

**HEBREWS 10-11 THE MEN AND WOMEN OF FAITH AND ACTION**

After Paul explains in Heb. 10 about this “new and living way” to approach God, he gives the fourth stern warning to them about not going back to Judaism—the “old way” of going to God--and not to forsake attending Church services.

As he says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a fearful [the term means frightening] thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:24-31).

The sin here is of apostasy--a definite falling away from the truth and faith. *Expositor's* notes, “The people in question, then, know what God has done in Christ; their acquaintance with Christian teaching is more than superficial. If, knowing this, they revert to an attitude of rejection, of continual sin (the present participle *hamartanonton* is rendered ‘keep on sinning’), then there remains no sacrifice for sins. Such people have rejected the sacrifice of Christ, and the preceding argument has shown that there is no other. If they revert to the Jewish sacrificial system, they go back to sacrifices that their knowledge of Christianity teaches them cannot put away sin (see Heb. 10: 4).”

Three descriptions of this sin of apostasy are given: (1) the *trampling* of the Son of God *underfoot*—or having contempt for Him and His teachings; (2) counting the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified *a common thing*—referring to treating the covenant with God, made

possible through Jesus' sacrifice, as abhorrent and unclean; and (3) insulting the Spirit of grace—or rejecting God's Holy Spirit in one. It's an example of “the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” which Jesus spoke about in Mt. 12:31. Remember, Christ will not be crucified twice for anyone (Heb. 6:6).

After this warning, Paul, as a loving pastor, reminds them of their past faithfulness, and to keep their eyes on the goal of the kingdom, by stressing, “But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: ‘For yet a little while, and he who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’ But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul” (10:32-39).

They need to persevere in the faith through obedience and action, because nothing is guaranteed until one's life comes to an end. He then comforts them by recounting in chapter 11 the many great examples of faith and obedience, which is appropriately called “the Faith Chapter.”

He says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. 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. 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 those who diligently seek Him" (1-6).

Faith, in this context, means to be faithful to what one believes by showing it with actions or works. It is the evidence, or the *doing* of what one holds as truth. Notice this is confirmed in the next verse: "For by it the elders *obtained* a good testimony." The NLT version has it, "Through their faith, the people in days of old *earned a good reputation*." They were faithful by their *examples*.

As *Expositor's* brings out, "Faith is a *present and continuing reality*. It is not simply a virtue sometimes practiced in antiquity. It is a living thing, a *way of life* the writer wishes to see *continued in the practice* of his readers."

Yes, it was their faith with action that pleased God. As James said, "But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" (James 2:20-22). Of course, we should not boast about our works, for we all fall short of the righteousness God requires, but He does want to see our faith in action and says He *will reward* our efforts (vs. 6).

The first example of faith is believing God created the universe out of nothing (*ex nihilo* in Latin). Ancient religions believed matter was eternal and their gods just fashioned it, but the Bible is the only source that says matter is *not eternal* and that God brought it about through an invisible force called spirit (Rom. 1:20). Science has shown matter had a beginning and came "out of nothing." Nobel winner Arno Penzias stated, "Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created *out of nothing*, one with the very delicate balance needed to provide *exactly* the conditions required to permit life, and one which has an underlying (one might say 'supernatural') plan" (*Cosmos, Bios, and Theos*, 1992, p. 83).

Next we have examples of faith in action, of which *sixteen* are mentioned by name. Abel is the first, who carefully presented to God a sacrifice that was pleasing to Him, instead of the disrespectful sacrifice of his brother Cain.

Enoch follows, who "walked with God" (Gen. 5:24), meaning he was obedient in God's ways, and God took him so he would not "see death." This probably means evil people were persecuting righteous Enoch to kill him. He was taken to an undisclosed place (such as happened with Elijah), where he dwelt safely until he died a natural death, for remember, Enoch did not go to heaven and did not "receive the promises" (vs. 13).

Then comes Noah, another who walked with God and who "was moved with godly fear" to faithfully obey His commands. He persevered for 100 long years and finally finished the ark.

Next we have faithful Abraham, who was tested many times to see if he would obey God despite the many trials and difficulties. Here we receive insight in what motivated him – he had faith in the coming kingdom of God, where he would inherit the promises made to him--the coming city of God.

Then Sarah, his wife, is mentioned, who "by faith...received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised." When Sarah had Isaac, she was around 90 years old, way past her fertile state and yet she believed in God, although at first she laughed at the notion, and Isaac means "laughter" because of this incident.

As *Believer's Bible Commentary* states, "The record clearly states that she was past the time of life when she could bear a child. But she knew that God had promised her a baby, and she knew He could not go back on His word. She had shatterproof faith that He would do what He had promised."

Abraham's faith is shown through another test. *Believer's Bible Commentary* points out, "We now come to the greatest test of Abraham's faith. God told him to offer up his only son, Isaac, upon the altar. With unhesitating obedience, Abraham set forth to offer to God the dearest treasure of his heart. Was he oblivious of the tremendous dilemma? God had promised him numberless progeny. Isaac was his only begotten son. Abraham was now 117 and Sarah was 108! The promise of a great host of descendants was to be fulfilled in Isaac. The dilemma was this: if Abraham killed Isaac, how could the promise ever be fulfilled? Isaac was about 17 and unmarried.

Abraham knew what God had promised; that was all that mattered. He concluded that if God required him to slay his son, God would raise him up, even from the dead in order to fulfill the promise...Abraham's faith in the promise of a numerous progeny was tested over a period of *one hundred years*. The patriarch was seventy-five when the promise of a son was first given. He waited twenty-five years before Isaac was born. Isaac was seventeen when Abraham took him up on Mount Moriah to offer him to God. Isaac was forty when he married and was married twenty years before the twins were born. Abraham died when he was 175. At that time his descendants consisted of one son (75) and two grandchildren (15). Yet during his lifetime, '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' (Rom. 4:20-21)."

This is why he is called the "father of the faith" or "the father of all who believe" (Rom. 4:16, NLT).

Next, Isaac's faith is described, who "blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come" (Heb. 11:20). *The Believer's Bible Commentary* explains, "What was so remarkable about that? Before the children were born, the Lord announced to Rebekah that the boys would become the source of two nations and that the older (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). Esau was Isaac's favorite and, as the elder son, would normally have received the best portion from his father. But Rebekah and Jacob deceived Isaac, whose sight was now poor, into giving the best blessing to Jacob. When the plot was exposed, Isaac trembled violently. But he remembered God's word that the older would serve the younger, and in spite of his predilection for Esau, he realized that God's overruling of his natural weakness must stand."

Then it says about his son, Jacob, "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff" (Heb. 11:21). He trusted God with this change of orders. When blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, he crossed his hands so that the older son's blessing fell on Ephraim, the younger son. In spite of Joseph's protests, Jacob insisted that the blessings must stand because this was the order which God had specified and we know each son

fulfilled the prophecies about their descendants – Ephraim as Great Britain and its Commonwealth of Nations and the U.S. as Manasseh.

Next is Joseph, who, "by faith...when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones" (Heb. 11:22).

Believer's Bible Commentary points out, "He believed God's promise that He would deliver the people of Israel out of Egypt. Faith enabled him to picture the Exodus already. It was so sure to him that he instructed his sons to carry his bones with them for burial in Canaan. 'Thus,' writes William Lincoln, 'while surrounded by Egypt's pomp and splendor, his heart was not there at all, but with his people in their future glory and blessing.'"

Next is Moses, whose parents hid him instead of following the Pharaoh's orders to give him up to be slain. Then, as a child he learned his parent's religion despite the risks, believing in the Hebrew God as the only true one and about the coming kingdom of God. He chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward...and as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:25-27).

The account then shows Moses' faith in leaving Egypt to Midian (for it was not yet time to liberate his people), later keeping the Passover with his countrymen and finally crossing the Red Sea.

During the siege of Jericho under Joshua, the faith of Rahab is mentioned, who "did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" (Heb. 11:31).

Believer's Bible Commentary notes, "She abandoned the false religion of Canaan to become a Jewish proselyte. Her faith received a rigorous test when the spies came to her home. Would she be loyal to her country and her fellow countrymen, or would she be true to the Lord? She decided to stand on the Lord's side, even if it meant betraying her country. By giving friendly welcome to the spies, she and her family were spared, while her disobedient neighbors perished." She married Salmon of the tribe of Judah and eventually became King David's great-great grandmother—and of the lineage of Jesus Christ! (Mt. 1:5-6). What an example of faith!