

Christ's Surpassing Supremacy

"By Faith"

Hebrews 11:2

FCC | November 8th, 2015

Introduction:

Turn with me if you will to Hebrews 11. The meaning of, and therefore translation of, Hebrews 11:2 is widely disputed among the English translations of the Scriptures. Not just a single part of verse 2, but the entire thing changes with almost every translation. The American Standard and English Revised Version are the only versions that repeat each other. Which this rather odd. Typically with the plethora of English translations out there you'd see at least 5 or 6 that would be the same, but that's not what we find here. Now you may say, "Well we have all these translations surely that's the point of having them—so you can get a different spin on the same verse." To that I would say sure, absolutely. That's actually one of the reasons why I began my study looking at them.

When start studying for a sermon one of the first things I'll do is read that verse in 10 to 15 different versions. Each translation of the Bible, not counting the paraphrase ones, are a representation of—teams of linguistic scholars and Theological experts. A translation of the Bible is the meeting of the minds as they seek to take the Biblical languages and parse them out bit by bit, in order to divulge the meaning that the author originally intended. Or at least that's the aim of the good translations anyways. So before I go, with my feeble understanding of Greek and Hebrew, I go to the expert translators, to see where they find unity and disunity. I would commend that to your study as well. There is no greater study tool of the Bible than the Bible itself.

But what I found interesting was not that there was some disunity, but that there was, only, disunity. Not just in the wording, which that happens sometimes, but also in the concept as well. I say there's no unity in what they said, but there is a little bit of unity or continuity in principle. There are two basic ideas that are understood by translators and then there are even more ideas as you dig in deeper. Let me explain by just walking through it with us. Let's read verses 1-3 together so we can get a nice large picture of what's going on.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the

universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” (Hebrews 11:1-3 ESV)

Verse two is what we'll be dealing with this morning, the “For by it the people of old received their commendation.” that verse. The two camps or ideas that I could find some unity in among translators had to do with the point of the verse as a whole. Some translations make it sound like, faith is the subject. The second camp or the second basic idea sort of omits faith as the subject and makes the people the subject. Let me give you an example of each. The ESV, which we just read would be highlighting faith, but let me give you another example of this as well; The Darby Bible Translation reads this way; “For in the power of this, the elders have obtained testimony.” Do you hear the clear stress on faith? The American Standard and the English Revised Version, the only ones that perfectly agree on the wording, they put it this way, “For therein the elders had witness borne to them.” Now witness and testimony, both are similar terminology, but can you hear the stress, or the pressure placed upon the people and not on faith in that one?

I believe the two camps are pretty easy to hear when you read them. I mean the ESV says, “For by it the people of old RECEIVED their commendation.” Whereas the New Living Translation says; “Through their faith, the people in days of old EARNED a good reputation.” There is a clear dividing line between the two camps. Now before you sit back and think, “Oh great, here's one of those things that Christians are just never going to understand...” Let me say that someone is right and someone is wrong. The author of Hebrews didn't intend to be ambiguous here, so it means one or the other. What I want to do then is take the rest of our time this morning and do two things; I want to prove to you that God's favor bestowed upon His children is truly not about us. And secondly, I also want to take then the opportunity to showcase how this truth then effects our lives, if we come to submit to it. So two points moving forward; Why we should side with the ESV, NIV, NET, Darby's, Young's Literal Translation, and so on, why we should side with understanding the point of this verse is faith and not man; and secondly, what happens to our walk with God, when we do that.

It's About Faith, Not Me:

So, point number one I've titled, “It's About Faith, Not Me” With all this talk about translations and scholars etc. The last thing you should feel about the Bible that sits in your lap right now is a lack of trust. You can trust the Scriptures that we have in our language today. When we talk about things like this, we're talking about digging in

deep and seeking to unlock mysteries hidden deep within. For your daily encouragement there is nothing better you could do but read that Bible that sits in your lap. My one caveat however, is that the Bible that sits in your lap for daily reading really needs to be a translation of the original text and not a paraphrase of it. I know we're talking a lot about this this morning but let me take just a few more minutes of your time to encourage you in this area.

There are popular Books out there that bill themselves as "Bibles". They are on the Bible bookshelves, but they are not God's holy Word. Some of those popular books would be things like "The New Living Bible" not the Living Translation" cause that's a translation; but the Living Bible. That is actually a paraphrase of the Word of God and not the actual words of God. "The Message" is also not God's Word either. Eugene Peterson, a pastor, began to write out a paraphrase of the Scriptures in his own words so as to catch the attention of his listeners and refresh their hearts with a devotional work. It wasn't until a publisher called him and asked him to put it in book form and then published it as a version of the Bible, that it was received as such.

Now about those two and others like them, I have both in my library and I will consult them as more or less like a commentary. What man has to say about God's Word, but as far as seeking to intake God's Word and be refreshed by it, only an english "translation" will suffice for such a task. "Your Word, have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you." Not, "Someone else's basic understanding of Your a Word that they have paraphrased for readability, have I hidden in my heart..." So for clarification, I believe that those have a place in the Christian life, but they do not hold the place of the Bible. And just for clarity here, not that I want to be spending all this time on this subject, but note the inherent danger of these books. That ought not to be overlooked. These things are billing themselves as Bibles when they are not. This is extraordinarily dangerous. And it's that danger as Christ's under shepherd over you that I warn you about. Alright, that's it we can move on now.

Why should we side with the ESV, the NIV, the NET, and others I've mentioned, in regards to saying verse 2 is about faith and not about me? I could jump into the text and try to open up the Greek and prove to you that there is sufficient evidence there to stand with these translators. But I think there is a more clear and obvious reason why we should take the stand where I suggest—the context. Now the American Standard and other like them would say the same. They would say, the rest of the entire chapter highlights person after person showing "their" faith and therefore pleasing God. Abel,

Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah—Isaac, Jacob, Joseph—Moses, The Children of Israel, Rahab, and on and on the chapter persists. What's more is that they point even to the ESV's rendering of verse 39. "And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised." There you have it, it's about them and the faith they exhibited and won God's approval.

No it's not. Do we have a part to play in the life we live? You betcha! You better believe it. You and I are called, we are commanded to exhibit faith. We are told, no we are warned in verse 6, that it's impossible to please God unless we are exhibiting faith. But ladies and gentlemen, the faith that God has given is pointing the universe to the giver not the recipient. The faith, that according to verse one, and according to verse 39, is ours—is a gift that God has graciously bestowed upon us. It does belong to us, because God has given it. We have this faith to believe, we own it. But understand that we own it—we have it like a possession, like we own or have the mind of Christ. "But we have the mind of Christ." 1 Corinthians 2:16. This faith belongs to us just as Christ belongs to us. Like the song In Christ Alone beautifully and poetically expresses, "For I am His and He is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ." Paul teaches just that in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and chapter 7. "You were bought with a price so..." Therefore exhibit faith, "...glorify God in your body." (1 Cor. 6:20)

That's why I don't believe it's all about us. But here's why I believe it's all about God and His gracious gift of Faith: Verse 1; "Now Faith is..." Verse 2; "For by it..." Verse 3; "By faith we..."; Verse 4, "By faith Abel..."; Verse 5, "By faith Enoch..."; Verse 6, "...without faith..."; Verse 7, "By Faith Noah..."; verse 8, verse 9, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33...

From the first children ever born to the authors day, there has been one constant as it related to men and women having received a commendation or a testimony from God and to God. Faith. The faith that all these people exhibited, and so many more, is the same faith that you and I have, and thereby please God. And this faith has absolutely nothing to do with us and everything to do with God's grace. Verse 11 says, by faith Sarah conceived... but didn't she laugh when the travelers promised this? Verse says that Moses rejected being called a son of Pharaoh and rather chose to be mistreated like his people. This act of "faith" what did it produce in practice? The murder of an Egyptian soldier. Verse 32 mentions the sorts of people that we are said to look up to "because of their intrinsic faith?" Gideon, the notorious fleece layer? Barak who was

told by Deborah the Judge to take ten thousand men to Tabor. Barak's faith, said I'll go only if you go Debbie.

We could keep going, we could. I think however the point is sufficiently made. This faith is not some great work done by man that we look at and say I want to be me Sampson. No, this faith is given by God regardless of who we are and what we've done. It's God's with through us. Did Barak win the fight? Yes. Did Sampson actually defeat the philistines like he was commanded to? Yes. They absolutely did all those things, and as a result, verse two says they then received not only the faith to do what was needed, but they also then received a commendation for it.

When it's About Faith, Not Me:

This is where we come to the second point of my sermon. My previous point was, "It's About Faith, Not Me". The second point is, "When it's about Faith, Not Me". When we let this guide our Christian walk things change. I'll say from experience, everything seems to change. If Hebrews was written today, and included your name, it would say of you and me, By faith they trusted in Christ and thereby received their reward. Was Sarah's faithlessness mentioned in the text? Was Barak's? How about Moses' murder or Sampson's relationship with Delilah? No, why? Because of the gracious gift of faith, there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ.

When it's about faith and not about me, that is, really when it's about God's grace in granting us faith, the pressure of pleasing God is gone and all that remains is the joy of pleasing Him. If I exhibit faith and do x, y, or z, then I get a wonderful blessing from God. If I fail at x, y, or z, then I am still counted as faithful. I'm declared righteous. I'm declared as faithful regardless of what I do or have done. That is what is said of me in the throne room of God. And there is nothing I could ever do to bring a rebuttal to that declaration. So when we truly get the fact that God is the one who bestows this faith, when we begin to understand the sovereignty of God, I mean really understand the powerful sovereignty of God, then We'll begin to understand our actual standing with Him. No longer as faithless people, but heroes to look up to because God has done a work in us.

We receive a commendation, other translations use the word reward or testimony, good report, or approval and so on. The reason the translators are all over the map on this word is due to the fact that the Symantec meaning of this word is so widely used. It means literally or figuratively a testimony or evidence. It's the Greek word Martyreo

the root word is "martyr" which means witness. As I view the context and the point of verse as a highlight ion of God's faith granted to us, it seems right to me to say that Hebrews is saying here that because of faith - God speaks well of us. And just let that thought strike you.

Conclusion:

I got some junk mail this week. On the front was a picture of a bronze statue of Bill France's wife. If you know anything about Daytona and its history you will recognize the name Bill France. He was, essentially, the creator of NASCAR. Bronze statues have been erected of Bill all across the country due to that one fact. Probably the largest estate in all of Daytona Beach was his home on Halifax Rd. When I got that junk mail I thought, that doesn't look like Math McCloud Bethune, who is that? And then I read the caption and sure enough it was Betty Jane France. Other than the statue being a little, creepy looking, and then thinking how odd it was that people are still getting statues made in their image, I thought about my sermon this week.

That statue was erected in front of the France Tower of Halifax Hospital. That statue was erected for the purpose of standing as long as bronze is supposed to last, so that the France name, so that Betty Jane's name and support will garner conversation and a good report for years to come. So that people, even after she's dead, might speak well of her. Bronze won't last friends. Your good works won't last. But God's great gift of faith will because it's the only part of the equation that's eternal. If you've never recited the faith to believe, to trust, in Christ alone for your salvation, ask God to be gracious to you and bestow that trust so you may believe and live. If you're a Christian and you're struggling with your position in Christ, understand you don't have a problem with yourself. We know who we are. You have a problem with seeing rightly the sovereignty of God in his declaration of you as a sinner as faithful and righteous.

If this morning felt somewhat of a reminder to you about the great gift of faith, then I pray this has been an opportunity for you to worship Him and praise Him as you have been reminded of this beautiful gift. Let's take a moment now in silent pray to respond in like manner depending upon how we are living in relation to this truth. Let's pray together.