

2 Faith versus Hope

Last week, we examined the difference between faith and sight—between believing and seeing. Today, we will examine the difference between faith and hope.

Herein lies one of the greatest sources of misunderstanding among Christians today. Many Christians are disappointed and frustrated with prayer because they do not receive what they think they should. Often it is because they are praying in hope, but not in faith.

The results promised by God to faith are not promised to hope. What is the difference between faith and hope? How can we tell them apart?

Faith Is in the Heart The first main difference is that faith is in the heart, while hope is in the mind. In *Romans 10:10*, Paul said, “*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*” (KJV).

True biblical faith originates in the heart. In this verse, it is expressed by the verb believe, and it is followed by the preposition “unto,” indicating the result that it produces: righteousness. The word unto implies motion or transition of some kind. Faith is never static. It always expresses itself in motion, change, and activity. A person who truly believes will be changed by what he believes. On the other hand, a person who merely accepts truth with his intellect can remain unchanged by it. Mental acceptance of truth is not faith. To produce faith, truth must penetrate beyond the conscious mind into the inner centre and source of life, which is called the heart.

Truth received intellectually by the mind may be sterile and ineffective, but truth received by faith into the heart is always dynamic and life-changing. In *Proverbs 4:23*, Solomon warned us, “*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.*”

Everything that finally decides the course of our lives proceeds from our hearts. True biblical faith proceeds from the heart and determines the way we live. It is not a mere intellectual concept, entertained by the mind; it is a real, active force at work in the heart. However, God does not leave the mind without its proper provision. Faith at work in the heart produces hope in the mind.

We see this in the definition of faith that we have already examined in Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for” (KJV). Faith in the heart is the substance, the underlying reality.

This provides a valid, scriptural basis for the hope that we entertain in our minds. In *1 Thessalonians 5:8*, Paul mentioned the different areas of our personalities that are affected by faith and those that are affected by hope: *“But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.”*

Faith and love are the breastplate, and the breastplate protects the heart. Hope is the helmet, and it protects the head, or the mind. In distinguishing faith from hope, I do not mean to belittle hope. Hope, in the biblical sense, is a confident expectation of good—a steady, persistent optimism. Hope protects our minds. Every Christian should wear this helmet of hope twenty-four hours a day. If we lay aside the helmet and begin to dwell on negative thoughts and gloomy forebodings, our minds are vulnerable to Satan’s subtle attacks.

True Christian optimism is not fanciful or unrealistic. It is not mere wishful thinking. Optimism must be based firmly and exclusively on the statements and promises of Scripture. For example, in *Romans 8:28*, we are told, *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*

If God is working all things together for our good, what room is left for anything but optimism? However, in applying this verse to our lives, we first need to make sure that we are meeting its conditions. Do we truly love God? Are we seeking to fulfil His purpose for our lives? If so, then God is working all things—every event, every situation—together for our good.

This leaves only one attitude of mind that we can logically adopt: optimism. In light of this, for a Christian to be a pessimist is, in fact, a denial of his faith. This example confirms what has already been said: faith is the only solid basis for hope. We must first truly believe what *Romans 8:28* tells us: all things are working together for our good. If we believe this, we have no alternative but to hope. But if we do not believe this, then our hope has no solid basis.

So we see that there are two forms of hope. Outwardly, they are similar, but they are different in one vital respect: one is based on faith, and one is not.

One form of hope is based on genuine faith within the heart, and it is therefore valid. Its expectation will, at the right time, be fulfilled. The other form of hope is within the mind alone, lacking any basis of genuine faith within the heart, and therefore has no scriptural validity. More likely than not, it is doomed to disappoint us. Until we have learned to distinguish between these two forms of hope, we will always be in danger of entertaining hopes that will never be fulfilled.

Faith Is in the Present Therefore, the first main difference between faith and hope is that faith is in the heart, while hope is in the mind.

The second main difference between faith and hope is that faith is in the present, while hope is in the future.

Faith is a substance, something that is already here; hope is an expectation, something that of necessity looks toward the future. I cannot tell you how many people, in the years of my ministry, have come to me and said, "I have great faith; pray for me." I remember one man who said, "I have all the faith in the world." I thought, facetiously, that this was rather unfair because it left none for the rest of us!

Seriously, every time I hear people say, "I have great faith," my heart sinks because my experience tells me that they will not get what they claim they have faith for. They may be perfectly sincere, but their desires will go unanswered because they have confused faith with hope.

It is very easy to confuse them because, as we have already seen, hope is in the mind, while faith is in the heart.

We usually know well enough what is in our minds, but it is much harder to know what is in our hearts. If a person has a strong expectation in his mind, he may mistakenly call it faith, but it is really hope.

Lacking the necessary basis of faith, he does not see the results that he expected. There is an unpredictable quality about faith that mirrors the unpredictable nature of the human heart.

Sometimes I have “felt” that I have had strong faith, but nothing has happened. At other times I have not “felt” any faith and yet have been pleasantly surprised at what God has done. The kind of faith that I can “feel” is usually mental—a substitute for the true heart faith.

On the other hand, at times there can come forth out of my heart true, effective faith that I did not know was there, with results that amaze me! Many people who say, “I believe that God will heal me,” really mean, “I hope that He will heal me tomorrow.” That is not faith, because faith is not for tomorrow; faith is something that we have now. If we keep directing our expectation toward the future, we are substituting hope for faith.

When we are seeking healing for ourselves, or praying for the salvation of an unsaved loved one, the Devil does not flatly say we will not obtain what we are seeking. He does not say, “You will not be healed,” or, “Your loved one will not be saved.” If he did that, we would not listen to him. Instead, he says, “Yes, you will obtain what you are seeking, but not today; tomorrow!” And so we never come to the moment of obtaining what we are seeking. We are willing to accept the Devil’s “Tomorrow” when we would never accept his “No!” We have hope, but not faith.

However, God does not put us off until tomorrow. He says, “*Now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation’*” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

God lives in the eternal now. To faith, He never reveals Himself as “I was,” or as “I will be,” but always as “I am.”

When faith contacts God, it is always in the present. When we apply this principle to petitioning God, it will revolutionize this aspect of our prayer lives. In Mark 11:24, Jesus told us, “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you.” When did Jesus tell us to receive what we pray for? At some undetermined point in the future? No, but at the very moment that we pray. We ask, and at the same moment we receive. Thereafter, we know that what we asked for will be granted to us. Granting still remains in the future, but receiving, by faith, takes place when we pray. Having received now by faith, we know that, at God’s appointed time, the things we received at the moment of praying will actually be granted to us. Faith to receive is in the present; the

manifestation of what we have received is in the future. But without present faith, there is no assurance of future manifestation.

In Hebrews 4:3, the writer put the act of believing one stage further back in time than the act of receiving. He used the perfect tense: *“For we who have believed enter that rest.”* Believing is here viewed as something already accomplished that does not need to be repeated. Having believed, we “enter that rest.”

There is no more struggle or anxiety. We know that what we have received by faith will in due course be manifested in experience. The receiving is our part of the transaction; the manifesting is God’s.

Summary Faith and hope are closely related, yet there are two important differences between them. First, faith springs from the heart, but hope is entertained in the mind. Second, faith is in the present; it is a substance—something we already have. But hope is directed toward the future; it is an expectation of things to come. Hopes that are based on true faith within the heart will not be disappointed. However, without this basis, there is no assurance that our hopes will be fulfilled. Hope is God’s appointed protection for our minds, but it will not obtain for us those results that God has promised only to faith. The key to obtaining what we ask from God is to receive it by faith at the very moment we petition Him. Doing this sets us free from continual struggle and anxiety, and brings us into an inner rest.