

Hebrews 11:1-3 "The God Who Creates Gives Faith"

From our text last week we saw how our writer emphasized the importance of persevering to the end. But what we noticed is that the way a believer perseveres to the end is not through his own strength, but rather, by relying on the Holy Spirit who enables us to do this. But the means by which this is done is through faith.

The faith that was given to us by Christ at conversion is the same faith He is working in us today, and has every intention of completing in us unto eternity. This is why we're told in this letter in Heb.12:2 that Jesus is the author and the perfecter of our faith. He not only gave us our faith, but is strengthening it as well.

This faith in Christ enables us to do those things that bring Him glory and further His work in this world. This is part of what Paul meant in EPH 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

How do we walk in these good works? By faith; faith in our awesome God, faith in His salvation, faith in His promises and faith in His faithfulness. With this perspective and attitude toward our God, we can rejoice with our writer in HEB 10:39 "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

But sometimes it's hard to live by faith, isn't it? Sometimes we get faith confused with other things going on in our lives and so we make choices and do things that are not by faith but by sight. And we lose spiritual sight of what God really wants us to do. And what He wants us to do is to look exclusively to Him, not ourselves.

And so we begin a new chapter in Hebrews which is going to deal with this faith which God has given us. And in the process, our writer will explain what faith is and what it is not.

Part of the way he'll do this is in showing us how faith worked in the lives of real people just like you and me. And so in the process this will also encourage us to know that faith is real and God has every intention of perfecting it, or completing it, in you and me so that our sanctification will move forward as we're conformed more and more into the image of Christ on a daily basis.

Let's look at our text.

HEB 11:1-3 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."

Our writer begins by giving a definition of faith and though it may not be exhaustive it is certainly sufficient to give us some profound insights into what we actually possess and how God intends to work in our lives.

Let's start with the first verse ... "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Other translations would substitute the words *assurance* and *conviction* with *substance* and *evidence*. And so it would might read, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Arthur W. Pink comments on this idea of what faith consists of when he says, "The acts of faith are two: it is the substance and it is the evidence. Think it not strange that I call them acts, for that [is what the writer] intends; faith substantiates or gives subsistence to our hopes, and demonstrates things not seen."

Now when we talk of faith being the substance of things hoped for we must keep in mind that what our writer is conveying is that faith is not some cosmic, intangible force. Rather, there is a substance to it in the sense that it actually allows us to hold the eternal.

There is really something there which God allows us to possess with the express purpose of being able to see the reality of what lies ahead for us in Christ. We may not see with physical eyes, but we certainly see with spiritual eyes, which God has given us in Christ.

When we talk about faith being the substance of things hoped for, we need to realize that God is not playing mind games with us as we look forward to the future with Him. Pink points out that the word substance "comes from two Latin words; *sub*, and *stans*, meaning "standing under".

He says, "faith provides a firm standing-ground while I await the fulfillment of God's promises. Faith furnishes my heart with a sure support during the interval. Faith believes God and relies upon His [sure truth]: as it does so, the heart is anchored and remains steady,

no matter how fierce the storm nor how protracted the season of waiting."

With our faith from God, our assurance is substantiated in the truth of who God is and what He has promised. And that is a supernatural reality working by faith in God.

This faith, which is the assurance or substance of things hoped for, is not some pie-in-the-sky in the bye and bye. It is the very vehicle by which we can look to the future with a sure hope.

But simply looking at the promises of God and saying that I believe them is not the only thing faith truly rests on. It is certainly part of the equation, but it's only a part of the whole.

Andrew Murray puts it this way: "Faith is thus more than trust in the word of another. That trust is of extreme importance as its initial exercise, but the word must only be the servant leading in to the Divine truth it contains, the living person from whom it comes....."

..... To deal too exclusively with the word as the ground of faith will lead to a faith that is more intellectual than spiritual, a faith that, as the Church so universally shows, rests more in the wisdom of men, in the power of reason, than in the power of God. We need to be persuaded very deeply that faith is not only a dealing with certain promises, but an unceasing spiritual intercourse with the unseen world around us."

And of course, the One who holds that unseen world is our invisible, eternal God and Creator whom we trust by faith. Because you see, our faith, which is the assurance or substance of things hoped for, also contains that element of having a conviction or evidence of things not seen.

And there's the tough part. Everybody has a kind of faith. The unbeliever has faith which he or she puts into practice every day. They have faith that their lives will continue on each day. They have faith that the paycheck will be there to pay the bills. They have faith that their car will get them to the store and back.

But that type of faith only relies on what you can see or expect to see, like the promise of a gift at Christmas. You can talk to someone making a promise to you, and look right into their eyes as they tell you what you can expect for Christmas.

And then lo and behold, you eventually see the gift. This kind of faith would even fit into the first part of our verse which talks of having an assurance or substance of things hoped for.

But that kind of faith will never really rely on God whom you can't see. That kind of faith will never let go of self and trust totally in what is beyond our physical senses. This is why this faith we speak of must be supernatural and God-given.

Only a supernatural type of faith will look beyond that which can be seen and then trust in One whom we have not seen; but trust none the less, for the ways in which He's worked in the past in the lives of others, which is one reason our writer fills this chapter with real live people who are doing essentially what you and I are doing.

This is the only reason we have a conviction of things not seen. This conviction comes from an evidence that we possess that was promised by God. And we possess that conviction because the Holy Spirit possess us and seals us for the day of Redemption. That's real, that substantive. But it's real only to those who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good as we place our faith in Him.

A.W. Pink comments on this: "The word evidence in our text denotes that which furnishes proof, so that one is assured of the reality and certainty of things Divine. Faith, then, is the first hand of the soul which lays hold of the contents of God's promises; second, it is the eye of the soul which looks out toward and represents them clearly and convincingly to us."

This is why Paul says in ROM 8:22-25 "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

The first fruits of the Spirit, which Paul speaks of, includes our ability to trust God in what we do not yet fully possess. This is why we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our bodies.

Faith from God is that conviction that though I don't see it now, I know that I will possess it in full one day. That's a proof, an

evidence, from a personal stand-point, that the Spirit of God is working in and through me to give me such an assurance and enable me to trust Him by faith.

And that's what makes this supernatural faith such an amazing gift. And I use the word "gift" because that's exactly what it is. This too, Paul points out in EPH 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, ***it is the gift of God*** - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

Your salvation is a gift and part of that salvation package is the faith that enables you to believe. This is why we can't even boast in our faith as we look to the rest of the world and wonder why they don't get it and just believe what God did. 'After all, I did it.'

Yes you did. But it was God's gift to you to believe. He opened your eyes, He gave you new life, He cradled you in His arms. But it's His gift to give; it's the world's responsibility to believe. But with a faith that can look no further than what it can see, this "worldly faith" will not trust God.

Paul speaks of this as well in 1CO 2:12 -14 "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. 14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Darkness blinds the eyes of all men. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But praise God, He opens the eyes and gives sight to the blind, and brings life where there was death.

This kind of faith is what the child of God can rejoice in because it allows us to see with spiritual eyes, and live with spiritual strength in the God who has given us an eternal inheritance found in His son. It's not a blind leap in the dark. It may be a leap, but it's based on light and life found in the life of Christ.

It is this very faith from God that gives us assurance of, (the substance of), things hoped for, and the conviction or evidence of things not seen. But, believe me; no, believe God, you will see it one day. It will not always be clouded and just beyond your reach. The substance of it will become the true reality which will never

end, unlike this present cursed physical world which will pass away.

It is this faith that our writer wants us to see and rejoice in, and also to see how it affected the lives of other people in history. He begins with a very broad group of people in verse two.

HEB 11:2 "This is what the ancients were commended for." The NAS puts it, "for by it the men of old gained approval.", or as some translations have it, "obtained a testimony".

Who are these men of old? Well, they're part of a group who are named here in this letter and are shown to be every true believer who placed their faith in the One true God and His promise to send a Savior.

These people, through their faith in God and His promises, gained approval. There is no other way. These saints of old obtained a testimony in the sense that their lives bore witness to the fact that the unseen God was the One on whom they trusted. They lived by faith.

This should also dispel the notion that the saints of old were saved by the law. This simply is not the case. They were saved the same way you and I are saved; by faith they looked forward to the promise of a coming Messiah, whereas we look back, by faith, in the fulfillment of the Messiah who came. It's all by faith in the God who saves.

By the way, I should add here that a lot of emphasis is put on faith today, but I believe in many instances it's misplaced. There is a trend to place faith on an equal par with the One who gives faith.

Faith has a tendency to take center stage in some instances and among some teachers who have given rise to the Word-faith movement. "Whatever you conceive and believe, you will receive."

'It's your faith which is the moving force, which allows you to attain anything you want'. This is the teaching which is spreading rampantly today. 'It's your faith that assures you that sickness will never visit your door, or trials will never be found on your path.' But these are false assessments of the focus of faith and what faith does and how it works.

You'll notice that the men of old gained approval, not "for" their faith, as though they earned it through such means, but "by" their faith. Pink rightly points out that faith itself was "not the cause [of

their salvation], yet it was a condition; there was nothing meritorious in it, yet it was a necessary means."

Faith itself is not what actually saves people. Jesus Christ saves people. Faith is the means of embracing Jesus Christ and this is a gift from Him. So, we don't want to place faith in a position of being more than what it is, as though it were a magic formula for attaining any and all things, simply because we have the "Power".

Rather, we should understand that faith enables us to not only gain access to Christ, but it also enables us to live in that relationship on a daily basis as we look to the future hope, so that He will be glorified in our lives, instead of us trying to use faith as a toy for self-gratification.

Now, before our writer gets into specific people who placed their faith in the living God, he uses one more example of how faith works in a particular instance and he reintroduces the idea of things not seen.

HEB 11:3 "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."

Now, we might wonder why God would introduce this issue of His creation at this point. What does His creation have to do with the faith of those who are about to follow in the rest of the chapter?

Dr. Donald Guthrie sheds some light on this. He says, "the answer lies in the fact that He cannot consider the world of men apart from their environment. Indeed God's interest in the faith of individuals is conditioned by His purpose in creation. If faith is exercised by men on earth, it must be considered that everything that exists on earth is under God's control."

You see our faith in Christ is worked out in this real world which is God's creation. If God is the Creator then only He could be Savior. To place your faith in God as Savior follows that you place your faith in God as Creator who is Almighty and holds us in the palm of His hand. Our faith in Him trusts that He will do so.

Now for the natural man this is all foolishness. After all, no one in their right mind would believe that God created the universe. But who in their right mind believes that the universe created itself? Since when have scientists changed the laws that speak of matter not being able to be created out of nothing?

Well, if everything evolved and came forth from the universe colliding in on itself and creating such an explosion that it spun this matter into the far reaches of space and formed our planet and everything else in the universe, where did this matter originate?

Where did it come from? It's easy to postulate all of these far-fetched ideas of the origins of the universe when you start with the matter already existing. But matter doesn't have a mind of its own. It doesn't will itself into existence.

Now this is where we get into the real matter of faith for the unbeliever, because it takes a great deal more faith to believe that matter created itself than that a Creator brought it into existence.

And since one of the hallmarks of religion is faith, it stands to reason that evolution must be a religion. And in fact it is. No men were there when the heavens came into existence. So, how can the evolutionists claim with certainty that which cannot be scientifically tested?

They have to step out in faith. In fact this is the blind leap of faith they accuse us of taking. Both believers and unbelievers have the same evidence; a universe and a planet we call earth on which we live. One looks at the evidence and concludes it came from nothing, the other looks at it and concludes God created it just as He said. So, who's living in reality?

The Christian admits he has faith that God created the universe, and the evidence would support it as all things appear abruptly; even the fossil record shows this. The unbeliever will not admit it takes faith to believe his position that matter creates itself.

Our text is another example of this faith which comes from God and allows us to see how this wonderful God worked in the universe and in the lives of men.

"By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."

By faith we have a true understanding. An understanding which takes into account that God not only exists but is All-powerful; so powerful in fact, that His ability to create worlds was accomplished through His willing them into existence as He spoke them into existence.

That's power, that's an Awesome God. The word "worlds" could be better translated ages, which includes not only the idea of physical matter, but the time in which they exist and the conditions upon which they exist, including all of the laws that God built into the creation.

It would be pretty senseless to have matter that didn't obey some sort of law. Things like gravity, centrifugal force, kinetic energy and potential energy and whatever else you can remember from your school days.

I suppose if matter could create itself it could also create such laws and have the power to enforce them. But that would take faith wouldn't it?

What about time? This matter that we have all around us exists in time. Where did time come from? If there was nothing before matter, then it would stand to reason that there was also not time.

But when God set forth His magnificent plan to create a universe He created it with all of these elements. Space, time and matter. And you know how He did it? He spoke it into existence. He willed it and spoke it and it came to be. How do we know this? We see it all around us and we believe God did it, by faith.

This is why Paul said in ROM 1:20 "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - *have been clearly seen*, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

God did not take existing matter and create a universe. No, everything that was made came out of nothing; Ex Nihilo, for you Latin scholars. But in reality it did not come from nothing, it came from someone who needed nothing but His own will and power to create.

This is the God we trust for salvation. This is the God who is All-powerful. This is the God who says, "Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Why not put your faith in God. We who have done just that, as we've embraced Christ by faith, must also be able to trust that this same loving God will be there for us in this world and the one to come. We'll talk more of faith next week as we look into the lives of some of God's people in the past.

Let me leave you with an exhortation and an encouragement from Paul as he spoke to the Church in Colossae.

COL 2:6-10 "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. 9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."