

Faith to please God

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- [0 : 0 0] to Hebrews chapter 11. So Hebrews chapter 11, beginning at verse 1, the first six verses. A famous chapter, really. Now hear God's word. Hebrews chapter 11, beginning at verse 1. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. 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. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous. God commending him by accepting his gifts, and through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up, so that he should not see death, and he was not found because God had taken him. Now before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God.
- [1 : 3 6] And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who seek him. Well may God bless his word to us this evening. Well the topic should be fairly straightforward for you to see. Faith. You know, what is faith? Well, here in verse 1, faith is explained as assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen. But even that needs quite a lot of explaining. What is faith and what is faith for? There's a difference between the two. So the way I'd like to begin it is by stating the obvious, and that is, Christianity exists because God does. Christianity exists because God does, and we have faith in that God. In fact, that God gives us the very faith that we need to believe in him, and to believe the things that we need to believe.
- [2 : 5 5] Hebrews 11 says, verse 6, that we must believe that he exists, this is faith, that without faith it's impossible to believe him, that we must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who draw near to him, that he rewards those who seek him and draw close. You know, how does a person do that? Well, it's interesting that the Bible starts describing faith in Abel. You know, faith existed in terms of relationship right from the very beginning. But Abel here is mentioned long before Abraham. Then Enoch is mentioned again long before Abraham. Noah is mentioned long before Abraham. You know, Abraham gets all the credit for living by faith, having believed God in Romans chapter 4. But here, we have several other people being mentioned. You know, before any laws are written as such, before Moses is given the Ten Commandments, before Abraham turns up. You know, here are people being commended by God because they live by faith. Abel, through sacrifice, and his sacrifice being more acceptable than Cain's. You know, we could go into that another time. And Enoch, because he walked with God by faith.

[4 : 12] And what that means is that he decided to live his life in the pursuit of God daily. You know, seeking God.

What does God want me to do? How does God want me to live? It's that type of, you know, I live with God on my heart and mind every single day. He walked with God. And that type of faith, it says, please God.

And God removed him so that he would not taste or see death for himself. Just gone. Faith. It is the most incredible part of our relationship with God.

In fact, it's, you can't have a relationship with God without this faith. In fact, without faith, it is impossible to please God.

So we're looking at a very important ingredient of your Christian life. Now, before I get on to ask, how big is your faith? Or how strong is your faith? Or anything like that. We need to clear the way.

[5 : 14] You know, over the years, I've seen people mistreat faith in terrible ways. Down in the northwest of England, there's a place that I'll remain nameless for now.

But they were sort of, sort of faith healers. You're telling a man just before he went into hospital, you know, that you've just got to have enough faith and you'll come out the other side.

Well, maybe that's true. Maybe that God would, would save his life and bring him out the other side. But it had nothing to do with how much faith he had in that actually happening.

You know, we've got to be very careful about where does faith come from and what is faith for? So let's start with the second question. You know, what is faith for? What do we use it for?

Well, it says here that Enoch used it for walking with God. Abel used it for making a sacrifice towards God. In short, faith is a necessary ingredient for living life in relationship with God.

[6 : 17] So you're living your relationship with God and the one thing that you need above everything else is faith in God, that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. In 2 Corinthians 5, it says that Christians are to walk by faith and not by sight.

And yet, how easy it is to walk by sight and how difficult it is sometimes to walk by faith. I'm going to make it a lot easier for you this evening, hopefully, by explaining to you that actually walking by faith is not only the necessary way to walk as a Christian, but I'm going to show you how to do it, hopefully, or why it is easier to do than you might think.

Difficult, but easier than you might think. Faith, as we've read it in Scripture, allows us to see that God is the only solution in this world when all that we see with our eyes in this world is problems.

Tons and tons of problems is what we see with our eyes, but it takes faith to see that God is the solution to all those problems that we see with our own eyes. We're to walk by faith and not by sight.

Faith allows us to see that everybody makes their plans, writes their diary entries in, but God is the one who determines man's steps.

[7 : 42] You know, I'm frightened by that a little. You know, all authority has been given to Jesus. You know, I love the fact that God is in control of everything apart from that everything being me.

You know, I want God to be in control. I struggle with it when it gets personal. And yet, Proverbs is quite clear that, you know, man plans his way, but the Lord ordains his steps.

So I walk by faith and you walk by faith, trusting God completely and here's why. Because your tomorrow depends on him. Your today depends on him as well, but your tomorrow depends on God totally from beginning to end.

And the only way you can get through it the way God wants you to get through it is to walk by faith and not by sight. Trusting in the things of God, not in the things that you can sort of work out with your vision or work out with your mind.

difficult, extremely difficult at times. But nevertheless, it is the way that God wants us to live. The world is full of countless directions, hundreds and hundreds of different directions.

[8 : 53] But it takes faith to understand, to see that only Jesus Christ is the way. Simple, yeah, but yet so difficult for so many people. Faith is the essential ingredient for living in relationship with God. My today depends on him and my whole of tomorrow depends on him as well. So what is faith for?

Well, faith is for living life in relationship with God. And without that faith, it is impossible to please God. Second question.

What is faith? faith? You see, many of us, when we're asked what is faith, go to explain what we do with it. We ask what is faith and then we start explaining what faith is for.

Faith is for this, faith is for that. I'm not asking that. What is faith? Well, Hebrews 1 says, faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.

[9 : 57] Well, that's how faith operates. That's what faith is as it gets worked out in daily living. But what is faith itself? That's a different question and sometimes we seek to explain it and all we do is explain what faith is for.

So I want us to get to the bottom if we can ever so quickly. We're not, you know, slowly enough to understand it but move through it at a pace of what actually faith is.

And the reason I want to stress this point is because I want to be a Christian that pleases God conscious of the fact that I probably don't all the time. You know, I want us to be a church that pleases God but definitely conscious of the fact that that's not happening all the time.

So the reason I want to stress this is because faith is absolutely essential for pleasing God. So I want to get it right. I want us to get it right this evening. What is faith?

Well, let's look at some familiar stories. In the New Testament Jesus, you'll remember, is out in the boat with his disciples and he's asleep very cleverly, Mark puts it and the other disciples put it, with his head on a pillow.

[11 : 10] Now the disciples are pulling their hair out at the storm but Jesus, no, he's asleep with his head on a pillow. In other words, a complete peace and comfort. And you'll remember that the disciples wake Jesus up and, you know, sort of petrified of the storm, you know, do not care type of thing.

And Jesus, before he rebukes the wind in the way, sort of has stern words to say to the disciples, oh, you of little faith. Hold that thought for a minute.

Oh, you of little faith. And let's go to another story and the other story is the one with the centurion. Jesus is not minding his own business but he's going about the mission of God and all of a sudden this centurion comes up to Jesus and he starts telling Jesus about this poorly servant that he has back in his house and Jesus says, well, I'll come.

No, I don't want you to come, Jesus. Just say the words from where you are because just like you, I have people under me and if I tell them to go, they go. If I tell them to come, they come. I say the word and they do it and Jesus has said to this man that he marveled at this centurion's faith that he found nowhere in Israel in the whole of Israel a man like this with faith like his.

Now let's put the two stories together and what do you have? Apart from the fact that you have a centurion on one side and you have disciples on the other, what you have is faith in both stories but you have a different measurement of faith.

[12 : 41] Oh, you have little faith to the disciples but to the centurion great faith, marveled at his faith. What does this tell us?

It tells us this, number one, that different people can have different measurements of faith. That in some people faith can be great and in other people faith can be small but why?

Doesn't it bother you why? And I think the answer is quite clear. When Jesus was in the boat and the disciples were saying this to Jesus, do you not care that we're perishing and he rebukes the wind and the waves, when he does that, what's the thing that the disciples say?

They look at each other and go, who is this? They can calm the wind and the waves. That's why their faith was small. Their faith was small because they didn't perceive who Jesus was.

They didn't understand what he was capable of. They could not see who he really was. The centurion, on the other hand, had great faith in Jesus. Why? Because he understood that all Jesus had to do was speak a word and his servant would be healed.

[13 : 52] He is perceiving in something in Jesus that the disciples were not. What does that tell us about faith? It tells us that faith is your valuation of Jesus.

Faith is your perception and understanding of Jesus. Faith is your complete perception of who Jesus is and what Jesus can do.

You know, the centurion clearly appreciated who Jesus was. The disciples were struggling. Who is this that can calm the wind and the waves? So, don't think of faith as something that you have that you use.

Not yet. Rather, think of faith as a measurement of your belief in God. Of who God is. Think of it this way. In the New Testament, in the Sermon of the Mount, we're told that God values people more than the birds of the air.

Now, most people, I have to be careful here, but most people value people more than the birds of the air. And the reason I say that is because, you know, I watch the news as well and the legal case that's going on about this woman who's left more money to cats and dogs homes than she has to her own daughter.

[15 : 13] So, you know, 10 or 20 years ago, it was easy to say, yeah, most people will value people more than animals. Today, not quite as clear. Not quite as clear.

God clearly values people more than the birds of the air. Most people clearly value people more than animals. Why? It's very simple.

You can tell the difference. You see the value of one over against the other. You're able to perceive the difference. And the reason you treat one differently than you treat the other is because you see the difference in the two.

That's what's happening as you perceive, as you understand what's before you. So, as you look at man and as you look at God, are you able to see the difference?

What is the appropriate response to man? What is the appropriate response to God? How should we treat God appropriately?

[16 : 17] How should God be treated? That's the question. And the only answer that comes back to us is by faith. In other words, if you treat animals in this way and you treat people in this way, the only way to treat God properly is by having faith in him.

That's why you please him. Because faith treats God properly. Your faith in God is you treating God properly.

That's why it pleases him. That's why without faith it is impossible to please God. Another way of putting it is your faith is your value of God.

Okay? Your faith in God is the measurement of how much you value God. It's the precise measurement of how much or how little you value God.

God. That's why as it says here in verse 6, without faith it is impossible to please God. Don't think of faith like a Christmas jumper you get from your auntie.

[17 : 31] You know, it's Christmas morning, you wake up, a present to Daniel from auntie, I don't think I have any aunties or uncles, but from so and so, from auntie Maud.

And you open it up and it's sort of this, she's not a very good knitter. Some people are very good knitters, she's not. You know, one arm's longer than the other, the colour's terrible, it doesn't really look that great on you, but she's coming for lunch.

You better be wearing it, right? Because without wearing it you're not going to please her. You know, sometimes we think of faith like that, don't we? You know, that God has given us this gift, and, you know, we really ought to be wearing it, but we're not.

No, faith isn't something that you can take off and put on and it's always there. No, faith is your value of God. Faith is your appreciation of God. Faith tells God exactly what you think of him.

Faith is your perception of who God is and what God can do. Are you of little faith? Are you a disciple like that?

[18 : 42] Are you more like the centurion who takes Jesus at his word, sees Jesus for who he is and have great faith? Why? Because your perception is right. You're valuing God for who he is.

So faith, in whatever measurement it is, it is always telling God exactly what you think of him in any given moment. In any given moment. So Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion because his faith was great, but then he marveled also at the unbelief of the people in his hometown.

Why? Because he knew exactly what they thought of him. He knew exactly what they thought of him. You know, Jesus can do very little there.

In fact, he even has this to say to them. They say to Jesus, is this not the carpenter's son? Says Jesus, a prophet, is not without honor except at home, except in his hometown.

It says that Jesus could do nothing there apart from a few healings and he had to move on. Now, what do you think Jesus is saying? He's saying that one centurion marvels, Jesus marvels at because of his faith in Jesus.

[19 : 55] He sees who Jesus is, but Jesus in his hometown marveled at them because their unbelief was so great that they thought very little of him. Is this not the carpenter's son?

You see? Is this not the carpenter's son goes parallel with their unbelief? Who we think Jesus is really matters to how we believe and our faith in him.

Relationship then. This is the bit that we're getting to really. Our relationship with God. It says here in Hebrews that God is a rewarder of those who seek him.

That God is a rewarder of those who draw near to him. God is a rewarder of those who are going to take him to him. He's a rewarder of those who are going to be.

I'll give you an illustration. Same illustration as I use with the birds of the air. When Jesus turns our attention to God and says, does God not care for you more than the birds of the air?

[20 : 57] He cares for the birds of the air, but how much more does he care for you? Greatly. Greatly. Okay. What context does he say that in? Anxiety and worry.

You worry. Why? Jesus has told you not to worry. You're anxious. Why? Jesus has told you not to be anxious. Now you're feeling the tension here because we all do it.

Right? Why do you do it? You know, the temptation, even though Paul repeats it doesn't in Philippians 4, be anxious for nothing. Jesus says, don't worry about tomorrow.

Tomorrow will take care of itself. God will take care of you. Tomorrow will take care of itself. Don't worry. Okay. Right, fine. But we do. Why? The temptation is to say, I don't have enough faith.

The trouble is, we can't use that answer anymore, can we? Because faith is our value of God. The answer should really be, I don't believe God's going to do it for me.

[22 : 01] not, I don't have enough faith, but actually, I worry because I don't believe God will look after me. We turn it, why?

Because we don't want to say bad things about God, and we certainly don't want to be heard to say in that type of statement, but nevertheless, the reason we're anxious, the reason we worry, is because we do not take Jesus at his word, and we do not take God's character as it is.

It's not, the answer is not, I don't have enough faith. The answer is, I don't trust you God. It's much harder to take, but that is the answer when you peel back all the fluff and confusion.

That's the real answer. You know, Austin Farrar said, faith is not like a lock and a key. Faith is not the key that opens the lock.

You use it when you want to and you don't use it when you don't want to. You know, faith is not like the Christmas jumper, you know, that you put on just to please somebody else while you're around them. No, faith is your valuation, is of God, your perception of God, and without faith, it is impossible to please him, because faith in God tells God exactly what you think of him.

[23 : 27] Exactly what you think of him. He already knows it anyway. I'm trying to put it in terms that we can all relate to. Now, there are a few other things to mention as we sort of draw to the end and the conclusion.

Here's a few other things. Sometimes Christians can misunderstand faith by explaining what faith is for rather than what faith is, you know, and we can clear up that fairly easy.

sometimes Christians have beliefs that stop other beliefs from getting in. You know, we see this in the world of atheism.

So, atheism has one belief that stops other beliefs from getting in. So, I believe that the world was created over millennia, or, sorry, came into existence over millennia, that people were nothing more than slime, primordial slime, coming up, and developing into people.

Okay, I'm not going to challenge your belief right now, but as long as you hold on to that belief, the idea that God created the world is going to be a very difficult one for you to grasp. I first have to show you why your belief doesn't work to show you why this belief is true.

[24 : 41] You know, sometimes Christians can get themselves into the same difficulty over faith. We hold one view so tightly that any other view, even though it may be Christian and Orthodox, biblical, we don't let it in.

We don't let it in because we're holding so tightly onto another view. To give you an illustration of this, take for instance this one. God has no grandchildren. True.

True. God has no grandchildren. children. We understand the role of personal faith. Yet, when you take it to its extreme, and here's the difficulty, you can end up believing that your faith can have no influence over your own children.

As though my faith in God will not affect my children. And that's not true. It's biblically not true. I'll give you an example.

The centurion. What does the centurion do? He comes to Jesus. Where's the servant? Back at the house. Has he seen Jesus? No. Is he exercising any faith in Jesus?

[25 : 53] No. But the centurion comes before Jesus, exercises faith in Jesus, and who gets healed? The centurion? Oh, the servant. The servant benefits by the centurion's faith in Jesus.

Okay. Parent and child. The Canaanite woman. She says to Jesus, yes, but even the dogs eat the food that fall from the master's table.

Jesus marveled at this woman's faith. Great faith that she had. One of the favorite accounts in the whole scriptures. What does she say to Jesus?

My daughter is possessed by a demon. Has the daughter seen Jesus? No. Does she exercise faith in Jesus? No. Not a bit. But the woman, in faith to Jesus, puts her case before him and he has this to say to her.

Go home for it has been done for you as you desire. And the daughter is immediately healed. You know, sometimes we get it, God has no grandchildren.

[26 : 56] Therefore, my faith cannot have any influence over my children. Rubbish. Total rubbish. Don't allow one view to block out other views. Read the scriptures for what they are.

There's a clear example there in Matthew 15 of the Canaanite women coming to faith in Jesus Christ and it doesn't benefit her, but it benefits her daughter. Her faith in Jesus benefits her daughter.

Wonderful example. Why? Because you're valuing Jesus for who Jesus is and what Jesus can do. It's not about my faith. It's about who Jesus is and what Jesus can do.

How much more could that apply to? I could say so much more on this subject, but time permits me doing so. So remember the illustration.

Faith is not like this jumper that God is pleased when you're wearing it. You know, faith can't be taken on and off and it still exists. Faith is your appreciation of Jesus, your valuation of Jesus, your perception and understanding of who God is.

[28 : 05] Attitude, value, understanding, perception. That's what faith is in God. Your faith is the measurement of who you think God is.

Here's the exhortation then as we come to a close. You're exhorted to walk by faith and not by sight. Difficult? Yeah, it is difficult.

But that's the challenge and that's the call to every Christian person here this evening, to walk by faith and not by sight. You know, don't be like children in the sense where, you know, right, we're going to the beach.

What's the beach? And you have to explain why it's worth going. You know, often you're taking them somewhere they've never been before and you're telling them how great it is, but because they can't picture it, because they can't value it in any way, they don't want to go.

And then the moment they get there, they say, well, why don't you bring me sooner? You know, too often as Christians we're like that. We're fighting against the obvious and then God brings us round to it.

[29 : 12] No, have faith in God. Walk by faith, not by sight. Why? God rewards those who seek him. So seek God.

God. You know, I don't doubt for a minute that Christians in this church believe that God exists. But faith is not just believing that God exists, faith is seeking the God that exists.

How many of us are seeking God? Not believing in God, just seeking God. Without faith it's impossible to please God. Well, faith is not just believing that he exists, but seeking the God who does exist.

Again, difficult. But pleasurable. Rewarding. Seek God.

Know his presence. Because without faith it is impossible to please him and surely you want to please him. It raises the question then to finish on of whether or not we're living by faith.

[30 : 15] The constant challenge to live by faith and to walk by faith as not by sight. Remember, the issue is not I don't have enough faith. The issue is do I believe God to be who he is?

Do I trust God to be who he is and believe what he says to be true? In other words, if I could illustrate it in a slightly different way. It's a bit like saying, you know, I don't love my wife anymore.

I don't love my love. I don't love my love. You know, it's not just I have faith in God. Well, I don't have enough faith in God. The issue is much more personal than that. It's I don't trust God.

I mean, I said to my wife, it's not that I don't have faith in her. I don't love her anymore. It's the relationship issue. Value the person for who the person is. Value God for who God is.

Here's the final thought. What does it mean to be a people who please God? And what does it mean to be a church that pleases God? Well, the answer that comes to us from Hebrews is absolutely clear.

[31 : 27] Live by faith. Your faith is the only appropriate treatment for God. Living by faith is treating God properly.

That is why without faith, it is impossible to please God. So as you leave the church this evening, be absolutely determined to live by faith and not by sight.

Be determined in it. Tie it into your practical Christianity. But also be absolutely determined to make a practice of pleasing God by doing that.

That your motivation is not, I must try harder to live by faith. No. Your motivation is, I want to please God. And I please God by valuing God for who He is.

I'm going to live by faith and not by sight. Amen. Amen. Amen.