

Substance and Evidence

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The Epistle to the Hebrews, perhaps beyond all others, is designed to strengthen the faith, confidence, and assurance of God's people. This is everywhere apparent: the great quality that is extolled in chapter 11 is not zeal or godliness or love, but faith; the Israelites, we are told, failed to enter into Canaan because of unbelief (3:19); the condition of our having become partakers of Christ is this same confidence of faith, and that not only at the beginning but all the way through (3:14); and the ministry of our High Priest is aimed at securing that we do not cast away our confidence (10:35), or our confession, (4:14 R.V.), for if a man abandons his confession of faith in Christ, what is he?

Hypostasis and elenchos are both used as descriptions of faith in Hebrews 1:1.

Faith is the hypostasis of things hoped for. The word basically means

"an underlying support, foundation." Then in one direction, it develops the meaning "substance, substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality." So, for instance, Christ is the very image of God's substance (1:3, R.V.). In another direction, it develops the meaning "steadiness, firmness, conviction, assurance,"

and from that it is an easy step to the meaning "a giving substance to, a guaranteeing,"

and so "title deeds," which are instruments of guarantee and security. The choice of meaning in Hebrews 1:1 is not easy (witness the differences in the versions), but it

lies between giving hypostasis a passive meaning, i.e., "faith is the inwrought confidence and assurance that one day we shall possess the things we hope for," and an active meaning, i.e., "faith gives substance to our hopes, turning them into solid realities." If here the active meaning seems preferable, in 3:14 the passive meaning alone is possible. The expositor, rather than the grammarian, must decide.

A similar situation pertains to the word *elenchos*, which basically means "proof, proving, something which brings conviction." It is perhaps possible to give it a passive meaning, "faith is the inner conviction about things not seen,"

but the active meaning is grammatically easier, "faith is that which supplies the conviction and makes us certain of things not seen."

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