

It is seen within him. It is seen by fellow-believers. And it will even be seen by unbelievers as well. Faith is the evidence or conviction of things not seen.

What has been said of the Father can be said of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as well. Faith demonstrates convincingly that all contrary opinions about God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are false. It provides convincing evidence that the promises of God are not empty or false. Rather they are sure and certain. By faith a believer apprehends personally the objective truth of the Bible.

Faith, then, is the demonstration of the persuasion a believer has. It is the evidence he has within himself. And such evidence, as well as being used by God to comfort a believer will also be used to challenge unbelievers.

### **Conclusion**

What encouragement can we derive from knowing that faith is the confidence of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen?

Although the writer does not tell us everything that can be said about faith in Hebrews 11.1, he tells us enough to help us see what we should do when we 'take up the shield of faith'

(*Ephesians 6.16*). It fills us with hope.

Christians face opposition. They can be fiercely persecuted. They are constantly under pressure to confirm to the attitudes and norms of the world. The devil attacks and seeks to unsettle and rob believers of peace and joy. He seeks to make them act in unloving ways.

But the believer, knowing the promises of God, and knowing how gracious and merciful God is, by faith, able to stand and go on standing for Christ.

A believer knows that the worst we can experience here, though unpleasant, will be more than compensated for and far surpassed by the hope of what is yet to be.

A believer knows that by faith he or she will be empowered to resist the world the flesh and the devil. By faith he is assured that in Christ victory is sure and certain.

A believer knows that by faith, no matter what pressures he faces, he is enabled to focus upon the eternal God, upon his person, his promises and his purposes. He knows his confidence in things hoped for and his conviction about things not yet seen is evident to himself and even to others.

## ***Faith: confidence and conviction***

What is faith? The question is important for three reasons.

First, Christians are men and women of faith. Secondly, Christians seek to see others come to faith. Thirdly, those who say they have faith need to check whether their claim is true or false.

### **Concern**

The author of the book Hebrews is keen to see his readers persevere. He does not want them to turn back. To help them keep going he instructs them not to throw away their confidence. Instead they are to focus on what God has promised (*see Hebrews 10.35-39*).

To help them remain constant under pressure he reminds them of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah and others (*see Hebrews 11.1-40*). These people, he says, kept going. They did so as they looked forward to what God promises his people shall enjoy.

The writer makes a great claim. "Faith", he says, "is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (*Hebrews 11.1*). He makes no mention, at this point, of the Lord Jesus Christ whom all people are called to love and serve. Nor does he refer to repentance which, though distinct from faith, always accompanies it. What then is his aim if it is not to provide a complete definition of faith? It is to highlight two key features of the faith that trusts and does not give up.

### **Confidence**

First the author speaks of assurance. Older translations (*e.g. the Latin Vulgate and King James*) use the term 'substance'. The word in the original Greek is found only five times in the New Testament. Three uses of it are found in Hebrews (*1.3, 3.14 and 11.1*). The other two are in 2 Corinthians 9.4 and 11.17. In Hebrews 1.3 it is translated as 'person' or 'nature'. The other uses of it are rendered 'confident' or 'confidence'. This indicates we may understand the word 'assurance' in Hebrews 11.1 to mean confidence. It is generally agreed the idea the author seeks

to convey is that those who have faith display confidence in the things for which they hope. They are things of they are sure they shall receive.

For what does a believer hope? Let us turn again to the promises of God. What does the writer say about Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah? In verse 13 he says they "all died in faith, not having received the things promised". He talks of them 'seeking a homeland' (verse 14), and of a 'desire' for 'a better country' and 'city' (verse 16). We also discover this desired 'country' is 'a heavenly one' (verse 16). In other words it is heaven itself.

Clearly, then, the hope of heaven is something for which a believer does not just hope. He is also confident he will enter it, see it and enjoy it on the last day. So confident is he that the promise of God is sure, it is as though he begins to see something of heaven now even though he is still on earth. It is for that reason the writer describes faith as the 'substance' of the things for which a believer hopes. Faith enables him to see something of its substance now.

Christians are not mere wishful thinkers. Faith is never about resting upon things that may exist. The realm of doubtful assertion is occupied by other people, not believers. Those born again by God's Spirit are those who have 'a living hope' (1 Peter 1.3). It is alive and real because it is rooted in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because he was raised bodily and ever lives the bodies of those who believe upon him shall be raised up on the last day. They will live for ever with him in the new heavens and earth.

Here we find a test we can apply to ourselves. We can ask: 'Do I know I am going to heaven?' Or, 'Does my life declare to others that I know I shall be raised up on the last day?' It should if my faith is real. Why? Because faith is the substance, the confidence, of things hoped for.

Let us now turn to the second feature of faith referred to in Hebrews 11.1. Again it can be summed up in a word.

### **Conviction**

The writer (who may have been Paul) also asserts that faith is 'the evidence of things not seen'.

He does not merely repeat in the second part of the verse what he says in the first part. Rather he builds upon what he has said.

It can be argued that in the first part of the verse the author describes what a believer does - he shows himself (and others) that he is confident that that for which he hopes will undoubtedly be on the last day. In the second part of the verse the author describes the challenge a believer's faith presents to himself and to unbelievers. Because faith is the evidence of things unseen, a Christian (and others) is confronted with evidence that the things of God and Christ are real and true.

The word sometimes translated 'evidence' occurs only twice in Scripture. It is found in 2 Timothy 3.16 (usually translated as 'reproof') as well as Hebrews 11.1. The message Paul conveyed to Timothy is that 'All Scripture is profitable for teaching and for reproof (*evidence*)'. As in Hebrews so in 2 Timothy, the idea is to show us what is true. It is to demonstrate the truth in such a way that we will be convinced it is truth itself. We

can say this because the word used is derived from a verb which means to convince. Thus here the word 'conviction' is used in some translations (*e.g. ESV*) as an alternative to 'evidence'.

What are the 'things not seen'? They can be said to be 'the better possession' (10.34), 'better country' and 'heavenly... city' (11.16) which God has prepared for his people. Certainly, as we have seen, believers are convinced that is what they shall enjoy in God's appointed time. However, John Owen is surely right to say the author also refers to God himself, as well as to the eternal and heavenly things which God has promised to his people.

We cannot see God. Nor can we see Christ Jesus at his right hand in heaven. Nor do we see the Holy Spirit. A person of faith knows God exists. That is why we read in Hebrews 11.6: 'whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him'. In the act of faith he gives evidence that God, whom we cannot see, actually is. He always has been, always is, and always will be. A believer has this inner conviction.