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.”

In chapter 10:22 the author of Hebrews urges us to draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings. Because of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, he opened the new and living way for us to come to God with confidence which comes from faith. Hebrews chapter 11 is called ‘the chapter of faith.’ What, then, is faith? Chapter 11 teaches us the definition of faith and the examples of many heroes and heroines of faith who lived by faith. Through this chapter I pray that we may learn how to live by faith and how we can have faith that pleases God. Amen!

First, what is faith? (1-2) There are many definitions of the word ‘faith’ in dictionaries, but the definition in verse 1 is best. Look at verse 1. “***Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.***” Faith is confidence in what we hope for. This means that we have confidence in what God says and in what we expect from Him. We are sure of what God promises us even though we have not gotten it yet. The word ‘confidence’ in Greek is ‘substance’ or ‘real thing’. Faith is the ‘substance’ which we expect from God. Faith is also assurance about what we do not see. Even though we do not see at present, we have confidence that it will happen in God’s time. For example, God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as stars in the sky. At that time Abraham had no child. He was too old to produce a child and his wife Sarah was also too old to conceive. But Abraham had confidence that God would keep his promise and saw his children as many as stars with his eyes of faith. Every night he looked up at the sky and counted stars as if he had as many children as the stars.

In 1984 Dr. Joseph Ahn went to Mexico as the first missionary for Latin America from UBF. It was not easy for a Korean diplomat to advance the gospel and raise Jesus’ disciples in Mexico. For a year he had no convert, not even one worshiper, but only himself. But Dr. Ahn believed Jesus’ promise in Matthew 28:18-20. On Sunday he drew pictures of sheep and put them in empty chairs as if Mexican worshipers were sitting there. He had confidence that someday God would fill the chairs with Mexican sheep. Now there are more than 40 UBF chapters in Latin America and more than 1,000 disciples of Jesus are growing in each country.

Confidence and assurance do not come out of nowhere. They come through prayer. When we pray, God gives us confidence and assurance. Jesus said to his disciples in Mark 11:22-24, “*Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “Truly I tell you, if anyone who says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours*.” Do you believe that you can move a mountain? If you think it is impossible, the mountain will not move. But if you believe that it is possible, it will move. How? When you pray, God will move it. In the 1980s sending missionaries to Russia seemed to be mission impossible. The iron curtain still blocked the West under the Cold War. But Dr. Samuel Lee believed that God would move the mountain and lift up the iron curtain if we prayed. He asked us to pray for sending UBF missionaries to Russia within 10 years, So, the whole church people around the world began to pray. We danced Russian dances and drank Russian tea as if we already went to Russia. Dr. Jim Rabchuk sang ‘Moscow Night’ every Friday night during the student testimony meetings. We believed and prayed. Such confidence that God would answer our prayer came from faith in the power of prayer. Since we began to pray, not in 10 years but in 5 years, in 1990 we had the first Bible conference in Moscow with 20 Russian students. At that time God used Mr. Gorbachev to break the wall and open the door for missionaries.

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. These days almost every day I visit the WashU campus and pray to prepare for the fall semester. I want to advance the gospel, raise Jesus’ disciples, and expand the gospel in Wash U, but the pandemic situation is not likely to be improved. How can I work for God’s kingdom in this situation? So, I began to pray. I believe that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. When I pray, God will move the mountain. When we pray, we will see God’s miracle. One famous pastor in Korea said, “Faith is to believe that we can break a rock by throwing an egg.” Of course, it is impossible for us to break a rock with an egg. But faith is throwing an egg to a rock believing that God will break the rock. What he meant is that living by faith is experiencing God’s miracle every day as a rock is broken by an egg. Do you want to see God’s miracle in your daily life? Start with prayer. Do you have a mountain in front of you? Pray and ask God to move the mountain. Amen!

Second, creation faith.(3) Look 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***.” Creation faith is to believe that the universe was formed at God’s command. In other words, it is to believe Genesis 1:1, which is “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” By faith we understand that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. This verse means that when we believe, we understand that all visible things came from the invisible God. When people don’t believe in God’s creation, their thinking becomes futile and their foolish hearts are darkened. Although they claim to be wise, they become fools. (Ro 1:21-22) It is interesting that by faith we understand. This means that understanding comes from faith. When we believe God’s creation, all things are understandable and the existence of all things on this earth make sense.

Therefore, creation faith (Faith in God’s creation) is the foundation for all beliefs in Christianity such as all miracles in the OT and all stories and works of Jesus in the NT. How could the Israelites cross the Red Sea as on dry land? How could a virgin give birth to a child without having a relationship with a man? How could Jesus be raised from the dead without believing in God's creation? When we have God’s creation faith, all things are possible. Creation faith is to believe that our God is the almighty creator God (*Elohim*), that nothing is impossible with Him. Creation faith is also to believe that our God is faithful. Our God who promises is faithful to keep it. The ancients were commended because they lived by faith that God is Almighty and that he is faithful. (10:23, 11:2) Let’s study about the heroes and heroines of faith one by one who lived by faith. Let’s see what made their faith special and commendable.

Third, Abel’s faith in worship (4) What made Abel’s faith special and admirable before God? It is in his worship. Look at verse 4. “***By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous, when God spoke well of his offering. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.***” According to Genesis 4:4 God looked with favor on Abel and his offering. God did not look at only his offering, but Abel’s heart. People look at outward appearance, but God looks at our heart. Abel’s heart for offering was right. He offered with gratitude and joy. On the contrary God did not look with favor on Cain and his offering. God did not accept Cain before he offered because his heart was not right. He was ungrateful and grumpy. People bring issues about the content of their offering saying that God prefers bloody sacrifice. But this verse focuses on their attitude for offering.

Offering is a part of worship. Abel feared God and brought his best with gratitude and joy. God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Co 9:7) By faith Abel prepared his offering with all his heart and brought his best. What is your attitude toward worship? Do you fear God and bring your best to God every Sunday? Do you cheat God and rob his money? I pray that God may be pleased with our worship service and our attitude toward him. God looks at our heart.

Fourth, Enoch’s faith in his personal relationship with God. (5) 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.***” According to this verse Enoch had faith that pleased God. What is faith that pleases God? Enoch’s story is written shortly in Genesis 5:24. “*Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away*.” Enoch walked faithfully with God. Noah also walked with God (Ge 6:9). What does ‘walk faithfully with God’ mean? What do people usually do when they walk? They talk. Almost every day Mary and I walk around forty minutes. When we walk, we talk. Mostly she talks and I listen. Enoch talked with God. He had a daily walk with God. Enoch prayed. He had a deep personal relationship with God through prayer. We often talk with God through prayer.

These days people walk faithfully with their smartphones. Wherever they go they carry their smartphones. Whenever they sit, they use smartphones. Statistically speaking, people use their smartphones at least 3 hours a day. I pray that we may walk faithfully with God, not with smartphones. Several years ago, Ben West said that he would listen to an audio Bible while he was driving to work. He wanted to spend more time with God by hearing the word of God. I saw the image of Enoch in him who walked faithfully with God.

Fifth, Noah’s faith in his perseverance (7) Noah’s faith is characterized with his perseverance. 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 is in keeping with faith***.” Noah’s story with the flood judgment is written in Genesis 6-9. God planned to judge this sinful world and commanded Noah to build the ark for his family. But it was not easy for Noah to build the ark. He confronted obstacles and challenges within and without. He had to build the ark according to what God had designed. He had to prepare all the materials. He had to persuade his sons to join his work. We know how difficult it is for us to persuade our children to join us. Noah also endured ridicule, mockery, and disturbance from his people. Noah endured all these. He persevered through all difficulties and hardships and built the ark as God had commanded. His persevering faith was commended by God.

Thus far we have studied three heroes of faith who pleased God. How can we please God? How can we live by faith that pleases God? Verse 6 gives us an answer. 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.***” It is impossible for us to please God without having faith in him. Only having faith in God pleases him. Having faith in God means that we believe that God exists, which means God is living and active. We believe that even though God is invisible, he works, saves, loves, creates, heals, cares, and judges. Next, we must believe that God rewards those who earnestly seek him. This means that our living God is good and faithful to respond to our prayer. We must believe two things to please God: First, God exists. Second, he rewards. Amen!

In conclusion faith is confidence in what we expect from God and assurance about what we pray for. Dr. Joseph Park’s family must believe that they have already received a green card by faith. We must believe that God advanced the gospel, raised Jesus’ disciples, and expanded his kingdom in Wash U and all other campuses in St. Louis this semester. May God help us to live by faith so that we may please God and experience his miracle every day. Amen!