

Faith Factors

By Steven Harper

Within the circle of individuals who profess to be followers of Christ, there is little or no argument that faith saves us; the differences come when one tries to define what that saving faith is. Some argue that faith is the simple mental acknowledgment that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; others will just as strongly argue that it is much more than that. Obviously, they cannot both be right, so to know which is true, we must allow God's word to define that for us, and accept the answer as true and right. After all, we are talking about a matter that God's word says, without it, "it is impossible to please Him [God]" (Heb. 11:6). Since professing believers obviously want to please God, it becomes vitally important, then, that we have the right kind of faith to ensure we are doing the very thing that will bring us forgiveness and eternal salvation.

Since faith is, as just noted, vital to pleasing God, let us also let Him define it — and He does: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Faith, according to man, is "belief without evidence" [as our modern dictionaries define it]; faith, according to God, is belief based on evidence, though the object of the belief may not be seen [as is the case with belief in Jesus, God, and heaven]. One may have faith in Jesus and heaven just as certainly as one may believe the city of Paris, France, exists; though I have never been there and seen it in person, I have seen what I believe to be credible pictures and heard credible stories from some who have. In the same sense, I can believe in Jesus because I have read credible accounts of those who walked with Him, and I can believe in heaven because He has given us credible accounts of it, and others have recorded credible information about it.

But God did not simply define faith by the mental conviction [Heb. 11:1]; in that same context, He went on to give us examples [Heb. 11] of individuals who had the kind of faith that pleased Him, and there are some important factors of faith that we should note for our spiritual good — things that truly define the kind of faith that pleases God. If these factors define our faith, then we may know that our faith is pleasing to God, too.

Factor 1: Vision. (Heb. 11:13-16) The list of individuals cited in this chapter were all people of faith, and the writer notes for us that they "all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." [It should be noted here that this is a figurative expression; they did not literally see these things for which they lived, for heaven itself was one of the things for which they lived and they desired "a better, that is, a heavenly country."]

These people of faith lived with a vision for what they could not actually see. Though Abraham could not see the son of promise, he believed God's word and lived as if he would come, just as God said. Though Moses could not foresee the deliverance God would bring to the Israelites when he was told to go back to Egypt, he believed in God's word and he went back and did everything God said to do. For all of these individuals, none could see heaven, but they trusted in God's word and believed that it was real and their lives reflected that belief. They could see the unseen — because of their faith in God's word — and they were able to hold fast to that faith in some extremely difficult times and situations. Faith takes vision, if we want to truly please God.

Factor 2: Action. (Heb. 11:4-39) A common factor that we should note in the description of all of these individuals is that they all acted because of their faith. Abel did not simply believe in God; he offered a sacrifice. Noah did not simply believe in God; he moved with godly fear and built the ark. Abraham did not simply believe in God; he offered his son Isaac as God commanded. Moses did not simply believe in God; he led the people. The Israelites did not simply believe in God; they marched around Jericho. Others are certainly mentioned, but a

common factor in all of them was not just belief in God, but also action based on that belief in God. I would strongly emphasize that their faith, in fact, demanded they act! If they had not acted because of their belief [and trust] in God, He would not have been pleased with them!

This is an important factor that is not just ignored today, but something that is often rejected and the very idea denigrated. Far too many religious men teach that man must “simply believe” and then vehemently deny that man must actually do anything in regards to their “faith.” [I note it in this way because this kind of “faith” does not match God’s definition and, in fact, falls far short of it.] The claim is that if man does anything towards his own salvation, then he could claim “works salvation” and take away the glory from God. Such arguments are weak attempts to deflect attention away from such examples as have just been noted that show definitively that faith is much more than a mental acknowledgment of certain facts, but includes and, in fact, requires action based on that mental conviction. None of the individuals noted in this chapter would claim they saved themselves! They would all gladly acknowledge that whatever blessings they received and the very salvation for which they lived was because of God, and they were merely doing what God commanded them to do. That is what true faith is!

Factor 3: Endurance. (Heb. 11:32-38) Another common factor in all of these examples of faith — one that must not be overlooked or neglected — is that of endurance. Endurance, in regards to faith, is what makes one faithful. A person of faith who does not hold onto that faith cannot, of course, be called faithful. If we are seeking to please God through faith, we must realize that it is something we must obtain through the hearing of God’s word (Rom. 10:17), but it is also something that must be strengthened (2Peter 1:5-11) and kept until we die. Faithfulness is defined by a life of faith — not just a moment in time. To be able to honestly expect eternal salvation, we must not have faith for a moment, for a short time, or for even many years; we must have faith until we die!

When we look at all the individuals named in this chapter, we see that faithfulness — not just faith as a simple mental acknowledgment of God — was how their life was defined. They lived for God and some, in fact, died for God; but even in that death, they held onto their faith because they were looking beyond this life and forward to the next. Noah endured ridicule and rejection as he preached to a sin-filled world, but he did not surrender his faith — and he was saved in the flood. Abraham endured the pain of having to offer up his only son of promise, but he did not surrender his faith — and he was blessed abundantly. Many unnamed individuals endured torture, fire, mocking and scourging, imprisonment, stoning, and even death itself, but they did not surrender their faith — and they were ultimately blessed.

If you are one who sincerely seeks to please God, please know that you must have true faith to do that. That faith must be such that you look beyond the things of this life and see the unseen things and believe they are real; you must act on that belief and do the things God says you must do; and you must hold onto that faith until you die or until time ends [whichever comes first]. Then — and only then — can you be said to have the kind of faith that pleases God.