

What Is The Difference Between Emotional and Intellectual Faith?

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Does *how* we believe make a difference? Is there more than one kind of belief? The answer to both of these questions is 'yes'. It *does* make a difference how we believe something and there *is* more than one way to believe. This article will contrast and compare intellectual belief with emotional belief. We will look at the strengths and weaknesses of both. We will also discover how these two different means of believing affect our relationship with God.

The two types of faith [belief] defined

An emotional belief is based on feelings instead of facts. Many emotional beliefs are based on feelings alone, apart from reality. As children, we sometimes feared what was hidden under our beds. However, for the most part, the only things under the bed were harmless dust bunnies. As adults, we may misunderstand someone or some issue and become agitated, only to find out later our agitation was unfounded. Nevertheless, in both situations, the feelings were real. The fear that something was under my bed definitely caused me to break out in a sweat several times during my childhood. And, how many marital arguments have ensued simply because of a misunderstanding?

We believe something intellectually when we accept its precept in our minds as being true. This intellectual belief may or may not include acting upon that belief. It may merely be a mental assent to a fact without doing anything about it. An example of an intellectual belief would be that I believe an airplane can fly. I may or may not get into that airplane to have it fly me somewhere. Nevertheless, I believe in my mind, that it is capable of flight.

It definitely makes a difference whether we believe something intellectually or emotionally. These two different kinds of belief (also called 'faith') play important roles in our spiritual lives. The kind of faith we have means the difference between eternal life and eternal punishment.

Emotional faith: Working hard toward the wrong goal

A biblical example of an emotional faith can be found in Paul's epistle to the Romans. The apostle Paul, speaking of his fellow Jews, said this, "*For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*" (Romans 10:2 ESV). Paul was saying that these people were very active in their religion, but it was a religion that was not based on truth.

Paul continued in this passage, "*For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness*" (Romans 10:3 ESV). These Jews had ignored the truth that Jesus is the Savior of the world, and had fashioned a religion of their own. Paul says that this religion was a self-centered religion in which the participant attempted to work his or her way to salvation by obeying certain rules and regulations. However, it is not possible to work one's way to salvation or forgiveness, as Paul finishes this passage, "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*" (Romans 10:4 ESV). We cannot work enough to pay for our own sins. Jesus paid for our sins on the cross, the work we do to be forgiven of our sins is to trust in Him, "*Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent'*" (John 6:29 ESV).

They were very busy going about things they believed would merit salvation, but they were wrong. This is an example of an emotional faith; one that is based on a feeling, or an assumption, or even a fantasy, but is misguided because it is not based on truth.

Intellectual faith: belief that changes nothing

Jesus addresses the subject of *knowing* the right things but not *doing* them, when He said, "*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? Everyone who*

comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6:46-49 ESV; see also Matthew 7:24-27). Jesus indicated that, if we truly consider Him to be our Lord, we should be doing what He wants us to do. The people calling Him, "Lord, Lord" had the knowledge to know what they should do; they simply were not doing it. Jesus makes a direct contrast between the man who acts upon the knowledge he has and the one who does not act on that knowledge. Both have the same knowledge, but one has chosen to commit to living according to the truth he knows, while the other has not. For the one who simply knows the truth without acting on it, Jesus says, "...the ruin of that house was great."

Salvation requires both types of faith

Both types of belief must exist for one to have true biblical faith. First, one must have the truth from which to guide his or her thinking. No one has the right to invent a path to salvation of his or her own design. However, saving faith requires more than mere mental assent. It requires commitment.

Saving faith requires not only knowledge of the truth, but a heart commitment to the Author of that Truth. Once again, in the epistle to the Romans, Paul describes the correct response to the Gospel message, *"...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved"* (Romans 10:9-10 ESV). Paul is saying that one must have a heart commitment to Jesus in order to be truly saved. If a person believes in Jesus sincerely enough to voice his or her faith in public, this is evidence of true commitment to God.

I used to wonder what "...with the heart one believes" meant. I knew the organ in our chests that pumps blood throughout the body could not 'believe' anything. I discovered that it meant that one believes so fully that it is felt in the heart. Much like one 'feels' the pain of a lost loved one. The intensity of the truth is actually felt in the body. "To speak of reasoning in the heart does not mean that the heart is doing the reasoning. Rather, it means that the heart has become involved. The ideas or thoughts take place in the mind and a corresponding attitude or feeling occurs in the heart. It is then and only then that we can speak of reasoning in the heart...The truth becomes real. Value (importance) is felt. Truth has become internalized." (The Randall House Commentary. Romans. Forlines, F. Leroy. p. 34)

Conclusion

There is indeed a difference between emotional faith and intellectual faith. When it comes to 'saving' faith, both emotional and intellectual faith must be present. Emotional faith, without knowledge of the truth, will lead to an enthusiastic journey down the wrong road. Intellectual faith, without the commitment of the heart, is not faith at all, but merely a mental acknowledgement of facts.

God has given us His Word in order that we might know His plan, our sin, and the Savior, Jesus Christ. He has told us that we are all sinners in need of forgiveness, we cannot fix ourselves, Jesus Christ died on a cross for our sins, and repentance and faith in Jesus will cleanse us, so that we can have fellowship with God again. When one realizes this Truth [intellectual faith] and acts upon it by committing himself or herself to Jesus [emotional faith], that person truly gains eternal life.

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