

QUESTION #4 – What is saving faith?

Anyone who honestly reads the Bible must admit that it does say in many places that all one must do to be saved is “believe” in Jesus Christ. Repeatedly, the Bible does say that salvation is by “faith” (i.e. John 3:16-18; 6:35; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:22, 26; 4:5; 5:1; Eph. 2:8).

In other words, the Scriptures state that the matter of salvation

is not a matter of who a person is ;

it is not a matter of what a person is ;

it is not a matter of what a person does ;

it is not a matter of what a person feels ;

BIBLICAL SALVATION IS A MATTER OF WHAT A PERSON BELIEVES .

So when we crawl through the Bible it is obvious that having everlasting life is contingent upon believing in Jesus or having faith in Jesus Christ. Now we tend to translate “believe” and “faith” as two different words, but in all reality both of these words are in the same family , except one is a verb and the other is a noun.

The basic Greek verb used for “believe” (πιστεω) and noun used for “faith” (πιστις) all come from the same family. The Greek words mean to believe in something in the sense of trusting something and placing your confidence in something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 361-362).

We can illustrate the simple meaning of these “faith” words by pointing out some places where they are used when not connected to the matter of salvation. One place where Jesus uses the verb “believe” is Matthew 24:24, 26. During the Tribulation, Christ says to Israel that they should not believe or trust or place their confidence in anyone who says they have found the Messiah on earth. So if someone came to one and said they had found the Messiah, one should simply say “I don’t believe that.” What I believe is that Jesus will come from the sky, not from some remote spot out in a wilderness.

In one other place, Jesus rebuked the disciples for not believing the testimony of Mary Magdalene and the testimony of two other disciples (Mark 16:11-14). The point of “not believing” was they did not trust or place their confidence in the fact that the testimony was true.

When we put these simple, Greek New Testament words in the context of saving faith, it is not complicated. We are very grammatically accurate to state it this way—**Saving faith means to place your trust and confidence in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins. Saving faith is what you believe in or trust in or place your confidence in to save you from your sins.**

Dr. Earl Radmacher made a very important observation and presents a critical truth we need to remember when he writes: “We need to beware of the tendency to add meanings to these words that they were never intended to carry” (*Salvation*, p. 119). The words “believe” in something and have “faith” in something mean just that.

As Dr. Radmacher said, “It is not our job to encourage people to have faith in their faith” (*Ibid.*, p. 19). It is our responsibility to proclaim that people need to have faith or believe in the object of their faith, Jesus Christ.

So the critical question one would need to ask and answer is “What do you place your trust or confidence in to save you from your sins?” “In whom or in what do you trust to take you to heaven?” To me the question based on the words is simple. You either trust in Jesus Christ to save you or you don’t. It isn’t complicated.

There is a very critical passage that actually deals with saving faith in the face of death that enable us to clearly understand the simple meaning of believe. The text is one I have used at funerals many times—John 11:25-26.

Mary and Martha’s brother Lazarus had died and the Lord Jesus Christ came to Martha and made a, as Zane Hodges called it, “majestic claim.” He claimed that He was the resurrection and the life and any who would believe in Him would live even if He died. Then in verse 26 he asked Martha “Do you believe this?” Believe what? The simple facts of what I just said. He doesn’t ask her to believe and make Him Lord of her life. He doesn’t ask her to believe and follow Him. He doesn’t ask her to believe and repent of sin. He doesn’t ask her to believe and promise to live right. He simply asks her whether or not she believes the fact that faith in Him will give her life?

So the facts are saving-faith facts. Whatever Jesus asked her to believe is enough to save her. What Jesus simply asks her to believe or trust was that He was the one who could save and give life. That is it. No more and no less.

Now when you look at **verse 27**, she gives us the answer about what she believed that saved her. She believed Jesus was the Messiah (the Christ); she believed Jesus was the Son of God (God) and she believed that Jesus was God come into the world to save us. That is what she believed. It is so simple, so uncomplicated and so right. She placed her trust in Jesus Christ to save her and any who do that “shall live even if they die.”

Lordship salvation proponents make this faith business a complicated commitment to discipleship or Lordship. In other words, it isn’t just simple faith in Jesus Christ that saves; it is real commitment to Jesus Christ or real dedication to the Lordship of Jesus Christ that saves.

But if you base what you believe on the actual inspired words of Scripture, here is the plain truth of the actual words that are used: **If you believe that by placing your trust and confidence and faith in Jesus Christ that you will be saved from your sins, you are saved. If you believe that Jesus Christ is the only one who can take care of your sin problem and take you to heaven, you are saved.** That is exactly what the words mean when they say “believe” on Him or have “faith” in Him.