THE ESSENCE OF “FAITH”  
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The idea of faith is concerned with the establishment of “some particular reality” as indeed being trustworthy. The Hebrew word for faith in the Old Testament, he’emin, is built upon the word ‘aman, which means to be true, reliable, faithful. The New Testament term for faith, pisteuo, further develops the Old Testament concept and denotes the various aspects of the religious relationship into which the gospel calls people – that of trust in God through Christ. The most common characteristic of pisteuo conveys a movement of trust going out to, and laying hold of, the object of its confidence. The nature of faith according to the New Testament, rises out of testimony, authenticated by God (Jn 10:25, 37, 38; Acts 2:22; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4) – therefore faith rests upon the acceptance of that testimony, and lives accordingly. Faith and life are intimately connected in the New Testament. The three major tenets of biblical faith are as follows (Elwell, pp. 431-432):

1. Faith in God involves right belief about God – Throughout the Bible trust in God is made to rest on the belief of what He has revealed to humanity concerning His character and purposes. The frequency with which the NT Epistles depict faith as knowing, believing, and obeying “the truth” (2 Th 2:13; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet 1:22) show that their authors regarded orthodoxy (right belief) as faith’s fundamental ingredient (Gal 1:8-9). Faith and the word "belief" are often treated synonymously, which has led to Christians being called “believers.”

2. Faith rests on Divine testimony – Beliefs are convictions held on the grounds of divine testimony. Whether a particular belief should be treated as a known certainty or a doubtful opinion depends upon the worthiness of the testimony on which that belief is based. The Bible views faith’s convictions as certainties and equates them with knowledge (1 Jn 3:2; 5:18-20), not because they spring from supposedly self-authenticating mystical experience, but because they rest on the testimony of a God who “does not lie” (Titus 1:2), and is therefore utterly trustworthy. To receive His testimony is to certify that God is true (Jn 3:33), and to reject it is to make God a liar (1 Jn 5:10). The Christian faith rests upon the recognition of apostolic and biblical testimony as God’s own testimony to His Son.

3. Faith is a supernatural Divine gift – Sin and Satan have so blinded fallen human beings (Eph 4:18; 2 Cor 4:4) that they cannot discern the divine testimony of God’s Word… nor comprehend the realities of which it speaks (Jn 3:3; 1 Cor 2:14)… nor arrive at self-renouncing trust in Christ (Jn 6:44, 65) except through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 4:6). Only the recipients of this divine teaching, drawing, and anointing place their faith in Christ and abide in Him (Jn 6:44-45; 1 Jn 2: 20, 27). As such, God is the author of all saving faith (Eph 2:8; Phil 1:29).

The author of Hebrews writes, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). This passage describes the true nature of faith, and provides us with the only definition of it attempted in all of Scripture. In short, faith makes things hoped for as real as if we already had them, and it provides unshakable evidence that the unseen, spiritual blessings of Christianity are indeed certain and true. So faith is confidence in the trustworthiness of God, and the conviction that what He says is true and that what He promises will come to pass. Faith has the revelation from God as its foundation – it is not a leap in the dark.
Faith seems to involve some kind of “venture” in the minds of most people, even though talk of a “leap of faith” is wholly inaccurate. It is widely held by many that faith goes beyond what is ordinarily reasonable, in the sense that it involves accepting what cannot be established as true through the normal exercise of our naturally endowed human cognitive faculties. The nineteenth century metaphysician “Immanuel Kant” put it this way in his work, *Critique of Pure Reason* – “I have found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.” But other theistic philosophers have clearly shown that “faith is not at all contrary to reason.” The truth is, faith without reason has no biblical foundation; to deny one is to deny the other. Obviously, one should only trust with good reason, and good reason to trust requires sufficient evidence of the trustee’s trustworthiness; thus *reasonable trust has its venture-someness diminished*. Reasonable faith arguably needs to conform to *evidentialism* – the requirement generally thought essential to rationality – to hold propositions to be justifiably and evidentially true. So faith and reason are clearly interrelated. If faith consists in beliefs that have the status of knowledge, then faith cannot fail to be rational, and the evidential requirement of reasonable faith is satisfied. In the following paragraphs we will briefly examine the description and definition of faith as it is presented in Hebrews 11:1 —

**Faith is the assurance of things hoped for** – The word “assurance” – *hupostasis* – commonly appears in ancient papy-rus business documents, conveying the idea that a covenant is an “exchange of assurances” which guarantees the future transfer of possessions described in the contract. In view of this, James Moulton and George Milligan suggest the following rendering: “Faith is the *title deed* of things hoped for” (Moulton, p. 660). *Hupostasis* is frequently rendered “confidence, substance, reality, or nature” in Scripture (2 Cor 9:4; 2 Cor 11:17; Heb 1:3; 3:14) – to get a fuller understanding of this word, substitute each of these words for “assurance” in the corresponding passage. The word *hupostasis* literally means, “that which is placed under” – thus it refers to the “ground, basis, foundation, or support;” so “reality, substance, existence” are in juxtaposition to that which is unreal, imaginary, deceptive. One could say that faith imparts reality in the mind of those things that are not seen, and enables us to feel and act as if they really exist *(Barnes’ Notes)*.

**Faith works like this in every sphere** – Believing that there is a place called “London,” leads us to act as if this were so, even though we may never have been there; the belief that we will “earn money” by doing some particular work, leads us to act as if it were so; the belief that we will “inherit something genuinely promised to us by our parents,” leads us to act as if it were so. Faith gives the force of reality to what is believed. The Christian hopes to one day be perfectly free from sin, be admitted to heaven, and enjoy everlasting happiness – under the influence of faith the believer allows these things to control his mind as if they are certain future realities. God’s Word is the principal ground and foundation of hope, and faith is a confident persuasion, expectation, and assurance of those things. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the *Septuagint*, this word is translated “foothold” in Psalm 69:2. David here cries out, “I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold” – essentially he is saying there is no ground or foundation under his feet; as such, he feels as though he is about to perish. Faith gives us substantial footing – it provides us with a sure foundation upon which to stand. The first century Jewish philosopher, Judaeus Philo, said, “The only infallible and certain good thing is *that faith* which is faith towards God – it is the solace of life, the fullness of good hopes” *(Gill’s Exposition)*.

**Faith is the conviction of things not seen** – The word “conviction” – *elengchos* – occurs in the New Testament only here and in 2 Timothy 3:16, where it is rendered “reproof.” It means proof, evidence, or proof which convinces another of error or guilt. The idea behind this word is that the *evidence*
produces conviction in the mind with regard to that which is true. When a man is arraigned in a court of law and evidence is furnished as to his guilt, the idea of “convincing argument” enters the case – Barnes suggests this is the meaning of elengchos here (Barnes’ Notes). Faith in the divine declarations of Scripture provides a convincing argument to the mind of those things that are not seen. But is this a good argument? The infidel naturally says “no.” However, when a man who has never been to “London” believes that there is such a place, his belief in the numerous testimonies respecting it which he has heard and read is to his mind a “good and rational proof” of its existence, and he would act on that belief without hesitation. In like manner, the Christian believes what God says – though he has never seen heaven and has never seen his Redeemer, he has evidence which is satisfactory to his mind that his Redeemer and heaven are undeniable realities. Those declarations are to his mind more convincing proof and conclusive evidence than all the reasonings and declarations of the infidel to the contrary (Barnes’ Notes). Thus faith is the firm assent of the soul to every part of the divine revelation that it is true.

The “convincing proof” that the declarations of Scripture are indeed true, is ultimately accomplished in the believer’s mind and heart by the “Holy Spirit” – He is the Trinity’s agent of transmission and communication, and the divine author of faith and Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; Jn 5:37-47; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 16:14; Rom 15:4; Heb 12:2; 2 Pet 1:20-21; 1 Jn 2:27); without His agency, we would neither come to understand nor respond in to Him in faith. Every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God is revealed, inspired, and authoritative (Mt 4:4). Paul says, “The natural man cannot know or understand the things of the Spirit of God because such things are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor 2:14) – Spiritual is in opposition to Natural in this verse. The psalmist understood the need for God’s illumination of His Word: “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy Law” (Ps 119:18). Though God gives His children the grace to understand His Word, it is incumbent upon the believer to “accept, believe, trust, and act upon it” – such is our part in the matter of “faith” (Prv 3:5; Heb 1:17; 1 Jn 5:4).

THIS STUDY CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING BIBIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES


