

What is Faith?

“Are you a person of faith?” How you respond to that question will depend on what you think faith is.

Faith is an urgent matter which you must immediately come to terms, because “without faith it is impossible to please” God.

To help you process that question, we will see what a faith is not and then at what faith is.

What Faith Is Not

There are three common misconceptions about biblical faith that we need to refute. These are what faith is not.

1. Faith is not a religious feeling.

Scripture teaches that faith is not a subjective religious feeling divorced from the objective truth that God has made known. It is not a vague, internal experience that has its origin in one’s own self.

This doesn’t work, because the Bible continually reminds us of the danger of being misled by our feelings. Proverbs 28:26 - *Those who trust in themselves is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.* Walks in wisdom here equates with “whoever trusts in the Lord.”

Jeremiah 17:9 states, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt, who can understand it?*

Whatever an emotional faith is, it’s not biblical faith.

2. Faith is not accepting something without evidence.

Another prevalent view is that Christian faith requires us to stop *thinking*. Behind this opinion is the assumption that if you were to ever examine the evidence for Christianity, you would discover that it’s flimsy; therefore, the only way to be a Christian is to launch oneself into mindless oblivion. Faith then becomes a leap in the dark, a conviction that if I just believe enough and get pumped up enough, then something which isn’t true can *become* true.

-1 John 1:1 states “that ... which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.”

-In 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, the apostle Paul described the hundreds of people who were, like John, witnesses to what Jesus did in rising from the dead.

-In Acts 17:10-12, Paul praises the people of Berea for not simply believing what he said but also testing it against the Scriptures.

Biblical faith, then, doesn’t ask anyone to stop thinking. It is not “Believe or else!” but “Believe because...”

3. Faith is not a positive mental attitude.

To say, “I believe,” but not having an object in who or in which you believe, is of no value.

In New Testament faith, what we believe is crucial! It is faith’s *object* that gives faith itself any sort of significance. Biblical faith is not a positive mental attitude that seeks to bring into existence the things that are believed in

It’s good to be positive, yet positive thinking in and of itself is not biblical faith.

Hebrews 11:6 - “Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” *Real* faith is reliable because its object is God, who is completely trustworthy.

What Faith Is

Hebrews 11:1- *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* True, biblical faith produces a certainty regarding the unseen things that we, as followers of Jesus Christ, are to hope for.

God is the One Who graciously opened your eyes to the truth of who He is. Such faith creates conviction. Such faith is a gift from God—a gift that He wants us to receive and enjoy.

Ephesians 2:8 - *By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.*

What Faith Involves

Biblical faith involves three key features:

1. Knowledge

Faith is dependent upon what can be *known* about God.

In John 17:3, Jesus says, *This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

You know God in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus says in John 1:18, *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.* We know God when we know Jesus.

2. Assent

In biblical faith, our knowledge of God must then be followed by assent. Once we've recognized that certain things are true and are to be believed, we must actually *believe* them! Biblical faith is certainly *more* than giving assent—but it is never *less*.

When we lay our lives open before Christ, when we see Him on the cross, and when we understand that He bore all of our sin and rebellion, He compels our belief. When we see Christ in this way, knowledge will be followed by assent.

3. Trust

Lastly, genuine faith involves trust. Knowledge and assent alone do not make genuine faith. James 2:19 says that “even the demons believe,” yet we know they do not have saving faith.

There must be a movement from knowledge to assent that then culminates in trust.

A summons to trust in Christ—actively, not passively—is included in all of His invitations.

Matthew 11:28-29 - Notice the verbs: “come,” “take,” “learn,” “find rest.” These are all action words. They involve *doing*. You see, faith is not passive resignation. New Testament faith begins in knowledge, leads to assent, and ends in trust on the basis of the knowledge to which we have assented.