

## What is Faith, Part 2

January 29, 2017

Hebrews 11:4-7

**4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.**

### 2. THE DIVINE ACCEPTANCE OF FAITH (11:4–16)

In the first major movement of his exposition, the author stressed the theme suggested in verse 2. Faith wins acceptance and reward from God.

11:4. **Abel** represents the **righteous man** referred to in 10:38, whose acceptance before God was based on a superior sacrifice. Like Abel, the readers found acceptance before God on the basis of the better sacrifice of the New Covenant. Their unbelieving brethren, like **Cain**, found no such divine approbation. Even death does not extinguish the testimony of a man like Abel.

11:5–6. **Enoch**, on the other hand, reflected the kind of life that pleases God since he walked with God by faith (as the readers also should). If Christ had come in their lifetimes (cf. 10:37), the readers also would **not** have experienced **death**. In any case they could only please God by continued confidence that **He exists and ... rewards those who earnestly seek Him**.

11:7. That God does reward those who seek Him is suggested by the career of **Noah**, who became an heir of righteousness by faith. What he inherited was, in fact, the new world after the Flood as the readers might inherit “the world to come” (cf. 2:5). The reference here to Noah saving his household recalls the writer’s stress on a Christian’s salvation-inheritance. It further suggests that a man’s personal **faith** can be fruitful in his

family, as they share it together.<sup>1</sup>

**4–6** Moving on through the pages of the OT, the writer notes that Abel’s faith was expressed when he *offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did*. The difference was not in the substance of the sacrifices (Gn. 4:3–4), but in the attitude of the two brothers (as implied in Gn. 4:4–7). Cain was told that his offering would be acceptable if he did what was right (*cf.* Pr. 15:8). But God testified to the righteousness of Abel and to the faith that motivated him when he *spoke well of his offerings*. Abel *still speaks* in the sense that he witnesses to the faith that pleases God. Enoch’s experience of being *taken from this life, so that he did not experience death* was the sign that he was *commended as one who pleased God*. Gn. 5:22 and 24 insists that he ‘walked with God’ and Hebrews takes this to mean that his life was characterized by faith. For, *without faith it is impossible to please God* (6). This generalization corresponds with the two elements in the definition of faith given in v 1. Anyone who *comes to* (lit. ‘draws near to’, as in 4:16; 7:25; 10:22; 12:22) *God must believe that he exists* (be certain of what is not seen) and believe *that he rewards those who earnestly seek him* (trust that his promises will be fulfilled).

**7** When Noah was warned about *things not yet seen*, he was told about the approaching judgment of the flood (Gn. 6:13–22). He reacted to this word from God *in holy fear* or ‘reverent submission’ (the corresponding noun is used to describe Jesus in 5:9). Expressing his faith by the building of an ark, he saved his family and *condemned the world*. Noah became *heir of the righteousness that comes by faith* in the sense that his righteous behaviour (Gn. 6:9; 7:1) was clearly shown to be the outworking of his faith.<sup>2</sup>

**4.** From the proposition of the nature of faith in general, the apostle now gives examples of its power and efficacy in particular people.

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

Abel. The example given is Abel, the second son of Adam and first son of the promise. Abel was the first person to be killed for Christ, and this at the hands of his brother. This has made him well-known in all generations, which, as Chrysostom thinks, is intended by the last clause,

<sup>1</sup> Hodges, Z. C. (1985). Hebrews. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 807–808). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>2</sup> Peterson, D. G. (1994). Hebrews. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 1345–1347). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

he still speaks, even though he is dead.

**Offered God.** Abel offered his sacrifice to **God** (Genesis 4:3). This was the best way of paying homage to the Divine Being. Whoever sacrifice is offered to is God. Therefore, when the Gentiles sacrificed to the devil, as they did (1 Corinthians 10:20, “the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons”), they owned him as “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

**By faith.** Abel offered his sacrifice **by faith**. He was not doing something that he had invented, but his sacrifice was in response to God’s command and promise. He did it in **faith**, in that he exercised faith in God as he sacrificed.

**A better sacrifice.** The difference between Cain and Abel was Abel’s faith. As their faith differed, so did their actions and the objects they used to sacrifice with. Cain considered God only as a creator and preserver, whom he offered the fruits of the earth. He had not thought about sin or how to be delivered from it. Abel’s faith was fixed on God, not only as a creator, but as redeemer also, as the one who, in his infinite wisdom and grace, had appointed the way of redemption through sacrifice and atonement. So Abel’s sacrifice was accompanied with a sense of sin and guilt, with its lost condition by the fall, and a trust in the way of redemption and recovery that God had provided. This is borne out by his type of sacrifice, which was by death and blood: death, which he deserved because of his sin; blood, which was the way atonement came.

Commended. That is, God commended Abel. This was so famous in the church that he seemed to be known by the name “righteous Abel,” which is how our Savior referred to him (Matthew 23:35). The apostle testifies that Abel was indeed righteous with the words, he was commended as a righteous man.

**His offerings.** How God spoke well of Abel’s **offerings** is not stated. Most people think God brought fire from heaven to set his sacrifice on fire on the altar. What is certain is that in some way, through some token, Abel’s faith was strengthened, and Cain became angry, knowing that God had accepted his brother’s sacrifice.

Here is a prototype of the believing and malignant churches in all ages—of those who are born after the Spirit and those born after the flesh. “At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit” (Galatians 4:29). This was the first public display of the enmity between the descendants of the woman and the descendants of the serpent. “Cain, who belonged to the evil one [the descendant of the serpent] ... murdered his brother” (1 John 3:12).

**And by faith he still speaks.** The second result of Abel’s faith happened after his death. **And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.** **By faith**, that is, through the means of that faith that was the ground of his acceptance with God, **he still speaks**. The apostle interprets the meaning of this in 12:24, where he specifically ascribes these words to Abel’s blood.

5. By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

His second example is **Enoch**. Enoch has a double witness given to him in Scripture; once in the Old Testament, and once in the New Testament. In the Old Testament his faith and holiness are mentioned (Genesis 5), while in the New Testament his prophecy is remembered: “Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: ‘See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him’ ” (Jude 14–15). Enoch preached about the warnings of the law, the future judgment on ungodly sinners, especially those who scoffed and persecuted.

**Taken from this life.** Literally, “removed.” He was “translated” out of one state and condition into another. There are only two states for good men such as Enoch. The first is the state of faith and obedience here in this world. Enoch lived in this state for “300 years.” “He walked with God” (Genesis 5:22–24), leading a life of faith as he obeyed God. The second state, in the next world, is the blessed state of enjoying God. No other state for good people is once intimated in the Scripture or is consistent with God’s covenant. So Enoch, being translated from the first state, immediately was installed into the second. The Scripture leaves no room for any conjecture about the whereabouts of the particular place, or the kind of place it is, and only rash and foolish people make such conjectures.

**He did not experience death.** For “God took him away” (Genesis 5:24). Enoch was removed from one state to the other, without the intervention of death.

6. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Faith is not specifically mentioned in Genesis in connection with Enoch, just that he walked with God and pleased God. This verse shows that he pleased God through his faith and consequently “was taken from this life.” The apostle now states that **without faith it is impossible to please God**. It follows that Enoch “pleased God” and was translated because he had faith.

**To please God.** Literally, “to have been well-pleasing.” What is impossible without faith is **to please God**. This verb is only used in the passive in these two verses and in 13:16 in the whole of the New Testament. The adjective, often translated “pleasing,” is constantly applied to people or things that are accepted with God: “anyone who serves God in this way is pleasing to God” (Romans 14:18; see also Romans 12:1–2; 2 Corinthians 5:9; Ephesians 5:10; Philippians 4:18; Colossians 3:20). Three things are included here. First, for a person to be accepted by God, God needs to be well pleased with him; second, the person’s actions need to please God, as did Abel’s gifts and Enoch’s obedience—see 13:16; third, such people are righteous, just or justified,

as Abel and Enoch were, as all true believers were in the Scripture. Faith alone pleases God. Otherwise there could be many acts that pleased God. But God is only pleased by those who are accepted and justified by God. So our coming to God and our believing in God must be interpreted in the light of pleasing God.

God **rewards those who earnestly seek him**, not those who just seek him. To “seek” the Lord is used in general for any inquiry after him (Acts 17:27). But this word, which literally means “to seek out,” indicates that the person is diligently seeking God. So a faith that is not diligent is no faith.

7. By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Chrysostom particularly commends this third example the apostle gives because it not only shows the efficacy of faith in Noah, but because it also shows the effect of unbelief in the world. This was a most relevant example for the Hebrews who were being tested about whom they would follow and abide with.

**Warned about things not yet seen.** This warning is recorded in Genesis 6:13–16. In the first part, Noah is told that God will destroy the world (Genesis 6:13), and in the second part he is told what he has to do: build an ark (Genesis 6:14–16). This had a double effect on Noah. First, it made him fearful, and second, he obeyed God as he built the ark according to God’s directions. Both parts of this divine warning were **about things not yet seen**. The apostle said in verse 1 that “what we do not see” is the correct object of our faith. But the things meant by this were not invisible in themselves; they were seen well enough when they existed. Therefore, the apostle says these things were not **yet** seen, that is, the flood, and Noah’s being saved by the ark. These were **not yet seen** when Noah warned about them, nor were they “seen” a hundred years later. The cause of the flood, the wickedness of the world, and the destruction of the world, through God’s power, was invisible. So it was a pure act of faith for Noah to believe what he had no evidence for, except through divine revelation, especially since the thing itself seemed so incredible.

**In holy fear.** Noah was moved with fear and at this point was exercising faith. For although Noah may be said to be warned by God inasmuch as he became accepted with God by faith, and then received this divine warning, yet the emphasis here is the effect this faith had on Noah. “By faith Noah ... was moved by fear.” This is the effect that believing God’s word had on Noah. Thus **holy fear** was a reverential fear about God’s warnings and is meant here, not an anxious fear about the evil threatened. In the warning Noah received, he considered the greatness, the holiness, and the power of God. Seeing God through faith in this way, he was filled with a reverential fear of him (see Psalm 119:120; Habakkuk 3:16; Malachi 2:5).

**He condemned the world.** Noah did not condemn the world as its judge, but as an advocate

and a witness, through a plea and testimony. He **condemned the world** by his teaching, through his obedience, by his example, and through the faith he exercised.

**Heir of righteousness.** The way Noah obtained his righteousness is that he was made the **heir** of it. The way we partake of this righteousness is through gratuitous adoption. This is through faith (John 1:12). So in justification, forgiveness of sin and the inheritance go together (Acts 26:18). And this inheritance is through the promise, not through the law or deeds (Romans 4:14; Galatians 3:18–19). So Noah was **heir of righteousness that comes by faith** in free adoption, through faith, and he came to have an interest in and right to the righteousness that is offered in the promise, through which it is given us as an inheritance.<sup>3</sup>

4. *By faith Abel offered, &c.* The Apostle's object in this chapter is to shew, that however excellent were the works of the saints, it was from faith they derived their value, their worthiness, and all their excellences; and hence follows what he has already intimated, that the fathers pleased God by faith alone.

Now he commends faith here on two accounts,—it renders obedience to God, for it attempts and undertakes nothing, but what is according to the rule of God's word,—and it relies on God's promises, and thus it gains the value and worth which belongs to works from his grace alone. Hence, whenever the word faith is found in this chapter, we must bear in mind, that the Apostle speaks of it, in order that the Jews might regard no other rule than God's word, and might also depend alone on his promises.

He says, first, that Abel's *sacrifice* was for no other reason preferable to that of his brother, except that it was sanctified by faith: 1 for surely the fat of brute animals did not smell so sweetly, that it could, by its odour, pacify God. The Scripture indeed shews plainly, why God accepted his sacrifice, for Moses's words are these, "God had respect to Abel, and to his gifts." It is hence obvious to conclude, that his sacrifice was accepted, because he himself was graciously accepted. But how did he obtain this favour, except that his heart was purified by faith.

*God testifying, &c.* He confirms what I have already stated, that no works, coming from us, can please God, until we ourselves are received into favour, or to speak more briefly, that no works are deemed just before God, but those of a just man: for he reasons thus,—God bore a testimony to Abel's gifts; then he had obtained the praise of being just before God.<sup>2</sup>

This doctrine is useful, and ought especially to be noticed, as we are not easily convinced of its truth; for when in any work, anything splendid appears, we are immediately rapt in admiration, and we think that it cannot possibly be disapproved of by God: but God, who regards only the inward purity of the heart, heeds not the outward masks of works. Let us then learn, that no right

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<sup>3</sup> Owen, J. (1998). *Hebrews* (pp. 219–222). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

or good work can proceed from us, until we are justified before God.

*By it he being dead, &c.* To faith he also ascribes this,—that God testified that Abel was no less the object of his care after his death, than during his life: for when he says, that though dead, he still speaketh, he means, as Moses tells us, that God was moved by his violent death to take vengeance. When, therefore, Abel or his blood is said to speak, the words are to be understood figuratively. It was yet a singular evidence of God's love towards him, that he had a care for him when he was dead; and it hence appears, that he was one of God's saints, whose death is precious to him.<sup>1</sup>

5. *By faith Enoch, &c.* He chose a few of the most ancient, that he might make a transition to Abraham and his posterity. He teaches us that through faith, it was that Enoch was translated.

But we ought especially to consider the reason why God in so unusual a manner removed him from the earth. The event was remarkable, and hence all may know how dear he was to God. Impiety and all kinds of corruptions then prevailed everywhere. Had he died as other men, it would have not occurred to any, that he was thus preserved from the prevailing contagion by God's providence; but, as he was taken away without dying, the hand of God from heaven, removing him as it were from the fire, was openly manifested. It was not then an ordinary honour with which God had favoured him. Moses indeed tells us, that he was a righteous man, and that he walked with God; but as righteousness begins with faith, it is justly ascribed to his faith, that he pleased God.<sup>1</sup>

As to the subtle questions which the curious usually moot, it is better to pass them over, without taking much notice of them. They ask, what became of these two men, Enoch and Elijah? And then, that they may not appear merely to ask questions, they imagine that they are reserved for the last days of the Church, that they may then come forth into the world; and for this purpose the Revelation of John is referred to. Let us leave this airy philosophy to those light and vain minds, which cannot be satisfied with what is solid. Let it suffice us to know, that their translation was a sort of extraordinary death; nor let us doubt but that they were divested of their mortal and corruptible flesh, in order that they might, with the other members of Christ, be renewed into a blessed immortality.<sup>1</sup>

6. *But without faith, &c.* What is said here belongs to all the examples which the Apostle records in this chapter; but as there is in the passage some measure of obscurity, it is necessary to examine its meaning more closely.

But there is no better interpreter than the Apostle himself. The proof, then, which he immediately subjoins, may serve as an explanation. The reason he assigns why no one can please God without faith, is this,—because no one will ever come to God, except he believes that God is, and is also convinced that he is a remunerator to all who seek him. If access then to God is not opened, but by faith, it follows, that all who are without it, are the objects of God's displeasure. Hence the Apostle shews how faith obtains favour for us, even because faith is our teacher as to the true

worship of God, and makes us certain as to his good-will, so that we may not think that we seek him in vain. These two clauses ought not to be slightly passed over,—that we must believe that God is, and that we ought to feel assured that he is not sought in vain.<sup>2</sup>

It does not indeed seem a great matter, when the Apostle requires us to believe that God is; but when you more closely consider it, you will find that there is here a rich, profound, and sublime truth; for though almost all admit without disputing that God is, yet it is evident, that except the Lord retains us in the true and certain knowledge of himself, various doubts will ever creep in, and obliterate every thought of a Divine Being. To this vanity the disposition of man is no doubt prone, so that to forget God becomes an easy thing. At the same time the Apostle does not mean, that men ought to feel assured that there is some God, for he speaks only of the true God; nay, it will not be sufficient for you to form a notion of any God you please; but you must understand what sort of Being the true God is; for what will it profit us to devise and form an idol, and to ascribe to it the glory due to God?

We now then perceive what the Apostle means in the first clause; he denies that we can have an access to God, except we have the truth, that God is deeply fixed in our hearts, so as not to be led here and there by various opinions.

It is hence evident, that men in vain weary themselves in serving God, except they observe the right way, and that all religions are not only vain, but also pernicious, with which the true and certain knowledge of God is not connected; for all are prohibited from having any access to God, who do not distinguish and separate him from all idols; in short, there is no religion, except where this truth reigns dominant. But if the true knowledge of God has its seat in our hearts, it will not fail to lead us to honour and fear him; for God, without his majesty, is not really known. Hence arises the desire to serve him, hence it comes, that the whole life is so formed, that he is regarded as the end in all things.

The second clause is, that we ought to be fully persuaded that God is not sought in vain; and this persuasion includes the hope of salvation and eternal life, for no one will be in a suitable state of heart to seek God except a sense of the divine goodness be deeply felt, so as to look for salvation from him. We indeed flee from God, or wholly disregard him, when there is no hope of salvation. But let us bear in mind, that this is what must be really believed, and not held merely as a matter of opinion; for even the ungodly may sometimes entertain such a notion, and yet they do not come to God; and for this reason, because they have not a firm and fixed faith.<sup>1</sup> This then is the other part of faith by which we obtain favour with God, even when we feel assured that salvation is laid up for us in him.

But many shamefully pervert this clause; for they hence elicit the merits of works, and the conceit about deserving. And they reason thus: “We please God by faith, because we believe him to be a rewarder; then faith has respect to the merits of works.” This error cannot be better exposed, than by considering how God is to be sought; while any one is wandering from the right way of seeking him,<sup>2</sup> he cannot be said to be engaged in the work. Now Scripture assigns this as

the right way,—that a man, prostrate in himself, and smitten with the conviction that he deserves eternal death, and in self-despair, is to flee to Christ as the only asylum for salvation. Nowhere certainly can we find that we are to bring to God any merits of works to put us in a state of favour with him. Then he who understands that this is the only right way of seeking God, will be freed from every difficulty on the subject; for reward refers not to the worthiness or value of works but to faith.

Thus, these frigid glosses of the Sophists, such as, “by faith we please God, for we deserve when we intend to please,” fall wholly to the ground. The Apostle’s object was to carry us much higher, even that conscience might feel assured, that it is not a vain thing to seek God; and this certainty or assurance far exceeds what we can of ourselves attain, especially when any one considers his ownself. For it is not to be laid down as an abstract principle, that God is a rewarder to those who seek him; but every one of us ought individually to apply this doctrine to himself, so that we may know that we are regarded by God, that he has such a care for our salvation as never to be wanting to us, that our prayers are heard by him, that he will be to us a perpetual deliverer. But as none of these things come to us except through Christ, our faith must ever regard him and cleave to him alone.

From these two clauses, we may learn how, and why it is impossible for man to please God without faith; God justly regards us all as objects of his displeasure, as we are all by nature under his curse; and we have no remedy in our own power. It is hence necessary that God should anticipate us by his grace; and hence it comes, that we are brought to know that God is, and in such a way that no corrupt superstition can seduce us, and also that we become assured of a certain salvation from him.

Were any one to desire a fuller view of this subject, he should make his commencement here,—that we in vain attempt to try anything, except we look to God; for the only true end of life is to promote his glory; but this can never be done, unless there be first the true knowledge of him. Yet this is still but the half of faith, and will profit us but little, except confidence be added. Hence faith will only then be complete and secure us God’s favour, when we shall feel a confidence that we shall not seek him in vain, and thus entertain the certainty of obtaining salvation from him. But no one, except he be blinded by presumption, and fascinated by self-love, can feel assured that God will be a rewarder of his merits. Hence this confidence of which we speak recumbs not on works, nor on man’s own worthiness, but on the grace of God alone; and as grace is nowhere found but in Christ, it is on him alone that faith ought to be fixed.

7. *By faith Noah, &c.* It was a wonderful example of magnanimity, that when the whole world were promising themselves impunity, and securely and unrestrainedly indulging themselves in sinful pleasures, Noah alone paid regard to God’s vengeance though deferred for a considerable time,—that he greatly wearied himself for a hundred and twenty years in building the ark,—that he stood unshaken amidst the scoffs of so many ungodly men,—that he entertained no doubt but that he would be safe in the midst of the ruin of the whole world,—yea, that he felt sure of life as it were in the grave, even in the ark. It is briefly that I shall touch on the subject; each one can

better for himself weigh all the circumstances.

The Apostle ascribes to faith the praise of so remarkable a fortitude. He has been hitherto speaking of the fathers who lived in the first age of the world; but it was a kind of regeneration when Noah and his family emerged from the deluge. It is hence evident that in all ages men have neither been approved by God, nor performed anything worthy of praise otherwise than by faith.

Let us now then see what are the things he presents to our consideration in the case of Noah. They are the following,—that having been warned of things to come, but not yet made visible, he feared,—that he built an ark,—that he condemned the world by building it,—and that he became the heir of that righteousness which is by faith.<sup>1</sup>

What I have just mentioned is that which especially sets forth the power of faith; for the Apostle ever reminds us of this truth, that faith is the evidence of things not seen; and doubtless it is its peculiar office to behold in God's word the things which are hid, and far removed from our senses. When it was declared to Noah that there would be a deluge after one hundred and twenty years, first, the length of time might have removed every fear; secondly, the thing in itself seemed incredible; thirdly, he saw the ungodly heedlessly indulging in sinful pleasures; and lastly, the terrible announcement of a deluge might have appeared to him as intended only to terrify men. But Noah attended so much to God's word, that turning away his eyes from the appearance of things at that time, he feared the destruction which God had threatened, as though it was present. Hence the faith which he had in God's word prepared him to render obedience to God; and of this he afterwards gave a proof by building the ark.

But here a question is raised. Why does the Apostle make faith the cause of fear, since it has respect to promises of grace rather than to threatenings? for Paul for this reason calls the Gospel, in which God's righteousness is offered to us for salvation, the word of faith. It seems then to have been improperly stated, that Noah was by faith led to fear. To this, I reply, that faith indeed properly springs from promises; it is founded on them, it rests on them. We hence say that Christ is the real object of faith, for through him our heavenly Father is reconciled to us, and by him all the promises of salvation are sealed and confirmed. Yet there is no reason why faith should not look to God and reverently receive whatever he may say; or if you prefer another way of stating the subject, it rightly belongs to faith to hear God whenever he speaks, and unhesitatingly to embrace whatsoever may proceed from his sacred mouth. Thus far it has regard to commands and threatenings, as well as to gratuitous promises. But as no man is moved as he ought and as much as is needful, to obey God's commands, nor is sufficiently stirred up to deprecate his wrath, unless he has already laid hold on the promises of grace, so as to acknowledge him as a kind Father, and the author of salvation,—hence the Gospel is called the word of faith, the principal part being stated for the whole; and thus is set forth the mutual relation that there is between them both. Faith, then, though its most direct regard is to God's promises, yet looks on his threatenings so far as it is necessary for it to be taught to fear and obey God.

*Prepared an ark, &c.* Here is pointed out that obedience which flows from faith as water from a

fountain. The work of building the ark was long and laborious. It might have been hindered by the scoffs of the ungodly, and thus suspended a thousand times; nor is there a doubt but they mocked and derided the holy man on every side. That he then bore their wanton insults with an unshaken spirit, is a proof that his resolution to obey was not of an ordinary kind. But how was it that he so perseveringly obeyed God except that he had previously rested on the promise which gave him the hope of deliverance; and in this confidence he persevered even to the last; for he could not have had the courage willingly to undergo so many toils, nor could he have been able to overcome so many obstacles, nor could he have stood so firm in his purpose for so long a time, had he not beforehand possessed this confidence.

It hence appears that faith alone is the teacher of obedience; and we may on the contrary draw this conclusion, that it is unbelief that prevents us to obey God. And at this day the unbelief of the world exhibits itself dreadfully in this way, for there are a very few who obey God.

*By the which he condemned the world, &c.* It were strange to say that Noah's deliverance condemned the world, and the context will hardly allow faith to be meant; we must then understand this of the ark. And he is said on two accounts to have by the ark condemned the world; for by being so long occupied in building it, he took away every excuse from the wicked;—and the event which followed proved how just was the destruction of the world; for why was the ark made the means of deliverance to one family, except that the Lord thus spared a righteous man that he should not perish with the ungodly. Had he then not been preserved, the condemnation of the world would not have been so apparent. Noah then by obeying God's command condemned by his example the obstinate disobedience of the world: his wonderful deliverance from the midst of death, was an evidence that the world justly perished; for God would have doubtless saved it, had it not been unworthy of salvation.

*Of the righteousness which is by faith.* This is the last thing in the character of Noah, which the Apostle reminds us to observe. Moses records that he was a righteous man: history does not expressly say that the cause and root of his righteousness was faith; but the Apostle declares that as arising from the facts of the case. And this is not only true, because no one ever devotes himself really and sincerely to God's service, but he who relies on the promises of his paternal kindness, and feels assured that his life is approved by him; but also on this account, because the life of no one, however holy it may be, when tried by the rule of God's law, can please him without pardon being granted. Then righteousness must necessarily recumb on faith.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (pp. 266–277). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.