

Hebrews 11

Rev Peter De Boer

Outline 1

INTRODUCTION

1st week of October

The material of our Bible outlines for the coming season deals with the impelling and challenging chapter of Hebrews 11. The present outline is of an introductory nature, and will consist largely of information regarding the background and setting of this chapter, material that ought to be quite thoroughly grasped to have the proper approach. If you wish to read a definite Bible lesson the first evening of society discussion, we suggest you read the tenth chapter of Hebrews, especially the verses 23 to the end, and conduct a general discussion on these verses. Following this procedure, you will have opportunity to discuss the material presented in the outline, and ought to have a fairly good view of the background of Hebrews 11.

THE STUDY OF HEBREWS 11 WORTHWHILE

The question might be asked, Is a special study of Hebrews 11 worthwhile? We might answer in a general way that a special study of any part of Scripture is worthwhile—God's Word, and every part of it, is worthy of special study. Apart, however, from this general truth, there are several considerations that ought to show clearly that the choice of Heb. 11 for study by our societies is certainly in order. For, first of all, the chapter deals with one of the most important matters conceivable, *faith*, and that from the viewpoint of faith as the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Because of the latter viewpoint the chapter is also of an extremely practical nature- it is exactly faith as the evidence of things unseen which all Christians in the midst of the world need so much, not the least in our day. Secondly, Heb. 11 is a good choice for us, since the author does not deal with faith as the evidence of things unseen in an abstract way, difficult to understand. On the contrary, the chapter offers one example after another of historical illustrations to drive home the truth that faith is the substance of things hoped for. And this makes the chapter easier to grasp and to discuss. And, thirdly, since the illustrations are all from the Old Testament, we are impelled to refer continually to the Old Testament. This continual reference gives us opportunity to combine the Old and the New Testaments, and to show the unity, connection and relation between the two.

TO WHOM WRITTEN

The secondary author of the book of Hebrews is unknown. Paul is often referred to as the author; Art. 4 of the Belgic Confessions also shares this opinion. However, there is no certainty on this score. Several points in the epistle itself plead strongly against the Pauline authorship. The matter of secondary authorship is, of course, not of great importance; the primary author is God, and that is of greatest significance.

The entire epistle gives evidence that it was written originally for a community of Jewish Christians, that is, for Christians that were converted from Judaism to Christ. Such Christians there seem to have been at first in almost every congregation organized under the instrumentality of the apostles. They sometimes seem to have constituted by far the large majority in the local churches. In the case of those to whom this letter was written, it seems that the entire church consisted of just such Jewish Christians. It may safely be concluded, also, that these Christians lived in the city and vicinity of Jerusalem. The fact that so much mention is made of the temple service, of the danger of falling back into the temple service with its shadows, pleads for this view.

THE THRUST OF THE LETTER

The key-word of the book of Hebrews is “better”. Christ is better than the angels, better than Moses, better than Melchizedek; the New Testament covenant is better than the Old Testament form thereof; etc.—over and over the book compares the New Testament manifestation of grace in Christ to the Old Testament manifestation thereof and always finds the one “better” than the other. It is evident that these Christians to whom the letter was originally addressed were tempted to fall back into Judaism, from Christ back into the shadows. Perhaps they were a bit disappointed in Christianity after their first enthusiasm had passed. Perhaps they had expected the full realization of the kingdom at once; but the Lord tarried and things remained the same. And being weak in faith they were in daily danger of returning to their former worship in the temple and falling away from the reality in Christ. It was with a view to this that the writer warns them. The day of shadows has passed and Christ has entered the holy of holies in heaven. In vs. 23 of chapter 10 he admonishes them to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, and to consider one another to provoke unto love and good work. In vs. 25 the writer exhorts them not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some had become. He points out in vs. 26 to 29 that if those that despised Moses did not escape, how much less those that turn away from the Christ and trample the blood of Christ underfoot. In vs. 32 he reminds them to call to mind their former zeal and enthusiasm when they were first converted. Then they endured the afflictions and did not seek to flee them. Yes, they even according to vs. 34 took joyfully the confiscation of their goods. Then they knew and were assured that they had in heaven a better and enduring heritage. In vs. 35 the writer pleads with them not to cast away their confidence which hath great recompense of reward. He points out in vs. 36 that they have need of patience, and that, after they have done the will of God, they will then receive the promise. And that promise is the coming of the eternal salvation in the return of Christ, for “yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry”. The second coming of Christ would surely come, there could be no question about that. And, now in vs. 38 they are reminded of the rule, “The just shall live by faith”. They had ceased to live by faith. They wanted to see, and therefore they had grown impatient and were tempted to fall back into the service of the shadows. Their faith had grown dim, and so they were inclined to give up the hard battle against Judaism. They must live by faith, by the faith that is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. To encourage them therein, and to show that from of old it was always necessary to live by faith, the author leads them in Heb. 11 through the hall of the heroes of faith. These all lived and died by faith. They did not give up, no matter how dark it seemed. So they must do, for “if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him”.

(10:38) The writer has better hopes for them; he is convinced that they are “not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul”.

QUESTIONS: Why is a study of Hebrews 11 worthwhile? What is meant by the distinction between the primary and the secondary author of Scripture? Who in your opinion might be the secondary author of the book of Hebrews? Is the latter question of great importance? To whom was the epistle to the Hebrews originally written? Where did the addressees undoubtedly live? Why was this letter written to them? Why did the writer take special pains in vs. 25 of chapter 10 to warn the believers against forsaking the assembling of themselves together? Did he mean the church worship, or perhaps societies? What significance does this injunction have for us? What is patience, and why do Christians need it?

Outline 2

FAITH, THE EVIDENCE

OF THINGS NOT SEEN

2nd week of October

Heb. 11:1- Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

In vs. 1 the writer points out the particular aspect of faith that he wishes to enlarge upon and impress upon the readers. It is imperative, first of all, to bear in mind that this verse speaks only of a particular *aspect* of faith. There are those that assert that this verse is *the* definition of faith, a complete definition. If that were true something would be asserted of faith as a tie to Christ, of faith as a gift of God etc. A definition, a complete definition would naturally have to contain mention of all these, since all these are integral parts of faith as set forth elsewhere in Scripture. We should remember that the Bible is not a book of definitions. God has given us the *facts* of history in Scripture, a book of dogmatic definition. The facts of astronomy are in the sky, but the science and orderly arrangement thereof God has left to man to discover. So too, it is with Scripture and with faith. All the elements of faith are clearly portrayed in the Bible but nowhere do you find a simple definition. God has left the latter to the church. There is, consequently, in this verse no definition of faith, only a statement regarding the aspect of faith the author wishes to emphasize.

FAITH CLOSELY ALLIED TO HOPE

We discovered in the previous outline that the writer emphasizes that the just shall live by faith. We discovered, further, that he exhorts them to patience with a view to Christ's return and their faithfulness in the interim. Put these two together and it is evident that faith here means almost the same thing as hope. It is primarily faith as a firm adherence to the sure things yet to come that is on the foreground.

However, it ought to be added that although it is faith from the aspect primarily of hope that receives the emphasis, it is surely living faith of which the writer speaks. Some have taken

the position that the author does not speak of living faith at all, but of faith in general, which even unbelievers may have. A cursory view of the chapter to our mind is sufficient to disprove this, as we believe the sequence will clearly show.

THINGS UNSEEN AND THINGS HOPED FOR

The two concepts “things unseen” and “things hoped for” are very closely related; the former is the more general thought and the latter the more limited idea. All things hoped for are things unseen, but all unseen things are not things hoped for. For example the creation of the world (vs. 3) certainly does not belong to the things still hoped for, yet it is a thing unseen.

By the things unseen are meant those things that escape our general perception, that cannot be seen or heard, or touched and tasted, and that are even contrary to physical sight. For example, the past things of history to which belong all the miracles spoken of in Holy Writ. The miracles of the raising of the dead have not only, not been seen by us, but are even contrary to what we see. They are real, very real, but they belong for us to the unseen things. So also it is with our righteousness in Christ. That the believers and their children are washed in the blood of Christ and are clean from all iniquity is not something evident to physical eyesight; it is real, very real, but it belongs to the unseen things. These examples might be multiplied many times over, since all the spiritual realities of God’s grace fall in the realm of things unseen.

By the things hoped for we must understand those unseen things that lie as yet in the future. Some of the things Abraham hoped for have been fulfilled, e.g. the inheritance of the earthly Canaan. That is no longer a thing for us to be hoped for. So too with the birth of Christ, his suffering and death, his ascent to heaven and the outpouring of the Spirit. But that does not mean that there are no things that still lie in the future. There are. Centrally speaking, there is one great event still hoped for by the church, and to be hoped for- that is, the second coming of Christ with all that it implies.

These unseen things and the things hoped for play a great role in the Christian’s world and life view. Take them away and his Christianity is gone. Undermine his certainty in regard to their certainty, let him waver in respect to the certainty of Christ’s return on the clouds of glory, and his spiritual life loses its vitality and is bound to disappear. If these things are not sure for him, then why should he suffer for Christ’s sake? Then the Christian life is a vain thing.

FAITH THE SUBSTANCE AND THE EVIDENCE

What is the secret of the Christian’s certainty in regard to the reality of the things unseen and hoped for? To that question there can only be one answer, viz. *faith*, for faith is the substance and the evidence of these things. The word “substance” is not an altogether fortunate, nor clear translation. The Revised Version translates the original with the English word “assurance”. For those still acquainted with the Dutch we might mention that in the Holland version you find “*vaste grond*”, quite similarly to the King James Version in use among us. The meaning is that faith is the ground, the pillar upon which these things stand. Not, of course, in the sense that if you take away faith these things cease to exist. The reality of God and his Word, of Christ and our righteousness, etc. do not depend upon our faith in the sense that if faith is taken away the facts themselves cease to exist. Of course not- our unbelief cannot make God’s Word less true. Nevertheless, the reality and certainty of these things *for me and for you* does depend on faith.

Subjectively, faith is the assurance, the certainty, the proof of their reality. Consequently, faith is very important.

Fundamentally the word translated “evidence” means the same thing as the word “substance”. Also here faith is considered as the subjective conviction which proves the reality of the unseen things to me and to you as believers. Faith is not the proof whereby we can convince others that God’s Word is true. But for me and you personally faith it is that convinces us, that proves to us, that assures us of the reality of the things unseen and the things hoped for. That personal faith is the root of hope that looks forward to the day of Christ. This includes, naturally, that all doubt and fear is not faith, and does not arise from faith. Faith, as here described, is certainty, assurance, confidence.

QUESTIONS: Is Heb. 11:1 a complete definition of faith? Prove your point. How does the Heidelberg Catechism define faith? How is the aspect of faith spoken of implied in that answer of the Catechism? Can the believer convince the unbeliever of the reality of the heavenly things by appealing to what he believes and knows by faith? What is meant by “things unseen” and by “things hoped for”? Which one of these two does the chapter especially enlarge upon? May the Christian ever doubt; does he ever; is doubt ever compatible with faith?

Outline 3

THE GOOD REPORT OF THE ELDERS

3rd week of October

Heb. 11:2- For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Faith as described in the first verse is the theme of the entire chapter. Yet the writer does not speak of it in an abstract, hard to understand, way. On the contrary, it is very easy to follow his elucidation, for the simple reason that he brings to our attention a number of men who lived through faith, and through it became distinguished, and obtained a good report. The writer intends to take his readers through the Old Testament Hall of Heroes, and illustrate from their lives the faith that is an evidence of things hoped for. This is made clear in the second verse.

THE ELDERS

The elders spoken of in the verse are not our consistory members, but as the chapter shows those saints that have gone before us, particularly those of the Old Testament dispensation. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and all the rest whose names are mentioned in the chapter are the elders. These all were men of faith. They possessed the faith that is the substance of things not seen and the evidence of things hoped for. And they lived and died in that faith. Of them may be said truly that they kept the faith. The unseen things were real to them. They were motivated and controlled by the faith that is the certainty of the things hoped for. They even sacrificed the visible things of this life for the invisible things of God’s promise, as e.g. did Abraham when he forsook Ur and went to the land the Lord would after show him.

THEIR GOOD REPORT

The text says that by faith these men obtained a good report. It is not stated with so many words from whom they received a good report. But we know that they did not obtain this good report from the world. The world at times even spoke ill of the, e.g. of Abel, of Enoch, of Moses. In a certain sense even the world must give the Christian a good report. So I Tim. 3:7 says of office bearers in the church, "he must have a good report of them which are without". And, of course, the wicked world must not be able to speak evil of the believers and to point to wicked ways of living in conflict with the faith. In so far Christians must take care to have a good report from those that are without. However, from the aspect of faith itself, the world will never give the Christian a good report. If all men speak well of us, if the world finds in us a good partner, we may well ask ourselves whether we are walking in the faith, yes, if we are believers at all. "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets". (Luke 6:26).

In the light of the context it is evident that the good report spoken of is the report the elders received *from God*. It is the good report of them that the Scriptures of God give of them on the pages of Holy Writ. But it is not only the good report God gave about them and after they were gone that is intended; primarily, it is the good report they obtained of God themselves while they were living. Vs. 4 says that Abel obtained witness of the Lord; they obtained testimony in their hearts even while they lived that they pleased the Lord. God inscribed their names on the roll of the heroes of faith, and God gave them assurance that their walk was pleasing in his sight. And as it was with them, so too it is for every Christian, through faith the Lord bears testimony to us, and walking in faith he gives us assurance that we please him. There is no other way than faith to obtain a good report.

QUESTIONS: Who are the elders? Must Christian have a good report of them that are without; and if so, in what sense? Of whom above all must the Christian have a good report, and is this compatible with a good name in the world in every sense? Who are the heroes of the church? May the church hold up Washington, Lincoln, etc. as examples whose lives we must emulate? When it is done, can you see any bad effects? How does God give testimony and witness to believers when they walk in faith?

Outline 4

UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD

4th week of October

Heb. 11:3- 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.

In a sense this verse is an interruption in the train of thought developed throughout the course of the chapter. As the chapter as a whole indicates the writer intended to present a list of example of Old Testament worthies to show that faith is indeed the substance of things hoped. Already in vs. 2 the author speaks of the good report the elders obtained. But now, before he passes on to review the lives of these elders, he pauses to speak of the creation of the world. The insertion of this interruption is, however, surely easily understood. Undoubtedly as the writer's thoughts wandered back to older times, the thought occurs to him that even before the history of

the elders began there lies an event, a significant event, which is an object of faith only: the creation of the world. The interposition of this reference is certainly not out of place, if simply because the verse contains a cogent illustration of faith as evidence of things not seen. How the world originated is absolutely an object of faith only. And, not only is this interlude in place here, but we may add in our day there is every reason to give serious attention to the truth expressed here.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD

How did this world originate? This question is a wholly natural one, and every thinking man or woman sooner or later puts the question to himself. Everything about us has a beginning, and so almost unbeknown to ourselves we find ourselves asking, “Whence did all this that we see have its beginnings?” To this question there are only two possible answers- either the answer of faith or the answer of human philosophy. When the writer of Hebrews answers the question he does so as Scripture always does- God created the world. He puts the answer positively and negatively. Positively, he asserts that the worlds were framed by the word of God; negatively, that the things that are seen were not made from the things that do appear. In respect to the positive assertion the emphasis falls upon “by the Word of God”. We know from other portions of Scripture that this Word by which the world was framed is very God Himself, the second Person of the Trinity (John 1:1ff; Heb. 1:2). There, the writer is rather thinking of the simple fact that by a word of power God framed the world. This is plain from the text itself which wishes to show that the world was not made from the things that are seen. God called creation into being by the word of His power, Gen. 1; Ps. 33, etc. The word “framed” is used rather than “created” or “made” because “framed”, “ordered”, “prepared” is the more comprehensive term, for God not only called the material into being, but He also framed it, he ordered it into the beautiful and orderly whole that is now called *cosmos*. The text speaks of “worlds” (the plural)- are there more worlds than one? Certainly not. The plural is used (and more frequently in such a case) since the viewpoint of creation is that of time and duration. One thing is plain; Heb. 11 ascribes to God the entire work of creation.

Negatively, the text asserts that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. The reason for the negative statement is the fact that apart from faith this other conclusion would be the only possible one in regard to the origin of the world. Unbelief always answers that the things were made of things which do appear. Evolution is unbelief’s answer. The old Greeks taught it, so there is nothing new or modern about this error. The theory of evolution in one form or another has many adherents even today. Over against them the author emphasizes that the word of God, so that the things that are seen were not made of things that do appear. He means the things seen, creation in all its beauty and order, was not made from things that do appear, that is, did not have its origin in them, did not evolve from them. The seen things do not find their beginning in seen things, not on the first day of creation nor on any other. They find the origin in the word of God. There is here no room for the theory of evolution.

That God made the world, we understand through faith. By “we” the writer means the believers, those that receive the testimony of God’s revelation. But “understand” he does not mean that we comprehend God’s creative act- that we never can- but that we know it, recognize it and are convinced of it. That, he asserts, is *through faith*. Certainly the Christian does not know that God created the world by sight- we were not present, nor from the testimony of men- no man saw it, not even Adam. Neither does “pure reason” (so-called) ever lead men to this

conclusion. Apart from God's revelation we can only conclude either that the world was eternal or that it evolved. Without faith there can be no *knowledge* in respect to the origin of the world. Faith gives knowledge, for faith is the adherence to God's revelation regarding the origin of His own creation.

Faith is thus the *only* way to knowledge to the origin of the world. Mere reasoning can never convince the unbeliever who rejects the testimony of God. The trouble with the unbeliever is a spiritual one- rejecting God, he rejects him also as Creator. Then he can only wander about in the vain corridors of the cave of human philosophy. Faith alone gives us the answer. And this faith is also reasonable. Unbelief's evolution is unreasonable, for it conflicts with the very fact; faith is reasonable for it is in harmony with creation fact.

Well may the writer spur the believers on to faith. If we forget faith, and live only by the seen things, we are foolish. If in respect to the origin of the world we must walk by faith, is it not proper that also with a view to the future and the ultimate end of the world we walk by faith and not by sight. ..

QUESTIONS: What is meant by the theory of evolution? Whose name is most frequently associated with this view? Can any scientific fact be mustered to substantiate the claim of evolution? What different types of evolution are there? Can you see any dangers in the theory of evolution? Is it possible to convince the unbeliever that God created the world? Give reasons for your opinion.

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