

Faith Explained and Illustrated Part One: Hebrews 11:1-7

Hebrews 11:1-7 Introduction

- *"Faith is believing something you know ain't true."*
 - Mark Twain
- *"The way to see by faith is to shut the eye of reason."*
 - Benjamin Franklin
- *"Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence."*
 - Richard Dawkins

Hebrews 11:1-7 Introduction

- The rabbi's audience was growing weak in their Christian convictions.
- They were continually at risk of falling back into a Christ-less Judaism based on rituals and animal sacrifice.
- He is encouraging them to be strong and remain steadfast in their faith.
- In Hebrews 11 we have faith explained and illustrated.
- The rabbi's goal is to stir up the hearts of God's people to greater trust and obedience.
- Hebrews 11 is closely connected to the previous section.
 - See 10:23-24, 35-39.

- If you've ever wondered if your faith was real, you can benefit from this chapter.
- If you've been puzzled by the relationship between faith and works or faith and obedience, this chapter can help.
- If your faith in Christ has ever wavered, this chapter is for you.
- Biblical faith is our willing response to God, expressed inwardly by submissive trust, and outwardly by obedience.

Hebrews 11:1-7 Outline

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| I. | A Description of Biblical Faith | 11:1-3 |
| II. | Faith Prior to the Flood | 11:4-7 |

- But first, let's read Hebrews 11 from beginning to end.

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A Description of Biblical Faith 11:1-3

- Faith is not blind optimism.
- It's not something we work up through emotional hype.
- Faith is not the belief in something despite purely contrary evidence.
- Faith does, however, require that we gather sufficient evidence from all the right sources and that we interpret that evidence correctly.
- Otherwise wrong conclusions are inevitable.

- Consider a complex math problem:
 - The correct answer is waiting to be found, but you may not initially take the right approach.
 - Once you have the right approach, there may still be minor errors in your calculations.
 - The final solution will only be found by looking at all the information in the right way and then applying some careful, diligent effort.
 - Anything less will yield incorrect results.

- Think also about getting to know a person:
 - Getting to know people takes time and effort.
 - Even if we rule out any kind of conscious deception, first impressions still are still not always completely correct.
 - The only way we get to know anybody is by trying to get to know them. (How's that for insight?)
 - Otherwise our conclusions about them will probably be all wrong.

- Such is often the state of those who misunderstand biblical faith:
 - We may take the wrong approach.
 - We may fail to examine all the evidence.
 - We may misinterpret the evidence that we have.
 - Or we may simply not be trying hard enough.
 - The end result is that we misunderstand faith, misunderstand the Bible, misunderstand Christianity and misunderstand God.

- 11:1 This is more of a description of faith rather than a dictionary definition.
- Alternative translation from ESV:

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

- 11:1 substance = assurance, the thing that stands under all the rest, the foundation.
- Warren Wiersbe put it like this:
- *"Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house; it gives confidence and assurance that he will stand."*
 - Warren Wiersbe

- 11:1 evidence = conviction
- A vague, "I hope so" kind of faith, based on sentimental twaddle about God, leads to a feeble, anemic, pitiful Christianity.
- A faith deep enough to form convictions leads to action, strength and determination, even in the face of insurmountable odds.

- 11:2 The word testimony is related to “martyr” or “witness.” Also in 11:4 & 5.
- Our faith, when properly grounded and courageously exercised, bears witness to the world around us of the faithfulness of God.
- 11:3 worlds = *aiōnas* “the universe”
- This word includes both time and space – or “space-time” as physicists now describe it.
- Prior to the 20th Century this verse was harder to understand.
- It was believed by many that the universe or “space-time” didn’t have a beginning – but now everyone knows otherwise.
- 11:3 Science, however, for all its wonderful strengths, is limited to observing the observable.
- The universe is one huge effect looking desperately for a cause, but the cause is not directly observable.
- Therefore, a philosophy, religious belief, or simple, hard-nosed skepticism will influence our conclusions.
- 11:3 A careful examination of the universe will point to a both a benevolent creator and a tragic, universal fall.
- God created everything good, but it has since become corrupted – as a result of human sin.
- The study of nature with respect to how it reveals the character of God is called “Natural Theology.”
 - See Psalm 19:1 and Romans 1:18-23.

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Faith Prior to the Flood 11:4-7

- 11:4 The story of Cain and Abel, the first two sons of Adam and Eve, shows the disastrous result of sin.
- Abel, motivated by faith, offered a better sacrifice to God than his brother.
- Rather than respond with repentance, Cain killed Abel. Faith can be costly.
- 11:5 Enoch walked with God and thanks to his faith, he pleased Him.
- God’s response was to snatch Enoch away, by translation or rapture, prior to the flood.
- That’s why the text tells us that “he did not see death.”
- 11:6 Let’s say I came to the conclusion that you don’t exist.
- I would do nothing to try to understand you, your desires, your motives or your character.
- If I ever did anything you wanted me to do, it would only be by pure chance.
- That wouldn’t be very satisfying, because you would know I didn’t really care.
- 11:6 Such is the sorry state of the faithless person in relation to God.
- It is impossible for he or she to please Him.
- They may occasionally do what God wants, but this is very far from obedience.
- It’s more like pure coincidence.
- Nobody speeds in a traffic jam, but that’s not because they all want to obey the law.

- 11:6 Biblical faith will put forth effort to know God and do His will.
- The net result will be a life that is increasingly pleasing to God.
- Trust will lead to more trust; obedience to further obedience.
- A cycle of growth begins to take shape leading to greater spiritual maturity.

- 11:6 Getting to know God yields more satisfying rewards than simply trying to make something out of our lives without Him.
- See Matthew 6:31-34.

- *“How God is pleased when we put our faith and trust in Him! It pleases God! It would seem to me that the converse then would also be true. God is displeased when we don’t trust Him, when we doubt His promises, and when we live in fear and anxiety.”*
 - Chuck Smith, in the Word for Today Bible

- 11:7 Noah believed, and acted upon, God’s warnings about a flood.
- He was moved by godly fear, not by the fear of a flood as a natural disaster.
- This was not like preparing for a tornado or a snowstorm here in the Midwest.
- It was something that never happened before.

- 11:7 Noah is the first person in the Bible to be called “righteous.”
- Though he was a sinner just like we are, he was made right in God’s eyes.
- His righteousness was the result of his faith.

- Think for a moment about these three men: Abel, Enoch and Noah:
- Abel was killed by his brother as a result of his faith and obedience.
- Enoch was snatched away and never personally had to die.
- Noah had to endure 120 years of disbelief, criticism and ridicule as he bore witness to his generation of the judgment to come.

- In each case God was the initiator. Faith is always a willing response to God.
- All of them had to exercise a submissive trust when confronted by the word of God.
- All of them had to express their faith in some form of obedience.
- In each case, however, their faith led to different results.

- Let’s not oversimplify the eventual results of biblical faith in this life.
- Faith does not always lead to healing, wealth or earthly happiness.
- Nor does it always lead to martyrdom, poverty suffering or death.
- In each case the ultimate rewards are not to be found in this world.

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Hebrews 11:1-7 Conclusions

- A lost and dying world does not understand a truly biblical faith.
- One reason may be that people see so little faith in action in the church today.
- Let's determine to be men and women of obedient, biblical faith.
- We have to be willing to exercise submissive trust in the Lord, even when that seems contrary to popular opinion.

- Let's also determine to grow in our faith.
- The best way to grow in faith is to walk with the faithful.
- If we want to get to know God better, wouldn't it make sense to become friends with His friends rather than with His enemies?
 - See Proverbs 13:20

- Remember that we will not always see positive results of our faith here in this world.
- Faith may lead to some kind of success, but that usually involves various trials, troubles and problems along the way.
- Faith requires diligent effort.
- And biblical faith entails a strong conviction and a steadfast hope regarding the hereafter.

- Let's put forth diligent effort into getting to know God.
- As we just read in 11:6, He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
- Best of all, the rewards we receive from seeking God are eternal.

- *By and by when I look on His face,
Beautiful face, thorn shadowed face;
By and by when I look on His face,
I'll wish I had given Him more.*

*By and by when He holds out His hands,
Welcoming hands, nail riven hands;
By and by when He holds out His hands,
I'll wish I had given Him more.*
 - from a hymn by Grace Reese Adkins