

What does the Bible mean by Faith?

By Dr. Dave Geisler

Many people today believe that Biblical faith is blind adherence to unprovable fables, however this is not how the Bible describes Biblical faith. The Old and New Testament writers collectively provide us with substantial evidence to support the claim that God does exist and that He has revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament gives examples of proof for what was asserted, including God's blessings and provision for Israel (Gen. 12:3; Ps. 67:7) and the miracles performed by His prophets Moses (Exodus 7: 5) and Elijah (I Kings 18:20-38). The New Testament also shows how the miracles performed by Jesus and his Apostles provided substantial evidence to authenticate the message of the Christian faith that the Church is built on. (2 Cor. 12: 12; John 20:31; Acts 5:12-16; Heb. 2: 3-4)

Therefore the Bible does not imply in any way that the Christian faith is a "blind" faith. In fact what separates Christianity from other major religions in the world is that Christianity stands or falls on one single event in history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul proclaimed that if the resurrection did not occur, then Christianity is worthless (I Cor. 15:14).

So what part then does evidence play in Biblical Faith?

What is important is not faith itself, but rather the object of our faith. According to the Apostle Paul, if Christ did not die and rise from the dead, then the Christian “faith is useless” (I Cor. 15:14). Paul warns us that the object of our faith must be real and true. Just because we are sincere in our beliefs about something, doesn’t mean that there is any merit to our particular belief.

There are many foolish things taught today. As a result, we would be wise not to act upon a particular belief if there is no evidence to support that belief. For example, most of us would acknowledge that we should never walk into an elevator without looking to see if there is a floor to the elevator, otherwise our unwarranted faith may have some serious consequences. Likewise, most of us would acknowledge that we should never trust a doctor to operate on us for open heart surgery without first finding some evidence that he or she is a competent doctor. In the same way, we should “check out” a religious truth claim before we embrace it as true and commit our life to that belief. Therefore, we need to make sure there is evidence for the beliefs we hold before we commit to that idea or trust someone for our welfare.

Biblical Faith then is putting our trust in what we have good reason to believe is true about God and Jesus. However Biblical faith is more than just believing the fact that Jesus is the Messiah but is a decision of the will. It is much more than an intellectual agreement about who God is, His revelation of Himself in Christ and Christ’s payment of the penalty for my sin through His death. James points out that the demons “believe that” God does exist (James 2:19) but

demons certainly do not “believe in” God. To broaden the illustration, one may have good reason to believe that some person would make a great spouse. This evidence however does not force you to marry that person but it is a decision of the will not merely the intellect. In the same way, Biblical faith involves more than just intellectual agreement. It also involves a personal commitment to the person of Christ, which is a decision of the will. This is the same thing as “believing in” Christ. James also points out that this commitment to submit to Christ should result in a change as to how we live our lives (James 2:20).

Faith in Christ means trusting Christ’s death on the cross as sufficient payment for one’s sins and living his life in accordance with this truth. Biblical faith then is more than an intellectual agreement that Jesus really is the Messiah but involves a daily commitment to and trust in the God of the universe, who revealed himself in the person of Christ. A true Biblical faith then will result in God’s transforming power in our lives, which will change us from the inside out (Romans 12:2: Phil 2:13).

Biblical Faith also involves trusting God when I do not have strong intellectual reasons to do so because He is trustworthy. This may seem unwise yet if most of us were honest, we would have to admit that many of our every day decisions in life do involve a certain degree of faith in people, principles, or things that we can never prove in a court of Law as totally reliable. We truly cannot cross a street, drive a car, sit in a chair, or choose a spouse without some degree of faith or trust. In the same way, Biblical faith involves trusting God when we

have incomplete understanding. Yet we can trust God in areas we do not fully understand because we have good reasons to believe that God is trustworthy. There are some things that God has revealed to us in His Word that go beyond our ability to fully understand by reason alone. For example, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity or the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ cannot be known by reason alone. We may know from reason alone that God does exist, but we could never know from reason alone that this God exists eternally in three persons. These are things that God specifically revealed to us in His Word and must be taken by sheer faith. Yet certainly this is not mere blind faith because we already have good evidence that God is trustworthy. Biblical faith, therefore, includes evidence and reason, sometimes goes beyond reason, but never goes against reason (2 Cor. 18). Biblical faith goes beyond reason because God's thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9). But God has revealed to us enough of Himself and His faithfulness so we can trust Him even if we do not fully understand everything He says. As a result we can trust God for what we don't know because of what He has revealed to us that we do know.

What are the implications of this truth!

Each person must make two key decisions regarding the person of Christ. First, he or she must decide if there is good evidence to "believe that" Jesus is who He said He is. If one makes the first decision, this still leaves them to make the most important decision. Each person must also decide whether to submit

their will to God (believe in) and follow Him. It is amazing to me to realize that the God of the Universe loves us so much (John 3:16: 2 Pet. 3:9) that He is willing to give us the opportunity to turn toward His love or from His love. Every person then must come to a decision about these two questions before he or she can truly exercise Biblical Faith.

Rev. Dr. Dave Geisler is President of Meekness and Truth Ministries and Adjunct Professor at Singapore Bible College.

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