith is the means by which one lays hold of Christ, who is our righteousness. Faith alone justifies “because faith brings us the Spirit gained by the merits of Christ.” Faith saves because it “takes hold of Christ and believes that my sin and death are damned and abolished in the sin and death of Christ.” Faith saves, then, because it unites believers to Christ. Faith looks away from oneself and trusts in what Christ has done.”<sup>1</sup>

“Faith must turn to god as the One who saves; it must come to him seeking reward, seeking favor, seeking his grace. The alternative is to ignore him, to think that it doesn’t matter what God thinks of us, what he intends for our future. This is what unbelief is all about. Few people deny the existence of God, but many deny the relevance of God, the need to seek him for salvation. This is demonstrably true in our own day. The vast majority of people agree that God must exist, yet they are not seeking him. Instead, they are serving other worldly other worldly gods as the source of the rewards they so highly covet.”<sup>2</sup>

Given the critical role of faith put forth in the Bible, verses 1 and 6 of chapter 11 in Hebrews are of critical value in helping us to understand both the necessity and enormous value of this thing called “faith”. The danger here in this verse for a teacher is how to edit the study of this verse in order not to get bogged down for weeks going through passage after passage of examples and explanations, which could draw us away from the context of Hebrews 11.

In order to keep our study on a narrow ( and thus, hopefully, more fruitful ) track, my intention is to cite ( as I have already done above with quotes by Tom Schreiner & Richard Phillips ) some key theologians, as well as to delve a bit more into the context of Heb. 10:19-23, which I believe is a key precursory contextual comment by the author leading up to chapter 11 in general and also 10:32-39. We won’t delve into these passages in depth, as we have already covered them in some depth, but in order to see the segue the author uses into Heb. 11:1-5, the pathway leading us into verse 6, connecting verse 6 to verses 1-5 by use of the word “And”.

So, just by way of a sort of summary of the above-noted sections of Hebrews, notice from 10:19-23 these key elements: as a result of the immense promise of forgiven sins, as a direct result of the “single offering” ( v. 14 ) of our High Priest, and the fact that He has “sanctified for all time” the elect, and the reality of the initializing of the New Covenant by Jesus’ sacrifice which brings about that full forgiveness of our sins, the author begins v. 19 with “Therefore”. Notice these words; “since” in v. 19 and 21, and

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *faith Alone*, Zondervan, 2015, p. 45

<sup>2</sup> Richard Phillips, *Hebrews*, p. 419

“let us” in v. 22,23,24 [ Draw near, hold fast and consider how to stir up one another ] – all of these instructive words or phrases providing us with motivation to act on our faith in what vv. 14-18 have told us. *“Since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus...”*, *“Since we have a great high priest over the house of God...”*, then ( implied ) v. 22,23,24 – *“Let us...”* do these 3 things, which are not so much commands as they are exhortations or divine direction on how we should respond to these truths about what has been done by God in Christ to save us.

This exhortation is followed by vv. 26-39 ( the 4<sup>th</sup> Warning Passage in Hebrews ), the final ½ of which – vv. 32-39 – is devoted to showing us what faith will keep us from, and a further exhortation in vv. 35-39 to *“not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.”* This ties this verse to Heb. 11:6 – “He rewards those who seek Him.” But then v. 36 explains, *“for you have need of endurance...you may receive that what is promised.”* In this case, eternal life. Then in v. 38, the ‘kicker’ verse of this warning passage, citing Hab. 2:4 ( and parallel to Rom. 1:17 and Gal. 3:11 ) gives us the alternatives – *“live by faith” or “my [ God ] has no pleasure in him.”*

Then, v. 39, as we saw in an earlier lesson ( # 30 ), the “we” includes the author, and indicates that *“we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed”* – so shrinking back results not just in a loss of rewards, but rather, in destruction! So then, “we” have faith and preserve our souls, which leads directly into Hebrews 11:1-6. *“Without faith it is impossible to please him.”*

John Piper’s comment here is right on;

“When we trust God to be the decisive power behind all our obedience ( as with all the saints of Hebrews 11 who obeyed “by faith” ), we make much of God’s greatness. This is Peter’s point in I Peter 4:11: “Whoever serves [ let him serve ] by the strength that God supplies [ that is, by trusting God for his decisive acting in and through our serving ] – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” In other words, God is glorified when we serve by faith in his ever-arriving power. This is why faith is essential in our saving relationship with God. It glorifies him. It makes him look like what he really is – trustworthy, strong, gracious and wise. Faith is the essential root of worship.”<sup>3</sup> Emphasis is mine.

The substance or character of faith ( from v. 1, *“the assurance of things hoped for”* ) is that it ‘sees’ the reward that is yet future, to be experienced in the here and now. Obviously, not in the real sense, but so profoundly that it releases extraordinary acts of obedience. It sees that the ultimate reward of faith that God supplies is the gift of Himself to us ( and we are so unworthy of this ) to be enjoyed forever.

We see this working out of faith in all of chapter 11, but, for example, note 11:24-26. This is self-sacrificing love, similar to that described in Heb. 10:32-35, where believers risked their lives and property to visit their friends and family in prison. They did so

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<sup>3</sup> John Piper, Expository Exultation, Crossway, 2018, p. 79-80

because they ( v. 34 ) had a *“better possession and an abiding one.”* Moses did it because ( v. 26 ) *“he was looking to the reward.”*

Besides this first point in v. 6, *“Without faith it is impossible to please him.”*; there are two important points in the heart of this verse; whoever would draw near to God...

- Must believe that He exists, and
- That He rewards those who seek Him.

### 1. We must believe He exists

This seems to be fairly basic advice doesn't it? If we don't believe that God exists, then there is no faith, and no cause besides our own pleasure to live our lives in any particular way, except pragmatism.

The Apostle Paul indicates the real issue here, when he implies that there is no such thing as an Atheist – notice Romans 1:18-32. The word “suppress” here in v. 18, is a parallel word to “repress”, “smother”, “stifle” or “silence”. It carries the meaning of knowing a fact, then stifling that knowledge because perhaps it is inconvenient, or requires us to do something we do not want to do – in this case, worship God. This is done against all evidence that is available – here vv. 19-32 – that God obviously exists! In fact, it is so obvious a fact, that Paul adds, that those who suppress this truth are “Without excuse!”. What does he mean by this? RC Sproul comments;

“The excuse that is banished, the excuse every pagan hopes in vain to use, the excuse that is exploded by God's self-revelation is the pretended, vacuous, dishonest appeal to ignorance. No one will be able to approach the judgment seat of God justly pleading, “If I had only known you existed, I would surely have served you.” That excuse is annihilated. No one can lightly claim “insufficient” evidence for not believing in God.”<sup>4</sup>

The problem of unbelief is not a lack of evidence then, it is the natural moral disregard of humanity for God. It stems from what Paul says in Ephesians 2:1 and Col. 2:13 – that men are dead in sin, without any spiritual discernment ( I Cor. 2:14 ).

So, all people know there is a God, but Heb. 11:6 provides a distinction for us – just knowing there is a God ( whether or not you suppress that truth ) is of virtually no value. It is merely step 1. We must ‘know’ Him in a sense of seeing Him as worthy of our obedience, gratitude and worship, ( i.e., to please Him ) thus having a saving / redemptive knowledge of and relationship with God. That is something that God provides only to the redeemed.

### 2. We must believe that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

“We know much of God's goodness, justice, mercy and truth by the way he responds to our efforts to serve him. God's honoring of our righteousness does not change the degree of his love for us or imply that we can earn his affection. Still his recognition and reward of righteousness

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<sup>4</sup> RC Sproul cited by Sam Storms, Tough Topics, Crossway, 2013, p. 262-263 – not cited word for word here

does indicate that he values efforts that conform us more to his image. In so honoring our works, God demonstrates his regard for his own glory and cultivates in us an appreciation for the beauty of his holiness. The righteousness in us that God motivates and enables by his grace, he also graciously blesses.”<sup>5</sup>

The reward depicted in Heb. 11:6 is salvation – it is being with God forever – desiring to be with Him is the pre-requisite, note John 17:3 tells us what eternal life is. Back in Heb. 10:35-39, the A.H. defines for us the reward – note v. 35 especially. Confidence here is a synonym for “faith” and the great reward is the promise from God that we can expect to receive after we have persevered to do His will. Note again John 17 – this time, vv. 22,24.

In Hebrews 1:14, salvation is portrayed as a future inheritance. This imagery is sustained throughout Hebrews. In 11:7, the reward is the righteousness which Noah is to inherit by faith. Notice also what Heb. 6:11-12 tells us. – notice – “*through faith and patience*”. God’s promises are a sure hope ( confirmed with His oath – Heb. 6:13-20 ) and in Heb. 9:15a, God rewards us with “*the promised eternal inheritance*”, which equals salvation.

But it is important to see that, both in v. 6 and the rest of Hebrews 11, that there is an inseparable link between faith and faithfulness. It is faithfulness, the exercising of our faith that seeks God to attain the reward He offers. If ‘faith’ is just a passive resting in God ( IOW – bare assent or belief in God ), then it is woefully inadequate. Such a faith, according to James 2:14-20 is a dead faith, somewhat like what even demons possess. See also Heb. 3:7-4:11, especially vv. 4:2-3.

Faith that perseveres receives the commendation of God. That sort of faith expresses itself in a diligent pursuit after God ( seeking Him ) – cf. Matt. 6:33. God is not interested in a solitary act of faith that fades out and does not go the distance. That idea is well expressed in Heb. 10:35-36. Faithfulness is the proof ( fruit ) of faith , since our pattern of behaviour, our words and deeds ( and even our unexpressed thoughts ) uncover what we really believe.

Tom Schreiner and Ardel Caneday comment;

“Faithfulness is the proof of faith. Our pattern of behavior and the words we speak uncover what we truly believe. What we say, what we desire, what we do – all reveal what is in our hearts. God formed us so that there is an unbreakable and tight connection between faith and action, between creed and word, between belief and desire. Paul underscores this link: “Those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act in faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” ( Rom. 14:23 NRSV ). Because we act out our beliefs, we disclose to those around us what our hearts secretly believe and cherish. Regrettably, it is true that we find ourselves too easily speaking or acting contrary to a belief we profess, confirming the fact that God’s gift of faith is not yet perfected in us. God’s grace gives birth to our faith, and this faith

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<sup>5</sup> Brian Chapell, Holiness by Grace, Crossway, 2001, p. 208-209

governs the pattern of our behavior, so that by faith God purifies our hearts into holiness ( Acts 15:9; 26:18 ). Therefore, when Hebrews 11 recites the registry of those whom God commends, what the author mentions in every case is the behavior and conduct for which God commends them. God commends them for their faith, which shows itself in their faithful words and conduct ( cf. Heb. 11:9 ). All behavior is conceived in the womb of our beliefs. Therefore, all our desires, all our words and all our deeds make known what we truly believe and what we truly value in our hearts.”<sup>6</sup>

In Matthew 25:23, said as an expression of reward by a master to his faithful servant, we see that aspect of the reward we are to receive from the Father and soon after that, in Matt. 25:31-34, Christ expresses His own sense of reward at the judgment of the sheep and goats. We strive faithfully to hear those words in our own ears when we stand before our Saviour at last, don't we?

I am giving Tom Schreiner the last comment in this lesson, as he comments from his book, “Faith Alone”;

“I have tried to show in this work that faith isn't merely a mental agreement or an intellectual assent to certain teachings or doctrines. Faith includes mental assent and if such assent is lacking, faith isn't present. Understanding truth is imperative for saving faith, for “faith comes from hearing” ( Rom. 10:17 ), and what must be heard is the gospel of Christ. So, faith is never less than mental assent. At the same time, saving faith is more than mental assent. Saving faith embraces, leans on, and trusts in all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Justification is by faith alone because it relies on and rests on Christ alone for deliverance from God's wrath. Justification is by faith alone, for faith finds its joy in Christ alone, seeing him as the pearl of great price, the one who is more desirable than anything or anyone else. Faith rests in the Beloved, realizing that there is no salvation or peace or joy anywhere else. Faith, then, recognizes that all the glory belongs to God alone. Faith saves, not because of our faith, but because of the one in whom we trust. The person we trust in saves us, and he is shown to be merciful and almighty, just and loving so that both his judging and saving righteousness are satisfied at the cross. We see from another angle why our faith isn't our righteousness, for such a scenario focuses on our faith instead of the one in whom we trust. This is not to deny for an instant that we must believe and persevere in the faith. Human beings aren't automatons or nonentities. Still, our faith doesn't ultimately save us, for salvation is of the Lord. It is the Lord who justifies us, and it is the Lord who is justified and vindicated in the justification of sinners. God is revealed to be the Holy One of Israel and the loving Savior of his people. The praise, honor, and glory belong to him alone for our salvation.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Schreiner & Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, IVP Academic, 2001, p. 96

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, Zondervan, 2015, p. 262