

A Faith That Does Not Fail

Lesson 1

Cast Not Away Your Confidence

Hebrews 10:35; 11:1-3

Outline:

- I. Faith is the Only Way to Deal with Things Yet Future or Things Presently Invisible (11:1)
 - A. The Realms to Which Faith Relates
 - B. The Relations Faith Sustains to Those Realms
(substance and evidence)
- II. Faith is the Way Men Have Historically Dealt with Things Yet Future or Things Invisible (11:2)
- III. Faith is the Way We are Understanding the Origin of Everything We Now See (11:3)
 - A. Faith is not . . .
 - B. Faith is . . .

Introduction: Along the narrow strip of the northern California coast grow the largest living things on earth: the California Redwoods. Some of these trees are over 350 feet tall—taller than a football field is long—and some of them have a circumference of more than 60 feet. One tree has grown in such a way and to such a size that a car can actually be driven right through the base of it. These trees have bark up to a foot thick. Some of them have actually been through forest fires and have been burnt, and yet they continue to endure. Some have lived over a thousand years, resisting disease, insects, fires, and everything that comes from nature, and still they continue to tower up there on the coast. The passage that will occupy us for this teaching cycle is reminiscent of the 33-mile drive through the Redwoods that is called the Avenue of Giants. God has grouped together in this one passage giants whose lives collectively span almost all of human history. The people in these chapters, some of them living for hundreds of years, cumulatively lived for thousands of years. God has placed

all of them here so that later readers could survey an exhibition of individuals who towered over their respective generations. Like the redwoods, they displayed a tremendous resistance to all of the ravages of their respective eras. They resisted, they remained, and God gives their testimonies here as exemplary case studies.

These characters are placed within the book of Hebrews for a purpose. Notice Hebrews 10:35, where the writer exhorts the people to *cast not away therefore your confidence* (KJV). The context of this statement is instructive. The “Avenue of Giants” falls in the latter half of the book of Hebrews. The book consists of two main parts: 1) Assurance that Jesus Christ has finished completely the faith, that everything necessary for salvation from sin and acceptance by God has been completed in Him (1:1-10:18), and 2) Based on that assurance, those who believe are enabled to overcome temptations to apostatize from their faith or to reject Christ (10:19ff). The Hebrew audience is being tempted to apostatize from a faith they once held dear. At least one of the catalysts to their temptation is the compilation of harsh events described in 10:32-34.

³²But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, ³³partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

³⁴For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

These New Testament believers had entered an era when Christians were being persecuted. They were being afflicted with great trouble (10:32), were being made a public laughing stock as they experienced reproach and affliction (10:33), and were encountering bondage and the deprivation of goods (10:34). Any kind of sustained trial has the potential to erode people's confidence in God. That was true then, and it is true still. Facing the temptation to apostatize in the midst of this sustained affliction, these people are given this urgent exhortation to *cast not away [their] confidence*. The writer compels them to consider that they need patience or endurance.

The test of every Christian virtue is whether it can endure. What is the test of love but its endurance? What is the test of faith, peace, or joy except its ability to endure? Nothing is strong unless it can stand up to that kind of pressure. When we are on our hospital beds, suffering from some sustained affliction, we should reflect that God is working in us at least to develop our endurance in trouble. Often we are afflicted because we have need of this very endurance (10:34-35). James reinforces this point in 1:3-4, stating that it is this very endurance that will produce in us the ability needed in order to not falter in a sustained trial. Endurance is to permeate all the virtues of our lives so that we will be perfect and entire, lacking nothing in our Christian experience.

The writer follows the admonition with a warning. *Now the just*, he writes quoting from Habakkuk 2:4, *shall live by faith*. The emphasis here is on the word *live*.¹ Righteous people *live* this way. Surrounded by affliction, trouble, persecution, loss of goods, difficulties, and snares of many kinds, you can identify righteous people because they *live* by faith: *Now the just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*²

The placement of all these people in this single collection reinforces that exhortation and that warning: *Don't cast away your confidence*. One who casts away his confidence loses everything. If any man draws back, God has no pleasure in him. The stakes are quite high, because these several warnings make it clear that if a person turns away from his faith, there is no possibility of his further salvation. Some Bible students use these passages to teach that one may lose his salvation. However, the passage is more a warning for those who have allowed the seed of the Word a little life in their hearts and are now in danger of entirely quenching its growth. Why is it impossible for these people to be saved? Because of the whole nature of rejecting and suppressing known truth that quenches the life of the Word of God in the heart. Apostasy is truly a dangerous thing.

Hebrews 11 reinforces the exhortation, *Cast not away your confidence*. Our society lives for instant gratification,

¹ Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three times in the New Testament, and each time the contextual emphasis is on a different word in the original statement. In Romans 1:17, the emphasis is on *just*, and the statement establishes the theme for the book. However in Hebrews the focus is on the word *live*. In Galatians 3:11, the emphasis falls on the word *faith*.

² This is not the first warning in the book of Hebrews. It is only one of a whole series of warnings. Chapters 2, 3-4, 5-6, and 10:26-31, 38, and ch. 12: all contain warning passages. It probably is best to understand the entire section from 10:26-ch. 12 (including ch. 11) as an extended warning passage.

immediate results, and undelayed success. The entire society in which we live is one that refuses to wait, detests saving money, cannot remain pure, and hesitates to commit to long-term relationships and obligations. As Christians, we have been infected by our culture, so we often desist from doing things the Bible way, failing to remember we will reap if we faint not. We tend to want deliverance *now*. We want converts *now*. We want healing, prosperity, recognition, and results *now*. We refuse to remain under a trial or a delay, and if God does not deliver us in a timely fashion, we opt to bail out. If his miracles do not come on our timetable, we tend to question His ability to do them.³

God's way always involves this principle of learning to endure and to walk by faith and not by sight. God has ordained that this glorifies Him the most. When we fail to endure, we tend to compromise the essence of Christian living—living for the future—in order to obtain something lesser and more immediate that only has the appearance of being given by God.

Notice how the introductory verses of Hebrews 11 (vv. 1-3) support the exhortation of 10:35.

Do not cast away your confidence because . . .

1. Faith is the Only Way to Deal with Things Yet Future or Things Presently Invisible (v. 1)

If we cast away our confidence, we cast away the substance of what is future. Faith is the evidence of these invisible realities that cannot be perceived by the senses. Faith is the only way to deal with those things. If invisible things truly exist, then the only way to deal with

³ One of the men in Hebrews 11 is Moses. Moses waited 80 years for a miracle, and then God gave him one of the greatest groupings of miracles to be found in all of Bible history.

them is by faith. We cannot interact with them with our ears, eyes, sense of touch, or smell.

This verse is not a technical definition of faith. The writer is assuming we know what faith is, and he is teaching us about faith's relationship to what is yet future and what is unseen.

A. The Realms to Which Faith Relates

Faith is not related to anything present or to what we can currently see. Our hands and our eyes are related to what we can currently see, but faith is related to things we cannot see, and it is related to things that are yet future. What are those things?

1. Future Things (things hoped for)

a. Needs or Promises Yet Unfulfilled in This Life

Future things may consist of things that we may need and not have. They may include things for our temporal existence. They may include a need for healing, for deliverance from sin, or for a Christian mate. Generally, future things consist of those things the Word assures us that we can have through Christ, but that as of yet we have not received or experienced.

b. Promises Awaiting Us in the Life to Come

Though there are certain things we need for the present, think of all for which we hope: rapture, resurrection, glorification, acceptance by God, the company of angels, Christ's "Well done, good and faithful servant", and being made a ruler over many things in eternity because we were faithful over a few on earth. All of these things are yet future, and faith is the only way to relate to these things.

2. Invisible Things (things not seen)

There is a sense in which all things future are not seen, but all things not seen are not necessarily future. The writer is not simply being redundant here. When he says things not seen, he could be referring to something future because those things are invisible. But he is really dealing with a second category of things. He is dealing with things that exist and are actual right now, yet unable to be seen (e.g., forgiveness of sins that we enjoy, the continual washing of the blood of Christ, Christ's present High Priestly work on my behalf, access to God in prayer, God's love for me, and the Spirit's indwelling).

Faith is the only way to relate to these things. They are not future, but present, though invisible. They are beyond the reach of our senses.

B. The Relations Faith Sustains to Those Realms (substance and evidence)

Understanding the significance of these words in this opening verse is critical to a greater profiting from the contents of the chapter. Sometimes definitions are conveyed through synonyms (using other words that mean basically the same thing). Sometimes definitions are conveyed by telling the function or result of something or by describing what something does. For example, using synonymous expressions, we could define a tree by saying, “A tree is a plant” or “A tree is a great, large, living thing with leaves.” Or, using the more descriptive method for definition, we could say, “A tree is a provider of shade,” “A tree is a producer of fruit,” or “A tree is a source of lumber.” This attempts to define something in terms of what it does or by what it does that is distinctive from other similar things.

In verse 1, the words substance and evidence could either be terms synonymous with faith or they could be expressions of the result of faith. The commentators differ in their understanding of the way the words are being used. The word translated substance is translated three out of five times by the word confidence (cf. 3:14, we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast). We could see confidence as a synonym for faith (“Faith is confidence.”) However, an interesting aspect about this word is that it could also be translated the way it is in 11:1 with the idea of a foundation—faith is the thing that stands under something else. It is the “sub-stance” – the “stance” that “subs” (supports) something else, like a foundation.

The second word, evidence, means “conviction.” We could go through the same exercise with this word. Is the writer saying, “Faith is conviction”? Or is he saying that “Faith yields conviction,” or “Conviction is the proof or result of faith”?

Bible translators have a decision to make when they come to these words. They could opt for the synonym-oriented translation, or they could choose the result-oriented one. The KJV translators, instead of translating it “Faith is the confidence regarding the future, and it is the conviction about invisible things,” wove the result aspect right into the translation: Faith is the substance (foundation) of things hoped for (future things), and faith is the evidence (proof) of things not seen (invisible things).

We do not normally think in the same way the writer is thinking. How does someone’s faith prove that future and invisible things exist? The writer explains further in verse 2. In verse 1, however, the force of the statement in its context is this: Do not cast away your confidence. Your confidence is the whole foundation of ever realizing in your present experience what is yet future. Do not cast away your confidence. Your confidence is the whole proof that those things even exist. All of the characters in the ensuing chapter did what they did or got what they received because they had faith. These people were exemplary in their own generation, and they continue to be examples for us today.

II. Faith is the Way Men Have Historically Dealt with Things Yet Future or Things Invisible (v. 2)

The writer is doing more than simply telling us that faith works. He demonstrates it through historical precedent, in fact, sixteen historical precedents. And these predecessors are ordinary men and women who towered over their generations by operating with exemplary faith. Through these historical figures, the writer is trying to illustrate that all of these people either did not have something or could not see something happening, but then, sure enough, they received that something or that something happened. The principle that is being established is that faith becomes the foundation on which God places those things (future and invisible things), and when someone displays faith that those future or invisible things exist, we will see that his conviction was proof that the thing really did exist.

For *by it* [faith], the *elders* obtained a good report [witnessed to by God].

Notice the relationship of faith to future and unseen things in the first historical examples the writer cites. By faith Abel (v. 4) offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous. Abel could not see God's declaration of His righteousness. It was invisible to him but, nonetheless, he counted it to be true. By faith Noah (v. 7), being warned of God of things not seen as yet (things still future). Why did Noah live through the flood? Because he laid a foundation. By faith, Abraham (v. 8), when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed and he went out not knowing whither he went (going to a place he could not see). He went out not knowing where he was going, but his faith, his conviction, was itself an evidence that

something was going on. By faith Isaac (v. 20) blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come (things future). Isaac blessed his sons with blessings that did not yet exist, saying “May God give you this, and may God give you this, and may this be your inheritance, and may this be your blessing,” and it happened—though not at the time Isaac said it.

God wants us to know there is a realm of things invisible or future, and that the only possible way that we have of accessing these things and coming to obtain them is by faith alone. All of the illustrations are proof of this. This kind of faith is the confidence that becomes the foundation of the future things. This kind of faith is the conviction that becomes the evidence that invisible things actually do exist.

What then is faith?

III. Faith is the Way We Understand the Origin of Everything We Now See (v. 3)

A. Faith is not . . .

1. Simply a natural optimism. It does not consist in having a sunny, cheerful disposition that always looks at the bright side of things. Even lost people can have optimism. Faith is supernatural, not natural. Optimism is great, but it is not faith.
2. A fanciful use of the imagination. This particular understanding of faith proliferates among charismatic religious groups. Their view of faith tends to be that a person needs to imagine what he would like to have from God, and then wish real hard for it, even for a long time if necessary, until God gives you what you have been wanting.

3. Uncertain hopefulness. Often when we use the word “trust” we are using it in reference to things that are not certain. For example, we might say, “I am going to trust that God will help you with this.” We are expressing a hopefulness about a specific desire for which we may even be praying, but there is an element of “I don’t know” in what we just said.

- B. Faith is . . . (Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe, 11:6)

The word for faith (v. 1) occurs 244 times in the New Testament and is translated faith 239 of those times. The verb form of faith occurs 248 times and is translated 239 of those times with the word believe. Faith means simply to believe. Faith in action shows itself in belief. Belief regards something to be true, not uncertain, and not doubtful.

In 11:6, the noun and verb forms of faith appear (faith, believe). A man that comes to God must exercise faith. He must regard certain things to be true. But what gives us any assurance that we can regard something to be true, especially if others seem to believe it to be false? True faith cannot be based on anything but the explicit statements of God. Briefly notice how frequently this refrain occurs throughout the chapter: Noah was warned of God (v. 7). Abraham sojourned in a land of promise (v. 9). Sarah’s faith was in a promise (v. 11). People died in faith, not having received the promises (v. 13, they had heard the promises but the promises had not yet been fulfilled when they died). Abraham received a promise from God regarding Isaac (v. 17). Notice promises again in verse 33.

A good cross-reference substantiating this point is Romans 10:17. When we talk about believing a promise of God, we are talking about a specific statement from Scripture that there can be no question about. When we have a clear statement from God, that is no time for doubting, denying, quibbling, or looking around for a way around it. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. The word *rhema* used here is not the word *logos* that refers to the entirety of the Word of God. Instead, it is the word that refers to the specific statements of Scripture. This is the same word used in Ephesians 6:17 in connection with the sword of the Spirit. Our weapons in the face of temptation are the short, specific daggers drawn from the scabbard of the *logos*. Faith comes from hearing, remembering, and meditating on the specific statements of God. Like Sarah we must judge Him faithful who made those promises (v. 11).

The writer contends that we are all right now exercising faith (11:3). It is through faith that we understand the worlds were framed by the word (specific statement) of God. While we often have trouble with what we cannot see, do we realize that there was a day when what we now see was not here? But it is here now, and we exercise faith when we believe that it got here. Through faith we right now understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen, the things we do see and perceive with our senses, were not made of things which do appear. So why do we have trouble with this regarding the future when everything we know about the present was not here in the past? The writer's argument is clear. He is convincing us based on our own present experience.

Conclusion: In the early pages of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian is beginning to make his way to the celestial city, and everyone is calling him back. Christian responds by saying, "I have found written in this book that this city is going to be destroyed." He then puts his hands to his ears to squelch the pleas of his family and friends, and he begins to run. Two of his friends race after him. One, named Pliable, decides that what Christian is saying from the Book has some merit. He is fascinated by talk of angels, crowns, and rewards. So he joins Christian. The other man, Obstinate, refuses. As Christian journeys with Pliable and reads to him from the Book, Pliable asks, "Are you really sure this is true?" "Oh," Christian says, "Yes, because this book was written by Him who cannot lie."

The essence of faith is not simply believing what is written, but our willingness to embrace what is written because of our trust in the One who spoke it. As we investigate the lives of the characters in this chapter, our goal will be to discern how they traced the tethers of God's promises all the way to their origin in the trustworthy character of God. Their character is exemplary in the way they came to trust God's character.

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