

CONFIDENT FAITH

Confidence, trust, faith, belief -- all these project the same emotions and mental images. Many times we have difficulty in finding people, things, or institutions that we can really trust or have "confident faith" in. Solomon once noted that in all his experiences, he had found only about 1 in 1000 men who could really be trusted (a truly upright person)--his assessment of women was that he had found none. Most of us want to find something or someone that we can put our confidence in, have faith in, believe in, trust. Many people find themselves gravely disappointed with leaders (political, business or church) whom they trusted.

The writer of Hebrews has been building his case to show that Jesus is greater than prophets; even greater than Moses. He is a more capable priest than any that had served in that capacity. His approach to dealing with the relationship of God and man (the New Covenant) is superior to the old method that had been in effect for thousands of years. He is building up to the conclusion that if we are ever going to have confidence, trust, faith, belief in anything, then this is what we've been waiting for. Jesus is the ultimate final answer. Through what Jesus did we will be able to participate in God's final solution to the sin problem. Hebrews 10:16-17 asks the question: "What else can He do?"

Because all this has been done, we can get on with the ultimate desire of every human heart and that is to draw near to God. In Hebrews 10:19-22 we see the way opened and all we need to do is act in confident faith to make it a reality for us. Because of the great opportunity we have we need to take every advantage that is afforded us.

HEBREWS 10:23-25 We realize that it is by the grace of God that we have faith to believe. Paul tells us that each person has been given a measure of faith. God's faithfulness to us does not waver and since He is our Source, we too can then be faithful. The word translated faith in the KJV is usually rendered hope in other places. The promises of God going back to the start of His dealing with mankind form the HOPE for us. This hope is personified in Jesus Christ. In Chapter 6 of Hebrews we are told that we have this HOPE as an anchor of the soul, firm and secure. Now we are told to hold steadfast the profession (confession) of that hope. If we lose hope, then our faith becomes directionless. We'll see later that faith is the substance of things hoped for. If we have no hope then our faith becomes academic and not practical. As we put our hope into words and share these hopes with others, we provide encouragement for a variety of people. Many people do not know what they want or where they want to go until they hear about the possibilities. How many times have you heard someone talk about a trip they had taken and we found ourselves wanting to do the same thing? As we share our vision of God's hope and how He is working in our individual lives, others will want to buy into that vision. They will be encouraged and the Kingdom of God will be strengthened. This sharing of vision and experience is a good reason for meeting together regularly so that all may be encouraged. Those that do not have this sort of support system may drift away and lose the vision and the hope, and then faith wavers.

Sometimes in our faith walk we can become discouraged and think that we haven't much to show by way of victories in life. During those times we need to look back to see what has been done.

HEBREWS 10:32-34 The early Christians did not find the world around them very friendly to their faith. Throughout the centuries there have been struggles for those who walked according to the teachings of Jesus. There is suffering being endured today by many who would resist the rising tide of evil in the world. In some parts of the world there is organized repression from governmental sources. In our country, the opposition is also organized by certain groups that have special interests in getting rid of constraints. The opposition comes in ridicule in the media of anything that is Christian in nature. Events related to the prominent Christian leaders who stumble in their walk really gave these folks fuel for their fires. The people of the first and second centuries found physical abuse,

public insult, had property confiscated. They had stood firm knowing that what they had in Christ Jesus was superior to anything that might be lost in material things and that the joy of being with the Lord was worth any temporary suffering that they might have to endure in the meantime.

HEBREWS 10:35-39 The characteristic of a Christian is that he is not going to give up. We need to persevere in doing the will of God. Don't just toss away your confidence. So many times we set goals in life and after a couple of set backs we come to the conclusion that maybe the goal wasn't right. The rightness or wrongness of our goals does not depend on the bumpiness of the road that leads to the goal. If we set our destination based only on the smoothness of the road, there is no telling where we will wind up. Paths of least resistance go downhill--wrong direction! In this passage we see a quote from the Old Testament about a principle that never changes...the necessity of faith in being pleasing to God: "The just shall live by faith." That particular passage was key in the reformation movement of Martin Luther. He saw living by faith as the "missing ingredient" in the religious practice of his day. It is not ritual or even works of righteousness--it is faith that is essential. The early Christians were encouraged to be of the faith group rather than those that turn back from following God.

Having introduced the necessity of faith (and faithfulness) the writer moves to a discussion of the subject of faith complete with examples of Old Testament persons who exemplified real, true, confident faith.

HEBREWS 11:1-3 Here we have the definition of faith. It is said to be the "substance" and the "certainty" of the things hoped for. Recall earlier that we saw the admonition to hold on to our hope. We said that the hope was what God had promised. We see then that faith is directed toward something more than "wishful thinking", it is based on the promises of God. You've heard of blind faith-- there is nothing scriptural about blind faith. Faith is related to something or someone. What if I said that I believe that one million dollars is going to drop out of the ceiling at 10:45 this morning? What would such a belief be based on? Did someone in whom I have confidence tell me that was going to happen? Did I put the money up there? The answer is "no" in both cases. Belief based on nothing is presumption and not faith.

The other side of that picture is that if someone told me that he had put the money in the ceiling and had a trap door with timer and I believed it, then I would be exercising faith based on that person's word. If I did not believe, then that would be doubt. Faith is bounded on one side by doubt and on the other side by presumption.

The examples of righteous men and women in the Old Testament were those who were faithful--those that believed God. The business of faith goes back to the creation. Did the universe "just happen" or was it created at God's command? This is the starting point--it is also a significant stumbling block to many people who have much difficulty getting past this one point. The existence of God as evidenced in the universe is a pretty convincing argument that God IS. We may not be able to know a lot about Him from this but we can certainly see that He IS. The progressive revelation of God to us is hindered if we fail to respond to each of the many ways which He reveals Himself to us.