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# What is Faith? (The Associate Editor's Desk)

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The Associate Editor's

DESK

E. Edward Zinke

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## What Is Faith?

Faith played a key role in the lives and preaching of each messenger of God. Since faith had such an important factor for these God-ordained individuals, it is vital for us to understand what faith is.

We could analyze faith from a human standpoint to develop a definition. In our attempt to discover its nature, we could explore the faith of a historian in forming a thesis, of a scientist in developing a hypotheses, or of a banker in granting a mortgage.

Historians analyze their sources, determining their probable reliability and the way that they relate with other pieces of data such as that provided by archaeology, dating, climatology, etc. After evaluating the data, they interpret them in terms of their own historical frame of reference and worldview. Based upon such interpretation, historians make a "faith" statement regarding the reality and significance of some event.

Scientists likewise collect data in the laboratory, analyze it, and then interpret it according to "known" facts. They then develop a hypothesis, a faith statement, on how new pieces of data will fit into the current scientific model.

Bankers do a careful analysis before they approve a loan, studying such factors as the applicant's age, sex, health, payment history on prior loans, net worth, and income. They test each criterion by current banking experience. The banking official may conclude, based upon the combination of such factors, that there is a 99.8 percent chance that the applicant will repay the loan as agreed. Using such information, and relying upon their skills as an analyst, bankers have enough "faith" to be willing to grant the loan.

Each example grounds faith upon the evidence of the data collected and interpreted by the particular model of the historian, scientist, or banker. The interpretation then leads to a conclusion—a faith statement. Such a method of defining faith uses a humanistic, or human-centered, approach to knowledge. The humanistic approach to faith places confidence upon the foundation of human ingenuity, upon people's ability to collect, analyze, and interpret the evidence.

The biblical concept of faith, however, is quite different. Faith is not a human creation. It is, rather, the gift of God that rests upon divine power instead of human achievement (Eph. 2:8; 1 Cor. 2:5). "Faith that enables us to receive God's gifts is itself a gift."<sup>1</sup> "No man can create faith. The Spirit operating upon and enlightening the human mind, creates faith in God. In the Scriptures faith is stated to be the gift of God, powerful unto salvation, enlightening the hearts of those who search for truth as for hidden treasure."<sup>2</sup>

Faith is itself the ground, the assurance, the conviction of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). As the basis of knowledge, it is through faith that we understand (vs. 3). And as the key of knowledge,<sup>3</sup> it enables us to discern between truth and error.<sup>4</sup> The humanistic approach states that we must find a foundation, the criterion for faith; whereas the biblical approach states that faith *is* the foundation, the criterion.

According to the Bible, faith does not come by our humanistic analysis of the data of the natural world, but by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10: 17). "Our assurance and evidence [for faith] is God's word."<sup>5</sup> The attempt to found our faith in the Bible as the Word of God upon data interpreted through reason is to doubt that which God has already declared. It is similar to the temptation Satan offered Christ in the wilderness, namely, to doubt His Sonship after the Word of God had already affirmed it. "Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures."<sup>6</sup>

To base our faith in Scripture upon the description of a historian or a geologist indicates that we have not yet come to biblical faith. "In order to have true, abiding faith in Christ, we must know Him as He is represented in the word."<sup>7</sup> The Spirit and the Word work together.

"The Spirit operating upon and enlightening the human mind, creates faith in God."<sup>8</sup> Biblical faith comes through the Word under the work of the Spirit.

The faith that God gives us is powerful. Reinforcing and building upon itself, it is contagious, for we can share it with others.

The context of the faith chapter (Hebrews 11) also contains a warning: "Do not cast away your confidence" (Heb. 10: 35, NKJV). Doubt is also powerful, building upon itself. And it is contagious, for it can be transmitted to others.

The contemporary humanistic way of thinking begins with doubt. People question everything in order to determine what is truth. That which survives the fire of cross-examination they accept as rock-solid knowledge, something on which to place one's faith. Some apply the same method to the Bible, calling everything into question from a scientific, historical, psychological, philosophical, archaeological, or geological perspective to determine what is truth in the Bible. The very

method itself begins with and builds upon doubt in the veracity of Scripture. Christ asked, "'When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?'" (Luke 18:8, NKJV).

Ellen White raises questions about humanistic methods that begin with a presupposition of doubt: "God has permitted a flood of light to be poured upon the world in both science and art; but when professedly scientific men treat upon these subjects from a merely human point of view, they will assuredly come to wrong conclusions. It may be innocent to speculate beyond what God's word has revealed, if our theories do not contradict facts found in the Scriptures; but those who leave the word of God, and seek to account for His created works upon scientific principles, are drifting without chart or compass upon an unknown ocean. The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God in their research, become bewildered in their attempts to trace the relations of science and revelation. Because the Creator and His works are so far beyond their comprehension that they are unable to explain them by natural laws, they regard Bible history as unreliable. Those who doubt the reliability of the records of the Old and New Testaments, will be led to go a step further, and doubt the existence of God; and then, having lost their anchor, they are left to beat about upon the rocks of infidelity."<sup>9</sup>

It would be nice if we could go back and rewrite biblical history. It would begin like this: "By faith, when confronted by the serpent in the tree in the garden of Eden, Eve was victorious through her allegiance to the Word of God. She responded to Satan, 'It is written, you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.'" Instead, Eve responded with methodological doubt in the word of God. By also starting with doubt, the contemporary process of learning continues the same method Eve used in the garden.

A major difference exists between the belief of God's

messengers and that of those who rejected God's leading. Eve, the antediluvians, and Israel at Kadesh-barnea wished to found their beliefs humanistically—upon the evidences of their senses, logic, philosophy, observation. They wanted a reasonable belief. Instead of founding their human study upon the God's revealed intention for their best, they sought to test it by their human study. By contrast, Noah, Abraham, Caleb, Joshua, John, and Christ accepted God's leading by faith—they had a belief based upon His expressed instruction and therefore accepted the God who revealed Himself instead of the idols of human making.

God is calling not only for conversion of the heart, but also conversion of the mind. He urges us to think biblically rather than humanistically. Just as Noah called the people of his time into his ark, so God is looking for us to be His messengers today to preach His Word, summoning others to prepare to meet Him at His second coming. Choose you this day whom you will serve.

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## REFERENCES

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2. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 940.
3. *Education*, p. 24; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 139.
4. *Selected Messages*, Book 2, p. 58.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
6. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 126.
7. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 433.
8. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, op cit.
9. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.