

Faith or Confidence?

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

“We live by the faith of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us” (Galatians 2:20).

“For we are [they] . . . which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

Faith lies at the heart of all that we have in Christ and from Christ and through Christ. It is the very energy of God in us through the presence of His Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 11:1 gives us the clue to the meaning of faith. In the phrase, “*Faith is the substance,*” we have insight into its true nature. The text does not say that faith is a human instrument for getting things from God, it says that faith is the substance of things hoped for. Faith is the essential reality of all that we receive from God. The phrase “*hoped for*” is better translated “*expected.*” The English word “*hope*” has too much uncertainty in it to properly express the Greek word *elpidzo*. Hebrews 11:1 would better be translated—“Faith is the essence of our expectations.”

But what precisely does that mean? Faith is an expression of Divine energy. It is strictly a gift of God and is impossible without Him (Ephesians 2:8). It is that flow of Divine energy that activates our spirits. Our spirits then become like a circuit board, receiving signals from God. Apart from the gift of energizing faith we would not be able to receive these signals. And without the Holy Spirit, we would not have this faith.

The Greek word *hupostasis*, usually translated by “*substance,*” means in Greek what it does in Latin—that which “*stands under*” or is “*the inner essence of.*” A good analogy is the structure of a building. The expectations one has for a building is indicated by the facade—marble or tile or glass—but that which holds the building together is the concrete and steel behind the facade. Thus, the concrete and steel make up the substance of the building and the facade, the expectation.

Or, in another figure, in the case of electric wiring, it is the electricity or energy flowing through the wire that is the essence of it. When the energy flows through it, the wire is the effective instrument that accomplishes innumerable tasks. Without the energy flowing through it, the wire is simply like a cord, useful only for tying things. The electrical circuitry in a house gives to that house an innumerable range of useful functions. But the wiring itself, were it not connected to an energy source, would be of little value. Just so, it is not the object itself, for which we pray, that is important, but the flow of energy that represents our communion with Christ. As the electricity is more vital and real than the appliances it serves, so the energy of faith within us—the gift of God—is more vital and real than those things which come to us as a result of our interactions with God.

So faith, then, is the energy process from God that charges our spirit nature and equips us for communion with Him.

Confidence, on the other hand, is a function of the mind. It has to do with how we feel about things and is based upon the general patterns of thought or mental grid that occupies the cortex of the brain. As a feeling or emotion, it is the result of energy impulses, not from God, but generated by the data on the cortex of the brain. Thus, feelings of confidence will be based on past experiences and the characteristics provided through heredity. Those who have inherited tendencies toward anxiety will have a problem with confidence. So also those who have had bad experiences. One, for example, who has been severely frightened in childhood by a dog will have a good deal of difficulty being confident around dogs. Those who have had social problems will have difficulty with confidence in themselves or others. This has nothing to do with the energy of God or the faith as a result of it that is a constant flow in our spirits.

Similarly confidence may be affected by physiological problems. Chemical imbalance accounts for much in the way of anxiety. For example deficiency in the endocrine glands—the ductless glands, such as thyroid, adrenal, gonads—will result in an inadequate supply of the chemicals we call hormones, which maintain emotional balance. In times of stress, for example, the adrenal glands secrete adrenalin which stimulates the flow of blood and oxygen to the affected areas. Deficiency of adrenalin can result in depression and anxiety (as well as a host of other things). Such depression and anxiety will result in a lack of confidence. This, again, has nothing to do with faith as it pertains to the energy of God within our spirits.

Furthermore, confidence may be affected in many temporary ways by special circumstances, such as physical disorders or personal devastating experiences. Many of these experiences evolve doubts, which are of themselves only temporary uncertainties of the mind and do not reflect the condition of the spirit. Paul speaks of his own weaknesses in the flesh—“*For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears*” (II Corinthians 7:5). He confessed also to a “*thorn in the flesh*” which gave him much distress and spurred him to seek earnestly its removal. But God, acknowledging it as a weakness of Paul, elected rather to give him grace for his weakness than to remove it.

Weaknesses in our flesh keep us tied to Christ. Paul had no confidence in his flesh although he did not see his weaknesses in the flesh as a lack of faith, but rather as a source of humility and an instrument to keep him continually relying upon God. It was to him a part of the continuing earthly frustration. Such frustration caused him to cry out in anguish, “*Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?*” (Romans 7:24). Paul, by his own confession, was weak and frustrated and wretched, but that did not affect the strength of his inner spirit; which, he said, “*was renewed day by day.*” He had no confidence in his flesh, but was never flagging in his faith.

At the end of his life, facing martyrdom, Paul made his ultimate declaration—“*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith*” (II Timothy 4:7). He had nothing to say about the numerous churches he had established; or souls he had helped; nor did he see himself as a “superstar.” Nor

did he claim any special personal piety. *“He counted not himself to have apprehended, either were already perfect.”* He merely kept on, fighting the battle, and keeping the faith. At the end of his life he had come to no personal position of confidence in his flesh, as well might be after a lifetime of arduous and unstinting service.

The ultimate concept here is that there is a distinction between faith and confidence. Faith, as a gift of God, is an energy process flowing from God through our spirits, enabling us to interact with Him in fellowship and communication. Confidence is a process of the natural mind, accumulating the data of experience together with the predispositions of heredity and reacting to impulses in a proscribed behavior pattern. In other words, we respond to experiences emotionally, based on our given personality traits. Thus, confidence is a feeling very much affected by human personality. Faith is beyond feeling and is a constant part of the new-born spirit nature that we have from God.

The lack of feelings of confidence does not mean lack of faith any more than feelings of confidence indicate the presence of faith.

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