

Core Theology How to Believe

Christianity is based on Faith. You become a Christian by faith. You remain a Christian by faith. You grow as a Christian by faith. The faith required can be expressed by God, yourself or someone else. In the healing miracles faith was present. It was either the faith of Jesus, the faith of the person to be healed or the faith of those who brought them. 'When Jesus saw their faith He said to the paralytic..' (Mk 2:5). God responds to faith not need. People are offended by God because He does not appear to meet the needs of people. Why does God not heal all the blind people? If God was good, there would be no evil in the world, no tsunamis, no earthquakes, no murders, no disasters! Need-centred people get very disappointed (and offended) by a faith-requiring God. God may respond to a need (I would not exclude that possibility) but He always works with faith.

Everybody knows and believes certain things. That is how we define ourselves in the world. A child learns what to believe about themselves. Often we are locked into our childish beliefs. We hang on to them like familiar friends. It would be strange not to believe certain things about ourselves. Paul says that when he was a child he spoke, thought and reasoned like a child. But when he became a man he gave up childish ways (1 Cor 13:11). Faith can change what we believe. People can be destroying themselves by what they believe. We believe on the basis of what we have been told and what we have experienced. Faith is a force. In fact, faith is the force of the creation. God is a faithful creator. God creates by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please (God) (Heb 11:6). So as Christians we must grow in faith. We can increase our faith. Faith can be measured. In scripture there are those with little faith (Mtt 14:31) and those with great faith (Mtt 8:10). The disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith (Lk 17:5-10). Paul speaks of faith growing (2 Cor 10:15). In fact, we want to increase with an increase that is from God (Col 2:19).

There seems to be a difference between faith and belief. In the Greek NT they are the same word (pisteuo = I believe). In English 'faith' is not a verb; you do not faith something but you believe something. I would suggest that belief is static and faith is active. We can change our belief but it is our faith that grows. This suggests that our belief anchors us in a particular direction. But it is faith that measures what we do with our belief. Our belief is pushed by our faith. Our capacity to believe is expanded (or reduced) by our faith force. This distinction may be hard to maintain because one can merge into the other. One distinction is that everyone believes something. What we believe about ourselves defines who we are and tells us how to react in the world. People can be born into a belief system and never change it. They can hold that belief system rigidly. But faith can take us beyond the boundary of what we believe. Hebrews 11 is a record of those who, by faith, went beyond what they thought (believed) was ever possible. God wants to blow our belief-based mind and its way of thinking, with faith force. When the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith (Lk 17:5-10), Jesus gave two parts to His answer. The first part of His answer was that we need the seed of belief, which is the mustard seed. There needs to be a belief, or orientation, that faith can build upon. If there is no seed or base then faith has nothing to increase. The second part of the answer is that we must do our duty, which means that we must

faithfully perform what is required of us, without complaint. The dutiful performance of seed-belief creates the capacity of faith. We get faith, or build faith, by the daily performance of our duty as perceived in our belief. Often we diminish our faith by not performing what we say we believe. This suggests that there is another hidden (or default) belief system at work which kicks in when things become tough for Self. We become threatened by some means which reveals our double-mindedness. We have two tracks in our life. One track is the belief track that releases faith and grows. The alternative track is the unbelief track which we resort to with things get difficult. Here the force of faith is negative and we diminish in belief stature. To get rid of double-mindedness we have to purify our hearts (James 4:8). The double-minded can receive nothing from the Lord (James 1:7,8).

Faith has to do with purity of heart. There are 7 references about purity of heart in the NT:

- Mtt 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.
Acts 15:9 ..purifying their hearts by faith.
1 Tim 1:5 The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart.
2 Tim 2:22 Pursue Righteousness, faith, love... with those that call upon the lord out of a pure heart.
Heb 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.
James 4:8 Cleanse your hands, you sinners and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
1 Pet 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.

What goes together here is purity, faith and single-mindedness. Purity is of the spirit, faith is of the soul and singleness is of the body. Purity is an expression of the singular heart.

How to Believe.

Christianity is about faith.

Revelation is God coming to us. Religion is us coming to God.

Revelation says what God wants. Religion says what we want.

Religion is man's response to God. It is about control. Religion is, generally, our attempt to control God and get God to do what we want. We want God to change things to suit us. We may have a respect and awe for something greater than ourselves but we do not see ourselves as changing as a result. We want the world to change to suit us. Faith is about us changing to be part of a process greater than ourselves. Faith gets us beyond Self.

There is, therefore, a struggle between religion and revelation.

Religion is based upon human need and, therefore, it develops methods and rituals to express and meet human need. Human beings always have needs and humans are usually revolving around their problems. Revelation reveals the requirements of God which can clash with the requirements of Self. The basic issue in life is Self or God. Our life is either Self-serving or God-serving. We can use Self to serve God or we can attempt to use God to serve Self. The idolized Self can capture and live off real ambition in God. Alternatively, Self limits ambition to Self convenience.

Self requirements impose a limitation on life. Self protects Self.

Self is about enhancing Self. Self re-directs energy to itself.

Self curtails possibility and limits faith to self constraints.

Christian Faith is getting beyond Self limitation into God extent

(or lack of limitation). I need to deny, resist and oppose the limitation created by the constraints of Self concern. Christian faith must lead to a denial of our Self, because God is taking us far beyond the limits of our current Self.

It is important to remember that the Self is not the enemy. Satan is the enemy. Everybody has a Self and a Self is the product of living. Our Self-image is the picture that we derive for ourselves in our interaction with the world. We will always understand and judge ourselves in terms of the Self that we have devised for ourselves. Jesus Christ can change our sense (or image) of Self. The Scripture tells us who we really are in Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:17-19). We believe by releasing who we are to what we can really be in Jesus Christ. We are not told to kill our self; we are told to deny our self. Our identity in Christ must change. We can achieve greater things believing out of a different identity or structure of our energies. May I be released by faith into the new identity that Jesus Christ has for me. What is that new Identity?

The Creeds.

Over a period of time the Church has devised formulas, symbols or summaries of the Christian faith. These were formulated as creeds (Latin: Credo = I believe). They were devised to be used in baptisms and the Mass. Historically, there are three ecumenical (universal) creeds. These are the creeds agreed upon before the major schisms of the church. They are the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed.

The Apostle's Creed.

The Apostle's creed had its origins in the early confessions of the church. However, it did not take its final form until the 7th century AD. It was not devised by a council of the church. It is a concise summary of traditional Christian belief and language.

1. I believe in God
2. the Father Almighty
3. Maker of heaven and earth.

4. And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord
5. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
6. Born of the Virgin Mary
7. Suffered under Pontius Pilate
8. Was crucified, dead and buried.
9. He descended into hell.
10. On the third day He rose again from the dead.
11. He ascended into heaven.
12. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
13. From there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

14. I believe in the Holy Spirit
15. the Holy Catholic Church
16. the Communion of Saints
17. the Forgiveness of Sins
18. the Resurrection of the Body and
19. the Life everlasting.

This creed asserts an initial belief in God and then proceeds to describe God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is described principally as the Creator. The faith in Jesus Christ is expressed as a sequence of historical events, past and future. The Holy Spirit refers principally to the activity of the church.

The Nicene Creed.

This creed was formulated by the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Another reason for the creation of creeds is to counter heresy or false teaching. This creed was formed principally to counter Arianism, which taught that there was a time when Christ was not and that He began to exist at some point in time. Jesus Christ is, in this teaching, a creature.

1. I believe in one God
2. the Father almighty
3. Maker of heaven and earth
4. and of all things visible and invisible.

5. And in one Lord Jesus Christ
6. the only begotten Son of God
7. Begotten of His Father before all worlds
8. God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God
9. Begotten, not made,
10. Being of one substance with the Father;
11. By whom all things were made:
12. Who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven
13. He was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary.
14. He was made man
15. and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
16. He suffered and was buried.
17. On the third day He rose again according to the scriptures.
18. He ascended into heaven
19. and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
20. He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead:
21. Whose kingdom shall have no end.

22. I believe in the Holy Spirit
23. the Lord and Giver of Life
24. Who proceeds from the Father (and the Son),
25. Who, with the Father and the Son together, is worshipped and glorified,
26. Who spoke by the prophets.

27. I believe one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.
28. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.
29. I look for the Resurrection of the dead
30. and the life of the world to come.

This creed is richer in theological reflection. This is because people are coming up with strange ideas of who Jesus Christ really is. The Apostle's creed gives us the plain history of the events of Christ's life. The Nicene creed attempts a deeper explanation of the significance of Jesus Christ. This is consistent with the scriptural experience. In scripture the Gospels give us the events of Christ's life with some recognition of Who He is. In the Epistles we see Paul interpreting the significance of Jesus Christ in such passages as Phil 2:5-11 and Col 1:15-18. Jesus Christ is both the Man from Galilee and the Cosmic Christ. In Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Col 2:9). This is not just God looking like a man or a man having a bit of God. Jesus Christ is fully God and Fully Man. The credal process is heading towards the Trinitarian formula of the Athanasian creed.