

Lesson Nineteen

(11:1-3)

FAITH

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²For by it the men of old received divine approval. ³By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

Faith = trust. Trust issues in obedience. Paul speaks about the "obedience of faith," Romans 1:5; 16:26. This Hebrew epistle offers a roll call of faith's "hall-of-famers" for the consideration and challenge of all until Jesus comes again.

With these ideas in mind, then, it was thought appropriate to devote a lesson to the subject, not only because it is the proper place in the book to do so, but it also provides a means of encouragement to us as we study it.

In our epistle, this chapter is devoted to those whose lives reflected a life-style God designates as faith. The concept means more, therefore, than just a one time belief, although it includes that. The people mentioned throughout the chapter were among those who committed themselves into God's will, come what may, and kept that fact true until God honored

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them with his presence after their departure from this world. No other type of life is acceptable to God, or commended by the scriptures.

The idea of faith in ch. 11, especially as it relates to the various people mentioned by name, seems to involve a life dedicated to God in such a way that said life was based upon some knowledge of God's will for them, and yet went beyond that to expression in ways they thought "appropriate" to faith. As a rule, you will notice the people "by faith obeyed" or an equivalent expression. Yet in many cases the things endured would have seemed foolish to others not so minded. In fact, one of the problems that any discussion of faith must consider is this very point: when does faith cease to be such in God's eyes or in our eyes. It has been the experience of us all that some have been observed to believe in something for which there appears no reason to do so. And this is part of the problem: a reason to believe. What constitutes reason to believe for one is not so for another. A related problem is that of presuppositions (i.e., what is believed/accepted as true before consideration is given to any position of faith). These are like axioms, something given but not provable. In Mathematics, we would say that it is axiomatic that there is one and only one straight line passing through two given points. Let it be observed that many "facts" are taken for granted that are in and of themselves not provable, or have some evidence for and some against. In the realm of knowledge, one can not prove the basic starting point, our thinking, and yet we must trust our thinking in order to doubt it. That is, in order to assert that we are not in existence, we must assume our existence and that we are thinking "correctly" in order to so state.

The above discussion was not intended to do more than quicken our awareness of problems that exist with the discussion of faith. Even the term itself can be variously used and understood. The definition given at the beginning of this lesson was "trust." If we trust, we obey (or act). All religious systems, then or now, are based upon faith/trust. No one is religious without some basis for being so, even if, to others, said reasons do not justify the person for so being. Every religion presents some reason for being, some foundation for existence. Hence, every person who is of that religion is so because there is some reason that justifies such. Because these things are so, all religious people have faith of some sort. Conversion from one religion to another really involves transferal of faith, which is done because of some compelling reason(s). You will notice that Christianity, with its own set of reasons (i.e., evidences for it), is a religion that proposes that people should believe in it rather than some other religion (with its set of reasons). Consideration of the Acts accounts will disclose that the apostles, for instance, preached in argumentative fashion through presentation of facts or alternative

(i.e., "better") conclusions from a given body of facts (like the Old Testament, for instance) for the purpose of persuasion. Some believed (i.e., switched) while others did not. It is always so. None of us who are Christian can, beyond a shadow of a doubt, prove that our religious system is the correct one. However, neither can any other person do so for their religious system. It is then a matter of evidence, what kind, how much, etc. It is a matter of careful thinking about what is assumed as true, and about the conclusion(s) drawn. In this writer's judgment, Christianity has far and away the best evidence (reasons) for its claims, and its demands upon those who adhere to it. At the same time, I recognize that many think me unjustified for my position. In fact, I am definitely in the minority in this world. Regardless, I believe and obey. It is so with every person.

As we consider this chapter, contemplate carefully the persons mentioned, what they did, why they did so, and what others who did not so live thought, etc. Attempt to see how trust in God came out in life, and how trust was measured. Remember that the account we are studying is considered by us as being inspired (i.e., from God) and thus the truth. How it would be read by someone not of our persuasion should be held in mind as we study.

11:1 — **faith** — As suggested above, a good synonym would be trust. Our English words "faith" and "belief" translate the same Greek word *πίστις*. In various contexts different states of mind or life are to be seen. For instance, read John 2:24, then 3:16. Read I Timothy 5:12, then Jude v. 3. Read Acts 17:31, then Romans 14:22. The word occurs hundreds of times in the New Testament (some 60 times in Romans, and about 40 times in Hebrews). In our text and throughout the chapter, it is applied to people whose lives were marked by allegiance to God, not regardless of the evidence but rather regardless of the earthly consequences.

Our consideration of "faith" should take in Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:39, as mentioned in the preceding lesson. In the time of Habakkuk, the call of God was for the Israelite to trust God for deliverance, in a physical sense, from the challenge of invaders such as Nebuchadnezzar, etc. Those who trusted God received the promise of God. The text, though, enunciates a general principle that has always been true in any realm of life at any time in history: if one trusts God, God proves faithful. Our chapter 11 is a classic proof of this. Moreover, it is a general faith in God that issues in obedience that is in view, whatever obedience is called for. In Abel's time, it was obedience of one sort; in Moses', another; in ours', still different (specifically, we must accept the position that Jesus has come in the flesh, died for our sin, etc.). The principle of trust in God, though expressed in somewhat different "acts," is yet the same in all cases. Hence, the essence of the "gospel" is faith, as is plain when Romans 1:16 and 1:17 are read together, as they are meant to be. In the "gospel" is to be found the revealed

righteousness of God, expressed in Jesus Christ, accepted and experienced by our faith. Read Romans 3:21-26 now, and "see" the essence of the gospel expressed, in which we must place our trust and to which we then render the obedience required.

assurance — The Greek term is *ὑπόστασις*. See it in 1:3; 3:14; then II Corinthians 9:4 and 11:17. Whatever evidence was/is available, that causes a person to choose a certain position in opposition to another, gives foundation for faith. Faith will then be the foundation upon which confidence/assurance is based. Hope is a consequence of adequate evidence, and comes only because of sufficient reason for belief.

conviction — From the Greek *ἐλεγχος*. This is an interesting word in several respects. Note its uses in Matthew 18:15; Luke 3:19; John 3:20; 8:46; 16:8; Ephesians 5:11, 13; I Timothy 5:20; II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:15; Hebrews 12:5; James 2:19; Jude v. 15, 22; Revelation 3:19. It has the idea of to expose or uncover, then convict, convince. Here, faith adequately based upon evidence brings a conviction, even if the matter of conviction is not "seen" (i.e., of a tangible, or empiric nature). For the Christian, many things are of this nature. Much of our doctrinal position is based upon our acceptance of God and his authority (upon evidence, of course). For instance, the familiar verse in Acts 2:38 has two commands (repent, be immersed) and two promises (forgiveness of sins, gift of Holy Spirit). Close and careful examination will disclose that the two promises are accepted as being true upon God's word, not upon any evidence that would be 100% proof of reception of the promises. We believe that the promises are ours because God said so.

V. 2 — **For by it** — Faith in God and consequent commitment to him produced God's acceptance in turn. If God did so for others, he will do so for us. Faith does not necessarily make things unseen anymore real, but simply gives "title" to them. In the lives of those in ch. 11, faith took the form of an active and abiding conviction, acting upon faith in unseen but actual realities. Only persuasion that an unseen but real world exists would have caused people to act as they did.

men of old — The Greek term is *πρεσβυτερός*, which is sometimes translated "elder" as in I Timothy 3, or simply "older." It means either or both.

V. 3 — **by faith** — We were not present at the creation of our world. What we believe/accept about it comes through our faith in the God we have accepted, and his written revelation.

word of God — As Genesis 1 clearly reveals.

which do not appear — Such texts as John 1:3; Acts 17:24-26; and Colossians 1:15-16 help us see that all that exists, save persons whose nature is deity (God, Christ, Holy Spirit) have been made, and from

nothing. Such a position necessitates faith, but so does any other position (i.e., that matter has always been, is able to create itself, etc.). The question is; which position has the best evidence for it?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 19:

174. Define faith (Don't describe it, 11:1 is a description of what faith produces, not what faith is. All of ch. 11 describes the results of faith, though implicit therein is the definition of faith.). As an example, water is defined as H₂O. It is described as cool, good, etc.
175. How does our lesson relate to the whole book?
176. What presuppositions do you have in regard to your religion? your Bible? your personality?
177. Would it be possible to have false suppositions lead one to false conclusions?
178. Contrast the evidence for God's creation of this universe vs. the faith position that it came from nothing.
179. Did you look up several verses with the word "faith" in them to see various aspects of the word?
180. What characteristic in the men of old (i.e., such as are mentioned in ch. 11) brought them God's approval?
181. Is it by faith, not sight, that we maintain our position that God made the world/universe? (Do we really walk by faith, not sight? Cf. II Corinthians 4:7.)
182. Can we see atoms? protons? anti-matter? How do we "know" they exist?
183. Could these "unseen" things in #182 have always been in existence, and it was out of such "unseen" things that God made the world/universe?