

As we enter into this chapter that we call the Faith Hall of Fame, we should keep in mind the preceding argument that the author has laid out. He has given these believers the most severe warning that we see in the New Testament. He warned them against falling away from God's only salvation so graciously provided in Christ (Hebrews 10:26-27), and spelled out for them many of the advantages we have under the new covenant (Hebrews 10:16-17). Then he used a passage from Habakkuk to encourage them to endure. "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). Those who are justified by the blood of Christ should live out that faith in their daily life, lights to a world in darkness, cities on a hill (Matthew 5:14). If we don't live by our faith, he warns, God will not be pleased with us (Hebrews 10:38).

Now in chapter eleven, we will see those who did live out their faith and pleased God. The connection with the context is important. The author is encouraging them to face the persecution that is coming with faith in God and to endure so that they receive God's commendation. ¹ *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* Hebrews 11:1 Here is the Bible's definition of faith. First, it is the assurance of things hoped for. What were these Hebrew believers hoping? It seems that they were hoping to escape the persecution; but the examples we will see do not suggest that is what the author is talking about a different kind of hope. Often what we hope for is not what God would have us desire. The examples in this chapter are of people who were assured that God would see them through what they faced and help them stay faithful to the end. That is the hope God would have us cling to: His presence helping us through the storms of life (Joshua 1:9). They were assured that it was worth it to live a life of faith. The heavenly reward would be worth every sacrifice (Romans 8:18). If you have faith, you are sure it is true, so you act accordingly.

That brings us to the second part of the definition of faith, the conviction of things not seen. They couldn't see Jesus right there with them through it all. Nor could they see with their eyes that what Paul said was true. ¹⁷ *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,* ¹⁸ *as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 Faith has the conviction that these things are true. What a mindset! The righteous live with the assurance of what they hope for. The righteous hope for way more than the world has to offer. The world offers genuine but temporal pleasure, but the psalmist promises fullness of joy and pleasures that are eternally rich and satisfying (Psalm 16:11).

In his book *The Weight of Glory*, C S Lewis explained it like this: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." The heroes of faith gave up their mud pies in the slums and were confident that life in Jesus was a holiday by the sea both now and in an even greater extent ever after. Their spiritual eyes were open to the difference and they refused to look back.

Commented [PW1]: Hebrews 10:26-27 (ESV)

²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,
²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Commented [PW2]: Hebrews 10:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,"
¹⁷ then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

Commented [PW3]: Habakkuk 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith."

Commented [PW4]: Hebrews 10:38 (ESV)

³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him."

Commented [PW5]: Joshua 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Commented [PW6]: Romans 8:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Commented [PW7]: Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

The temptation these Hebrews faced was for an easier way in the short term. Sin always costs more in the long run. Eyes of faith see that conviction views reality.

Paul speaks of this conflict between what our earthly senses tempt us with and what our faith assures is true. ¹ *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* ² *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.* ³ *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* ⁴ *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* ⁵ *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

Colossians 3:1-5 The apparent problem with this Hebrew church was that they were slipping back into covetousness and not wanting to lose the earthly goods that had been restored to them. What the author is telling them through the following testimonies is the very message Paul proclaimed to the Corinthians and the Colossians and to us as well. **Are you raised with Christ? Then seek the things that are above! Set your hearts and minds there, not on earthly things.** Your old nature died on the cross. Don't try and resurrect it. Keep your foot on its neck. Keep taking it back to the cross, or in Paul's words, put it to death. Paul wrote that it died, but also that you have to put it to death every time that old zombie raises its ugly head and dangles some lure before your eyes or thoughts. Lures have hooks on them! They will drag you to places you will wish you never went (James 1:14-15)!

Have faith, the conviction of things unseen. Know that if you suffer with Christ you will be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17). **Is your hope to be glorified with Christ? Now that is a greater hope than anything we could come up with in our wildest dreams.** It's greater than we can comprehend. Are you by faith assured of it? Honestly, I'm still trying to grasp being glorified with Christ. That is huge! If we have the faith described in this first verse, the world doesn't have anything big enough to tempt us with. We need a bigger vision more in line with the reality presented to us in the Scriptures. We don't need less desire, as Buddhism teaches, we need a greater desire, an all-consuming desire that can only be satisfied by our infinite God.

² *For by it the people of old received their commendation.* Hebrews 11:2 This kind of faith is assured of the hope of glorification with Christ and a conviction in the unseen realm with all that is promised. That is how the saints of old won the commendation of God. We'll see the word in ESV translated "commendation" a number of times in these few verses, so let us get a clear meaning of the original language. *Martyreo* comes from the root *martus* which means to be a witness, to testify, or give a good report. It is the word from which we get our word martyr. Martyrs refused to deny Christ, for their faith assured them of the unseen. That is why they were able to die faithful to their testimony. King James version reads, ² *For by it the elders obtained a good report.* Hebrews 11:2 (KJV) We could think of this word "commendation" as used here as a final witness that they were faithful to the end. Faith is what enabled the saints of old to have a good testimony to the end (Revelation 2:10).

Commented [PW8]: James 1:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Commented [PW9]: Romans 8:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Commented [PW10]: Revelation 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Little children as well as adults in the Middle East, in Syria, Nigeria, Libya, and other nations are going to their executions refusing to deny Christ. They may not have the Bible knowledge that we have, but they have faith. They have the assurance of their hope and the confidence in the unseen. Even a new believer can have this kind of faith. It is a gift of God (1 Corinthians 12:9), but we must be willing to receive and act on it.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. Hebrews 11:3 We don't need as much faith today to believe this. Science tells us that matter can't come from nothing. We must conclude that either matter is eternal or God is eternal. But if matter is eternal, science also tells us that it would have run out of energy long ago. We are left with no explanation for the universe other than an eternal God. Some people argue that eventually we'll find out why there is matter. I could respond, "Eventually you will, and that discovery will be that God created it." Any answer is an expression of faith.

I believe in the Big Bang. God spoke and, "bang", it was created. "Let there be light! and - bang! - there was light" (Genesis 1:3). The invisible God created all that is visible. That is easy for me to believe. I can't see why anyone would argue otherwise. There is nothing to base their argument on except their hope that there is no God to whom they are accountable. In fact, the first verses of Genesis are so logical. The invisible God began creation by making space, matter, and energy (Genesis 1:1-3). No physicist would argue that those are the necessary building blocks of all that is. How did the author, living over 1500 years before Christ, know that? The rest of the world, a millennium later, was thinking of earth, wind, and fire as the basic elements.

If everything that we see with our eyes came from the invisible realm, it means the invisible realm is more enduring. It means our hope and faith should be placed in that abiding realm. "For the world and its desires are passing away, but whoever does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17). Sedona, our houses, this nation, companies, empires, are all to pass away. When we tour Israel, we see excavations that cut through civilization after civilization. One day it will all be gone. Our faith is placed in the passing physical realm or the enduring invisible one. Why would we put our faith and hope on the one that won't last?

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. Hebrews 11:4 Here is our first testimony of someone who was assured of what he hoped for and convinced of what he could not see. Abel had the testimony of his parents, that of their former face to face communion with God in the Garden. Just as their nakedness was covered by the skins of innocent animals (Genesis 3:21), Abel knew by faith that God would accept a substitute, which pointed to God's provision for sin. If God covered their nakedness with skins, he reasoned by faith that this blood sacrifice was the right thing to do. He believed the word his parents passed on to him and in the mercy of God to provide atonement, a covering for sin.

Commented [PW11]: 1 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

Commented [PW12]: Genesis 1:1-3 (ESV)

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.
³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Commented [PW13]: 1 John 2:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Commented [PW14]: Genesis 3:21 (ESV)

²¹ And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Cain on the other hand, seemed to think his hard work earned him God's favor, and so presented the product of his hard labors. (Grain offerings were accepted in the future as faith in God's provision for future harvests (Leviticus 2:1)). Cain's heart must have trusted more in his merit than God's grace, for it was not accepted by God. In spite of God's warning to Cain (Genesis 4:7), he went ahead and killed his brother. Abel was the first martyr for his deeds of faith. Here is that word again, "commended." He died with a good testimony of being faithful unto death. His act of faith still speaks to us today. It tells us that faith pleases God. It tells us to endure. It also tells us the world will be angry when they see God's favor on our lives. What foreshadow of Christ: An obedient heart giving the sacrifice God wanted, killed because of it, and is still speaking. We can expect repercussions from the world for our life of faith (1 John 3:12). But it is still the only reasonable way to live.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. Hebrews 11:5 We only have three verses about Enoch in the Old Testament. He walked with God for three hundred years (Genesis 5:22-24). He was one of the few people in the Bible to be taken into heaven without going through death (2 Kings 2:11). He was commended as well. Faithful until he was raptured, he found that faith could restore what was lost in the Garden, the privilege of walking in communion with God (Jude 14-15). (More on that next week.) His faith pleased God.

These first two examples of people that pleased God by their enduring faith can be contrasted by the way their lives ended. The first died a violent death as a martyr. The second was raptured. In case we think it must end one way or the other, we have the example of both. The emphasis is on what they had in common, their faith kept their eyes on the unseen world. Their mind and heart were on things above, not on earthly things. They had the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen. That is why their testimonies still speak to us. They tell us it is worth it to endure. Our heavenly reward is far greater than we can comprehend (1 Corinthians 2:9).

While I was writing this sermon I came across this analogy in Streams in the Desert. **This school of our Heavenly Father will soon close for us; the term time is shortening every day. Let us not shrink from a hard lesson or wince under any rod of chastisement. The richer will be the crown, and the sweeter will be Heaven, if we endure cheerfully to the end and graduate in glory.—Theodore L. Cuyler -Streams in the Desert.** He is describing those who will be commended. By faith that includes us. Remember two weeks ago we read together, *³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.* Hebrews 10:39 This is the point the author is driving home. Don't give up. You are so close to finishing the term and graduating with honors. You've come so far and the future is so bright. Endure! Keep your eyes on Jesus. God will see you through to the end.

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6 Without that conviction of what is hoped for and assurance in the unseen, we can't

Commented [PW15]: Leviticus 2:1 (ESV)

¹ "When anyone brings a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it

Commented [PW16]: Genesis 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

Commented [PW17]: 1 John 3:12 (ESV)

¹² We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

Commented [PW18]: Genesis 5:22-24 (ESV)

²² Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters.
²³ Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years.
²⁴ Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

Commented [PW19]: 2 Kings 2:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

Commented [PW20]: Jude 1:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones,
¹⁵ to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Commented [PW21]: 1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—

please God. God is pleased with righteousness, goodness, holiness, and these are only ours through faith in Jesus. These are the valued possessions of those whose hearts are fixed on things above, those who realize the real treasure is not this temporal world and its passing pleasures. God has given us this world to enjoy and see His goodness, but when our hearts are set on these little gifts instead of the Giver, we miss the whole reason for them (1 Timothy 6:17). Kent Hughes described it as falling in love with a photograph of your future bride and forgetting about the wedding (Romans 1:20).

Faith that pleases God was seen in Abel and Enoch, but the author will go on to give us many more examples of men and women commended by God because their faith endured to the end. They left a testimony of believing God regardless of what they faced in this world.

Personally, I tend to think of pleasing God as being available for Him to use me in whatever way He should desire (Romans 6:13). There is something to that, but the emphasis here is pleasing God by faith and drawing near by believing Him and enduring in that faith to the end. It is simply to draw near to God by believing that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. Do you believe that with all your heart? **Are you drawing near to Him, or are you avoiding Him?** Are you seeking to know Him more intimately? The answer depends on where your heart is set.

It can be possible to believe in God and that He rewards those who seek Him, but have no desire to draw near or to live for the unseen. The passing world captures our thoughts and desires and we find momentary pleasure there and avoid the real treasure. That is not faith that pleases God. That is a misunderstanding of grace. It's a lack of the fear of God. It is really rebellion against God, high treason. It's making gods out of the things that were intended to be blessings.

Two clear paths are laid out before this church of Hebrew believers and before all believers. One is faith that endures whatever comes because we know God is true to His Word. The other is to go our own way and end up shrinking back to our destruction. May each of us live a life that ends hearing the great commendation of God, **"Well, done good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of the Lord."** Mathew 25:21

Questions

- 1 What is the context?
- 2 What is faith?
- 3 What should be our hope and conviction?
- 4 Where is the believer's heart and mind set?
- 5 How did the saints of old win their commendation?
- 6 Where did everything come from?
- 7 Why believe the invisible is more important?
- 8 Why was Abel's sacrifice accepted?
- 9 What is alike and different with Abel and Enoch?
- 10 How can we please God? How do we draw near?

Commented [PW22]: 1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Commented [PW23]: Romans 1:20 (ESV)

²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Commented [PW24]: Romans 6:13 (ESV)

¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

Commented [PW25]: Matthew 25:21 (ESV)

²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'