

Hebrews 11:4-6 "The Faith Of Abel And Enoch"

The entire letter of Hebrews has been moving to this point. Our writer has been reminding his readers of Christ's supremacy, of His mission in being our High Priest, and the need to persevere to the end so that Christ will be magnified in our lives. The message up to this point has been, 'don't turn back to the ways of old, to the ways which were familiar and comfortable, but only lead to death.'

Hold on to life and live in that life you have in Christ. But don't forget the means to gaining that life and walking in it. Faith. This is probably the most simple and yet profound statement any Christian can hear. How many times have we all been told during troubles or trials, don't walk by sight, walk by faith.

Don't merely look at the circumstance, look to Christ by faith. Trust Him because He is Supreme, and Almighty, and our High Priest who took our place for sin and He loves us. Don't think for a moment that these Hebrew Christians had not heard all of this before concerning living by faith.

But because we live in a physical world, we see with physical eyes and we are tempted to close our spiritual eyes to the reality of God's involvement in our lives which we can only see by faith, and which is often confirmed with action taken by God as it effects our physical existence.

Sickness befalls us. Our physical eyes confirm this, but by faith we call out to our God whom we trust to be there for us. Our Lord intervenes and gives us the healing or provides the grace to go through it.

Maybe there are trials that are beyond our control. There appears to be no way out as far as we can sense with our physical faculties. But we look to our invisible God whom we know is there and by faith we have the assurance that He is faithful and the promise that He will never leave us or forsake us is real as we rest in His Sovereignty.

This is what our writer begins to build on as he starts this section.

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."

The ancients were commended for their faith. They too, lived in this physical world, but they knew that their invisible God was there for them as He spoke to them and other prophets and gave them hope that the broken fellowship through sin would be dealt with and that He would come through for them as they looked to Him, not themselves.

These "ancients" as the NIV puts it, or the "men of old" as the NAS has it, were those who lived prior to the incarnate Christ, who looked forward to the promise of eternal fellowship with their God, Creator and Savior, whom they placed their faith in, being sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they did not see.

The first ancient to be mentioned is Abel. He is contrasted with his brother Cain.

HEB 11:4 "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead."

A little background may help here.

GEN 4:3-7 "In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Two offerings were brought. One was accepted by God the other was not. Keep in mind that the context is dealing with worship. These two men were coming into the presence of God with the express purpose of bowing before Him and honoring Him with their sacrifices.

But what must be kept in mind is that worship of God must be according to God's word. You and I do not have the option to worship God any way we desire. And the way God desires our worship is according to faith and trust in Him alone from the heart.

Lots of people go through the motions of coming out on Sunday mornings or midweek, or in the privacy of their own homes they may say prayers and even read God's word thinking their actions alone make them righteous.

But worship places God above all and submits to Him by faith which effects our hearts towards godliness in following Him according to His ways. Jesus spoke of this very thing.

MAT 15:8-9 "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. 9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."

We're also told in PRO 15:8-9 "The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him. 9 The LORD detests the way of the wicked but he loves those who pursue righteousness."

Cain worshiped God in vain because, though he honored God with his lips, his heart was far from God. The word wicked used in Proverbs 15 is *rasha* in the Hebrew and it means morally wrong. There is a wrong way and a right way to worship God. And it all stems from faith in God and obedience to His will which shows that faith.

Cain's sacrifice was not accepted because he was wicked. How do we know this? Because faith accepts God's will and then acts on it. We're told that Abel had a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous.

But where did Abel's righteousness come from? Did it come from the lamb he sacrificed to God? Well, yes and no. The lamb itself did not attain Abel's righteousness, but the faith and the obedience which brought that lamb did. This is why God was pleased with Abel. Remember, without faith it is impossible to please God, as we're told in Heb.11:6.

Cain did not please God with his offering because it was not brought in faith. And his lack of faith was demonstrated in his disobedience. What disobedience? I thought he brought an offering. Again, yes and no. He brought of the fruit of the ground, but it was not accepted.

Now, there has been debate on whether or not Cain's offering in and of itself could have been acceptable to God. Some would argue that had Cain simply offered his fruit of the ground in faith God would have accepted it and regarded him righteous as well.

Others would suggest that the offering itself is what led God to determine that it was not brought in faith and that Cain disobeyed, not only in his lack of faith, but proved that lack of faith by not bringing the type of offering God commanded, namely a sacrifice of an innocent animal victim.

We know that Abel's offering was in fact a true sacrifice because "he brought of the firstlings of his flock and their fat portions." The fat of an animal can only be obtained if you kill it. The animals' blood had to be shed. And this is the argument which is brought to bear on why one sacrifice was accepted and the other was not. One was a blood sacrifice, the other a bloodless offering.

But, it has been argued that the sacrificial system of worship was not officially instituted by God until Moses. Therefore, they argue, animal sacrifices were not required. This is true as it relates to the law given to a nation. But it does not mean that God had not spoken to Adam and Eve and given them the means for approaching Him in worship, which would have been done by faith.

Arthur W. Pink makes this observation of what God did for Adam and Eve after God judged them for their sin.

GEN 3:21 "The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."

Pink says, "here the Lord spoke to Adam and Eve by action: four things were clearly intimated. First, that in order for a sinner to stand before the thrice Holy God, he needed a covering. Second, that which was of human manufacture was worthless. Third, that God Himself must provide the requisite (or mandatory) covering. Fourth, that the necessary covering could only be obtained by death, by blood-shedding."

Pink, along with many others, is saying that the first bloody sacrifice in covering Adam and Eve, to enable them to stand before God, pictured the gospel which states that the sacrifice of another must stand between you and your sin. This covering in the blood enables you to stand before God. But this covering must be accepted by faith since you must take God at His word that such a sacrifice is sufficient for covering your sin.

God did speak clearly to Adam and Eve. They knew that to come before God, they must come before Him in worship as they

accepted His provision by faith and obeyed Him in bringing the sacrifice of an animal on their behalf.

Both Cain and Abel knew this. They knew that to come before a holy God in worship was to recognize that He was Holy and that His will must be obeyed. His will was for them to submit to Him in faith as they obeyed in bringing the sacrifice of an animal. Abel, in faith, brought the appropriate sacrifice and God was pleased with him. Cain, brought an offering which was not according to His will and therefore he did not come in faith.

This is why God told Cain in GEN 4:7 "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

The right thing for Cain to do was to approach God by faith according to the means He provided. Only in this way can anyone have mastery over sin. This is exactly what Paul said in ROM 6:10-11 "The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Here Paul speaks of receiving, by faith, the provision God has in Christ, but then Paul goes on to connect that faith to action on our part as it regards the sin which was covered by Christ.

ROM 6:12-14 "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."

Sin was the master of Cain. You'll notice however that even after Cain brought an offering, he knew was not right, God still offered the grace and mercy to come to Him again according to faith and obedience. Cain, would not bow. Instead, he murdered the very one who was righteous.

What's interesting about Abel is that the life he lived, he lived by faith in God. But in his death is where that life found its fulfillment. Abel knew, by faith, that the ultimate life was not to be in this temporal world, but in the everlasting presence of his God in glory. Though he died yet he still speaks.

His life, in a sense, was a prophecy of what Christ would say to Martha in JOH 11:25-26 "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Abel, in his death, speaks in different senses. Through his testimony of a life of faith in God he speaks of one who ran the race and finished the course and received his reward, even if his life was taken violently and before his time, if you will.

But he also speaks in the sense that his very existence now, in the presence God, assures us that we too will receive the inheritance promised us in Christ. Abel literally lives today in the presence of God and speaks of life eternal, which only comes by faith in God and His promises, which have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Now, before we move on to Enoch it should be noted that faith can be explained in what it actually is and does. But it can also be explained in what it is not and what it does not do. Cain defines it in just this way.

A.W. Pink makes this comment: "Cain was [not] irreligious, for he came before [God] as a worshipper; but he refused to conform to the Divine appointment. Thus, in Cain we behold the first hypocrite. He refused to comply with the revealed will of God, yet cloaked his rebellion by coming before Him as a worshipper, (and) sought to approach unto the Lord, and patronize Him. It is the way of self-will, of unbelief, of disobedience, and of religious hypocrisy. What a contrast from Abel!"

And so our writer urges us to consider our faith in Christ. Is it the same faith of Abel, who not only trusted in God's provision but also lived his life in a way that demonstrated it even unto death? It was his faith in God which was reckoned as righteousness; being in a right standing with God to where God was well pleased with not just his sacrifice, but more importantly, his trust in the God who gives life to them that come to Him and abide in Him by faith.

Next we come to a man whose name is Enoch. This Enoch is not the one who is the son of Cain who is spoken of in GEN 4:17 "Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch."

Rather, this Enoch is the one whose father was Jared, born of the godly seed of Seth.

GEN 5:21-24 "When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. 22 And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away."

This is the Enoch of Hebrews 11.

HEB 11:5 "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

Essentially what happened was that Enoch was simply living his life and it was a life that trusted in God and a life that demonstrated that trust by placing his faith in God. Then after living a mere 365 years one day Enoch's wife and family looked for him and he was gone. He didn't die. He was simply taken by God without physically dying. Enoch was the first to be taken in this way, but he would certainly not be the last. Elijah would experience this as well.

What was it about Enoch's life that pleased God, even to the extent that He should reward Enoch with not having to taste death? We're told in verse 5. "God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

We're not told if Enoch and his family had been informed of what God was about to do. But what we are told is that God had commended Enoch as one who pleased Him. The word for commended in the Greek is *martureo* and it means to be a witness; to testify. It's where we get our English word for martyr.

God testified that Enoch pleased Him. How God testified to that prior to his being taken we don't know, but it must have been made clear to Enoch and those who knew him. That's the reason for a testimony or bearing witness, to let others know of the truth.

And so, Enoch was used by God as a shining example of what it is to live by faith in Him. What's interesting about the order used by our author is that it might appear that he is simply giving a chronological order starting with Abel and then moving to Enoch who was 5 generations separated from Abel.

But a closer examination will show that this is not what our author is doing. In fact, the chronology breaks down when we look at our text. Pink points out that "reference is made in verse 9 to Isaac and Jacob before attention is directed to Sarah in verse 11; the falling down of Jericho's walls (vs.30), is mentioned before the faith of Rahab (vs.31); in verse 32 Gideon is mentioned before Barak; Samson, before Jephtha; and David before Samuel."

Pink then surmises that the Holy Spirit is doing more than giving a chronology or lack thereof. Pink believes that this is to instruct us in the sense that we are given an outline of the life of faith. He says of the first three men; Abel, Enoch and Noah in our text.... "Each [foreshadowed] a distinct feature or aspect of the life of faith, and the order concerning them is [sacred]. Another before us has characterized them thus: in Abel we see faith's *worship*, in Enoch faith's *walk*, in Noah faith's *witness*."

Enoch certainly walked with God in a way that told those who came in contact with him that God was his Master and Lord and Savior, and that his life of faith spoke volumes as he relied on the Lord for everything and gave Him the glory.

This too Pink comments on: "The term walk signifies a voluntary act, a steady advance, a progress in spiritual things. To "walk with God" imports a life surrendered to God, a life controlled by God, a life lived for God."

Are you beginning to see how the Holy Spirit is showing us what our faith is to be as we look at the faith of those before us? But the question I have is if Abel was righteous and pleased God by faith, then why wasn't he taken up by God not to taste death? In fact that could be asked of any one of the saints of old and today. What is the point of taking Enoch and leaving the rest of us behind to have to travel this path and be the pilgrims in a world that is not our home?

Well, there is something instructive in exceptions to the rule. And we would have to say that people not tasting death and being taken up to meet God is certainly an exception to the rule.

But, it's the exception which speaks of a better life. A life with no death, no pain, no end. A life in constant communion with God and a life which was initiated by God. Enoch was not the one who decided one day to join God and leave this world behind without having to die. It was God who came to Enoch because of his faith in the Lord. God initiated the whole thing.

Having said that we need to be careful not to think that Enoch's faith was so outstanding that he somehow earned God's special privilege not to have to taste death. No one, including Enoch, deserved anything from God. But in taking Enoch we do see the future for all of God's people as we too will be transferred from this world into the presence of God where death will be swallowed up in victory.

That hope which Abel had and the hope which Enoch had will be realized, but not in this present world. They laid hold to it by faith. They lived by faith. They were witnesses of God's grace and mercy by faith. And just as they were able to please God in their faith, we too have the promise that God is pleased with us as we trust His Son to be our substitute for sin and also the resurrection life to which we look forward.

In a very real sense Enoch points to 1TH 4:13-18 "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words."

Even if Enoch's family didn't fully understand Enoch's disappearance, they must have had a sense of God's involvement. And they must have been excited to think that there was the possibility that maybe God would take them in the same way, as they placed their faith in Him, and walked in that faith daily even as Enoch. Through Enoch's translation or taking away by God, there was a hope of being united to God and to have life with Him forever.

But it would only come through a faith in God and His promises. We too have that same promise that we will one day meet our Lord face to face and we may not have to taste death to see it. Our Lord Jesus could come back at any time. And so we will be with the

Lord forever. And we are to encourage each other with these words.

Through the lives of the saints of old we get a glimpse of what they must have known to be true about their eternal destiny as they placed their faith in the One true God. But they also gave us insights as to what God promised through their lives of faith. You see, God has spoken through their testimony and given us the picture of the One they all looked to; Jesus Christ Himself.

Andrew Murray says, "Abel shows how death is the entrance to life: he triumphs over death by submitting to it. In Enoch, we see how life triumphs over death. Through faith Abel being dead yet speaks; Enoch speaks as one who ever lives. In Abel we see how death leads to life. In Enoch we see the life that never dies. In Abel we see Christ the crucified, and the boldness we have through the shed blood to enter into the new and living way that goes through the torn veil. In Enoch we see Christ glorified and have life in the Holiest -- the walk with God, the living One."

But we must keep in mind HEB 11:6 "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

To please God should be the delight of every believer. And yet that is exactly what we have done when we placed our faith in Christ. I like the idea of knowing that my life of faith pleases my Creator. But more important I cherish the truth of knowing that pleasing God comes through the One of whom the Father said, "In Him I am well pleased."

That One is the Son sent from the Father. Praise God the Father was well pleased with the mission of His Son. Praise God He came to fulfill all righteousness and that through faith in Him we have the righteousness of Christ put to our account. Just as Jesus pleased the Father we too please Him in Christ.

May we say with our Lord Jesus, JOH 5:30 "for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

That was Paul's desire. But Paul knew that only walking by faith and demonstrating that faith through his actions would he be able to please God. He knew how great it would be to be in the presence of the Lord just as Enoch and Abel presently enjoyed, but he also knew of the importance of being faithful and being

responsible to God, to love and serve Him on this side of eternity as well as the next.

He put it this way.

2CO 5:7-9 "We live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it."

Live in the faith God has given you and grow in that faith and please Him every day, knowing that we are one day closer to going home.