

## XXV. The Hall of Faith

December 11/12/13, 2018

Hebrews 11:1-3

**Aim:** To understand that faith is a fixed hope on God's promises, to seek the commendation from God that true faith brings, and to hold fast to the Word of God, which informs our faith.

*MacArthur:* 'The Saints' Hall of Fame,' 'The Heroes of Faith,' 'The Honor Roll of the Old Testament Saints,' 'The Westminster Abbey of Scripture,' and 'The Faith Chapter' are but a few of the titles that have been given to Hebrews chapter 11. This chapter deals with the primacy and the excellency of faith, and fits perfectly into the flow of the epistle, that the new is better than the old.

### A. Background on Faith

#### 1. Schreiner

*Schreiner:* In popular circles Hebrews 11 is often disconnected from the rest of the letter, but it fits with the exhortation section which begins in 10:19. We have seen in 10:19-39 that the author encourages the believers to hold fast and warns them of the danger of falling away. Chapter 10 ends with a call to faith. Those who believe will enjoy eschatological life, but those who shrink back will be destroyed. Chapter 11 is tucked into the exhortation section of the letter by highlighting the nature and character of saving faith. It should be said, however, that chapter 11 itself does not constitute an exhortation but provides examples that serve the exhortation. The writer illustrates the nature of that faith by giving many examples of such faith in the OT.

#### 2. Bruce

*Bruce:* Our author might well have proceeded from 10:39 to the exhortation to 'run with steadfast endurance the race for which we are entered' (12:1); but first he encourages his readers further by reminding them of examples of faith in earlier days. In Old Testament times, he points out, there were many men and women who had nothing but the promises of God to rest upon, without any visible evidence that these promises would ever be fulfilled; yet so much did these promises mean to them that they regulated the whole course of their lives in their light. The promises related to a state of affairs belonging to the future; but these people acted as if that state of affairs were already present, so convinced were they that God could and would fulfill what He had promised. In other words, they were men and women of faith. Their faith consisted simply in taking God at His word and directing their lives according; things yet future as far as their experience went were thus present to faith, and things outwardly unseen were visible to the inward eye. It is in these terms that our author now describes the faith of which he has been speaking.

#### 3. Phillips

*Phillips:* The Christian life is the life of faith. Faith is the issue on which the matter of salvation depends; it is the key that turns the lock on the door of eternal life. Faith is the channel by which we receive the benefits of Christ's saving work; it is the cup into which God pours His saving grace. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews clearly deals with the matter of faith, most carefully defines its nature, and most exhaustively describes its working. This chapter is to faith

## Hebrews – Lesson 25

what the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is to love. Hebrews 11 is the work of a master teacher and loving pastor who is convinced that the fate of his readers hinges on their faith. If they are to enter into eternal life, he knows, it will be through the possession and the exercise of faith, and in that alone.

*Phillips:* In this 11<sup>th</sup> chapter, therefore, we will devote ourselves to a thorough study of faith, which the Westminster Confession calls ‘the alone instrument of our justification’ (WCF 11.2). Hebrews 11 is an enjoyable chapter, presenting a brilliant series of examples and connecting us to some of the greatest episodes of the Old Testament. But it is also a chapter with a purpose. Its aim is that we would emulate the faith of those heroes of Scripture so that the salvation they received would be ours as well.

### 4. Hughes

*Hughes:* For the Christian there is substantial reason for hope in this life and the life to come because of the promises of God’s Word. In fact, 1 Peter 1:3 tells that we have been ‘born again to a living hope.’ The degree of our experience of hope is proportionate to the degree of our faith. The more profound our faith, the more profound our hope. A deeply intense faith spawns a deeply intense hope.

*Hughes:* This was important to the writer of Hebrews because of the rising storm of persecution that was about to fall on the church. He knew that the key to survival was a solid faith and an attendant hope. That is why in 10:38 he quoted Habakkuk 2:4, ‘But my righteous one shall live by faith.’ There is a spiritual axiom implicit here: *faith* produces *hope*, and *hope* produces *perseverance*. Without faith one will inevitably shrink back.

*Hughes:* This understood, the preacher launches into an eloquent song of faith that occupies the whole of chapter 11, beginning with a brief description of faith in verses 1-3 that is followed by a lyrical catalog of grand examples in verses 4-40. As we take up verse 1-3 and the theme of what ‘faith is,’ we must keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive definition, but rather a description of a faith that perseveres.

## B. Introduction to Faith (Hebrews 11:1-3)

### 1. What Faith Is (11:1)

<sup>1</sup>*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

*Schreiner:* Verse 1 explains the nature of faith, not by completely defining faith but by explaining how faith works. Faith is assured that what is hoped for will become a reality. It is convinced that the unseen promises of God will be fulfilled.

*MacArthur:* In a form the old Hebrew poets often used, the writer expresses his definition of ‘faith’ in two parallel and almost identical phrases. It is not a full theological definition, but an emphasizing of certain basic characteristics of faith that are important in understanding the message the writer is trying to get across.

*Phillips:* Hebrews 11:1 is an oft-quoted and oft-memorized definition of faith. But it is not a comprehensive definition of faith—there are important truths about faith that are not mentioned here—but it serves as a well-crafted introduction to all that the writer of Hebrews wants us to consider in this chapter.

## Hebrews – Lesson 25

*Phillips:* Verse 1 describes the environment in which faith exists and works. Faith takes place when things are hope for but not yet possessed or manifested. In this respect, faith deals with the future. Faith concerns unseen spiritual realities, things as they are in God's sight. Faith, therefore, relates to the things we do not yet have, to the things we hope for and do not see, to things that are promised by God but are so far unfulfilled in our actual experience.

*Hughes:* The character of faith is spelled out with great care in the famous lines of verse 1. Faith's character is, in a word, *certitude*—a dynamic certainty about what God has promised. It is *not* a feeling. It is not optimism or bootstrap positive thinking either. It is not a hunch. It is not sentimentality. True faith is neither brainless nor a sentimental feeling. It is a solid conviction resting on God's words that makes the future present and the invisible seen. Faith has at its core a massive sense of certainty.

*MacArthur:* Faith is living in a hope that is so real it gives absolute 'assurance.' The promises given to the Old Testament saints were so real to them, because they believed God, that they based their lives on them. All the Old Testament promises related to the future—for many believers, far into the future. But the faithful among God's people acted as if they were in the present tense. They simply took God at His word and lived on that basis. They were people of faith, and faith gave present assurance and substance as what was yet future.

### a) Assurance (11:a)

<sup>1</sup>*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for...*

*Schreiner:* The word 'reality' (*υποστασις*, *hypostasis*) here is translated 'confidence' (NIV, NLT) or 'assurance' (ESV, NSRV) by other translations.

*Phillips:* Scholars translate verse 1 in a variety of ways. The reason is that the key word in the opening clause, *hypostasis*, carries with it a number of shades of meaning. In the Septuagint, *hypostasis* occurs twenty times to translate twelve different Hebrew words. The ESV, NAS, and NRS render it as 'the assurance.' The NIV translates it as 'being sure,' while the KJV has it as the 'substance' of things hoped for. J. B. Phillips calls it 'full confidence.'

*Hughes:* The first half of the verse expresses the future certitude that faith brings. The word 'assurance' is a translation of a single Greek noun—*hypostaseōs*, which literally means, 'That which stands under' or 'foundation' and hence 'substance. This word has appeared twice earlier in Hebrews where it was translated objectively ('nature') in 1:3 and subjectively ('confidence') in 3:14.

*Bruce:* Faith is, the author says, the *hypostasis* of things that are hoped for. This word *hypostasis* has appeared twice already in the epistle. In 1:3 the Son was stated to be the very image of God's *hypostasis*; in 3:14 believers are said to be Christ's associates if they hold fast the beginning of their *hypostasis* firm to the end. In the former place it has the objective sense of 'substance' or 'real essence' (as opposed to what merely seems to be so). In the latter place it has the subjective sense of 'confidence' or 'assurance.'

*MacArthur:* The Greek word *hypostasis*, translated here as 'assurance,' appears two other times in Hebrews. In 1:3 it is rendered 'exact representation,' speaking of Christ's likeness to God, and in 3:14 it is rendered 'assurance' as in 11:1. The term refers to the essence, the real content, the reality, as opposed to the mere appearance. Faith, then, provides the firm ground on which we stand, waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise. Far from being nebulous and uncertain, faith is the most solid possible conviction. Faith is the presence essence of a future reality.

## Hebrews – Lesson 25

### (1) Objective Meaning

*Phillips:* Philip Hughes’s excellent commentary on Hebrews lists four main ways we may take *hypostasis*, all of which have something to offer. The first corresponds to the way it is used in Hebrews 1:3. There this same word describes God’s substance or being: ‘[The Son] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His *nature*.’ This is the idea that comes across in the King James Version of 11:1: ‘Now faith is the *substance* of things hoped for.’ The point is, as Hughes says, that ‘faith lays hold of what is promised and therefore hoped for, as something real and solid, though as yet unseen.’ By faith, therefore, we possess things that are hoped for; faith is the manner in which we hold them, and by faith they are real in our experience. This, then, is how faith functions: it makes real to us and gives us possession of things that are hoped for but are not yet part of our experience.

*Phillips:* The second way we may take *hypostasis* is as a *foundation*. The construction of the word lends itself to this, combining the prefix ‘under’ with the word for ‘standing.’ A *hypostasis* is something that stands under something else, as a foundation to a building. This is the way Saint Augustine understood our passage, that faith is the beginning which contains the certainty of the end. By faith we begin what we will ultimately conclude by possessing and seeing.

*Hughes:* The KJV here uses the objective translation: ‘Now faith is the substance of things hoped for.’ Likewise, the NEB says, ‘Faith gives substance to our hopes’—the idea being that faith grabs hold of what is hoped for, as something real and substantial.

### (2) Subjective Meaning

*Schreiner:* Those who support the translation reflected in the HSCB argue that the word used here (*υποστασις*, *hypostasis*) never has the idea of subjective confidence or assurance. It seems however, that this judgment is too rash, for the word denotes confidence in Ps. 38:8 in the LXX, and the Hebrew word here means ‘hope’ as well. We see the same phenomenon in Ezekiel 19:5, where the term (*υποστασις*, *hypostasis*) renders another Hebrew word for ‘hope.’ It also seems that the word ‘confidence’ coheres well in 2 Cor. 9:4 and 11:7. I argued earlier that such a reading fits with 3:14 also. We have evidence, then, that ‘confidence’ and ‘assurance’ are in the semantic range of the word used here. Most important, ‘confidence’ or ‘assurance’ fit the context of chapter 11. The author concluded chapter 10 by emphasizing the need for persevering faith. The OT ancestors in chapter 11 are saluted because of their trust in God’s promises, even when there was no evidence that the promises would come to pass. So the traditional rendering of 11:1 actually accords best with the context of chapter 11.

*Phillips:* Third, *hypostasis* may be taken as *confidence* or *assurance*, which is how the majority of translations render it. This definition deals with what faith is, namely a confidence or assurance in things hoped for but not yet seen. This is how the word is used in Hebrews 3:14, the other occasion where it appears in this letter: ‘we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original *confidence* firm to the end.’ Faith then, is our attitude toward our circumstances, particularly toward uncertainty and want.

*Phillips:* Finally, this word may be rendered as *guarantee* or *attestation*. Faith, in this sense, is the title deed to things we do not possess but hope for in the Lord. Faith is our guarantee that provides a foretaste of the spiritual blessings that ultimately we will know in full.

*Hughes:* Along with the ESV, most other translations render the word subjectively—‘the assurance’ (RSV, ASV, NASB, NAB) or ‘the guarantee’ (JB) or ‘being sure’ (NIV).

## Hebrews – Lesson 25

*Bruce:* Here in 11:1 it is natural to take *hypostasis* in the same subjective sense as it bears in 3:14, and so the ERV/ARV and the RSV render it ‘assurance.’ There is, however, something to be said for the objective meaning, represented by the AV/KJV (‘faith is the substance of things hoped for’) and the NEB (‘faith gives substance to our hopes’). That is to say, things which in themselves have no existence as yet become real and substantial by the exercise of faith. But on the whole, the subjective meaning ‘assurance’ is the more probable, especially as this meaning chimes in well with the companion word ‘conviction.’

### (3) Objective and Subjective

*Schreiner:* Taking the viewpoint that a subjective meaning of *hypostasis* accords best with the context of chapter 11 should not be interpreted to say that the objective view is entirely without merit, for the subjective and objective meanings are tied together here. The subjective side emerges when *hypostasis* is linked with ‘faith,’ which pertains to the believing person. The objective side emerges when *hypostasis* is connected to ‘things hoped for,’ since the object of hope lies outside the believer.

*Phillips:* This word *hypostasis* can be taken in at least four ways, and so the question may arise as to which one is right. It seems that the writer of Hebrews deliberately chose a word that has a broad and rich array of meanings, all of which are to the point. Faith is the substance of things hoped for; it is the foundation upon which they are brought into being; it is a confident attitude toward those things God has promised; and it is the guarantee that gives us a sure possession even now.

*Hughes:* Actually, the objective and subjective tenses of the word are not at odds because genuine faith does bring an assurance of what we hope for that is solid and substantive. The subjective certainty in our hearts has an objective solidity to it—*real certitude!* The solid certainty is about the future—what we hope for. What are the things we hope for? We hope for *Christ’s return* (Titus 2:13). We hope for the *resurrection* (1 Pe. 1:3). We hope for *glorification* (1 Jn. 3:2-3). We hope to *reign* with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). The believer’s faith gives him such an inner certitude that the return of Christ, the resurrection, the glorification, a place in Heaven, and a coming reign all become present to him!

#### b) *Conviction (11:1b)*

...*the conviction of things not seen.*

*Schreiner:* A subjective meaning is also suggested in the next line. The second line means ‘to be sure (*ελεγχος, elenchos*) about things unseen.’ A subjective sense for the Greek word here (*ελεγχος, elenchos*) matches the notion of confidence or assurance in the first line. Faith is convinced that what God promises will most certainly be fulfilled. What is unseen is not completely defined in terms of future promises, for the unseen also describes past realities, such as creation (11:3), or present realities, such as God’s existence (11:6, 27), His faithfulness (11:17), and power (11:19).

*Bruce:* The word rendered ‘conviction’ (*elenchos*) has the same twofold sense as the English word. In 2 Tim. 3:16 it occurs as a variant reading for the cognate *elegmos* to denote the ‘conviction’ or ‘refutation’ of error which Holy Scripture provides; here it means ‘conviction’ in much the same sense as ‘assurance’ in the preceding phrase. Physical eyesight produces conviction or evidence of visible things; faith is the organ which enables people (like Moses in v. 27) to see the invisible order.

## Hebrews – Lesson 25

*Phillips:* The concept of *hypostasis* as ‘substance’ is the idea of faith emphasized in the second half of verse 1, where we read that faith is ‘the conviction of things not seen.’ The key Greek word here is *elenchus*, which the NIV translates as ‘being certain,’ and which normally means proof or evidence or attestation of ‘things that are not yet seen.’ These things are not seen, but their proof and our conviction of them are realized through faith. One of the reasons to favor the translation of *hypostasis* as ‘substance’ is that they see a parallel between the first and second halves of this verse: faith is the ‘substance of what we hope for and the evidence of things not seen.’

*MacArthur:* ‘Conviction of things not seen’ carries the same truth a bit further, because it implies a response, an outward manifestation of the inward assurance. The person of faith lives his belief. His life is committed to what his mind and his spirit are convinced is true.

*Hughes:* The second half of verse 1 joins faith’s future certitude to the parallel visual certitude that comes through faith, because faith means having ‘the conviction of things not seen.’ The KJV translates this, ‘the evidence of things not seen.’ These translations augment each other because the evidence by which a thing is proved brings conviction and certainty to the mind. Our faith is the organ by which we are enabled to see the invisible order—and to see it with certainty, just as our eyes behold the physical world around us. What do we see? As we have mentioned, we see the future because it is made present to us through faith. But we also see more—namely, the invisible spiritual kingdom around us (cp. Gen. 28).

*Hughes:* Faith brings a dynamic dual certitude to everyday life. First, there is *future certitude* as that which is to come becomes present for us. Second, there is a *visual certitude* as we see the invisible. So here is the possibility we must consider if we are serious about following Christ: it is possible by faith to live in *future certitude*—to be present at Christ’s return, to be present at our resurrection and glorification, to be present in Heaven, and to reign with Him. It is also possible by faith to live in *visual certitude*—in the supernatural—to see all the mountain flaming with light—to see the traffic between Heaven and earth in our behalf. This is what our passage is calling us to, just as Abraham by faith put his stock in the future heavenly country, and just as Moses saw Him who is invisible.

*MacArthur:* There is a sense in which all men live by faith. Society is built on a foundation of faith. We drink water out of a faucet, with perfect confidence it is safe. We eat food in a restaurant, confident that it is not contaminated. We willingly receive our pay in the form of a check or paper money—neither of which has any intrinsic value at all. We accept them because of our faith in the person or the company or the government that issues them. We put our faith in a surgeon, and in medical science in general, though we may not have the least training, competence, or experience in medicine ourselves. We submit to the surgeon’s knife entirely by faith. The capacity for faith is created in us. Spiritual faith operates in the realm of that capacity. It willingly accepts and acts on many things it does not understand. But spiritual faith is radically different from natural faith in one important way. It is not natural, as is our trust in water, money, or the doctor. ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God’ (Eph. 2:8). Just as natural trust comes by natural birth, so spiritual trust comes from God.

### 2. What Faith Receives (11:2)

<sup>2</sup>*For by it the people of old received their commendation.*

## Hebrews – Lesson 25

*Schreiner:* Faith and confidence in God’s promises are important, for the ancestors recorded in the OT gained approval for their faith, and the writer is about to give us a litany of those ancestors in the forthcoming verses. The word translated ‘won approval’ (*εμαρτυρηθησαν, emartyrēthēsan*) often has this meaning (Acts 6:3; 10:22; 16:2; 22:12; 1 Tim. 5:10). In the context of Hebrews 11, the author means they won approval before God. Clearly, the author’s desire is for the readers to imitate the example of their illustrious ancestors so they will obtain favor before God on the last day.

*MacArthur:* ‘Men of old gained approval’ from God because of their faith, and because of nothing else. God has always approved and recognized the person of faith. This verse implies what other parts of the chapter make clear—that God makes His approval *known* to those who trust Him. How God shows His approval varies, but every saint, just as surely as Enoch (11:5), has God’s witness that his faith is pleasing to his Lord. Faith is not simply one way to please God; it is the only way (11:6). No matter what else we may think, say, or do for or in the name of God, it is meaningless and worthless apart from faith. It cannot possibly be approved by God.

*Phillips:* When it comes to understanding and defining faith, there are two basic approaches we may safely take, or two basic questions for which we may find an answer. The first of these has to do with what faith *does* and the second addresses what faith *is*. If the question concerns what faith does, the answer is that it makes real to us things that are otherwise unreal to our experience; it presents to our hearts things that cannot be seen with our eyes. If that is what faith does, the answer to what faith is must be closely related—faith is confidence in those things that are not present to us but are promised in the Word of God. If we believe, we are acting upon things that are not yet manifest but which we accept as true.

*Phillips:* Those who put their faith in God and in His Word, and not in this world and the evidence it presents, are those whom God receives. This is the point stressed in verse 2, which indicates where the author is taking us in this chapter: ‘For by it the people of old received their commendation.’ What will follow in this chapter is the record of those men and women God commends in Scripture, starting in the Book of Genesis. What we are to note in each and every case is that the one thing that brought people God’s commendation was their faith. Not their gifts, not their attainments, not their beauty, strength, or popularity—these are the things that bring people commendation of the world.

*Hughes:* Having given us *faith’s character* in verse 1, the writer now calls to mind *faith’s activism* in verse 2. All the ancients of Israel who received divine commendation received it because of the character of their faith. Their certitude produced a dynamic activism. Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (alluded to in 11:34). They had nothing but God’s word to rest on. They had no visible evidence that they would be delivered in this life. But they knew they would ultimately be delivered—they knew it so well that it was a present reality. The faith of the trio consisted simply in taking God at His word and living their lives accordingly. Things yet future, as far as their experience went, were *present* to their faith. Things unseen were *visible* to their individual eyes of faith. And so it goes for every example in the great Hall of Faith of Hebrews 11—from Abel to Samuel to the unnamed heroes of the faith. And so it goes for us. By certain faith we will endure in blessed activism. And by certain faith we will receive God’s commendation.

*Bruce:* It was for faith of this kind that men and women of old received the divine commendation, and this has been placed on permanent record as an example to their

## Hebrews – Lesson 25

descendants. The record is surveyed in vv. 4-38. Our author does not only accumulate a series of examples; he sets them in historical sequence so as to provide an outline of the redemptive purpose of God, advancing through the age of promise until at last in Jesus, faith's 'pioneer and perfecter' (12:2), the age of fulfillment is inaugurated.

*Phillips:* This, by the way, is why the men and women we will study in Hebrews 11 are unnoticed and unrecorded in the secular histories. What the world admires is power, wealth, worldly glory, fame. Thus you will find no great monuments to Abraham and the others, no tablets celebrating their lives in the libraries of ancient empires, because what they had is of no account to the world. But their faith in God, though scorned by men, made them great in the eyes of the Lord and brought them His commendation and approval. Here in this chapter we see God's record, His hall of fame. The obvious point, therefore, is that if we want God's favor, God's approval, God's commendation during these brief years of our own lives, then it will come only by the possession and exercise of faith.

### 3. What Faith Understands (11:3)

<sup>3</sup>*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.*

*Schreiner:* The author now begins to give examples of faith, beginning with creation. No one observed the creation and what happened at the inception of the world can't be verified or reproduced in laboratories.

*Phillips:* The method our writer takes in this chapter is to follow the record of the Old Testament as it presents different men and women of faith. To that end, he begins with the opening chapter of Genesis, finding proof of his doctrine even in the creation of the world. His point in verse 3 may seem obscure, but it is one that is especially germane to our times. The nature of the universe, the creation or beginning of all things, cannot be explained by evidence that is available to our eyes. Without faith we cannot even explain the world in which we exist.

#### a) *The Secular View of Origins*

*Phillips:* Ours is a time committed to atheism—that is, to a view of the universe and history that excludes God. Nowhere is this lifeworld more evident than in contemporary attempts to explain the origins of the universe. Undoubtedly the most popular answer today is the Big Bang Theory, which says the universe was caused by a massive outward explosion of an incredibly dense mass. But that begs the question, 'What caused the Big Bang?' This is a question scientists leave unanswered. Only faith provides an answer, both for the Christian and for the atheist. The non-Christian's faith is in the Big Bang. For the materialist, the Big Bang has taken on divine qualities that rule out questions regarding its origin.

*Hughes:* Many manage to deny the Creator. They are like the piano mice who lived all their lives in a large piano. The music of the instrument came to them in their 'piano world,' filling all the dark spaces with sound and harmony. At first, the mice were impressed by it. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought that there was someone who made the music—though invisible to them—someone above, yet close to them. They loved to think of the Great Player whom they could not see. Then one day a daring mouse climbed up part of the piano and returned very thoughtful. He had found out how the music was made. Wires were the secret—tightly stretched wires of graduated lengths that trembled and vibrated. They must revise all their old beliefs. None but the most conservative could any longer believe in the Unseen Player.

## Hebrews – Lesson 25

Later, another explorer carried the explanation further. Hammers were now the secret—great numbers of hammers dancing and leaping on the wires. This was a more complicated theory, but it all went to show that they lived in a purely mechanical and mathematical world. The Unseen Player came to be thought of as a myth, though the pianist continued to play.

### b) *The View of Faith*

*Bruce:* Before he proceeds to celebrate the faith of the elders, however, he illustrates in another way his statement that faith is a conviction or proof of things not seen. The visible universe, he says, was not made out of equally visible raw material; it was called into being by divine power. Here, as in 1:2, the ‘worlds’ are the *aiōnes* (lit. ‘ages’); in both places the universe of space and time is meant. There God is said to have made the universe by the agency of the Son; here He is said to have fashioned it by His word. The Greek substantive translated ‘utterance’ here is not *logos* (as in John 1:1-4), but *rhēma*, referring to the utterance by which God summoned into existence what had no existence before. Our author is thinking of the creative command ‘Let there be light’ (Gen. 1:3) and the following commands. The writer to the Hebrews is biblical in his reasoning and affirms the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*, a doctrine uncongenial to Greek thought. The faith by which he accepts it is faith in the divine revelation; the first chapter of Genesis is probably uppermost in his mind, since he is about to trace seven living examples of faith from the subsequent chapters of that book.

*MacArthur:* God did not just create the world, but the worlds (*aiōn*), which designates the physical universe itself and also its operation, its administration. He created everything simply by His word (*rhēma*) His divine utterance. He created from nothing, at least not from anything physical, or ‘visible.’ The writer makes an absolutely stupendous claim in this short verse. The greatest claim, and the one hardest for an unbeliever to accept, is that understanding of creation comes entirely by faith.

*Schreiner:* Believers ‘understand’ and comprehend ‘by faith’ that the world was ‘created’ (*κατηρτισθαι, katērtisthai*) or ‘formed’ or ‘prepared’ by the word of God (cp. Ps. 73:16; 88:8; Rom. 9:22). Here the writer reflects on Genesis 1 where God speaks and His word is effective in that what He speaks becomes a reality so that the things in the world come into existence. We find a similar notion in Ps. 33:6, ‘The heavens were made by the word of the LORD’ (cp. Ps. 148:5). The result (second) clause could be taken in various ways, The HCSB rendering indicates that the visible world derives from invisible ‘things’: ‘so that what is seen has been made from things that are not visible.’ This could be read to say that visible realities derive from ‘real things,’ namely, the word of God. The problem with this reading is that the invisible things are plural and the word of God is singular. The NIV and ESV take the negative with the infinitive: ‘so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.’ Grammatically, the ESV and NIV readings are preferable, for it is more likely that the negative modifies the infinitive ‘made’ (*γεγονεναι, gegonenai*) instead of the prepositional phrase ‘out of things that are visible’ (*εκ φαινομενων, ek phainomenōn*). The interpretation favored here fits nicely with what the author is doing in this chapter. The creation of the world is a miracle, and it doesn’t derive from preexisting material. Creation out of nothing can’t be demonstrated empirically (though neither can the contrary!), and it is embraced by faith.

*Phillips:* But the Christian finds the answer not in this kind of scientific mysticism, but in the Word of God. According to Hebrews 11:3, the universe was formed from nothing by the Word of God, who alone existed before creation. Here the writer of Hebrews appeals to the Word of God as the object of our faith. If God’s Word was capable of creating everything out of nothing,

## Hebrews – Lesson 25

then surely that Word is a sufficient ground for our hope. Indeed, if God's Word was sufficient to bring all that is into existence, it is also sufficient to give me all I need. This is how we distinguish biblical faith from the popular notion of faith as a leap in the dark. Faith is not blind trust, wishful thinking, a mere manifestation of our positive attitude. We believe the Word of God because it is the Word of the God who made all things, and who, as 1:3 tells us, 'sustain[s them] by His powerful word.' Our faith therefore feeds upon the word (Mt. 4:4). Our faith grows strong from the Word, rests secure in the Word, and bears fruit from the Word, which, as the writer of Hebrews has said, 'is living and active' (4:12). Ours is not a blind faith, but a faith that sees by the light of God's sure revelation (cp. Ps. 119:105).

*Hughes:* For the believer, those who know the Pianist, it is all so clear. We do not hold our breath to see if Stephen Hawking re-embraces the Big Bang theory. That theory is somewhat congenial to the Biblical account, but we do not need it. We know that God simply spoke the universe into existence.

*MacArthur:* Through *faith* we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, a truth the world's most brilliant thinkers have not discovered and cannot discover on their own. *It* is beyond the realm of scientific investigation, but it is not beyond knowing—if we are willing to be taught by the Word of God. The Christian has no reason to be proud of His knowledge. It is a gift from God, like every other blessing of faith. By his own resources, he could no more discover the truth about origins than could the rankest atheist.

### C. Application of Faith

#### 1. Schreiner

*Schreiner:* Faith is introduced because the flip side of apostasy is faith. The author doesn't ask the readers to look to themselves and to summon up all their energy to persevere until the end. What it means to endure is to keep trusting God until the end. Endurance comes when we look to God for strength and put our trust in His promises. Faith means we put our trust in what God has promised, even if those promises seem impossible to us. Chapter 11 reminds us that we are not the first to take this journey; many have walked this path ahead of us, and thus we are not alone in our journey of faith.

#### 2. Phillips

*Phillips:* What are the practical implications of what this passage says about faith and its centrality to the Christian life? First, if what we read here is true, then faith is how we receive the blessings of salvation. What are the unseen things that our faith grasps? These are our justification, the forgiveness of sins, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us. There is only one way to receive and to know and then to grow into full assurance of our acceptance with God, and that is through faith in His Word. What God asks us to do is to believe the gospel of His Son and thereby be saved; only through faith can we know the benefits of what Christ has achieved for us.

*Phillips:* Second, faith sustains us in the midst of trial and difficulty. Only through faith do the people of God every find strength and courage to stand up against the world and the trials of this life. This is the kind of Christianity our own world needs, the kind this world always needs, a Christianity made bold by the reality of faith.

## Hebrews – Lesson 25

*Phillips:* Third, faith makes us pleasing to God and useful to others in this life. This is what we are going to find all through our studies of the biblical examples set before us in Hebrews 11. As verse 2 tells us, it is for faith that the ancients were commended by God. Faith is what got these men—Noah, Abraham, Moses—into the Bible. None of them were perfect or sinless, but all of them served the Lord by faith.

*Phillips:* Therefore let us pray with the disciples, ‘Lord, increase our faith!’ (Lk. 17:5). Nothing is more valuable to us, or more beneficial to others, than the faith that saves us through union with Christ, the faith that sustains us in the wilderness of this world, the faith that alone will make us pleasing to God and useful in His kingdom. If we believe in the supreme value of faith, then we will give our time, our effort, and our favor to those things that build up our faith, scoring all those things that stand opposed to it.

### 3. Hughes

*Hughes:* What is needed is a rebirth, or perhaps birth, of Hebrews 11 faith—the kind that is characterized by a twofold certainty: a *future certainty* that is so sure of what we hope for that it considers God’s promises to be present—and a *visual certainty* that gives us ‘the conviction of things not seen.’ This is *certitude*—full belief in what we believe—bounding hope! Such a faith produces a dynamic activism such as that for which ‘the people of old received their commendation’—and a place in God’s Hall of Faith. Finally, the certainty and activism of faith is crowned with a dynamic understanding of God’s creatorship.

*Hughes:* What is the benefit of all this? Certainly the will to persevere. But also something else very important—the ability by God’s grace to take the hand of the despairing and lead them away from the bridge to a life of certitude and love and life and understanding and action.

For next time: Read Hebrews 11:4-7.