

HEBREWS 11:1 - FAITH - STUDY NOTES

Hebrews 11:1 AMP

NOW FAITH is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see *and* the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]. AMP

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1, NKJV)

Delitzsch: "It seems to us that a more complete and accurate definition of faith and one that is more generally applicable could not be devised than that which is given here."

Definition of Faith

Faith represents the proper alignment between a person and God.[1] Yet this single term encompasses multiple dimensions that have evolved across biblical history.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew root *’āman* fundamentally conveys "constancy" or stability—something enduring and reliable—and in its active form means "to become steadfast" or "acquire stability." [1] This concept appears foundationally in Abraham's covenant relationship with God, where belief and righteousness become intertwined.[2] However, Old Testament faith extends beyond mere trust to encompass "faithfulness" or "fidelity"—a commitment to covenant loyalty.[2]

The New Testament shifts the focus significantly. The Greek *pistis* ("faith") carries the same dual meaning—both "trust, belief" and "faithfulness"—but emphasizes personal conviction.[2] Faith becomes personalized as trust directed toward Jesus Christ himself, who functions as the object rather than the subject of faith.[3] Paul connects faith directly to righteousness and justification,[3] while Hebrews defines it as "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." [3]

Beyond biblical categories, faith functions psychologically as an inner orientation of trust toward sources of meaning and security,[4] and this posture naturally produces corresponding action.[4] Genuine faith and genuine works are inseparable—faith demonstrates itself through actions aligned with God's will, such as caring for the vulnerable.[3] Faith, then, is neither mere intellectual assent nor passive confidence, but an active alignment of belief, trust, and conduct toward God.

[1] John Reumann, "Faith," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 453.

[2] Chris Kugler, "Faith," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al.

(Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

[3] Tremper Longman III, Peter Enns, and Mark Strauss, eds., in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 565–566.

[4] J. H. Ellens and H. N. Malony, "Faith," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 427.

- Now faith is (ἐστίν δε πιστις [estin de pistis]). He has just said that "we are of faith" (10:39), not of apostasy. Now he proceeds in a chapter of great eloquence and passion to illustrate his point by a recital of the heroes of faith whose example should spur them to like loyalty now. The assurance of things hoped for (ἐλπίζομενων ὑποστασις [elpizomenōn hypostasis]). ὑποστασις [Hypostasis] is a very common word from Aristotle on and comes from ὑφίστημι [huphistēmi] (ὑπο [hupo], under, ἵστημι [histēmi], intransitive), what stands under anything (a building, a contract, a promise). See the philosophical use of it in 1:3, the sense of assurance (une assurance certaine, Ménégos) in 3:14, that steadiness of mind which holds one firm (2 Cor. 9:4). It is common in the papyri in business documents as the basis or guarantee of transactions. "And as this is the essential meaning in Heb. 11:1 we venture to suggest the translation 'Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for' " (Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary*, etc.). The proving of things not seen (πραγματων ἐλεγχος οὐ βλεπομενων [pragmatōn elegchos ou blepomenōn]). The only N. T. example of ἐλεγχος [elegchos] (except *Textus Receptus* in 2 Tim. 3:16 for ἐλεγμον [elegmon]). Old and common word from ἐλεγχο [elegchō] (Matt. 18:15) for "proof" and then for "conviction." Both uses occur in the papyri and either makes sense here, perhaps "conviction" suiting better though not in the older Greek. *Robertson, A. T. Word Pictures in the New Testament. Broadman Press, 1933, p. Heb 11:1.*

- Faith is a present and continuing reality, 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. Faith, he tells us, is a "being sure" (5712) of things hoped for. The word used here sometimes has a subjective meaning, as NIV translates it (cf. also "confidence" in 3:14). But it may also be used more objectively ("substance"), though this does not seem to be what the writer is saying. There are realities for which we have no material evidence, though they are not the less real for that. Faith enables us to know that they exist and, while we have no certainty apart from faith, faith does give us genuine certainty. Faith is the basis, the substructure of all that the Christian life means, all that the Christian hopes for. *Barker, Kenneth L. Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition: New Testament). Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, p. 993*

- The Greek word for "proof" is elegchos, indicating an inner conviction that is not based on visible matters. Divine approval is the primary consequence of faith. Other results of faith are the declaration of righteousness, the ability to look forward to the heavenly city of God, the ability to understand that faith is possible only because God is faithful, the ability to accomplish great things in the world, and the ability to see that even when believers are persecuted and murdered, beyond this world is a better resurrection.

Yarnell, Malcolm B., III. "Hebrews." *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary*, edited by E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard, Broadman & Holman, 2015, p. 1345.

- This verse is not a definition of faith, but a description of what faith does. Substance means "essence" or "reality." Faith treats things hoped for as reality. Evidence means "proof" or "conviction." Faith itself proves that what is unseen is real, such as the believer's rewards at the return of Christ (2 Cor. 4:18). *Radmacher, Earl D., et al. Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. T. Nelson Publishers, 1999, p. 1654.

- First he gives a definition of the kind of faith he has in mind. Now faith is the confident assurance about the things we expect to happen; it is a conviction about things that are not seen. Faith relates to God's word and God's character. It is believing God in such a way that we have a deep and gripping assurance that what God says will happen will indeed happen. Faith is the opposite of sight. If you see something you are not taking it upon trust when someone else tells you about it. When you believe without seeing, you are exercising faith in the other person's word. Faith is assurance. True, it may have battles with doubts. But the very heart of faith is certainty that God is telling us the truth. 'We shall now have a full definition of faith', said the famous John Calvin, 'if we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favour toward us.' Faith is being sure of what God says to us. Both in the general salvation-message of scripture and in the particular guiding of the Holy Spirit the Christian comes to assurance that what God says to him or her is utterly trustworthy. *Eaton, Michael A. The Branch Exposition of the Bible: A Preacher's Commentary of the New Testament*. Langham Global Library, 2020, p. 1005.

- Faith is the substance of things hoped for] Εστι δε πιστις ελπιζομενων υποστασις· Faith is the subsistence of things hoped for; πραγματος ελεγχος ου βλεπομενων· The demonstration of things not seen The word υποστασις, which we translate substance, signifies subsistence, that which becomes a foundation for another thing to stand on. And ελεγχος signifies such a conviction as is produced in the mind by the demonstration of a problem, after which demonstration no doubt can remain, because we see from it that the thing is; that it cannot but be; and that it cannot be otherwise than as it is, and is proved to be. Such is the faith by which the soul is justified; or rather, such are the effects of justifying faith: on it subsists the peace of God which passeth all understanding; and the love of God is shed abroad in the heart where it lives, by the Holy Ghost. *Clarke, Adam. The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes*. New Edition, vol. 6, Faithlife Corporation, 2014, pp. 761–62.

FAITH — in its widest sense: not restricted to faith in the Gospel. Not a definition of faith in its whole nature, but a description of its characteristics in relation to Paul's exhortation to perseverance (ch. 10:39). substance, &c.—it substantiates God's promises, the fulfilment of which we hope for, making them present realities to us. [However, hupostasis is translated in ch. 3:14, 'confidence.'] So Alford. Thomas Magister, like our version, 'The whole thing is virtually contained in the first principle; now the first commencement of the things hoped for is in us through the assent of faith, which virtually contains all the things hoped for' (cf. note, ch.). Through faith, the future object of Christian hope, in its beginning, is already substantiated (v. 6). Hugo de St. Victor

distinguished faith from hope. By faith we are sure of eternal things that they are; by hope we are confident that we shall have them. Hope presupposes faith (Rom. 8:25). evidence [elenchos]—‘demonstration:’ convincing proof to the believer; the soul thereby seeing what the eye cannot see. *Brown, David, et al. A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Acts–Revelation. William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited, n.d., pp. 565–66.*

- In this wonderful and well-known chapter, faith is explained as the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. Faith starts with believing in God’s character, that he is who he says he is. Faith culminates with believing in God’s promises, that he will do what he says he will do. We often think of the word hope in terms of uncertain desire—“I hope it doesn’t rain on Saturday.” For believers, however, “hope” is a desire based on assurance, and the assurance is based on God’s character. Faith is the evidence of things we cannot yet see, meaning we have complete confidence that God will fulfill his promises, even though we don’t yet see any evidence. These include eternal life, future rewards, heaven, and so forth. Faith regards these to be as real as what can be perceived with the senses. This conviction about God’s unseen promises allows Christians to persevere in their faith regardless of persecution, opposition, and temptation. *Barton, Bruce, et al. Life Application New Testament Commentary. Tyndale, 2001, pp. 1043–44.*

- Since faith is such an important element in perseverance as the prophecy from Habakkuk shows, so much so that it constitutes the very dynamic by which the just shall live, the writer now turns his attention to a full exposition of its meaning. He begins with a description: faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (1). Now if this translation is accepted (note and Westcott, Comm., p. , for an alternate possibility), then the writer has described faith, not as itself ‘the substance of things hoped for’, etc., but as an attitude of mind toward the future and the unseen that is determinative for personal conduct in the present. Faith, based as it is upon the firm word of God, is not at all a ‘leap in the dark’. It assures one of the reality of the invisible world, and of its superiority to the visible, and thereby enables him to make the right choice in the moment of decision. Faith, therefore, is fundamental to perseverance, for perseverance is nothing more than a series of choices for the future and the unseen over against choices for present and transient things belonging to the phenomenal world. It was thus by faith that the ancients received divine approval (2), for they, as the author is about to demonstrate massively, were enabled by it to ‘hold fast to the unseen in spite of the illusions and temptations of this passing world’ (E. F. Scott, Comm., ad loc.). Thus, there is seen again a continuity existing between the past and the present—a continuity of faith in the unseen which binds the two peoples together. *Bruce, F. F. New International Bible Commentary. Zondervan Publishing House, 1979, p. 1526.*