

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF FAITH PART 1

The concept of Biblical faith has fallen into a maze of confusion.

- a. Faith, according to Soren Kierkegaard, is a leap into absurdity; a totally irrational decision we make -- not because there is good reason to do so, but in the face of good reason not to do so.
- b. Faith, according to John Calvin and other theologians of the Protestant Reformation, is a gift of God, an overwhelming of the inner man in decision for God which is accomplished by an infusion of the Holy Spirit.
 - ▶ It is God's decision made for His chosen one which regenerates him and sets him apart as a child of God
- c. Faith, according to Alexander Campbell, is something far less mystical and complex than all of this; faith is simply the acceptance of testimony.
 - ▶ Rather than being a decision God makes for us, it's a decision we make based upon reliable and trustworthy evidence

But what is the Biblical concept of faith?

- a. How do the Bible writers use the word "faith?"
- b. And how did the apostles and evangelists of the 1st century bring people to have faith?

1. The Bible gives its own definition of "faith" in Heb 11:1.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (KJV)

- a. And by consulting several other translations we are able to bring the Bible definition of "faith" into sharp focus:
 - ▶ **"Now faith is assurance (hupostasis) of things hoped for, a conviction (elegchos) of things not seen (ASV), (NAS)**
 - ▶ **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (NIV)**
 - ▶ **"Faith is being sure of the things we hope for, being convinced of the things we can't see" (Beck's)**
 - ▶ **"And faith is of things hoped for a confidence, of matters not seen a conviction" (Young's)**
- b. Of these several translations, probably the best and clearest is the NIV: **"Now faith is being sure (hupostasis) of what we hope for and certain (elegchos) of what we do not see."**
 - ▶ *hupostasis*, when used subjectively, is to be understood as assurance of mind, conviction, confidence, or certainty (as in **2 Cor 9:4, Heb 3:14**)
 - ▶ *elegchos*, when used subjectively, is the attitude of being convinced by the evidence -- not the evidence itself; it is being sure
 - See Vincent's Word Studies, Vol. 4, pg 510, on **Heb 11:1**
 - Both *hupostasis* and *elegchos* convey the idea of certitude of mind (see F. F. Bruce, Epistle to the Hebrews)

2. Actually, "believing" is knowing.

To profess that the evidence is clearly convincing, and therefore to affirm that you believe it, is knowing in the full sense.

- a. We are told by some theologians that we may affirm we "believe" that God

exists, but we cannot affirm we “know” that God exists.

- ▶ The assumption is that the claim to know implies certainty (which in turn demands evidence or reason), but to believe is only an act of the will -- a psychological disposition: I believe simply because I want to believe
- ▶ This view, however, is not the Biblical view.
 - In the language of the Bible, a person may affirm that he “believes” the same thing that he can affirm he “knows” -- and be just as certain of one as the other
 - + Jn 4:42 -- “Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we **believe**, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we **know** that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.’”
 - + Jn 6:69 -- “Also we have come to **believe** and **know** that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
 - + Jn10:38 -- “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; 38 but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may **know** and **believe** that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”
 - + 1Tim 4:3 -- “forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who **believe** and **know** the truth.”
- ▶ “believing” and “knowing” are not mutually exclusive

A person may come to know a given thing by any one of four ways.

- a. **Sense experience** -- through the five senses.
- b. **Discursive reasoning** -- progressing from evidence to the conclusions warranted by the evidence.
- c. **Intuition** -- “a truth perceived by the mind directly and necessarily as so (Webster’s Dictionary).
 - ▶ Example: a thing cannot be, and not be, at the same time
 - ▶ We say such truths are “self-evident”
- d. **Testimony of an unimpeachable source** -- the testimony of one in a position to know whereof he speaks, and of such character and integrity that he will accurately report what he knows.
- e. And underlying all of this is the **Law of Rationality**: We must draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence.

And the question, “Shall we be rational, or irrational?” is a question for us all.

- a. In things we claim to know by sense experience, shall we be rational, or irrational?
- b. In things we claim to know by reason, shall we be rational, or irrational?
- c. In things we claim to know by means of testimony, shall we be rational, or irrational?

Summary: Faith is being sure and certain of a thing for good and sufficient reason.

- a. Faith is being sure and certain based upon evidence.
- b. Faith is knowing based upon evidence.

3. “Faith,” as defined in Hebrews 11:1, is demonstrated throughout the Bible.

That the New Testament writers intend for us to understand “faith” in this way is made abundantly clear in many New Testament passages

- a. Jn 10:37-38 -- “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;

38 but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”

▶ discursive reasoning

- b. Jn 20:30-31 -- “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”
 - ▶ testimony of an unimpeachable source
- c. Lk 1:1-4 -- “Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”
 - ▶ testimony of an unimpeachable source
- d. Ac 1:1-3 -- “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”
 - ▶ discursive reasoning
 - ▶ testimony of an unimpeachable source
- e. Ac 17:2-4 -- “Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” 4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.”
 - ▶ discursive reasoning
- f. Ac 18:4 -- “And he **reasoned** in the synagogue every Sabbath, and **persuaded** both Jews and Greeks.”
- g. Ac 18:19 -- “And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and **reasoned** with the Jews.”
- h. Ac 24:25 -- “Now as he **reasoned** about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.’”
- i. 1 Th 5:21 -- “**Test** all things; hold fast what is good.”
 - ▶ NASB: “But **examine** everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;”
 - ▶ ASV, KJV: “**Prove** all things; hold fast that which is good;”
- j. Heb 2:3-4 -- 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?
 - ▶ testimony of an unimpeachable source
 - ▶ discursive reasoning
- k. 1Jn 1:1-3 -- “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-- 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life

which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

- l. Rev 2:2 -- “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have **tested** those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;”
 - ▶ “tested” -- “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (2 Cor 12:12)
- m. 1 Cor 15:1-11 (testimony of an unimpeachable source)
 - ▶ 1 Cor 15:12-18 (discursive reasoning)
 - ▶ 1 Cor 15:30-32 (inductive argument)

Conclusion.

God does not call upon anyone to make a “leap of faith.”

- a. The Bible writers have not asked anyone to believe anything without convincing evidence.
- b. And being true to the Biblical concept of faith is believing only what is warranted by the evidence.

Faith is not a supernatural gift from God.

- a. Faith comes by hearing the word of God.
 - ▶ Rom 10:17 -- “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
 - ▶ Faith is something we “do”
 - Jn 6:28-29 -- “Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ 29 Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’”
 - Ac 16:30-31 -- “And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ 31 So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”

If the evidence/testimony is destroyed, rational faith is made impossible.

- a. Our faith can be no stronger than the evidence/testimony.
 - ▶ Lk 16:29-31 -- “Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31 But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’”
- b. And our faith can be no stronger than our knowledge of the evidence/testimony

Bill Walton
1629 Rock Bluff Road
Hixson, TN 37343
(423) 842-0460
bw1944@bellsouth.net

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF FAITH PART 2

In this second lesson on the Biblical concept of faith I want to draw a clear distinction between “faith” and “personal knowledge.”

- And, in order to stimulate your thinking, I want to challenge you with a question:
- a. How do you know that the woman you accept as being your mother is, in fact, your natural mother who gave birth to you?
 - b. If that seems to be an absurd question, let me remind you of the case that was brought before King Solomon in the Old Testament (**1Kgs 3:16-28** -- a case of 2 women claiming the same baby)
 - ▶ And don't forget about Moses being raised in Pharaoh's house as a son of Pharaoh's daughter (**Ex 2:1-10**).
 - c. Truth really is stranger than fiction, and what you think is impossible sometimes proves to be the fact.
 - ▶ Consider this 1982 newspaper headline: WOMAN WINS \$29,999 IN WRONG BABY CASE (read the newspaper article).

So, let me return to my question: How do you know that the woman you accept as being your mother is, in fact, your natural mother who gave birth to you?

- a. There are several kinds of evidence you could consider:
 - ▶ A birth certificate bearing an official state seal, your name and the name of your mother and father, and the date of birth.
 - ▶ Testimony of the doctor who delivered you; the nurses, and any others who may have been present.
 - ▶ Family resemblance.
 - ▶ Your mother's claim: “You don't talk to me that way, young man. I'm your mother!”
- b. But the fact is that none of this evidence is absolutely fool-proof.
 - ▶ It's possible to falsify the evidence.
 - ▶ Documents can be forged.
 - ▶ And for some hidden, bizarre reason the witnesses may be lying.
 - ▶ And family resemblance certainly isn't conclusive -- sometimes people bear a strong resemblance to one another when they are not related at all.
 - ▶ Consider the baby swapping case reported in People Magazine.
- c. The fact is, you don't know that she is your natural mother of your own personal knowledge, and all the evidence that can be offered will not enable you to know it absolutely.
 - ▶ You were there - but you had your eyes shut and you were screaming your head off!
- d. On the other hand, all the evidence supports your confident belief that she is your natural mother -- and there is no evidence to the contrary.
 - ▶ So you ought to believe it -- and you do believe it.
 - ▶ In fact, you believe it so strongly that you have no doubt about it.
 - ▶ You “know” it.

Now, let me challenge your thinking along this line with another question: How do you know that your husband or wife is faithful to you and always has been?

- a. To “know” it as a matter of personal knowledge you would have to spend 24 hours a day, every day, for your whole life, together.
 - ▶ From the time you said “I do” you would have to be inseparable in order

for you to “know” that she had always been faithful to you as a matter of your own personal knowledge.

- b. And yet, I believe my wife is faithful to me, and always has been -- and I believe it without any doubt.
 - ▶ I believe it because her demonstrated love for God and for me, and her demonstrated honesty and integrity, causes me to believe in her and trust her without any doubt.
 - ▶ I ought to believe it, and I do believe it -- and I believe it so strongly that I “know” it.

When you really stop to think about it, a great many of the things we think we “know,” we really don’t “know” -- not in the absolute sense of personal knowledge.

- a. And yet, we have such good reason for believing, and no good reason for not believing, that we do believe.
 - ▶ And we would be acting the fool if we didn’t believe.
 - ▶ We believe with such certainty, based upon the evidence, that we “know” it – and we act accordingly.

1. I’ve said all that just to get you to realize: THE NECESSITY OF FAITH.

Faith is not only a religious necessity, it is also a moral and social necessity. We all exercise faith -- and we must.

- a. **Heb 11:6 -- “But 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 diligently seek Him.”**
 - ▶ So, without faith it is impossible to please God.
 - ▶ But pleasing God is not the only thing that is impossible without faith.

Without the willingness to believe something about which you have no personal knowledge, it is impossible to live and function sanely in this life!

- a. Example: our whole system of jurisprudence is really based upon faith.
 - ▶ Jurors make decisions, even life-and-death decisions, without having personal knowledge of the facts in the case
 - ▶ The verdict of the jury reflects what the jurors “believe” based upon the evidence that was presented to them
 - ▶ If the jurors had personal knowledge of the facts of the case they would be witnesses, not jurors
- b. Example: our knowledge of history is really a matter of faith.
 - ▶ We weren’t there; we didn’t experience it; we didn’t see it
 - ▶ But we believe those historical events happened when there is sufficient evidence presented to cause us to believe
- c. Example: our knowledge of daily world events is a matter of believing the news reporters.
- d. Example: taking medicines prescribed by a doctor certainly requires faith – faith in the doctor’s competence, and faith in the pharmacist’s competence.
 - ▶ But it certainly is not “blind faith”

So, you see, religion is not the only thing that requires faith.

- a. We exercise faith in every area of our lives, every day of our lives.

2. And that brings us to: THE DEFINITION OF FAITH.

It is important that we understand exactly what faith is - and what it is not.

- a. The Bible definition of faith is given in **Heb 11:1** -- **“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”** (NIV).
- b. Webster’s Dictionary definition of faith -- *Belief is an assent of the mind to the truth of a declaration, proposition, or alleged fact, on the ground of evidence, distinct from personal knowledge.*

So faith is not a matter of feelings, or opinion, or superstition, or the acceptance of traditions.

- a. Faith is not blind.
- b. And faith is not irrational.

Faith is being convinced by the evidence.

- a. Consider these Bible examples: **Jn 10:36-38; Jn 20:30-31; Ac 1:1-3; Ac 17:2-4; 2 Cor 12:12.**
- b. When I say “I believe in God,” I mean: I believe in God AND I know *why* I believe in God.
 - ▶ I believe because: “. . . every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God (Heb 3:4)
 - ▶ I believe because: “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork (Psa 19:1)
 - ▶ And: “since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Rom 1:20)
 - ▶ I believe because men of demonstrated honor and integrity have testified that God spoke to them and revealed Himself to them (example: “For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain” (2 Pet 1:17-18)
 - ▶ I believe because: the Bible is PROVEN to be a revelation from God.
 - ▶ I believe because: Jesus is PROVEN to be the Son of God.
 - ▶ I believe because: there is no reasonable alternative to God.
- c. I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God because of the overwhelming evidence that supports its claim of inspiration.
 - ▶ The claims of inspiration made by the Bible writers.
 - ▶ The amazing unity of the Bible.
 - ▶ The historical fulfillment of amazing Bible prophecies.
 - ▶ Archaeological discoveries that confirm the Bible’s historical accuracy.
 - ▶ The absence of absurdities and glaring inaccuracies.
- d. I believe Jesus was raised from the dead because the evidence won’t allow me to believe anything else.
- e. And I have no right to say I believe anything unless it is on the basis of convincing evidence.
 - ▶ Never say: “Well, I just believe such and such. . .”
 - ▶ Never say: “I know I can’t prove it, but . . .”

3. And finally, I want to talk to you about: THE REQUIREMENT OF FAITH.

Just believing is not enough; and saying you believe is not enough. Faith requires commitment.

- a. If you really believe that God is -- then you must “**diligently seek Him**” (Heb 11:6)
- b. If you really believe that Jesus gave His life for you -- then you must live your life for Him (2Cor 5:15)
- c. If you really believe the Bible is the word of God -- then you must “**be a doer of the word, and not a hearer only**” (Jas 1:22)
- d. There is a story that illustrates faith, and its requirement, very well:
 - ▶ The famous tight-rope walker, Blondin, was waiting to begin his performance when he noticed a schoolboy standing by, wide-eyed with interest.
 - Pointing up to the tight-rope, Blondin said: “Do you believe I can walk across that rope?”
 - The boy said: “Yes, sir. I do.”
 - ▶ Then Blondin asked him another question: “Do you believe I could carry you on my back and walk safely across?”
 - Without hesitation the boy answered: “Yes sir. I sure do.”
 - “Very well, then,” Blondin said, bending down, “jump up.”
 - ▶ But the boy disappeared.
 - He said he believed, but. . .
- e. Gal 2:20 -- “**I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**”

Conclusion.

We cannot live and function in this world without faith.

But faith that is genuine is always based upon evidence.

- a. The things we truly believe we believe for good and sufficient reason.

And the things we truly believe in, we commit ourselves to.

Bill Walton
1629 Rock Bluff Road
Hixson, TN 37343
(423) 842-0460
bw1944@bellsouth.net