

The Believer and the Holy Spirit

XIV. - Faith

“By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any one should boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9).

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

Faith is at the heart of our relationship to God and all that that implies. Without faith no connection is possible with Christ and the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately the word “faith” is highly ambiguous and of a great variety of interpretations and definitions. One would think that for so vital a connection there ought to be a very precise understanding of what faith is all about. We have spoken of it a number of times, but it seems necessary to research and review it once more. The most fundamental point about faith is that it is a gift of God. As such, it is not something we barter on the basis of good behavior or good feelings. The second most important point is that it is a quality of the spirit and not the flesh. That means that it is not something we can develop within our own mental patterns of trust and confidence. These are terms of the psyche or mind or emotions, and not of the spirit. We must separate between these two realms if we are going to have a viable understanding of the term. So then what is faith?

Hebrews 11:1 gives us a lucid description of it. The idea of faith as substance is most important. The Greek word *hupostasis*—means literally “to stand under.” The Latin word “substance” means essentially the same thing. A good analogy of this might be a building with a concrete and steel structure and a facing of glass or tile. The concrete and steel are obscured by the facade, but the facade is the evidence that there is something there. Another example would be electric wiring. The substance is the energy flowing through the wire; the evidence is the tubing that surrounds it.

We thus deduce that faith is an energy process from God that flows through us affecting in us whatever God designs. This energy flows in our spirits, unchecked, but is not always obvious in our human sensitivity to it. Thus, God is going to do what He wants to do in our lives in spite of how we feel about things.

Feelings of confidence are part of the human emotion, and do not affect the flow of the energy of faith within us. There is no way that we humans can place any reliability on our feelings. Confidence and trust are mere expressions of human attitudes. They vacillate with our physical and mental conditions. For example, one may experience panic attacks from physiological conditions, such as neurotransmitters. There are rational anxieties and irrational anxieties. Rational anxieties are those that are based upon real situations that cause distress. Irrational anxieties are based purely on a physiological process, which is not controllable by the individual.

The condition of the facade of a building does not necessarily affect the structure underneath. The surface may be cracked and chipped and unsightly, but the concrete and steel remain secure. Just so, the energy of God flows in our spirits irrespective of our human inadequacies or vacillations or characteristics.

Trust, for example, is directly related to one's personality, which in turn is affected by genetics and experiences and traumatic events. Trusting anyone, even God, from an emotional point of view, may not be possible for some who have had extremely negative experiences in the matter. God must function through us in our spirits irrespective of the extremely vacillating nature of all our human characteristics and potentialities. So remember that the Spirit of God is energizing you and fulfilling His purpose in you in spite of you. Paul consoles the Philippians with this truth—*“Being confident of this very thing that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:6).

Hebrews 11 furnishes us with an excellent illustration of these principles. The characters in this chapter, which are identified often as “heroes of faith,” were upon closer examination, vacillating humans like the rest of us. Sarah, for example, was visited by the angel who promised her a son. In response to this, Sarah laughed. The angel then said to her that she must now name her son Isaac, which means “laughter” in Hebrew. But the author of Hebrews says that it was by faith that Sarah received strength to conceive seed. By the same token, Moses was described as having fled Egypt by faith, when in fact he fled from before the Pharaoh, feeling that an act of murder on his part would be discovered. In both instances, the faith that was the energizing process that functioned within Moses and Sarah was unaffected by their own mental attitudes. Samson is also listed among the “faith heroes.” Samson slew more Philistines in his death than in his life, but his heroic action was the result of a tragic situation where he was betrayed by Delilah, blinded, and asked to be led to the temple, where he, having regained his strength, toppled the pillars. Still, he is listed in the faith chapter.

The bottom line is that in all the processes of history recorded in the Old Testament, whereby God functioned with His people, it was His energy working in them and through them that accomplished His purposes, and not the reliability of their own personal characteristics or attitudes. On the other hand, there were those listed in “the faith chapter” of whom it was said that they “did not receive the promises, but were able to see them afar off.” These also were commended for their “faith.”

In both Galatians and Philippians, we encounter the phrase—“The faith of God.” To the Galatians, Paul wrote, *“The life which we now live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us”* (Galatians 2:20). Again in Philippians 3—*“Not having my own righteousness which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ—the righteousness which is of God by faith”* (3:9). What Paul had accomplished in terms of his identity with God through his own efforts in keeping the Law, he counted refuse and sought instead the work of God in him, which he considered to be through the faith of Christ.

We cannot rely on the human emotions of trust or confidence. For one thing, we do not know absolutely what it is that God is going to do. Universally, the fruit of the Spirit is an energy process of faith within us which inevitably and invariably gives us the sense that God really can do anything He wants to do in this universe. The problem comes when we have to ask what is it that He's going to do at this particular time for me. Since we do not know that, we can't rely on our own human confidence in it. What we can do is to assume that God

will do what He wants to do in our lives according to His own time and purpose. That is the true impact of faith.

Faith then is an energy process from God that flows through us when we receive His Holy Spirit. It is not dependent on our own feelings, but functions continuously in spite of them, to accomplish God's purpose in us.

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October 1994

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