

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAITH & BELIEF

What is the difference between Faith and Belief? How do we **believe** in God, and when should we exercise our **faith**? In Mark 5, shortly after Jesus says to the woman with the issue of blood, ***“Your faith has made you well”*** (verse 34), He says to the ruler of the synagogue (who’s daughter had just died), ***“Do not be afraid; only believe”*** (verse 36). Both people received the miracle they were needing, yet the Lord commended the woman for her “faith” and He told the ruler of the synagogue to simply “believe.” This can be rather confusing if you need a miracle right now!

In Hebrews 11:6 both words are used in the same verse, ***“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.”*** Here, we can see clearly that our relationship with God involves both faith and belief. But what is the difference between the two? The English Dictionary says, ***“faith”*** is ‘complete trust or confidence in someone or something’, and ***“belief”*** is ‘an acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof.’ The Dictionary makes belief sound more spiritual than faith. Doesn’t it? So let us examine what the Bible says about these two words....

In the Old Testament we find the word *“aman”* often translated “to believe.” Genesis 15:6 says, ***“And Abram believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.”*** The Orthodox Jewish Bible says, ***“And he believed in the Lord; and He credited (faith) to him as righteousness.”*** The impression we are given here is that Abraham was full of trust and confidence in God first, and thereafter, he was credited with faith. To be specific, he believed in God first and then was credited with faith.

Also, it was not primarily in God's words that Abram **believed**, but rather, in God Himself. This verse does not imply that Abram "believed God," accepting that what He had said was true and trustworthy (as in Genesis 45:26). It simply states that Abram believed in God! In other words, Abram came to experience a personal relationship with God rather than an impersonal relationship with His promises. Hence, whoever comes to God "**must believe that He is**" - must have experienced a 'personal relationship' with God. From this we can see that, "believing" is very personal. It has to do with an intimate relationship between the person "believing" and the one to whom the belief is being directed. In this context, believing precedes faith because it has to do with **relationship**.

When God is the subject or object of the act of believing, then the Hebrew verb "*aman*" appears. "*Aman*" has a direct parallel in the Greek - the word "*pistevo*" (to believe). "*Pistevo*" is also translated "to be persuaded of" or "to place complete confidence or total trust in" (which has the same meaning as "*aman*"). It's interesting that "*pistevo*" appears 10 times in Matthew, 10 times in Mark, 9 times in Luke and 99 times in John. Showing us that the disciple who was most intimate with the Lord Jesus had the greatest revelation of the true meaning of the word. Again, confirming that "belief" is always about relationship.

Before we move on to "faith," it would may help if we got a secular view of the difference between Faith and Belief. When many motivational speakers talk about belief and faith, they are often talking about them in the context of achieving goals. Quote... "*Both faith and belief refer to roughly the same thing, but there is an unspoken and subtle difference between the two. **Belief** is pretty much based on the fact that you're confident you will achieve your goals. That belief can be based on past experience, logic, or just the fact that you know somebody who achieved a similar goal.*"

Faith on the other hand, usually brings along with it the implication that it's needed to achieve those goals that seem out of reach, hence hearing phrases like "taking a leap of faith" when it comes to those types of situations. In other words, that term is usually used in the context of achieving extraordinary goals.

Here is a simple example to differentiate between the two. The Wright Brothers, who built a machine which would allow man to fly in the sky - they had faith. Everyone after, who created the shuttle, helicopter, jet, etc. they had belief." (Brian Kim - Self Improvement author). Interesting, but not exactly accurate in the Biblical sense. However, I like the fact that "belief" is based on confidence and trust (like "pistevo"), and faith is connected with doing the impossible.

Let's move on to **faith**. The Greek word "pistis" is translated faith and in the NT "pistis" is always used for faith in God or Christ. It literally means "a conviction or firm persuasion based upon hearing ('peitho')." Notice how the word "pistevo" (to believe) and "pistis" (faith) are very similar. The reason being that "pistevo" is a verb and "pistis" is a noun. It's in their usage that we get their true meaning. In contrast to **believing**, which is founded on a personal relationship (a confidence and trust in God Himself), **faith** has to do with a conviction or firm persuasion, (based upon 'hearing'), that produces a full acknowledgement of God's revelation or truth. That is why **faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God** (Romans 10:17).

With this understanding, I would like to propose that we must first "believe" in God Himself, with whom we have experienced a personal relationship, and thereafter, we are to hear His voice so that we can be fully persuaded concerning any revelation or truth (faith). Again, "believing" must precede faith!

To make this clear, think of any relationship... Until you know someone intimately (have confidence and trust in them), it is not possible to take them at their word. Is it? Abram believed and God credited faith to him as righteousness. Another example of “believing” going before faith is found in John 3:16, ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*** Notice, it doesn’t say “believes the gospel,” but believes IN HIM! I would like to propose that everyone whom Jesus commended for having **faith**, first believed IN HIM.

Let’s take the story of the centurion, in who’s faith Jesus was astounded. Matthew 8:5-10, ***Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed, dreadfully tormented.” And Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.” The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!”***

How can we be sure that this man believed in Jesus before exercising such great faith? Remember, “to believe” you must have experienced a personal relationship with Jesus, enough for you to be able to have total trust and complete confidence in Him. Listen to the centurion's words, ***“Lord, my servant is paralysed...” “Lord, I am not worthy...”*** To call someone “**Lord**” you must have experienced a personal relationship. There would be a connection beyond being just an acquaintance.

Notice also that it was only after he addressed Jesus as **Lord**, and Jesus had responded by saying, ***“I will come and heal him,”*** that he said, ***“But only speak the word and my servant will be healed.”*** The sequence of events were: (a) The centurion called Jesus “Lord,” (b) Jesus says, “I will heal him,” and (c) this man’s great faith is exercised. The centurion *“believed in the Lord Jesus,”* he then **heard** His words, and thereafter, was able to exercise great faith. It is no different for you and me. We must first believe, in order to hear, so that we can use our faith!

Remember the woman with the issue of blood? Matthew 9:21-22, ***For she said to herself, “If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.” But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, “Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.”*** And the woman was made well from that hour. Again we see “relationship” making way for great faith! The Lord addresses her as “daughter.” The Lord must have seen the complete confidence and total trust (belief) this woman had in Him. It was probably shining out her eyes! So He responded accordingly. He called her “daughter” and this word is used primarily in a natural (not spiritual) context. What an honour it must have been for this woman to hear that word spoken over her publicly! How must she have felt knowing that she has an ‘intimate’ relationship with the Christ, who delivered her from all her distress and healed her body.

To end, let us go back to Mark 5 where Jesus says to this woman, ***“Daughter, your faith has made you well,”*** and then a few verses on He says to the ruler of the synagogue, ***“Do not be afraid, only believe.”*** I have just explained the first part thoroughly, so what about the second? Why was the ruler of the synagogue told to simply “believe?”

Firstly, I'm sure Jesus must have know the ruler of the synagogue, and even if He didn't, the man definitely knew Jesus. While this man was about to ask Jesus to come to his house and heal his sick daughter, a bunch of people from the house came up to him and said, ***"Your daughter is dead, why bother the Teacher any further?"*** (Mark 5:35) First of all, notice that the people who had just arrived did not have a relationship with Jesus, they called Him teacher. Also that Jesus responded after He heard the "words that were spoken." The Lord immediately counteracted these words of death (that had been spoken) with words of life, He said, *"Don't be afraid at what you've just heard, have complete trust and confidence in Me only."*

Than Jesus doesn't allow any of the 'unbelievers' to follow Him. Only His three disciples and the father went back to the house. Again, when Jesus arrives He speaks LIFE, ***"Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping"*** (verse 39). So Jesus clears the house of all the unbelievers and takes with Him the mother and father of the child (and the three disciples) into the room where she lay. Observe, it was only those who "believed" that Jesus allowed in with Him. There was no mention of faith! Jesus has surrounded Himself only with believers! That is, people who have complete confidence and total trust IN HIM. ***"Then He took the child by the hand and said to her, 'Little girl, I say to you arise'. Immediately the girl arose."***

Out of relationship, Jesus was able to perform a miracle for this family. However, the first person Jesus had to encourage was the father. He had to **believe** and keep on **believing** until the miracle was performed and his daughter raised from the dead. Many of you need to do the same. "ONLY BELIEVE!" Out of relationship, keep on trusting in Him and don't ever loose confidence in Him either. This is another sure way to receive your miracle. It has nothing to do with you having faith!