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Faith Works!

Hebrews 11:1-40 - Part 1
The "Substance" of Faith

Introduction

You are trying to share the Gospel with a person who is willing to listen to the message of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. So you are asked this question by the person standing before you, "What is faith? You are asking me to believe, to have faith in Jesus as my Savior, but what is faith?" What would be your answer? This is a valid and vital question, the answer to which will help us understand and appreciate our own faith relationship with God in Christ.

What is faith? To the disciples who couldn't heal the epileptic boy Jesus said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, move from here to there and it would be so!" Mt 17:20. He rebuked them for their unbelief, i.e. lack of faith. After Jesus had healed blind Bartimaeus, He said to him, "Your faith has made you whole," Mk. 10:52. When Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered, He told the disciples "Have faith in God ... and whatever you say will be done," Mark 11:22-24. When the Centurion's servant was healed Jesus said, "I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel," Luke 7:9. Hebrews 10:38 quotes, Habakkuk 2:3-4 which says, "The just shall live by faith." Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast." But none of these examples define faith.

What is faith? Some suggest faith is believing the impossible or unbelievable to be true. Others say faith is believing something to be true even in the absence of evidence or facts. Some say that faith is to believe contrary to the facts, or to believe if there are no facts! Still others say, faith is to believe the unknown and unknowable, and it is a blind leap into the dark not knowing what is there. Finally, there are those who suggest faith is an affirmation of a set of doctrines or principles. But what is this thing we call FAITH?? Biblical faith is none of the above.

The Bible Never Defines Faith! In the Bible faith is described and illustrated, but never defined. There is no theological definition of faith in Scripture. The closest the Bible comes in defining faith is in Hebrews 11:1-3. In Hebrews 11:1 faith is described as the "substance" which is the Greek - u`po, stasi j *upostasis* = "essence, substance, foundation, guarantee, basis" of things being hoped for. The Greek word *evlpi, zw* Greek *elpizo*, also from 11:1 in the form,

elipizomenon, which is the present passive participle meaning "things being hoped for." The word translated "evidence" Greek - *elegcos elegchos* = "evidence, proof" and it is coupled with the Greek *pragmatwn* which is our word "pragmatic" here as here "the pragmatic proof" and used in papyrus manuscripts as "evidence" that is legal proof of things not seen. The Greek word *u`po, stasi j upostasis* is only used five times in the New Testament and three of those are in Hebrews, 1:3; 3:14; 11:1.

God's Word expresses the confidence that the person of "faith" may appropriate the promises of God. In this we must never confuse faith with feeling. "We walk by faith, not by sight," is a statement of confidence that when we are absent from the body, a believer is present with God, 2 Cor 5:6-7. Faith is the tangible "evidence" and "proof" of what we cannot see or explain. Electric current is intangible, but if you have faith enough to flip the light switch, it becomes the tangible evidence that the electric current is there. Therefore biblical faith is not a leap into the dark but a leap into the light.

Faith is defined in its operation! It is not hard to see when faith is absent in a person's life or when it is present. Faith is not a set of theological propositions to which a person subscribes. It is not a statement about what a person believes. Biblical faith is, in fact, what you do based on what you believe. When your practice matches your profession, then you are demonstrating biblical faith. So the writer of Hebrews does not tell us what Abraham believed, or what Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Barak, Samson, or Jephthah believed.

What Hebrews 11:1-40 does tell us is what these men and women did based on their belief in God. Their actions validated their faith. Paul understood this by experience. He once opposed the Gospel, but by faith he later proclaimed the truth of the Gospel by faith, Gal 1:23. He also stated that the righteousness of God that every Jew tried to produce by works, "comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe," Rom 3:22.

True faith produces a certainty. It is being sure of the things that we hope for on the one hand and being certain of the things we cannot see. This certainty is an inner conviction that produces hope within us as we exercise faith, and the certainty of things we cannot see. Faith comes from within us born out of hope that demonstrates itself through a confident assurance and a convincing certainty.

James 2:14-26 tells us that salvation is not of works, Eph 2:8-9, but faith confirms that genuine salvation produces works that are an affirmation of our faith. The following chart is a modified version of the one in the *Believer's Study Bible*, p.

1751. This shows us that faith has at least six basic components based on the text of Hebrews 11:1-40.

Let us look at the attributes of faith as it unfolds in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. There are six elements of faith described in this chapter. The first three have to do with trust through the Word; the last three have to do with obedience to the Word of God. Faith involves both belief and action. The "substance" of faith is our trust in God's promises and the "evidence" of faith is our acting upon the promises of God, see Jms 2:14-26. The substance of faith is based on three things, (1) the promises of God, (2) the power of God, and (3) the plan (purposes) of God.

1. Faith is Being Certain of God's Promises, 11:1.

If faith is the substance of things hoped for, *u`po, stasi,j upostasis*, we must know the following: What is it that gives substance to our faith? What is it that causes faith to germinate in our heart, mind, and will? The substance of faith is in the Word of God. Look at Romans 10:17, which says, "So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." In the context of this verse Paul is challenging the Romans to share their faith. How can you effectively share the concept of faith? The answer is simple; it is by sharing the Word of God and its promises. The word "promise," is the Greek *evpaggeli,a epaggelia*, and it appears thirteen times in the New Testament, six of those times in Hebrews 6:11; 7:6; 11:13, 17, 19, 32; see also Rom 9:4; 15:8; 2 Cor 1:20; 7:1; Gal 3:16, 21.

- **We can be certain because Jesus established a better covenant than the Old Covenant**, one of the elements of which is that it has better promises, Heb 8:6, with a (1) better mediator, 2 Cor 1:20; (2) better in quality, i.e. spiritual not physical, 1 Cor 2:13-15; 15:44-46; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 2:5; (3) eternal not temporary, Jer 31:31-34; 2 Cor 5:1; Heb 8:8-12; (4) better destination, heaven, 2 Cor. 5:1.
- **The certainty we seek to believe is tied to obedience, Dt 4:5-6.** Faith is not a leap into the dark, but a leap into the light. The promises of God are true and faithful, but you will never know that until you are willing to trust Him and obey. Old Testament believers saw the promises from the other side of the cross and believed that God would provide redemption in the Messiah, see e.g. Heb 11:13, 17-19; Jn 8:56-58. Obeying God's law is not a means of salvation, but it can lead us to Jesus who is our salvation, Gal 3:21, 24.
- **Certainty is also tied to trusting Jesus to be our Savior, 2 Cor 1:20.** Jesus is the fulfillment of all the promises of God. The promises of God were given to the Hebrews to share with the whole world, Rom 9:4. Jesus

came to confirm those promises for Jews and Gentiles alike, Rom 15:4; Eph 2:11-22.

- **Certainty is also tied to our "fear" of God, 2 Cor 7:1; Prov 1:7;9:10.** "Fear" is the reverence and awe of God that results in our willingness to trust Him and obey His precepts which are for our good, Dt 10:12-13. All the promises of God that He revealed to Abraham, the father of the faithful, were received by faith, and are available to us by faith, Gal 3:16. Certainty comes by receiving the exceedingly great and precious promises from God, 2 Pet 1:4.

2. Faith is Being Certain of God's Power, 11:1-2.

Faith is the evidence *elegcos elegchos* of things not seen. Hebrews 11:3 points out that the existence of the universe is a witness to the power of God. The universe was created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, Genesis 1:1. This chapter of Genesis reveals the ten commandments of creation. The limitless power of God is available to us as well by faith. Ephesians 3:20 - God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us. OUR CERTAINTY COMES FROM OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD!

- **Certainty of God's power comes from the Word, Heb 4:12; Mt 22:29; Gen 1:6ff.** We have learned that the Word of God is alive, powerful, and convicting, Heb 4:12. Jesus told the Sadducees that the mistake in their question about the woman who had seven husbands was twofold: first, they didn't know the Scriptures, and second, they didn't know the power of God, Mt 22:29. The power of the Word of God is also seen in Genesis 1 in the ten commandments of creation, "God said, let there be . . . and there was . . ." Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28.
- **Certainty of God's power comes from the Gospel, Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:24; 2:5;** We have learned that it is the power of God unto salvation for ALL, Jew and Gentile alike, Rom 1:16. It is the power and wisdom of God, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 1 Cor 1:24. But faith is not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, 1 Cor 2:5.
- **Certainty of God's power comes from belief in the resurrection, Ph 3:10-11; Rom 1:4.** If God could raise Jesus from the dead after His death on the cross, He can do anything you need, Rom 1:4; Ph 3:10-11. If He could call into existence the vast universe by His Word, He can meet your needs, Gen 1:6ff, as above.
- **Certainty of God's power comes from the Holy Spirit, Rom 15:19; 2 Tim 2:7; Jn 16:5-15.** Great signs and miracles, done by the Holy Spirit, accompanied the preaching of the Gospel, Rom 15:19. Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit would have the power to convict of sin, righteousness, and

- judgment; power to understand the Word, guide to all truth, and power to glorify God, Jn 16:5-15.
- **Certainty of God's power comes from His ability to save us and keep us, Mt 28:18-20; 1 Cor 4:20; 1 Pet 1:5; Rev 12:10; Rev 4:11; 19:1.** All power and all authority was granted to Jesus in His triumph on the cross, Mt 28:18-20. The Kingdom of God is not in Word only but in power, 1 Cor 4:20. We have an inheritance awaiting us in heaven and until then we are kept secure by the power of God, 1 Pt 1:4-5.
 - **We can't be certain of God's power until we put the promises into practice, Heb 6:11-12, 19.** These verses come near the end of the third warning, 5:1-6:20, to say that the Jews had the message of the coming Messiah. Christ is that Messiah but He must be received by faith that He alone has fulfilled all the promises of the Old Testament. As we look at these promises such as Psalm 22:1-31 clearly fulfilled in the crucifixion, or Isaiah 7:14 about the virgin birth quoted in Matthew 1:23, or any one of the hundreds of passages (see Lk 24:27, 44), we see that the promises were there, and they were confirmed in the life and ministry of Jesus (see James Smith, *The Promised Messiah* and Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament*).

3. Faith is Being Certain of God's Plan, 11:3

For many people life is a mystery, a series of disconnected events and circumstances that have no meaning, no rhyme or reason. It is to be blown about by every wind of doctrine and every imagination of the hearts and minds of men, Eph 4:11-16. God created the universe and it stands as a witness to His power and to the fact that His power produced this plan from nothing. Science has failed to explain the origin of matter, nor will they ever know it.

- **God has a plan for every life; none are here by accident - Jer 1:5; 29:11.** "For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope." God knew Jeremiah before birth and called him to be a prophet from birth. Some, like Samson, reject the plan of God for their life in favor of doing it their own way, see Jgd 13:1-31, esp. 16:20.
- **God reveals His plans by the Holy Spirit, Isa 30:1; 1 Chr 28:12,19; Jn 16:13-15.** Isaiah 30:1 warns of devising plans, but not without the guidance of His Spirit. When David planned for the building of the Temple, His plans came from the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, 1 Chron 28:12,19; Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would bring comfort, conviction, and guidance to all who trust in Christ, Jn 16:13-15.
- **God reveals His plans through His Word, Ps 119:1-8,11,105; Dn 9:2-3.** God and the Holy Spirit use the written Word of God to guide

and direct our lives, Ps 119:11, 105. The entire 119th Psalm is in praise of the Word of God and commending it as the source of wisdom, Ps 119:1-8. The prophet Daniel was motivated to pray for the restoration of Israel by reading the Word of God, Dn 9:2-3. If you don't know the Word of God, you won't know the will of God, Rom 12:1-2. The Bible reveals many things about the will of God. Here are a few: It is God's will that (a) you be saved, 2 Pt 3:9; (b) sanctified, 1 Thess 4:3; (c) thankful 1 Thess 5:18; (d) Spirit-filled, Eph 5:16-17; (e) have a giving spirit, 2 Cor 8:5; (f) serve for God's approval not man's, Eph 6:6. Some things we don't even have to pray about, such as committing murder, stealing, adultery, bearing false witness, lying, etc., because the Ten Commandments rule out such behavior for everyone.

- **God revokes the plans of men, Ps 33:10; Ps 146:4; Prov 19:21; Jms 4:13-17; Isa 55:8-9; Rom 8:28 (see Gen 50:19-20)** God will intervene when necessary and disrupt the plans devised by human wisdom. He brings the counsel of nations to nothing and makes the plans of mankind as nothing, Ps 33:10. As with Adolf Hitler, God takes some rulers out of the way and their plans perish, Ps 146:3-4. Human beings may propose plans, but only God can bring them to fruition, Prov 19:21. God also is able to overturn the evil work of humanity so that it becomes blessing and benefit, Rom 8:28. He did just that in the life of Joseph, Gen 50:19-20.
- **God's plans are set even to the sending of His son for our salvation. Jn 3:16; Acts 2:23; Gal 3:19,24.** God's plans are set and no one can change them. He provided the Law under Moses so that we would see the inability of human works to save us. So, the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ who alone can save us by faith, Gal 3:19, 24.

Conclusion

So here it is! The substance of our faith lies in our certainty of God's promises, our certainty of God's power, and our certainty of God's plan. Redeeming grace and immeasurable love has flowed from the Father to us in His sending His one and only Son to be the sacrifice for our sin, and not only ours, but the sins of the whole world. In the fullness of time, He revealed His purpose and plan to provide us with a sure, secure salvation in His omniscience and by His omnipotence.