

“Enoch: How Can I Please God?”

Hebrews 11:5,6

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“Dear God, I kept 7 out of Your 10 commandments this past week. 70% is still a passing grade, right? If not, maybe I could do some extra credit work. Your friends, Joey”

Folks, that letter to God from a 9-year-old boy reflects a concern all of us ought to have. If God does indeed exist, which there is every reason to believe, then we should be asking questions like: How can I live in a way that pleases God? What do I need to do to make Him happy with me? How can I make sure the Lord will be there for me both in this life and the next?

Over the centuries, people have taken numerous paths in the effort to please God. In Incas would throw young virgins into volcanos in an effort to appease their deities. People in various religions give food, flowers, animals or money as they seek to earn God’s favor. Islam teaches that fighting and dying in a “Holy war,” or “Jihad” is pleasing to God and provides a sure ticket to heaven.

Many folks, seem to think a lot like young Joey: “If I try to be a good person and succeed most of the time, like 70% maybe, then God will be happy with me.”

Folks, as we continue our tour of the faith all of fame in Hebrews 11, we come to our second exhibit. It features a man named Enoch, and highlights these words, **Hebrews 11:5 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.**

Let’s pause and pray the Lord would enable us to see the significance of those words for our lives today.

Enoch is a remarkable fellow. He does not experience death, which simply means he didn’t die. I get the impression Enoch went out for a walk one day and God kind of beamed him up to heaven. Nobody really knew what happened to him. I wonder how long search parties combed the area. As far as we know, Elijah and Jesus are the only other people to be taken from this life to the next, by a means other than death.

Yet, there is something even more significant about Enoch. The text says he is a man who pleased God. How did he do that? It was faith. **Hebrews 11:6a And without faith it is impossible to please God.** That is a message that the writer of Hebrews repeats over and over again in chapter 11, seeking to ensure that it sticks in our minds. He repeats the phrase “by faith” 24 times in this chapter.

Enoch was a man who pleased God, thus clearly, he was a man of faith. That is the only way any of us can please God. Throwing someone into a volcano won’t do it. Giving a lot of money to charity won’t do it. Trying to be a good person or keep the 10 commandments won’t do it. We cannot please God without faith.

Last week we saw that was Cain’s problem. He tried to please God without faith, and it didn’t work. There is no substitute for faith. Anyone attempting to please God without it, is on a dead-end road. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Now I suspect this truth is not really a surprise to most in this room. Many of you have memorized **Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-** One of our main themes at Chisholm Baptist church is that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

**Romans 1:17 “The just will live by faith,”** was the verse God used to bring about Martin Luther’s conversion and to launch the protestant reformation. The fact faith is necessary for us to please God is not exactly news to many of us. Yet what exactly is this faith that pleases the Lord? Though the word “faith” is frequently used in the church and in society at large, most folks have only a fuzzy definition of the term. What exactly does it mean to have true faith, the faith Hebrews 11 is talking about?

Well, throughout the summer we will be answering that question as we tour “the Faith Hall of Fame,” but our text today enables us to identify some key elements of biblical faith, the type of

faith that is pleasing to God. **Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**

First, note that faith includes believing the truth about God. At the most basic level, faith involves believing God exists, that He is. We need to remember that whenever the Bible talks about faith, the object of that faith is God. It is not faith in ourselves, not faith in other people, not faith in faith, but faith in the Lord that pleases Him. If someone says to me, "My brother Joe has a lot of faith." It doesn't really tell me much. Joe may be a very devout Christian, or maybe it just means Joe is a very optimistic person.

Someone who doesn't worry much and believes everything will somehow work out okay, even when things appear very grim, is often described as having a lot of "faith." This faith is not necessarily in God, but can be just faith in, well, life. In the classic movie, "Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street," Santa Claus says, "Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to." Folks like this may have faith, but it is a faith that has nothing to do with God. We can certainly place our faith in many things other than the Lord, but none of these other types of faith are what pleases God.

We also need to realize that genuine faith is not just believing in the existence of a god, but rather belief in *the* God of the Bible. And before we can believe in the true God, we need to have some idea of who He is. We must have certain knowledge, accurate information about God which we can believe. You can not just make up your own god and then declare, "Yes, I believe in God, the god I created."

How much must we know about God before we can have true faith? That is not an easy question to answer. It would seem that without an Old Testament, a New Testament, or a system Theology textbook to tell them what God is like, Old Testament saints like Enoch would have a rather limited understanding of the Lord.

Yet, Genesis 5:22 tells us that Enoch was a man who walked with God for 300 years, so I suspect he got to know God pretty well. In **Romans 10:14**, the apostle Paul asks, **How, then, can they call**

**on the one they have not believed in ? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?** The implied answer is that unless people are informed of the basic truths concerning God and the Gospel, they cannot believe.

So, I think before one can really believe in God, he or she must be aware of God's basic nature, of His greatness and His goodness. If you picture God as impotent or cruel, you are not believing in the real God. If you think God is someone like George Burns portrayed in the old "Oh God" movies, a grandfatherly figure who would make a nice next-door neighbor, you don't believe the real God.

Many years ago, Augustine said, *"If you believe what you like about God and reject what you do not like, it is not God you believe in, but yourself."* In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems many are very good at believing in themselves. Tim Keller put it this way: *"If your god never disagrees with you, you might just be worshipping an idealized version of yourself."*

A lot of folks try to redesign God to make Him more acceptable to modern and post-modern people than the God of the Bible is. I sometimes hear statements like: "The god I believe in would never allow anyone to suffer in hell." Or "the god I believe in wants people to be happy. If premarital, extra marital, or homosexual activity can bring someone happiness, then God must be for it." Or "The god I believe in is not a father, but a mother. She is the one I worship." Or "The god I believe in is the spark of life that exists within every human being, really in every living thing." Friends, I submit that if you believe in these or any other god you might create, you do not believe that the true and living God of the Bible exists and thus, you do not have a faith that is pleasing to the Lord.

Second, faith involves delighting in the truth about God. It is not enough to simply believe God exists. Knowledge and mental assent are not enough. That point is made very clearly in **James 2:19 You believe that God is one; you do well.** Or the NLT says, **"Good for you." Even the demons believe --and shudder!**

A faith that is pleasing to God has to involve more than just believing the right things about God.

James reminds us that the devil can pick up a theology book, read all the descriptions of God's attributes, His power, wisdom, holiness, goodness, etc., and say "Ya, I believe all those things to be true. I agree that this is what God is like. But I hate Him. In fact, it is because I believe God is the way the Bible describes that I hate Him."

There is another essential element of a faith that pleases God besides believing the right things. Theologians call it "fiducia." Some call it believing, not just with your heart but with your heart. It is the faith of Abel, not of Cain. It involves not just believing something to be true but liking that something is true. That is implied in **Hebrews 11:6b for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**

We must not only believe God exists, like demons do, but we must also believe He is fair, just, and gracious, that He treats us far better than we can deserve or imagine. Genuine faith involves believing that God is who He is. The devil hates the God in whom he believes. Those who have faith, love the God in whom they believe.

Believing something to be true and liking that it is true are two very different things. For example, I believe Abraham Lincoln was president of the United States from 1861-1865 and I believe Adolph Hitler was chancellor of Germany from 1933-1945. I believe those two things with an equal amount of intellectual certainty. I am just as confident that Hitler was the German chancellor as I am that Lincoln was president. But my emotional reaction to the two facts is very different. I have great admiration and respect for Lincoln but have very opposite feelings about Hitler. The faith that pleases God includes not only intellectual agreement but includes an emotional reaction of delight in who God is.

I fear we sometimes neglect to emphasize this important dimension of faith. We focus on believing that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. Yes, we must believe that, but the demon believes that too. We must also see Jesus' death and resurrection in our place as an event of great beauty and a reason for great joy.

Jonathan Edwards, the great New England preacher of the 1700s. "Sinners in the Hands of

Angry God" is the most famous of his sermons. I remember reading it in high school English class. Yet, that sermon was not typical of Edwards. Yes, he believed in the reality of hell and God's judgement, but the focus of his preaching was almost always the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ. He usually invited people, sinners, to come to Jesus, not because they were afraid of hell and needed a way to escape, but rather because Jesus alone was worthy of their faith and devotion. Yes, there are times that I as a pastor and all of us as Christians should warn others of the dangers of hell. There are times when we should talk about many other topics that are addressed in the Bible.

But our most important task, like John the Baptist, is to proclaim, "Behold, Jesus, the Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world." Friends, throughout history the common characteristics of great Christian preachers, Paul, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Spurgeon, is their focus on presenting the Lord Jesus in all His splendor.

Friends, may we do that as well and encourage people not just to believe that God exists, but to delight in His grace and goodness revealed for us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Third, there is one other important dimension of true faith that flows out of a belief in and love for God. It is our willingness to personally trust the Lord. Faith is not just thinking the right thoughts and having the right feelings. It involves volition, a choice, an act of the will. To have faith means to entrust oneself to the Lord.

What does that involve? I like the story of the man who slipped off the edge of a mountain trail and had managed to grab hold of a branch growing from the side of the cliff. Realizing he cannot hang on for long, he calls for help. "Is anybody up there?" A voice replies, "Yes, I am." "Who's that?" "It's me, the Lord." The man cries, "Oh, Lord help me!" "Do you have faith?" "I'm a man of great faith!" the voice then says, "let go of the branch." "What?" "I said, let go of the branch." After a long pause, the man asks, "Is anybody else up there?"

Friends, true faith involves, in a sense, letting go of the branch. It means we stop trusting in ourselves and put our confidence in Jesus Christ. That means giving up control, which is not easy. Yet, if we believe that God is who the Bible says

He is, and we delight in that truth, then it becomes very natural for us to trust Him.

We become like a little boy who loves it when his dad grabs his ankles and holds him upside down four feet above the floor. It would be horrifying to have a stranger do that to a child, but that little boy has total confidence in dad and does not hesitate to entrust his safety to him. He knows who his father is, and delights in who his father is. That little boy has real faith.

Friends, if your faith is real, you will be willing to entrust your very life to the Lord. And when those times come, when it feels like He is holding you upside down by your ankles, when there is no money left in your bank account, when the doctor says he needs to do a biopsy, when your fiancé breaks off the engagement, in those very uncomfortable times, you will find a certain joy knowing that you can count on God to never let go.

So, folks we please God by having a faith that believes God is who the Bible says He is, that delights in who He is, and that is willing to entrust ourselves to his care, both in this life and the next. That is the type of faith Enoch had. It is the type of faith that by His grace, God desires you to have as well.

I want to conclude with one additional lesson we learn from Enoch. Let's go back to **Genesis 5:21,22** **When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters.**

Those of us who are not familiar with the early chapters of Genesis are probably a bit shocked by Enoch's life span. He was clearly chronologically gifted, but that is a topic for another day. What strikes me is that the text implies that Enoch did not begin his faithful walk with God until his son Methuselah was born.

In other words, for the first 65 years of life, it seems Enoch was not quite living in a way that pleased God and was not really a man of faith. So, though Enoch has many, many good years of walking with the Lord, he did not begin to do so until he was my age, until he was on Medicare. Friends, this reminds us that it is never too late to

begin to walk with God, never too late to trust the Lord and become a man or woman of faith.

Friends, my guess is that there is at least a couple of people in this room, maybe quite a few, that are not pleasing God, because they do not have true faith.

Oh yes, you may believe in God. You may believe all the right doctrines in the Bible. You may be a church member, you may have repeated a prayer someone asked you to pray, but because you are still trusting in yourself instead of Jesus Christ, your faith is not true, biblical faith, and you are not pleasing the Lord.

If that is the boat you are in, it is time to change that. As God enables, you need to place your trust in Him. By His grace, you need to let go and receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Perhaps you think you might be doing that but are not sure. Or maybe you are not quite sure what I am talking about. If so, make sure you talk to me or one of our pastors or deacons before you leave today. It is very important.

If friend, you do have true faith, you believe in the God of the Bible, you delight in who He is, and you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, you have so much for which you can be thankful, and so much to celebrate. I encourage you to join us as we celebrate....