

# Biblical Belief

---

By David Lasseter

This is another exceptionally important topic for anyone wishing to please the Lord and spend eternity in heaven. In John 8:24 we read the words of Jesus: "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Earlier in the same chapter Jesus said unto the Pharisees, "I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come." (John 8:21) Jesus tells Mary in John 20:17, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." Where was His Father? Matthew records, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 18:19) So without belief, one will die in their sins. If one dies in their sins, they cannot go where Jesus is. Jesus is with His Father, who is in heaven. Therefore, one who does not believe in Jesus as the Son of God cannot enter heaven! But what does it mean to believe in Him? Does it mean to simply believe that He was born of a virgin and did live some 2000 years ago, or is a belief in Him which is capable of washing us of all sin and opening the gates of heaven to our entry something more? The purpose of this study is to answer this question. Please open your Bibles and your hearts to the word of God as we consider Biblical Belief.

A common understanding of the definition of the words we are considering is essential to our study. I will begin by defining belief, believe, and faith. Next, we'll consider the scriptures dealing with these concepts and determine the meaning within them. We'll then undertake a detailed study of the "chapter of faith", Hebrews 11. Finally I'll close the study with a summary.

## DEFINITIONS

1. *Peitho* (verb; translated believe, persuade, trust, obey, have confidence, be confident and with 7 miscellaneous words in the KJV)
2. *Pisteuo* (verb; translated believe, commit unto, commit to (one's) trust, be committed unto, be put in trust with, be commit to one's trust, believer)
3. *Pistis* (noun; translated believe, faith, assurance, belief, them that believe, fidelity)
4. *Pistos* (adjective; translated believe, believing, faithful, faithfully, true, believer, sure)
5. *Plerophoreo* (verb; translated be most surely believed, be fully persuaded, be fully known, make full proof of)
6. *Apeitheo* (verb; translated believe not, disobedient, obey not, unbelieving)
7. *Apisteo* (verb; translated believe not)
8. *Apistos* (adjective; translated that believe not, unbelieving, faithless, unbeliever, infidel, thing incredible, which believe not)

9. *Elpis* (noun; translated faith, hope)
10. *Oligopistos* (noun; translated of little faith)

## DISCUSSION

This has been an exceptionally difficult study to put into words. Where does one begin? I found it difficult to identify a starting point, since the concept of belief is so widely misunderstood in the religious world today. I would like for us to start by reviewing the definition of *pisteuo*. As you recall, *pisteuo* is comprised of 3 parts:

1. A firm conviction
2. A personal surrender to Him
3. Conduct inspired by such surrender

The English word "believe" oftentimes does not carry the same meaning. Many people stop after the first part of *pisteuo*, and say they believe in Jesus therefore are saved. However, their conduct fails to satisfy the second and third parts of the original Greek word. Vine's emphasizes this application of belief in the latter portion of his definition of *pistis* and states, "All this stands in contrast to belief in its purely natural exercise, which consists of an opinion held in good "faith" without necessary reference to its proof." Jesus emphasizes the work involved in belief when He tells us that "this is the work of God, that ye believe on Him who He hath sent." (John 6:29) So, true belief in the Son of God is a work! Since belief in Jesus is necessary for salvation, and belief in Jesus is a work, then works are necessary for salvation!

Let's begin with a Biblical example. Moses was a well-known leader of the nation of Israel. He was called by God to leave his home in Midian and return to Egypt, to free the people of God from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 3:1-10). Eventually Moses obeyed the Lord's commandment and returned to Egypt. While in this great nation he demonstrated the awesome power of the Lord by performing signs and wonders before the people. After the death angel passed through the nation, Pharaoh relented and allowed the people of Israel to leave Egypt. However, he shortly thereafter changed his mind and began pursuing the Israelites. The people saw the pursuing Egyptians and were fearful, believing they were trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army (Exodus 14:1-12). But Moses said to the people, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." (Exodus 14:13-14) Moses then stretched his hand out over the Red Sea, which was parted by the power of the

(Continued on page 2)

*(Continued from page 1)*

Lord, allowing the Israelite nation to pass across on dry land (Exodus 14:21-22). The Egyptian army followed, and was completely destroyed when the Red Sea collapsed over them. This event occurred after Moses obeyed the Lord and again stretched his hand out over the sea (Exodus 14:26-28). What was necessary before the Lord could fight for Israel? Moses had to act! God's power was manifest after Moses lifted his rod over the sea as the Lord commanded.

The children of Israel then began a journey through the wilderness that would eventually take them to the land promised them by God. However, this journey was characterized by much complaining by the Israelite people. In Exodus 17 we read of an account of the people's discontent. When the congregation came to Rephidim there was no water for them to drink (verse 1). The people complained so bitterly about this fact that Moses was concerned they were going to stone him (verses 2-4). God instructs Moses to take the elders of Israel and his rod to Horeb, and strike the rock of Horeb with his rod (verses 5-6). Moses obeyed the Lord, and God caused water to flow from the rock (verse 6). Again, we see Moses had to act before the power of the Lord could be manifest.

Three months after the children of Israel left Egypt they came to Mt. Sinai. While on this mount he received the tablets of stone containing the commandments written by God Himself (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10). The Bible tells us that the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11). Later in the same chapter Moses makes a request of the Lord. Verses 18-23 read, "And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen." Moses was given the privilege of seeing the physical presence of God Himself! In these few verses we learn much about the relationship between Moses and the Lord God.

Let's turn to the 20th chapter of Numbers. Again we see the Israelite nation wandering in the wilderness (verse 1). As in Rephidim there was no water for the people to drink (verse 2). Just as before we see the Israelite nation complaining about the lack of water (verses 2-5). The Lord spoke to Moses and gave him these instructions, "Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink." (verse 8) Let's read what Moses did: "And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this

rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also." (verses 9-11) Was the Lord pleased with Moses? Absolutely not! Please, very carefully, consider what God said to Moses: "And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." (verse 12) God tells Moses that he will not be permitted to lead the nation of Israel into the promised land! This is the same Moses that left Midian for Egypt, who performed miracles in the presence of Pharaoh, who led them across the Red Sea, who intervened on their behalf and turned God away from his fierce anger as He prepared to destroy them (Numbers 16:20-50), who received the tablets of stone containing the commandments written by the finger of God, who spoke to God face to face as one speaks to a friend, and who was permitted to see the physical presence of God! But why would he not be permitted to lead the people? Because "YE BELIEVED ME NOT"!! How could Moses have NOT believed the Lord? Did Moses doubt the existence of God? Absolutely not! As we've seen in the books of Exodus and Numbers, he spoke with God as a man speaks to his friend. There was no doubt as to the truth of the existence of God in the mind of Moses. So how did he fail to believe God? He failed to follow his firm conviction in the existence of God with complete submission to His will and obey His commandment exactly as given. We learn more of the Lord's attitude regarding Moses disobedience in Numbers 27. Verses 12-14 read, "And the LORD said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered. For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes: that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin." What did God say? Moses REBELLED against His commandment! But what did the Lord command Moses in Exodus 17? He commanded Moses to strike the rock, after which water would flow. What did He command in Numbers 20? To speak to the rock. So in these two passages we learn a valuable lesson regarding the commandments of God. He may be pleased with one action at one time, but displeased with exactly the same action at a different time. There was an explicit commandment given Moses in Numbers 20. He was to speak to the rock. The explicit commandment was accompanied by an implicit commandment: Nothing else will do. We must consider the significance of implied commands in our relationship with God. If we have been given an explicit commandment, it is accompanied by the implicit command that nothing else is acceptable. Moses believed in the existence of God, but he failed in the second and third points of *pisteuo*. Because of this failure he received a severe punishment.

Let's consider another example. Abraham is another man of faith who was called God's friend (2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23). In Romans chapter 4, Paul uses the

*(Continued on page 3)*

*(Continued from page 2)*

word *pisteuo* in reference to Abraham. He writes, "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." (verse 3) James uses the same phrase in chapter 2, verse 23: "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." However, James tells us something more about this scripture: he said the scripture was fulfilled. What scripture did James say had been fulfilled? "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6) But what event took place in Abraham's life, which led to the fulfillment of scripture? "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" (James 2:21) In verse 22 James tells us something more about Abraham's faith: "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" The Greek word translated "wrought" is *sunergeo*, and means "to work together, help in work, be partner in labour". *Teleioo* is translated "perfect", and means "to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish, bring to an end; add what is yet wanting in order to render a thing full; to be found perfect; to bring to the end (goal) proposed". I'd like for us to consider these 3 verses together: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." What do we learn about Abraham's faith in these verses? His faith was incomplete until after he offered Isaac on the altar! His action (to offer Isaac) worked together with his faith to make his faith complete! But doesn't Genesis 15:6 say that Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him for righteousness? Yes, it does. But how could God do that if Abraham's faith was incomplete? God could count his belief to him for righteousness, because Abraham's belief in God was all that he could possibly do at that time! It was impossible for Abraham to make his faith perfect at that time, because he was required to offer Isaac upon the altar to do so! Since Isaac was not yet born, Abraham could do nothing more than believe in God at that time. However, when God gave Abraham the commandment to offer Isaac and Abraham obeyed, that action worked together with his faith to make his faith perfect (complete), and the scripture recorded in Genesis 15:6 was fulfilled.

What does this event tell us about belief? It is not enough to be convinced of the existence of God. Only after one has submitted to His will and manifested actions consistent with submission will God impute righteousness unto him. In Abraham's submission to God's will and actions consistent with his submission we see all 3 components of *pisteuo* in effect. We spent a great deal of time considering righteousness and justification in a prior study. Click on the link provided should you wish to review this topic. Briefly, what did we learn about righteousness in this study? It is God who declares man righteous, not man declaring himself to be righteous! When does God declare man righteous? When he has obeyed every commandment given him by

God! Where does a man stand should he believe in the existence of God, but fail to obey every commandment he's given? He stands in condemnation! Notice how James closes his account of Abraham's obedience: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." One who claims to have faith but does not have the corresponding works is not justified by God and faces eternal punishment should he fail to rectify the situation.

These passages tell us about Abraham, but what about us today? Many people teach that one is justified at the moment of belief in God, and that works play no role in their justification. This example of Abraham shows us the falsehood behind this teaching. When does God impute righteousness to us? When we've done all we can possibly do! For Abraham, God imputed righteousness to him once he believed God's promise that his seed would be as innumerable as the stars in the sky. (Genesis 15:5) Abraham could do nothing more than believe at that time. When he was given an additional commandment and obeyed, his faith was made complete and the scripture recorded in Genesis 15:6 was fulfilled. Just as with Abraham, God will not impute righteousness to us until we've done all we can possibly do. If there is any commandment we've not obeyed, God does not impute righteousness to us! Since God has commanded us to repent (Acts 2:38), confess (Romans 10:10), and be baptized (Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38) in addition to believe before our sins will be forgiven, it is not until after we've obeyed each of these commandments that our sins are forgiven and God imputes righteousness to us. There are many people who are incapable of understanding these commandments. What does this passage tell us about them? God imputes righteousness to them when they've done all they are capable of doing in obedience to His commandments! For one who is mentally retarded and incapable of understanding these commandments, God does not require such a one to obey something they CANNOT obey! God imputes righteousness to them once they've done what they can. The same truth applies to an infant. Since an infant is incapable of understanding sin, repentance, confession, and baptism that infant is born with righteousness already imputed unto them. However, as they mature and become aware of God's commandments, they must then do as Abraham did and obey those commandments they now understand. When they fail to do so they no longer have righteousness imputed unto them and their sin is not forgiven. Many people turn to the Philippian jailer and his household to justify their doctrine of salvation by faith only. We read of the jailer in Acts 16:23-34. Paul and Silas were put into prison. During the night a great earthquake occurred, resulting in the prison doors being opened and the stocks keeping the prisoners secure being loosed. The jailer saw the doors opened and the stocks loosed and prepared to kill himself. Paul spoke up and told him not to do so, for none of the prisoners had escaped. Verses 29-31 say, "And he called for lights and sprang in, and, trembling for fear, fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house." What did Paul tell the jailer? Believe on the Lord Jesus

*(Continued on page 4)*

(Continued from page 3)

Christ. Paul used the word *pisteuo* when he told the jailer to believe. As we've learned, *pisteuo* requires action. So what action was required of the jailer? The American Standard version says the following: "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God." (verses 33-34) When did Luke say the jailer and his household had believed in God? After they were baptized! When did the jailer and his family rejoice? After they were baptized! What action was required of the jailer and his family before they were saved? Obedience to every commandment taught them by Paul and Silas (verse 32), one of which was baptism.

### **A brief grammar review**

Let's review the words "faith" and "belief". As you recall in our word study, the noun *pistis* is translated "faith". *Pisteuo* is translated "belief", and serves as a verb. If you consulted an English grammar and asked the question, "What makes a complete sentence", you'd likely find an answer such as this: "In standard written English, a complete sentence must have a SUBJECT and a VERB within a MAIN CLAUSE." (I found this statement at the University of Oregon's "writing tips" website.) The subject of the verb is a noun or a noun equivalent (a word which acts as a noun). So we can see that whenever *pistis* serves as the subject in a complete sentence, it must be accompanied by a verb. A noun may also serve in a prepositional phrase as the object of a preposition. Let's define "preposition". The American Heritage dictionary defines preposition as follows: "A word or phrase placed typically before a substantive and indicating the relation of that substantive to a verb, an adjective, or another substantive, as English at, by, with, from, and in regard to." Grammatically, a "substantive" is "a noun or a noun equivalent". So a preposition is a word that indicates the relation of a noun or noun equivalent to a verb, adjective, or another noun.

### **What we are to believe in**

Next, I'd like for us to consider what we are to believe. In Mark 1:14-15 Jesus tells those of Galilee to do 2 things:

1. Repent
- AND
2. Believe in the gospel

These two requirements are connected together by the coordinating conjunction "and". A coordinating conjunction is a word which connects two words or phrases of equal grammatical value (Merriam-Webster). Therefore, repentance and belief in the gospel are separate but equal. One can repent but NOT believe in the gospel. We all understand that, if the cake recipe says "add eggs and sugar", we need to put both eggs and sugar into the mixing bowl in order to have a cake. If we leave one or the other out, the product

will not be what we hoped for. We must use the same common sense in our study of God's word.

Next, does the requirement Jesus placed on the Galileans apply to us today? Mark tells us that Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God. (Mark 1:14). Is this the same gospel that is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes today (Romans 1:16)? In Acts 20:24-31 Paul tells us that he hoped to finish his course to testify the gospel of the grace of God. He uses 3 phrases to describe this gospel:

1. Gospel of the grace of God (verse 24)
2. The kingdom of God (verse 25)
3. The whole counsel of God (verse 27)

So, Paul used the same phrase to describe the gospel he preached as did Mark to describe the gospel Jesus preached. Therefore, the gospel preached by Jesus was the same one preached by Paul, and it is the one with the power of God unto salvation today.

Next question: How does one repent? Since repentance is just as important as belief in the gospel, we must determine what one has to do to repent. Paul tells us that repentance comes about because of Godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). Paul contrasts two types of sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7: Godly and worldly. Notice how both groups of people are sorry. So what's the difference? Doesn't being sorry for something mean I've repented? No! Paul tells us that the Corinthian brother who had committed the sin he was addressing had demonstrated a particular type of sorrow: one which led to repentance. He defines this type of sorrow as "Godly" sorrow. However, not all sorrow leads to repentance. The type of sorrow which does not lead to repentance he calls "worldly" sorrow. One with worldly sorrow is grieved because they were caught. However, they have no determination to change their minds and actions. Once the sorrow is behind them, you'll find them returning again to the sin which caused their sorrow. This type of sorrow leads to death. Godly sorrow, on the other hand, works repentance unto salvation. Paul tells the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31 to "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." In Galatians 3:22 he says that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Since salvation is available only to those who believe in Jesus, Godly sorrow must characterize those who believe in Jesus, since it worketh repentance to salvation. We learn in these verses that one who is saved is a believer in Jesus and manifests Godly sorrow. One with Godly sorrow experiences more than just feeling bad for getting caught in their sin. Such a one realizes the consequences of sin extends far beyond ones own life. His sin is the reason Jesus left heaven and was crucified on the cross. When one realizes the magnitude of the sacrifice made for their sin, their desire will be to sin no more. The sorrow they have works repentance unto salvation. But what did Jesus say in Mark 1:15? Repent AND believe in the gospel. Belief in the gospel must be added to the repentance which results from Godly sorrow. But what Gospel is the one with the power of God unto salvation? The gospel of Christ!

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

(Romans 1:16) So one may have Godly sorrow, truly repent, but not believe in the gospel of Christ. What must we say about such a one? They do not believe in Christ! So even true repentance resulting from Godly sorrow is insufficient for salvation. Only when the repentant sinner believes in the gospel do they gain access to the power of God which saves.

### What else do we know about the gospel?

1. Paul preached it, and he preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8
2. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Romans 1:16.
3. Those who are saved have believed the gospel. Romans 1:16.
4. The saved are found in Christ's church. Acts 2:47
5. The letter to the Galatians was written to the churches in Galatia. Galatians 1:2. (Since the Galatian letter was written to the churches in Galatia, the members receiving the letter were members of the church. Since the ones receiving the Galatian letter were members of the church, they had believed the gospel with the power to save.)
6. Paul rebuked the Galatian Christians for turning away to a different gospel, which was not another gospel, but a perversion of the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:6-7
7. Paul tells the Galatian Christians that, should he or an angel from heaven preach any gospel other than that which Paul preached to them such a one is to be accursed.
8. Since the gospel is preached to the unsaved, giving them access to the power of God to save, and the gospel is preached to the saved and is not to be perverted, the gospel is comprised of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, along with the entire body of doctrine taught by the inspired writers (Apostles and prophets, Ephesians 3:5) and given to the first century Christians. The repentant one who believes in this gospel (both the tenets giving him access to salvation and is faithful to the teachings required after salvation) has gained access to salvation. The repentant "believer" in Jesus who fails to also believe in the gospel has never been saved.

We'll have more to say about the gospel in the summary of this study. Please continue with me as we seek to understand Biblical Belief.

## HEBREWS 11

You may be asking why I felt it necessary to review nouns and prepositions. The noun *pistis* is used as the object of the preposition "by" throughout the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. I wanted to make sure each of us understood the role this phrase is playing as we examine this chapter. *Pistis* is not the subject of the sentence in this chapter, but is telling us something about the subject of each sentence. The prepositional phrase "By faith" tells us some-

thing about the relation of the sentence subject to the verb. I would like for us to look at each verse where the writer uses the prepositional phrase "by faith" and determine what it tells us about the subject.

Verse 1: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Unlike the rest of this chapter the writer uses *pistis* as the subject of the sentence in this verse. He then proceeds to tell us that faith is two things:

1. The substance of things hoped for
2. The evidence of things not seen

*Hupostasis* is translated "substance" in this verse. It is actually used 2 other times in the book of Hebrews. In 1:3 it is translated "person", and in 3:14 it is translated "confidence". Paul uses the word in 2 Corinthians 9:4 (translated "confident") and 11:17 ("confidence"). If you link to the online Greek lexicon you'll learn that *hupostasis* indicates "that which has actual existence". How often is that for which we hope something without actual substance to us? Oftentimes we have no confidence in things hoped for, because there is always the possibility that our hopes may be dashed. This is not the case with Biblical faith. The things for which one with true faith hopes have actual existence! One with true faith has confidence in the spiritual things for which they hope. The Hebrews writer continues with this thought when he says that faith is "the evidence of things not seen". *Elegchos* is translated "evidence" and means "a proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested". We live in a "prove it to me" world today. Many people seem to have the attitude that if something cannot be perceived with one or more of the 5 senses then it doesn't exist. Faith is the proof for the existence of something that cannot be perceived by the physical senses. These things are just as real as those which can be seen, felt, tasted, heard, or smelled! Think for a moment about the electromagnetic spectrum. There is a very narrow portion of this spectrum that is visible to our physical sense of sight. However, the fact we cannot see infrared or ultraviolet light does not mean they don't exist! We've developed instruments which are capable of detecting these wavelengths of light. In the spiritual realm faith serves as the instrument which proves the existence of things we cannot perceive with our senses.

So we learn in verse 1 that through faith we have absolute confidence in things for which we hope, and proof for the existence of things we cannot know with our physical senses.

Verse 2: "For by it the elders obtained a good report." The Hebrews writer now introduces faith as the object of the preposition "by". In verse 1, faith serves as the subject and is defined by the writer. Now he begins to tell us the relationship between a different subject and its associated verb by using faith as a prepositional object. We need to clearly understand this relationship before we can understand Biblical belief. Let's break down verse 2. The subject of this

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

sentence is "elders". The verb is "obtained". Did the elders (forefathers) obtain a good report? Yes. Why? Because of faith ("by faith"). Did they have hope? Yes. Was their hope some nebulous wish that was just as likely to fail as to come true? No! Did they obtain a good report because of something they could perceive with their physical senses? No! (Recall the definition of faith: it is the confidence that that one hopes for will be realized, and the proof of the existence of something which cannot be known by the physical senses.) Would the elders have received a good report had they placed their trust in their physical senses? No! This would not have been faith, and the Hebrews writer tells us that it was by faith that they received a good report. Let's keep these important points in mind as we consider the actions of the forefathers as recorded in the remainder of Hebrews 11.

Verse 3: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." The writer tells us something extremely important about faith in this verse: I gain understanding by faith! The Greek word translated "understanding" is *noeo*, and means "to perceive with the mind, to understand, to have understanding". But what do people oftentimes say about faith? When it's impossible for us to understand something, then we believe it because of faith! This is NOT Biblical belief!! The Hebrews writer tells us that true faith leads to understanding. Faith is not what is left over when I'm faced with something I cannot understand! When people make such a statement, upon what are they relying for understanding? Their physical senses! For example, why do I understand that fire is hot? Because I've experienced the pain with my physical sense of touch. Because of this experience my mind understands the nature of fire. In verse 3 of this chapter we learn that faith is just as valid a tool to mental perception and understanding as are my five physical senses. To say I have faith when I don't understand something is to make a false claim.

The Hebrews writer reinforces this point through the example he uses in verse 3. He tells us that, by faith, we understand (*noeo*) that the worlds were not made of things we can see. If we rely on our physical senses for our understanding of the origin of the universe then we do not have faith! Does this mean we cannot use our senses to understand what has been created? No! However, we cannot rely on our senses to determine the origin of the universe. Our senses help us understand what God has created, but they cannot help us understand where these things came from! This understanding comes only by faith. However, this understanding is no less valid than that I gain by my physical senses as I study the universe He created.

As a physician I've been in the audience at several scientific meetings where the speaker has used the following phrase: "It's no longer science but religion". This phrase is extremely offensive to me! This phrase is generally used to refer to a scientist who believes something to be true, but can't prove it scientifically. What is the one who uses this phrase saying? Religion is void of proof! It may well be

that many scientists believe something for which no proof exists, but such is NOT the case in true religion! Faith is as valid a proof to those who wish to please God as is an experiment to a scientist. In fact, faith is MORE valid a proof than is many scientific experiments! Science is continually being rewritten as new discoveries are made. The proof which comes by true faith is valid throughout eternity.

Verse 4: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh." In this verse the writer tells us something else extremely important about faith: when one has faith, an appropriate action results. "By faith Abel offered..." Because of Abel's confident hope and the proof he knew existed despite lack of physical evidence he offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Did Cain have a living faith? NO! What did Abel's sacrifice do for him? It served as a witness that he was righteous! Recall again from our study of righteousness that only God can declare one righteous. The Hebrews writer confirms this fact when he says, "God testifying of his gifts". Why did God consider Abel righteous? Because of the action that resulted from his faith! Abel had true belief (*pisteuo*) in God. He knew God existed, he surrendered to His will, and his actions reflected his surrender. Cain did not believe in God. Oh yes, Cain knew God existed. However, he failed to surrender to His will and his actions reflected his lack of surrender.

Let's return to James 2 for a moment. Recall James 2:23, which says, "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." But James continues in verse 24: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." What did Cain have? He had faith only! His only tribute to God was his mental understanding of His existence. He did NOT believe in God! God WILL NOT impute righteousness to one who fails to surrender to His will and manifest works consistent with such surrender. Such a one WILL NOT be called a friend of God. Please consider how James closes chapter 2: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (verse 26) The one who believes in God's existence but does not fully surrender to His will has a DEAD FAITH!

Verse 5: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." As we'll see throughout this chapter, we have the prepositional phrase "by faith". This phrase is telling us something about the relationship between the subject (Enoch) and the verb (was translated). So, by faith Enoch was translated. But who translated him? God! Why did God translate him? Because he had received testimony that he pleased God. *Martureo* is translated "testimony" in verse 5. The Hebrews writer has already used the word three times so far in chapter 11 (verse 2, translated "good report"; verse 4, "witness" and "testifying"). With what is God

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

pleased (Greek *euaireto*)? *Euaireto* is used in verse 5, and also in Hebrews 13:16. This verse reads, "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Here we see that God is pleased with action (to do good and to communicate), not simply with one's testimony that they believe in the existence of God. The Bible doesn't give us specific actions performed by Enoch that pleased God, but we know from the context of Hebrews 11, and also from 13:16, that there must have been actions demonstrating Enoch's surrender to the will of God before God would consider him pleasing and translate him directly to heaven.

Verse 5, however, tells us something else about faith: It is by one's faith in God that one receives spiritual blessings from God! Let's read the first few words of verse 5 again: "By faith Enoch was translated..." Who had faith? Enoch. What happened to Enoch? He was translated. Who translated him? God. Why did God translate him? Because of his testimony that Enoch pleased God. How did God translate him? By faith! The word "by" means "through the agency or instrumentality of". So, through the agency or instrumentality of faith Enoch was translated by God. Not only is true faith associated with an appropriate action on man's part, it also results in action on God's part! Without faith there is no agent through which God can work in the lives of men. Let's move on to verse 6, and the Hebrews writer will emphasize this point again.

Verse 6: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." In my opinion, this is one of the most well-known and often-memorized verses in the New Testament. But how many of us who've committed this verse to memory truly understand what it says? In verse 5 the writer gave us an example of one who pleased God, and how his faith resulted in a miraculous action by God. However, in verse 6 he tells us how one will not be pleasing to God. One who does not have faith CANNOT please God. It is impossible, the writer says. Let's enter what we've learned about faith in place of the word faith. One who does not have full confidence in hope cannot please God. One who relies only on their physical senses for understanding cannot please God. If you've gone through some of my other studies you know how I emphasize the importance of the coordinating conjunction "and". In the next phrase the writer tells us two things that the one who comes unto God must believe. These two things are joined together by "and". (As you know, this word tells us that the word or group of words on the left side of "and" is of equal importance to those on the right side.) The one who comes unto God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. In this phrase we again see the fallacy behind the "faith only" doctrine. It's not enough for one to simply believe that God is. One who comes unto Him must also believe that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. He doesn't reward just anyone. One must diligently seek Him to be rewarded by Him. *Ekzeteo* is translated

"diligently seek" and means "to seek out or after, to search for". Paul says something similar in his sermon on Mars Hill. Acts 17:24-28 says, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." Paul uses the word *zeteo* ("to seek, to seek for") in verse 27. The Hebrews writer tells us that action MUST accompany a belief in God's existence before one will be rewarded by Him. The one who simply believes but does not seek God in order to find Him will not be rewarded by Him. In Hebrews 11 we've already considered a man who had faith only: Cain. When he failed to accompany his belief in the existence of God with appropriate action he failed to be rewarded by God.

Verse 7: The writer in these next several verses gives examples of those in the past who, by faith, demonstrated an action consistent with their faith. I'd like for us to consider these examples and apply the principles we learned in the first few verses of Hebrews 11 to understand the role of faith in their lives.

"By faith Noah prepared..." Again we have faith (*pistis*) serving as the object of the preposition "by". It is telling us something about the subject (Noah) and the verb (prepared) of this sentence. So, through the agency or instrumentality of faith, Noah prepared an ark. Noah's faith resulted in action. But that's not the only "by faith" in verse 7. The writer continues, "by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." How did Noah become heir of righteousness? By faith! But who declares one righteous? God! So, through the agency or instrumentality of Noah's faith he was declared righteous by God and became heir of righteousness. His faith in God was required before God could declare him righteous, since it is by faith that one becomes heir of righteousness! Again we see faith serving as the agent by which one receives blessings from God.

Verses 8-10: By faith Abraham obeyed and went out; by faith Abraham sojourned. God called Abraham to leave his home and journey to a place, not knowing where he was going! Here again we see faith in action. Abraham could not have been trusting his physical senses, since God didn't tell him where he was going. Abraham realized that God's word was just as valid as the information he gained by his senses, and he acted upon this realization. The writer tells us where Abraham was looking as he sojourned in the promised land: "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

Verses 11-12: Through faith Sarah received strength. Abraham and Sarah were promised a son, yet they were well past childbearing years. It was through Sarah's faith that she received the strength from God to conceive Isaac. If Sarah had not had true faith, God could not have given her the power to conceive! It was through her faith that she received this power from God. Again we see the requirement of faith before God can reward those who diligently seek him. Consider what can result when one refuses to rely solely on their physical senses for understanding and obeys the commandments of God: "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable."

Verses 17-19: By faith Abraham offered up Isaac. The son that God had promised Abraham and Sarah, who was born in their old age, through which all nations of the earth would be blessed, was about to be sacrificed on an altar. How many of us have that kind of faith? What must Abraham have known about God to do such a thing? God was able to raise Isaac from the dead! Not only was God able, God would absolutely have to raise Isaac! Abraham had absolute confidence in God's promises (if he hadn't, Isaac would never have been born), and God promised that it would be through Isaac that all nations would be blessed. If Isaac was dead, this couldn't have happened. Therefore, had Abraham sacrificed Isaac, he would have to have been raised from the dead.

Consider the subject and verb in each of the following verses...

Verse 20: By faith Isaac blessed...

Verse 21: By faith Jacob blessed...

Verse 22: By faith Joseph made mention and gave commandment...

Verse 23: By faith Moses was hid...

Verses 24-26: By faith Moses refused and chose...

Verse 27: By faith Moses forsook...

Verse 28: By faith Moses kept...

Verse 29: By faith they passed...

Verse 30: By faith the walls of Jericho fell...

Verse 31: By faith Rahab perished not with them that believed not...

Verses 32-38: "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-

skins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."

Consider everything these people did through faith! This is not a dead faith! The true faith of one who is pleasing to God is truly living!

## SUMMARY

For me, this has been an incredibly difficult article to write. The meaning behind *pisteuo* is powerful, but oftentimes misunderstood and diluted by the English word "believe". My goal in this study has been to clearly demonstrate the meaning of belief as recorded by the inspired writers. I pray I have done so. To close this study, let's summarize what we've learned.

In our study we've learned that *pisteuo* is comprised of two principal parts: a firm conviction, and action consistent with such conviction. How might one claim to believe, but in actuality not believe? There are two possibilities: One could claim a firm conviction but fail to demonstrate an appropriate action, or one could demonstrate an action but fail to have a firm conviction. The Bible gives us examples of each. Let's consider these examples.

### Firm conviction but inappropriate action

We've already considered one man who knew God existed but didn't manifest the action necessary for one to have true faith. Cain knew He existed, but failed to obey His commandments. Someone may state, "But Cain didn't know what God expected!" He must have known! We know that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), and that He doesn't change (Malachi 3:6). Since God doesn't change, and is no respecter of persons, He must never have been and never will be a respecter of persons. But we read in Genesis that God respected something of Abel's, but not of Cain's. What did he respect? Abel's offering! (Genesis 4:4-5) Since God is no respecter of persons, but He respected Abel's offering, why did He respect his offering? Because Abel did what God commanded him to do! If God hadn't told the brothers what He expected in worship to Him, and had respect for one brother's offering over the other, His respect would have been for the person and not the offering. We know this could not be the case. So, both Cain and Abel knew what God expected, but only Abel obeyed. As we learned in Hebrews 11:4, because of Abel's faith (knowledge of God's existence and obedience to His commandments) he received witness that he was righteous.

Next, please consider James' words in chapter 2, verses 17-20 of his epistle. Before using Abraham as an example of faith accompanied by works, James writes: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God;

(Continued on page 9)



(Continued from page 8)

thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" There is only one verse in the entire Bible that uses the phrase "faith only": James 2:24. But what does he say about faith only? Man cannot be justified by faith only! The only passage of scripture which uses this phrase condemns the doctrine of faith only! However, he doesn't deny the fact that many live by this doctrine. What does he tell us about these people? They are no different than the devils! (verse 19) He describes one who teaches such doctrine as being vain. Kenos is translated "vain" in verse 20, and means "destitute of spiritual wealth, of one who boasts of his faith as a transcendent possession, yet is without the fruits of faith." How many people today claim to have this unshakable faith, but have failed to manifest the works which must accompany such faith?

Let's consider these devils for a moment. James uses a striking word when speaking of their belief: in verse 19 he actually uses *pisteuo* to speak of the belief the devils possess! *Pisteuo*! The word we've considered in detail (I pray not *ad nauseum*!) in this study! The word which speaks of one's firm conviction in the existence of God, and is followed by surrender and action consistent with conviction. The word Jesus uses in John 8:24. When I first began work on this study I was convinced some word other than *pisteuo* would be used in James 2:19. It just goes to show that what we think must be true in God's word is frequently not true! No wonder Paul tells Timothy to "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15) The use of *pisteuo* by James in 2:19 is one reason this has been an exceptionally difficult article for me to write. Once I knew James used *pisteuo* in this verse, it behooved me to understand what he is saying about the devils.

It is certain that James is emphasizing the fact that belief in God without works is insufficient. This is no different than the belief possessed by the devils. However, let's think about the other two components of *pisteuo*. Did the devils surrender to God and then manifest works demonstrating such surrender? Turn to Luke 8:27-33. Luke gives his account of a man possessed with a legion of devils. Jesus came to his country and commanded the legion of devils to depart from the man. The legion confessed their knowledge of Jesus as the Son of God, and asked Him that He not cast them into the abyss but rather into a herd of swine. He consented to their request, and they promptly left the man and entered the herd. Here we see the legion of devils fulfilling all 3 parts of *pisteuo*: they had a firm conviction of Jesus as the Son of God, they surrendered to His will (manifested as His commandment for them to leave the man), and their actions reflected their submission as they left the possessed man and entered the herd of swine. But they remained devils! What does this tell us about belief? It's not enough to simply fulfill these 3 parts of *pisteuo*. One must willingly obey!

Do we have Biblical examples of people who appeared to fulfill these 3 parts of *pisteuo*, but in reality failed to do so? Please turn to Mark 7:1-7. Jesus' disciples failed

to wash their hands before eating. The Pharisees asked Jesus about their failure to wash their hands. Jesus' reply: "Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." These were the Pharisees! They certainly had a firm conviction of the existence of God, and by their pious actions appeared to be submitting to His will. But to what were they actually submitting? The commandments of men! Jesus proceeds to tell them that worship given according to the commandments of men is vain! Here we have a people who, according to Jesus, was certainly honoring God, but their honor was no deeper than their lips. Their heart was far from Him. This distance was manifest by their unwillingness to obey His commandments. Instead, they worshipped according to the commandments of men, and as a result their worship was useless (vain). This example is somewhat different than that of the devils given above, in that the devils obeyed exactly the commandment given them by Jesus. However, in both examples the heart of the one who claimed to submit to God was far from Him. The point is that it is not enough to simply go through the motions of submission. One's heart must be right or the works are vain.

Paul tells us much the same thing in Colossians 2:18-23: "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." What do we see in religion today? We see many pious people, but are their pious actions according to the will of God? Paul tells us that one may be beguiled of one's reward by those who teach these doctrines of men (touch not, taste not, handle not). "Beguile" is not a word we use much in everyday English today. Vine's tells us *katabrabeuo* (translated "beguile") speaks of false teachers who would frustrate the faithful adherence of the believers to the truth, causing them to lose their reward. These things have a "shew of wisdom in will worship". *Ethelothreskeia* (will worship) refers to "worship which one prescribes and devises for himself, contrary to the contents and nature of faith which ought to be directed to Christ." Such worship appears pious and full of wisdom, but in actuality is vain and destined to condemn the believers to an eternal torment. How much worship offered to God today is will worship (worship one prescribes and devises for oneself, contrary to the contents and nature of faith which ought to be directed to Christ)? Again, in this passage we see one who may well have a firm conviction in God's existence, but has failed to submit to His will no mat-

(Continued on page 10)

*(Continued from page 9)*

ter how religious his actions appear to be. Their lips honor Him, but their hearts are far away.

Let's consider these religious people in light of James 2:19. Anyone today who worships God according to the commandments of men is no different than the Pharisees of old. But what did Jesus tell the Pharisees in John 8:44? Listen to His words: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." Everyone today who does as the Pharisees did and worships God according to the commandments of men rather than according to the truth is a child of the devil! They are no different than the devils spoken of by James in 2:19! They may appear to be servants of God, but are truly the servants of Satan. Paul tells us to watch out for these people, because Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Consider his words to the Corinthians: "But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." (2 Corinthians 11:12-15)

In these examples of those with a firm conviction but inappropriate action we see that one may appear to be a servant of God but truly be a servant of Satan. Next, let's consider those who may have an appropriate action but lack conviction.

### **Appropriate action but lack conviction**

Why is it necessary for me to write an article on Biblical Belief? Many people misrepresent Paul's words in Romans 3:24-28. Listen to what he says, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." What did we learn about righteousness in Hebrews 11? It is by faith that one becomes an heir of righteousness! Did this mean that the heir of the righteousness which is by faith did not have to perform works consistent with their conviction in the existence of God? Absolutely not! On the contrary, those who failed to perform appropriate works were not declared righteous by God! What does this tell us about Paul's statement that "we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law"? Deeds alone are insufficient to lead to one's justification! But did anyone think that their deeds alone were sufficient? Absolutely!

Paul tells us of these people in Romans 9:30-33. He says, "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." What else does Paul tell us about these Gentiles who attained to righteousness? Romans 2:13-15 says, "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another". Paul concludes Romans 2 with these words: "Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (verses 26-29) What was the Jews' problem? They did not believe Jesus was the Son of God. They stumbled at that stumblingstone and were ashamed because of it. They attempted to be justified by their works, but Paul tells us that one cannot be justified in such a manner. The Gentiles who attained to righteousness, on the other hand, performed the works of the law in faith! They showed the works of the law written on their hearts, even though they did not have the law as a covenant between them and God. So we see the Gentiles were justified because of their works and the fact they were performed in faith, but they were not justified by their works! The Jews may well have performed the same works, but they were not performed in faith. As a result, they failed to attain to righteousness and stood condemned because of their unbelief! They were a people who lacked conviction, but performed appropriate works.

I said in my introduction to this section that many people misrepresent Romans 3:24-28. How do they do so? John Calvin, in Book 3, chapter 15 of his Institutes of the Christian Religion states, "The principal point in this subject has been now explained: as justifications if dependent upon works, cannot possibly stand in the sight of God, it must depend solely on the mercy of God and communion with Christ, and therefore on faith alone." In Book 3, chapter 11, paragraph 19 he asks the question, "Does he not plainly enough attribute everything to faith alone when he disconnects it with works?" This is why it is necessary to write an article on Biblical Belief. Many people today are being misled down the path to destruction by teachings such as these. As we've seen throughout this study, works alone certainly

*(Continued on page 11)*

(Continued from page 10)

will not justify a man before God, but faith without works is equally dead. Works, while they cannot justify alone, must be performed in faith before one will be declared righteous by God. The Jews attempted to do the exact opposite of what many religious people today attempt: they sought to be justified by the works they performed, and failed. Today many people attempt to be justified by faith alone without works, and fail just as miserably. Only when one's firm conviction in the existence of God and the deity of His Son is combined with a total submission to His will and works consistent with such submission, along with the proper attitude and motivation for performing these works, will one be declared just by God. As we've seen in a prior study of justification, man is justified by faith (Romans 5:1), by works (James 2:24), by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9), and by grace (Titus 3:7). One cannot trust in one to the exclusion of another and be declared just by God. They all work together.

### **Our physical senses and understanding**

Much of our study dealt with the issue of understanding. Noeo (to perceive with the mind, to understand) is used to tell us of the understanding we gain by faith. This understanding is independent of our physical senses. Many religious people today, however, rely upon the understanding gained by their physical senses when they reject certain teachings of the scriptures. Many people teach that baptism is not essential to salvation. Peter hinted at the presence of this doctrine when he, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned these words: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). What do our physical senses tell us concerning baptism? They may say, "I've taken thousands of baths in my lifetime. What power is contained in my immersion in a tub of water?" Peter answers this question: Baptism for the remission of sins is the answer of a good conscience toward God! When one has Biblical faith and manifests the appropriate actions necessary to confirm that faith, God's power may then work in his life. Until one has true Biblical faith it is impossible for them to be saved! The saving grace of God is not available to them. Consider Jesus' words in Mark 16:16: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Here we learn that belief alone is insufficient for salvation. When one has "belief" but has not been baptized, they do not have faith in God and His power cannot wash away their sins. Such a one is not saved. It was unnecessary for Jesus to state, "but he that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned." If one doesn't believe, it doesn't matter whether they are baptized or not. They will be eternally condemned should they not correct that situation. From our study of Biblical Belief, what do we know about the one who claims to believe but refused to be baptized for the remission of sins? They don't believe (*pisteuo*) in Jesus! Their belief is in the false teachings of man, their faith is not in God, and it is

impossible for such a one to be forgiven of their sins.

### **How does one gain a true faith?**

For everyone who desires to spend eternity in heaven, this should be one of the most important questions they ask themselves. Without a true faith in God their sins will not be forgiven. So how does one obtain this faith? Paul tells us: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17) Here we have *pistis* as the subject of the sentence. "Cometh" is the verb. Next, we have a prepositional phrase, with the Greek noun *akoe* serving as the object of the preposition. *Akoe* is translated "hearing", and is in the genitive case. What is meant by a noun being in the genitive case? The genitive case "indicates that the noun is modifying another noun in the same phrase; often shows possession." Recall from our earlier study how a prepositional phrase is telling us something about the relationship between the subject and the verb? So in the first part of this sentence Paul is telling me that "Faith comes by my hearing". I cannot obtain faith by your hearing, and you cannot obtain faith by my hearing. The verb form of *akoe* is *akouo*. We considered *akouo* in some detail when we answered the question, "Does God hear a sinner's prayer?" For a brief review, the word *akouo* may refer to the sense of hearing or to the understanding of that which is heard. We need to determine which thought is being conveyed by *akoe* in this verse.

To determine which thought is being conveyed by *akoe*, let's review what we've learned about Romans 10:17 so far. To this point we know that my faith comes about because of my hearing, and your faith comes about because of your hearing. To answer the question regarding *akoe*, let's ask another question. Can I have faith if I am incapable of physical hearing? Surely the answer must be yes! Therefore, if I can have faith even though I'm deaf, and faith comes about because of hearing, the concept of hearing in Romans 10:17 must refer to an understanding of the information given rather than the physical act of hearing.

Paul goes on to say, "and hearing by the word of God." *Akoe* is used a second time by Paul in this phrase, but this time the noun is in the nominative case. In the first part of the verse, "by hearing" told us something about faith. Now, the prepositional phrase "by the word of God" is telling us something about "hearing". Again, the context of the sentence tells us that *akoe* is referring to understanding rather than the physical sense of hearing. The word of God doesn't have a direct effect on our physical sense of hearing, but it does have a direct effect on our understanding. The psalmist declares this truth when he says, "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way." (Psalm 119:104) We learn much about faith in this verse. It is by the word of God that a man gains understanding. This understanding then leads to faith. As we learned in Hebrews 11:3, it is by the means or instrumentality of faith that a man gains understanding which extends beyond the understanding gained through the input of his physical senses. But it all begins with the word of God! One who does not hear the word of God does not gain the understand-

(Continued on page 12)

*(Continued from page 11)*

ing required for true faith. One who does not have true faith cannot understand truths that extend beyond his physical senses. And, it is impossible for one without faith to please God. Therefore, one who will not hear God's word CAN-NOT be pleasing to Him!

We now know that one gains true faith by the understanding obtained through the word of God. One whose "faith" is based on the words of men does not have the faith required to be pleasing to God. Such a faith is truly dead. It cannot serve as the conduit through which the power of God flows to the true believer. But how does one know upon what their faith is based? One must evaluate their faith in the light of the word of God!

I heard an excellent analogy recently which I believe makes a valid point. Did you know that several brands of rat poison contains only 0.005% poison by weight? Bromadiolone is one type of poison used to kill rats. (If you'd like to see how little it takes to achieve its purpose, please visit the link above.) But why do the rats eat it at all? Because the majority of the compound is not toxic! Not only is it not toxic, but it is designed to be attractive to rats! Bromadiolone may be purchased in multi-edged sticks which appeal to the rats desire to gnaw, it may be purchased in pellets designed with greater "palatability", it's made in canary-seed form to appeal to mice, meal baits give rodents a variety of textures and flavors, liquid baits are available to attract rodents during dry seasons of the year, and powders may be used that stick to the rodent's fur causing their death when they ingest the poison while grooming. What is the end result: a dead rodent! The rat found the bait desirable, consumed it, and died. What would happen should one decide to use pure rat poison? It's likely they would continue to have a problem with rats! Even rats know better than to consume pure poison. However, when it's included in small quantities as part of a nourishing bait, the poison is highly effective. From the standpoint of religion, how much of the teaching proclaimed from pulpits, published in printed form, or made available around the world on the internet is just like rat poison? Nobody preaches pure false doctrine. If they did, they would have few if any followers. Just like the rat which wouldn't eat pure poison, the overwhelming majority of people would refuse to consume teaching which was completely contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Unfortunately, a small quantity of spiritual "poison" derived from the mind of man is mixed in with a large quantity of truth. What is the spiritual fate of those who consume this mixture? Those whose faith was based on such poison would be condemned to an eternity in hell! We've already considered Satan's tactics as recorded by Paul in the book of 2 Corinthians. Please hear his words again: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." (verses 13-15) Just as the vast majority of rat poison is non-toxic, the majority of Satan's teachings may be true to the word of God. It's that small percentage that kills.

Each of us must evaluate our faith in the light of God's word. If any part, even the smallest, most seemingly insignificant portion, is based on something other than the word of God the entire body of our faith is vain (empty and useless).

### **The Gospel**

In the discussion section of our study I mentioned that I would come back to the gospel in our summary. I'd like for us to close by considering the gospel and the role it plays in our salvation. We've spent much time in our study considering the actions that occur and others that are made possible by faith. Hebrews 11 taught us that, by faith, actions occur on the part of the one with faith. These actions are consistent with faith and demonstrate the presence of faith. In addition, by faith it becomes possible for the power of God to work in the one with faith. Keeping these thoughts in mind, what does Paul tell us about the gospel? Let's review Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." What did Paul say the gospel is? The power of God unto salvation! He didn't say "The power of God into salvation"! If you've studied with me already you understand the difference between these two words. If you haven't, let me briefly review them. "Unto" and "into" tell us where we are in relation to where we are going, or where we've been. "Unto" tells me that I am near my goal, while "into" tells me I've reached my goal and am currently within its confines. When Paul tells us that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation for everyone that believeth, he is telling us that the gospel takes us up to the point of salvation. But how does the believer get into salvation? By grace. Listen to Paul's words in Ephesians 2, verses 4-10: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." This passage in many ways sums up what we've learned about Biblical Belief. Where was I before God quickened me together with Christ? I was dead in sins and trespasses. What saved me? God's grace. Was I saved because I was obedient to everything God told me to do in the gospel? Yes and no. Yes, because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for those who believe, and without obedience to it one does not have this power; but no, because no work I do will ever bring me "into" salvation. The only way I get into salvation is by the grace of God!

So how does one summarize the need for works? Many sincere religious people have completely discounted

*(Continued on page 13)*

(Continued from page 12)

their importance. But James tells us that it is by works we are justified, and not by faith only. Consider where we started with this study. Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6). But how do I acquire this faith I need to please Him? By understanding the teachings recorded in His word. (Romans 10:17) What does the understanding I gain from His word cause me to do? Be obedient to the commandments He has given us to obey. What is the body of teaching and commandments God has given called? The gospel. How is God's power allowed to work in my life? By my faith. When I've obeyed the commandments contained in the true gospel, what am I? A believer in Jesus Christ (recall *pisteuo*, conviction plus action consistent with surrender). When I've become a believer in Jesus Christ, what does the gospel become to me? The power of God unto salvation. As long as I'm unto salvation, in what state am I? Dead in sins and trespasses. How do I move from a state of death in sins and trespasses into salvation? By the grace of God. What role do works play in this process? Just as Abraham was required to do everything he could at the time he believed God's word before God imputed righteousness unto him, every work God has commanded to take me unto salvation must be performed before God will, by His grace, bring me into salvation! So by understanding true Biblical Belief we see how the following four things are involved in our justification (being declared righteous by God):

1. Faith (Romans 3:28): True faith gained by understanding God's commandments leads to action.
2. Works (James 2:24-25): True faith leads one to obey the commandments given him by God.
3. The blood of Christ (Romans 5:9): When one is obedient to the commandment to be baptized for the remission of sins one comes into contact with the blood of Christ.
4. Grace (Romans 3:24): When I have true faith, have obeyed His commandments, have been washed of my sins by the blood of Christ, I receive the grace of God which brings me into salvation.

I have no doubt that some of my students are asking, "How do you know that baptism is required for one to access the blood of Christ?" Many denominations teach that one is cleansed of sin before baptism. The answer is found in the scriptures. John tells the seven churches of Asia, "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and

the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (Revelation 1:4-6) Now let's read what Ananias told Paul: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." What did Jesus do? Washed us from our sins in His own blood. What did Paul have to do to have his sins washed? Be baptized. Therefore, it is by baptism that one comes in contact with the blood of Jesus, which washes away our sins. One who depends upon salvation based upon the "sinner's prayer" in one of it's varied forms has NOT come into contact with the blood of Jesus. Without the blood of Jesus one will not be declared righteous by God.

I pray this study of Biblical Belief has been beneficial to you. Faith is a universal requirement for everyone who desires to be pleasing to God. This faith comes only by understanding the requirements for true faith as outlined in the word of God. I pray each of you will critically evaluate the source of your faith, and determine to eliminate any doctrine of men that may have crept in unawares, poisoning your faith and rendering it worthless. Listen to the words of Jude: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." (verses 3-4) Friends, the true faith was delivered once, and it was delivered to those living in the first century. Anything different is of Satan. Please allow God to purify your heart. This purification, however, can only occur by faith (Acts 15:9). If I may be of any help, please let me know. Feel free to contact me by e-mail. I stand ready to serve in whatever capacity I may as you strive to develop the understanding necessary to have a true faith in God.

(Continued on page 14)

*(Continued from page 13)*

The information in this study was taken from my website. The domain is [www.noeo.net](http://www.noeo.net). I am always in the process of writing and publishing new studies to the site. Please log on and continue your consideration of God's word through the internet. I have provided an e-mail link and will be happy to answer any questions which may arise. This material is not copyrighted. It is free for anyone to use. However, I require it be used to the glory of God, be provided to others free-of-charge, and not be associated with any man-made doctrines or creeds. My sole purpose for writing this article was to teach my fellow man of God's word, with the sincere prayer that by this material His name might be glorified and that many may come to know and obey the truth.

David H. Lasseter