

Faith is Evidence

By Elder David Pyles

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. – Heb 11:1-3

These are beautiful verses that are known to many, but they strike the eye as containing something profound. One can immediately see that they take an intriguing perspective of faith. Most think of faith as being in lieu of evidence, or as something to which we resort whenever evidence falls short. Obviously, this is not what the scriptural writer intended because he said faith is itself evidence. Accordingly, he said faith is the “*substance*” of our hope, meaning that it *substantiates* our hope, though most think of faith as embracing unsubstantiated claims.

When he describes faith as “evidence” and “substance,” this shows that true faith cannot embrace superstitions and other unfounded products of human imagination. “Evidence” is a term that is meaningful only where there is intellect and reason. His statement about the creation illustrates this. Reason dictates that nothing can derive from itself, even a Universe, so the Universe must have derived from something external to itself. Accordingly, it could not have derived from anything that can be seen, so it must have originated from what cannot be seen. These are logical statements that are corroborated by evidence. This implies that “faith,” as here defined, is not distinguished by lack of reason or evidence; rather, it is distinguished by lack of *visibility*. God and creation are things to which we cannot serve as eyewitness, but this is not to say they are illogical or unfounded ideas. No man has ever seen atoms either, yet they are supported by so much reason and evidence that only a fool would deny their existence.

One serious problem with the usual notion of faith is that it would imply that the faith of a Christian differs nothing in principle from the faith of a Pagan. The Pagan believes what he does with little or no evidence, so if this were what the Bible meant by “faith,” then the Christian would do no better. Christians should not be happy to agree with this, particularly since they have the most highly

corroborated religion in the world. One can be sure that such ideas were not intended in the important verses being considered here.

Another problem is that under the errant definition, faith serves as evidence to nothing apart from the fact that man is a fool when it comes to religion. What is it that he has not worshipped? What is it that he has not believed? As absurd as his religion has been, it obviously derives from something firmly and deeply rooted in his nature, because he has gone to the utmost extremities in service to his religion, even when there was little to corroborate it and much to contradict it. His “faith” is therefore evidence only to the fact he is a religious fool. This surely is not what the scriptural writer meant when he said “*faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*”

The truth is that the usual notion of “faith” refers to a mere *natural* phenomenon, being deeply rooted in the nature of fallen man. The scriptural notion is a *spiritual* phenomenon, necessarily deriving from the Spirit of God. This being the case, its presence serves as *evidence* to His work upon the heart, and since this work is in preparation for heaven, it serves to *substantiate* our highest hopes. It is an unfortunate thing that even many Christians apply the errant definition to “faith” and not the one intended by the Bible. They view faith as a mere product of human choice, and see it as being productive of the Spirit rather than being produced by the Spirit. When this line of reasoning is taken, the supremacy of the Christian religion is abdicated. It is placed on the same footing with Paganism and all other religious fabrications of man, and the verses in question are reduced to nonsense.

Since true Christian faith derives from the Spirit and not nature, there is much about it that is *unnatural*. Bible-based Christianity is not a religion that carnal man would design for himself. It tells a man that he is a helpless, condemned sinner; puts his salvation in one who has little appeal to his natural eye; tells him that the best for him will be deferred to another life; sets before him a set of objectives he will never be able to attain; promises him little with respect to the present life, thus denying the principal wants of his natural being, but guarantees him that if he will be faithful to his religion, then he will be judged a fool by most of the world and will almost surely suffer loss in things treasured by his carnality.

Now there is nothing in these claims to defy logic or to contradict the facts of experience. Indeed, there is much to corroborate them. They are simply claims that man by nature would not want to believe, and the Bible unequivocally says that he in fact *will not* believe them (Mt 12:33-35, Jn 8:43-47, Rom 8:5-8, 1Cor 2:14). This means that when a man does believe these things, one can account for this only by a power that is external to the man and above his nature. It derives necessarily from Spirit of God, and its presence therefore serves as evidence of Him and His work.

The chapter then presents numerous examples of faith from the Old Testament. One of the most important of these is the first:

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. – Heb 11:4

This says the difference between Abel's offering and Cain's offering was not in the hand but in the heart. Abel was not made righteous by his offering, nor was he made righteous by his faith, but through his faith he "*obtained witness*" that he was already righteous, having been made such by the gift of God. His faith therefore served as *evidence* of precious things not seen and as *substantiation* of heavenly hopes.