

What Does It Mean to Believe?

By Jim Elliff

Sitting on the deck on a balmy evening, my daughter asked again for more clarity on the most important question she could pose: “Dad, what does it really mean to believe in Christ?” I commended her for that question, because it is not asked by most people in the world, nor is it examined closely enough by those who have some of the language of Christianity.

Here’s what I told her while sitting under the Big Dipper.

“Do you ever think about how I care for you? You don’t worry about your food or a place to sleep. And even if somehow we were to be taken away from our home, you still wouldn’t worry much about having what you need every day. You know I’ll take care of you.”

“But suppose you *did* worry about it. Suppose that you would not trust me even though I have not changed. What would you do? You would fret about your needs every day. I’m sure you would save your money and count every penny you could find. Then you would have to discover some way to get to a store to buy what you could to eat. Your money would not last long, so you would have to find ways to sell some of the items you own. You would eventually have to go to your neighbors and friends and see if you could do some labor for them so that you could make more money for food. And if this did not work after a while, maybe you would become a beggar, all because you were not willing to trust me. You would make a difficult life for yourself.”

“But you *don’t* worry about all of that because you *do* trust me. You don’t question for one minute that I will provide all you need because you know that I love you so much that I will take care of you the best I can—*always*.”

“There are two types of people in the world—those who believe or trust Christ and those who don’t. Among those who don’t are the rebellious people who run from Christ and don’t want to have anything to do with Him. There are also people who rebel in a different way. They refuse to trust Christ and prefer to try to accomplish salvation *their own way* even though they want to be called ‘Christians.’”

“These people try hard to do whatever they can to save themselves, but even though they are sincere they are actually disobedient to God’s Word. Some of them worry



about whether they are doing enough and fret about not being sufficient to earn eternal life, but others actually think they are doing plenty at the moment. That, of course, is a mistake. Their emphasis is on *doing* enough to earn God’s love, and they live a stressful life trying to be accepted by God.”

“On the other hand, there are some who reject their self-reliance and all the awful disobedience that it brings, and they trust Christ and what Christ has done on the cross for them. Jesus died to purchase the full pardon for their sins. They rest in that and have full confidence that everything is done by Christ for their salvation. They trust that Christ’s life and death and resurrection is sufficient to satisfy God’s requirements and to provide pardon and a future in heaven. They are amazed that such a great gift could be theirs, but that does not keep them from trusting Christ for it. After all, that’s what God tells them to do.”

I had more to say to my precious daughter about how a person who trusts Christ demonstrates the “marks” of a true Christian once she begins the life of trust. But my first and most important job was to make Christ’s death and resurrection abundantly clear, and then to show my daughter the path to Him through faith alone.

It is amazing that something so coherent, uncomplicated, and wonderful is dismissed by most people. Many cannot bring themselves to give up on the impossible “works” way of salvation. Children are no different. If American parents are religious about anything, it is their insistence on building up a child’s self esteem. It is almost impossible for most children to understand that they cannot impress God with how good they are. Yet, when those children gain a clear picture of their sinfulness and complete inability, they will understand better what reliance on God is all about.

Interestingly, a child’s trust is the same trust that any young person or adult must have in order to come to Christ.

One day a jailer asked the apostle Paul, “What must I do to be saved?” The answer was the same one it has always been. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved . . .” (Acts. 16:31).

Faith is not complex, but it is absolute—that is, it is a whole turning from any shred of confidence you have in *yourself* to be saved, and a full, or total resting on *Christ alone*. And that may be the most difficult and humbling thing you will ever do.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.” (John 6:47)

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