

The Confident Christian (part two)

Paul the confident believer

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Introduction

This is the last study I have for you on the topic of the Confident Christian. The subject is by no means exhausted! It is more important to me that we as believers personally understand, and apply to our lives the confidence that we have that comes from God. It is one of our greatest gifts, and will transform our lives into a God honoring force that will not only affect us personally, but the world around us as well.

In this study, I'd like to continue on in the pursuit of how we as believers may become confident children of God. I understand that merely knowing something does not make it a living force in our lives. We have to have the Holy Spirit of God work on us to be able to live as the confident believer God desires us to be. My prayer for you is that after you get the notes on these studies you will deeply consider the ideas that are put forth, and earnestly seek to become a confident Christian. Speaking for myself, I desire to become a more confident believer, and I hope you do as well!

I. Why Paul is important to the believer

At the conclusion of our last study, we looked at three examples of confident believers given to us in scripture. I am sure that you all can think of other examples, not only within the scripture, but also in the lives of other believers in times past who gave their lives for the truth. The three examples, Moses, Samson, and Stephen, which I gave at the conclusion of the last study, are important for these reasons.

Moses is an example of the progressive work of God in the life of a man. It is a mirror of the progressive work of God in our lives as believers in this day. Moses, at the end of his life, is a perfect example of a confident believer. He had his head on straight!

Samson is an example to us of how, even though we often fail in being what God wants us to be, God is faithful to his own. We will in the end show our true self. After all, we are all lumps of coal surrounding the diamond of faith!

Stephen is an example of the believer who is confident in that he continues to look forward towards the things that God has for him. In this life we can never look back, we must continue to look forward in confidence and full assurance of faith. Remember Lot's wife!

A. Paul is a unique example in the growth of the believer

In the life of Paul, we have the combination of all three of these examples. Like Moses, Paul at one point had his confidence not upon the God of Israel, but rather upon the keeping of a religion. He knew the type, but not the person of God. His accomplishments in the religion of the Jews were the source of his confidence. He speaks of these things in Philippians chapter 3 verses 4-9. He concludes his thoughts on this subject with the words found in verse 9 of this chapter.

“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

Like Moses, Paul had a period of time in his life when he thought he was of no value, his falsely based confidence was seen to be worthless compared to the glory of the risen Lord. I believe this occurred in the life of Paul at the time the Lord revealed Himself to him the first time, on the road to Damascus, in Acts chapter 9. Paul, at that time known as Saul, fell to the earth was astonished and trembled. I believe at this instant Saul knew his confidence was of no value compared to the power and glory of the Lord. This is similar to the revelation of God to Moses within the burning bush, when Moses realized this same thing as evidenced by his answer “Who am I?”

As Paul began his ministry within the early part of the book of Acts, I don’t believe he had yet realized the value he had in the eyes of the Lord. This is evident in his first letters, which are I and II Thessalonians. In these letters, you will not find any personal pronouns used by Paul in regard to his authority. To me, this is evidence of the fact that at that point Paul had not yet come to understand the unique place God had for him in the revelation of the truth. From this I conclude that at this point within the life of Paul, he had not yet reached the point of the confident believer he was later to become. This is similar to the years in the life of Moses when he also was learning to place his confidence in the Lord alone.

In the later years of Paul’s life, he learned with surety to place his confidence solely upon his Lord. He learned this in a progressive manner throughout his life, similarly to Moses, and similarly to the way we believers learn the same thing. Paul gives testimony of this fact in Philippians 4:19, which was written very near the end of his life.

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

In this verse he speaks with all the confidence of a mature believer. The use of the word ‘my’ denotes a sure relationship with his Lord. The use of the word ‘shall’ reflects a confident knowledge (it is already come to pass). The need will be supplied according to the riches of Christ Jesus, who is in glory. Paul had reached a level of personal faith and confidence we all should strive for.

In the life of Paul, we have the progressive building of the confident believer, that similar to Moses, and similar to Samson and Stephen, in that Paul attained a sure belief never waned. He remained faithful to the end. We can see this in the very last letter that he wrote, II Timothy 4: 6-8. This was very close to his death at the hands of Rome.

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

In these verses Paul expresses a true confidence in the things that really matter; not in the things of men but rather with the things of God. It is Christ who has laid up this crown of righteousness for Him. Paul's confidence is also seen in the last sentence in these verses; Paul believed with his dying breath that there would be others to follow after him who would seek the life he led as a confident and faithful follower of Christ.

The life of Paul is very important to us as a believer for many reasons; one more to consider is this.

I believe that we should look at the life of this servant of God as a history of how Christ had a personal relationship with a man. The relationship of Paul with Christ is unique in that it is based solely upon faith, and through this relationship we are given a mirror in order to understand what things we should seek with our walk in Christ. Paul learned his truth in a progressive manner and is in effect a map for us to read, in order to understand how we are to progress down this same path.

The problem that many face is that they fail to understand how to properly read the road map of his life. Many claim that to hold Paul in special regard with respect to the other Apostles is to 'worship Paul'. What they fail to understand is that the revelation given to Paul is not really his revelation. The truth Paul came to understand is really the truth that the risen Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, wanted mankind to know. It would be impractical for the Lord to teach men (especially those not yet born) these things as a group. For that reason, Christ chose out Paul, a man born in due time, to perform this task. This should not be hard to understand, for as God chose Moses to instruct Israel, He chose Paul to instruct us! Paul was given to us as an example of a man who personally walked with the risen Lord, day by day, step by step, upon this earth. This gives Paul a unique position above every other man who has lived, in that he personally learned the Christian walk by faith, in order that we who seek faith may also!

I believe that the life lived by Paul is very unique, for by it Christ gave us an example of the relationship that he desires to have with men who will live by faith alone. Many people do not understand the purpose the Lord Jesus Christ had in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. It was to provide a witness to all men, of a life lived by faith alone! Because many believers do not understand the role that Christ had for Paul, they fail to understand the fullness of the resurrected Christ. They believe in the resurrection, but they fail to fully understand the ministry of the risen Lord. As a result, there are many believers in the world that never attain maturity in Christ, and live their entire lives as children, when Christ desired for them to become mature in Him!

B. In his letters we see a personal development in a progressive manner.

One thing about the reading of the Paul's letters in a progressive manner is that they provide personal insight into the development of his character. The subject of this study is the quality of confidence. How did Paul become a confident believer? If we can see how his confidence developed in a progressive manner, through his writings, maybe we will be able to understand how to become more confident believers in our own lives! If

we are honest with ourselves, we will see that the thoughts and doubts concerning our walk with the Lord were experienced at one time by Paul in his walk of faith.

It would be very difficult to time to do an exhaustive look at how Paul became a confident believer. However, I will tell you what to look for and show you some examples, so that as you study to show yourself approved unto God you may see this for yourself!

The inner-Acts books

The first thing to always bear in mind in your search is the progressive order of Paul's writings. The most important thing to remember is the difference between the inner-Acts and the post-Acts books. The inner-Acts books are I and II Thessalonians, I and II Corinthians, Romans, Galatians and Hebrews.

The post-Acts books are Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Titus, Philemon, and I and II Timothy. These books were written after the Lord God set Israel aside in Acts chapter 28. They contain the thoughts and instructions of Paul as he became a mature believer in his walk with the Saviour. In this portion of the study we will consider his inner-Acts books.

Confidence, as you remember from the previous study, is a sense of security and assurance based upon a position of strength. The believer is to stand in a position of strength because of his relationship to the Lord. Because we are believers we have this comfort in His strength. The confidence that we all lack, and must strive to possess, is that of experience, that we know without a doubt that our God will supply all our need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. This is the Philippians 4:19 confidence, the confidence of the mature believer!

In the previous message I tried as much as possible, to keep to references of scripture within what Paul knew in that time frame. That included I & II Thessalonians, and I & II Corinthians. This was in order to show you the progressive manner in which Paul came to the truth. What we are looking for within his letters are personal doubts and thoughts of Paul as he matured to a fully confident man of God. This takes some serious study and meditation upon what he said, for they are hard to find!

In the previous message we looked at the four mentioned letters that he wrote to the assembly of believers in Corinth. They included the lost letter mentioned in I Corinthians 5:9-13, and the painful letter mentioned in II Corinthians 2:9-11. The situation surrounding the delivery of what is termed the painful letter is what shows us the consternation of the Apostle Paul. As you recall, he sent this letter to them via Titus. Titus was to rejoin Paul in Troas, with the response to the teachings within this letter. Paul reflects a lack of confidence when he did not find Titus in Troas. (II Corinthians 2:13)

“I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.”

In this case a lack of confidence, doubt if you will, is shown to be present in the inner thoughts or spirit of Paul.

We see the progressive development or growth of confidence within Paul, the believer, in II Corinthians chapter 7. In this chapter Paul speaks of the return of Titus (Paul was in Macedonia), with the tidings of how his previous letter had been received with good results, in that the believers in Corinth took to heart what he had said. Paul writes of these things in II Corinthians chapter 7: 6-16. We will not read the entire passage but merely a few verses within it to show how Paul grew in confidence in his relationship with the Lord.

Verses 6-8,13 and verse 16:

“Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more. For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all. I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things.”

It is interesting to note that in this chapter we have the same words concerning the mainstays of the believer used in reference to the relationship Paul had with God and to his relationship to these believers regarding their correct reception of the truth. As a result, the confidence and self assuredness of Paul was greatly encouraged, so that he had confidence in all things. The events surrounding this painful letter of Paul and its reception by those of Corinth show us how personal confidence based upon Christ grew within the heart of Paul.

Earlier I mentioned the lack of personal pronouns in regard to Pauline authority in the Thessalonian letters. In the Corinthian letters Paul first begins to instruct believers from a position of God given-authority that is given to him alone.

I Corinthians 14:37 “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”

This also shows the growth of Paul’s confidence, in that he begins to understand that he has a place unique within the plan of God. In spite of Paul’s knowledge of this authority, he still had doubts (the events surrounding the painful letter). The consideration of both of these facts shows us the progressive development of the Paul, the confident believer.

In the Galatians letter, I find another reference to the developing confidence of Paul. In chapter one verse 20, Paul, giving an account of his meeting with the twelve concerning what he had been teaching, says this: “Now the things that I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.”

I don’t think Paul is referring to his actually lying to these people; the people he was writing to knew better than that, but he is perhaps showing a lack of confidence in that they would receive what he told them. He says to them, ‘behold’ or look, I am telling you the truth, as God is my witness!

In Galatians 6:14 I believe Paul shows a complete confidence in the truth of God.

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

In this statement, the confidence of Paul, the believer, is seen to be based upon the work of God alone. He understands that because of the cross of Jesus Christ (His death) and Paul’s relationship to it, God will not allow his confidence to be in anything except the work of Christ alone. This is the complete confidence of the mature believer. A believer who has attained godly confidence understands that his strength, his comfort, is in Christ alone. In his times of weakness, he takes consolation in this fact alone and leans not upon the weakness of his own strength.

II. How Paul became a confident believer

We have considered some examples in scripture of how the confidence of Paul, the believer, developed progressively, as displayed in his letters. It should be evident that his confidence progressed due to the trials and doubts of his spirit. I believe the many tribulations he received from the hands of his enemies played a role in it as well. Many times Paul suffered great physical harm and spiritual torment from the enemies of the cross of Christ. Yet, as a result of these things, he became a man of supreme confidence in God. He speaks of these things and the results in several places in his letters. One of them is in II Corinthians chapter 12, where he concludes the discussion with these words in verse 10:

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Paul, the believer, came to understand that the weaker he was, the stronger was his Lord. He took comfort and consolation in this fact, and so he grew into a confident believer. In our lives as believers we become more confident in the provision of God for us the more we realize that our every need relies on His provision. We need to come to the point where we expect Him to provide for us!

In Romans chapter 5 Paul speaks of the great benefit of understanding our weakness as believers. The greatest thing is that knowing we are weak we have confidence that Christ is strong. The weaker we are, the stronger He is! In verses 3-6 and 8-10, he speaks of the confidence by which we as believers can move forward in our life.

“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath

through him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

We, as believers like Paul, learn confidence through the trials and tribulations of this life. Through them we gain experience (of how God does provide for us); from this experience we gain hope (which should always be the believer’s companion). The fact that Christ died for us while we were yet enemies and sinners in God’s sight should enable us to stand in confidence. God has a blood investment in us!

Through experience and hope, developed by trial, we gain confidence!

III. The complete man, the confident believer- the post-Acts books

Paul was as we are, in that he had to learn to be a confident believer. He understood as we do that everything we have resides in Christ. He had to learn, as we must, the experience of a confident believer. As you may recall in the previous study, we learned that the mainstays of the believer are: comfort (the strength of Christ in us), consolation (which is comfort in action or we are consoled by the strength of Christ), conscience (the believer has the mind of Christ to direct him), and conversation (which is the experience of the other three in our lives, before God and men).

Confidence, a feeling of self assurance, by which we conduct our lives is a learned thing through trials and tribulations. It is the mark of a mature believer and is learned in a progressive manner in our life in Christ. We have seen how in the inner-Acts writings of Paul he was learning to be a confident believer. In his post-Acts writings, Paul learns how to be a truly confident believer; he becomes of full age in Christ. It is in these writings we find out what a mature believer is and how he is to conduct himself.

A. The truly confident believer

We have followed Paul in his inner-Acts writings in order to understand how he became a believer with full confidence in God. He is unique in history, because it is through him that a man may learn how to have a personal walk with Christ. Paul journeyed through a life where many occurrences tried his faith. With every trial, he put God to the test and his Lord came through! Through these things Paul learned to have complete and unswerving confidence in the care of his Saviour for him.

It is in his post-Acts writings where Paul comes to understand and take a firm unwavering stand on what he has learned through his experience. It is interesting that it is only in these books that he speaks of the complete man. The two times that Paul mentions the complete believer are found in the book of Colossians. They are found in Colossians 2:10 and 4:12.

We understand that this book is the second letter he wrote during this time in his life. In the earlier letter (the letter to the Ephesians), Paul revealed a truth that was not previously known by believers. He speaks of this in Ephesians chapter 3.

In this chapter he speaks of a relationship that is based solely upon faith, it involves the membership of a believer in Christ alone through the personal identification of the believer with gospel. He refers to this as “the mystery of Christ”. This was the hidden mystery which came about because of the eternal purpose of God. It is the fullness or completeness of God, that mankind could be brought to a unity in Christ alone. We will not read the entire chapter at this time. I have compiled some of the verses in order to convey the main ideas. Ephesians chapter 3:4, 5, 9, 11, 19

“Whereby, when ye read, (perhaps the letter to the Colossians) ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.”

The letters of the Ephesians and Colossians were to be shared between these two assemblies, we know this because of the instructions he gave to the Colossian believers in Colossians 4:16.

“And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”

Because of this, I believe that the subject of these two epistles is similar; that is to reveal this mystery to his fellow believers. In other words, how Paul came to understand that through the grace of God he had been made a complete man!

In Colossians 2:9-10, Paul is speaking to believers who had read of this great revelation, (first revealed in the letter to the Ephesians), and tells them that they are now made complete in Christ, and have the fullness or completeness of God within them.

Colossians 2:9-10 “For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power;”

The word ‘complete’ means: wholly finished, having all needed parts, whole, entire, full, lacking nothing.

Through the many things that had transpired in his life, Paul had progressed to a point where he relied upon nothing but Christ alone.

B. Our identity with Paul, as the complete man

We as believers see the same doubts and lack of confidence in our lives as Paul had in his, on the way to his understanding that he was the complete man. I believe that it was when Paul understood, and grasped with faith the fact that he was a complete man, that he became a truly confident believer, a believer who understood that his position was secure in Christ, and that knowing this, he was able to face any circumstance that confronted him.

We can see this by comparison of his inner-Acts writings with his post-Acts writings. In II Corinthians chapter 1:8, Paul speaks of fearing for his life because of the perils he endured while in Asia.

“For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.”

In II Timothy chapter 4:6-8 (the last letter written by Paul), Paul speaks without fear concerning his upcoming death. He instead speaks the thoughts of a truly confident believer concerning his upcoming departure from this earth. Paul faced the end of his life as a believer who fully understood, and had full confidence in the fact that his spirit and soul was secure in Christ. He was Christ’s, body, soul and spirit! This is a result of his coming to understand that he was a complete and perfect man in Christ Jesus!

Conclusion: Why we need to know these things.

It is my opinion that there are many believers who have never reached the level of maturity that they should have because they fail to understand that they are the complete and perfect man in Christ. As a result they can not become a truly confident believer! There are some believers who may understand they are complete in Christ, but never avail themselves of the confidence they should have! It is these two types of believers I would like to address as this study comes to a conclusion.

The letter that Paul wrote to the assembly of believers in Colossi addresses both of these types of believers. As you remember the Colossian letter should be read along with the letter to the Ephesians. These two letters are commentaries on one another. The main message is the introduction of the complete or perfect man who is created in Christ Jesus. As you study on your own, bear in mind that the subject of this letter is to show the doubting believer how he may become a confident believer who stands firmly upon the merits of Christ, and faces his life upon this earth by faith alone.

In the first chapter in Colossians, Paul is seeking to have these believers come to the knowledge of the complete man or the mystery hidden since the beginning of the world (as he referred to in Ephesians 3:9).

In this first chapter of Colossians, we should pay attention to the ministry of Paul’s fellow servant Ep-a-phras. He first is mentioned in verse 7. Paul refers to him as a faithful minister of Christ, in regard to his relationship with these believers. His responsibility towards them was that they might be filled with knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding and be fruitful and increase in the knowledge of God (verses 9 and 10).

We know that wisdom is knowledge in action, as knowledge without action is of no value. As these believers increase in knowledge they need to apply what they know, or increase in wisdom. The desire of Ep-a-phras, as their minister, was that they would increase in wisdom (knowledge in action) to the point where they would understand that they stand perfect and complete in **all** the will of God. That they would come to the

wisdom (knowledge in action) that they are complete in Christ. Combining 2:10a and 4:12b will show us Paul's desire and the desire of Ep-a-phras for these believers.

“And ye are complete in him, that ye may stand perfect and complete in **all** the will of God.”

To us as believers today, we need to come to this wisdom within our own minds. Remember, wisdom is knowledge in action!

The other sort of believer (the one who understands that he is complete in Christ but fails to take action (does not increase in wisdom), may be helped by the warnings given by Paul concerning the enemies that face the believer in his struggle to come to the wisdom of the complete man. They are given in chapter 2 of this letter. In verse 10 the complete man is presented, in verses 11-13, the complete man is shown to be a totally new spiritual being through identification with the gospel. A being who is complete and entirely forgiven and at peace with God. This is due to the resurrection of Christ (verses 14 and 15).

Because we are complete in Him, we are not to worry about the picture of Christ previously presented, in ordinances and rules, commandments and teachings of men. (verses 16, 18, 20-23) These things are all a shadow of what was to come, which is Christ of whom we are become a complete man. (verses 2:17 and 3:1)

An interesting thing to do is to go through Colossians and see where the words complete, full, fullness, and perfect are used. I believe this will show you what the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to understand as believers. I went through this letter with a colored pencil and highlighted the places where they are used, and received a greater understanding of the intent of this letter. I will not do this at this time but I can tell you from experience that it will be a great benefit to you to increase in your wisdom (knowledge in action) of Christ. You will be granted grace to come to the perfect, complete, and confident believer Christ desires us all to become!