

Let God Be Your Confidence

As sinful humans, we must know that we are so precious or valuable to Jesus Christ that He was willing to die for us. Also as believers, we must understand who we are in Him, our legal standing in Him and our wonderful privileges in Him. For example, we are His treasured possession and totally accepted by God through Him. These are all crucial aspects of our faith in God and Jesus Christ.

But in addition, we must receive a revelation of the Bible's teachings that we must have *confidence in God and not self-confidence*. Proverbs 3:26 says God Himself should be "**our confidence**": "**for the Lord will be your confidence...**" Psalm 40:4 reveals God should be "**our trust**": "**Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust...**" Fallen, self-centred humans do not like this requirement by God. One major feature of the Fall of the first two humans was their turning to self-confidence in preference to dependent confidence in Him.

Modern humanistic Westerners despise even the thought of not being self-confident. From the moment we are born, we are taught constantly by the secular media and the secular education system the supposed crucial importance of relying on ourselves and being self-confident. Even some humanists in the modern-day church teach believers more about having faith in themselves than in God.

In the New Testament, many times we are taught to have confidence in God and not in ourselves. Relevant verses are Luke 18:9, 2 Corinthians 1:9, 1:12, 1:15, Ephesians 3:12, Philippians 1:6, 1:14, 3:3, 3:4, 2 Thessalonians 3:4 and Hebrews 3:6. Luke 18:9 speaks very critically of people who trust in themselves or are self-confident: "**Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.**" In Greek, the word "**trusted**" here is a form of the word "peitho" which in this context means "*depend on, trust in, put one's confidence in*".¹

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 reveals God wants us to have confidence and trust in Him and not in ourselves. These verses show God allowed Paul and Timothy to experience great hardships in the Roman province of Asia to teach them: "**that we should not trust in ourselves but in God...**" In Greek, the word "**trust**" in the latter verse is a form of the word "peitho" which means in this context "*to believe in something or someone to the extent of placing reliance or trust in or on*".² Confidence or trust in God includes confidence in Him working through and empowering us to be able to love Him, resist sin, be healed, have a good marriage, raise our children properly and to obey whatever else is His will for us. Self-confidence is the opposite of this.

The great revivalist preacher Charles Spurgeon said the following about self confidence and trusting in ourselves: "*A man may escape from poverty, but if he falls into **self-confidence** he has of two evils fallen into the worse...**Self-trust** before God is a **monster evil** which the Lord will not endure.*"³

2 Corinthians 1:12 shows our confidence is not based on our own wisdom but on the undeserved grace of God which provides us with His help: "**For our boasting is this: the**

¹ Bauer, page 639.

² Louw and Nida, page 376.

³ Charles Spurgeon, "Humility and how to get it", page 60.

testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.” God’s grace has many marvellous results, but one is the God-given power to obey His will (see Titus 2:11-12). Proverbs 3:5 urges: **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.”**

As stated earlier, Proverbs 3:26 says God Himself is our confidence. Is God our confidence or do we fit into the category of the type of person Proverbs 28:26 speaks?: **“He who trusts in his own heart is a fool...”** Proverbs 14:16 states: **“A wise man fears and departs from evil. But a fool rages and is self-confident.”** This verse implies the *fear of the Lord* is one *opposite* of *self-confidence*. One aspect of the fear of the Lord is standing in awe of who God is and on the basis of this, recognizing how inferior we are to Him. We *should not feel inferior to other people*. But we must confess before God and others how inferior we are to Him. After God revealed Himself to Job, Job humbled himself before God’s superiority (see Job 38:1-40:24 and 42:1-6).

Whenever we as believers fall into the sin of being self-confident instead of having God as our confidence, we must confess and turn from this sin. Also we should continually resist this sin when it tries to rear its ugly head again. With God as our confidence, there is nothing that can defeat whatever are His wonderful purposes for our lives. As Romans 8:31 stresses: **“...If God is for us, who can be against us?”**

The Biblical godly type of confidence is expressed in Paul’s words in Philippians 4:13: **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”** This is the wonderful type of confidence in which all believers should grow.

God does not want believers to be ruled by fear, anxiety, depression, self-condemnation and self-hatred. Also He does not desire them to feel inferior to any other person. Instead He wants them to be *the most confident people on Earth*. This confidence is not in themselves but in Him. If you begin to hate yourself as a result of reading what I am saying, you are misinterpreting my words. Also note feeling ashamed of your past sinful attitudes and actions is different from feeling God is condemning you to eternal punishment. (Compare Romans 6:21 and Job 42:6 to Romans 8:1.) Believers are *not condemned* by God. But they *should not be pleased about or proud* of their past sins.

Lukewarm believers full of positive confessions about self not God

In Revelation 3:15-17, Jesus said to the Laodicean church: **“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”** Here we see the churchgoers at Laodicea had become full of self-confidence, self-trust and positive confessions about themselves instead of about God. In Revelation 3:17, Jesus showed that these supposedly “super” Christians did not realize how spiritually blind and lacking they were.

In 2 Corinthians 3:4-5, Paul taught us to have *God-confidence* and *not self-confidence*: **“And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.”** The above verses show our *total sufficiency* is in *God*. He does not want us to be self-sufficient or have

faith in ourselves. Before Adam and Eve turned to sin, self-sufficiency and independence from God, they were totally dependent on Him.

Boasting in the Lord or in ourselves

The written Word of God opposes humans boasting about themselves, their character, abilities, accomplishments or successes and good works. Read Daniel 4:28-32, 4:37, John 8:54, Romans 1:30-31, 3:27, 4:2, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, 3:21, 4:7, 2 Corinthians 10:17-18, 11:17 and Ephesians 2:8-9. In 1 Corinthians 1:29, Paul said ***“that no man should boast before God”*** (N.A.S.B.). God’s Presence is everywhere and not just in heaven. So even when we boast to others on Earth about ourselves, we are sinning by boasting before God. In Romans 1:30-31, Paul reveals that boasting deserves severe punishment by God.

In 1 Timothy 3:2, Paul says boasting will be one of the sins which religious hypocrites will practice in the last days. 2 Corinthians 10:17-18 shows it is not the one who commends himself because of his own achievements or successes who is approved by God but the one whom He chooses to commend. In 2 Corinthians 11:17, Paul shows that those who boast about their own capabilities, competence and achievements are fools. In Deuteronomy 8:17-18, God warned the Israelites not to be confident in their own abilities to produce wealth.

In John 8:54, Jesus revealed that honouring ourselves means nothing. Psalm 94:4 states: ***“...all the workers of iniquity boast in themselves.”*** In Hebrew, the word ***“boast”*** here is the verb “amar” in the Hithpael form. Brown, Driver and Briggs says the Hithpael form of “amar” means “act proudly or boast”.⁴ Daniel 4:28-32 and 37 show God punished Nebuchadnezzar greatly for boasting in himself and being full of self-confidence.⁵

Proverbs 27:2 declares: ***“Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.”*** The Bible teaches us to boast in the Lord and not in ourselves. Jeremiah 9:23-24 commands us: ***“Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,’ says the Lord.”*** Read also Psalm 34:2-3. Psalm 44:8 says we should boast in God *all day*: ***“In God we boast all day long...”***

Boasting in the Lord involves boasting about what Jesus Christ is to us, whom we are in Him, what He does through us and that He is the source of every good thing we may do (see Romans 15:17-18 and 2 Corinthians 1:12). In 1 Corinthians 3:5-11, Paul boasted of what the Lord was doing through him and Apollos. Boasting in the Lord also is expressed in being confident or certain we can do all things that are God’s will, through Christ Who strengthens us. Such boasting in God also involves reminding ourselves often that all our spiritual and natural abilities are God’s gifts (see 1 Corinthians 4:7).

⁴ Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 56.

⁵ Daniel 4:17-18 says: ***“This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men. This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you.”***

Philippians 4:13 expresses one wonderful aspect of our boasting in the Lord: ***“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*** But note the *primary emphasis* in this verse is on *Christ strengthening me*.

If we boast about ourselves, we are claiming the praise and glory that belongs to God and Jesus Christ *alone*. In Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11, God stressed that He will not share His glory with another person. If we boast in ourselves, we are forgetting we are created and God is our Creator. Everything we have is a *gift* from Him (see 1 Chronicles 29:14, 1 Corinthians 4:7). The lesser emphasis is on me. John 3:27 says: ***“John answered and said, ‘A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.’”***

James 4:16 links human boasting to human *arrogance*. When instead we boast in God and in His Christ, we are giving to Him the praise and glory which are *His* by *right*. In everything we do, we should glorify and praise God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says: ***“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”***

Someone may argue, “In 2 Corinthians 10:8, 10:15-16 and 11:10, Paul boasted about himself. So we should copy him.” But note in 2 Corinthians 11:16-18, he said his boasting was *not according to the Lord* but according to *foolishness*: ***“...If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I will also boast.”***

Paul boasted here only because the false apostles, who had deceived some of the Corinthian churchgoers into receiving a false gospel, a different Jesus and a different spirit, boasted. So Paul foolishly boasted in 2 Corinthians 10:8, 10:15-16, 11:10 and 11:22-33 in order to lead these backsliding Corinthians back to the true Gospel and true Christ preached by him, Timothy and others. In 2 Corinthians 12:1, Paul said, ***“It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast...”*** In 2 Corinthians 12:11, he also said: ***“I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing.”***

2 Corinthians 7:14, 8:24 and 9:2-4 record Paul boasted about the good attitudes of others. This is different from boasting in yourself.

Also in Philippians 3:4-9, Paul reveals that if he wanted to, he had more right to boast about himself than others. But he qualified this by saying that all his successes and privileges were ***“rubbish”*** compared with having Jesus Christ. In Greek, the word ***“rubbish”*** in verse 8 is a form of the word “skubalon” which means in this context “rubbish or dung”⁶ or “worthless or unwanted material that is rejected and normally thrown out”.⁷ “Dung” is human excrement. Paul regarded all his great achievements in doing good and his special religious privileges as an Israelite as like *human excrement* or *worthless* compared with having Jesus Christ as his Lord. Is this your attitude to all your achievements and special privileges which distinguish you from others?

We should honour others but not idolise them

Even though the Word of God does not teach us to honor ourselves, it does teach us to honor others. We should honor our parents (see Ephesians 6:2), widows (see 1 Timothy 5:3) and

⁶ Bauer, page 758.

⁷ Louw and Nida, page 80.

political leaders (see Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:7). Husbands should honor their wives (see 1 Peter 3:7). Wives should show respect to their husbands (see Ephesians 5:33). 1 Peter 2:17 commands us to **“Honor all people.”** We should *honor all humans* regardless of how sinful they are living or how lowly society regards them.

But our honouring of others should always be *less* than how much we honour God and Jesus Christ. Also our honouring of others should be done because of the *God-delegated authority* He has given them as parents, political leaders, husbands and so on and/or simply because they were *created by Him*.

Honouring others does not mean making idols of them. We should *never idolize* any sports star, movie actor or actress, preacher, so-called “Saint” or any human except Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:18 says that **“in all things”**, He should **“have the pre-eminence”**. In Philippians 2:9, Paul said God **“has highly exalted Him”**, referring to Christ. In Greek, the expression **“has highly exalted”** is a form of the word “huperupsoo” which means “to regard a person as being *exceptionally* honored in view of high status”⁸ or “raise someone to the *loftiest height*”.⁹ It is no coincidence this Greek word is only used in the New Testament about Jesus Christ.¹⁰

Seeking our own glory, honour and praise

In John 7:18, Jesus revealed that those who seek their own glory or honour or praise, speak or minister out of their own fleshly self instead of from God: **“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.”** In John 8:50, Jesus said, **“I do not seek my own glory.”** In Greek, the word **“glory”** here is “doxan” which in this context means “good reputation, honor”¹¹ or “fame”.¹² The same word “doxan” is translated **“praise”** twice in John 12:43 when it says some of the Jewish rulers loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Their main concern was whether other people thought highly of them or not.

Proverbs 25:27 says: **“...so to seek one’s own glory is not glory.”** In Galatians 1:10, Paul insists that if we wish to please others, we cannot serve Jesus Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 2:4 and 6, Paul reveals he, Silvanus and Timothy did not aim to obtain glory or approval or prestige from others. How different was the attitude of King Saul who was so concerned about people approving of Him (see 1 Samuel 15:24, 15:30 and 16:6-9).

Many Christians want God to manifest more of His glorious grace to them. But note James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 stress that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. James 4:6 declares: **“But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”**

⁸ Louw and Nida, page 735.

⁹ Bauer, page 842.

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:21 teaches that believers can be *honoured vessels* of their Master Jesus Christ while here on Earth: **“Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”** Being honoured by God is different from being both loved by Him and accepted by Him through Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:10 reveals that when Jesus Christ returns, He will be glorified in His people. Romans 8:17 shows believers can be honoured together with Christ. But note these verses refer to God honouring us and not us honouring ourselves.

¹¹ Vine, page 268.

¹² Bauer, page 204.

Two unbiblical extremes

In the past, some churches encouraged churchgoers to have a *pagan ascetic attitude to themselves*. Many church leaders exhorted their people to hate their bodies and minds and to feel condemned by God most of the time. They encouraged their people to think continually about how sinful they were. Also, they taught their people to regard themselves as *worms*. These leaders did not emphasise how totally accepted true believers are by God and what are their glorious privileges in union with Jesus Christ. This was very wrong and brought bondage onto multitudes.

In the modern church, however, many have gone to the *opposite humanistic extreme*. They say it is wrong to ever mention anything about the sinfulness of our human nature without Jesus Christ and His Spirit. Paul did not agree with such humanistic garbage. In 1 Timothy 1:15, he said he was previously *“the chief of sinners”*. In Titus 3:3, he emphasised how wickedly he used to live prior to conversion: *“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”* Also read Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 11:30 and 12:9-10.

If we assume Romans 7:14-24 refers to Paul as a believer, there he emphasises that without the Holy Spirit ruling him, he is totally carnal, full of evil desires and cannot stop regularly practicing sin. In these verses, Paul recognizes the real state of his human nature without the Holy Spirit and God’s grace through Christ. In Romans 7:24, Paul said, *“O wretched man that I am.”*

As seen in Jesus’ words in Luke 18:9-14, one of the numerous problems many religious Jews in Christ’s time had was they did not see how sinful they were without God: *“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You that I am not like other men – exhortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess. And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his chest saying, God be merciful to me a sinner! I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’”* Note the tax collector above understood his need of God’s mercy better than did the Pharisee. This is because the tax collector had a much greater revelation of his own sinfulness without God than did the Pharisee.

Clinging to Jesus Christ, no matter what

Some people imagine that strong faith involves only receiving blessings and miracles for themselves all the time. But really strong faith is evidenced by people who cling to God no matter how bad the circumstances.

For example, in England in 1863 John Merrick was born. He was born with one of the most pitifully deformed bodies imaginable. As an adult, he had an enormous head of about one metre in circumference. He had large bags of brownish spongy skin across his face and hanging from the back of his head. The poor young man’s jaw was so deformed that he could not smile or show any other type of facial expression. His right arm was greatly oversized and his right

hand was more like a paddle than a hand. His legs were terribly deformed and his hip was so defective, he could only walk with the aid of a stick.

His mother had been an extremely attractive woman and found her son's appearance so grotesque, she gave him away as a child. Most people who saw him either were frightened of him or laughed at him. He often used to put a cloth on his head so people could not look at him. John could not sleep lying down because of the size of his head. He had to sleep sitting up in bed with his heavy head resting on his knees. For many years, he was shown to people at circuses and fairs as a monster. One poster advertising him said "Elephant Man can be seen inside for 2 pennies". The man who made money from this used to feed John with scraps.

Despite being treated so badly by his mother and everyone else, John never complained or said an unkind word about anyone else. He always spoke lovingly of his mother. Dr Fredrick Treves, a surgeon at the London Hospital who looked after John Merrick in his last few years, confirmed this was John's attitudes. What was Merrick's secret to facing such a dreadful life? He loved God and Jesus Christ, prayed and read his Bible regularly. Reading about his life makes me ashamed to think that I have complained about problems in my life.¹³

John Merrick had a similar heart to that expressed in Psalm 23:4: "***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.***"

Bible Study Questions

1. Which verses in the Bible teach us to have confidence in God instead of self-confidence?
2. Describe what confidence in God means.
3. What wrong attitudes to themselves do we see in Revelation 3:15-17 that the Laodicean churchgoers had?
4. Which Bible verses show it is sinful to boast about ourselves?
5. What is wrong with boasting about ourselves?
6. What does boasting in the Lord involve?
7. Which Bible verse teaches us to boast in the Lord?
8. When Paul was boasting about himself in 2 Corinthians 10:8, 10:15-16 and 11:10, did he regard this as foolishness?
9. What does the Bible teach about:
 - a) honouring other people
 - b) and idolising others besides Jesus Christ?
10. What do John 7:18, 12:43 and Proverbs 25:27 teach about seeking glory, honour and praise for ourselves?
11. Describe the two following unbiblical extreme attitudes to ourselves:
 - a) the pagan ascetic attitude
 - b) and the humanistic attitude.

¹³ Refer to "....." for more details.