

Katamares: Hebrews: 11:1–10.

11:1–3 *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*

If You Do Not Believe, You Will Not Understand.

Clement of Alexandria: “Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?”² “The majority do not turn their minds to the sort of things they encounter, and, if they are taught, they do not acquire knowledge, although they think they do.” So says the admirable Heraclitus. Do you not realize that he is another critic of nonbelievers? “The righteous shall live by his faith,” says the prophet.³ One of the other prophets remarks, “If you do not believe, you emphatically will not understand either.”⁴ How could a soul come to the study of these things, itself exceptional, if, deep within, lack of faith over the teaching is fighting against it? Faith, which the Greeks think alien and useless and which they consequently malign, is in fact preconception by the will, an act of consenting to religion and, as the divine apostle puts it, “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval.” Without faith it is impossible to please God. Stromateis 2.2.8–9.⁵

Scripture Testifies About the Faith.

Ephrem the Syrian: Now our faith is not destroyed by despair because it was made firm by true hope. And there are witnesses who testify about it. In fact, even though faith was hidden from the people of the middle generation, it had nonetheless been revealed to those of the first. And there is a proof that reveals what is not evident. What proof? Certainly the one through which the testimony about the people of the first generation was made, that is, the narrative of scripture, that testified about the faith, through which the ancient fathers were put to test. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews.⁹

Arouse the Reason in Your Heart.

Augustine: If they are not seen, how can you be convinced that they exist? Well, where do these things that you see come from, if not from one whom you cannot see? Yes, of course you see something in order to believe something, and from what you can see to believe what you cannot see. Please do not be ungrateful to the one who made you able to see; this is why you are able to believe what you are not yet able to see. God gave you eyes in your head, reason in your heart. Arouse the reason in your heart, get the inner inhabitant behind your inner eyes on his feet, let him take to his windows, let him inspect God’s creation. Sermon 126.3.¹⁰

A Word to Catechumens About Faith.

Cyril of Jerusalem: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.” Notice how great a dignity the Lord bestows on you in transferring you from the order of catechumens to that of the faithful. The apostle Paul says as much when he affirms, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ.” ¹¹ Since God is here called faithful, you also in receiving this title receive a great dignity. God is called faithful in the same way that he is called good, just, almighty and maker of the universe. Consider therefore to what kind of dignity you are rising, seeing you are to become a partaker of a title of God.

Here, then, it is further required that each of you be found faithful in his conscience: “for a faithful man it is hard to find” ¹²—not that you need to reveal to me what is on your conscience, for you are not to be “judged by man’s judgment.” ¹³ But you are supposed to show the sincerity of your faith to God, “who tries the reins and hearts” ¹⁴ and “knows the thoughts of men.” ¹⁵ A faithful person is a great thing, being richest of all rich people. For “to the faithful person belongs the whole world of wealth,” ¹⁶ in that he disdains and tramples on it. For they who in appearance are rich and have many possessions are poor in soul: since the more they gather, the more they pine with longing for what is still lacking. But the faithful person (a strange paradox, indeed) is rich in poverty. Such a person knows that we only need to have “food and clothing” and, being “content with these,” ¹⁷ he has trampled riches under foot. Catechetical Lectures 5.1–2.18

Faith Sustains Many.

Cyril of Jerusalem: It is not only among those of us who bear the name of Christ that the dignity of faith is great. Rather, all things that are accomplished in the world, even by those who are strangers to the church, are accomplished by faith. By faith the laws of marriage yoke together those who have lived as strangers. Because of the faith in marriage contracts, a stranger is made partner of another stranger’s person and possessions. By faith, farmers are also sustained, for the one who does not believe that he shall receive a harvest is not going to endure the work. By faith seafaring men, trusting to the thinnest plank, exchange that most solid element, the land, for the restless motion of the waves, committing themselves to uncertain hopes and carrying with them a faith more sure than any anchor. By faith therefore most of men’s affairs are held together: and not among us only has there been this belief, but also, as I have said, among those who are outside the church. For if they receive not the Scriptures but bring forward certain doctrines of their own, even these they accept by faith. Catechetical Lectures 5.3.19

Prophecy Seen in Long Time Frame.

Chrysostom: But I will make the matter plainer by an example. Christ said that Jerusalem should be taken and should be so taken as no city ever was before, and that it should never be raised up, and in fact this prediction came to pass. He said that there should be “great tribulation,”²⁰ and it came to pass. He said that, as a grain of mustard seed is sown,²¹ so should the preaching of the gospel be extended, and every day we see this happening over the world. He said that they who left father or mother or brothers or sisters should have both fathers and mothers,²² and this we see fulfilled by facts. He said, “In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”;²³ that is, no one shall get the better of you. And this we see by events has come to pass. He said that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church,”²⁴ even though persecuted, and that no one shall quench the preaching of the gospel; and the experience of events bears witness to this prediction also. And yet, when he said these things, it was very hard to believe him. Why? Because all these were words, and he had not as yet given proof of the things spoken. So that they have now become far more credible. He said that “the gospel will be preached throughout the whole world, then the end will come.”²⁵ Lo! Now you have arrived at the end, for the greater part of the world has been preached to; therefore, the end is now at hand. Let us tremble, beloved. But what, tell me? Are you anxious about the end? It indeed is itself near, but each person’s life and death is nearer. For it is said, “The days of our years are seventy years; but if one be in strength, fourscore years.”²⁶ The day of judgment is near. Let us fear. “A brother does not redeem; shall man redeem?”²⁷ There we shall repent much, “but in death no man shall praise him.”²⁸ Wherefore he says, “Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving,”²⁹ that is, his coming. For here in this life indeed, whatever we do has efficacy; but there, no longer. Tell me, if a person placed us for a little while in a flaming furnace, should we not submit to anything in order to escape, even were it necessary to part with our money or to undergo slavery? How many have fallen into grievous diseases and would gladly give up all to be delivered from them, if the choice were offered them? If in this world, then, a disease of short duration so afflicts us, what shall we do yonder, when repentance will be of no avail? On the Epistle to the Hebrews 21.5–6.30

Your Hands Are Not Empty.

Augustine: When you hope, you do not yet have what you are hoping for, but, by believing it, you resemble someone who does possess it. For faith will eventually take hold, but our very faith stands for the thing itself. I mean, you do not have your hands on anything when you have them on faith, nor are they empty if they are full of faith. The reason faith is greatly rewarded is that it does not see and yet believes. I mean,

if it could see, what reward would there be? ... But faith does not falter, because it is supported by hope. Take away hope, and faith falters. How, after all, when you are walking somewhere, will you even move your feet, if you have no hope of ever getting there? If, though, from each of them, that is from faith and hope, you withdraw love, what is the point of believing; what is the point of hoping, if you do not love? Indeed, you cannot even hope for anything you do not love. Love, you see, kindles hope; hope shines through love. But when we attain the things that we have been hoping for while believing in and not seeing them, what faith will there be then to be praised? Considering that “faith is the conviction of things not seen,” when we do see, it will not be called faith. After all, you will be seeing, not believing. Sermon 359a.3–4.³¹

Faith Is the Substance.

Chrysostom: Oh, what an expression has he used in saying “an evidence of things not seen.” For we say there is “evidence” in the case of things that are very plain. Faith then is seeing things not plain, he means, and brings what are not seen to the same full assurance with what are seen. So then neither is it possible to disbelieve in things which are seen, nor, on the other hand, can there be faith unless a person is more fully assured with respect to things invisible than he is with respect to things that are most clearly seen. For since the objects of hope seem to be unsubstantial, faith gives them substantiality or, rather, does not give it, but is itself their substance. For instance, the resurrection has not come, nor does it exist substantially, but hope makes it substantial in our soul. This is the meaning of “the substance of things.”

If therefore it is an “evidence of things not seen,” why do you wish to see them, so as to fall away from faith and from being just? Since “the just shall live by faith,” you, if you wish to see these things, are no longer faithful. You have labored, he says; you have struggled. I too allow this; nevertheless, wait, for this is faith. Do not seek the whole “here.” On the Epistle to the Hebrews 21.4.³²

Our Mutual Faith.

Chrysostom: Faith needs a generous and vigorous soul, one rising above all things of sense and passing beyond the weakness of human reasoning. For it is not possible to become a believer otherwise than by raising one’s self above the common customs of the world.

Inasmuch then as the souls of the Hebrews were thoroughly weakened—though they had begun from faith, yet from circumstances, I mean sufferings, afflictions, they had afterwards become faint-hearted and of little spirit and were shaken from their position—he encouraged them first indeed from these very things, saying, “Recall the former days”;³³ next from the Scripture, saying, “But the righteous shall live by

faith”;³⁴ afterwards from arguments, saying, “But faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” And now again from their forefathers, those great and admirable people, as much as saying, “If, where the good things were close at hand, all were saved by faith, much more are we.”

For when a soul finds one that shares its same sufferings, it is refreshed and recovers breath. This we may see both in the case of faith and in the case of affliction, “that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.”³⁵ For people are very distrustful, cannot place confidence in themselves, are fearful about whatever things they think they possess and have great regard for the opinion of the many.

What then does Paul do? He encourages them by the patriarchs.... Since faith is slandered as being a thing that cannot be demonstrated and rather a matter of deceit, he shows that the greatest things are attained through faith and not through reasoning. And how does he show this, tell me? It is manifest, he says, that God made the things which are out of things which are not, things which appear out of things which appear not, things which subsist out of things which subsist not. But where is it shown that he did this even “by a Word”? For reason suggests nothing of this kind, but, on the contrary, suggests that the things that appear are formed out of things that appear.

Therefore the philosophers expressly say that “nothing comes out of things that are not being sensual”³⁶ and trusting nothing to faith. And yet these same people, when they happen to say anything great and noble, are caught entrusting it to faith. For instance: They say that “God is without beginning and unborn”—yet reason does not suggest this, but the contrary. Consider how great their folly, I ask you. They say that God is without beginning, and yet this is far more wonderful than the creation out of things that are not. For to say that he is without beginning, that he is unborn, neither begotten by himself nor by another is more full of difficulties than to say that God made the things which are out of things which are not. For here there are many things uncertain, as that someone made it, that what was made had a beginning, that, in a word, it was made. But in the other case, what? He is self-existing, unborn; he neither had beginning nor time. Tell me, do not these things require faith? But he did not assert this, which was far greater, but the lesser. How does it appear, he would say, that God made these things? Reason does not suggest it. No one was present when it was done. How is it shown? It is plainly the result of faith. “By faith we understand that the world was created.” Why “by faith”? Because “the things that are seen were not made of things which do appear.” For this is faith. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 22.1–2.³⁷

11:4 Cain and Abel

Abel Talks Through His Faith.

Ephrem the Syrian: “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain,” who brought offerings selected without care. The faith of Abel and the infidelity of Cain were sealed up in their offerings. If Abel had not believed in the promise, he would not have chosen and brought the best offerings. He had actually seen his brother, who picked up everywhere the vile ears [vegetable offerings] with contempt and offered them by laying them on the altar. For that faith Abel “obtained testimony” about himself “that he was righteous” and certainly not from a human being but from God, “who testified of his gifts,” so that up to this time Abel talks through his faith, that is, is put to test through it. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews.³⁹

Through Fame, Glory, Memory.

Oecumenius: “He speaks” by his fame, by his glory and by his memory. Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 11.4.⁴¹

Through It He Still Speaks.

Photius: “Although he died, through it he still speaks,”⁴² that is, because his very sacrifice furnished his brother with an opportunity for malice and jealousy, and his brother produced murder. Even if “he died,” “through it he speaks.” For this very reason Abel was always to be remembered and never forgotten. If someone should investigate both matters more accurately, the phrase “through it” (as is commonly understood) applies equally to “dying” and to “he speaks.”

He still speaks. He is always to be remembered. He says that Abel’s deed done in faith does not allow him to fall into obscurity. Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 11.4.⁴³

11:5–6 God Rewards Those Who Seek God

Paul Teaches Us to Seek God.

Athanasius: With the aid of your prayers, I hope to give a true picture of the plans of Paul, that holy man. He was very knowledgeable and skilled in these matters of God, and he knew the power of the Lord’s teaching. So he deemed it necessary to teach first about Christ and the mystery of the incarnation. Only then did he point to things in their lives that needed to be corrected. He wanted them first to know the

Lord and then to want to do what he told them. For if you don't know the one who leads the people in observing God's commands, you are not very likely to obey them.

Moses, that famous and faithful minister of God, used this method. When he set forth those things having to do with the divine system of laws, he first dealt with the knowledge of God, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord." ⁴⁵ Then, after describing God to the people, teaching them about the one in whom they should believe, and informing them concerning the one who is truly God—only then did he tell how a person can please God. Only then did he say, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal," and the other commandments. The reason for this order of teaching is given to us in the apostolic writings. God is sought by godly and righteous acts, as the prophet tells us. ⁴⁶ Festal Letters 11.3.⁴⁷

A List of Biblical Ironies Showing Where to Seek God.

Pachomius: Become guileless and be like the guileless sheep whose wool is sheared off without their saying a word. Do not go from one place to another, saying, "I will find God here or there." God has said, "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" ⁴⁸ and again, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you"; ⁴⁹ and again, "The rivers shall not overwhelm you." ⁵⁰ My son, be aware that God is within you, so that you may dwell in God's law and commandments. Behold, the thief was on the cross, and he entered paradise; but behold, Judas was among the apostles, and he betrayed his Lord. Behold, Rahab was in prostitution, and she was numbered among the saints; but behold, Eve was in paradise, and she was deceived. Behold, Job was on the dung heap, and he was compared with his Lord; but behold, Adam was in paradise, and he fell away from the commandment. Behold, the angels were in heaven, and they were hurled into the abyss; but behold Elijah and Enoch, who were raised into the kingdom of heaven. "Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his presence continually!" ⁵¹ Seek God out like Abraham, who obeyed God and offered his son in sacrifice to God, who called him "my friend." Seek God out like Joseph, who did battle against impurity, so that he was made ruler over his enemies. Seek him out like Moses, who followed his Lord, and God made him lawgiver and let him come to know God's own likeness. Daniel sought God out, and God taught him great mysteries; God saved him from the lions' gullet. The three saints sought God out and found God in the fiery furnace. Job took refuge with God, and God cured him of his sores. Susanna sought God out, and God saved her from the hands of the wicked. Judith sought God out and found God in the tent of Holofernes. All these sought God out, and God delivered them; and God delivered others also. Instructions 1.25.⁵²

Introduced Again to the House.

Ephrem the Syrian: “By faith Enoch was taken up and did not taste death.” If he had not believed that the observation of the commandment could introduce him again to the place from which the house of Adam had come out because of the transgression, he would not have applied himself to please God for three hundred years. In fact, “without faith,” that is, if that person did not believe that the true God exists and “rewards those who seek him,” he would have never tried to please and seek him. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews.⁵³

Faith Was the Cause of Enoch’s Pleasing God.

Chrysostom: How was it “by faith” that “Enoch was taken up”? Because his pleasing God was the cause of his being taken, and faith the cause of his pleasing God. For if he had not known that he should receive a reward, how could he have pleased God? But “without faith it is impossible to please” God. How? If a person believes that there is a God and a retribution, that person will have the reward. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 22.4.⁵⁴

The Woman from Canaan.

Athanasius: Jesus continually nourished his believing disciples with his words and gave them life by his closeness. But when the woman from Canaan asked for help, he did not answer her, ⁵⁵ because she was not yet a believer—even though she desperately needed food from him. He behaved this way not because he despised her; far from it. For the Lord is loving and good to humankind. That is why he went to Tyre and Sidon in the first place. No, it was because she did not believe, because she was an impious woman who had no idea of God’s requirements.

What he did was most appropriate, brothers and sisters, because it was not right for her to put her request before faith. Rather, she needed to support her prayer by her faith. For “whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him”; and that “without faith it is impossible to please him.” That is what Paul teaches. Festal Letters 9.7.⁵⁶

The Credo “I Believe.”

Rufinus: “I believe,” therefore, is placed in the forefront [of the Apostles’ Creed], as the apostle Paul, writing to the Hebrews, says, “The one who comes to God must first of all believe that he is, and that he rewards those who believe on him.” The prophet also says, “Unless you believe, ⁵⁹ you shall not understand.” In order that the way to understand, therefore, may be open to you, you do the right thing

in first of all professing that you believe. For no one embarks upon the sea and trusts himself to the deep and liquid element unless he first believes it is possible that he will have a safe voyage. The farmer does not commit his seed to the furrows and scatter his grain on the earth unless he believes that the showers will come together with the sun's warmth, through whose fostering influence, aided by favorable winds, the earth will produce and multiply and ripen its fruits. In essence, nothing in life can be transacted if there is not first a readiness to believe.

Is it any wonder then that when we come to God, we first of all profess that we believe, seeing that, without this, not even common life can be lived? We have premised these remarks at the outset, since the pagans are wont to object to us that our religion, because it lacks reasons, rests solely on belief. We have shown, therefore, that nothing can possibly be done or remain stable unless it is preceded by belief. Finally, marriages are contracted in the belief that children will be born; and children are committed to the care of teachers in the belief that the teaching of these teachers will be transferred to the pupils. In the same way, one person assumes the emblems of empire, believing that peoples and cities and a well-equipped army also will obey him. But if no one enters upon any one of these several undertakings except in the belief that the results spoken of will follow, must not belief be much more requisite if one would come to the knowledge of God? Commentary on the Apostles' Creed 3.⁶⁰

Faith Is the Eye That Enlightens Conscience.

Cyril of Jerusalem: The lesson also which was read today invites you to the true faith, by setting before you the way in which you also must please God. It affirms that "without faith it is impossible to please him." For when will an individual resolve to serve God, unless he believes that "He is a giver of reward"? When will a young woman choose a virgin life, or a young man live soberly, if they don't believe that for chastity there is "a crown that does not fade away"? ⁶⁶ Faith is an eye that enlightens every conscience and imparts understanding. The prophet says, "And if you do not believe, you shall not understand." ⁶⁷ Faith "stops the mouths of lions," ⁶⁸ as in Daniel's case, for Scripture says concerning him, "Daniel was brought up out of the den, and he was found to be hurt in no way, because he believed in his God." ⁶⁹ Is there anything more fearful than the devil? Yet even against him we have no other shield than faith, an impalpable buckler against an unseen foe. For he sends forth various arrows and "shoots down in the dark night" ⁷⁰ those that are not watching. However, since the enemy is unseen, we have faith as our strong armor, according to the saying of the apostle, "In all things taking the shield of faith with which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." ⁷¹ A fiery dart of desire to indulge one's baser

instincts is often shot from the devil's bow. But faith, suggesting a picture of the judgment, cools down the mind and quenches the dart. Catechetical Lectures 5.4.⁷²

God Rewards Those Who Seek Him.

Chrysostom: It is necessary to "believe that God is," not "what God is." If "that God is" needs faith and not reasoning, it is impossible to comprehend by reasoning "what God is." If that "God is a rewarder" needs faith and not reasoning, how is it possible by reasoning to compass God's essence? For what reasoning can reach this? For some persons say that the things that exist are self-caused. Do you see that, unless we have faith in regard to all things—not only in regard to retribution but also in regard to the very being of God—all is lost to us?

But many ask about where Enoch was translated, and why he was translated, and why he did not die, neither he nor Elijah, and, if they are still alive, how they live, and in what form. But to ask these things is superfluous. For that the one was translated, and that the other was taken up, the Scriptures have said; but where they are, and how they are, they have not added, for they say nothing more than is necessary. For this indeed took place, I mean his translation, immediately at the beginning, the human soul thereby receiving a hope of the destruction of death, and of the overthrow of the devil's tyranny, and that death will be done away; for he was translated, not dead, but "that he should not see death." Therefore, he added, he was translated alive, because he was well pleasing unto God.... A father, when he has threatened his son, wishes indeed immediately after he has threatened to relax his threat but endures and continues resolute, that for a time he may chasten and correct him, allowing the threat to remain firm. So also God, to speak, as it were, after the manner of men, did not continue resolute but immediately showed that death is done away. And first God allows death to happen, wishing to terrify the father through the son: For, wishing to show that the sentence is verily fixed, God subjected to this punishment not wicked people at once, but even him who was well-pleasing, I mean, the blessed Abel; and almost immediately after him, God translated Enoch. Moreover, God did not raise the former, lest they should immediately grow bold; but God translated the other being yet alive, having excited fear by Abel, but by this latter giving zeal to be well pleasing unto God. Therefore they who say that all things are ruled and governed of themselves and do not expect a reward are not well pleasing; as neither are the heathen. For "God becomes a rewarder of them that diligently seek God" by works and by knowledge. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 22.5.⁷³

Seek God But Not Despairingly.

Chrysostom: Since then we have “a rewarder,” let us do all things that we may not be deprived of the rewards of virtue. For indeed the neglecting of such a recompense, the scorning of such a reward, is worthy of many tears. For as to “those who diligently seek God,” God is a rewarder. But to those who do not seek God, the contrary.

“Seek,” he says, “and you will find,” ⁷⁴ but how can we find the Lord? Consider how gold is found, with much labor. “I sought the Lord with my hands,” it is said, “by night before God, and I was not deceived,” ⁷⁵ that is, just as we seek what is lost, so let us seek God. Do we not concentrate our mind thereon? Do we not inquire of every one? Do we not travel from home? Do we not promise money?

For instance, suppose that any one among us has lost a son. What do we not do? What land, what sea do we not make the circuit of? Do we not reckon money and houses and everything else as secondary to finding him? And should we find him, we cling to him, we hold him fast; we do not let him go. And when we are going to seek anything whatever, we busy ourselves in all ways to find what is sought. How much more ought we to do this in regard to God, as seeking what is indispensable; no, rather, not in the same way, but much more! But since we are weak, at least seek God as you seek your money or your son. Will you not leave your home for God? Have you never left your home for money? Do you not busy yourself in all ways? When you have found it, are you not full of confidence?

“Seek,” he says, “and you will find.” For things sought after need much care, especially in regard of God. For many are the hindrances, many the things that darken, many the things that impede our perception. For as the sun is manifest and set forth publicly before all, we have no need to seek it; but if, on the other hand, we bury ourselves and turn everything upside down, we need much labor to look at the sun. So truly here also, if we bury ourselves in the depth of evil desires, in the darkness of passions and of the affairs of this life, we look up with difficulty, we raise our heads with difficulty, we see clearly with difficulty. Whoever is buried underground, in whatever degree that one sees upwards, in that degree does that one come towards the sun. Let us therefore shake off the earth; let us break through the mist that lies upon us. It is thick and close and does not allow us to see clearly.

And how, you say, is this cloud broken through? If we draw to ourselves the beams of “the sun of righteousness.” “The lifting up of my hands,” it is said, “is an evening sacrifice.” ⁷⁶ With our hands let us also lift up our mind. You who have been initiated know what I mean; perhaps too you recognize the expression and see at a glance what I have hinted at. Let us raise up our thoughts on high.

I myself know many people almost suspended apart from the earth, and beyond measure stretching up their hands, and out of heart because it is not possible to be lifted into the air, and thus praying with earnestness. Thus I would have you always praying with earnestness and, if not always, at least very often; and if not very often, at least now and then, at least in the morning, at least in the evening prayers. For tell me, can you not stretch forth the hands? Stretch forth the will, stretch forth as far as you will, yes, even to heaven itself. Even should you wish to touch the very summit, even if you would ascend higher and walk there, it is open to you. For our mind is lighter and higher than any winged creature. And when it receives grace from the Spirit, oh, how swift is it! How quick is it! How does it compass all things! How does it never sink down or fall to the ground! Let us provide these wings for ourselves. By means of them shall we be able to fly even across the tempestuous sea of this present life. The swiftest birds fly unhurt over mountains and woods and seas and rocks in a brief moment of time. Such also is the mind; when it is winged, when it is separated from the things of this life, nothing can lay hold of it; it is higher than all things, even than the fiery darts of the devil. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 22.6–7.⁷⁷

In Faith the Devil Is Disarmed.

Chrysostom: The devil is not so good a marksman as to be able to reach this height; he sends forth his darts, indeed, for he is void of all shame, yet he does not hit the mark; the dart returns to him without effect, and not without effect only, but it falls upon his own head. For what is sent forth by him must of necessity strike something. As, then, that which has been shot out by humans either strikes the person against whom it is directed or pierces bird or fence or garment or wood or the mere air, so does the dart of the devil also. It must of necessity strike, and, if it strikes not the one that is shot at, it necessarily strikes the one that shoots it. And we may learn from many instances that, when we are not hit, without doubt the devil is hit himself. For instance, he plotted against Job; he did not hit him but was struck himself. He plotted against Paul; he did not hit him but was struck himself. If we watch, we may see this happening everywhere. For even when he strikes, he is hit—much more then when he does not hit.

Let us then turn the devil's weapons against him, and, having armed and fortified ourselves with the shield of faith, let us keep guard with steadfastness, so as to be impregnable. Now the dart of the devil is evil concupiscence. Anger especially is a fire, a flame; it catches, destroys, consumes; let us quench it, by long-suffering and by forbearance. For as red-hot iron dipped into water loses its fire, so an angry man, falling in with a patient one, does no harm to the patient man but rather benefits him and is himself more thoroughly subdued.

For nothing is equal to long-suffering. Such a person is never insulted, but, as bodies of the adamant are not wounded, so neither are such souls. For they are above the reach of the darts. The long-suffering person is high and so high as not to receive a wound from the shot. When one is furious, laugh; but do not laugh openly, lest you irritate that one, but laugh mentally on that one's account. For in the case of children, when they strike us passionately, as though thereby they were avenging themselves, we laugh. If then you laugh, there will be as great difference between you and that one as between a child and an adult, but, if you are furious, you have made yourself a child, for the angry are more senseless than children. If one looks at a furious child, does that one not laugh at the child? "The poor-spirited," it is said, "is mightily simple." ⁷⁸ The simple, then, is a child, and that one "who is long-suffering," it is said, "is abundant in wisdom." Let us then follow after this "abundant wisdom," that we may attain to the good things promised us in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom to the Father together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, power, honor, now and forever and world without end. Amen. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 22.7–8.⁷⁹

11:7 Noah Became an Heir of the Righteousness

Noah Received a Warning.

Ephrem the Syrian: "By faith Noah was warned by God concerning events as yet unseen," that is, about things which would have happened 120 years after he had received the warning, and [he] "took heed" of those distant threats of punishment [and] "constructed an ark" with great toil "for the saving of his household." By that same faith the world which did not believe was condemned, and that same faith made Noah the heir of the promise. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews.⁸⁰

Faith Works Righteousness.

Chrysostom: "Noah became," he says, "an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith." That is, by his believing God, he was shown to be righteous. For this is the part of a soul sincerely disposed toward God and judging nothing more reliable than God's words, just as unbelief is the very contrary. Faith, it is clear, works righteousness. For as we have been warned of God respecting hell, so was Noah. Yet at that time he was laughed at, reviled and ridiculed, but he regarded none of these things. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 23.1.⁸¹

11:8–10 Abraham Went Out, Not Knowing Where

Abraham Obeyed.

Ephrem the Syrian: “By faith Abraham” obeyed and left his father and family “to go” not to his private estate but to “an inheritance” prepared for him. Constantly supporting himself “by faith” through his wanderings, he “sojourned” and lived in the land of promise as in a foreign land, that is, as in a foreign inheritance, “living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.” Through the promised inheritance, which they did not receive, it became evident that “they looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews.²

To Be Confident Is to Receive.

Chrysostom: The metaphor is of persons on shipboard, seeing from afar the longed-for cities. Before they enter, they by their words of greeting already are beginning to occupy.... Do you see that they received the promises in this sense, in their already accepting them and being confident respecting them? If then to be confident is to receive the promise, it is in your power also to receive. These faithful did not yet fully enjoy the future blessing but yet by their longing still saw it. Why now do these things happen? That we might be put to shame, in that they indeed, when things on earth were promised them, regarded them not, but sought the future “city.” God again and again speaks to us of the city that is above, and yet we seek that which is here. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 23.4.³