

**HEBREWS 35  
(Hebrews 11:3-7)**

**THE OPERATION OF FAITH  
By Ron Harvey  
(April 29, 2012)**

**INTRODUCTION**

We have defined faith in simple terms. Faith is confidence in someone else's testimony. None of us can be experts in everything. And so we all operate by faith every day. If I had a question in the field of aeronautics I would feel very confident asking Bro. Mark McNair to tell me about it. He is a commercial airline pilot. And if I had a question about how Memphis Light Gas and Water works I would have a lot of confidence in Bro. Terry Motes and Bro. Jack Ray. Both of them worked for the company and they have a lot of inside information.

But you can see that your level of confidence depends on the person who is giving you testimony. When you are taking the testimony of men, you would like to have at least two or three witnesses because men are prone to error. But godly faith is confidence in the testimony of God himself.

Now remember that faith is not something that causes something to happen. Faith is something that simply receives truth from God. Faith is the spiritual mechanism whereby those who are regenerated receive the promises of God with confidence. Faith is that disposition of the mind and soul to accept the word of God as true even if the thing promised is yet unseen.

1. Godly faith has as its object the word of God.

Godly faith is no empty imagination. Godly faith attaches to a very certain reality. It attaches to the promise of God. Godly faith is not a vague hope, but it is a bold assurance.

*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. (10:22)*

There is only One in all of the universe whose testimony can be utterly relied on. There is only One whose yea is always yea and whose

may is always nay. There is only One who has all knowledge and all power to make promises and keep them perfectly. And when we place our faith in Him, we have confidence and assurance in what he has said.

2. Godly faith has its origin in the regenerative act of God.

*But 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.*

I Corinthians 2:14

There is no receptacle of faith in the unregenerate. And therefore, it says the natural man (that is, the unregenerate man) receiveth not the things of God.

**Example: Back in the old days, we used to watch television. And we had three network stations. There was no cable. There was no satellite. And we had to have an antenna. And we would climb out and attach this crazy looking contraption to the roof. And if we got it firmly attached and if it pointed in the right direction, we could pick up the television signal. And it was very frustrating. If the wind blew hard, it might blow the antenna around and we could not watch TV.**

You see, the unregenerate are like a television set without an antenna. There is no mechanism to receive the signal.

But God has done a very wonderful thing for his elect. He has provided an antenna. When he makes them alive by regeneration, he gives them a little antenna that receives God truth. And this antenna is called faith.

This antenna of faith is a gift from God that comes along with the new creation. When God does that marvelous work of bringing you to life, he wraps up a special little gift for you. And when you open it up, you will find your very own little antenna. And now you receive his signals.

This is why the Bible states clearly that faith is a gift.

*For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: It is the gift of God: Not of works lest any man should boast.*

Ephesians 2:8,9

3. Godly faith produces the works of God.

A person who really believes something will act on it.

**Example: If you knew that an airplane was going to crash into your house in five minutes, what would you do? You would vacate the house. You would act according to your belief.**

**Example: If you knew some billionaire would be handing out \$1,000 dollar bills on the street corner in 30 minutes you would go there.**

And if you believe the Word of God, then you will order your life by it. You see a godly faith naturally produces a godly life.

Now this afternoon we are going to see some examples of how faith operates in the lives of real people.

### The Operation of Faith in Us

Now here the writer of Hebrews uses all Christians as examples of faith. You didn't know that you were mentioned in Hebrews, did you? You didn't know it, but you are in God's faith hall of fame.

*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.*

Hebrews 11:3

Now when it says we understand, that is a collective we. It is a "we" that brings all the saints of God into view. All those of faith are in view. Though faith we understand.

Now I want you to know that faith is not something for thoughtless ignoramuses. Faith is not for those who are devoid of intellect. For here it says that through faith we understand.

Laying your confidence in the Word of God will stand you on a pedestal of understanding far above your natural fellows. There is understanding and wisdom in the truth of God. And that understanding and wisdom will lift you up infinitely higher than the wisdom of men.

Now this could not be more clear than in the science of origins.

It says that "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."

Now this illustrates faith in a very cogent way.

Now remember our principle of faith found in verses one and two.

*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

You can easily see that no one was present when the worlds came into existence. And we would have no idea about how it all happened were it not for the testimony of God.

And left to his own devices, man comes up with the most ridiculous speculations as to how it all happened. Rejecting the possibility of God, man speculates as to what happened millions and even billions of years ago. And he projects that this universe of brilliant order and complexity put itself together from disorder and chaos. And he presumes that living things sprung up from dead things. And even though scientific knowledge tells him that this cannot be true, he asserts it as though it is fact and all because he will not admit there is a God.

Man is a very foolish creature and he is without understanding.

*There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*

Romans 3:11

But what does Hebrews 11:3 say? Through faith we understand.

I would feel safer having a conversation with a regenerate person

than a thousand conversations with the otherwise learned men in this world. The unsaved of this world are marked by ignorance and a lack of understanding. But a saved man is a man of wisdom, through faith.

You see, there is great wisdom to be had in believing the Word of God.

*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God.*

Now you will notice that we didn't cause the worlds to be framed by our faith did we? Faith has no causative power. We weren't even around when the worlds were created.

But by faith we understand. God has told us how it all happened.

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

Genesis 1:1

And with the reading and believing of the very first verse of the Bible, I have more understanding than all of the scientists and philosophers of the world who are full only of their foolish speculations.

God has given us great wisdom and it all comes by the simple gift of faith.

By faith I understand that God made this world out of nothing.

*So things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

Now scientists are caught in a great quandary because God has made this universe with an enduring principle and that is that nothing comes from nothing. Not one scientist has ever been able to create something from nothing. According to the laws of this world, it cannot be done. And so, the scientist cannot account for the existence of this world.

But, by faith, we believe God when he says he made it out of nothing.

## The Operation of Faith in Abel

Now there is no need to go back and rehash the whole account of Cain and Abel from the book of Genesis. And this is why the writer of Hebrews covers this in one verse. He assumes that we know something about Cain and Abel.

And let me summarize for you. It is apparent from the Genesis account that both Abel and Cain knew that something was wrong between himself and God for they both brought sacrifices. So both men knew there was a serious sin problem.

How did they know? It is not revealed how they knew although we would speculate that they so learned from their parents. Surely their parents explained to them the awful mistake that was made in the garden. And if the testimony of their parents was not sufficient it is not hard to imagine that God told them directly.

And also, we must realize that sinners of all ages have been impressed with the consciousness of sins.

*Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing them witness . . .*

Romans 2:15

One thing we know for sure, they both came offering sacrifices. And it is evident that they knew themselves to be sinners and they knew something had to be done.

Now it says,

*By faith, Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.*

Now we know that it was more excellent because it was a blood sacrifice. Cain brought an ineffective sacrifice when he brought grain from his field. But Abel brought a bleeding sheep.

Now the question is, "How did Abel know to bring a bleeding sheep?"

Well we have a very large hint. It says that he brought his sacrifice by

faith. Now we have no reason to believe that Abel had any more information about the matter than Cain. But Abel came by faith. Now remember that faith, by definition, is believing the word of God.

*Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*  
Romans 10:17

Now the only way that Abel could come in faith was if God had given him a command. Faith is not some wisp of a hope. Faith is not some duty or fancy conjured up in the mind. Faith is a settled confidence in the word of God. God told him to bring a bleeding sheep and thus he did.

Cain on the other hand was the first known hypocrite. He refused to comply with the word of God but he acted piously as though he came to worship God. He brought a more convenient sacrifice. Cain thought he could worship God in his own way which was a way of disobedience. Cain's way was not a way of faith. Cain's way was a way of unbelief and a way of rebellion.

Now you should notice that faith always has attending works. It is not as though there are no works in the Christian life. But the works that come forth, come forth out of faith. Faith causes a man to obey God and to do the works of God. And so, Abel did the works of God. And notice that this outward work had the effect of confirming his righteousness.

*By which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts.*

Now when Adam brought his sacrifice he undoubtedly laid it down somewhere. He didn't just carry it perpetually on his shoulder. Perhaps there was an altar. Perhaps he laid it on a rock. Perhaps he laid it in the dust. But wherever he laid it, we are told that God testified of his gifts. It seems likely to me that in some way God showed favoritism to his gifts. Perhaps God sent a miraculous fire to consume the body of the lamb. And perhaps Cain's sacrifice lay cold and unattended. Perhaps God spoke to Abel and showed approval for his sacrifice but either refused to speak to Cain or spoke disapprovingly to him. Whatever the mechanism, we believe the words here which say that God testified of Abel's gifts.

I am quite sure that Abel went home from his worship that day a happy man, for his sacrifice for sin was accepted. But Cain was wroth with God and with Abel.

And Cain slew his brother Abel. And yet, notice the glorious reference in the last of the verse.

*And by it he being dead yet speaketh.*

When it says by “it,” what does it mean?

It means by his faith he yet speaketh. There are many lessons to be learned from the faithful sacrifice of Abel. But we will content ourselves with but one.

Fallen man can only approach God through the death of an innocent Substitute. Even though there were two men in this story, only one of them believed that he needed a blood substitute. Did you know that only God’s elect will ever feel the need for such a substitute? Only God’s elect will set aside their own inclinations and bow to God’s revealed will. Only the elect will bring the true sacrifice of Christ to heaven’s gate. But they who bring that one and only sacrifice for sins, will obtain witness from God himself that they are righteous. You see, God told Abel, you are righteous, And one day, God will look his elect in the eye and testify once more, “Thy sacrifice hast made thee righteous.”

### **The Operation of Faith in Enoch**

Now we saw in Abel a faith that led him to be accepted by God by a proper sacrifice. And now we see in Enoch a faith that led him to a proper walk with God. Now the brief account of Enoch is found in Genesis Chapter 5. And there it says that he walked with God. Now this takes the life of faith to the next step. In Abel we saw the beginning of our life in God. That is, it begins by faith in a substitutionary atonement. Our spiritual life thus begins in faith. But then we have a life to lead. We have a little walk to walk with God. You see we are on a journey from here to there. We must take a walk through the wilderness. And Enoch took that walk, and he took it by faith.

Now notice that it says that Enoch pleased God in verse 5. And it is clear that he pleased God by faith. It is evident that Enoch lived a life of

faith and this pleased God.

Now remember, faith is believing the testimony of God.

Now we don't know what words God may have spoken to Enoch, but we do know that whatever God told him Enoch believed him. And it appears from Hebrews 11:5 that somewhere along the walk of life, God promised Enoch that he would translate him directly to heaven without the necessity of death.

Now Enoch lived 365 years and he may have waited 300 years for the fulfillment of this promise. But he waited in faith. And at the appointed time he was translated.

Now the translation of Enoch must surely serve as a type of a more widespread translation. And A.W. Pink suggests that it serves first as a type of all the faithful who are translated from spiritual darkness to spiritual life. It is interesting that the New Testament uses the same word to describe our "translation" from death to life.

*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

Colossians 1:13

And John puts it this way.

*We have passed from death to life.*

John 5:24

God demonstrated to us in Enoch that through faith he is able to translate us from death to life. Death has no sting upon us. He has translated us to a new realm where we are out from under the curse of sin and death.

But also, the translation of Enoch is a type of the translation that will take place when Christ returns. Because when Jesus comes again he will shout and the arch angel will also shout and the trumpet will sound and the dead in Christ will rise first and then, those that are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to be with him forevermore.

Some will say this is impossible. And we say, with God nothing is impossible and besides, he has already done it with Enoch as a token and as proof of the translation of all living saints at his return.

And all of this simply because Enoch believed God.

### **The Operation of Faith in Noah**