

The Most Important Issue in Life - Part One: What is Belief?

Jesus audaciously declared that whoever believes in Him will go to heaven when they die, but whoever does not believe in Him will go to hell. He declared this when He asserted, “whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” John 3:18. Considering the gravity of belief, therefore, two questions beg to be asked: What is this belief of which Jesus speaks, and, why should we so believe in Him? This article will answer that first question. My article on November 4th will answer the second question.

Belief is a personal and positive act. Jesus Christ has successfully accomplished everything for sinners’ salvation. He lived the perfectly holy life for us that we cannot live. He paid the penalty for sin on the cross for us that we cannot pay. We do nothing whatever to add to or to take from Jesus’ incredibly gracious work on our behalf. “It is finished!” (John 19:30). The great mission that He came to do, “He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21), was accomplished! But He does require us to personally and positively believe in Him. Christ’s salvation is not universal and it is not automatic. It is neither for the neutral-hearted nor for the unsure. Paul made this very clear when a troubled jailer asked him, “what must I do to be saved?” Though he understood Christ’s finished saving work, Paul replied unhesitatingly, “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:30-31).

Belief is an intelligent assent. It cannot live in a vacuum of knowledge. Rather, it is an “acknowledging of the truth” (Titus 1:1). Thus, saving belief understands at the least who Jesus Christ is. Jesus dogmatically asserted this when He stated that “unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Thus, a real believer is one who understands that Jesus is that great personage of the Old Testament prophecies who is God in the flesh come down to save us from our sins (Isaiah 43:11-15). A real believer is one who also understands that Jesus died on the cross and that He physically arose again on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-6). Furthermore, belief is not a blind leap. A real believer understands facts that were prophetically foretold in the inspired Scriptures; that were diligently recorded by inspired eyewitnesses; and that were irrefutably confirmed in history. Unlike evolution and the other fourteen major world religions, Christ’s adherents do not believe in Him contrary to all reason and evidence. Rather, they know the truth and they decide for Christ.

Belief is a whole-soul reliance upon Jesus Christ alone. Even the Devil knows the facts. But saving belief is a conviction of the veracity of those facts. Therefore, a real believer is one who has completely transferred reliance upon every other means and method of salvation, including oneself and religion, wholly and exclusively to Jesus Christ (Mark 9:14-19). Believers do not hold onto any other way of salvation. They are committed to the declaration that “there is salvation in no one else” (Acts 4:12).

Belief is a readiness to obey God. The believing Thessalonians demonstrated this readiness. They “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1

Thessalonians 1:9). The believing Romans were characterized as people that “have become obedient from the heart . . . and have become slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18). The writer of Hebrews makes obedience to God a result of belief, “He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (5:9). Jesus pinpointed this element of true belief when He preached “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2).

If any one of these elements is lacking, it is not the belief Jesus lauds and is not saving belief. That is the kind of faith that even the demons have who “believe” but “tremble” (James 2:19). The kind of belief that Jesus lauds is a gift from God and He will give it to all who sincerely ask for it.