

CHAPTER 59

THE FAITH OF NOAH

(~~SS106~~ HEBREWS 11:6, 7)

The verses which are now to engage our attention are by no means free of difficulty, especially unto those who have sat under a ministry which has failed to preserve the balance between Divine grace and Divine righteousness. Where the free favor of God has been strongly emphasized and His *claims* largely ignored, where privileges have been stressed and duties almost neglected, it is far from easy to view many Scriptures in their true perspective. When those who have heard little more than the decrying of creature-abilities and the denunciation of creature-merits are asked to honestly and seriously face the terms of ~~SS106~~ Hebrews 11:6, 7, they are quite unable to fit them into their system of theology. Where such be the case, it is proof positive that something is wrong with our theology. Often those who are least cramped by sectarian bias find that the truth of God is too large, too many-sided, to be squeezed into human definitions and creeds.

Others of our readers are probably wondering what it is we have reference to above when we say that our present portion of Hebrews 11 is by no means free of difficulty. Then let us raise a few questions upon these verses. If the exercise of faith be pleasing to God, does this signify that it is a thing meritorious? How is this concept to be avoided in the light of the statement that God is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him? How does a “reward” consist with pure grace? And what is the doctrinal force of the next verse? Does the case of Noah teach salvation by works? If he had not gone to so much expense and labor in building the ark, would he and his house have escaped the flood? Was his becoming “heir of righteousness” something that he earned by his obedient toil? How can this conclusion be fairly avoided? We shall endeavor to keep these questions before us in the course of our exposition.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (verse 6).

There is a threefold “coming to God”: an initial, a continuous, and a final. The first takes place at conversion, the second is repeated throughout the Christian’s life, the third occurs at death or the second coming of Christ. To come to God signifies to seek and have fellowship with Him. It denotes a desire to enter into His favor and become a partaker of His blessings in this life and of His salvation in the life to come. It is the heart’s approach unto Him in and through Christ: ^{<B146>}John 14:6, ^{<B175>}Hebrews 7:25. But before there is a conscious access to Him, God has to be diligently sought.

None come to God, none truly seek Him, until they are made conscious of their lost condition. The Spirit must first work in the soul a realization that sin has alienated us “from the life of God” (^{<B148>}Ephesians 4:18). We have to be made to feel that we are *away from* God, out of His favor, under His righteous condemnation, before we shall really do as the prodigal did, and say

“I will arise and go to My Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee” (^{<B158>}Luke 15:18).

The same principle holds good in connection with the repeated “coming” of the Christian (^{<B144>}1 Peter 2:4); it is a sense of need which causes us to seek Him who is the Giver of every good and every perfect gift. There is also a maintained communion with God in the performance of holy duties: in all the exercises of godliness we renew our access to God in Christ: in reading of or hearing His Word, we come to Him as Teacher, in prayer we come to Him as Benefactor.

But to seek God aright, He has to be sought in faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him,” therefore, “he that cometh to God *must* believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” There has to be first a firm persuasion of His being, and second of His bounty. To believe that “He is” means much more than assenting to the fact of a “First Cause” or to allow that there is a “Supreme Being”; it means to believe in the character of God *as* He has revealed Himself in His works, in His Word, and in Christ. He must be conceived of aright, or otherwise we are only pursuing a phantom of our own imagination. Thus, to believe that “God is” is to exercise faith upon Him as *such* a Being as His Word declares Him to be: supreme sovereign, ineffably holy, almighty, inflexibly just, yet abounding in mercy and grace toward poor sinners through Christ.

Not only is the heart to go out unto God as His being and character is revealed in Scripture, but particularly, faith is to lay hold of His graciousness: that He is “a *Rewarder*” etc. The acting of faith toward God as a “Rewarder” is the heart’s apprehension and anticipation of the fact that He is ready and willing to conduct Himself to needy sinners in a way of bounty, that He will act in all things toward them in a manner suitable unto the proposal of which He makes of Himself through the Gospel. It was the realization of this (in addition to his felt need) which stirred the prodigal to act. Just as it would be useless to pray unless there were an hope that God hears and that He will answer prayer, so no sinner will really seek unto God until there is born in his heart an expectation of mercy from Him, that He will receive him graciously. This is a laying hold of His promise.

In Scripture, privileges are propounded with their necessary limitations, and we disjoint the whole system of Truth if we separate the recompense from the duty. There is something to be done on our part: God is a “Rewarder,” but *of whom?* Of those who “diligently seek Him.”

“The wicked shall be turned into Hell, all the nations that forget God” (¹⁹⁰¹⁷Psalm 9:17):

not only “deny,” but “forget” Him; as they cast God out of their thoughts and affections, so He will cast them out of His presence. What is meant by “diligently seek Him”? To “seek” God is to forsake, deny, go out of self, and take Him alone for our Ruler and satisfying Portion. To seek Him “diligently” is to seek Him early (²⁰⁸¹⁷Proverbs 8:17), whole-heartedly (¹⁹³⁹⁰Psalm 119:10), earnestly (Psalm 27: 4), unweariedly (²¹⁰⁸Luke 11:8). How does a thirsty man seek water? The promise is,

“And ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart” (²⁴⁹¹³Jeremiah 29:13 and cf. ¹⁴¹⁵¹⁵2 Chronicles 15:15).

And *how* does God “reward” the diligent seeker? By offering Himself graciously to be found of them who penitently, earnestly, trustfully approach Him through the appointed Mediator. By granting them access into His favor: this He did not unto Cain, who sought Him in a wrong manner. By actually bestowing His favor upon them, as He did upon the prodigal. By forgiving their sins and blotting out their iniquities (²⁵⁵⁰⁷Isaiah 55:7). By writing His laws in their hearts, so that they now desire and

determine to forsake all idols and serve Him only. By giving them assurance of their acceptance in the Beloved, and granting them sweet foretastes of the rest and bliss which awaits them on High. By ministering to their every need, both spiritual and temporal. Finally, by taking them to heaven, where they shall spend eternity in the unclouded enjoyment of the wondrous riches of His grace.

But does this word “Rewarder” have a legalistic ring to it? Not if it be understood rightly. Does it signify that our “diligent seeking” is a meritorious performance which is entitled to recognition? Of course it does not. What, then, is meant? First, let us quote from the helpful comments of John Owen:

“That which these words of the apostle hath respect to, and which is the ground of the faith here required, is contained in the revelation that God made of Himself unto Abraham, ‘Fear not: Abram: I am thy shield, and they exceeding great reward’ (^{<0150>}Genesis 15:1). God is so a rewarder unto them that seek Him, as that He is Himself their reward, which eternally excludes all thoughts of merit in them that are so rewarded. Who can merit God to be his reward? Rewarding in God, especially where He Himself is the reward, is an act of infinite grace and bounty. And this gives us full direction unto the object of faith here intended, namely, God in Christ, as revealed in the promise of Him, giving Himself unto believers as a reward, (to be their God) in a way of infinite goodness and bounty. The proposal hereof, is that alone which gives encouragement to come unto Him, which the apostle designs to declare.”

“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt” (^{<0404>}Romans 4:4):

is not the implication clear that *grace* itself also “rewards”? Grace and reward are no more inconsistent than the high sovereignty of God and the real responsibility of man, or between the fact that Christ is and was both “Servant” (^{<2401>}Isaiah 42:1) and “Lord” (^{<4131>}John 13:13). The language of ^{<5032>}Colossians 3:24 makes this clear as a sunbeam: “Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.” The “inheritance” is Heaven itself, salvation in its consummation. But is not salvation a free gift? Yes, indeed; nevertheless it has to be

“bought” by its recipients (^{<2850>}Isaiah 55:1), yet “without money and without price.” Salvation is both a “gift” and a “reward.”

While it be true that Heaven cannot be earned by the sinner, it is equally true that Heaven is not for idlers and loiterers. God has to be “diligently sought.” To enter the strait gate the soul has to agonize (^{<4134>}Luke 13:24). We are called upon to “labor” for that meat which endureth unto eternal life (^{<4027>}John 6:27) and to enter into the heavenly rest (^{<3941>}Hebrews 4:11). Such efforts God “rewards,” not because they are meritorious, but because He deems it meet to recognize and recompense them. There are those who teach that in serving God we ought to have no “respect unto the recompense of the reward” (^{<3812>}Hebrews 11:26), but this verse refutes them, for the apostle explicitly declares that this forms a necessary part of that truth which is to be believed in order to our pleasing God.

Heaven, or completed salvation, is spoken of as a “reward” to intimate the character of those to whom it is given, namely, the diligent laborer. Second, because it is not bestowed until our work is completed: ^{<3947>}2 Timothy 4:7, 8. Third, to intimate the sureness of it: we may as confidently expect it as does the laborer who has been hired by an honest master: ^{<3012>}James 1:12. This “reward” is principally in the next life: ^{<3816>}Hebrews 11:16, ^{<4047>}2 Corinthians 4:17 — it is then that all true godliness shall be richly recompensed: ^{<4109>}Mark 10:29, 30. It only remains for us now to add that the *ground* on which God bestows the “reward” is the infinite merits of Christ, and out of respect unto His own promise. *That which* He “rewards” is the work of His own Spirit within us, so that we have no ground for boasting.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (verse 7).

The apostle now presents a concrete example which illustrates what he had said in verse 6. God’s dealings with Noah and the world in his time were plainly a sample and pledge of His dealing with the world in all ages, particularly so when its history is finally wound up. Inasmuch as God is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, it necessarily follows that He is also the Revenger of all who despise Him. In the destruction of the old world, God showed His displeasure against sin (^{<4025>}Job 22:15, 16); in the preservation of Noah, He made manifest the privileges of His own people

(2 Peter 2:9). That the whole was a *pledge* and type is clear from 2 Peter 3:6, 7.

In the verse which is now before us three things claim attention.

First, Noah's faith and its ground, namely the warning he had received from God.

Second, the effects of his faith, namely, internally, the impulse of "fear"; externally, his obedience in making the ark under God's orders.

Third, the consequences of his faith, namely, the saving of his house, the condemning of the world, his becoming heir of the righteousness which is by faith. But ere taking up these points, let us face and endeavor to remove a difficulty which some feel this verse raises. Let us put it this way: was Noah saved by his own works? We believe the answer is both Yes, and No. We beg the reader to exercise patience and prayerfully ponder what follows, and not cry out rank heresy and refuse to read further.

If Noah had not "prepared an ark" in obedience to God's command, would he not have perished in the flood? Then was it his own efforts which preserved him from death in the great deluge? No indeed; it was the preserving power of God. That ark had neither mast, sail, nor steering-wheel: only the gracious hand of the Lord kept that frail barque from being splintered to atoms on the rocks and the mountains. Then what is the relation between these two things? This: Noah made use of the *means* which God had prescribed, and by His grace and power those means were made effectual unto his preservation. Must not the farmer toil in his fields? yet it is God alone who gives him the increase. Must I not observe the laws of hygiene and eat wholesome food? yet only as God blesses them to me am I kept in health. So it is in spiritual things: salvation by grace alone *does not exclude* the imperative necessity of our using the means which God has appointed and prescribed.

The temporal deliverance of Noah from the flood is undoubtedly an adumbration of the eternal deliverance of God's elect from the wrath to come: and here, as everywhere, the type is accurate and perfect. Nor can any sophistical quibbling honestly get rid of the fact that Noah's building of the Ark — a most costly and arduous work! — was a means towards his preservation. Then does the case of Noah supply a clear example of salvation by works? Again we answer boldly, Yes and No. But the

difficulty is greatly relieved if we bear in mind that Noah was *already a saved man* before God bade him build the Ark! A reference to ^{<0008>}Genesis 6:8, 9 and a comparison with ^{<8064>}Hebrews 6:14, 22 makes this unmistakably plain. But does not this fact overthrow all that has been said in the previous paragraphs? Not at all. The Christian's salvation is not only a past thing (^{<8009>}2 Timothy 1:9), but a present (^{<8052>}Philippians 2:12) and future (^{<8131>}Romans 13:11) thing too! We trust that the solution of the difficulty will be more evident as we proceed with our exposition of the verse.

As we have before pointed out, the first three verses of Hebrews 11 are introductory, their design being to set forth the importance and excellency of faith. Then, in verse 4-7, we have an outline of the life of faith: the beginning of it is seen in verse 4, the nature of what it consists in verse 5, a warning and encouragement is supplied in verse 6, and the end of it is shown in verse 7. Before bringing before us the glorious goal which the life of faith reaches, verse 7 gives us the other side of what was before us in verse 5: there we saw faith elevating above a world of death, carrying the heart of its favored possessor into Heaven. But we are still in the world, and that is the place of opposition, of danger, and hence, of testing. Thus in verse 7 we are not only shown what faith obtains, but *how* it obtains, it.

Now as we found it necessary to go back to Genesis 3 and 4 to interpret ^{<8104>}Hebrews 11:4, and to ^{<0054>}Genesis 5:24 to get the meaning of ^{<8105>}Hebrews 11:5, so now we have to consult Genesis 6 in order to discover what is here adumbrated. Let the reader turn back to ^{<0005>}Genesis 6:5-22. There we find unsparing Divine judgment announced (verse 13), a way of deliverance presented to one who had "found grace" in the Lord's eyes (verse 14), faith's obedience called for if escape was to be had from judgment (verse 14), the Divinely prescribed means to be used (verse 15); by employing those means deliverance was obtained. Now in like manner, a most solemn warning has been given us, an announcement of coming judgment: see ^{<8007>}2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8; ^{<6080>}2 Peter 3:10-17 — let the reader duly observe that both of these passages are found in epistles addressed to God's children.

In saying above that ^{<8107>}Hebrews 11:7 gives us the other side of what is spiritually set forth in verse 5, we mean that it gives us the *balancing* truth. It is most important to observe this, for otherwise we are very liable to entertain a mystical concept of verse 5 and become lopsided. Satan is ready

to tell us that verse 5 presents to us a beautiful ideal, but one which is altogether impracticable for ordinary people — alright for preachers, but impossible for others. After reading our article on verse 5, many are likely to exclaim: We cannot be thinking of heavenly things all the time, we have our daily duties to attend to here on earth: the only way we could reach the standard of verse 5 would be by entering a monastery or convent, entirely secluding ourselves from the world; and surely God does not require this of us. No, indeed; that was the great mistake of the “Dark Ages.”

“By faith Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” This gives us the other side of verse 5. It shows that we *have* duties to perform on earth, and intimates *how* they are to be discharged — by faith, in the fear of God, implicitly obeying His commands. And more: our present verse insists on the fact (now so little apprehended) that, the performing these duties, the rendering of faith’s obedience to God, is indispensably necessary to our very salvation. The “salvation” of the soul is yet future: note “saving” and not “salvation” in ^{<3810>}Hebrews 10:39, and also compare ^{<4005>}1 Peter 1:5. In order to be saved from the destructive power of sin, the ruinous allurements of the world, and the devouring assaults of Satan, we *must* tread the path of obedience to Christ (^{<3810>}Hebrews 5:9), for only there do we escape these fatal foes. Let the reader prayerfully ponder ^{<4096>}Mark 9:43-50; ^{<2146>}Luke 14:26, 27, 33; ^{<4181>}Romans 8:13; ^{<4027>}1 Corinthians 9:27; ^{<5105>}Colossians 3:5; ^{<3812>}Hebrews 3:12, 14.

^{<3810>}Hebrews 11:5 and 7 supplement each other. Verse 5 shows us that by the exercise of faith our affections are elevated above the earth and set upon things above. Verse 7 teaches us that our lives on earth are to be regulated by heavenly principles. The real Christian is a heavenly man living on earth as a heavenly man; that is to say, he is governed by spiritual and Divine principles, and not by fleshly motives and worldly interests. The Christian performs many of the same deeds as the non-Christian does, yet with a far different object and aim. All that I do should be done in obedience to God, in joyous response to His revealed will. Let us be specific and come to details. Let the Christian wife read ^{<4152>}Ephesians 5:22-24 and the husband 5:25-31, and let each recognize that in obeying the husband and loving the wife, they are *obeying God*. Let Christian employees ponder ^{<4105>}Ephesians 6:5-7, and recognize that in obeying their masters they are obeying the Lord; contrariwise, in sulking or speaking against them, they murmur against the Lord!

Now such obedience to God's commandments in the ordinary relationships of life are necessary unto salvation. If this staggers the reader, let him contemplate the opposite. Those precepts and commands have been given us by God, and to disregard them is rebellion, and to refuse compliance is defiance; and no rebel against God can enter Heaven. Unless our wills have been broken, unless our hearts have been brought into subjection to God, we have no scriptural warrant for concluding that He has *begun* a good work in us (~~5006~~Philippians 1:6).

“He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (~~6104~~1 John 2:4).

The only path which leads to heaven is that of walking in obedience to God's commands.

Now the salvation of the soul lies at the end of that path. Does the reader exclaim, I thought it was at the beginning of it, and that none but a regenerate person could or would walk therein. From one standpoint that is quite true. When genuinely converted a sinner *is* saved from the eternal penalty of his sins, and *is* “delivered from the wrath to come.” But is he there and then removed to Heaven? With very rare exceptions he is not. Instead, God leaves him here in this world. And this world is the place of danger, for temptations to return unto its ways and pleasures abound on every side. Moreover, the judgment of God hangs over it, and one day will burst upon and consume it. And who will escape that destruction? Only those who, like Noah, have a faith which is moved with fear and produces obedience. But it is now high time that we considered more closely the details of verse 7.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” Ah, here is the key to our verse, hung right upon the very door of it. Like every other one of God's elect, Noah was saved by grace through faith; and yet not by a faith that was inactive — ~~4120~~Ephesians 2:10 follows verse 9! *Faith* was the spring of all his works: a faith which was far more than an intellectual assent, one which was a supernatural principle that sovereign grace had wrought in him. God had determined to send a flood and destroy the wicked world, but ere doing so, He acquainted Noah with His purpose. He has done the same with us: see ~~4518~~Romans 1:18. That Divine warning was the ground of Noah's faith. He argued not, nor reasoned about its incredibility; instead,

he believed God. The *threatening*, as well as the promise of God, is the object of faith; the justice of God is to be eyed, as well as His mercy!

Human reason was altogether opposed unto what God had made known to Noah. Hitherto there had been no rain (^{<0006>}Genesis 2:6), then why expect an overwhelming deluge? It seemed utterly unlikely God would destroy the whole human race, and His mercy be thus utterly swallowed up by His avenging justice. The threatening judgment was a long way off (120 years: ^{<0006>}Genesis 6:3), and during that time the world might well repent and reform. When he preached to men (^{<0006>}2 Peter 2:5) none believed his message: why then should he be so fearful, when every one else was at ease? To build an ark of such huge dimensions was an enormous undertaking, and, as well, would involve the scoffs of all his fellows. And even if the flood came, how could the ark float with such an immensely heavy burden — it had no anchor to stay her, no mast and sail to steady her, no steering-wheel to direct. Was it not quite impracticable, for Noah was quite inexperienced nautically. Moreover, for him and his family to dwell for an indefinite period in a sealed ark was far from a pleasant prospect unto the flesh and blood. But against all these carnal objections faith offered a steady resistance, and *believed God!*

“Moved with fear.” This evidenced the reality and power of his faith, for saving faith not only “worketh by love” (^{<0006>}Galatians 5:6), but in “fear and trembling” (^{<0012>}Philippians 2:12). A reverential awe of God is a sure fruit of saving faith. That “fear” acted as a salutary impetus in Noah and operated as a powerful motive in his building of the ark.

“His believing the word of God, had this effect on him... a reverential fear it is of God’s threatenings, and not an anxious solicitous fear of the evil threatened. In the warning given him, he considered the greatness, the holiness, and the power of God, with the vengeance becoming those holy properties of His nature, which He threatened to bring on the world. Seeing God by faith under this representation of Him, he was filled with a reverential fear of Him. See Habakuk 3:16, ^{<0010>}Psalms 119:120, ^{<0006>}Malachi 2:5” (John Owen).

“Prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” As Matthew Henry says, “Faith first influences our affections and then our actions.” “Faith without works is dead” (^{<0012>}James 2:20), particularly works of obedience. “Thus did Noah: according to all that God commanded him, so did he”

(^{<0062>}Genesis 6:22). Privilege and duty are inseparably connected, yet duty will never be performed where faith is absent. Faith in Noah caused him to persevere in his arduous labors amid many difficulties and discouragements. Thus his building of the ark was the work of faith and patience, a labor of Godly fear, an act of obedience, a means to his preservation — for God’s covenant with him (^{<0068>}Genesis 6:18) did not preclude his diligent use of means; and a type of Christ. As it was by faith-obedience he prepared the ark, so by faith’s obedience came the “saving of his house.” God always honors those who honor Him. This temporal salvation was a figure of the eternal salvation unto which we are pressing forward for note that the destruction of the and-deluvians was an *eternal* one — for their spirits are now “in prison” (^{<0089>}1 Peter 3:19)! Observe it is *our* responsibility to seek after our own salvation and those committed to us: see ^{<4424>}Acts 2:40, ^{<5046>}2 Timothy 4:16.

“By the which he condemned the world.” The reference is to all that precedes. By his own example, by his faith in God’s warning, his reverential awe of God’s holiness and justice, his implicit and unflagging obedience in preparing the ark, Noah “condemned” the unbelieving, unconcerned, godless people all around him. One man is said to “condemn,” another when, by his godly actions, he shows what the other should do, and which by doing not, his guilt is aggravated; see ^{<4124>}Matthew 12:41, 42. The Sabbath-keeper “condemns” the Sabbath-breaker. He who abandons a worldly church and goes forth unto Christ outside the camp, “condemns” the compromiser. Noah’s diligent and costly labors increased the guilt of the careless, who rested in a false security. Though we cannot convert the wicked, yet we must be careful to set before them such an example of personal piety that they are left “without excuse.”

“And became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” The “righteousness” here referred to is that perfect obedience of Christ which God imputes unto all who savingly believe on His Son: ^{<2216>}Jeremiah 23:6, ^{<4169>}Romans 5:19, ^{<4182>}2 Corinthians 5:21. This righteousness is sometimes called, absolutely, the “righteousness of God” (^{<4017>}Romans 1:17, etc.), sometimes the “gift of righteousness... by one, Jesus Christ” (^{<4167>}Romans 5:17), sometimes “the righteousness which is of God by faith” (^{<5089>}Philippians 3:9); in all of which our free and gratuitous justification by the righteousness of Christ reckoned to our account through faith, is intended. In saying that Noah “became heir” of this righteousness, there may be a double significance.

First, by faith's obedience he *evidenced himself to be* a justified man (^{<0009>}Genesis 6:9), as Abraham did when he offered up Isaac (^{<3021>}James 2:21).

Second, he *established his title* to that righteousness which is here spoken of as an "inheritance": this is in contrast from Esau who despised his. That righteousness which Christ purchased for His people is here denominated an "inheritance," to emphasize the dignity and excellency of it, to magnify the freeness of its tenure, to declare the certainty and inviolability of it.

The actual entrance upon our Inheritance is yet future. "That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the *hope of eternal life*" (^{<3037>}Titus 3:7). The great question for each of us to settle is, Am I an "heir"? To help us do so, let me inquire,

Have I the *spirit* of one? Is my main care to make sure that I have *the birthright*? Am I putting the claims of God and His righteousness (^{<4033>}Matthew 6:33) above everything else? Have I such thoughts of the blessedness of my portion in Christ that nothing can induce me to sell or part with it (^{<3026>}Hebrews 12:16)? Is my heart wrapped up in that inheritance so that I am groaning within myself, "waiting for the adoption" (^{<4023>}Romans 8:23)? Am I walking by faith, with the fear of God upon me, diligently attending to His commandments, thereby condemning the world? If so, thrice blessed am I: and soon shall I be saved "to sin no more."