

Introduction

A pastor asked a little boy to define what faith is. The little boy thought for a few moments and then innocently replied, "**Faith is believing what you know isn't true.**" That little boy had learned something from observing adults. They have doubts about their beliefs.

That's true even of Christians. I once counseled a Christian who just couldn't get himself to pray. I talked with him at length and finally figured out what the problem was. He professed that prayer changes things but didn't believe it. He sincerely doubted that God responds to our requests, which makes fervent prayer psychologically impossible. He illustrates that many Christians have doubts about their beliefs. I mean by that, they doubt some of the things they profess to believe.

Are you one of those? Do you have doubts about any of your beliefs? If so, it's vital that you deal with them, which is the purpose of the "Belief Questionnaire" you filled out and this sermon. It's to help you deal with your doubts.

Beliefs

In Genesis 6:13, God informed Noah that the world was so wicked He was going to destroy it. He then explained how He would in verse 17 – by flooding and drowning all of its inhabitants. The exceptions in verses 18-20 were Noah, his wife, his three sons, his three daughters-in-law, and an array of animals. God would save them by placing them on an ark that He commanded Noah, in verses 14-16, to build.

That's all well and good but what does it have to do with beliefs and doubts? The answer is "**everything.**" Hebrews 11:7 makes it clear. The key component in God saving whom and what He saved was Noah's faith. Verse 7 declares, "**By faith Noah.**" The word "faith" in that verse and all of chapter 11 is a synonym for belief. Noah had faith. He believed. As Hebrews 11:1 says it, he had "**the conviction of things not seen.**"

That helps us define what a belief is. It's a conviction that

something is true. "Conviction" is the operative word here. We're convinced in our minds that something is so. That something that we're convinced is so is a belief.

The fact is that you and I have thousands of beliefs. The most significant of those concern God and His kingdom. One of the statements on the "Belief Questionnaire," for instance, is, "**I will come to have an abundant life of pervasive love, peace, and joy if I become a disciple of Jesus.**" You and I are convinced or not convinced that is so. We believe it or doubt it. Anyway, all of us have thousands of beliefs about a whole range of realities, from the vital to the trivial.

What Beliefs Do

And you know what? Those beliefs govern our lives. I like the way Dallas Willard says it. They're the rails upon which our lives run.

We see that in Genesis 6:22. Try to imagine the magnitude of what God commanded Noah to do. Building the ark and bringing the animals in it were enormous, arduous tasks, far more than most of realize. But according to verse 22, Noah did "**according to all that God had commanded him.**" Hebrews 11:7 explains why he did, "**By faith Noah . . . prepared an ark for the salvation of his household.**" Noah did what he did, in other words, because he believed what he believed.

That teaches us one of the fundamental truths of our existence. Our beliefs govern our lives. They are the rails upon which our lives run. They determine what we do. It is true that, for one reason or another, we occasionally act contrary to what we believe, but we usually don't. We usually act according to what we believe.

Suppose I find out that I have only three months to live. How will I act and react? It depends on what I believe. If I'm convinced, "**to die is gain** (Philippians 1:21)," I'll feel destined and act medically in one way. But if I'm not convinced of that, I'll feel doomed and act medically in another way.

Or suppose that I land a six figure a year job. What will I do with

my extra money? It depends on what I believe. If I'm convinced that "what's mine is God's," I'll direct it to His purposes (meeting needs). But if I'm not convinced of that, I'll direct it to my purposes (living lavishly).

It's true. Our beliefs govern our lives. We usually act according to what we believe.

Share the Beliefs of Jesus

You realize what that means. Right beliefs are constructive beliefs. They make things go well for us. But wrong beliefs are destructive beliefs. They make things go poorly for us. So, believe rightly.

To do that, we must share the beliefs of Jesus. We talk all the time about having faith **in** Jesus and we must to be saved. We must believe in Him. But once we do, we must then seek to have the faith **of** Jesus. We must seek to share in His beliefs. Noah did. He believed three things that Jesus does: (1) God exists; (2) God is all-powerful; and (3) God always does what He says. He had the faith **of** Jesus, in other words. He shared in His beliefs and so must we.

I say "must" because the well-being of others and us depends on it. When our beliefs are those of Jesus, we live **up** to them. They increase love, peace, and joy. But when they aren't those of Jesus, we live **down** to them. They decrease love, peace, and joy. So, once again, let's have the faith **of** Jesus. Let's share in His beliefs.

Now, having the faith **of** Jesus is first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit. He Himself creates and sustains the beliefs of Jesus in us. But, as with most things in our lives with God, we have a part to play in that. Our part is to do two things.

Identify Our Beliefs and Doubts

First, we have to identify our beliefs and doubts. You might think that's a "given," that all of us know what we believe and doubt but we don't. The truth is that many of us have sincere doubts about things but think we aren't allowed to. We fear that we might not be Christians if we

have them. Or we fear that others, if they find out we have them, might disrespect or even reject us. So, we conceal them, from others and ourselves, by keeping them hidden deep inside. The result is that many of us profess to believe things that we actually doubt.

It's essential, therefore, that we identify our beliefs and our doubts. Doing so is the first step in having the faith **of** Jesus. That is the express purpose of the "Belief Questionnaire" that the Spiritual Life Commission had you fill out today – to help you take that first step.

There is a practical way to identify our beliefs and doubts. It's by carefully examining what we feel and do. Our beliefs and doubts create and sustain our feelings and actions. It's in those very feelings and actions, therefore, that we discover our beliefs and doubts. We determine the beliefs or doubts that would create and sustain what we're feeling or doing. We then conclude that we possess them.

Suppose I'm unattractive and embarrassed that I am. I can determine the belief and its corresponding doubt that create and sustain that feeling. Beauty of character not beauty of body is supreme. Believe that – not embarrassed. Doubt that – embarrassed. My feeling, therefore, shows me what I believe, beauty of body is supreme, and what I doubt, beauty of character is supreme.

Or suppose I don't study the Bible. I can determine the beliefs and their corresponding doubts that create and sustain that action. #1 – God wrote the Bible. #2 - It gives us the best information about the most important matters in life. #3 – I'm able to understand it. Believe all three – study the Bible. Doubt any one of the three – don't study the Bible. My action, therefore, shows me that I doubt one or more of the three.

You can see from what I've said that identifying our beliefs and doubts can be a painful process. It does require an honesty and objectivity that probably most people aren't willing to give it. But give it we must. Why? It's because identifying our beliefs and doubts is the first thing we have to do in order to have the faith **of** Jesus.

Inform Our Beliefs

The second thing we have to do is inform our beliefs and doubts. Once we've identified them, we have to inform them.

Some of our beliefs and doubts are one or both of two things. First, they're uninformed. There is critical information that we haven't taken into account. And/or second, they're misinformed. Some of the information we've taken into account is false. The bottom line is that some of our beliefs and doubts, including life-defining ones, are uninformed and/or misinformed. They're based on insufficient and/or incorrect information. The result sometimes is that what we believe isn't so, or what we doubt is so, which is detrimental to others and us.

You can see then what we have to do to have the faith **of** Jesus. We have to inform our beliefs and doubts. We do that in two specific ways. First, we analyze a belief or doubt in terms of the facts. We gather as many facts as we can that are relevant to it. We then stack it up against those facts. Is it consistent or inconsistent with them? Second, we analyze the belief or doubt in terms of implication. If it's true, what must also be true and false. And is "what must also be true and false" consistent with what we know about reality?

One of the statements in our "Belief Questionnaire" is this. **"God is good."** Do you believe that or doubt it?

Some years ago, a Christian made an appointment to see me. He told me that he was going to confess something that would make me think he was a horrible person. **"I don't believe that God is good,"** he said, **"I want to believe it but I just can't."** He doubted God's goodness.

Remember what I said. Beliefs and doubts are based on information. So I got that information by asking him, **"Why do you doubt God is good."** **"It's because so many bad things happen to so many good people,"** he replied. Is that information true or false? It's true.

But it's also insufficient. So I helped him gather other facts including the following: (1) many good things happen to good people; (2) many good things happen to bad people; (3) many bad things don't

happen to good people; and (4) many bad things don't happen to bad people. I noted for, instance, that one out of every 33 babies born in the United States has a birth defect, which means that 32 out of every 33 are born without one. In light of the complexity and array of natural processes childbirth involves, it's a miracle they are. That illustrates that there are many more good things that happen to good and bad people than there are bad things that happen to them.

After gathering those facts, we stacked up his doubt against them. His doubt did take the fact that many bad things happen to good people into account. But it didn't take any of those other four facts into account. It was uninformed, based on insufficient information. Taking only the first fact into account, logic leads us to conclude God isn't good. But taking all five facts into account, logic leads us to conclude He is.

Another thing I did was help him identify the implication of his doubt. If God isn't good, the implication is that He is bad. Skeptics use this logic. If God is good, bad things wouldn't happen to good people. But bad things happen to good people. God, therefore, isn't good. But I use their logic against them. If God isn't good, then He is bad. And if He is bad, good things wouldn't happen to anyone. But good things happen to everyone. God, therefore, isn't bad. He is good.

What that man and I did with his doubt that day, we need to do with our doubts – and our beliefs. We need to inform them. That, along with identifying them, is how we have the faith **of** Jesus.

Conclusion

I close with a little line that author Olin Miller wrote. Listen carefully to it, **“to be absolutely certain about something, one must know everything or nothing about it.”** That's a profound insight. Are you certain about your beliefs or doubts? If so, it's because you know either everything or nothing about them? Make it everything by informing them. That's the best way I know of to deal with your doubts.