

Believe

26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."³⁰ 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. (John 20:26–31)

About 35 years ago, a controversy broke out. The controversy was around what it means to believe. The one side said that belief is simple, childlike agreement and trust that Jesus is your Saviour. The other side said belief is a wholehearted surrender to Jesus as Saviour and Lord. It became known as the Lordship Salvation controversy. On the one side you had people like Zane Hodges, Charles Ryrie, on the other men like John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, J. I Packer.

The stakes were very high in this debate, because it is really a debate about what saving faith is, and what fruits it bring. Those who said faith is childlike acceptance of Jesus as Saviour looked over at their opponents and said, "You're adding works to the Gospel. You're frontloading faith and turning it into a kind of Roman Catholic penance, where we must first rectify our lives and then accept Christ."

Those who said faith is wholehearted surrender to Jesus as Lord looked at their opponents and said, "You're creating a cheap grace, an easy-believism that requires no repentance. You are going to have false converts, shallow and superficial "decisions" that are not real faith.

It was very confusing at first, even quite alarming. At the centre of this controversy was the Gospel of John. John gave us the famous John 3:16. The the word *believe* comes up around 98 times in John. John doesn't have the word repent, or surrender in his Gospel. What are we to make of that? Here in the last verses of John 20, we reach the climax of the book, the high point of it all, and as we see, it is all about belief.

³⁰ 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.

On Easter Sunday, the disciples witness the ultimate sign, the Resurrection of Jesus. A week later, Jesus appears again, and shows Himself to Thomas. Thomas believes. The sign of the resurrection convinces him. Jesus goes on to say that belief without signs is more blessed, faith in the Word, the testimony of what God has said is more honourable and more joyful than seeing a sign.

Now John as the writer makes this comment in verse 30. Jesus did many other signs not recorded. John selected seven signs to include in his Gospel. But Jesus did many, many more.

²⁵ And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. (John 21:25)

But John says he has included what he has in this Gospel, so that you, the reader, might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing you might have life in His name. Here in John is what you need to believe in Jesus. John is not only going to give you the reasons to believe, but the signs he selects will tell us what it means to believe. Is it believe in Jesus as Saviour, or Saviour and Lord? As we look back through John, the book will answer that question in three ways. It will tell is what faith is not; it will tell us what faith is, and it will tell us what faith requires.

I. What Faith Is Not

Faith is not selfish belief

²³ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, ²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. (John 2:23–25)

Here is a very striking statement: many believed in Jesus, but Jesus did not believe in them. The word commit is exactly the same word for believed. These people believed when they saw His signs, but Jesus did not trust their trust, He did not accept their acceptance. Why? He knew what was in man. In the man is a deep selfishness that wants to use the people around us, use the world, and even use God. Many of the sign-seekers wanted Jesus to be a tool to fix their lives, to make it better. But they did not want Jesus Himself for Himself. They wanted Him for what He could do for them.

Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.” ²⁷ Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” (John 6:26–27)

The crowd that wanted to make Jesus king did so because He had fed them miraculously. They wanted to enthrone the miracle-worker who would make working unnecessary. They wanted to use Him.

Many in our country want to use Jesus as a cure-all for sickness, disease, bad luck, poverty. Prosperity Gospel teachers prey on millions who are looking merely for a better material existence, and they've been told the name of Jesus will do it. But such people could swap any other name in there, and they wouldn't mind, as long as it worked. As long as it brought them more money, job security, health, marriage, children, status, things. Some people want to use Jesus as insurance against future judgement. They are not interested in Him, in His Person. But they hear Jesus saves you from hell if you accept Him or pray a prayer, so they do that. This is not what the Bible means by believe on Jesus.

Faith is not a social belief

⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?” ⁶¹ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “Does this offend you?” ⁶² *What* then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. ⁶⁵ And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” ⁶⁶ From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. (John 6:60–66)

Notice you had people who called themselves disciples who stopped following Jesus. Why? Because Jesus taught them a hard doctrine: that He Himself was to be their bread; He was to be their sustenance, they were to trust in Him and His person. At this point, these disciples gave notice and headed for the door.

Evidently, theirs had been a social belief. Crowds had been following Jesus, and they joined the crowds. It was a new movement, it was the in-thing, it was the next big thing in Israel. So they joined, and followed. But if you believe because of the crowd, you will also walk away when the crowd walks away.

Jesus said that a social faith is no faith at all.

⁴⁴ How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from the only God? (John 5:44)

People who go to church merely and only because it is the done thing, who go because their family does, who go because their friends are there, who go because it's a social outing, who go because it's a trend do not have true faith. Oh, it's not wrong to begin that way, to start seeking the Lord because of others, or be drawn because your friends and family are going. That's perfectly natural. But if that's the only thing keeping you, then it's not faith. When the popularity of Jesus drops, when the crowd thins out, when the cool people go somewhere else, so will you.

Faith is not a secret belief

⁴² Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. (John 12:42–43)

Here were people hiding their faith lest it get them into trouble. If people knew that inwardly they agreed Jesus was Messiah, it would mean they could lose standing, status, friends, even job or career. So they hid their belief.

But John tells us that this belief was not real belief because the people loved the praise of man more than the praise of God. And if your greatest love is still acceptance by others, then biblical faith has not been birthed in your heart. Real faith is love for God in seed form, in beginning form.

They hid their belief from others, and in some cases, they were even hiding from God.

¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. (John 3:19–20)

Here are people who know what the light is, they know where the light is, but they are going to hide in the dark, secret away their sin and pretend. They will not come out and own Christ, and own their own wrongs. They will remain secret.

All of these people had some embrace of Jesus, some persuasion that Jesus is the Messiah, some agreement. But that didn't count as real faith. Faith is not a selfish belief. Faith is not a social belief. Faith is not a secret belief.

So if that is what faith is not, what then is faith?

II. What Faith Is

You might remember that John wrote this book with Jesus' giving seven I AM statements. These tell you who He is and what it means to believe in Him.

1. "I Am the Bread of Life. Jesus is the Bread of Life, so believing on Jesus is like taking in food for your sustenance and life, eating, chewing, digesting, swallowing, making the food part of you. So believing is a complete embrace of Jesus into your inner man, taking Him for all He is.

2. I Am the Light of the world. Jesus is the Light of the world, so believing on Jesus is like looking

to the source of light and not shying away, approaching that light as it makes everything clearer, including your own sin. Believing on Jesus is like sight restored.

3. I am the Door. Jesus is the Door or the Gate. Believing on Him is like choosing an access to a place and going through it and nothing else, trying no other way.

4. I am the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Believing in Him is like belonging to a shepherd, trusting Him and remaining loyal to His voice and His flock, letting Him lead and protect.

5. I am the Resurrection and the Life. Believing in Him is like dying and being raised up, an old life that goes to the tomb, like a grain of wheat that must first die before the springtime comes, and new life, life in abundance comes in its place. It is like life from death, being woken up from the sleep of non-consciousness, being raised from the comatose paralysis of utter weakness, sickness, corruption into life.

6. I am the way, the truth, the life. Believing on Jesus is like choosing a path that you believe is the true way to life.

7. I am the True Vine. Believing in Him is like a branch growing out of a vine. It means being totally dependent, drawing all your life from Him.

But even more emphatically than that, John records exactly seven statements where Jesus simply says "I AM" (4:26; 6:20; 8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 13:19; 18:5). Here Jesus is showing that Messiah is also God, the true God of Israel. Believing on Him is to say like Thomas, My Lord, and My God.

So faith is not just one thing. It cannot be reduced to just one thing: not just accepting Jesus as Saviour. Or just trust. Or just acceptance. Instead, as you can tell, it includes the idea of trusting, of receiving, of choosing, of following, of depending, of surrender, of submission.

Maybe one way to unite all these images and metaphors is the way Paul puts it in Galatians 5:6.

⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. (Galatians 5:6)

Faith works through love. What does Paul mean by this? Faith moves or works in the direction of love. Faith is the root, love is the fruit. Or to put it another way, faith is the beginnings of love, the seed form of love. Jesus is the goal, and faith seeks Him as our bread, light, water, door, shepherd, life, way. All the good, all the beauty that He is, we desire, we seek, we lean towards. Yes, we want Him as Saviour, but we want Him as Lord, as Prophet, as Priest, as King, as God, as Redeemer. All He is, all He can be for us, we love, You cannot divide Jesus up, or take a bit here, and a bit there, take Him as redeemer, but not as king, as mediator, but not as Lord. You simply take Him, all He is, and that means receiving Him in the way you receive the Bread, Water, Light, Door, Shepherds, Life, Way. You accept not a part of Jesus, or one work of Jesus. You accept the Person of Jesus. You treasure Jesus Christ for all He is: the supreme treasure of life.

Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life, Thou light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

Perhaps you can see why faith cannot be a selfish belief, or a mere social belief, or a secret belief. If you have found the treasure of your life, you are not using this selfishly, or doing it because others are, or ashamed of it and hiding it. You've found the deepest satisfaction of your soul, the treasure of your life.

So why do some have that false faith, and others have true faith? What fuels this true, treasuring trust in Christ?

III. What Fuels Faith

The Gospel of John has given us two pillars that support true faith. They are like two parallel pipelines that fuel faith, two lines never meet or cross, but they co-exist.

The first of those lines is the sovereign love of God. People believe because God kindly enables them to believe. We've seen this all over the book.

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12–13)

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

"This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." John 6:37, 44, 65

⁴⁷ He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." (John 8:47)

"But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me... My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." John 10:26–29

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit... John 15:16

Eight times in the Gospel, believers are described as those the Father has *given* to the Son.

So this is one reason why people believe. Because of God's kind love, choosing, granting, drawing. Without this gracious intervention by God, no one would come. This is the sovereign grace of God. But it is never give to take away our hope. It is never given to make people doubt that God wants them to be saved. On the contrary, Jesus usually gave these teachings when dealing with proud hearts that boasted they were rejecting Jesus and did not accept Him. To those arrogant scoffers, Jesus would say, you can only believe if God grants it to you. And if you're rejecting, it's because you've been rejected. If you accept me, it's because God accepted you first.

When we are confronted with this, the right response is please and thank you. Please God, do not pass me by, grant me faith, help my unbelief. And then, thank you. Thank you for drawing me, choosing me, opening my eyes.

But then the second pillar, the other parallel pipeline turns from God to man, from God's will to man's will. And what Jesus teaches is that people believe or don't believe for a very simple reason: willingness or unwillingness.

⁴⁰ But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. (John 5:40)

People don't come because they don't want to. Why would they not want to? Again, John 3:19-21

¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (John 3:19–21)

People are not willing to come when they want to keep sinning, and keep their sins hidden. People are willing to come when they want a truthful account of who they are and what they have done. If you are willing to let God's light shine on you, reveal who you are, to deal with your sin, you will come. Be willing to walk openly and honestly before God, and you free up your faith, you fuel a true treasuring trust in Christ.

Notice how Jesus put it in John 7:17.

¹⁷ If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*. (John 7:17)

If you are willing to do God's will, you will know the truth, you will recognise the Gospel. You will believe truly in the true Gospel, because you are willing to submit to God, to do whatever He says. Willingness to come honestly to the light to see the truth. Willingness to obey the truth, whatever it is. And then notice John 8:31-32.

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31–32)

A willingness to persevere, to abide, to remain in that truth. If you do that, you won't be disciples in mere name, but in actual fact.

Those two parallel pipes, God's sovereign love, and your willingness are why faith springs up in the heart. That's why one man comes to treasure Christ above all else, and another keeps looking to self, and society, and sin to satisfy. God must draw, open our eyes, work in us to will. And we must be willing, we must forsake our hiding, and our disobedience, and our selfishness, and be willing to be exposed, be willing to come under God's authority, be willing to be loyal to Him.

So here is a test to bring it all together. Ask yourself, do I want to treasure Christ, embrace Him for all He is? If the answer is no, maybe there is still a stubborn selfishness in your heart that wants to keep self at the centre and use Jesus. Maybe there is a fear of man that cares more about our social standing than God's glory. Maybe there is pride that wishes to hide our belief from others, or hide our sin from God. Selfishness, man-pleasing, and pride are fatal to faith.

But if there is a leaning in your heart to treasure Christ, then thank God, because we love Him because He first loved us. There's already a gracious work in your heart. Ask for more. Ask Him to unite your divided heart, to incline your heart more, to open your heart. And then choose, desire, look to Christ to be all He is to the human heart.