

Belief vs. Faith

Faith-the Journey

1. Faith and intellectual understanding are not the same thing. They do not develop through the same process. 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 that 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. God is not the SUM of my doctrines; he is the AUTHOR of my doctrines.

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."