

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD

Hebrews 11:1-7

Key Verse: 11:6

"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

We live in a pragmatic society. So most people are self-seeking. God did not make us to be benefit-seeking, but to be sacrificial. When we study Hebrews 11, we learn that we must have faith that pleases God. Today let's study in verses 1-7 the general concept of faith and a few examples of men of faith who pleased God.

I. The character of faith (1)

Look at verse 1. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." In short, faith is invisible, but it is spiritual reality that we cannot see. This verse tells us that Christian faith includes hope as an essential factor. In Christianity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are one, though each person is different. Likewise, faith, hope and love are one body, though the meaning of each word is different. Where there is faith, there is love. Where there is love, there is hope.

After the Fall, the world was cursed. But God made a plan of world salvation. For this, God first chose a 75-year-old man called Abram, to

raise him as a blessing. At that time, Abram was full of despair because he had no son to inherit his name, even though his name, "Abram," meant a noble father. But God had faith in him. God said to him, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing" (Ge 12:2). God's faith for Abram was to make him a blessing -- ultimately for all peoples of all nations (Ge 12:3). God's faith was indeed great. Abram might have wished to have a son, but not so many sons as to amount to a nation. He had no idea to become a source of blessing to others. What did Abram say in response to God's calling? When Abram heard God's word of promise, he did not wave his nose in the air. He did not protest, saying, "You make me laugh." He simply believed and hoped that it would be done as God had said.

We also see in Jesus' life and work that he had faith in God. For example, his disciples were a handful of hillbillies and fishermen. They were clumps of human desires and a conglomeration of various human weaknesses. Jesus wanted to raise them as the best leaders who ever lived in the world, particularly in world salvation work and history. Jesus saw them with eyes of faith; despite their demerits, they were great; their greatness was their learning minds.

Before conversion, Paul had faith in Judaism. After conversion, he had faith in God. When he had faith in God, God's hope became his very own. In the hope of God, he had a plan to evangelize the whole world through Roman roads. Finally he went to Rome in chains when he was old and tired. Paul had to be tried before the Roman Emperor. But he did not despair. He was sure of what he hoped for.

Paul believed that God had evangelized the Roman Empire. Paul never saw the evangelization of Rome with his eyes, but it was done according to his faith. Paul had faith in God, but if he had not done anything, his faith would have been nothing but idealism. Paul rented an apartment and made many one-to-one Bible study appointments and taught mostly Jewish immigrants first, day and night. Some believed, most rejected his teachings and ran away. Paul's ministry at Rome was not as prosperous as he had expected. But he did not despair. History proves that his faith continues to speak to us. These days many people name their sons Paul, and their daughters Pauline, while they name their dogs Nero. It is because they want to be as great as Paul. Paul was great because he had faith in God; more to the point, he believed the spiritual realities. Paul was a political victim of the times. But in the sight of God, Paul was the top leader of the times because of his faith.

As we know well, the opposite of faith is fear, and the opposite of hope is despair. These days we see so many who are gripped with fear. One married couple are both medical doctors. They are proud of their achievements and honor. They have everything they want. But they have no faith. So they are slaves of fear. They have no faith to drink Chicago water. Faith in God doesn't seem beneficial, because faith does not give immediate benefit. But only faith in God gives true benefit. Let's read verse 1 again. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

II. The foundation of faith (2,3)

First, creation faith. In order to have faith that pleases God, we must know what the foundation of faith is. Look at verse 3. "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." Verse 3 is written philosophically. But this verse is equivalent to Genesis 1:1, which says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The foundation of Christian faith is to believe that God made man and the world. When people believe that God made man and the world, they become godly people. When people do not believe that God made man and the world, they become ungodly people. Godly people have the fear of God and the good integrity of humankind. Ungodly people only have the survival of the fittest.

Throughout history, thoughtful men and women have searched for the origin of all things. They have made endless effort to know "the First Cause" so that they might come to have a right view of man. For many centuries men devoted themselves to the study of ontology and epistemology in order to know the root of the origin of all things. However, in the last part of the 18th century, men gave up the search for the origin and meaning of man's being. As a result, they came to ignore the spiritual world as well as spiritual realities. They began to see man from an existential approach. They dealt mainly with man's inner problems, such as anxiety and the fear of death and so on. In short, they reduced man's thinking from the spiritual level to the physical level. When they did so, their way of thinking began to digress downward. They became pragmatic. Pragmatism is not a philosophy. It is an idea which completely ignores the question "why?"

Pragmatism lets people justify their sinful behavior.

No one has ever been able to give a clear answer to where the world came from, or what the meaning of man's existence is. But the Bible says that God made man and the world. Man did not come into being through a process of evolution. When we have creation faith, we can understand that the universe was formed by God's command. We can also understand that "what is seen was not made out of what was visible." By faith we understand that God made each person with a definite purpose and absolute meaning of life, and, most importantly, God made man and the world for his own glory. Suppose man was made through the process of evolution. Then man's life would be nothing but a by-product of "chance," "accidents," or "joke." But by faith we believe that God made man and the world, and that among God's creatures, I am number one.

Second, God made man and the world out of nothing. Look at verse 3 again. "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." This verse indicates that God made this world out of nothing. Our God is the Almighty God who made all things out of nothing. It is easy for us to assemble a readymade desk or cook some instant food. But making something out of nothing is beyond imagination. But our God is the Almighty God who made man and the world out of nothing; this is creation faith. Those who have creation faith can say like King David, "God is a stronghold, a high mountain and our fortress."

Look at verse 2. "This is what the ancients were commended for." Many people of the past thought that their generation was the worst;

so, they could not live by faith. But this is not true. Abel's time was worse than the present time. Enoch's time was worse than the present time. Noah's time was worse than the present time. People usually complain about their life situation or their times in order to make an excuse for their ungodly lives. But in the spiritual world what matters is one's faith. Always, those who had faith in God were those who pleased God, despite their situation.

III. The faith of Abel, Enoch and Noah (4-7)

First, Abel's faith. Look at verse 4. "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead." God preferred Abel's gift to that of Cain. It seems that God is unfair. But Hebrews tells us that Abel's offering was accepted because of his faith.

After the Fall, in the time of Abel, the relationship between God and men had been completely broken, and human beings were relativistic toward God. In short, men were God's enemies. Men lived in sin and under Satan's torment. Since men were gripped by Satan's fear, to approach the Holy God was harder than dying itself. Because of their sins, people in the time of Abel could not bear even to hear the word "God," not to mention to come to God.

But by faith Abel approached God. By faith Abel went to God with an offering. It was like a son who goes to his daddy with a Christmas card. In this way, Abel opened the way to God for himself as well as

for all men. God was pleased by Abel and commended him as a righteous man. His older brother Cain went to God because his younger brother did so. Later, out of jealousy, Cain hated his brother Abel and beat him to death. So Abel is dead, but still he speaks. As the author says, "...by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead." He stills tells us that we can come to God and have peace with God by faith, overcoming our fear of Satan.

Second, Enoch's faith. Let's look at verse 5. "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God." Genesis 5:24 says, "Enoch walked with God." In this one verse, Enoch's life is summed up. After the Fall, the world was full of fallen men. The world was filled up with God-haters. No one recognized God as God or walked with God. But one man, Enoch, walked with God. He was the only friend of God. He was the watchman of God for his times. Enoch was a lonely man, living among fallen men. They hated him because his holy pilgrimage seemed to offend them, and it hurt their sinful pride. He was the object of jokes and ridicule from the fallen men of his time. They hated Enoch as much as they hated God. They thought he was not fit to live because he walked with God. So they searched for him in order to destroy him.

Enoch's life was in great danger. He was running for his life. But he found no hiding place in the world. So God took him to heaven so that he might not experience a cruel death at the hands of God-haters. Because he walked with God as God's friend, he was commended by God. We must overcome sinful peer pressure in order to live a life of faith.

Third, Noah's faith. Noah is another example of a man of faith who pleases God. Look at verse 7. "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith." The times of Noah, the times of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the times of the end of the Roman Empire were the times of amorality. People of Noah's times lived according to their sinful nature. They were the examples of ungodly people. They were hedonistic, they were ungodly and they were God-haters.

But grandfather Noah, one person, had holy fear of God. When God commanded him to build a huge ark, he obeyed the word of God absolutely. In short, Noah honored God as God and respected God's word as God's word. But the people of the times mocked him, saying, "He's a dummy. He has a screw loose." Their accusations sounded as if Noah were a criminal simply because he lived a life of faith. But he was not condemned; rather he condemned them when God judged them by the flood. Noah believed that God is living and that his promises are true. He paid more attention to God's words than to the criticisms of people. As a result, Noah became an heir of righteousness, while they all perished. Noah listened to the word of God in holy fear. Because of this, he pleased God and was commended by God.

Fourth, we can also please God with faith. Look at verse 6. "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who

earnestly seek him." This verse teaches us two things about how to have faith that pleases God.

First, we must believe that God exists. There are many people who attend churches. But not many people believe that God exists. One young man studies the Bible and comes to worship service regularly. But he does not pray with a clear prayer topic. So he did not experience God's answer to prayer. One day he began to ask, "Does God exist?" On the other hand, the missionaries and shepherds in Russia began to pray early in the morning for their Russian Summer Bible Conference. As they prayed, they experienced God's presence with them and believed that he would answer their prayers. They prayed for women students -- for 12 "Marys." Then women students from the Physics Institute began to come to Bible study, though less than 1% of Physics Institute students are women. How can we believe that God exists? According to the example of Noah, we can believe that God exists when we live a holy life; animal party men cannot believe that God is living.

Second, we must seek God's reward only. Many say, "I don't want any reward." But everybody is striving to receive a certain reward from a certain person. Worldly rewards are no more than gray hairs and funeral services. But those who live for the glory of God receive eternal life and the kingdom of God as their reward.

To live by faith is like building a huge ark all by oneself. It requires absolute obedience. But without faith it is impossible to please God. May God help us to have faith that pleases God in this generation.