

The Christian Fight (Part Four)

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Previously, we had reached Hebrews 11:4 and its example of Abel's use of faith in God, Jesus Christ, and the instruction God provides to us in Scripture. We had seen that our faith in them comes about by hearing the Word of God, most specifically the gospel. However, to understand this specific faith properly, we need to realize that it is *not* truly and completely *our* response to hearing the gospel. Rather, it is more spiritually correct to understand that God gives this specific faith, and that the hearing of the gospel is the avenue by which He gives this awesome gift.

This specific faith is the faith required for salvation. One can have faith in any number of people or products through mere human experience. We commonly make statements like "He has faith in General Motors automobiles," or "She is faithful to Kenmore washing machines." We can even have faith in another person's character.

In John 6:44, Jesus declares for our humble acceptance, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." Not a single person could come to God for salvation unless God draws him through Jesus Christ. Saving faith is a very special faith, existing in an individual only because of a miraculous gift from God. It is not generated internally by logical human reason, common sense, or human experience. If faith were not a graciously and freely given gift of God, but rather our own internally generated response to hearing the gospel, God would be indebted to us. In other words, He would owe us because we, on our own, provided the faith to begin and continue in His way.

Notice the conversation Jesus had just moments before what is recorded in John 6:44:

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you...." Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?" (John 6:27-30)

Jesus clearly says that believing in the One God sent—Jesus Christ—is God's work! He clarifies this in verse 44, declaring that God is that specific belief's Originator and Source; otherwise, we would not have the faith of which He speaks. As usual, the Jews did not completely understand.

In Ephesians 2:1, 8-10, Paul reemphasizes this same foundational fact:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins. . . . For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Notice first how this chapter begins: *He* has made us alive. Paul makes sure that we understand that it is God who gives what we spiritually possess. As for verse 8, it does not matter whether we believe that the pronoun "it" refers to grace or faith; both are gifts of God.

Grace is God's kindness to us, shown or demonstrated by His revealing Himself to us. It might help to think of this in reference to God revealing Himself to Moses in the burning bush before He sent him to Egypt. If God did not freely purpose on the strength of His own sovereign will to reveal Himself, neither Moses nor we would ever find Him. If a person cannot find God on his own, how could he possibly have faith in Him? Satan has deceived us so well that men have only the foggiest idea of what to look for.

Faith—with God as its object—begins and continues as part of His gift of kindness. The gift includes His calling, the granting of repentance, the sacrifice of Christ for our forgiveness, and His giving of His Spirit. It is a complete package of many individual gifts. The gospel is the medium that provides the objects of the faith He gives, that is, what we believe and trust in. Paul, perceiving these gifts as a package, uses "grace" as its label. In verses 9-10, he advances to the logical "next step" in God's purpose.

The Faith/Works Connection

Our works in no way jump-start the process of justification, sanctification, and glorification. All our works, beginning with repentance and continuing through our period of sanctification, depend directly on the freely given kindness and faith God provides. Our God-ordained good works are the result of our response to the gift of faith that God gives. Works, then, are the external evidence of the unseen, internal faith that motivates them. A person could not do them unless God had given the gift of faith beforehand. Good works follow, they do not precede.

II Corinthians 5:17-18 confirms this: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." This corroborates that it is God working in the person. His work is termed a "new creation." Since nothing new creates itself, we are the workmanship of another. We are God's workmanship. In sum, because of what God does, we cooperate and produce works that He ordains.

The apostle Paul adds to our understanding in Philippians 2:12-13: "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." He is not saying that we should work in order to obtain salvation. These verses indicate the continuing use of something one already possesses. They suggest carrying something to its logical conclusion, which is for us to live lives worthy of the gospel, doing the works God ordained, as in Ephesians 2:10.

In Romans 9:9-19, Paul, using Jacob and Esau's pre-birth circumstances as a foundation, provides a clear illustration to show that from beginning to end, the whole salvation process depends upon God's involvement. Jacob, representing those called into the church, received God's love in the form of gifts designed to prepare him for the Kingdom of God. From Esau, representing the uncalled, God has simply withheld His love for the time being.

What had happened to the people to whom the book of Hebrews was written? They were losing—indeed, had already lost—much of their former conviction. Though they had plenty to believe in relation to God, as Paul shows within the epistle, their conviction was dissipating through neglect. They were not working out their salvation; thus, they were losing it!

Conviction is the opposite of superficiality. This does not mean a superficial person cannot be religious. Rather, he may appear religious outwardly, but in terms of a true, inward transformation of the heart, he is lacking, as seen in the absence of zeal in seeking change or in real application of righteousness.

In Paul's judgment, the Hebrews had lost the internal certainty that what they believed was right, trustworthy, and so important that they should willingly give their lives to it. They were allowing other concerns like business, social, and entertainment matters too much time and attention. In the world, the forces of hostile skepticism are everywhere and constantly pressuring a Christian from every angle. The Hebrews' works showed that they were steadily retreating before that pressure.

This world is the Christian's largest, broadest field of battle, and nearly constant influences designed to drive a wedge into our carnality emanate from it. What happens if we neglect the right use of God's gift of faith? Hebrews shows us that a Christian does not immediately "lose it," but as he slowly spirals downward, spiritual life becomes merely an intellectual position to be held, not a striving after righteousness. God becomes merely an object of intellectual thought, not a motivation for change of behavior and attitude to imitate Him. Church attendance and religion become intellectualized but not experiential. That is how Laodiceanism becomes a reality in a Christian's life. This is especially likely to occur when a Christian group is economically comfortable.

God's gift of faith is intended by Him to be intellectual, practical, and motivational. This brings us back to the many examples Paul uses in Hebrews 11 to illustrate how faith is most profitably used. He provides an orderly arrangement of instruction from basic definitions and builds toward the more difficult principles.

Faith, Christ's Death, and Justification

One of the most basic truths in God's program involves the fact that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The death we are intended to understand is the second death. There are only two ways to satisfy this basic truth: First, all humans must be paid that wage because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Second, another, an innocent One on whom death has no claim because He never sinned, must pay that wage in our stead, substituting His death for ours.

We find both aspects applied to practical Christian life in Romans. Paul writes in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It is essential that we thoroughly understand that Christ died, not merely as a benefit, but *for* us, that is, in our place. His death substitutes for our well-deserved death, which we earned through sin. Earlier, the apostle had written in Romans 4:1-5:

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him

for righteousness." Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

When confronted by such scriptures that cannot be broken, our only possible conclusion is that the sin-debt that each person owes to God absolutely cannot be worked off. It is so huge and serious that an already sin-defiled person cannot pay it off. Once a person sins, his debt is absolutely irredeemable by anyone or any action except through death. Either each individual pays for himself, or Christ pays in his place. These are the only acceptable payments. Romans 4:11-13 clarifies further:

And [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Circumcision represents any work or any body of works that an individual might attempt to use as payment—they are unacceptable *for this use*, any and all of them.

Verse 16 continues, "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." Paul states a major reason why justification absolutely must be by grace through faith: It is by means of grace that everybody receives a fair chance for salvation. Grace levels the playing field. What would happen to those who could not match the impressive body of works of an Abraham? They would fail to be justified. The truth is that even Abraham was not justified by his circumcision works. He, too, was justified through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and God's grace. It has been this way from the beginning; Genesis 6:8 testifies that Noah found grace in God's eyes.

Romans 4:18-21 continues Abraham's story of justification:

. . . who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

God made possible the faith Abraham demonstrated in this example of how he lived his life. A very positive result came of all of this, as verses 22-25 testify:

And therefore it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

The key word is *imputed*, which means "to credit to; to reckon or assign to; to ascribe or account to." Because of what God does, forgiveness and justification occur. We are credited to be in alignment with the laws of God because the righteousness of the sinless One who substituted for us by dying in our place is imputed—reckoned to—our account. Romans 5:1 declares that justification opens the way to all that follows:

1. Acceptance into God's presence so a true relationship can begin.
2. Having the hope of eternal life and the glory of God.
3. The receipt of God's Holy Spirit.
4. The writing of God's laws on our heart.
5. Making our legal, imputed righteousness before God into practical, experiential, personal righteousness through sanctification.

An Important Symbolical Death

To this point, Jesus Christ's substitutionary death has been emphasized, but an additional death must also occur to make justification a practical reality. This death is our own, but it is symbolical in nature and is based in the certainty of life that God makes available and effectual. Paul writes in Colossians 3:1-3: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." We must amplify this with Romans 6:5-6:

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

This symbolic death and resurrection is achieved through repentance, which we do because we believe we are sinners in need of God's forgiveness, having broken His law and earned death. Again, this occurs only because of what God does first. It also forges a link between God and us. That link is God-given faith, established because we believe and act on right, true knowledge. These subsequent actions provide evidence that the right connections have been made.

This brings us back to Hebrews 11:4 and the lesson contained in Abel's example of faith: "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks." Abel offered his sacrifice by faith. Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God, Abel believed what God said and followed through in obedience to it. His belief motivated and produced a work in agreement with what God ordained that those being created in Christ Jesus should walk in. From whom did Abel hear God's Word? Perhaps from God Himself, but it was most likely from Adam and Eve.

Even so, Abel's act of faith must follow the same pattern as everybody else's. He, too, is saved by grace through faith, thus it was God, working out His purpose, who enabled Abel to believe. By this act, to this very day, he is testifying to us that this process, the creation of salvation in each of us,

begins and continues in this manner. God is consistent (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17). In things pertaining to salvation, everybody is dealt with in an evenhanded, fair manner. Why?

Why has God made Himself solely responsible for the existence of the faith that enables a person to be justified and go on to perfection? We have already seen one reason: to give everybody a fair chance because no one could muster the works sufficient to pay for the wages of sin. A second, very important reason begins to be explained in I Corinthians 1:19-21, 26-31:

For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. . . . For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, God has chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption—that, as it is written, "He that glories let him glory in the Lord."

God has purposely chosen this means to put proud and stiff-necked man totally in debt to Him for the most important achievement in all of life. Men have accomplished much and will continue to do many great things. However, verses 19-21 expose why the wise of this world will not submit to God. The reason becomes clear in the phrase, "the foolishness of preaching" (verse 21, King James Version [KJV]). This translation is somewhat misleading in the King James; it should read "the foolishness of the message preached," as in the New King James Version (NKJV). Paul is not saying that the wise of this world reject the act of preaching but that they consider the content of the message preached to be foolish. In other words, the wise will not believe the gospel, most specifically that God in the flesh has died for the sins of the world.

It cannot be overestimated how important humility expressed by faith before God is to the overall spiritual purpose of God for each individual! Each person must know as fully as possible that Christ died for him, that his own works do not provide forgiveness, and that he has not created himself in Christ Jesus. Nobody evolves into a godly person on the strength of his own will. It is God who works in us both to will and to do (Philippians 2:13). No new creation creates itself. So, by and large, God calls the undignified, base, weak, and foolish of this world, people whom the unbelieving wise consider to be insignificant and of no account. He does this so that no human will glory in His presence. On this, a German commentator, Johann Albrecht Bengel, clarifies, "We have permission to glory, not before God, but in God."

The term "in Christ Jesus" (I Corinthians 1:30) indicates that we are in an intimate relationship with Him. Paul then details—through the terms "wisdom," "righteousness," "sanctification," and "redemption"—that God, using our believing, humble, submissive cooperation, will be responsible for all things accomplished in and through us. Some modern commentators believe that, because "wise" and "wisdom" appear so many times earlier in this chapter, the terms "righteousness," "sanctification," and "redemption" should be in parentheses because Paul intends them to define what he means by true wisdom in this context.

God, then, is pleased to save those who believe and to do a mighty work in them. This set Abel apart from, as far as we know, every other person living on earth at that time. What he did by faith pictures what everyone who receives salvation must also do to begin his walk toward the Kingdom of God. Everyone must be called of God; believe enough of His Word to know that he is a sinner who needs the blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins; repent, that is, undergo a change of mind toward God; and be justified, made legally righteous by having Jesus Christ's righteousness imputed to him. This enables a relationship with God to begin, and sanctification unto glorification can proceed.

The Relationship Process

This sets the stage for instruction on the faith of Enoch, who walked with God by faith:

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:5-6)

The fact that Paul states Enoch walked *with* God suggests a relationship had been established between them. Enoch had thus already experienced what Abel's example teaches. Enoch's experience takes us to the next logical step in a faithful person's movement toward glorification. In his arrangement of examples of faith, Paul is emphasizing, not chronological, but experiential order, that is, faith as experienced in practical life. In a true life of faith, walking with God follows justification.

"Walk" and "walking" are the Bible's most frequently used metaphors for two related concepts. Depending upon the translation, they are used almost three hundred times to indicate interaction with another and making progress toward a destination. Somewhat related but used to a lesser extent, "walk" or "walking" indicates the passage of time as a person continues in a chosen direction of life and lifestyle. For example:

- » **Psalm 1:1:** "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly."
- » **Proverbs 4:14:** "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil."
- » **Daniel 4:37:** "And those who walk in pride He is able to abase."
- » **Micah 6:8:** "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"
- » **Psalm 119:45:** "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts."

Scores of similar descriptions are scattered throughout the Bible. They provide a composite picture of the wide variety of the facets of the godly person's and the evil person's manners of life. Since Amos 3:3 shows that two cannot walk together unless they agree, a person walking with God illustrates that the two are in agreement. This does not mean the person is perfect, but it does imply God's acceptance of him at that stage of his life.

Before going forward, we should clarify the statements regarding Enoch being translated (as in the KJV and other translations) because the world generally interprets this to mean that Enoch was taken to heaven. That is simply untrue, as it contradicts other scriptures. For instance, Hebrews 9:27 states, "And it is appointed for men to die once." In context, this is showing Christ's commonality with mankind: Even as it is appointed for men to die once because of sin, so the perfect Christ died once as a sacrifice in mankind's behalf to pay for sin. If what the world says about Enoch's translation is true, Enoch did not die, creating a contradiction in Scripture.

Jesus makes an authoritative declaration regarding what happens after death in John 3:13, "No one has ascended to heaven but He that came down from heaven," meaning Himself. Who would know better than Jesus? "No one" certainly includes Enoch. Peter declares in Acts 2:29-34 that one as great as David has not risen to heaven either, but is still in the grave.

Hebrews 11:32 lists several other significant people of faith who served God with zeal. The section concludes, "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (verses 39-40). These and many more unnamed saints are awaiting the resurrection of the dead and glorification in God's Kingdom. This also applies to Enoch.

The term *taken away* (NKJV) or *translated* (KJV) in Hebrews 11:5 simply means "transferred." Enoch was transferred or conveyed from one place on earth to another to escape violence aimed against him. In this other earthly place, he died like all men.

We experience a spiritual form of this, as Colossians 1:13 shows: "He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and conveyed (*translated*, KJV) us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." Because we are justified and therefore reconciled to God through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, our true spiritual citizenship is now transferred to the Kingdom of God. The implication of this is that with this transfer comes the obligation to live and walk representing the Kingdom of God's way of life. Enoch's walk by faith tells us that he set aside his own carnal preferences and will, bowing in obedience before God's will and submitting his life to God's desires for him. Enoch did so by faith, which is why he pleased God.

Jude 14-16 adds a factor that needs consideration:

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." These are murmurers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.

Abel was a keeper of sheep and suffered a violent death. Enoch, however, was a preacher and undoubtedly walked to the beat of a different drummer than those around him. As a preacher, he probably gave messages that made others feel ill at ease with him, and it appears that this put him in danger of a violent death, precipitating his miraculous transfer to a safer place.

This brief report of Enoch's significant life for our spiritual instruction and well-being reveals that it is not sufficient for us to have judicially passed from spiritual death to life because our sins are

forgiven. In order to please God as Enoch did in the use of his faith, we must move beyond justification to actual, practical application in our daily conduct. Abel's example shows faith operating in regard to justification, which is good, but he died soon afterward, not having much opportunity to demonstrate his faith. Enoch's life represents a person proceeding to devote his entire life to living by faith. His example carries us into the sanctification stage leading to glorification. It is this that pleases God. Enoch's life became a living example of the commands and exhortations contained in Colossians 3:1-5, 8-10, 12-17:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry. . . . But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie one to another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. . . . Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

We should now be able to see why Hebrews 11 is one of the strongest witnesses in the entire Bible against the "no works" lie. As important as justification is, it is another thing altogether to carry faith into a lifelong practice. Enoch literally lived a life based in faith.

If we consider Enoch's example in a spiritual sense, a truth central to walking with God in humility appears. Even as Enoch's physical translation from one geographical area to another was supernatural, so also was his spiritual translation from a carnal, earthly person to a God/Christ /Kingdom of God-centered person supernatural. The Bible shows that a person's heart is the source of his motivations. For one's heart to function by faith, it must be entirely based in what God alone makes possible through His calling.

Living by faith is what pleases God, but we can only have that faith and the motivations that produce a life that pleases God when He supernaturally does what He does.