

Romans study week 3 - Faith

Faith has always been important for Christians; but Protestants have given it particularly high value, we say we are saved by faith and not by works. After Martin Luther personal faith became much more important and just being part of the Church less so.

Questions

What do you associate with believe?

What words do you associate with faith?

How is the word used in a non-faith context?

How is it used in the Church?

In English before about 1600 the verb 'believe' was always had a person as its direct object, not a statement. It did not mean believing that a statement is true, with varying degrees of certainty, but more like what we mean when we say to somebody, "I believe in you". To believe in someone means to have confidence in them, trusting that person.

The English word believe comes from the Old English *be loef* meaning to hold dear or perhaps to love. So to believe meant not only confidence and trust in a person; but also to hold that person dear to love that person. So to believe in God, meant to love God. How much difference does it make to think of belief as love, rather than believing that a set of statements about God are true?

The links between love and faith go back further. The Latin word *credo*, from which we get *creed* and *credulous*, is usually translated 'I believe'; but *credo* means 'I give my heart to'. Heart does not simply refer to feelings or emotions; but is a way of referring to the whole self at the deepest level. To whom do you give your heart? To whom do you commit yourself? Who do you love?

What is it that transforms us? Is it believing that a set of statements are true or loving God as known in Jesus? Isn't love what changes us?

The meaning of faith has also changed. The ancient meanings of faith are expressed by the Latin words *fidelitas* and *fiducia* and their Greek equivalents. *Fidelitas* means fidelity or faithfulness, this is more than a word about sexual relations, it means loyalty, commitment, allegiance and attentiveness to our relationship with God.

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Fiducia means trust, and its opposite is not infidelity but mistrust or anxiety. See Matthew 6:25-34, here little faith and worry or anxiety go hand in hand. 'Think how free you would be if there were no anxiety in your life.'¹

If faith is 'believing that' then it puts pressure on us to believe correctly or strongly, if it is faithfulness and trust, then it liberates us. 'Faith as faithfulness to God and trust in God is the product of a deeper and deeper centring in God.'²

Our beliefs matter; but Christianity is not a set of beliefs to which you have to give intellectual assent. Beliefs of themselves may be good or bad; we should not make Christianity unnecessarily difficult by demanding certain beliefs when what is really needed is a relationship of trust in God.

Sometimes we confuse the word faith because we contrast it with works. Protestants have sometimes portrayed Roman Catholics as a religion of works and portrayed themselves as a religion of grace and faith. To understand Paul properly we need to get away from this way of thinking. For Paul faith is 'a vital commitment to a program.'³ In other words faith is a lifestyle commitment.

When Paul contrasts faith and works he is contrasting faith with works and works without faith. So for example, 2 people may do the same thing; but one out of love and the other for appearances.

Sometimes it is hard to translate the Greek because of the way English has developed. When we want to translate 'I faith', we have to say 'I believe'.

	Greek	Anglo-Saxon	Norman French
Noun	Pistis	Belief	Faith
Adjective	Pistos	Believing	Faithful
Verb	Pisteuein	To believe	

Read Romans 1:16-17, 3:21-31

Notice how all can have a relationship with God by faith, Jews and Gentiles are all on the same footing. All can be 'righteoused' and by this Paul means all can be transferred from one realm to another, from sin to obedience, from death to life, from being under law to being under grace. When we are 'righteoused' we become a new creation, part of the new people of God.

¹ Borg Speaking Christian page 122

² IBID p122

³ Borg The First Paul page 168

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How are 'faith' and 'believe' used in a non-faith context?

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What would it feel like to 'belove' God, rather than just try to think a set of statements are true?

What do you think are the best words to explain faith/believe to someone today?

How is faith a lifestyle commitment?

How would you explain to someone what it means to have faith?

Has the church become too caught up with 'belief that ...'

What distinguished the Jews in the ancient world was the Torah, their side of the covenant. What should be the distinguishing mark of a Christian?