



Will He Find Faith?

Part 2 What IS Faith?

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But without faith it is impossible to please Him. Hebrews 11:61 KJV

Attempting to isolate a singular and simple point of focus to encourage and teach all, especially those who do not have any background or exposure to knowledge of the Word, I came to the concept of faith...and the question of whether or not Messiah will find faith on the earth when He returns. Although singular, it is NOT a simple topic. In fact, it probably drops me into the proverbial deep end of the pool as it may prove to be controversial.

We are living in a time in which it is no longer considered the “norm” to have a stable nuclear home with both parents and their children living together. This has impacted Believer’s ability to transmit our faith from one generation to another. Most denominational churches have seen a sharp decline in membership as even children raised “in” the church do not continue as adults. Many people, both those that remain in membership in churches and many of those who have left, consider that their childhood training is an adequate understanding of their faith. Barna Research projects, among other resources, have consistently shown this is not true as the familiarity and knowledge of His Word has greatly declined. Recently, I have spoken with people who even find that Biblical language can be an embarrassment or inappropriately suggestive with those in the general population, presumably because of the semantic drift, and current changes in meaning of words.

Let us begin then with a look at the **definition(s) of faith**, beginning with a current secular result and moving backwards through Greek and Hebrew understandings to get as close to the root and concrete meanings as possible.

Merriam-Webster definition of faith is similar to many secular sources. It’s second entry says that it is a transitive verb, archaic, and means “believe” and “trust.” (Hmmm, faith is archaic?? It is defined as “old, old fashioned, and antiquated,” “no longer in daily use” and “to have lost a particular meaning.” What does THAT tell you?) The first entry is more fully developed as follows.

1. something that is believed especially with strong conviction

2. A: allegiance to duty or a person : LOYALTY
 B: fidelity to one's promises
 C: sincerity of intentions
3. A: **belief and trust in and loyalty to God**
 B: belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion

 C. **firm belief in something for which there is no proof**
 D. complete trust

Parts 2 and 3 indicates the belief and trust in God or doctrines of a religion, or a person or promises but the other aspects do not address WHAT is believed in, even stating it may be for something for which there is no proof. (Actually, I find this a little scary, as it leaves too big an opening for any charismatic person or idea to draw people in, in my opinion!)

A Biblical definition certainly indicates that it is important to know **what/who** the faith is IN since it involves the entirety of self, including your mind. Contrary to some detractors' position, it was never intended to be a blind, mindless thing.

You shall love the LORD Your God with all your, heart,
 with all your soul, and **with all your mind.**

Matthew 22:37

Nowhere in the Word is anyone expected to exert a blind faith, but rather an intelligent faith, to examine the facts and determine what is believable. The writers of the NT were eyewitnesses of the Truth about Messiah, the most compelling kind of witness to anything, even today. They knew the prophecies of old, and how what they experienced confirmed them. They were confident of truth.

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you
 the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

2 Peter 1:16

Test all things. Hold fast what is good.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

With thanks to the **Blue Letter Bible**, the Greek word that was chosen to represent the original Hebrew word for faith, is *pistis*, G4102 and Strong's says this:

pis'-tis; from [G3982](#); persuasion, i.e. credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher), especially reliance upon Christ for salvation; abstractly, constancy in such profession; by extension, the system of religious (Gospel) truth itself:—assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity.

The root word of *pistis* is *pisteo*:

pisteo, G4100. The Outline of Biblical Usage says this:

to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence in

- . of the thing believed
- .to credit, have confidence
 - A. in a moral or religious reference
- .used in the NT of the conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of soul
 - i.to trust in Jesus or God as able to aid either in obtaining or in doing something: saving faith
 - ii.mere acknowledgment of some fact or event: intellectual faith
- I.to entrust a thing to one, i.e. his fidelity
 - to be entrusted with a thing.

Though Believers are grateful for the availability of the Word in our own mother tongues, it is still important to understand that God’s choice of language and culture was Hebraic. Translators know how difficult it is to fully convey the meaning of things in one language to another. In our western mindset, we tend to think of the mental effort to decide to believe in something as faith.

But even as I studied the meanings of *pisteo* in various contexts, I think I am also seeing a shift over time in the intended meanings.

Now faith is the **substance** of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1 KJV

The Greek word underlying “substance,” G5287, *hypostasis* is defined this way by The Outline of Biblical Usage:

From a compound of ὑπό (G5259) and ἵστημι (G2476)

- I.a setting or placing under
 - . thing put under, substructure, foundation
- II.that which has foundation, is firm**
 - . **that which has actual existence**
 - .a substance, real being**
 - A. the substantial quality, nature, of a person or thing
 - B. the steadfastness of mind, firmness, courage, resolution

.confidence, firm trust, assurance

This understanding confirms faith, as having substance, being real, which is different from the current secular and even the “way we usually think” definition. The last entries mentioned being firm, which corresponds more closely with the Hebrew behind it. Yet today, I think we can see the shift to the emphasis being greatly on what **God** has done and can do. It is not so in Hebrew. The Hebrew word for faith is *Emunah*, Strong’s H530 אֱמוּנָה, of course closely related to *emun* Strong’s H529, which we usually see as “amen.”

Strong's Concordance is an amazing base of information, yet it should be remembered that James Strong was also of a Western mindset as he established his range of meanings of words. I am not certain why Strong's so often begins by defining a word with the same word, but as you read through the list of definitions for each word, toward the end you come to those that reflect the Hebraic, less abstract sense: stability, steady. (A characteristic of the Hebrew language is to be more concrete, referring to observable things in nature, rather than the abstract concepts common to our Greek way of thinking.) This is closer to the Hebrew original concept of "being firm, like a pillar, supporters of the door" per Brown, Driver, Briggs. This reminds me of how impressed I was upon first learning the Hebrew word for wise counsel, *etzah*, which is related to a tree, *etz*...referring to the tall, straight firmness and strength of a tree as being like the wise counsel of an elder. I live among tall pines and they just seem to be a daily reminder of this concept of straight, firm strength....which underscores faith!

Taking it back further into the paleo Hebrew font, Jeff A. Benner's **Ancient Hebrew Lexicon** has this to say:

The Hebrew word for faith is אמונה (*emunah* - Strong's #530) and **is an action oriented word meaning "support"**. This is important because the Western concept of faith places the action on the one you have faith in, such as "faith in God". But, the Hebrew word אמונה places the action on the one who "supports God". It is not a knowing that God will act, but rather I will do what I can to support God. This idea of support for the word *emunah* can be seen in Exodus 17:12.

But Moses' hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat upon it, and Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady (emunah)until the going down of the sun.

Faith in God is to be based on intelligent consideration of observable, witnessed things. Rather than our western way of thinking that faith is **in God** and what He has and will do for us, (abstract concept) the Hebraic understanding is more connected to what **the person** does (action verb): stand firm like a pillar or a tree in support of God...which results in obedience and steadfastness toward Him...faith.

An abstract concept is probably easier to learn when there are people all around who are walking it out and clear, observable examples can be seen! That has become less and less the case as we are in a post-modern Christian time. It seems to me to be even more important than ever to be able to present a clear, observable, concrete understanding, not just our comfortable "church language!" The recent observation of shift of meaning making it difficult to share truths from the Word seems to confirm that.

While of course, we ARE grateful for Who He is and What He has and will do, still if the whole basis of our faith is what He does for us, that's rather like the "gumball machine" theory of God, isn't it? We love Him because of what He gives us? To love Him and have faith because one has an understanding and loves Him for Who He is, leading to support God in all we do, seems to put the shoe on the right foot. As maturing Believers we are to be walking after Him as He leads, learning to be more like Him...the sanctification process that is too often forgotten.

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. John 17:17 KJV

So while the “Jesus loves me, this I know” aspect is true, beloved of children and adults worldwide, and foundational, it isn’t a stopping place! Because He first loved us, we love Him and in love, determine to support and obey Him...which is the observable outcome called **faith**. And He will always preserve a remnant!

That whole time period before faith comes used to be considered primarily, or even ONLY, in childhood. Without the consistent and substantial framework of God honoring families and assemblies to pass on understanding, that has changed! This has led to the problem we have today of people being so far outside of understanding faith that we need to make a special point to know how to teach them.

I believe God has already foreknown this issue and has made His pattern for coming to faith known in His Word. It even provides for the absence of childhood frameworks.....***to be continued.***