



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V25 N38 September 24, 2023

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Salvation by Grace

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by his grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."

Ephesians 2:8-9



How can a
person please
God?

I BELIEVE

"Pleasing Faith"

Hebrews 11:1-6

Salvation in its entirety—including *redemption, reconciliation, regeneration, forgiveness, justification, sanctification, and glorification*—is obtained by faith *alone* and *not at all* by religiously doing what is morally right and humanly good (Eph 2:8-9). While it's certainly better to do what is morally right rather than wrong and humanly good rather than bad, moral perfection is humanly impossible. After all, "nobody is perfect," right? Fortunately, what human beings cannot do for themselves through works, God can do for them through faith.

About those who believe, Paul writes: "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (Tit 3:3-7).

More specifically, *justification*, that is, having a right relationship with God, comes by trusting Jesus rather than by working hard. This is the leading lesson learned from Abraham. Listen to what Paul writes about the patriarch:

"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'

"Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their

faith is credited as righteousness . . . The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Ro 4:1-5, 23-25).

Salvation by grace through faith is not a New Testament doctrine only. It's found in the Old Testament as well—in what some might think an unlikely story, the story of Cain and Abel. "Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast" (Ge 4:2b-5).

While Genesis says nothing about the brothers' standing before God, Abel being righteous and Cain not, the writer of the book of Hebrews says this about Abel, who brought "a better offering" (Heb 11:4a): "By faith he was commended as righteous when God spoke well of his offerings" (v. 4b). About Abel's offering, one commentator writes: "Cain's offering was offered out of obligation *without faith*, whereas Abel's sacrifice, while recognizing an obligation, was offered *in faith*. Thus the writer of Hebrews is stressing the fact that Abel's obligation was discharged by faith (Heb. 11:4). It was not through the sacrifice that Abel obtained righteousness, but through faith that produced obedience. And he was declared righteous. God saw his sacrifice as an evidence of his faith" (J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Faith that Endures*, 188). Put differently, Abel was right with God by faith, and his offering was a demonstration of his faith. Salvation has always been by grace, through faith, not through works.



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read Hebrews 11:1-6

1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for.

3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

4 By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Read in another translation

1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see. 2 For by it the people of old received God's commendation. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were set in order at God's command, so that the visible has its origin in the invisible. 4 By faith Abel offered God a greater sacrifice than Cain, and through his faith he was commended as righteous, because God commended him for his offerings. And through his faith he still speaks, though he is dead. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he did not see death, and he was not to be found because God took him up. For before his removal he had been commended as having pleased God. 6 Now without faith it is impossible to please him, for the one who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (NET)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "confidence" and "assurance" in v. 1.
- Circle "this" in v. 2.
- Circle "ancients" in v. 2.
- Circle "commended" in vv. 2, 4, 5.
- Highlight "by faith" in vv. 3, 4 (3x), 5.
- Circle "command" in v. 3.
- Box "so that" indicating *result* in vv. 3, 5.
- Underline "Abel" in v. 4.
- Circle "better offering" in v. 4.
- Bracket "commended as righteous" in v. 4.
- Underline "Enoch" in v. 5.
- Bracket "experience death" in v. 5.
- Box "because" indicating *reason* in vv. 5, 6.

Highlight v. 6a What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. *Faith* is defined in terms of two things (v. 1). Unpack them.

 2. *Who* are the ancients? *Who* commended them and *why*?

 3. The words “By faith” occur *first* and *repeatedly* in sentences in verses 3, 4a, 4b, and 5 (see also vv. 7, 8, 9, 11). Describe how that *rhetorical device* affects you as a reader.

 4. What has *faith* got to do with believing that God created the universe?

 5. *What* do you think made Abel’s sacrifice *better* than Cain’s and *why* do you think so?

 6. *What* do you think made Abel a righteous man and *why* do you think so?

 7. Abel is dead; his brother murdered him. *How* does he still speak today?

 8. The Old Testament doesn’t say that Enoch had faith, so *how* did the writer of Hebrews know that he did?

 9. *How* does faith affect God and *how* do you know?

 10. **Discussion:** Talk about how you think God rewards those who earnestly seek him.
-

Commentary On The Text

The recipients of the book of Hebrews were likely Jewish Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. According to one author, their antagonists were zealous Jews. “The persecutions and privations that caused the kind of suffering discussed in the book (10:32-34) came from organized Judaism and from Jewish people devoted to that religious system” (J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Faith that Endures*, 12). As a result, they were tempted to turn from living like Christians in order to avoid persecution; some may even have considered returning to living like Jews. They needed patient endurance. The same is implied at the end of the chapter leading up to this week’s passage. In Hebrews 10:35 the author writes, “So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” Then he quotes from two Old Testament texts, Isaiah 26:20-21 and Habakkuk 2:3-4 to make the point that God is going to punish the wicked and reward the righteous who live by faith, noting that he will not be pleased with those who shrink back from living by faith. Then the writer ends on an encouraging word, “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved,” which serves as an appropriate introduction to the faith chapter that follows.

In Hebrews 11, the “Hall of Faith” chapter, the author challenges his readers to follow the examples of those who by faith were faithful. He “follows the form of an ‘example list,’ a rhetorical tool used by ancient authors to challenge hearers to action” (George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, 374). His opening definition of faith indicates that faith is “*being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see*” (NET). It is what God commended the faithful for because faith pleases him. The notion that faith makes us certain of what lies beyond our senses is illustrated by our belief in creation. “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” God spoke and it was so. “The discernment of the unseen creative activity of God behind the visible universe exemplifies the capacity of faith to demonstrate the reality of that which cannot be perceived through sense perception, which is celebrated as the essence of faith in v 1b)” (William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47B, *Hebrews 9-13*, 330).

Following his opening definition of faith –

“having the confidence (‘the certainty’) that things yet future and unseen (‘hoped for,’ cf. 10:35-39) will happen as God has revealed they will” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Hebrews,” 2023 ed., 191, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/Hebrews.pdf) – the author gives us examples of people who by faith were faithful. One after another they parade past – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. The list goes on – Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Abel and Enoch are antediluvian examples of faith.

“By faith Abel offered God a *better* sacrifice than Cain did.” One commentator surveyed a number of reasons offered for why it was better: “it was living, whereas Cain’s was lifeless; it was stronger, Cain’s weaker; it grew spontaneously, Cain’s by human ingenuity; it involved blood, Cain’s did not. But all such suggestions seem wide of the mark. Scripture never says there was anything *inherently superior* in Abel’s offering. It may be relevant that there are some references to Abel as being a righteous man (Matt 23:35; 1 John 3:12), while the author of Hebrews insists on the importance of Abel’s faith. Abel was right with God and his offering was a demonstration of his faith” (Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, 115, italics added). It was better because it was accompanied by faith. “He is dead, but his faith is a living voice” (Morris, 115).

“By faith Enoch was taken from this life so that he did not experience death.” He was taken because he pleased God, and that because he had faith, since “without faith it is impossible to please God” (v. 6). After all, “anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (v. 6).

One commentator summarizes well the writer of Hebrews’ argument. “The writer does not contrast faith with works as Paul sometimes does, nor does he treat it as the means of receiving justification. Instead he treats faith not so much with reference to the past (what God has done in Christ) as to the future. He sees faith as that trust in God that enables the believer to press on steadfastly whatever the future holds for him. He knows that God is to be relied on implicitly. So the writer’s method is to select some of the great ones in the history of the people of God and to show briefly how faith motivated all of them and led them forward, no matter how difficult the circumstances” (Morris, 112).

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 **confidence** Cf. “being sure” (NET). “Essentially faith is having the confidence (‘the certainty’) that things yet future and unseen (‘hoped for,’ cf. 10:35-39) will happen as God has revealed they will. This is the basic nature of faith” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Hebrews,” 2023 ed., 191, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/hebrews.pdf). “The word *hypostasis*, translated by the NIV [©1984] as a participle (‘being sure’), is in fact a noun, which was used variously to communicate the idea of substance, firmness, confidence, a collection of documents establishing ownership, a guarantee, or a proof. It probably should be understood in 11:1, as in 3:14, in the sense of a ‘firm, solid confidence’ or a ‘calm courage’ with reference to things hoped for” (George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, 374). “There is, however, something to be said for the objective meaning, represented by AV (‘faith is the substance of things hoped for’), ARV margin (‘the giving substance to things hoped for’) and 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” (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT, 278).

v. 1 **assurance** Cf. “being convinced” (NET). “The word *elenchus*, used here, means . . . a ‘vital certainty which impels the believer to stretch out his hand, as it were, and lay hold of those realities on which his hope is fixed and which, though unseen, are already his in Christ’” (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 440-41, quoted in Guthrie, 374-75).

v. 2 **this** I.e., “faith” (v. 1).

v. 2 **ancients** “‘The ancients’ more strictly means ‘the elders’ (*hoi presbyteroi*), a term that may be used of age or dignity. Here it refers to the religious leaders of past days and means much the same as ‘the forefathers’ in 1:1” (Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, 113).

v. 2 **commended for** Cf. “received God’s commendation” (NET). “As a result of their firm faith they ‘received attestation’ [*emarturēthēsan*] from God himself (see Form/Structure/Setting on 11:1-40; cf. vv 4, 5, 7, 39). The verb [*martureisthai*] occurs seven times in Hebrews (7:8, 17; 10:15; 11:2, 4, 5, 39), and in each instance the reference is to the witness of the biblical record. The exemplars of faith to whom reference is made in the pages of the OT ‘enjoy the approving testimony of Scripture, and consequently of God himself, who speaks by his Spirit through the written word’ (Trites, *Witness*, 221)” (William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47B, *Hebrews* 9-13, 330). “In other words, not only did they bear witness to God, he bore witness to them, affirming their lives of faith” (Guthrie, 375).

v. 3 **by faith** Throughout the passage the repeated phrase “by faith” appears first in the sentence for emphasis. “Two literary devices give form to the writer’s challenge in Hebrews 11. (1) He uses the phrase ‘by faith’ (*pistei*) repeatedly, reiterating the

phrase over and over again, driving it into the hearers’ consciences like a poignant, monotonous melody. Through this literary tool the author focuses attention on the centrality of a life of faith for the people of God. (2) The author follows the form of an ‘example list,’ a rhetorical tool used by ancient authors to challenge hearers to action. This device worked by impressing the audience with the extensive evidence that the desired course of action is indeed the best one to take” (374; cf., 1Macc 2:51-60). On the exemplars one author writes, “Their faith consisted simply in taking God at His word and directing their lives accordingly; things yet future so far as their experience went were thus present to faith, and things outwardly unseen were visible to the inward eye” (Bruce, 277).

v. 3 **command** “The universe came into being because God uttered his performative word” (Lane, 332). “There [1:1] 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. It is unlikely that ‘the word of God’ here is hypostatized as in John 1:1-3, so as to be practically synonymous with ‘the Son of God’; for one thing, the Greek substantive translated ‘word’ here is not *logos* (as in John 1:1ff.) but *rhēma*, referring to the utterance by which God summoned into existence what had no existence before. He is thinking of the creative command ‘Let there be light’ (Gen. 1:3), interpreting it and the following command after the fashion of the psalmist: ‘By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made; And all the host of them by the breath of his mouth . . . For he spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast’” (Bruce, 280-81).

v. 4 **Abel** Abel’s sacrifice was “better” not because it was inherently superior and not because Cain’s was ritually inferior. “The general tenor of Scripture indicates that the superior quality of Abel’s offering derived from the integrity of his heart rather than from the nature of the offering itself. This is the clear implication of Gen 4:7, where the Lord says to Cain, ‘If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?’ For the writer of Hebrews, the fact that Abel offered his sacrifice [*pistei*], ‘by faith,’ is sufficient explanation for the acceptance of his offering by God” (Lane, 334).

v. 4 **Cain** See Ge 4:1-16. “Cain had not done what was right (4:7), revealing that *he himself* was not right spiritually” (Guthrie, 376).

v. 5 **Enoch** See Ge 5:21-24. “This faithful believer, according to Hebrews’ interpretation of the Old Testament text, was taken out of this world by God without experiencing death (Gen. 5:24). Why? Because in his life he was ‘commended as one who pleased God’; that is, he brought God pleasure. This observation reflects a conviction inherent to the Genesis text, which tells us that Enoch ‘walked with God.’ Most significantly, however, the author still has in mind the quotation of Habakkuk 2:3-4 (Heb. 10:37-38), which speaks of God’s lack of pleasure toward one who shrinks back from commitment. By contrast, Enoch was resolute in his commitment, thus bringing God pleasure” (Guthrie, 376).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

The faith-life is the only life that pleases God, so believe in Jesus and live by faith.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

How would you describe faith to your kids? Faith is one of those things we mostly know and understand but have difficulty describing or defining so we just start rambling, "Faith is part trust, part belief, part confidence, part hope and all the way invisible. I don't know how to describe it; you just have it. Go clean your room." Nothing makes a Christian parent sound quirkier and that can potentially make our belief (and faith) in God unappealing. Young kids are looking for concrete answers to the abstract and that can be challenging. Thankfully, Hebrews 11:1 gives us a clear definition, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." This week our church begins a new series that will explore the nature of faith, and this means you'll have an incredible opportunity to foster rich conversations with your kids. Take this time to share with them your faith journey and how God called you to believe in Jesus as your Savior. Tell them about struggles or hardships where your faith was on the line and you had a choice to believe God's promises. Share with them about a time you were rewarded because of your faith even though your hope was never realized. Sharing these stories with your kids will not only help build a bridge for them as they begin to experience their own faith journey but challenge them to consider what they believe about God. The door will be wide open for conversations that will help build a foundation of faith for your kids. This is discipleship! We're praying for you.

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Hebrews 11:1-6

1. How does the author of Hebrews describe faith?
2. What does faith help us understand about God? (v. 3)
3. What does faith have to do with pleasing God?

What Do You Think?

Who are "the ancients?" How can they be commended for faith if Jesus had not yet lived and died?

What Do You Do?

Do a trust fall with your parents. How did it feel falling back? Were you confident your parent would catch you or were you scared? How is this like faith in God?

CORE COMPETENCY: Salvation by Grace

I believe that I become a child of God through faith in Jesus, not because of anything I do.

MEMORY VERSE: Habakkuk 2:14

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) from 1986 to 1998 and Spiritual Formation Pastor at Central Bible Church (Arlington, TX) from 1998 to 2022. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

© 2023 Central Bible Church.

Material researched, written and supervised by Dr. Tom Bulick. All Scripture referenced from the New International Version unless otherwise noted. This resource is freely distributed and may be copied without permission.



**CENTRAL
BIBLE CHURCH**

8001 Anderson Boulevard
Fort Worth, Texas 76120
817-274-1315
wearecentral.org