

Belief vs. Faith

Hebrews 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

Galatians 5:6 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*

Faith-the Journey

1. Faith and intellectual understanding are not the same thing. They do not develop through the same processes. They do not have the same goal. In our western discipleship, we often talk about faith but what we are describing is belief.

2. Christ is the goal toward which we walk by faith. One person can do much for another, but he cannot give him faith.

3. Faith expects victory. First, faith expresses an overcoming attitude and ultimately a victorious outcome. The believer who walks in faith is finished with the future before he begins with the present.

1 John 5:4 (MSG) *Every God-begotten person conquers the world's ways. The conquering power that brings the world to its knees is our faith.*

4. Hearing, comprehending, and agreeing is what modern philosophy and theology understand as faith. But this is really what is called having an opinion, or what in everyday language we call "to believe." All this would be entirely proper if Christianity were a teaching. But it's not. Faith is in a person, not a doctrine.

5. Drawing near to God is not achieved by an intellectual pursuit of truth, but by a passionate pursuit of a PERSON. Intellect is certainly involved, but it cannot bring us to our destination of intimacy and companionship with God. I want to give you four major statements which help us to identify the deception afflicting Christianity in American culture as we seek to discern the difference between *belief and faith*.

A. OPINIONS, OR OUR DOCTRINES ABOUT GOD, ARE PART OF THE ROADWAY TO GOD, BUT THEY ARE NOT THE DESTINATION.

James 2:19 *You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.*

Our faith must move from mere *belief* in a proposition to *love* for a Person.

B. FAITH IN A PERSON RUNS DEEPER THAN FAITH IN A PROPOSITION.

Our doctrines are like garments which clothe our relationship with God. They can be changed as we grow. Faith in any doctrine, no matter how true, is not the heart of the gospel. To make it so is to give a person a stone when they asked for bread.

C. NOT OFTEN DOES THE BIBLE CALL US TO MERELY AGREE WITH AN OPINION; BUT WE ARE EVERYWHERE CALLED TO TRUST IN A PERSON.

Proverbs 3:5 *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.*

2 Timothy 1:12 *For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*

Trust in a Person is either the source or the goal of every Christian doctrine. The gospel at its center is not a series of propositions, but an experiential relationship opened between the human soul and the Divine Being we call God in Jesus Christ.

D. THE BIGGER PROBLEM IN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY TODAY IS NOT THAT OUR THINKING IS UNREASONABLE, BUT THAT OUR EXPERIENCE IS UNREAL.

Spiritual experience of God is often absent, ignored, feared, ridiculed, doubted, or rejected. But the worth of our doctrines depends upon the reality of our experience.

Harry Emerson Fosdick said, "The peril of religion is that vital EXPERIENCE shall be resolved into a FORMULA OF EXPLANATION, and that men, grasping the formula, shall suppose themselves thereby to possess the experience. Those who best define God, may understand him least."

Loving God—Why is it important?

Loving God is important because it's the beginning, the center, and the goal of everything good.

1. **Because He First Loved Us**

At the heart of the Christian faith is this stunning truth: "*We love because He first loved us.*" (1 John 4:19) Loving God is our response to a love that came first — a love that chased us, chose us, and changed us. It's not obligation; it's overflow.

2. **Because It Aligns Us with Our Purpose**

We were made **by Him** and **for Him** (Colossians 1:16). That God-shaped space in us? Only He fills it. Loving Him connects us back to the One who breathed life into us. It's not about religion — it's about **relationship** and **realignment** with our Creator.

• **Because It Transforms Everything Else**

When we love God deeply: our values shift, our priorities realign. Our love for others grows. And because **He is worthy!**

It's like putting on the right prescription for our glasses — everything else comes into focus. Jesus even said *all the law and the prophets hang on this love* (Matthew 22:40). That means **loving God is the root**, and from it grows every other good thing — justice, mercy, truth, kindness, joy.

4. **Because It Brings Life to the Soul**

Loving God isn't just about *eternal life later* — it's about **abundant life now**. Psalm 16:11 says: "*In Your presence there is fullness of joy.*" Loving God draws us into His presence, where peace replaces panic, and hope silences fear.

5. **Because It's the Fuel for Loving Others**

Jesus linked love for God and love for others — they're not rivals, they're **reflections**. The more we love Him, the more we see His heart for people — and our love for others becomes **more patient, more powerful, more pure**. God's love changes us. It changes everything. Because He is worthy!