

VIEWING THE WORLD THROUGH EYES OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:1–3 — *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."*

As we have changed chapters, we have not changed the subject. Verse 38 of chapter 10 contains that important phrase "the just shall live by faith", and verse 39 presents a line that we are either on one side of or the other:

Side 1: "them who draw back unto perdition"

Side 2: "them that believe to the saving of the soul"

We are not left with a third option, but we are on one side or the other. We are either of those that believe, or of those that do not.

There are some things that must be said regarding faith and believing that must guide our discussion of having faith.

The question "Do you have faith?" is the wrong question. The right question is "What do you have faith in?", and really more important is "Who do you have faith in?"

We will get to Abraham's faith later in our discussion, but let's take a quick look at Romans chapter 4 where Paul speaks "justifying" his declaration of justification by faith.

Romans 4:3 — *"For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness"*

That is a definition of what the faith that saves — broadly — looks like. Abraham believed God. God spoke to him, and he believed. Faith takes God at His word and believes Him. We do sometimes have questions that may or may not be answered, but this faith that we are discussing believes God.

In Romans 10:17, we have told to us the way that God brings faith to man.

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

If God had not spoke something, there would not be something to believe, as far as faith in God is concerned. We would believe something, but it wouldn't be believing God, for God must speak in order to believe Him.

That would bring us back to the opening of the Epistle to the Hebrews that we have under consideration:

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son..."

God has spoken, and we need to hear. It is sometimes said that faith to believe must be first given by God. There are two scriptures that often come up, one being Ephesians 2:8, which says, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God...."*, and another Philippians

1:29, which says *“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”*

I would take a different approach as to what these scriptures are saying. In regard to Ephesians 2:8, the context speaks of the entire act of God giving salvation by grace through faith is what His gift refers to. In the other, the point is not that God gave you the gift of faith so that you could believe, but that you are invited into suffering for the one that you also believe in.

Often those that argue hardest for this gift of faith idea also say that those to whom the gift is given cannot refuse it, which again, is not the witness of scripture. Scripture speaks over and over of those that refuse to believe God. Stephen in Acts 7:51 says to the council in front of him *“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.”*

In Matthew 23:37, we have the Lord’s lament over Jerusalem:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often ⁴¹ would have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”

This does not speak of *His* unwillingness but of *theirs*.

But if we grant that faith itself is the gift of God, we are again back at Romans 10:17 where we come to understand how it is that God gives faith: by His word! Without His word, there would be nothing to hear, and with nothing to hear, there would be nothing to believe, so there would be no faith. But what we do with that word places us on one side or the other of that line that we made at the beginning. We are either of those that believe to the saving of the soul, or of those that draw back unto perdition.

In the opening of chapter 11, we read that “faith is the substance of things hoped for”, and as we consider this, what are the things hoped for?

We are generally discussing eternal matters, and any confidence that we have in eternal matters must necessarily come from what God has said. We can believe many things, but what matters is not how sincere we are in our belief of them, but whether they are true. If we don’t have a word from God on the matter, our faith is not in God, but in something else. It might be in the word of someone else, or it might be in our own fanciful imagination, but it is not faith in God. You have nothing to stand on for your confidence in things hoped for if the foundation of the hope in them is not in the word of God.

When it says substance of things hoped for, it is about the ground that we are standing on. Faith, biblically defined, in the right place, is faith in the Word of God, in what He said. Faith comes by hearing,

⁴¹ This doesn’t only speak of His time on earth as recorded in the gospels, but goes back though the entire history that God had with Israel. In Isaiah 65:2, the prophet said “I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts”, or as Paul quoted it in Romans 10:21, “All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people”. This is an incident in the Gospels that we could say that yes, Jesus claimed to be God. A skeptic might say “find a verse that Jesus claimed to be God”, and we could say that this is one, but not only so, because it is not that there is one verse that He claims to be God, but it is the entire unified witness of all of Scripture, and the combined testimony of all of Scripture that He is indeed God manifest in the flesh.

and hearing by the word of God. We can have faith in God, because, first, God has revealed Himself to us, and second, because God is faithful and will do what He says He will do.

The substance of things hoped for, things which have been described and continue to be described in the chapters of this epistle leading up to this, is faith in God, and particularly in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who completed the redemptive work that the Old Covenant prefigured. When we read this idea of substance, we can think about the ground that we are standing on. What is our faith in? Can I point to something and say that this is what my faith is in, and this is what my hope rests in?

When you buy a car, or a house, or a plot of real estate, you can show the object as proof that it exists. But to prove that you own it, you show a title, which has seals and signatures and it is a legal binding document. The one who has the title deed in his name owns the property. This title deed gives substance to my claim of ownership. The word of God gives substance to my hope and it is in faith that I stand on it. If I rest claims on what God has not said, that is not faith but it is presumption. Many crises of faith come from presumption being mistaken as faith.

It is in this verse that we also read that faith is the evidence of things not seen. This, along with 2 Corinthians 5:7 — “For we walk by faith, not by sight” — might suggest something like a “blind faith”. But this is not the case. We have the word of God to believe, and His seal is upon it that we can trust what He says. We also have that evidence that is laid before us in it that what God has spoken, it will come to pass. The prophets spoke often of Christ coming, and we see that He did. So also He, along with the unified witness of all the New Testament writers speak that He will come again⁴². We believe the latter, because we can point to the truth that the former is true.

We do not have a blind faith in the word of God, but we have learned faith in the word of God. We can stand on God being true, because we can look to the past revelation and fulfillment and trust in the future. Just because it has not come to pass yet does not mean that it will not come to pass. *“For yet a little while and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry”*.

In the second verse, we have that “For by it [faith], the elders obtained a good report”. In chapter 12, we are told that these in chapter 11, among others, are a great cloud of witnesses. These elders are the witnesses, the elders being, those of the past. Sometimes we refer to these as the ancients or something like that.

It is interesting that Romans is often thought of as the courtroom epistle, and this has good founding. But here, we have much that would be found in a courtroom setting. We have substance, evidence, a good report, and a great cloud of witnesses. The “good report” that the elders obtained is their witness. This is their testimony, brought to show not only what faith looks like, but how faith guided the faithful of the past to get us where we are now.

In the third verse, we see that we understand what is going on in the world and that it is not operating randomly, by believing what God has said. In Hebrews 1:2, we read that God, by His Son, “made the worlds”. Here we see that God put order to the things going on in the world. The world here is the

⁴² The Old Testament writers have many things to say also about “the Second Advent”, but they speak often of the two advents seemingly as one. The prophets spoke of “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow”, but did not see the separation between them that we know to be true.

things going on in the world. It is how His plans for the world are being worked out in our continuing history.

We see many truths of the creation and order of the world throughout scripture. In Colossians chapter 1, we see Christ as the creator and sustainer of everything.

Colossians 1:16–17 — "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

Part of what He creates and what He sustains is the things that are going on in the world. God has ordered the ages of this world according to His own plan. We do not need to think that the world is out of control, and it is by faith that we know this. It is not that God is micromanaging all of the affairs of this world, for it is clear that now during man's day, the world is not operating according to the will of God, but in rebellion to it. Yet we can by faith know (because God has said it), that He is indeed in control, and He is letting man have his day and his way, because that is the way that He deals with this rebellion.

He is at the same time operating in grace, not dealing with us according to our sins, but according to His own reconciling objective in Christ:

"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Faith will recognize this because God says this is true.

We also know that this will not last forever. We read in 2 Corinthians 6:2 that "now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation", and there is certainty and urgency to this. The present day of salvation will not last forever, but God has given it to us in His grace. He will also end it when the time comes.

Right now we have truth to be believed from the mouth of God, written in His Word as witness to us. The truth is the gospel which we believe. It is gospel (good news) because it is true, and our faith is founded in it because it is God's truth. When God says by the mouth of His apostle in His word "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31), we take Him at His word and believe it. That is our obedience of faith. God has said, God will do it. God is faithful, and our faith in Him is sure, as we read earlier, we have an anchor for the soul, sure and steadfast. Those in the past who believed God were not disappointed, and we will not either.