

BELIEF AND FAITH

*The Lord said to Moses: “How long will these people despise me?
Will they never believe me, even after all the miracles
I have done among them?” Numbers 14:11*

*WHAT IS FAITH? It is the confident assurance that something
we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope
for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see what lies ahead.
Hebrews 11:1,2*

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FOREWORD

The words ‘belief’, ‘faith’ and ‘trust’ are often used in the context of Christianity, and sometimes are used interchangeably. But in scripture there is generally a difference in the meaning of these words.

The term ‘belief’ usually refers to the acknowledging of facts about God and about Jesus Christ.

For example –
belief about God—that he exists and is our creator, our sustainer, our Lord, to be worshipped and obeyed.

belief about Jesus—that he is the divine Son of God, our Saviour, our Redeemer, to be worshipped and adored.

So ‘belief’ typically results in the worship of God for who he is. This is belief about the Father and the Son.

Faith is more belief in the Father and the Son—belief that they will do what they promise, that their word is perfectly reliable, that we can trust them to save us eternally, to help us, to guide us, to sanctify us, and to make us more like themselves

So faith typically results in the worship of God for what he does, has done and will do.

A. BELIEF

“I am the Son of God. Don’t believe me unless I do the miracles of God. But if I do, believe them, even if you don’t believe me.” John 10:37

This is a very clear reference to the importance of ‘evidence’ so far as ‘belief’ is concerned. We typically base our beliefs on evidence—that is, upon facts and upon logic.

Jesus was saying, in effect—“How can you explain my miracles unless you accept that I am who I say I am—the Son of God, the Messiah?”

The logic is simple. If Jesus was a liar then he could not be the Son of God, who cannot lie, being perfectly holy.

So, if he was a liar, God would not work miracles through him—in which case he would not have had the divine power needed to perform the miracles.

So by the miracles of Jesus the case for his divinity is proven, and this is one of the main reasons for the miracles, as illustrated in Acts 2:22—*“God publicly endorsed Jesus of Nazareth by doing tremendous miracles through him.”*

The evidence for Jesus’ divinity is conclusive as is the evidence for his resurrection from the dead.

So the facts that Jesus is the Son of God and that he rose from the dead are not difficult to believe—in fact, it is harder to disbelieve them than to believe them, when the evidence is properly analysed.

But belief is not the same as faith.

B. THE NATURE OF FAITH

Faith is not believing about Jesus, but believing in Jesus. There are cases of people saying, “I believe all about Jesus, but I do not want to accept him as my saviour and my Lord.” They usually go on to say that they’re quite happy as they are, and don’t feel any need to change.

They clearly don’t understand the dire danger in which they place themselves by failing to act upon the truth.

Faith is accepting Jesus Christ as our own personal Saviour and Lord and trusting him to save us from the horrors of hell, and for the joys of heaven.

C. A PARABLE REGARDING FAITH

A woman was talking to a friend and said: “My husband will phone me if he is going to be late home for dinner.”

How did she know that? Is this faith? It most certainly is—because it’s belief in what is hoped for.

It hasn’t happened yet, but she knows it will. Why does she know it will happen? Because she trusts her husband to do so. Why does she trust her husband to do so?

Because he always has done so—she can trust him because he is always trustworthy in his dealings with her. She knows from experience that what he says, he will do. He does not make promises that he will not keep.

This must surely be true of Almighty God who is perfectly holy and cannot lie. We can trust God for things which haven’t happened yet, because we find him trustworthy in the things we do know about him—things which have happened.

So faith means that we believe things we cannot test or cannot see because of our trust in the person who says they are so—the person who promises them.

Faith has mostly to do with the future—it is mainly belief in the promises of God about our forgiveness, salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ. It is also, of course, about our future in this life and God's care for us.

Is this blind faith? I don't believe it is, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, I find from the readings about Christ's life, death and resurrection, that his sayings are true.

He said he would go to Jerusalem, be tried, killed, and rise from the dead on the third day. It happened just as he said.

He promised he would meet with his disciples in Galilee after his death—that they should go and wait for him there. They met Jesus in Galilee and worshipped him. He promised Paul he would be his apostle to the Gentiles, and this is exactly what happened.

These are just a few of many examples of Jesus' promises being fulfilled

Throughout the Bible God makes literally hundreds of promises, all of which were fulfilled as he promised. One of them has been fulfilled in our century—namely, the return of the Jews to Israel after being scattered among the nations.

Why would he lie about what is going to happen to us in the future—in this life and in the next? If he never lied about things we can check on, why would we not trust him in things we can't check on, because they haven't happened yet?

There are other reasons for trusting him about life after death:

(1) On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus was joined by Moses and Elijah.

“And he said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.’

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.” Mark 9:1-4

The Bible does not say that Jesus and his disciples were joined by the spirits of Moses and Elijah, but by them in person.

This means that God has demonstrated in history his ability to bring back to life people who have been dead for hundreds of years—in the case of Moses, over 1000 years. This lends great credibility to his promise to do the same for us.

Also on the mount Jesus was transfigured and took on a bodily form indicative of what we will receive in our final heavenly state. This is another dramatic demonstration by God of his power to transform us as Paul wrote:

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” Philippians 3:20,21

(2) Jesus came back to life in full physical form after his death.

Here God is demonstrating in very practical ways his creative power to materialise human beings out of thin air, as Jesus entered and left locked rooms, disappearing and reappearing at will. God didn't need to do this in order to communicate with the disciples and inform them of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus could have spoken from heaven as he did with Paul.

The example of Thomas is a most powerful indication of God's desire to convince us of his mighty power to save us and to transform us.

“Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” John 20:27-29

This last phrase can certainly be applied to us. We do not see the risen Christ, but we believe in him, And we can believe in him because the evidence is so overwhelming. Our God is so gracious that he leaves us in no doubt whatsoever—he overproves his mighty power to save and to give eternal life.

And, of course, we can trust Jesus because he died for us to show us how much he loves us. He could not do more to prove how trustworthy he is.

So faith is believing God's promises as stated in the Bible. In particular, his promise that if we believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we will be saved.

Faith is believing God will actually do what he says because he is trustworthy and true.

It is far from blind faith—it is very open-eyed faith, based upon the soundest evidence of trustworthiness and historical facts.

D. WHERE DOES OUR FAITH COME FROM?

The Bible says the Holy Spirit opens our minds to the truth. But what causes the Holy Spirit to do this?

(1) One way is for the person to be prayed for by others.

God can overcome Satan and open our eyes. Prayer is one way by which this can be brought about.

John Wesley said, “God does nothing except in answer to prayer.” This is a very bold statement—perhaps too bold, but it illustrates a point. God will answer prayer, especially if two or three pray together in faith.

(2) Another way is for the person to genuinely seek the truth. Jesus said, “Seek and you will find.”

Those who sincerely seek and really want to know the truth will find it. However, most people make up their minds, under Satan’s power, that they do not believe, before they even look at the evidence. This is mainly because it just doesn’t suit them to believe—they’re happy the way they are, and have no motivation to change. Or they may be sceptics and proud of being so—they like to remain that way.

As a result of this lack of ‘seeking’, Satan’s veil remains, and they are kept from the truth.

(3) Another way is for a person to come to such a desperate state in life that they cry out to God for help, and God responds. This in effect, is an answer to their own prayer, implicit in their cry for help.

This happened to Charles Colson of Watergate fame, and many more souls have been saved as a result—through his ministry

(4) At other times, people can call out to God, “If you are there, show me, and I will believe”, and God responds by a sign.

(5) It is also clear that God sometimes takes the initiative and calls people to himself. This is perhaps most graphically illustrated in revivals, when often thousands of people together fall down before the Lord, confess their sins, and are saved.

Rees Howells, the great Welsh evangelist, went to South Africa and over 10,000 people came to the Lord. God promised him this by speaking to him before he left Britain.

These are unusual events but do illustrate an initiative on God’s part which seems to be quite separate from the other points already discussed. There are possibly other ways for the veil to be lifted but perhaps sufficient has been said to give a reasonable coverage of the subject.

E. HOW DO WE MAINTAIN OUR FAITH?

We need to recognise that we are weak vessels and need a lot of spiritual food to keep spiritually healthy, just as we need good food to be physically healthy.

This food is:

- * firstly, feeding upon the word of God daily
- * prayer
- * association with other Christians in worship, Bible study, etc.
- * reading Christian literature

- * being active in the service of the Lord according to our gifts and talents

F. CONCLUSION

Suffice it to say in conclusion, that faith is a gift of God. It is a fruit of the Spirit.

If we lack faith we can ask God to increase our faith.

If we then diligently apply ourselves to the Bible, seeking God's Kingdom and his righteousness above all else, all we need will be given to us.