



## What Is Faith?

Hebrews 11 answers the question "What is faith?"

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the words of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible" (Hebrews 11:1-3).

When we read about the lives of the early Christians, we wonder what is this faith that caused them, in many cases, to give up their lives? What is this faith that caused them to live uprightly and work tirelessly? What was the faith of the Apostle Paul? Did he do what he did, live as he lived, and die as he died because he had a dream one day? Was he taking a chance with his faith, or was it a pretty sure thing in the first place?

**Hebrews 11 opens with two statements concerning faith; they are in reality a definition:** The opening statement is from the Authorized Version, and states, "Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen." The NAS Bible has it, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

In other words, faith has an assurance, a grounds, or a foundation which stands under it to support it. Liddell & Scott define the word as "the foundation or grounds of hope (confidence)." Faith, then, may be looked at as the *supported* confidence of the things we hope for. It is not like hoping to win the lottery. It is more like going to the bank hoping to get a loan on your house that is "free and clear" of debt, when money is in good supply, and your credit is good.

So, faith is a mental attitude of confident expectation that is based on a reasonable foundation of *known facts and experiences*. The house is paid for, the bank has a lot of money, and I have always paid my bills on time; there is supporting evidence for the thing that I hope for. Faith is not a leap into the dark. It is not an irrational religious feeling. It is clear-headed involvement with real knowledge, real information, and real data.

**All of this present knowledge has future implications.** Certainly, I'll get the loan. Sure I'll go to heaven; Jesus signed the note, paid off my mortgage, and besides that, God is rich in grace --it is in big supply. William Arthur Ward explained it like this: "*Faith is knowing there is an ocean because you have seen a brook!*" Because of *what we know*, we make this wholehearted commitment to God. *What we know* is the basis for putting our faith and confidence in God.

Faith is not the opposite of knowledge. It has a rational, reasoned basis. It is based on *deductive reasoning*, which has become in recent years, the most preeminent tool of science. Its perceptive outreach toward the not-

fully known is based squarely upon what is known. In this sense, faith is the bridge from the known to the unknown. There is "that which may be known of God" through the creation, through history, through the Bible, and through the conscience.

For example, if you were to cash a check for me, you would need to have faith that I am Ken Marple. If you looked at the contents of my wallet, you could be reasonably sure that I am Ken Marple; it would be reasonably safe to cash my check. The contents of my pocketbook become the *facts for your faith*.

It would be foolish to have faith without facts. For example, you wouldn't want to walk around the rows of cars in a junkyard, jump into one and expect it to start; you have no substantial evidence to hope that it will. However, you could jump into our 2021 Tucson and reasonably hope that it will start, since it has never done otherwise. With reference to our faith in God, there is sufficient supporting "evidence that he exists and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," so that, people of science, people of intellect, astronomers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, as well as clergy have put their faith in him.

This supporting evidence, which builds faith or confidence, is controlled by hope. Hope is the control factor. That is, what we do with the *facts of nature* is controlled by where we put our hope. Suppose I hope there is no God and therefore, no appointment with judgement after death? This idea will have a great affect on my selection and interpretation of factual data.

If I am controlled by the hope that there is no God, or judgement to come, then the facts of existence will be interpreted to support the belief that matter, form, and life have *come into being by chance and have developed by chance*. On the other hand, the hope of meaning, ultimate justice, life after death in the approving presence of God will cause me to see the facts of existence as explainable only on the grounds of God. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God" (Hebrews 11:3). In the outcome, the hope of immortality, or the hope of annihilation determines whether the *supporting evidence* will serve to build faith in God or faith in chance. These are the two faiths: faith in God and faith in chance.

***Contrary to those who feel that as knowledge increases, faith in God decreases, the supporting evidence for the wisdom and the power of God increase with every scientific discovery.*** For example, scientists now believe that the things that we see, the material universe came from that which we cannot see -- that it basically came from infinite energy --the ultimate "black hole." This is exactly what our text says; it is one of those "time capsules" hidden in the pages of the Bible. God is not the "God of the gaps." He is not the explanation of the mysterious unknown adopted by the ignorant as an explanation for what they don't know. Rather, with every increase in knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge, the greatness of God is revealed and the grounds of rational faith is strengthened. At the end of his long life, in a New York Times interview, Albert Einstein said, "The more I study science, the more I believe in God."

The DNA and RNA inheritance factors of biological science are recent to our day. We didn't know that there was a ridged plan for the ongoing of life. If it is true that one tablespoon of DNA could contain the genetic blueprint for all the people who have ever lived and who will live, that is a large order of faith. It appears that it is much harder for faith in chance to explain this remarkable thing. However, very easy for faith in an intelligent

planner, designer, Creator to explain. We found the blueprints --none of this just happened. I find this and every other amazing scientific discovery to be supporting evidence for my faith in God as a wise and beneficent Creator.

***Then there is the social front.*** Are people really animals become men, as the atheist would have us believe? If so, why does man have any more value than the rest of the animals? I think that man is more valuable than a cat, or the chicken you're going to have for dinner. Give me a choice between Gloria and the cat, and I'll pick Gloria every time! However, if there is no God, then I have nothing upon which to base my feeling. If man has value *only because* he has "outsmarted" the rest of the animals, then we are in a sorry state. If man is only an animal, what moral code is there that says, "You cannot take a human life?" You see, man was the only animal "created in the image of God."

Charles Darwin suggested that some races of people are closer to the ape than others; many people do not know that he said that, and that he said it often. Anthropologists need to face this issue squarely. There are many people who would contest Darwin. What does that do to *civil rights* and respect for our fellowmen around the world?

Atheism is not just a neat little theory; it has some far-reaching ramifications. If it is true, then there is no purpose, no design, no reason for morality, no basis for morality in the world, and no basis for racial equality. If it is true, then obviously, people could be millions of years apart; yet, that is simply not the case at all. The firm basis for all social issues is that "God created of one blood all races of men." There is no other basis that will stand the test of reason. The American constitution says the very same thing when it says, "All men are created equal." The blueprint for man is not to be found in the blueprint of a dog; yet, thousands of dog variations may be found there. This is supported by both observation and experimentation.

To assume there is no God, that we "just got here somehow," has many consequences including: no standard upon which to base morality, greater inclination toward suicide, loss of meaning, and lack of accountability and responsibility. Why live when there is no purpose or reason? Why be moral when morality is based on nothing? --when morality is just the idea of an individual, or even a group of individuals at any given time?

It is not dumb to believe in God; it is smart to believe in God. The Bible says reverence for God is the beginning of wisdom.

The first part of Hebrews 11:1, says that faith is the supported confidence concerning things hoped for. Faith has a reasoned content made up of real facts, experiences, and truths as found in history, archeology, geology, astronomy, biology, and sociology. For example: almost everything in science is explained by *gravity*; anyone who has taken a serious astronomy class understands that. Yet, we have not seen gravity, nor can we explain gravity itself. However, the idea of gravity does explain what we see. We don't doubt gravity just because we cannot fully explain it --so it is with God.

Now all these data are collected and arranged to support something hoped for. The process could well be compared to the growth of a scientific hypothesis into a theory, then ultimately into accepted scientific law. It

starts with observation, is carried forward with attempted explanation, and reaches its climax when all the facts contribute to and support the adopted theory. This is the development of the *intellectual side* of our faith in God.

But Hebrews 11:1 adds another dimension; faith (faith itself) is the conviction (evidence) concerning things unseen. How? Two things enter into this conviction: *First*, the purely intellectual confidence based upon supporting evidence --that is, what we can see and grasp tightly with our mind. *Second*, the enlightening or convicting work of the Holy Spirit as he works through our conscience. I shall not forget the confidence of one of my graduate professors, Dr. Joel Grace, former neuropsychologist for Saint Joseph's Hospital; he said, "I used to think that all that goes on in the mind could be explained by natural means; however there is more that goes on in the mind than what can be explained simply by neurology; there is the Holy Spirit." That is close to a verbatim quote.

As faith develops into saving faith, the Spirit of God acts as a catalyst to bring supporting evidence and human intellectual persuasion into firm conviction. Just as water added to hydraulic cement, sand, and gravel hardens them into concrete, so the work of the Holy Spirit firms fact and faith into settled conviction. Such conviction and conversion enabled Paul to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12), and Peter to say, "We believe and are sure that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69).

When we become Christians we crown, as it were, our persuasion that Christ is indeed the Savior of the world, and by an act of our own will commit our personal salvation to him. We are not Christians because we would blindly or stupidly put our faith in anything or anyone, but rather, we have good reason to "have faith in God."

There is ample supporting evidence for confidence in God. Therefore, let us come to him in the firm conviction that "He is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Let us come in the appointed way; Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." He said, "I am the way." Come --not to the minister --not to the front of the church; but come to God through Christ. It is Christ who said "come;" it is through prayer that we do come. One may come anytime, but *now* is always the best time.

Saint Thomas Aquinas had a way of thinking to help the doubter. He would simply ask, "Where did we come from?" When the person attempted an answer, he would ask, "Yes, but, where did that come from; what was before that?" At some point you are forced to say "It must have already been there." You are forced to say the word "Eternal" --your are forced to say, "God."

The smartest people of science or faith will say, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth --and don't expect me to know how He did it."