

To say faith is important for the Christian is a massive understatement. Faith is imperative. Verse 6 rattles our cages a little when it says, "And without faith it is impossible to **please [God]...**" Faith is what pleases God. And without faith, we cannot please God. Let that sink in. It is an impossibility. Impossible. (Romans 14:23 - context and quote). So faith, real and living must fuel all that we do. Obedience that flows from faith and the entire life that flows from faith is what pleases God. The necessary ingredient is faith. Everything else comes from that. So the all important question is: Is your life marked by faith? Do you truly believe? Think of prayer. We can either pray with faith or without it. And it makes a huge difference whether you have faith or not. JC Ryle said, "*Faith is to prayer, what the feather is to the arrow. Without it, prayer will not hit the mark.*"

Well, Christians are called to live by faith. The entire life is a life of faith. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "*The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God.*" So faith is what fuels our lives as followers of Christ. And real faith endures. It perseveres. And that is the point of the last verse of chapter 10: "*We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*" True, living faith takes us all the way. And of course, the reason Hebrews 11 was written was to encourage these Christians to not drift and shrink back in unbelief, but to keep going.

Even though we exercise faith and are called to live a life of faith, it's always important to remember that faith is a divine gift from God. It is not something that originates in you, but is a gift (Ephesians 2:8). It is a gift that comes down from heaven. And therefore, true faith will endure to the end and preserve the soul, because it comes from God and is powerful. A false faith, of course, will not endure. It will prove to be phony in the end.

Well, last week we looked at the first three verses. We looked at the definition of faith. Verse 1 tells us that faith is the God-given ability to trust the future He has promised and to see (by faith) the invisible realities he has revealed in his word. The future he has promised is of course heaven, the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life. The unseen, invisible realities he's revealed would be the promises he has given us, the presence of Christ who said, "I will be with you always to the end of the age." So this is the definition of faith.

We also looked at the approval of faith. Faith receives the approval of God - and we will look more at that today. But the point is that the way we please God by trusting him - taking him at his word. "*Oh how sweet to trust in Jesus. Just to take him at his word. Just to rest upon his promise. Just to know 'Thus saith the Lord.'*" This child-like trust pleases God.

And finally, we looked at the activity of faith, by which past saints lived lives of incredible faithfulness to God through great adversity. Sometimes they experienced incredible and obvious victories, and sometimes they suffered apparent defeat - all of it "by faith".

Now today, I want to look at why faith pleases God, and it has to do with the object of our faith. The object of faith. What is it that we have faith in? Jesus said in Mark 11 when talking about prayer, "*Have faith in God.*" God must be the object of our faith. This is so important. Because we can have misplaced objects we trust in. For instance, some put their faith in their faith, which is basically just believing in yourself. A woman I've known for years - she was such good friends with my dad. And she was talking about her faith and wanting to be so careful about the kinds of things she was saying because she wanted her faith to be strong. And if she said something that was negative it might hinder her faith. It became very clear to me that her faith was more in her faith, her thoughts, her words and attitudes, rather than in the nature and character of God. Others can put their faith in their felt needs. What they really believe with all their heart is the things that they need and so they approach God with their needs at the forefront.

Others can generally have their faith aimed in the right direction, but it is a kind of vague faith in God without any particulars. So their faith is vague, not defined and thin, not deep. Listen to what John Piper said,

*The nature of faith and the vitality of faith is rooted in what God is like, not what we are like. You don't find out what Christian faith is by consulting your felt needs. You find out what Christian faith is by consulting the nature of God. Therefore, if you would have your faith be strong, and your soul be strong and your family be strong and your church be strong... know your God. Know your God!*

Your faith will be strong and powerful insofar as the object of your faith is clear and strong and powerful. Let's take a look briefly at two men who had faith and pleased God and then look at why we cannot please God without faith. Verse 4 says Abel lived by faith (READ):

Abel and Cain both brought offerings to God. The difference is that Abel brought his offering in faith and Cain did not. And I love the sentence about Abel "*through his faith, though he died, he still speaks*". Isn't that amazing? Do you want faith that still speaks even when you are dead? Me too!

Verse 5 tells us about Enoch (READ). Enoch is a mysterious figure in the bible. The bible doesn't say much about Enoch. There are three verses in Genesis 5 that give us the biographical sketch of Enoch, but

apparently he had the kind of faith that is being commended to us. Enoch is one of two people that didn't die physically. Verse 5 says, "By faith was taken up, so that he should not see death". God just took them to heaven. The other was Elijah. Prior to being taken up, he pleased with God. Listen to Genesis 5:22-24 which describes Enoch's life in three short verses:

*Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters.*

*Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.*

This amazing phrase is repeated twice. Enoch walked with God. In the language of Hebrews 11, I think we could say, Enoch lived a life of faith. As the world was getting worse and worse - leading up to God's judgment in the flood, Enoch "walked with God". What a testimony! What if the only thing that was said about you after you were dead was "She walked with God," "He walked with God." That would be pretty awesome! Well, both of these men - Abel and Enoch - had faith that pleased God. After telling of the faith of these two men, the author says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him [God]..."

We've already talked about this. It is impossible. We are powerless, utterly impotent, without ability to please God without faith. The question is why? We **have** to see the answer that is given to us. The second part of 6 gives us the reason we cannot please God without faith and it has to do with the nature and character of God:

*For [because] whoever would draw near to God **must** believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

If we would please God or have a faith that pleases God we must draw near to him (not remain aloof) believing two things - two fundamental truths about the nature and character of God. First, that he exists or literally "that he is". And second that he rewards (or is the Rewarder of) those who seek him.

### **1) That He Is (read verse 6) -**

We must believe that he exists or "that he is". This is a strange phrase, but important - it helps us get rid of a "small God mentality" (Your God is Too Small). God is pleased with a faith that believes He is. God exists absolutely. He didn't come into being. He's always existed and always will. He is never becoming, never growing, never changing. He IS the ultimate reality. Remember what God said to Moses in Exodus 3:14: "I am that I am." That is his name, "I am." God is ultimate reality and he has not hidden himself, but revealed himself through the eternal Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of the God who is -

always has been and always will be. Listen to Colossians 1:15-20 which describes the eternal Son of God who is and let's look briefly at what it says of our eternal God and Savior Jesus Christ - the object of our faith:

*<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

This is the God who is, revealed in Jesus Christ. Let's think about what this reveals of the eternal Lord Christ:

**Christ IS the Creator of everything** (everything exists from Him) - He is the Creator of all things (v. 16). He does not derive his existence from anything else. On the other hand, everything else derives its existence from Him. Your existence is derived from Jesus Christ. We *must* believe that He is... Creator.

**Christ IS the Sustainer of everything** (everything exists through him - verse 17). In him all things hold together. Christ is the integration point for all things - he holds everything together. Your next breath is from him. You are alive at this moment because of Him. Christ **MUST NOT** be relegated to the margins of our lives if we call ourselves Christians. We *must* believe that he is... Sustainer.

**Christ IS the End and Goal of everything** (everything exists for him). All things were not only created through him but also "for Him" (v. 16). You and I and everything else in all of human history were created and exist for his glory. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end, the first and last. We must believe that he is... the end and goal of everything.

**Christ IS Our Loving Savior.** Verse 20 says he "makes peace by the blood of his cross." If we left this out, we would have a powerful God and Lord, but perhaps not a loving and gracious Savior. But of course, in Christ, we do! The Creator, Sustainer, the One who all things exist for, came to die for rebel sinners in order to make peace by the blood of his cross. We must believe that he is... our loving Savior.

To please God, you must draw near to Him, believing that **he is** - He is pleased with this! And then the final component is we must believe that God is the Rewarder of those who seek him. He rewards seekers.

## 2) That He is the Rewarder of Seekers (read verse 6 again)

You cannot please God without coming to Him as a Rewarder, with your hands out. Think about this. God wants us to believe this. He is generous. John Piper said,

*Behind the assertion that God is rewarding is the fact that God is so full and so completely self-sufficient that he overflows. Rather than needing our service, he is like a never-ending Spring of life and energy and joy and beauty and goodness and power.*

Psalm 84:11 says, *"No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly."*

Jesus speaks of the great generosity of the Father when he said, *"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more** will your Father who is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.!"* (Luke 11:13) → (Ortund) - the greater the gift, the more reluctant. Not so with God.

Again Jesus in Luke 12:32, *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

He is not tight-fisted. **But** it is to a particular group of people. Who does he reward? Those who "seek him". So draw near to him, seek him. And do it with open hands so you can receive from him. He wants to give you himself... and all things that you truly need. Romans 8:32 says, *"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"*

He has given us his Son, He will not withhold any other good thing from us... in due time. Of course the ultimate reward, which is coming in the future when we will see him face to face! Let's pray.

### **Lord's Supper (luke 22, 1 Corinthians 11, )**

The Lord's Supper is an outward act to be done by faith. Even though we see the bread and the cup and each other, this is still an act of faith. We must remember that. We are invited to approach the Lord's table right now by faith. And though we cannot see him, Christ is here among us by the Holy Spirit, and we are invited to see him by faith.

The bread is taken by faith... the cup by faith. Faith in what the bread and cup symbolize - the body of Christ, upon which our sins were laid hung on the tree. He really took our sins in his body. His body really was broken for us. And the cup - his blood spilled out of his wounds, he breathed his last and died through which every good thing now and in the future was purchased.

And we are to take the bread and cup, believing that there is a time coming in the future, when our faith will be made sight and we will physically sit across from Christ at a table and eat and drink with him with unspeakable joy.

Praise his name. Pass the elements please. We will take together (Luke 22:14-20)