

Faith

BELIEF AND BELIEVING

One of the most important considerations in the Christian way of life is the subject of the believer's faith. Several questions are always paramount in a person's thinking about faith, such as:

What is faith?

How does a person exercise faith?

How can we have stronger faith?

You will occasionally hear a person say something like this, "I do not believe anything that I can not see or feel." Or, "You really can not prove that there is a God, or that Jesus was what He claimed to be; and I'm not going to believe anything that I do not know is true!"

When a person says that he refuses to believe anything that is not proved, he ignores the fact that everyone believes unproved facts every day. If people were not willing to place their confidence in unproved facts, the whole world would grind to a halt. No one would be able to move.

In practice, a person employs the mental process of faith dozens of times every day, just to carry out life's routines. Faith is a standard operating procedure of human life. The discussion in this essay will show that God has made faith an integral part of human existence so that anyone in the world can have salvation and can experience Christian growth with all of its benefits and blessings.

Because Bible study is, in part, a study of past events and of ancient writings, the first section of this paper is a discussion of the uses of faith in the study of history. The intention of the whole paper is to give a Christian added confidence in the use of faith, and to provide a fairly thorough treatment of what the Bible says about the subject. Some of the ideas herein can be used effectively in witnessing to skeptics or to those whose ideas are hazy about salvation by faith.

The second section shows how faith is used in learning Bible truth, and it includes a comparison between the three systems of learning, empiricism, rationalism and faith.

The third section deals with what the Bible says about how Christian faith is developed and strengthened.

The fourth section contains an etymological study from the original Greek and Hebrew words used in

the Bible which are translated as faith or as some equivalent.

We shall see that as a mental activity Christian faith is no different from everyday faith. The unbeliever can use ordinary faith, the willingness to believe something, to accept the Gospel message and obtain salvation. The believer can use faith to acquire knowledge of Bible doctrine and to make application of those principles in his daily walk with the Lord.

Faith and the Study of History

A person who studies the past, and who writes about it, is continually involved with the concept of faith. First, he must decide which of his sources are reliable enough to be believed, for only with credible sources can the historian have any chance of reconstructing accurately an event or social situation.

Then, the historian must express his thoughts in writing in a manner calculated not only to inform his readers but also to encourage their belief, their faith, in the propositions he sets forth. A careful student of history will have faith only in historians who meet his standards for honesty.

THE COMMON HISTORICAL BIAS

But there are many historians, and other people, of course, whose opinions about historical facts are colored by their religious and anti Biblical prejudices. Many people have adopted a viewpoint which makes it impossible to view historical data objectively, especially data which deals with Biblical events and issues. This false viewpoint, a set of biased presuppositions, includes the following conclusions:

- There is no personal God.
- Therefore, there is no supernatural and miracles are not possible.
- We live in a closed system, the earth with its human race, into which no outside force can intrude, nor over which any God has control.

A skeptic holding these views approaches the study of the Bible knowing, for example, that Christ did not rise from the dead, because these things just cannot be. These conclusions themselves, however, amount to an exercise of strong faith, albeit in the wrong direction. Instead of beginning his study with the recorded historical data and an open mind, this individual precludes a

balanced approach by a sort of metaphysical speculation.

VALID HISTORICAL METHODS

All arguments and systems begin with presuppositions including the Christian system. This does not mean that all presuppositions that one might adopt are equally desirable. In considering any important idea, it is better to begin with presuppositions of method, which will yield truth, rather than with presuppositions of substantive content, which assume a body of truth already.

No study of the past has a right to assume a closed system of causation. Historical events are unique, and the test of their factual character can be the only acceptable documentary approach.

What does the historian do, then, when he experiences a surprise which runs counter to all his expectations, counter to his convictions, against even his culture's whole understanding of truth? Why, he must say that it is surely possible; because, for the critical historian, nothing is impossible! It is not the objective of the historian to construct a history from preconceived notions and then to adjust it to his own liking. He must, rather, reproduce history from the best evidence, and let it speak for itself.

History, then, is knowledge of the past based on testimony. And the plausibility, the believability, of history depends on the trustworthiness of the witnesses, not upon the erudition of the historian.

HISTORY AND BIBLE STUDY

Studying the Bible in the twentieth century involves a great deal of intense historical scholarship. One begins by placing some confidence, or faith, in early Christian witnesses and authorities. This confidence may very well be tentative at first; and one may test each hypothesis thoroughly before going deeper into study, certainly before going out on a limb by making dogmatic statements. At each decision point in study, faith must be exercised.

One does not have to prove beyond a shadow of doubt that Jesus Christ was God. What one does is weigh the evidence and evaluate the pros and cons. The results of careful study show that Christ must be who and what He claims to be. In fact, many people have begun studying the claims of Christ, intending to refute the Bible statements,

only to end up confirming what they had originally set out to disprove!

A criterion of absolute truth would wipe out all knowledge, because a person could never find a place to stand to begin his study. The Christian begins by accepting the proposition that the Bible is the word of God. Then, as he learns each new doctrine, he makes decisions. First, he decides whether to believe the doctrine as he understands it. Then, he decides whether to apply the doctrine in his life through believing the teaching, by claiming the promise or by obeying the commands given. As each new idea is tested and put into practice, it becomes part of the foundation for further learning and spiritual growth.

HOW THE BELIEVER USES FAITH

FAITH COMPARED WITH EMPIRICISM AND RATIONALISM

The Biblical concept of faith is that it amounts to complete confidence in something for which there is no empirical or rational proof available. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

HEB. 11:6

A person is said to have faith in something if he has believed it without having had a physical demonstration of it or a logical explanation of the truth behind it. Saying this another way, a person who has believed something without having it proved to him has exercised faith. Faith is, therefore, distinguished from the two other methods of learning, empiricism and rationalism.

Empiricism is a technical word which refers to the using of scientific methods to learn something or to prove something. The scientific method relies on the five senses for the proof of propositions. And each experiment produces either verification or refutation of the idea or point of view. A child who does not take his mother's word for the fact that the stove is hot may attempt empirical proof by touching the stove himself. He receives immediate experimental verification of the truth of his mother's statement.

The term rationalism is used to describe the method of arriving at proof through the logical method. This is proof by logical process of reason. In rationalism, logic produces documentation or refutation of a point of view.

Both empiricism and rationalism are very useful in learning; but neither is equivalent to faith.

FAITH USED IN LEARNING

Faith can also be described as a method of perception, or learning, which accepts an established criterion as the basis of reality. It is very convenient, and necessary, to use faith in this way. If we were to demand rational or experimental proof of everything stated to us, we would never get anything done.

Suppose you were using a mathematics textbook which made the statement, "The sum of the angles of a plane triangle is 180 degrees." Using faith, you could accept that statement as a true fact, and you could build your study of triangles using this fact, even though you had not seen a formal proof of its validity.

To insist upon proof of this statement, however, would mean that you would have to take a course in geometry where the formal, logical proof of this statement is developed. But if you were a total skeptic in the subject of triangles, you would not even be able to begin the geometry course, because you would not be able to accept the statement, by faith, that the shortest distance between two points on a plane is a straight line, one of the foundational axioms of plane geometry. You can see that faith is very useful, even indispensable, in every learning situation.

To this point in the study of faith, then, we have developed a partial understanding of what faith is and how it is used. Faith is:

- Complete confidence in something which is not subject to logical or experimental proof
- Acceptance of an established criterion as the basis of reality

The Christian's Faith in the Bible

The established criterion which the Christian accepts by faith is that the Bible is the word of God. The Christian accepts the Bible as being what it claims to be reflecting the mind of Christ. By adopting this presupposition, the believer has a basis from which to delve into the whole Bible with its hundreds of concepts vital to all aspects of human life.

The faith system of learning Bible truth is the only fair way for man to know and approach God. No one can claim personal credit for having believed the Bible, because even a person of very low intellectual ability can believe and understand Bible truth. Therefore, the faith system for acquiring doctrinal knowledge is perfectly fair and compatible with grace. It is the only method of

learning which is commonly available to all members of the human race.

The value of faith does not lie in the strength or intensity with which a belief is held. Every confidence man depends upon his victim's believing very strongly in lies. The merit of faith lies, rather, in the idea or object which is believed. Faith is valid only when it has a valid object.

Saving faith has as its object the Lord Jesus Christ and His substitutionary work on the cross for man's salvation, John 3:36; Acts 16:31. A belief in any other plan of salvation, however strongly and emotionally held, will prove to have been faith in an invalid and useless object, Acts 4:12.

Living faith has as its objects the facts, promises, and commands of the Bible, Matt. 4:4. Faith in Bible principles is the only method which will unlock spiritual truth, I Cor. 1:18 to 2:16. The believer who is growing spiritually receives continuous verification that the divine principles upon which he bases his life are perfectly valid, Eph. 4:11-16.

How to have strong faith

The strongest, best established faith is that which is the result of Christian edification, that process by which a believer is rooted and built up in his spiritual life, Col. 2:6,7. One of the most important results of Christian growth is the progressive increase in the believer's ability to use faith. Several important factors in the development of Christian faith are listed here along with some representative Bible passages.

- Faith requires the continuous intake of truth from the word of God. "...faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God...", ROM. 10:17.

Faith is not a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

- Faith must be exercised daily by using faith rest principles in day to day living, "...we who have believed do enter into rest...", HEB. 4:1-3; and by using faith and patience in all situations, "...the testing of your faith produces endurance.", JAMES 1:3.
- Applied knowledge overflowing from the human spirit, which refers to all witnessing, requires the exercise of faith. "...that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith...", EPH. 3:17-20.
- Moving towards maturity includes the development of great faith. "...this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith...", 1 JOHN 5:4, 5; HEB. 11:6.

- Daily occupation with the Lord Jesus Christ completes faith. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith...", HEB. 12:2.
- Undeserved suffering both tests and strengthens faith. "...the proof of your faith...", 1 PETER 1:7, 8.

The word faith in the Bible

In the Greek language of the New Testament there are five words which are rendered faith in the King James Version. They are:

πιστις, (pistis), noun, meaning faith; faithful; reliable; that which is believed, and, with the definite article, doctrine.

πιστος, (pistos), adjective, meaning dependable; inspiring of trust; believing.

πιστευω, (pisteuo), verb, meaning to believe; to be convinced.

πειθω, (peitho), verb, meaning to obey in the present tense; to be persuaded in the aorist tense; to have confidence in the perfect tense; faith in all tenses.

πιστωω, (pistoo), verb, meaning to show oneself faithful; to feel confidence.

In the Hebrew of the Old Testament there are ten words which are rendered in the King James Version as faith or as some equivalent idea of belief or trust. They are:

AHMAN, verb, to believe without merit

EIMOON, noun, belief; faithfulness

EIMOONAH, noun, truth; steadiness; doctrine; faith

AHMEIN, noun, truth; doctrine

OHMEIN, noun, faithfulness

EMETH, noun, one of the strongest words for truth

BAHTAK, verb, the faith rest verb which was originally a word used by wrestlers for giving someone a body slam. See PSALM 37:3; 91:2. It means to slam your troubles on the Lord, and it means faith in the sense of the function of the Faith rest principles. This verb is used extensively in the Old Testament.

KAHSAH, verb, PSALM 57:1, used of a rabbit fleeing from a desert fox and finding refuge in the cleft of the rock where the fox can not reach him. The word means to believe in the sense of finding refuge in the word or taking shelter in the Lord.

YAHKAL, verb, to trust in circumstances of pressure or suffering. JOB 13:15; LAM. 3:21, 24.

KAHWAH, used in the sense of binding or twisting strands of fiber together to make a rope. Threads which are weak in themselves are woven together into strength. The meaning is that we are weak and can be broken, but woven into the Lord and His word, we cannot be broken. ISA. 40:31; LAM. 3:25.

Grace Notes is a ministry of Austin Bible Church, Austin, Texas

<http://www.austinbiblechurch.com>

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There is no charge for Grace Notes materials. The work is supported by Christians who pray for the ministry and share in the expenses.