

Discerning “By Faith”

Faith Can Be Misplaced

The Hebrew Christians, because of their roots of family, community, tradition and peer pressure were tempted to go back to their former ways and practices of Judaism. These reasons come to light in this passage of Scripture. Judaism was a religion to behold, a religion infused into the life of the people. The sights, sounds, smells and rituals were in daily life. In addition, there was the wonderment of the history of God and the Jewish people. Can you imagine the amazement of the worshipper when he entered the temple and seeing the reflection of the gold and silver that lined the walls? It would be astounding to see the size of such a place with the flickering of the candles being reflected like a prism bounding off the walls. Can you imagine the singing and the blasting of the shofar or the smell of the incense rising up and filling the rooms? The majesty of the temple and all that was in it would have been almost more than one could take in.

The temple sat on the mount the City of David and it was 1600 feet wide, 900 feet broad and the temple itself was 9 stories high. The temple was built with blocks that averaged 2.5’ x 3.5’ x 15’ weighting an average of 28 tones or 56,000 pounds. The largest block discovered was 44’ x 11’ x 16’ weighting over 570 tones or 114,000 pounds. How did they move such large and heavy stones into place? Well, that is a whole different study. The temple was surrounded by a wall 16 feet high and 12 feet thick. In addition, the temple complex went over 2 stories

underground. Would not the temple have created an awe in one's heart and be a wonder to the eyes?

Christianity on the other hand does not have such breathtaking scenes. As far as images go, it really has none of grandeur, at least none that we can see now. Christian's image is the cross and the man and God called Jesus. I have never once seen the Lord Jesus Christ. I have not been allowed into heaven like John was. As Christians, we worship by faith. The New Covenant of Jesus is all about faith in the unseen built upon a foundation of history and what was and is seen.

The Old Testament worshipper was hindered in the fact that he often began to worship what he saw and not the God the physical man-made creations represented. Moses warned the people of this very thing, “ ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ ³⁸ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. ³⁹ Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ ⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. ⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: ‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? ⁴³ You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, **the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.**’ (Quoting Amos 5:25-27) ” (Acts 7:37-43) It has always been the nature of mankind to worship the man-made or seen instead of the unseen God of Creation.

So, in many ways, as Christians, we are much better off. They worshipped by sight; we worship what we cannot see by faith. We are not distracted by visual images as those in Jerusalem. We worship the Lord by faith and look to His return. One thing that New Testament worshippers must be cautious with is trying to create visual images that would take away from our worship of God. Churches have made icons and these often become worshipped instead of Jesus Christ, they have become idols, just as they did in the Old Testament. Visual images can compete with our devotion to God by faith. If there were glossy 8” x 10” photographs of Jesus – many would worship the image or photograph and not the true person of God. Just as some people worship the cross as jewelry or as magical more than Christ. Some worship and pray to saints or relics which the Bible forbids.

As these early Jewish converts entered Jerusalem and saw the great sights of Judaism and this could take their focus off of Christ. The problem was the great landmarks and sights Judaism did not remind them that their worship was to be with God and not man-made objects. When they saw the architecture of the temple it reminded them of the One God who gave Moses the blueprint of the temple but the temple was the accomplishment of men.

There was a group of people who struggled with the visual and worshipping the unseen God of heaven. This group was not pleasing to God, in fact this group met with God’s wrath. For these wandering Jews the magnificence and glory of the man-made in temples and edifices of Egypt, Babylon and Jerusalem exceeded the glory of the invisible God. Because of their lack of faith when God has given them so much to build faith, He let them perish in the wilderness. May we be a people ever growing in faith.

Pray

Faith Is The Gift Of God

Faith pleases God and a lack of faith or unbelief greatly displeases God. The contrast is very clear. Please open your Bible to Hebrews chapter 11 and follow along as I read verses 3 to 19. After we quickly explore these 17 verses, we will return our focus to the first 3 verses. Now reading at verse 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. ⁴ **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. And through **his faith**, though he died, he still speaks. ⁵ **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 as having pleased God. ⁶ And **without faith it is impossible to please him**, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. ⁷ **By faith** Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. **By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.** ⁸ **By faith** Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ **By faith** he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ¹¹ **By faith** Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains

of sand by the seashore. ¹³ **These all died in faith**, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. ¹⁷ **By faith** Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.” Ok, before we dig into this passage, for those who are analytical or enjoy trivia, how many times is the phrase “**By Faith**” used in these 17 verses? Answer is 8, which is meant to emphasize the importance of faith.

There was an entire generation of Hebrews during the exodus that rebelled and complained against God because they wanted to go back to Egypt rather than trust and believe God. They were walking by sight and they were unable to see the outcome of following God – so, they complained. Their situation was sand and desert, heat and cold, thirst and hungry and they thought that it was all there was. They thought that their present situation was how it would be forever. They were not looking to a land whose builder is God. They remembered Egypt, where they were slaves, as if it were the Promised Land – it may have been considered the promised land by Pharaoh but it would not last. The promised land God was taking these stiff-necked people to was the promised land where they were to live for the glory of God. Yet, they wanted their former life they could touch and feel

over a life with God that began with faith and took them to eternity. They were guilty of unbelief and they died in their unbelief. Like them, every person who does not have the faith God requires - will also die in their unbelief. If you are here today and your assessment of yourself is that you lack saving faith, ask God to give it to you. Plead with the Lord to give you what He requires. God is a God who always hears the cries and praise of His children. A God who gave His only Son, so that He could be in relationship with His children.

Many churches today, for the most part, do not understand true biblical faith. We have all heard various manmade definitions of faith but all of them come up short of what true biblical faith is. True biblical faith does **not** originate within us. Faith is part of the gift of salvation. Saving faith is given by God alone. It is **not** the power of positive thinking. It is **not** manufactured within our own heart; faith comes by and through God alone. As Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus, found beginning in verse 4 of chapter 2, “**But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,** ⁵ **even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—** ⁶ **and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,** ⁷ **so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.** ⁸ **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,** ⁹ **not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:4-10) As believers, saved by the grace of God, it is God who is everything and we are but His joyful slaves and servants. Paul wrote to the Roman church, “**For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each**

according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” (Romans 12:3) It is God who has given and assigned to you your faith and giftings. To the Philippian church Paul wrote,²⁷ **“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ ... standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,**²⁸ **and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, *and* of your salvation, and that from God.**²⁹ **For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”** (Philippians 1:27-29) God works faith within His people and results in their salvation. As we explore chapter 11, we will see a clear biblical view of faith and then in the next few weeks as we look at some specific examples of faith, we will understand that there is no way these people did what they did on their own. Faith is too great a commodity to be manufactured within a sinful fallen human. No one can believe apart from the work of God. Our human need that these verses address is the need for a biblical understanding of faith and a need for God who gives it and understanding it is through Christ and His gift of the Holy Spirit that faith in us is strengthened. If one desires rock-solid faith, they must trust in God’s promises already fulfilled and by this they can deepen their faith and trust God for the promises He has given that are yet unfulfilled. The faith God calls His children to have - is not blind faith, but faith built upon eternal truth.

Faith Perceives The Unseen (vs. 1-2)

The verses that begin chapter 11 are not so much definitions of faith as they are attributes of faith. This why now we will go to the beginning, reading at verse 1, **“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”**² **For by it the people of old received their commendation.”** It is by faith that God transfers the certainty of His promises to us. It is the means by which we live

based on unseen promises. We have assurance and conviction based on faith. Unlike the Old Covenant that had many visible experiences that over time became the focus of people's worship the New Covenant, for now, is invisible. I believe by being invisible it helps us focus on God and who we are in Him and not on icons or places or buildings. As Paul wrote, ¹⁶“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. **For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.**” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18) We might say it this way, “Faith is what gives the unseen truths substance today. In other words, faith is the eyes by which we can see the invisible unfulfilled truths of God.” We can trust God for all He has shown mankind and have faith in all yet to be revealed. Verse 1 says it well, **“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”** In Paul's writing to the Corinthian church, he explained why unregenerated intellectual people do not possess faith. **“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.”** (v. 14) Even Satan, as intellectually smart as he is, lacks the spiritual wisdom that Christ gives to believers by His Holy Spirit as Paul explains as he continues in verse 15, **“The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.”** ¹⁶ **“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?”** (Quoting Isaiah 40:13) **But we have the mind of Christ.**” (1 Corinthians 2:14-16)

Those who believe in God by faith demonstrate their faith in the living out of their lives, as Moses demonstrated in verse 27, **“By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is**

invisible.” Moses saw God, not with physical eyes but the eyes of faith. Faith is not based on knowledge alone, one can know about the Bible or Jesus or even God and still not believe, these people have knowledge but not faith. James wrote concerning faith and works, **“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”** (James 2:19) The demons believe in the power of God but they lack faith because they do not have spiritual wisdom given to believers by Christ. So, for demons their knowledge of God causes them to tremble with fear. For believers in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior the knowledge of God produces joy and peace. This is what Peter wanted his readers to understand,
⁸**“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,**
⁹**obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”** (1 Peter 1:8-9) Faith allows believers to see the invisible and faith makes the invisible visible to the soul.

Faith Reveals God (v. 3)

In the first two verses we discovered that all people need something that they were not born with and cannot get on their own. If a person is going to be able to see Christ, they must obtain something that the natural fallen sinful person does not possess. A person’s soul is spiritually dead until God brings it to life and gives the person spiritual wisdom or spiritual eyes in which to see Christ and be empowered to rise above themselves and live in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. God brings to life our dead spiritual soul and begins to give us spiritual wisdom for those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. As verse 3 says, **“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.”** Without this spiritual awakening Paul says, **“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.” (1 Corinthians 2:14) Spiritual insight or wisdom is given when we believe in Christ and He gives us His Holy Spirit. This is why when Nicodemus came in the night wanting to understand who Jesus was and how He could do miracles. Jesus told him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” *Not understanding* ⁴ Nicodemus said to Jesus, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ ⁵ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘ “**You** (Greek: “humas” hoo·mas is plural this statement is not confined to Nicodemus) **must be born again.**” ’ ” (John 3:3-7) Once a person’s spiritual soul is brought to life then they must believe -- for knowledge is not faith. Believing brings faith and faith bring obedience to what God, through the Holy Spirit, reveals; specifically, obedience to gospel of Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Old Covenant and ushered in the New Covenant for His followers.

The writer now in verse 3 reveals another work faith accomplishes for those chosen by God and who give their lives to Christ. Through faith believers are able to see how the visible reveals the invisible. We see creation with our physical sight and our hearts soar with the amazement, our souls sing hymns of praise because we know the Creator of every molecule in the universe; every galaxy, every star, every planet, every animal, every flower – everything - it was all made from nothing. We know that Genesis chapter 1 and every chapter all the way to the end of Revelation is true. Every physical sight our eyes take in was made by God. By faith we know God spoke and everything came into being. We know the truth of John’s inspired words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ **All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.** ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:1-4) This is what the writer of Hebrews wrote and later John expanded on. In verse 3 we read, **“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.”** Every time I take out my telescope and look into the universe I am overcome by the greatness of God and I think of the prophet Isaiah who knew the greatness of God and tried to put into words, God is He **“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span.”** (Isaiah 40:12) Everything speaks of God the Creator, the snowcapped Alps, to a spider spinning a web, to seeing the atom in a electron microscope. God uses the visible for us to understand the invisible. By faith one can recognize both the vastness of God and His attention to miniscule detail.

When God says in the Book of Genesis that He created the world, faith believes it and interprets creation in light of this special biblical revelation. God, who was the only thing that existed and He spoke into nothingness and nothingness responded with everything in the universe. Today, all around us we see the result of God speaking into the darkness and creating by His Word alone – He created everything we see. Faith allows us to see both the visible and invisible! We believe in every promise of God and by faith we know our Father because of the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus! What an amazing God! Stand with me and as God’s children, we together by faith say, “Amen”!

אָמֵן **“amen” (aw·mane)** Meaning, “So be it or it is true.”