

Stand Firm Upon Faith

Hebrews 11:1-3 (May 3, 2020)

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Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. 3By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Historical Context

To establish and validate the definition of faith offered at the beginning of this chapter, Hebrews makes its case by evidentiary and experiential fact. The primary example is Abraham. Abraham takes up the most space in Hebrews 11 (14 of the 40 verses) and is the father and progenitor of faith repeatedly in the New Testament. Abraham sets off on a journey without even knowing where he is going. And he lived with a vision of a city he would never see, “the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (11:10). A tent-dweller and traveler looked forward to a city with foundations.

Theme: Stand Firm Upon Faith

Hebrews 11:1 makes two statements about faith. First, faith is *upostasis*; this term indicates a standing (*stasis*) under (*upo*). Thankfully, this word appears two more times in Hebrews, shedding light on its meaning for this author. In Hebrews 3:14, he and his readers have become sharers of Christ, a relationship that will endure as they hold fast the beginning of *upostasis* firm until the end. The notion of a foundation of belief or a confidence of belief makes sense here. This foundational meaning fits also in the other occurrence in Hebrews 1:3. Shifting to a Christological application, the author states that Jesus is the imprint of God’s *upostasis*. He is the picture of the foundation or bedrock of God’s identity -- hence many translations have “being” here. The two other instances of the word in the New Testament also carry the idea of confidence (2 Corinthians 9:4; 11:17). If *upostasis* is something basic, something solid, something firm, then it provides a place to stand from which one can hope.

Second, faith is *elegchos*. Here, the author of Hebrews has stretched our vocabulary skills because this word appears only here in all the New Testament. It is not uncommon in the Old Testament where it appears over thirty times, primarily in the wisdom literature. In almost every instance the connotation of the word is quite negative. It is translated as “reproof,” “rebuke,” or “conviction.” *Elegchos* is evidence brought forth that the person doesn’t usually want to hear. Only twice does Job use the term more generally as “proof” (Job 16:21; 23:4). That sense of proof or usually translated as “evidence” is not wrong here. Faith presents that proof, even that rebuke, of things that you have difficulty seeing. If this community is beginning to struggle with doubt about God’s good character, they may need this jolt. You can stand firmly upon faith, and you will not want to deny or reject the evidence it presents.