

And Others . . .

“Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy), they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Hebrews 11:35-38).

One of the most tragic misconceptions in Christendom is the assumption that everyone who is really following Christ and in His will should be delivered from every earthly problem. The usual responses to lack of deliverance from earthly ills are—“If you only had more faith”; “Are you in the center of God’s will?”; “Are you fervent enough?”; “Is there sin in your life?” These and many other similar such phrases tend to shift the burden of our interactions with Christ on weak and fallible humans. Most Christians are very uncertain about their effectiveness in prayer. Who can ever feel adequate? Who can ever feel that they have enough faith or fervency or piety to merit God’s help at any point? For most Christians prayer is like a “sputtering carburetor.” It is quite intermittent. They hope against hope that somehow God will hear them and help them in spite of their inadequacy.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is a thorough confirmation of the fact that the faith of those who are not delivered can be as strong as the faith of those who did great exploits.

In reading this chapter, it is very important to understand the meaning of “faith.” We have discussed it before, but let me review it for you. There are two fundamental aspects to faith that must be understood. First of all, it is a gift of God and not something we acquire by religious effort. Secondly, it is a fruit of the Spirit and not something that can be fabricated by the mind. Thus, when we possess Christ in our spirits, we possess His faith and not our own. This provides a level of faith that is not always experienced in the mind. That is, faith operates within our spirits even when we do not feel confidence or trust. What most people consider to be faith is really only human trust or confidence—a product of the mind. Human confidence is a matter of the emotions. At that level the emotions are often regulated by the thought patterns of the mind, which are, in turn, dependent upon human knowledge and experience. For example, one who has been “let down” by family or friends may have difficulty with the ability to trust anyone. On the other hand, one who feels that the problems are the result of one’s own mistakes and inadequacy, may not feel confident that the Lord is going to work things out.

The statement in Hebrews 11:1—“*Faith is the substance of things hoped for*”—is a clue to its real meaning. The word “substance” both in the Greek original and in the Latin root of the English word, has to do with something that is the “essence of things.” For example, buildings of concrete and steel often have a facade of tile or marble or plaster. Whatever the facade, the real substance of the building is the concrete and steel of its infrastructure or in another figure, the energy flowing through the wire is the substance and not the wire. The

reality of our interaction with God is the faith itself and not the things we are hoping for from God.

All thoughts and emotions are, in reality, made up of currents of energy flowing through the neurons of the brain. They are the result of stimuli from the external environment. Faith is also a flow of energy in us, but it is an energy from God and not fabricated by any experience of the external environment. Human trust or confidence is a result of stimuli from the external environment, but such emotions are strictly based upon human experience.

So faith is an energy process from God affecting our spirits. Thus it is a fruit of the Spirit—“*The fruit of the Spirit is . . . faith*” (Galatians 5:22). The mind has no power to generate such faith. And thus it is that Christ is at work in our lives and interacting with our needs and problems even when our human minds struggle with feelings of confidence. If we did not have faith, we would not be talking with Him in the first place.

And so also prayer is a process of communication between ourselves and God, which really takes place in the spirit. The Spirit Himself initiates our prayers (Romans 8:26). Prayer is actually more of a participation with God in the process of our lives, than an effort to get God to “change His mind” about things (imagine a great celestial computer with God attempting to keep up with all the conflicting demands of believers who want Him to satisfy their whims).

It is necessary to understand this meaning of faith in order to realize what Hebrews 11 is getting across to us. If you will study the situations that are referred to in Hebrews 11, you will find that in the Old Testament accounts the so-called “heroes” were not all that heroic. For example, Sarah indeed gave birth to Isaac through the process of faith within her, but her human emotions caused her to laugh at the idea. And thus she was required to name her son Isaac—“she laughed.” Every time she would speak the name of Isaac it would be as though she were calling him “laughter.” Similarly, Moses, who is said to have left Egypt by faith, in reality fled from the face of Pharaoh. And so with these other characters, their deeds were always mixed up with human weakness. In other words, God worked His will in their lives on the basis of the Divine energy of faith, irrespective of their own human feelings and failures. And so with God’s process of deliverance. His dealings with these people were all on the basis of His own will. He did with them what He elected to do with them. The heroism was something of an outward facade. The substance of their service was the process of faith going on in their spirits.

And others . . . In the midst of the roster of those whose deeds were extraordinary, comes the roster of those who were not delivered. In the mind of God, they were exhibiting as much faith as those who did the exploits—“**of whom the world was not worthy.**” Their commitment to God was equal to the commitment of the ones who were delivered.

The bottom line is that they were all examples of faith, not in that they had great human capacities, but that they were in the flow of God’s purposes for them. The evidence of their faith was not the exploits, but that they held steady with God in all of these circumstances. The evidence of our own faith today is not that we are always delivered, but that we stay with Christ in the midst of the human misunderstanding of success or failure—of victory or defeat. In

Rudyard Kipling's famous poem—"IF"—he penned the classic lines:

If you can meet with triumph and disaster,
and treat those two imposters just the same.

Our own assessment of either victory or defeat is based on human standards. Usually we have little idea about what God is doing. *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts"* (Isaiah 55:8,9).

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