

QUESTIONS #1 – BELIEVE IN JESUS

THE QUESTION

Acts 16:31 – They said. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

There is a question concerning the definition of believe, what is meant when belief is in the context of a person, and the function and importance of prepositions. This is a question of grammar, but it has an extraordinary effect on theology.

When believers disagree, it is important to be able to discuss the issues and establish the method of that discussion. We do not discuss a contentious point with the opinions of other men; we rely upon what we can see from the Scriptures.

A couple of weeks ago, Dr. Cone filled in for me. In his introduction to Galatians, he made a few points about the difference between believing God/Jesus and believing IN God/Jesus. I have talked to Chris previously about this question and I believe he has identified a problem in the messaging of the Gospel, but I do not think he has the right solution.

In short, he said that believing God/Jesus and believing IN God/Jesus are different and that the proposition indicates trusting IN the person not just in their message. This statement by Dr. Cone is not uncommon and is echoed by many prominent teachers and scholars.

Quoted from GotQuestions.org:

Do you believe that Jesus is God in human form (John 1:1, 14)? Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins (1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21), for which you deserve eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23)? Do you believe that the sacrifice of Jesus, God incarnate, is the only adequate payment for your sins (1 John 2:2; John 14:6; Acts 4:12)?

Do you believe these things? If so, great, but believing the facts about Jesus is only part of the equation. Biblical faith/belief is far more than believing certain things to be true. Biblical, saving faith is also trusting/relying on those facts.

A chair is a good illustration. You can look at a chair and believe it is made of materials strong enough to support your weight, and you can believe that it was assembled correctly. But that is not biblical faith. Biblical faith is sitting in the chair. It is actually relying on the chair to hold your weight off the ground.

IS THIS TRUE?

THE RESOLUTION

The word *believe* is “πιστεύω pisteuō,” and it’s based root is “πειθω peithō.”

“πειθω peithō” means convince, persuade, be persuaded, confidence (Acts 17:3-4, 18:4, 19:8, 27:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:11). Now, some translations miss with this word (Galatians 1:9, 3:1, 5:7; Hebrews 2:13, 13:17-18).

“πιστεύω pisteuō” (except in the passive) means to be fully persuaded, to believe, to consider something as true. The question of whether or not this word means or implies “trust” will be discussed later.

The question about believing in a person (God/Jesus) is also connected to the use of prepositions and the grammatical form of the object of belief. Dr. Cone mentioned that the dative indicates the preposition “en.”

To see what this means, let's turn to John and make some general and specific observations dealing with the word *believe*. Why go to John to seek this answer? John uses the word *believe* 3 times more than Matthew, Mark, and Luke combined. Couple this with the fact that John is the only book written so that unbelievers would believe, we should discover if the statements about the nature of "believe in Jesus" are accurate.

John uses the word *believe* 98 times in 85 verses.

With the preposition "dia" (through, because of, *agency*) – three times (1:7, 4:41, 17:20)

With the preposition "en" (in) – once (3:15)

With the preposition "eis" (to, unto, into, with a view to, because of, with respects to, upon) – 34 times (1:12, 2:23, 3:36, 6:29, 7:5, 16:9)

Without preposition – 52 times. With these, most have either no object or are used with the dative; one is used with an accusative (John 2:22, 3:12, 4:46-53, 9:35-38, 16:27-31, 19:34-35)

Does the text indicate that believing in Jesus Christ is different than believing the claims and offers of Jesus Christ? Is there any indication that there is a separate step like what "Got Questions" has stated (repeat quote)? First of all, there is no text that states you believe the facts about Jesus Christ but now you need to believe in Jesus Christ. Besides that, there are a few texts that I am convinced proves otherwise.

John 5:44-47 - How can you believe (infinitive no object) when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses (no preposition/dative), you would believe Me (no prep/dative), for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings (no prep/dative), how will you believe My words (no prep/dative)?

What we see here is that to believe Moses is to believe what he wrote, to believe Jesus is to believe what He is saying. The dative is used, yet there is nothing that would lead one to look for a deeper belief or trust.

John 10:37-38 - If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me (no prep/dative); but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works (no prep/dative), so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.

Are you supposed to trust in the works? No. The works validate the claim and offer of Jesus Christ so that we would believe in Jesus.

John 11:25-27 – Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in (eis) Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in (eis) Me will never die. Do you believe this (no prep/acc)?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed (no prep/no object) that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."]

Here, we have some statements made by Jesus with the preposition "eis;" the follow-up question is, "Do you believe this?" The answer is in not "I believe IN You," rather she states what she believes about Jesus, confirming Jesus' claim and affirmation about His offer.

John 20:30-31 – Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe (no prep/no object) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

The theme of John does not state “so that you may believe in Jesus,” emphasizing something other than the content of His claim, His deeds, and His offer. The main issue for the 1st Century person revolved around who Jesus is.

What is trust? The emphasis that many people place upon the word believe is to trust in Jesus. The problem with that verbiage is what the words intend and how words are actually used.

In Greek, there is a word that means to rely upon or trust; that word is “ἐλπίς elpis” and “ἐλπίζω elpizō.” Usually translated *hope*, the definition of this word is to put one’s expectations and trust for a future expectation of something/someone (1 Corinthians 9:10, 15:19; 2 Corinthians 1:10). The word group sometimes reflects back (we have hoped in Him), but it is a never formula for being saved.

Furthermore, the idea of trust is problematic in our vernacular. Trust oftentimes indicates a reliance regardless of confidence.

CONCLUSION

What does it mean to believe? To be fully persuaded that the claim and offer of Jesus are true.

What is the claim and what is the offer? The Gospel of John provides the content of what is believed.

1. He is the Messiah (1:45-51, 4:25-29)
2. He is sent by God (6:29)
3. Jesus will raise up believers (6:40)
4. Jesus is the Holy One (6:69)
5. Jesus is the I AM (8:23-24, 58)
6. Jesus is the resurrection and the life (11:25)
7. Jesus is the one who was crucified yet is alive (2:22, 19:1-20, 29)
8. Jesus promises that the one who believes has eternal life (3:15-18, 36, 5:24, 6:29, 6:40, 47, 11:25-27, 19:35, 20:30-31)

What *believe in Jesus* does not mean:

1. To understand the claim
2. To follow His teachings, live as Jesus lived
3. To act upon the will so as to believe
4. To believe that Jesus is God
5. To accept Jesus
6. To receive Jesus (John 1:12); you receive when you believe
7. To take an additional step (sit in the chair, jump, leap of faith)

The main issue with statements such as “to believe in Jesus is to trust in Jesus” or “not just believe the facts about Jesus” is that it leaves people in a confusing state. To change *believe* into *trust* makes this about what you do, about your veracity, and our faith is no longer objective; we question if we did it right.

I am convinced that I have eternal life because Jesus is God in the flesh, Jesus died on the cross for sins, Jesus rose again on the third day, Jesus offers life as a free gift to all who are convinced of these things.