

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, I speak to You each day, and you listen to me.
Change my self-centred heart so that I show interest in others, not just myself,
Challenge my assumptions so that I begin to learn the truth about the world,
Clear the debris of everyday life from my mind so that I see the bigger picture,
Control my passions so that I become effective in being helpful to others,
And so, may 'less of me and more of You' become more than mere motto.
May this become the truth of my life that I accept and other people see. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Light

Praise God for the spiritual light that has brightened your life, for the spiritual gifts you have received from His hand and the help He has given you throughout your life.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the many blessings given to you the Lord
- Pray for the country of Sri Lanka, for stability and reconciliation
- Pray for political leaders who are imprisoned in their own lands

Meditation

May we, Lord Jesus, be true to our calling:

May we offer our honest worship;
The offering of our hearts in spirit and truth,
The service of our lives and everything we do,
And the giving of our best to You.

May we be a living fellowship;
A community founded in love and service,
A gathering of people in faith and peace
And the gifts of Your Spirit, shared.

May we be people who bless the world;
By practical and effective expressions of love,
By ceaseless effort for the benefit of others
And striving for the best, through You.

Bible Study - Hebrews 11:1-3

¹ Now faith is being convinced about what we hope for, and certain about things we cannot see; ² and this is how our forefathers received approval. ³ By faith we know that the present age was set in order by God's Word, meaning that the things we can see have been made out of things we cannot see.

Review

These powerful words have long been valued as one of the most helpful 'definitions' of faith. No single set of words, of course, can encompass everything that is meant by the word 'faith' in the Bible, but these three verses are a significant help to all who wish to find

a broad understanding of it. The classic understanding of faith defines it as the proper response to the saving work of Christ, which makes 'peace with God' possible (Romans 5:1f.). This text, however, adds to this by telling us not what it achieves, but describing its essential characteristics; and it is sandwiched between the writer's forceful presentation of the privileges and duties of Christian faith (ch.10) and a series of examples of faith, which come next in our studies (11:3-40).

The letter of Hebrews has just offered encouragement to faithful Christian people who have experienced a hard time as their faith has come under pressure from the society in which they live (see 10:32-39). In ancient times, as in the present day, Christian faith has to be sustained when everything in the world seems to contradict what we believe about God and Jesus Christ. Christians can often suffer through no fault of their own (10:33), Jesus sometimes appears to delay when His help is most needed (10:34-36), and injustices within the world can make some doubt that God is indeed benevolent (10:35). The truly wonderful statements in our reading today are actually set against this backdrop. Our text is not intended to be a definition, even though it uses terms that would have been familiar to anyone who was studying philosophy in the first century. Its purpose is to encourage us to hold on to the faith God has given us even though the evidence we see with our eyes may appear to contradict it.

You may the first verse in the King James version; 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' However, the old word 'substance' is unhelpful, because the Greek word implies something that is certain, hence my translation 'faith is being convinced about what we hope for'. Therefore, faith means to be fully convinced that something will happen before it has taken place or been concluded, and also fully convinced about something that we cannot see. Faith in Jesus Christ is therefore confident about securing our acceptance before Almighty God in the final judgment, though this judgment has not yet happened. We believe this even though we have no personal visible proof of it, because we accept the Scriptural testimony of Jesus as conveyed to us by the disciples and others in the New Testament, and the historical evidence of the life changing power of the Gospel. We are confident that what we have received from others, especially those how have gone before us, such as the 'forefathers' mentioned in verse 2. Their testimony of faith helps establish our faith.

Verse 3 is a fascinating development of this understanding of faith, which is developed from looking at how history progresses. The letter says that the 'present age' is based on what happened previously, a fact that people easily forget today! Yet this simple point is far more powerful than we imagine, because it is a simple demonstration of the fact that the things we see and experience are a direct consequence of things we cannot see and have not experienced! Furthermore, it declares that God has been active in His world throughout time, and so what we experience now in the 'present age' is 'set in order by God's Word'. This is because God has been working since the beginning of time according to a plan that is gradually coming to fruition. We only see what is before us, but the revelation of God as found in Scripture, in the life of Jesus, in the historical church and in what He says to us in our hearts now, all point us towards the certain completion of God's work in His world

So our faith is based on what we might call 'reasonable certainty', which is a perfectly respectable concept today, even in education and science! For Christians involved in any area of life, such faith is a true inspiration. For just as the people in the first century could see that their forefather's faith had been vindicated (as Hebrews goes on to say in the coming verses), we feel justified in our faith and inspired by what God has done both through Christ and also through the faith of those who have gone before us. They all tell us that the awesome God who made the world and is unapproachably moral, right and just, is

at heart faithful and loving, and ultimately, He will bring to fruition the hopes He has placed in the hearts of His people.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What is faith, and what is hope? What is the difference between these two, and how does this passage help us understand this?
2. What do these three verses tell us about faith, which is not found elsewhere in the New Testament (to the best of your knowledge)?
3. What does history teach us about the purposes of God in our world today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

What is it that you hope for in Christ? Indeed, what do you look forward to as a Christian? You may think that the answer to these questions is straightforward, or has been answered already by the text we have studied; but each of us must be honest with ourselves and with God about his, because our answer is closely related to the inner state of our faith. We often hide from other people those times of trial and distress in which we have difficulty holding on to our faith, and lose confidence in the things of God. However, if we share these things with others, and deal with them openly and honestly, then we will be blessed by the love and understanding other people show us, which lead us back to faith.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *How do you lose faith? What has happened in your own past that causes you to be uncertain about your faith, or challenges your core beliefs? Try to assess this so that you can find a way of overcoming problems before they begin.*
- *Pray for any people you know who are going through a difficult period when their life seems difficult and faith feels impossible. Pray that they will share their problems with others, especially their problems of faith, because in so doing, although they may not know it, they may well find the key to unlocking their problems.*

Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, lead me onwards to share with everyone I meet the great blessings I have received through Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit, take my life and purify it by Your fire, so that I might be found acceptable before God's throne of grace. Holy Spirit, strengthen my faith and give me hope; in the name of Jesus; AMEN