

Substance and Evidence

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LEE’S SUMMIT, Mo.—In 1930 Clyde W. Tombaugh, an astronomer at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Ariz., discovered the ninth planet of the solar system.

The sighting of Pluto was not a complete surprise. Some years before, others had discovered the evidence of the planet’s existence by observing certain irregularities in the orbits of Uranus and Neptune. Although no one had ever seen Pluto itself, they had seen the evidence of its presence and were convinced of the substance of what they had hoped to find.

All of which seems to illustrate the meaning behind the first verse of Hebrews 11: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Too often people think of faith as a blind, unreasoning belief without the relevancy of evidence. If we believe hard enough, so the thought goes, whatever we hope for will be fulfilled based upon some mysterious law of the universe.

But that’s not what Hebrews 11:1 says. That verse talks about the substance and evidence of things hoped for, but yet unseen.

Substance is something that’s substantial, something that’s real. The Greek word here is *hupostasis*, and it implies a foundation, a substantial quality, that which has an actual existence.

Evidence is something that is admissible as proof in a court of law. The Greek word is *elegchos* and is used in that way in classical Greek.

If you think God is telling you that you need to buy that new sports car, to what evidence should you look for validation?

If you don’t have any money saved up, should you proceed on faith anyway because it just feels like God wants you to have it?

Should you in faith incur a large debt in order to make the purchase, or would the evidence from Scripture about being wary of debt deter you (Proverbs 22:7)?

What if a preacher hints that you should, in faith that God will bless you, take out a mortgage on your house and send the money to his ministry? That very thing has happened. Is that an exhibition of faith?

Questions of acting in faith need to be tested in light of the Word of God, not in light of merely “stepping out on faith.” In the absence of substance and

evidence from Scripture and the facts on the ground, we can't expect God to bail us out if things go wrong.

One of the temptations Jesus faced was to "step out on faith"—actually, stepping off the pinnacle of the temple—because God, so the devil implied, had promised to send His angels to rescue Him (Matthew 4:5-6). Jesus rebutted this by pointing to the command in Deuteronomy that applies to all of us: "You shall not tempt the LORD your God."

- Before taking a leap of faith, get all the facts you can.
- Look for the substance before making a final decision.
- Look at the evidence.
- Test it against both experience and Scripture.
- Get the counsel of trusted friends and advisers.

The answer might still be unclear—rarely is anything in this life clear cut—but, if you look both ways before crossing the street, you'll have at least some basis for stepping off that curb in faith.