

“The Gift of All Gifts”

Hebrews 11:1-2

December 23, 2018

INTRO: Let me ask you few questions as we begin...

- Do you accept the connection of Christ & faith?
- Okay... but how about Christmas & faith?
- *How do you connect your faith w/ Christmas?*

VIDEO: *“Messy Christmas”*

- *To what extent do you have faith in that video?*
 - Faith in that PLAN of God?
 - Faith in that POWER of God?
 - Faith in that PERSON of God?
 - Faith in that PURPOSE of God?
 - Faith in that PEOPLE of God?

BIG IDEA: *Biblical faith is the gift of ALL gifts...
It is the gift that opens all other divine gifts.*

CONTEXT: Hebrews... “Hold On!” & [Hebrew 10:37-39](#)

³⁷ For yet in a very little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. ³⁸ But My righteous one will live by faith; and if he shrinks back, I have no pleasure in him. ³⁹ But we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed, but (we are) those who have faith and obtain life.

Today: Transitioning from *Exhortation to Clarification...*

BIG IDEA: *Biblical faith is the gift of ALL gifts...
It is the gift that opens all other divine gifts.*

Faith proves to the mind, the reality of things that cannot be seen by the bodily eye. – Matthew Henry

TEXT:

¹ Now faith is the assurance/reality of what is hoped for, the conviction/proof of what is not seen. ² For our ancestors won God's approval/witness by it.

PREVIEW: F. A. I. T. H.

- Foundational Faith
- Assertive Faith
- Inspirational Faith
- Tested Faith
- Holy Faith

There is scarcely any verse of the New Testament more important than this, for it states what is the nature of all true faith, and it is the only definition of faith which is attempted in the Scriptures.... Eternal life depends on the existence and exercise of biblical faith, per Mark 16:16, hence the importance of an accurate understanding of its nature. – Barnes

T/S: As we have already seen & will continue to see...

- **Divine divider** (see 10:37-39 & 11:6)
- **Divine discipler** (saves, sanctifies, & secures)

F: Foundational Faith

- **Personal-gift of grace**... Ephesians 2:8-10
 - *From* the LORD
 - *IN* the LORD
 - *For* the LORD

VIDEO: "What Is Faith?"

The concept of faith is primarily that of a personal relationship with God that determines the priorities of one's life. This relationship is one of love that is built on trust and dependence. We receive it by trusting the saving work of Jesus. Faith is the basic Christian experience, the decision for Christ Jesus. It is the acceptance of Christ's lordship (God-given, absolute authority). In this sense faith is doubly a break from the past: it is one's removal from sin, & it is one's removal from all other religious allegiances (1 Thess. 1:9). As a break from the past, faith is the beginning of relation to God & not an end. It is... the inauguration of incorporation "in Christ," in which one continues to grow and develop. - Holman Bible Dictionary.

- **Proclamation-gift**... Romans 10:17
 - *Creator-Christ*
 - *Corruption-came*
 - *Coming-Christ*
 - *Christ-came*
 - *Church-in-community*
 - *Christ-coming-again*

- **Producing-gift**... *Fruit of the Spirit* – Gal. 5
 - *Quality* of faith vs. “quantity” of faith
 - The faith of a “*mustard seed*”
 - *Child-like* faith vs. complicated faith...

Outside the Gospels faith is related to the keynote concepts of the Christian message: the state of salvation ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)), sanctification ([Acts 26:18](#)), purification ([Acts 15:9](#)), justification or imputed righteousness ([Rom. 4:5](#); [5:1](#); [Gal. 3:24](#)), adoption as children of God ([Gal. 3:26](#)). Each of these comes by faith.

Faith is also the living out of the religion; it is Christianity in action. This is the meaning of “We walk by faith, not by sight” ([2 Cor. 5:7](#)). Walking represents the totality of one’s way of life.

Faith changes the standards and priorities of life.

- **Protective-gift**... Armor of God – Eph. 6

- Power-gift of the Spirit – 1 Corinthians 12
 - *Saves*
 - *Seals*
 - *Sanctifies*
 - *Serves*
 - *Sends*

A: Assertive Faith

- Faith is always a verb in the Old Testament
 - Biblical faith is **BOLD** love...
 - NOT a “blind leap”

- Faith **URNS...**
 - *Responds*
 - *Respects*
 - Repents

- Faith **TRUSTS...**
 - **Confess** with your mouth...
 - **Believe** in your heart...
 - **Surrender** & Submit to “Jesus as LORD”

- Faith **TESTIFIES...** (BC @ AD & mMm)
 - You’ve been ACQUITTED
 - You’ve been ADOPTED
 - You’ve been ASSURED
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17-21
 - John 8:32 & 36

I: Inspirational Faith

➤ *Faith in the face of fear...*

- Exodus 14:14
- Daniel 3...
- Acts 4...
- Stephen in Acts 7...
- Hebrews 11...

Lane pointed out, *"faith" is objective because it bestows upon the objects of hope a present reality, enabling the believer to enjoy now the "full certainty of future realization."*

Faith is the objective grounds upon which subjective confidence may be based.

Such faith springs from a personal encounter with God. *This faith enables one to venture into the future "supported only by the word of God."* - New American Commentary

➤ *Faith that follows...* (out of love... John 14:15)

- John 3:36; Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20

T: Tested Faith

➤ *The reality of Spiritual Warfare...*

- 1 Peter 5:8... 2 Cor. 4:4... 1 Cor. 2:14
- Jesus & Paul on **WOLVES**
- False teachers in *Jude, Titus, Peter, John...*

- *Beware the sins of:*
 - **Fear...** vs. *faith*
 - **Worry...** vs. *worship*
 - **Doubt...** vs. *trust*

VIDEO: Eric Ludy – “*Anatomy of Faith*”

- *Hebrews overall & ch.11 specifically...*
 - *Starting* by faith is *essential...*
 - **Finishing by faith is the final test.**

True Bible faith is confident obedience to God's Word in spite of circumstances and consequences. Read that last sentence again and let it soak into your mind and heart.

This faith operates quite simply. God speaks and we hear His Word. We trust His Word and act on it no matter what the circumstances are or what the consequences may be. *The circumstances may be impossible, and the consequences frightening; but we obey God's Word just the same and believe Him to do what is right and what is best.*

The unsaved world does not understand true Bible faith, probably because it sees so little faith in action in the church today.

Faith is not some "feeling" that we manufacture. It is our total response to what God has revealed in His Word.

- Warren Weirsbe

H: Holy Faith

- *Word; Will, Ways...*
- *Plan; Promise; Person...*
- *Grace; Gospel; Glory...*
- *Turn; Trust; Testify...*
- *Miracle; MESSIAH; Mission!*
 - See John 17...
 - See Acts 2:41-47
 - See Stephen... our first martyr in Acts 7
 - See Paul's transformation & inspiration
 - See **JESUS!!!**

CLOSE:

- God guarantees that biblical faith...
 - *FEARS*
 - *FIXES*
 - *FOLLOWS*
 - *FIGHTS*
 - 2 Timothy 4
 - *I have fought the good fight..*
 - *I have kept the faith...*
 - 1 Corinthians 16:13
 - *Stand firm in the faith...*
 - *By faith... standing firm...*
 - *FINISHES*
 - Christ did...
 - Christians will as well!

Perseverance is the demonstration of faith.

Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house: it gives confidence and assurance that he will stand. [cf. [Matthew 7:21ff](#)]. – W.W.

Faith enables us to see what others cannot see
(note [Heb. 11:7, 13, 27](#)). **As a result, faith enables us to do what others cannot do!** – W.W.

Dr. Oswald Sanders:

"Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen."

Biblical, saving-faith is... missional and miraculous, loving-belief in lasting-obedience. – JDP

Let me show you how faith AND biblical Christmas out-shine the foolishness of cultural Christmas... Why would anyone settle for silly reindeer when there's the Savior's Irish Elks to be had?

Let's PRAY!

STUDY Notes:

Hebrews 11:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Now *faith* is the *assurance* of things *hoped for*, the *conviction* of things *not seen*. ² For *by it* the people of old *received their commendation*.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Main Idea: *Our Old Testament forefathers received the salvific blessings of God by faith. New covenant believers receive these blessings by faith as well and so must emulate the faith of those who came before.*

[Hebrews 11](#) is one of the most familiar passages in the entire Bible; it's the so-called hall of faith. While familiarity with certain passages in Scripture is wonderful, it can also be dangerous.

We may become so accustomed to the words of a chapter that we lose sight of their meaning and function within the section's larger context.

*Hebrews 11 comes **after a repeated series of warnings** to the original audience. The author has been reminding his congregation not to take the gospel lightly and not to have a superficial understanding of sin ([10:31](#)). Indeed, he even warns them what is in store for those who spurn the Son of God and set aside the gospel ([10:29](#)).*

[Hebrews 10:32-39](#) connects the admonitions and exhortations of [chapter 10](#) to [chapter 11](#). “Remember the earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings” ([10:32](#)). These are words we need to remember as we enter into chapter 11. We must remember the “hard struggle” that the audience is called to endure in the midst of persecutions and trials. As the author reminds them, “We are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are saved” ([10:39](#)). Notice the theme here: perseverance.

Perseverance is the demonstration of faith.

Faith is grounded in what God has done for us in Christ. The author expresses confidence that his audience’s endurance of persecution for the sake of Christ is a demonstration of their faith. This leads us right into the main subject of [Hebrews 11](#).

Additionally, as I have already mentioned many times, one of the author’s primary goals is to teach us how to read the Old Testament. ***Christians must read the Old Testament Christologically. God embedded in the history of redemption types and shadows that pointed forward to Jesus Christ. Thus, from Genesis to Revelation the Bible tells one story—the story of the grace of God found only in Jesus Christ.***

Yet, we must also remember that reading the Old Testament Christologically does not mean we are imposing something on the Old Testament that is not already there. In fact, one of the most important hermeneutical observations we can glean from [Hebrews 11](#) is that the true people of God in the Old Testament (those with circumcised hearts) understood that the old covenant and all of its attendant features pointed forward to a Messiah.

This was something they received *by faith*. In other words, **just as by faith we look back to the cross of Christ and his resurrection to receive the salvific grace of God, so too did the Old Testament saints look forward, through the types and shadows of the old covenant, to the Messiah. They thereby received the salvific blessings of God by faith.**

FAITH:

Trusting commitment of one person to another, particularly of a person to God. Faith is the central concept of Christianity. One may be called a Christian only if one has faith.

Our English word “faith” comes from the Latin *fides*, as developed through the Old French words *fei* and *feid*. In Middle English (1150-1475) “faith” replaced a word that eventually evolved into “belief.” “Faith” came to mean “loyalty to a person to whom one is bound by promise or duty.” Faith was fidelity. “Belief” came to be distinguished from faith as an intellectual process having to do with the acceptance of a proposition. The verb form of “faith” dropped out of English usage toward the end of the sixteenth century.

A. Old Testament Expressions

The word “faith” occurs in the Old Testament only twice in the KJV, eighteen times in the RSV, and sixteen times in the NIV. This discrepancy becomes even more interesting when we note that the RSV and the NIV agree on only five of these verses of Scripture ([Deut. 32:51](#); [Judg. 9:16,19](#); [Isa. 26:2](#); [Hab. 2:4](#)), and the KJV concurs with them only on the translation of [Habakkuk 2:4](#). These differences revolve around problems with the translation of two Hebrew roots, *ma'al* and *‘aman*.

The first of these roots, *ma'al*, is a negative term that means “to be deceitful, treacherous, or unfaithful.” The RSV, NAS, and the NIV translate this word with the phrase “broke faith” ([Deut. 32:51](#); [Josh. 22:16](#)) or with “acted unfaithfully” ([Deut. 32:51](#); [Josh. 7:1](#)). The KJV translates this root in those same verses with the word “trespass.” While the Hebrew uses no single noun for “faith” in these verses, the translators have in each case rendered the sense of the Hebrew.

The second root, *‘aman*, is more difficult to translate because its meaning changes as it passes through the various Hebrew verb forms. There are seven such forms, but this root occurs in only three of them. In the first and most basic verb form the root means to support or nourish and is used of a parent’s care for a child. In the second verb-form one encounters a range of meanings having to do with being secure.

Only the third verb form was rendered with the Greek word for faith in the New Testament and in the Septuagint, an early Greek version of the Old Testament originating in Alexandria. *‘Aman* expresses the idea of stability and steadfastness in this form and is translated as standing firm ([Job 39:24](#), RSV; [Isa. 7:9b](#) NIV), or “to trust” (a person) or “to believe” (a statement). One stands firm in one’s convictions. In relationships, one trusts persons and believes their testimony

or promises. Thus, we find *no Hebrew noun for “faith”* in the Old Testament, only verbs that have been translated with “faith” because of New Testament influence.

*If we do not find the noun “faith” in the Old Testament, we surely find the concept named with other words. In the Old Testament faith is described as the “**fear of God**” ([Gen. 20:11](#); [Ps. 111:10](#); [Eccl. 12:13](#); [Mal. 4:2](#)), and in terms of **trust** ([2 Chron. 20:20](#); [Ps. 4:5](#), [Isa. 26:4](#)), and **obedience** ([Ex. 19:5](#); [1 Sam. 15:22](#), [Jer. 7:23](#)).*

Faith is a New Testament concept that encompasses and enriches these Old Testament concepts.

The English versions of the Old Testament have translated a pair of Hebrew verbs using the noun “faith.” They do so in order to express the understanding of God’s relation to humanity that has grown out of the New Testament.

Because the Old Testament does not have a word equivalent to the English noun, “faith,” does not mean the idea of faith is unimportant for the Old Testament.

Habakkuk 2:4 was properly taken by Paul as the center of Old Testament religion. God prepared the way for His people in mercy and grace, then called them to obedience. To accept the responsibilities of God’s covenant was to trust His word that He alone was God and to commit one’s life to His promises for the present and future. That is faith.

B. New Testament Expressions

The Greek noun, *pistis* (faith), is related to the verb *pisteuo* (I have faith, trust, believe). The noun and verb are found virtually everywhere in the New Testament, with the notable exception that the noun is absent altogether from John’s Gospel and occurs only once in 1 John. The verb form does not occur in Philemon, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, or Revelation.

Classical Greek used *pistis* and *piseuo* to mean “trust” or “confidence.” In this period belief in the existence of the gods of the Greek pantheon would be expressed with the verb *nomizo* (to think, believe, hold, consider). In the Hellenistic period, however, both the noun and verb moved from secular to religious usage. The noun came to mean piety, and the verb took on the meaning “to believe”—a usage derived from debates with atheism in which faith required the overcoming of objections.

In the New Testament “faith” is used in a number of ways, but primarily with the meaning “trust” or “confidence” in God.

This basic meaning is particularly evident in the Synoptics.

Mark 1:15 introduces and summarizes the Gospel with Jesus' charge to his hearers to *“repent ye, and believe the gospel.”* (The word usually translated “believe” in this verse is the verb form of “faith” for which there is no English equivalent.

The call is repeated as “Have faith in God,” using the noun form, in Mark 11:22.) Thus, Jesus called His hearers to place their confidence in God. It is common in the Synoptics for Jesus to say after healing someone, “thy faith hath made thee whole” (Matt. 9:22; Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; 8:48.)

One's confidence in or allegiance to God makes one whole.

John expressed a similar understanding of faith in 6:29 and 14:1 where people are called to have faith in the Christ. The difference between John and the Synoptics is a grammatical one; John used only the verb and never the noun for faith.

Outside the Gospels faith is related to the keynote concepts of the Christian message: the state of salvation (Eph. 2:8-9), sanctification (Acts 26:18),

purification (Acts 15:9), justification or imputed righteousness (Rom. 4:5; 5:1; Gal. 3:24), adoption as children of God (Gal. 3:26). **Each of these comes by faith.**

...faith is an attitude toward and relationship with God mediated by Christ Jesus.

It is surrender to God's gift of righteousness in Christ rather than seeking to achieve righteousness alone.

*Faith is also called a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22)—**something God creates in a person.** In another place "faith" is used quite differently as a **gift of the Holy Spirit that is given to some but not to others** (1 Cor. 12:8-9). Apparently such special gifts of faith refer to the ability to do great acts for God, what Jesus called moving mountains (Matt. 17:20; 1 Cor. 13:2).*

The New Testament sometimes uses "faith" to designate Christianity itself or that which Christians believe (Acts 6:7; Eph. 4:5; Col. 1:23; Tim. 1:19;

Jude 3). In this usage it is clear that an element of what we call belief is essential to the personal relationship we are calling “faith.” Here it would be well to note Hebrews 11:6 also—”But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is” In this verse also the word translated “believe” is the Greek verb form of “faith.”

Context here dictates that we understand it in the sense of intellectual acceptance of a proposition, “belief.” To have a right relation with God, it is necessary to “believe” that God is, that God has revealed Himself in Christ, and to accept God accepts you.

If faith is the religion itself, it is so in more than an intellectual way. Faith is also the living out of the religion; it is Christianity in action. This is the meaning of “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).

Walking represents the totality of one’s way of life.

Paul wrote that “faith,” both in the sense of Christian piety and of the trust and confidence one puts in God, determines action in life. Faith changes the standards and priorities of life.

Similarly, using the imagery of a soldier’s armor, Paul said that faith is a shield against sin and evil in our lives ([Eph. 6:16](#); [1 Thess. 5:8](#)).

If **Christianity itself may be called “the faith,”** then it is a small step to the New Testament usage of the participle of the verb form of faith to designate Christians. This form is often translated “believers” (it occurs most often in the plural) or “those who believe” ([Acts 4:32](#); [Rom. 1:16](#)). If we continue our distinction between faith and belief, we would prefer the translation “those who have faith” or the ungrammatical “those who faith.”

The nearest the New Testament comes to presenting a definition of “faith” per se is in [Hebrews 11:1](#). Here faith is called “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (RSV).

Thus, Hebrews closely ties faith very to Christian hope. The personal conviction of faith encourages the Christian to continue hoping for the fulfillment of the promises of God, but it is not the substance (as in the KJV) of these “things hoped for” in any normal sense of “substance.” The “things hoped for” have a reality greater than anyone’s hoping for them.

Faith is then meant as a sort of foretaste of the hoped for things.

C. Faith as the Way to Salvation.

The concept of faith is primarily that of a personal relationship with God that determines the priorities of one’s life. This relationship is one of love that is built on trust and dependence. We receive it by trusting the saving work of Jesus. Faith is the basic Christian experience, the decision for Christ Jesus. It is the acceptance of Christ’s lordship (i.e., His God-given, absolute authority). In this sense faith is doubly a break from the past: it is one’s removal from sin, and it is one’s removal from all other religious allegiances (1 Thess. 1:9). As a break from the past, faith is the beginning of relation to God and not an end. It is, especially in Paul’s letters, the inauguration of incorporation “in Christ,” in which one continues to grow and develop.

If faith is primarily a relationship into which one enters through acceptance of Jesus’ authority, it also includes a certain amount of “belief.” As a derived use, then, “faith” may also denote the content of what is believed. In this sense faith is the conviction that God acted in the history of Israel and “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). In

theological usage “the faith” may refer to many more doctrines and dogmas that have been developed since New Testament times, but in the New Testament “that which must be believed” was more limited as [Romans 10:9-10](#) may demonstrate.

Conclusion: Faith is what we believe, it is Christianity itself, but primarily it is the relationship we have with God through what Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection.

- William L. Self & Holman Bible Dictionary.

An Invested Assurance

[Hebrews 11:1-2](#)

“Approval” does not just refer to temporary material blessings. Rather, this is the final eschatological approval—an eternal commendation instead of an eternal condemnation.

It is important to remember that these are the only two options: commendation or condemnation. There is no third alternative. On the day of judgment, we will either be approved in Christ or we will be condemned without him.

How did the people of old win God’s approval? In other words, why were the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel commended? This is not just an important question theologically; it is a particularly important question for the writer and for the original audience. In light of what has come before in this epistle, it would be natural for these Jewish Christians to be thinking, *So what about Abraham? What about Moses? How were they included in this story of God’s grace to us in Christ?* The author plainly answers that these men and women received their approval because they exercised faith.

Paul makes this same point in [Romans 4:1-12](#). Abraham was counted righteous before God because of his faith (see [Gen 15:6](#)). **These passages demonstrate the consistent and clear New Testament teaching that the redeemed from Israel who lived before the death and resurrection of Christ were saved because they trusted God to be faithful to his promises.**

Their faith was a messianic faith.

They had an assurance that they invested in the promises of God. They hoped in things yet unseen, in a deliverer that had been promised but had not yet come.

- Dr. Albert Mohler

Conviction to Live by Faith ([11:1-40](#))

In [Heb 10:38-39](#), the author prepared the way for the great hall of faith in [Hebrews 11](#) by his quotation of [Hab 2:3-4](#) and the reference in [v. 39](#) to "those who believe."

There is a clear shift in the discourse structure from exhortation in [10:35-39](#) to exposition in [11:1-40](#).

Although [Hebrews 11](#) is expositional in genre, the author has something of a hortatory purpose in mind, as can be seen by its connection with [12:1-3](#). Lane and Ellingworth both consider [11:1-12:13](#) one discourse unit with [11:1-40](#) being, according to Lane, "a celebration of the character of faith," and [12:1-13](#) being "a summons to steadfast endurance." Westfall considers [10:19-12:2](#) one discourse unit, with [11:1-40](#) clearly marked out.

The chapter is marked as a unit by the *inclusio* formed by the author's use of "faith" and "commended" in vv. 1,39. The author also made use of lexical chiasm in the order found in the Greek text: "faith" and "commended" in v. 1; "commended" and "faith" in v. 39, thus

creating an ABBA pattern. The chapter is also given cohesion by the lexical repetition of the word "faith" which occurs 24 times. In vv. 1-2, the author offers a two-pronged definition of sorts for faith, followed by the statement that the "elders" or "men of old" received divine approval. Verses 3-31 proceed to give examples of these Old Testament characters who illustrate the kind faith mentioned in v. 1. This section is unified by the repetition of the dative *pistei*, "by faith," at the beginning of successive clauses. This usage of *pistei* occurs 18 times in vv. 3-31, but nowhere else in the epistle. In vv. 3-31 the author selectively surveys key figures from the Old Testament from Genesis 1 through Joshua 6 who were characterized by their faith. Verses 32-38 continue in this same vein, but with the marked difference that the author employs short, staccato like clauses to contrast those who won great victories by their faith with those who suffered and were martyred for their faith. The contrast is only in the end result: some were victorious through miraculous means while others suffered and died. The point of the author, however, is that whether in life or in death, all were victorious "by faith." Their victory was not just the result of their faith, but was the result of the working of God in their lives in response to their faith in him. This section begins by mentioning four names from the period of the judges: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, followed by David, Samuel and "the prophets." Contrary to the previous section, the author does not mention specific events from their lives that illustrate faith. The chapter concludes with a summary statement in v. 39 harking back to vv. 1-2, followed by the author's comments that these Old Testament saints, though commended for their faith, did not receive what God had promised because "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

In addition to the commentaries and Grässer's work on the subject of faith in Hebrews, there are two important monographs on [Hebrews 11](#), one from a rhetorical standpoint which compares [Hebrews 11](#) with example lists from antiquity, the other which treats [Hebrews 11](#) in its literary context. Westfall divided the chapter into four major sections:

- [11:1-2](#) Faith is Described
- [11:3-31](#) Actions of Faith
- [11:32-38](#) Post-Conquest Actions of Faith
- [11:39-40](#) Conclusion: The Faithful Did Not Receive the Promises

Ellingworth offers the following assessment of the structure and outline:

- [11:1-2](#) introduction
- [11:3-12](#) first *pistei* series
- [11:13-16](#) interim comment
- [11:17-31](#) second *pistei* series
- [11:32-38](#) rapid survey
- [11:39-40](#) final comment

[Hebrews 11](#) can be compared to *I Clement* 17:1-19:3, which is its closest parallel in Christian literature outside of Stephen's speech in [Acts 7](#). Both Cosby and Eisenbaum offer detailed analyses of [Hebrews 11](#) in comparison with other Jewish and Hellenistic example lists. Windisch and Michel both suggested the author used a source for [Hebrews 11](#). This is generally rejected by scholars. [Hebrews 11](#) gives every evidence of having been constructed by the author and not taken from a source. For example, Eisenbaum noted the symmetry of the author's grouping of names into threes: Abel, Enoch, and Noah; then a lengthy treatment of Abraham. This is followed by Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph; then a lengthy section on Moses. A final grouping of three—those who crossed the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho, and Rahab concludes the major section at [v. 31](#). This gives a pattern of 3-1-3-1-3.

(1) Necessity of Faith ([11:1-2](#))

¹Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for.

[11:1 Hebrews 11:1](#) has been something of a conundrum for commentators and translators. Should it be taken as a definition of faith? Westcott and Lane are representative of those who do not see [v. 1](#) as a formal definition of faith. Cosby and Eisenbaum are most likely correct in their assertion that [v. 1](#) should be viewed as a rhetorical definition of faith. The predominant view of faith in [Hebrews 11](#) is that the word connotes trust in God and reliance on him in the sense of fidelity and firmness.

There are three basic views regarding the nature of faith in Hebrews, especially chap. 11. Grässer argued that faith in **1). Hebrews has no Christological or even Christian content, but is merely an ethical quality. This thesis is almost universally rejected today**, although Lindars and Attridge argue that it is basically ethical. This approach fails to consider that in Hebrews, as in the rest of the New Testament, Jesus is depicted as the believer's object of faith as well as the exemplar of faith. **2). The second view, the eschatological view, takes the author's concept of faith in Hebrews as primarily futuristic.** This perspective is represented by Käsemann and Thompson. This viewpoint gives too much weight to the notion of Platonic influence in the epistle. We have already seen that the author of Hebrews is not so much influenced by Philo as he is by Jewish understanding of eschatology. **3). The third view, the Christological view**, comports best with the overall context of Hebrews as well as the canonical context of the New Testament. Among those who adhere to this view are Lane and Rhee.

Verse 1 begins with the sentence initial *estin*, "is," for emphasis. **Faith is said to be the *hupostasis* of things hoped for. The NIV renders this noun verbally with the translation "being sure of."** The word

carried a range of meanings during the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Danker gives the word's basic meaning as "the essential or basic structure/nature of an entity, *substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality* (underlying structure, oft. in contrast to what merely seems to be...)." He goes on to explain that **"among the meanings that can be authenticated for Hb 11:1 a strong claim can be made for realization, as in the "realization of a plan." Here he suggests the meaning, "in faith things hoped for become realized."**

Another usage of the word according to Danker is "guarantee of ownership/entitlement," where, following Moulton and Milligan, "title deed" is given as a possible translation. Based on this, Lane thinks it "imperative" that the objective sense of the term be reflected in its translation. He cites other translations given along these lines: **"objective guarantee," "certainty," "reality," and "title-deed," something which legally guarantees future possession.**

Lane calls translations such as "confidence" and "assurance" "untenable" because they ascribe to the word a subjective connotation which does not adequately convey its objective sense.

Grässer is no doubt correct to note the conceptual relationship between faith, confidence and endurance, although the latter two words do not appear in [Hebrews 11](#). Baugh, building on J. D. Smith, questioned the traditional understanding of both *hupostasis* and *elenchos* in [11:1](#) as having only an objective sense with no concept of subjective assurance, and he suggested the Old Testament heroes were "recipients of divine testimony to the coming eschatological realities, and thence by faith they became participants in and witnesses to the world to come." In short, Baugh argued that the author presented these Old Testament saints as "witnesses to various aspects of this eschatological reality to which we have now come in Christ."

The use of the present passive participle ("what we hope for") "connotes the objects of hope, i.e., the totality of the expected heavenly blessings viewed in their objective certainty." Thus, **it is best to take the clause in 11:1 to have an objective sense with**

the meaning "faith gives substance to what is hoped for," and not a subjective sense that faith is the assurance that what is hoped for will come to pass (although this latter perspective is certainly true).

The second clause of v. 1 is in apposition to the first. This would indicate the author intended elenchos also to have an objective meaning along the lines of "proof," "evidence," and not only the subjective sense of "conviction" or "demonstration."

As Lane pointed out, *"faith" is objective because it bestows upon the objects of hope a present reality, enabling the believer to enjoy now the "full certainty of future realization."*

Faith is the objective grounds upon which subjective confidence may be based.

Such faith springs from a personal encounter with God. *This kind of faith enables one to venture into the future "supported only by the word of God."*

Such faith "has the capacity to unveil the future so that the solid reality of events as yet unseen can be grasped by the believer."

In secular Greek usage, elenchos is the "test" or "trial" which shows a thing as it really is.

Consequently, Nairne prefers the translation "test" over "evidence" in this context.

[11:2](#) The *gar* in [v. 2](#) (untranslated in the NIV) indicates the grounds for the preceding description of faith. The faith described in [v. 1](#) is what the "ancients" were commended for. The "ancients" (Greek "elders") are men and women of the Old Testament, possibly inclusive of the intertestamental period as well. Lane said that the verb *martureō* occurs seven times in Hebrews, "and in each instance the reference is to the witness of the biblical record." It occurs four times in [Hebrews 11](#) ([vv. 2,4,5,39](#)).

- The New American Commentary

The Description of Faith (Heb. 11:1-3)

This is not a definition of faith but a description of what faith does and how it works. True Bible faith is not blind optimism or a manufactured "hope-so" feeling. Neither is it an intellectual assent to a doctrine. It is certainly not believing in spite of evidence! That would be superstition.

True Bible faith is confident obedience to God's Word in spite of circumstances and consequences. Read that last sentence again and let it soak into your mind and heart.

This faith operates quite simply. God speaks and we hear His Word. We trust His Word and act on it no matter what the circumstances are or what the consequences may be. The circumstances may be impossible, and the consequences frightening and unknown; but we obey God's Word just the same and believe Him to do what is right and what is best.

The unsaved world does not understand true Bible faith, probably because it sees so little faith in action in the church today. The cynical editor H.L. Mencken defined faith as "illogical belief in the occurrence of the impossible."

The world fails to realize that faith is only as good as its object, and the object of our faith is God.

Faith is not some "feeling" that we manufacture. It is our total response to what God has revealed in His Word.

Three words in Hebrews 11:1-3 summarize what true Bible faith is:
substance, evidence, & witness.

The word translated "substance" means literally "to stand under, to support."

Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house: it gives confidence and assurance that he will stand. [cf. [Matthew 7:21ff](#)]

So you might say, "Faith is the confidence of things hoped for." When a believer has faith, it is God's way of giving him confidence and assurance that what is promised will be experienced.

The word evidence simply means "conviction." This is the inward conviction from God that what He has promised, He will perform.

The presence of God-given faith in one's heart is conviction enough that He will keep His Word.

Witness (KJV, "obtained a good report") is an important word in [Hebrews 11](#). It occurs not only in [verse 2](#), but twice in [verse 4](#), once in [verse 5](#), and once in [verse 39](#). The summary in [Hebrews 12:1](#) calls this list of men and women "so great a cloud of witnesses."

They are witnesses to us because God witnessed to them.

In each example cited, God gave witness to that person's faith. This witness was His divine approval on their lives and ministries.

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that faith is a very practical thing ([Heb. 11:3](#)), in spite of what unbelievers say. **Faith enables us to understand what God does. Faith enables us to see what others cannot see (note [Heb. 11:7, 13, 27](#)). As a result, faith enables us to do what others cannot do!** People laughed at these great men and women when they stepped out by faith, but God was with them and enabled them to succeed to His glory.

Dr. J. Oswald Sanders put it perfectly: **"Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen."**

The best way to grow in faith is to walk with the faithful.

In each instance, you will find the same elements of faith:

(1) God spoke to them through His Word

(2) their inner selves were stirred in different ways

(3) they obeyed God

(4) He bore witness about them. - Bible Exposition Commentary

The Excellency of Faith ***([Hebrews 11:1-3](#))***

Ere we take up the contents of the 11th chapter let us briefly review the sound already covered. Chapters 1 and 2 are more or less introductory in their character. In them the wondrous *person* of the God-man Mediator is presented to our view, as superior to the O.T. prophets and as excelling the angels. The first main division of the Epistle commences at [Hebrews 3:1](#) and runs to the end of [Hebrews 4:15](#), and treats of the *mission* of Christ: this is seen to surpass that of either Moses or Joshua, for neither of them led the people into the real rest of God; the section is followed by a practical application in [Hebrews 4:16](#). The second principal division begins with [Hebrews 5:1](#) and extends to [Hebrews 10:18](#), and deals with the *priesthood* of Christ: this is shown to transcend the Aaronic in dignity, efficacy and permanency; the section is followed by a practical application, contained in [Hebrews 10:19](#) to [Hebrews 12:29](#). The closing chapter forms a conclusion to the Epistle.

"The general nature of this Epistle, as unto the kind of writing, is paranetical or hortatory, which is taken from its end and design. The exhortation proposed is to constancy and perseverance in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the profession of the Gospel, against temptations and

persecutions. Both these the Hebrews had to conflict with in their profession; the one from the Judaical church-state itself, the other from the members of it. Their temptations to draw back and forsake their profession, arose from the consideration of the Judaical church-state and Mosaic ordinances of worship, which they were called by the Gospel to relinquish. The Divine institution of that state, with its worship, the solemnity of the covenant whereon it was established, the glory of its priesthood, sacrifices and other Divine ordinances ([Rom. 9:4](#)), with their efficacy for acceptance with God, were continually proposed unto them, and pressed on them, to allure and draw them off from the Gospel. And the trial was very great, after the inconsistency of the two states was made manifest. This gave occasion to the whole *doctrinal* part of the Epistle, the exposition of which, by Divine grace and assistance, we have passed through. For therein declaring the nature, use, end, and signification of all Divine institutions under the O.T.; and allowing unto them all the glory and efficacy which they could pretend unto, the writer of this Epistle declares from the Scripture itself that the state of the Gospel church, in its high-priest, sacrifice, covenant, worship, privileges and efficacy, is incomparably to be preferred above that of the O.T.; yea, that all the excellency and glory of that state, and all that belonged unto it, consisted only in the representation that was made thereby, of the greater glory of Christ and the Gospel, without which they were of no use, and therefore ruinous or pernicious to be persisted in.

"After he had fixed their minds in the truth, and armed them against the temptations which they were continually exposed to; the apostle proceeds to the second means, whereby their steadiness and constancy in the profession of the Gospel, which he exhorted them unto, was already

assaulted, and was yet like to be assaulted with greater force and fury. This arose from the opposition which befell them, and from the persecutions of all sorts that they had endured, and were still like to undergo, for their faith in Christ Jesus with the profession thereof, and observance of the holy worship ordained in the Gospel. This they suffered from the obstinate *members* of the Jewish church, as they did the other (temptation) from the *state* of that church itself. An account hereof the apostle enters upon in the close of the foregoing chapter; and withal declares unto them the only way and means on their part, whereby they may be preserved, and kept constant in their profession notwithstanding all the evils that might befall them therein, and this is by faith alone. From their *temptations* they were delivered by the *doctrine* of the truth, and from the *opposition* made unto them, by *faith* in exercise" (John Owen).

The particular character of the section begun at [Hebrews 10:19](#) is not difficult to ascertain: it is addressed to our responsibility. This is at once evident in the "Let us" of [Hebrews 10:22, 23, 24](#). In [Hebrews 10:32-36](#) there is a call to patient waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises. Nothing but real faith in the veracity of the Promiser can sustain the heart and prompt to steady endurance during a protracted season of trial and suffering. Hence in [Hebrews 10:38](#) the apostle quotes that striking word from Habakkuk, "The just shall live *by faith*." That sentence really forms the text of which [Hebrews 11](#) is the sermon. The central design of this chapter is to evidence the *patience* of those who, in former ages, endured by faith before they received the fulfillment of God's promises: note particularly [verses 13, 39](#).

"Whoever made this (verse 1) the beginning of the eleventh chapter, has unwisely disjointed the context; for the object of the apostle was to prove what he had already said—that there is need of patience. He had quoted the testimony of Habakkuk, who says that the just lives by faith; he now shows what remained to be proved—that faith can be no more separated from patience than from itself. The order then of what he says is this: 'We shall not reach the goal of salvation except we have patience, for the prophet declares that the just lives by faith; but faith directs us to things afar off which we do not as yet enjoy; it then necessarily includes patience.' Therefore the minor proposition in the argument is this, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for'" (John Calvin).

"The apostle now, for the illustration and enforcement of his exhortation, brings forward a great variety of instances, from the history of former ages, in which *faith* had enabled individuals to perform very difficult duties, endure very severe trials, and obtain very important blessings. The principles of the apostle's exhortation are plainly these: 'They who turn back, turn back unto perdition. It is only they who persevere in believing that obtain the salvation of the soul. Nothing but a persevering faith can enable a person, through a constant continuance in well-doing, and a patient, humble submission to the will of God, to obtain that glory, honor, and immortality which the Gospel promises. Nothing but a persevering faith can do this; and a persevering faith can do it, as is plain from what it has done in former ages'" (John Brown).

The order of thought followed by the apostle in [Hebrews 11](#) was ably and helpfully set forth by an early Puritan: "The parts of this whole chapter are two: 1. a general *description* of faith: [verses 1](#) to 4. 2. An *illustration* or declaration of that description, by a large rehearsal of manifold *examples* of ancient and worthy men in the Old Testament: [verses 4](#) to 40. The description of faith consists of three actions or effects of faith, set down in three several verses. The first effect is that faith makes things which are not (but only are hoped for), after a sort, to subsist and to be

present with the believer: verse 1. The second effect is that faith makes a believer approved of God: verse 2. The third effect is that faith makes a man understand and believe things incredible to sense and reason" (Win. Perkins, 1595).

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (verse 1). The opening "Now" has almost the force of "for," denoting a farther confirmation of what had just been declared. At the close of chapter 10 the apostle had just affirmed that the saving of the soul is obtained through believing, whereupon he now takes occasion to show what faith is and does. That faith can, and does, preserve the soul, prompting to steadfastness under all sorts of trials and issuing in salvation, may not only be argued from the effects which is its very nature to produce, but is illustrated and demonstrated by one example after another, cited in the verses which follow. It is important to bear in mind at the outset that [Hebrews 11](#) is an amplification and exemplification of [Hebrews 10:38, 39](#): the "faith" which the apostle is describing and illustrating is that which has the *saving of the soul* annexed to it.

"In verse 1 there is the thing described, and the description itself. The thing described is Faith; the description is this: 'It is the substance of things hoped for' etc. The description is proper, according to the rules of art: habits (or graces) are described by their formal acts, and acts restrained to their proper objects; so faith is here described by its primary and formal acts, which are referred to their distinct objects. The acts of faith are two: it is the substance, it is the evidence. Think it not strange that I call them *acts*, for that is what the apostle intends; therefore Beza says, in rendering this place, he had rather paraphrase the text than obscure the scope, and he interpreteth it thus—Faith substantiates or gives a subsistence to our hopes, and demonstrates things not seen. There is a great deal of difference between the acts of faith and the effects of faith. The effects of faith are reckoned up throughout this chapter; the formal acts of faith are in this verse. These acts are suited with their objects. As the matters of belief are yet to come, faith gives them a substance, a being, as they are hidden from the eyes of sense and carnal reason; faith also gives them an evidence, and doth convince men of the worth of them; so that one of these acts belongs to the *understanding*, the other to the *will*" (Thos. Manton, 1670).

The contents of verse 1 do not furnish so much a formal definition of faith, as they supply a terse description of how it operates and what it produces. Faith, whether natural or spiritual, is the belief of a testimony. Here, faith is believing the testimony of God. How it operates in reference to the subjects of this testimony, whether they be considered simply as future, or as both invisible and future, and the effects produced in and on the soul, the Holy Spirit here explains. First, He tells us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for." The Greek word rendered "substance" has been variously translated. The margin of the A.V. gives "ground or confidence." The R.V. has "assurance" in the text, and "giving substance to" in the margin. The Greek word is "hypostasis" and is rendered "confident" (should be "this *confidence* of boasting," as in Bag. Int.) in both [2 Corinthians 9:4](#) and [11:17](#); "person" (should be "subsistence" or "essential being") in [Hebrews 1:3](#); and "confidence" in [Hebrews 3:14](#). Personally, the writer believes it has a double force, so will seek to expound it accordingly.

"Faith is the *confidence* of things hoped for." In this chapter (and in general throughout the N.T.) "faith" is far more than a bare assent to any thing revealed and declared by God: it is a firm persuasion of that which is hoped for, because it assures its possessor not only that there *are* such

things, but that through the power and faithfulness of God he shall yet *possess* them. Thus it becomes the ground of expectation. The Word of God is the *objective* foundation on which my hopes rest, but faith provides a *subjective* foundation, for it convinces me of the certainty of them. Faith and confidence are inseparable: just so far as I am counting upon the ability and fidelity of the Promiser, shall I be confident of receiving the things promised and which I am expecting. "We *believe* and are *sure*" ([John 6:69](#)).

From what has just been said, the reader will perhaps perceive better the force of the rather peculiar word "substance" in the text of the A.V. It comes from two Latin words, *sub stans* meaning "standing under." Faith provides a firm standing-ground while I await the fulfillment of God's promises. Faith furnishes my heart with a sure support during the interval. Faith believes God and relies upon His veracity: as it does so, the heart is anchored and remains steady, no matter how fierce the storm nor how protracted the season of waiting. "These all died in faith, *not* having received the (fulfillment of the) promises; *but* having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them" ([Heb. 11:13](#)). Real faith issues in a confident and standing expectation of future things.

"Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for": as the marginal reading of the R.V. suggests, "giving substance to." Crediting the sure testimony of God, resting on His promises, and expecting the accomplishment of them, faith gives the object hoped for at a *future* period, a *present* reality and power in the soul, as if already possessed; for the believer is satisfied with the security afforded, and *acts* under the full persuasion that God will not fail of His engagement. Faith gives the soul an *appropriating hold* of them. "Faith is a firm persuasion and expectation that God will perform all that He has promised to us in Christ; and this persuasion is so strong that it gives the soul a kind of possession and present fruition of those things, gives them a subsistence in the soul by the firstfruits and foretastes of them; so that believers in the exercise of faith are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (Matthew Henry).

The confident expectation which faith inspires, gives the objects of the Christian's hope a present and actual being in his heart. Faith does not look out with cold thoughts about things to come, but imparts life and reality to them. Faith does for us spiritually what fancy does for us naturally. There is a faculty of the understanding which enables us to *picture* to the mind's eye things which are yet future. But faith does more: it gives not an imaginary appearance to things, but a real subsistence. Faith is a grace which unites subject and object: there is no need to ascend to Heaven, for faith makes distant things nigh (see [Romans 10:6, 7](#)). Faith, then, is the bond of union between the soul and the things God has promised. By believing we "receive"; by believing in Christ, He becomes *ours* ([John 1:12](#)). Therefore does faith enable the Christian to praise the Lord for future blessings as though he were already in the full possession of them.

But *how* does faith bring to the heart a present subsistence of future things? First, by drawing from the promises that which, by Divine institution, is stored up in them: hence they are called the "*breasts* of consolation" ([Isa. 66:11](#)). Second, by making the promises the food of the soul ([Jer. 15:16](#)), which cannot be unless they are really *present* unto it. Third, by conveying an experience of their power, as unto all the ends of which they are purposed: it is as Divine truth is appropriated and assimilated that it becomes powerfully operative in the soul. Fourth, by communicating unto us the firstfruits of the promises: faith gives a living reality to what it

absorbs, and so real and potent is the impression made, that the heart is changed into the same image ([2 Cor. 3:18](#)).

Ere passing on, let us pause for a word of application. Many profess to "believe," but *what influence* have their hopes upon them? How are they affected by the things which their faith claims to have laid hold of? I profess to believe that sin is a most heinous thing—do I fear, hate, shun it? I believe that ere long I shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ—does my conduct evince that I am living in the light of that solemn day? I believe that the world is an empty bauble—do I despise its painted tinsel? I believe that God will supply all my need—am I fearful about the morrow? I believe that prayer is an essential means unto growth in grace—do I spend much time in the secret place? I believe that Christ is coming back again—am I diligent in seeking to have my lamp trimmed and burning? Faith is evident by its fruits, works, effects.

Faith is "the evidence of things not seen." The Greek noun here rendered "evidence" ("proving" in the R.V., with "test" in the margin) is derived from a verb which signifies to *convince*, and that by demonstration. It was used by the Lord Jesus when He uttered that challenge, "which of you convicteth Me of sin?" ([John 8:46](#)). The noun occurs in only one other place, namely, [2 Timothy 3:16](#), "All scripture is... profitable for doctrine, for *reproof*," or "conviction"—to give assurance and certainty of what is true. Thus, the word "evidence" in our text denotes test which furnishes proof, so that one is assured of the reality and certainty of things Divine. "Faith," then, is first the *hand* of the soul which "lays hold of" the contents of God's promises; second, it is the *eye* of the soul which looks out toward and represents them clearly and convincingly to us.

To unbelievers the invisible, spiritual, and future things revealed in God's Word seem dubious and unreal, for they have no medium to perceive them: "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" ([1 Cor. 2:14](#)). But the child of God *sees* "Him who is invisible" ([Heb. 11:27](#)). Perhaps we might illustrate it thus: two men stand on the deck of a ship gazing toward the far horizon; the one sees nothing, the other describes the details of a distant steamer. The former has only his unaided eyesight, the latter is using a telescope! Now just as a powerful glass brings home to the eye an object beyond the range of natural vision, so faith gives reality to the heart of things outside the range of our physical senses. Faith sets Divine things before the soul in all the light and power of demonstration, and thus provides inward conviction of their existence. "Faith demonstrates to the eye of the mind the reality of those things which cannot be discerned by the eye of the body" (Matthew Henry).

The natural man prefers a life of sense, and to believe nothing more than that which is capable of scientific demonstration. When eternal things, yet invisible, are pressed upon him, he is full of objections against them. Those are the objections of unbelief, stirred into activity by the "fiery darts" of Satan, and naught but the shield of faith can quench them. But when the Holy Spirit renews the heart, the prevailing power of unbelief is broken; faith argues "*God* has said it, so it *must* be true." Faith so convinces the understanding that it is compelled, by force of arguments unanswerable, to believe the certainty of all God has spoken. The conviction is so powerful that the heart is influenced thereby, and the will moved to conform thereto. This it is which causes the Christian to *forsake* the "pleasures of sin" which are only "for a season" ([Heb. 11:25](#)),

because by faith he has *laid hold of* those satisfying "pleasures at God's right hand" which are "for evermore" ([Ps. 16:11](#)).

To sum up the contents of verse 1. To unbelief, the objects which God sets before us in His Word seem unreal and unlikely, nebulous and vague. But faith visualizes the unseen, giving substantiality to the things hoped for and reality to things invisible. Faith shuts its eyes to all that is seen, and opens its ears to all God has said. Faith is a convictive power which overcomes carnal reasonings, carnal prejudices, and carnal excuses. It enlightens the judgment, moulds the heart, moves the will, and reforms the life. It takes us off earthly things and worldly vanities, and occupies us with spiritual and Divine realities. It emboldens against discouragements, laughs at difficulties, resists the Devil, and triumphs over temptations. It does so because it unites the soul to God and draws strength from Him. Thus faith is altogether a supernatural thing.

"For by it the elders obtained a good report" (verse 2). Having described the principal qualities of faith, the apostle now proceeds to give further proof of its excellency, as is evident from the opening "For." It is by faith we are approved of God. By the "elders" is signified those who lived in former times, namely, the O.T. saints—included among the "fathers" or [Hebrews 1:1](#). It was not by their amiability, sincerity, earnestness, or any other natural virtue, but by *faith* that the ancients "obtained a good report." This declaration was made by the apostle with the purpose of reminding the Hebrews that their pious progenitors were justified by faith, and to the end of the chapter he shows that *faith* was the principle of all their holy obedience, eminent services, and patient sufferings in the cause of God. Therefore those who were *spiritually* united to them must have something more than physical descent from them.

"For by it the elders obtained a good report." Observe the beautiful accuracy of Scripture: it was not *for* their faith (nor could it be without it!), but "by" their faith: it was not a cause, yet it was a condition; there was nothing meritorious in it, yet it was a necessary means. Let us also observe that faith is no new thing, but a grace planted in the hearts of God's elect from the beginning. Then, as now, faith was the substance of things hoped for—promises to be accomplished in the future. The faith of Abel laid hold of Christ as truly as does ours. God has had but one way of salvation since sin entered the world: "by grace, through faith, not of works." They are grossly mistaken who suppose that under the old covenant people were saved by keeping the law. The "fathers" had the same promises we have: not merely of Canaan, but of heaven—see [Hebrews 11:16](#).

The Greek for "obtained a good report" is not in the active voice, but the passive: literally, "were witnessed of," an honorable testimony being borne to them—cf., [verses 4, 5](#). God took care that a record should be kept (complete in Heaven, in part transcribed in the Scriptures) of all the actings of their faith. God has borne witness to the fact that Enoch "walked with Him" ([Gen. 5:24](#)), that David was "a man after His own heart" ([1 Sam. 13:14](#)), that Abraham was His "friend" ([2 Chron. 20:7](#)). This testimony of His acceptance of them because of their faith was borne by God. Not only externally in His Word, but in their consciences. He gave them His Spirit who assured them of their acceptance: [Psalm 51:12](#), [Acts 15:8](#). Let writer and reader learn to esteem what God does: let us value a Christian not for his intellect, natural charms, or social position, but for his *faith*, evidenced by an obedient walk and godly life.

We cannot do better in closing our comments upon verse 2 than by giving the "practical observations" on it of John Owen: "1. Instances or examples are the most powerful confirmations of practical truths. 2. They who have a good testimony from God shall never want reproaches from the world. 3. It is faith alone, which, from the beginning of the world (or from the giving of the first promise), was the means and way of obtaining acceptance with God. 4. The faith of true believers, from the beginning of the world, was fixed on things future, hoped for, invisible. 5. That faith whereby men please God acts itself in a fixed contemplation on things future and invisible, from whence it derived an encouragement and strength to endure and abide firm in profession, against all opposition and persecutions. 6. Men may be despised, vilified, and reproached in the world, yet if they have faith, if they are true believers, they are accepted with God, and He will give them a good report."

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (verse 3). There is a much closer connection between this verse and the two preceding ones than most of the commentators have perceived. The apostle is still setting forth the importance and excellency of faith: here he affirms that, through it its favored possessors are enabled to apprehend things which are high above the reach of human reason. The origin of the universe presents a problem which neither science nor philosophy can solve, as is evident from their conflicting and ridiculous attempts; but that difficulty vanishes entirely before *faith*.

"Through faith we *understand*." Faith is the vehicle or medium of spiritual perception: "if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest *see* the glory of God" ([John 11:40](#)); "which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe *and know* the truth" ([1 Tim. 4:3](#)). Faith is not a *blind* reliance on the Word of God, but an intelligent persuasion of its veracity, wisdom, beauty. So far from Christians being the credulous fools the world deems them, they are the wisest of earth's inhabitants. The "fools" are they who are "slow of heart to believe" ([Luke 24:25](#)). Through faith in what has been revealed in the Scriptures we *know* that the universe is created and fashioned by God. "What does faith give us to understand concerning the worlds, that is, the upper, middle, lower regions of the universe? 1. That they were not eternal, nor did they produce themselves, but they were made by another. 2. That the Maker of the world is God; He is the Maker of all things; and whosoever is so must be God. 3. That He made the world with great exactness; it was a framed work, in every thing duly adapted and disposed to answer its end, and to express the perfections of the Creator. 4. That God made the world by His word; that is, by His essential wisdom and eternal Son, *and* by His active will, saying, Let it be done, and it was done. 5. That the world was thus framed out of nothing, out of no pre-existent matter, contrary to the received maxim, that out of nothing nothing can be made, which, though true of created power, can have no place with God, who can call things that are not as if they were, and command them into being. These things we understand by faith" (Matthew Henry).

"That the worlds were framed by the word of God." The word for "worlds" *in the Greek* signifies "ages," but by a metonymy it is here used of the universe. "The celestial world, with its inhabitants, the angels; the starry and ethereal worlds, with all that is in them, the sun, moon, stars, and fowls of the air; the terrestrial world, with all upon it, man, beasts etc.; and the watery world, the sea, and all that is therein" (John Gill). These "worlds were made at the beginning of mundane time and have continued throughout all ages. "The apostle accommodated his

expression to the received opinion *of the Jews*, and their way of expressing themselves about the world. 'Olam' denotes the world as to the subsistence of it, and as to its duration" (John Owen). We do not, then, espouse Bullinger's strange view of this verse.

The "worlds," or universe, were "framed," that is, were adjusted and disposed into a wise and beautiful order, by "the word of God." That expression is used in a threefold sense. First, there is the essential and personal Word, the eternal Son of God ([John 1:1](#)). Second, there is the written, ever-living Word, the Holy Scriptures ([John 10:35](#)). Third, there is the Word of Power or manifestation of the invincible will of God. It is the last-mentioned that is in view in [Hebrews 11:3](#). The Greek for "word" is not "logos" (as in [John 1:1](#)), but "rhema" (as in [Hebrews 1:3](#)); "rhema" signifies a word *spoken*. The reference is to God's imperial fiat. His effectual command, as throughout [Genesis 1](#): "God *said* (the manifestation of His invincible will) let light be, and light was." "For He spake, and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast" ([Ps. 33:9](#)). An illustration of the Word of His Power (see [Hebrews 1:3](#)) is found in [John 5:28, 29](#).

"So that things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear." There is some difficulty (in the Greek) in ascertaining the precise meaning of this phrase. Personally, we are inclined to regard it as referring back to [Genesis 1:2](#). The verse before us concerns more directly the *fashioning* of the present heavens and earth, though that necessarily presupposes their original creation. The elements were submerged and darkness enshrouded them. The *practical* force of this verse to us is: our "faith" does not rest upon what "appears" outwardly, but is satisfied with the bare Word of God. Since God created the universe out of nothing, how easily can He preserve and sustain us when there is not anything (to our view) in sight! He who can call worlds into existence by the Word of His Power, can command supplies for the neediest of His creatures.

- **An Exposition of Hebrews.**

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

(1) We have seen how the writer approached the subject which is the chief theme of this last division of this Epistle. The coming of the Lord, for judgment upon His adversaries, for salvation to His people, draws nigh. In the midst of dangers and judgments God's righteous servant shall live, and the ground, of his life is his steadfast faith--if he shrink back, destruction will overtake him. "Our principle of action" (the writer says to his Hebrew readers) "is not shrinking back, but faith. And faith is this. . . ." It has been debated whether that which follows is a definition of what faith is, or in reality a description of what faith does. It is not a complete definition, in the sense of including all the moments of thought which are present in the word as used in the last chapter ([Hebrews 11:38](#)) or in this. The "things hoped for" are not mere figments of the imagination; their basis is *the word of God*. If we keep this in mind, the words, still

remaining general in their form, agree with all that has led up to them and with all that follows; and whether they be called definition or description will be of little consequence.

The exact meaning of the special terms here used it is not easy to ascertain. The word rendered "substance" has already occurred twice in the Epistle. In [Hebrews 1:3](#) this was its true meaning--the essence which, so to speak, underlies, "stands under," the qualities possessed. In [Hebrews 3:14](#) the same metaphor of *standing under* is applied to steadfastness, confidence (see the Note). The former of these renderings the Authorised version--in this instance deserting the earlier translations (which for the most part have "sure confidence" or "ground") to follow the Rhemish in its rendering of the Latin. *substantia*--has made familiar in the present passage. The sense which it presents, however, is not very clean; and the symmetry of the verse almost compels us here to make choice of some word which denotes an act, or at all events an attitude, of the mind. Most commentators of our own day accept the second meaning explained above, "confidence" or "assurance in regard to things hoped for." To adopt Dr. Vaughan's clear explanation, "Faith is that principle, that exercise of mind and soul, which has for its object things not seen but hoped for, and which, instead of sinking under them as too ponderous, whether from their difficulty or from their uncertainty, stands firm under them--supports and sustains their pressure--in other words, is assured of, confides in and relies on them." This interpretation yields an excellent sense, and has the advantage of assigning to the Greek word a meaning which it certainly bears in an earlier chapter, and in two places of St. Paul's Epistles. On the other hand, the analogy of the second member of the verse, and a peculiarity in the Greek construction which we cannot here discuss, seem to be in favour of a third rendering of the words: "Faith is the giving substance to things hoped for." It has indeed been said that by such a translation the things hoped for are represented as being *without substance*. But this difficulty is only apparent; for *in regard to ourselves* these objects of our hope do not yet exist, since they still belong to the future ([Romans 8:24-25](#)). In the second clause the word "evidence" is likely to mislead; very probably, indeed, it now fails to convey the sense intended by our translators, who here followed the rendering of the Genevan Bible (suggested by Calvin's "evidentia"). The Greek word denotes putting to the test, examining for the purpose of proof, bringing to conviction. Under this aspect faith appears as neither blindly rejecting nor blindly accepting whatever may be said about things unseen, but boldly dealing with them as if with things seen, and then unflinchingly accepting that which has stood the proof. One peculiarity of the Greek yet remains to be noticed. In the second clause the word "things" is expressed in the Greek (as in [Hebrews 6:18](#)), but not in the first; we are by this means reminded of the *reality* of that which is thus spoken of as unseen. The whole verse, then, may be rendered "Now faith is the giving substance to what is hoped for, the testing of things not seen." And now passing away from the general aspect of the words to that in which they are presented by the context, we have as the meaning: Faith, holding to God's word, gives substance to what that word promises, investing the future blessings with a present existence, treating them as if already objects of sight rather than of hope. Through faith, guided by the same word, the things unseen are brought to the proof; what that word teaches, though future, or though belonging to a world beyond human sight, is received with full conviction. Thus "every genuine act of faith is the act of the whole man, not of his understanding alone, not of his affections alone, not of his will alone, but of all

three in their central, aboriginal unity." And thus faith becomes "the faculty in man through which the spiritual world exercises its sway over him, and thereby enables him to overcome the world of sin and death." (Hare, *Victory of Faith*.)

Pulpit Commentary

Verse 1. - **Now faith is the substance** (so A.V., with marginal readings, "or **ground**, or, **confidence**") **of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.** On the senses in which the word ὑπόστασις (translated "substance") may be used, see under Hebrews 1:2. As to the sense intended here, views differ. There are three possible ones, expressed in the text and margin of the A.V., **substance, ground,** and **confidence.** The first is understood by the Fathers generally, the idea being supposed to be that, inasmuch as things not yet experienced, but only hoped for, become real to us by faith, faith is metaphysically their substance, as substantiating them to us. So Theophilus: Οὐσίωσις τῶν μήπω ὄντων ὑπόστασις τῶν μὴ ὑφ'εστηκότων: and Chrysostom, who illustrates thus: "The resurrection has not yet taken place, but faith substantiates (ὑφίστησιν) it in our souls." So also Dante, following St. Thomas Aquinas, in a striking passage quoted by Delitzsch ('Paradise,' 24:70-75) -

**"Le profonde cose
Che mi largiscono qui la lor parvenza
Agli occhi di laggiu son si nascose,
Che l'esser lore ve in sola credenza,
Sovra la qual si fondu Palta spene:
E pero di sustanza prende Fintenza."**

**"The things profound
That here vouch safe to me their apparition
From all eyes here below are so concealed
That all their being is in faith alone,
Upon the which high hope doth base itself:
And therefore faith assumes the place of substance."** The rendering **ground**, which involves only the simpler idea of faith being the foundation on which hope is built, has not much support from the use of the word elsewhere, nor does it seem suitable here. For it is not the things hoped for, but rather our hopes of them that are grounded on our faith. The subjective sense, **confidence**, or **assurance**, is most in favor with modern commentators, principally as being the most usual one (cf. [Hebrews 3:14](#); [2 Corinthians 9:4](#); [2 Corinthians 11:17](#); also [Psalm 38:11](#), 'Ἡ ὑπόστασις μου παρὰ σοῦ ἔστιν: [Ezekiel 19:5](#), Ἀπώλετο ἡ ὑπόστασις αὐτῆς: [Ruth 1:12](#), "Ἔστι μοι ὑπόστασις τοῦ γενεθῆναι με ἀνδρὶ). One objection to this sense of the word here is that it is usually followed, when so intended, by a genitive of rite person, not of the thing; though [Ruth 1:12](#) is an instance to the contrary. But apart from this consideration, the consensus of the Greek

Fathers is a weighty argument for the retention of the rendering of the A.V. Either rendering, be it observed, gives the same essential meaning, though under different mental conceptions. Faith is further said to be **the evidence** of things not seen; ἔλεγχος meaning, not as some take it, inward **conviction** of their existence, but in itself a **demonstration**, serving the purpose of argument to induce conviction. So Dante, in continuation of the passage quoted above -

**"E da questa credenza ci conviene
Sillogizar senza avere ultra visa;
E pero intenza d'argomento tiene."**

**"And from this credence it is fit and right
To syllogize, though other sight be none:**

Therefore faith holds the place of argument." Is this meant as a **definition** of faith, or only a description of its effect and operation, with especial regard to the subject in hand? Virtually a definition, though not in the strict logical form of one. At any rate, "the constituents and essential characteristics of faith are here laid down" (Delitzsch); **i.e.** of faith in its most general sense - that of belief in such things, whether past, present, or future, as are not known by experience, and cannot be logically demonstrated. "Licet quidam dicant praedicta apostoli verba non esse fidei definitionem, quia definitio indicat rei quidditatem et essentiam, tamen si quis recte consideret, omnia ex quibus fides potest definiri in praedicta descriptione tanguntur, licet verba non ordinentur sub forma definitionis" (St. Thomas Aquinas, 'Secunda Secundae,' qu. 4, art. 1). Faith, in the general sense indicated, is and has ever been, as the chapter goes on to show, the very root and inspiring principle of all true religion. And be it observed that, if well grounded, it is not irrational; it would rather be irrational to disregard it, or suppose it opposed to reason. Even in ordinary affairs of life, and in science too, men act, and must act, to a great extent on faith; it is essential for success, and certainly for all great achievements - faith in the testimony and authority of others whom we can trust, faith in views and principles not yet verified by our own experience, faith in the expected outcome of right proceeding, faith with respect to a thousand things which we take on trust, and so make ventures, on the ground, not of positive proof, but of more or less assured conviction. Religious faith is the same principle, though exercised in a higher sphere; and it may be as well grounded as any on which irreligious men are acting daily. Various feelings and considerations may conspire to induce it: the very phenomena of the visible universe, which, though themselves objects of sense, speak to the soul of a Divinity beyond them; still more, conscience, recognized as a Divine voice within us, and implying a Power above us to whom we are responsible; then all our strange yearnings after ideals not yet realized, our innate sense that righteousness ought to triumph over iniquity, as in our disordered world it does not yet; - which things are in themselves prophetic; and, in addition to all this, the general human belief in Deity. And when, further, a revelation has been given, its answering to our already felt needs and aspirations, together with the usual considerations on which we give credence to testimony, induces faith in it also, and in the things by it revealed; natural faith is thus confirmed, and faith in other verities is borne in upon the soul; which is further itself confirmed by experience of the effects of entertaining it. In some minds, as is well known, and these of the highest order, such

faith may amount to certitude, rendering the "things unseen" more real to them than "the things that do appear." It cannot be said that to accept such faith as evidence is contrary to reason; our not doing so would be to put aside as meaning nothing the deepest, the most spiritual, the most elevating faculties of our mysterious nature, by means of which, no less than by our other faculties, we are constituted so as to apprehend the truth. And we may observe, lastly, that even to those who have not themselves this "fullness of faith," its very existence in others, including so many of the great and good, may surely be rationally accepted as evidence of realities corresponding to it.

[Matthew Henry Commentary](#)

11:1-3 Faith always has been the mark of God's servants, from the beginning of the world. Where the principle is planted by the regenerating Spirit of God, it will cause the truth to be received, concerning justification by the sufferings and merits of Christ. And the same things that are the object of our hope, are the object of our faith. It is a firm persuasion and expectation, that God will perform all he has promised to us in Christ. This persuasion gives the soul to enjoy those things now; it gives them a subsistence or

reality in the soul, by the first-fruits and foretastes of them. ***Faith proves to the mind, the reality of things that cannot be seen by the bodily eye.*** It is a full approval of all God has revealed, as holy, just, and good. This view of faith is explained by many examples of persons in former times, who obtained a good report, or an honourable character in the word of God. ***Faith was the principle of their holy obedience, remarkable services, and patient sufferings. The Bible gives the most true and exact account of the origin of all things, and we are to believe it, and not to wrest the Scripture account of the creation, because it does not suit with the differing fancies of men.*** All that we see of the works of creation, were brought into being by the command of God.

Analysis of the Chapter.

In the close of the previous chapter the apostle had incidentally made mention of faith, [Hebrews 10:38,39](#), and said that the just should live by faith. The object of the whole argument in this epistle was to keep those to whom it was addressed from apostatizing, from the Christian religion, and especially from relapsing again into Judaism. They were in the midst of trials, and were evidently suffering some form of persecution, the tendency of which was to expose them to the danger of relapsing. **The indispensable means of securing them from apostasy was *faith*; and with a view to show its efficacy in this respect, the apostle goes into an extended account of its nature and effects, occupying this entire chapter.**

As the persons whom he addressed had been Hebrews, and as the Old Testament contained an account of numerous instances of persons in substantially the same circumstances in which they were, the reference is made, to the illustrious examples of the efficacy of faith in the Jewish history. **The object is to show that *faith*, or confidence in the Divine promises, has been in all ages the means of perseverance in the true religion, and consequently of salvation.**

In this chapter, therefore, the apostle first describes or defines the nature of faith, ([Hebrews 11:1](#),) and then illustrates its efficacy and power by reference to numerous instances,

In these illustrations he refers to the steady belief which we have that God made the worlds, and then to the examples of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab in particular, and then to numerous other examples without mentioning their names. The object is to show that there is power in faith to keep the mind and heart in the midst of trials, and that, having these examples before them, those whom he addressed should continue to adhere steadfastly to the profession of the true religion.

Verse 1. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for.* On the general nature of faith, [Mark 16:10](#). The margin here is, "*ground, or confidence.*"

There is scarcely any verse of the New Testament more important than this, for it states what is the nature of all true faith, and is

*the only definition of it which is attempted in
the Scriptures.*

*Eternal life depends on the existence and exercise of
faith, (Mark 16:16), and hence the importance of an
accurate understanding of its nature.*

The word rendered *substance*—υποστασις—occurs in the New Testament only in the following places. In 2 Corinthians 9:4, 11:17, Hebrews 3:14, where it is rendered *confident* and *confidence*; and in Hebrews 1:3, where it is rendered *person*, and in the passage before us. Comp. Hebrews 1:3. Prof. Stuart renders it here *confidence*; Chrysostom, "Faith gives reality or substance to things hoped for." The word properly means *that which is placed under*, (Germ. *Unterstellen*;) *then ground, basis, foundation, support*. Then it means, also, *reality, substance, existence, in contradistinction from that which is unreal, imaginary, or deceptive*, (*tauschung*.) Passow. It

seems to me, therefore, that **the word here has reference to something which imparts reality in the view of the mind to those things which are not seen, and which serves to distinguish them from those things which are unreal and illusive.** It is that which enables us to feel and act *as if* they were real, or which causes them to exert an influence over us *as if* we saw them. Faith does this on all other subjects as well as religion. A belief that there is such a place as London or Calcutta, leads us to act *as if* this were so, if we have occasion to go to either; a belief that money may be made in a certain undertaking, leads men to act *as if* this were so: a belief in the veracity of another leads us to act *as if* this were so. As long as the faith continues, whether it be well-founded or not, it gives all the force of reality to that which is believed. We feel and act *just as if* it were so, or *as if* we saw the object before our eyes. This, I think, is the clear meaning here. We do not see the things of eternity. We do not see God, or heaven, or the angels, or the redeemed in glory, or the crowns of victory, or the harps of praise; but we have faith in them, and this leads us to act *as if* we saw them. And this is, undoubtedly, the fact in regard to all who live by faith, and who are fairly under its influence.

Of things hoped for. In heaven. Faith gives them reality in the view of the mind. The Christian hopes to be admitted into heaven; to be raised up in the last day from the slumbers of the tomb; to be made perfectly free from sin; to be everlastingly happy. Under the influence of faith he allows these things to control his mind *as if* they were a most affecting reality.

The evidence of things not seen. Of the existence of God; of heaven; of angels; of the glories of the world prepared for the redeemed. The word rendered *evidence* *ελεγχος* occurs in the New Testament only in this place and in [2 Timothy 3:16](#), where it is rendered *reproof*. It means, properly, proof, or means of proving, to wit, evidence; then proof which convinces another of error or guilt; then vindication or defence; then summary or contents. See Pussow. The idea of *evidence* which goes to demonstrate the thing under consideration, or which is adapted to produce *conviction* in the mind, seems to be the elementary idea in the word. So when a proposition is demonstrated; when a man is arraigned, and evidence is furnished of his guilt, or when he establishes his innocence; or when one by argument refutes his adversaries, the idea of *convincing argument* enters into the use of the word in each case. This, I think, is clearly the meaning of the word here. "Faith in the Divine declarations answers all the purposes of a convincing argument, or is itself a convincing argument to the mind, of the real existence of those things which are not seen." But is it a good argument? Is it rational to rely on such a means of being convinced? Is mere *faith* a consideration which should ever convince a rational mind? The infidel says no; and we know there may be a faith which is no argument of the truth of what is believed. But when a man who has never seen it believes that there is such a place as London, his belief in the numerous testimonies respecting it which he has heard and read is, to his mind, a good and rational proof of its existence, and he would act on that belief without hesitation. When a son credits the declaration or the promise of a father who has never deceived him, and acts *as though* that declaration and promise were true, his faith is to him a ground of conviction and of action, and he will act as if these things were so. In like manner the Christian believes what God says. He has never seen heaven; he has never seen an angel; he has never seen the Redeemer; he has never seen a body raised from the grave; *but he has evidence which is satisfactory to his mind that God has spoken on these subjects*, and his very nature prompts him to confide in the declarations of his Creator. Those declarations are, to his mind, more convincing proof than anything else would be. They are more conclusive evidence than would be the deductions on his own reason; far better and more rational than all the reasonings and declarations of the infidel to the contrary. He feels and acts, therefore, as if these things were so-for his faith in the declarations of God has convinced him that they are so. The object of the apostle, in this chapter, is not to illustrate the nature of what is called *saving faith*, but to show the power of *unwavering confidence in God* in sustaining the soul, especially in times of trial; and particularly in leading us to act, in view of promises and of things not seen, *as if* they were so. "Saving faith" is the same kind of confidence directed to the Messiah-the Lord Jesus-as the Saviour of the soul.

(*) "substance" "ground"

(*) "things" [Romans 8:24,25](#)

Verse 2. *For by it.* That is, by that faith which gives reality to things hoped for, and a certain persuasion to the mind of the existence of those things which are not seen.

The elders. The ancients; the Hebrew patriarchs and fathers.

Obtained a good report. Literally, "were witnessed of;" that is, an honourable testimony was borne to them in consequence of their faith. The idea is, that their acting under the influence of faith, in the circumstances in which they were, was the ground of the honourable testimony which was borne to them in the Old Testament. See this use of the word in [Hebrews 7:8](#), and [Hebrews 11:4](#) of this chapter. Also [Luke 4:22](#), [Acts 15:8](#). In the cases which the apostle proceeds to enumerate in the subsequent part of the chapter, he mentions those whose piety is particularly commended in the Old Testament, and who showed, in trying circumstances, that they had unwavering confidence in God.

(*) "understand" [Genesis 1:1](#), [Psalms 33:6](#)

- Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.