

Christianity Clarified Volume 16

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[0 : 00] What is Christianity really all about? The issue remains very confusing to a large segment of our society.

At times, it even extends to many who consider themselves Christian. Here, in an ongoing effort to try and dispel some of the confusion, is Marv Wiseman, with another session of Christianity Clarified.

Faith and Doubt, Part 1. The most important thing in the life of a newborn baby is its thriving, its growth and normal development. Nurture and nutrition are key factors in that development. This critical principle also applies to spiritual growth following one's spiritual birth, realized by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody has ever had any doubt as to whether he has been born physically.

Well, here I am. What more proof could I possibly need that I have been born physically? But spiritually? That's another matter. Great numbers of actual believers who have honestly placed their faith in Christ are plagued by doubt and uncertainty.

[1 : 11] And until their doubts are settled, spiritual growth and development are severely retarded, if realized at all. Spiritually speaking, one is stuck in place.

They may be truly saved, but lack of assurance prevents them from having any peace or security, and actually enjoying their salvation is out of the question.

The first thing such a person needs to know is, they are not alone. Doubt of one's salvation is not at all unusual. It's a painful and anxiety-ridden experience that many true Christians have had, including yours truly.

Most often, as in my case, the doubt set in within several months after I had made my decision for Christ. It was agonizing because I knew enough to know how important the issue was, but I didn't know enough to get it resolved.

Very often, the kinds of issues and questions that plague one who is in doubt of their salvation may include, but are not limited to, the following. Did I really actually receive Christ as my Savior?

[2 : 23] Did I do it right? Did I have enough faith when I believed, or when I think I believed? Did I really believe? Was I truly forgiven?

And if so, why don't I feel more forgiven? And if I was truly saved, why do I still have thoughts that I shouldn't have? Why do I still have struggles with some of the same old temptations I had before? Aren't I supposed to be completely free from sin if I'm truly a Christian? Well, I sure can't say that. Maybe that proves I'm not really saved at all. Or, do I need to believe again and get saved again, if I ever was saved the first time?

Maybe, maybe I left something out. Maybe it didn't take. Well, if I didn't truly receive Christ as my Savior when I thought I did, I want to now, and I want His salvation, if I don't really already have it. So many true believers have had these doubts and reservations. And this is why, in this new segment on the subject of faith, we deem it appropriate and necessary to begin with the subject of doubt.

[3 : 33] Doubt and faith belong to the same venue. At the core of both lies the intellect and our volition or the exercise of our will. The mind and the will are those vehicles we use in responding to the gospel of God's grace.

Assurance of salvation or the lack thereof is necessary to investigate. And we will. Faith and Doubt Part 2 There are at least three things a believer should know about faith and doubt, especially about doubt.

Number one, doubt is normal. Many true believers have undergone some period in which they doubted whether they are truly saved. Number two, doubt is not sinful, and there is no reason to

beat yourself up over your doubting.

Do not be ashamed because you have or have had your doubts. Number three, doubts become a plus, a positive benefit, when once you have worked through them to arrive at settled resolutions. Doubts are the bumps on which you climb. And when doubts have been resolved, they provide valuable progress in spiritual growth. Resolved doubts will increase your understanding and appreciation for the faith you have in the person of Christ and all he has made available to you.

[5 : 02] God is not angry with you because of your doubting. Faith, true faith, must contain room for doubt or faith cannot exist. This is because faith, by its very nature, is not a fulfilled reality.

It is only potential. A promise of fulfillment, but not fulfillment in itself. It is true that promises God has made are as good as fulfilled because of the power and integrity of the one who promised. But their yet being unfulfilled does leave room for doubt that they will. How can we possibly doubt God? Very easily.

Why? Because we are human. Weakness and doubt are built into our fallen psyche. Abraham, the only man ever to be called the friend of God, suffered doubts, lapses in his faith.

And this man had spoken face to face with God himself. John the baptizer, who formerly introduced Jesus Christ to the nation of Israel in John chapter 1, later doubted whether Jesus really was the one.

[6 : 15] And the whole world, of course, is familiar with the most famous doubter of them all, named Thomas. Were these people true believers? Of course they were. Then, how could they have had such terrible lapses in their faith?

How could these supposed stalwarts of the faith actually not be very stalwart at all? Well, it's because they were just like us. Human, flawed, and functioning with a limited perspective, just as we do.

Doubting our salvation, including periodic doubts of whether God even exists, are usually brought about by negative or adverse circumstances that appear contradictory to what a true believer should have to contend with.

And who doesn't have negative events enter their life from time to time? When they do, we may chide ourselves for having no faith at all, or at least not enough faith.

After all, we reason, someone who is supposed to be connected to God shouldn't have to experience these things, or should have the faith to triumph over them, if not avoid them altogether.

[7 : 23] But it's apparent that I don't. It looks like my faith is either not there at all, or woefully weak, whichever. Stay with us. Doubt Producing Circumstances Part 1 Spiritual anxiety, or even depression about one's personal salvation, is not at all unusual, especially in the life of a newer Christian.

Doubts may focus upon whether one is truly a believer, whether the gospel is really true, or even whether or not God actually exists. No one is exempt from undergoing doubts, even including biblical believers whom we may think were so spiritual they couldn't possibly have any doubts. Nonsense. As admirable and outstanding as these were, they were all just men made of flawed DNA as the rest of us. When difficult circumstances arrived in their life, the natural response was to question their connection with God.

Was there really a connection? And if there is, then where is God now that I need Him? Does He know what's going on in my life? Does He even care?

And if He does, can He do anything about it? And if He can, why doesn't He? There are very few of us who have been believers for even a short time who can't identify with some of these thoughts.

[8 : 58] Negative, hurtful circumstances can easily lead us into doubt. How could Abraham, the only man God ever designated as His friend, possibly doubt what God promised him?

But he did. How could someone converse with the living God face to face and ever doubt Him? But he did. How could he?

Simple. It may well have been years later, played out something like this, saying to himself, Was that for real? Did I actually talk with God Himself?

Or did I just imagine it? Was I dreaming? How can I be sure? And if it was all real, then where is God now? Right now, because of my circumstances, I really need some assurance that God is real and on the job.

So where are you? No answer. How then can Abraham not doubt? Abraham's circumstances were surely negative.

[10:03] He and Sarah had no child, not even one. Yet God told him He would make him the father of a multitude. A multitude? But month after month, year after year, and not even once did Sarah even think she was pregnant.

God had promised them a child years earlier, and every passing year lessened that likelihood more and more. Did Abraham doubt? Of course he did.

The passages that speak of Abraham's faith and not doubting were only after repeated assurances from God. Read Genesis 12 through 21 for the full picture.

It ought to be greatly encouraging to us all that while we may doubt what God has said because of our negative circumstances that tend to negate it, nonetheless God is faithful and He will perform all He has promised, regardless of our doubts and fears.

God wants to be honored by our getting to the place where we doubt our doubts and believe our beliefs. More than all else, God wants to be believed. Doubts resolved will get us there.

[11:17] Doubt Producing Circumstances, Part 2 It was an amazing scene to behold. Picture it, if you will. Hundreds of people lining both banks of the Jordan River.

Spiritual electricity in the air. John the baptizer was on the job, preaching as he was prophesied to do hundreds of years earlier by the prophet Malachi.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. And baptizing in the Jordan multitudes of Jews who identified with John's message, the fulfillment of which the nation of Israel had waited 4,000 years.

4,000 years! Can you believe it? And it now comes down to this scene. And the one who is to make it all happen is coming down the road to meet John.

It's Jesus of Nazareth, whom John identifies as the Lamb of God who should take away the sin of the world. John's mother, Elizabeth, and Jesus' mother, Mary, were first cousins.

[12:19] John and Jesus were second cousins. John thought, no doubt about it. Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited one, who will bring God's kingdom to this old, weary, unjust, and sinful world.

In fact, John even said, the reason I am baptizing is to introduce Jesus to the nation of Israel and tell them he is their long-awaited Messiah.

That's in John's Gospel, chapter 1. Now, let's fast forward and go from John's positive circumstance at the Jordan River to his negative circumstance in the prison of Herod the king.

What is the one who introduced Jesus and proclaimed him to be the Messiah doing in prison?

That's what John was wondering. What else was he thinking?

He was having his doubts. Negative circumstances do tend to produce doubts, you know. Calling some of his followers to his jail cell, John said, you go and find Jesus wherever he is and ask him if he really is the one we said he is, or should we be looking for somebody else?

[13:33] John's being in prison was a very negative circumstance that did not compute with the plan. And when they found Jesus, he assured them all was according to plan and he was doing what the Messiah was supposed to do.

John would have had to have been reassured. Confused, but reassured. Now, fast forward again. Standing at the door of John's cell is Herod's official executioner, brandishing his sharpened axe designed for beheading.

This was another negative circumstance, and this one really did not compute at all. How can we account for what had to be John's confused mind, and shall we venture to say, doubt?

If John was doubting, and my gut says he may well have, was it because John was not a true believer in Jesus? Nonsense. It was because of his negative circumstance, the kind of circumstances that did not belong in the life of one truly connected with God.

But here they were, and there goes John's head, severed and placed on a silver charger to be presented to an enemy of God himself, the evil wife of an evil king.

[14:54] Doubt Producing Circumstances, Part 3 The Apostle Peter stands out as one of the most strategic and colorful characters among the twelve apostles chosen by Christ.

He was not merely one of the twelve, nor just one of the inner circle of Peter, James, and John. He was clearly the premier of the three. It was Peter who at Caesarea made the affirmative declaration about Jesus, Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

Well, how's that for a clear positive answer to Jesus, who'd ask the question, Who do you say I am? We can only get the impression Peter said it with great certainty and confidence.

The positive circumstances demanded no less. How could one not believe in view of Christ's teaching? Reception by the masses to say nothing of his undeniable miracles. No doubt about it. Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Now we fast forward Peter from that positive circumstance to one negative, perhaps two years later.

[16:03] They are in the courtyard of the Jewish high priest Caiaphas. It isn't even daylight yet. Jesus had been arrested hours earlier and taken into custody, while they were all spending overnight in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Now Jesus is in the clutches of those who had sworn they would get him, and it really looks grim. It's negative and threatening and very confusing all the way.

What is Peter supposed to think in light of this unfolding nightmare? His mind had to have been in emotional, psychological turmoil as he frantically attempts to process and make some sense of what is happening.

He is jarred out of his contemplations when a little servant maid confronts him with a dangerous allegation. Hey, I know you. You are one of his followers, aren't you?

And then another chimed in after Peter's first denial. Yes, you are. Your northern accent gives you away. You're a Galilean, just like Jesus.

[17:13] You're one of his. Really now, wouldn't this have been the golden opportunity for Peter to simply repeat his earlier confession, made at Caesarea Philippi?

Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. But nothing close to that comes from this scared, confused apostle, thought to be the chief lieutenant of Jesus.

But all Peter could muster when confronted for this third time was the swearing of an oath that he even knew the man, let alone being one of his disciples. What can possibly explain this radical reversal of allegiance?

How do we account for Peter's earlier boast, Though all others may forsake you, Lord, you can count on me? Well, it was all due to a change of circumstances.

Negative circumstances do tend to create doubt. They did for Abraham, for John, and for Peter. Should we think ourselves exempt? We do have the advantage of knowing that no matter how negative our circumstances or how painful and confusing they may be, God is faithful and loving.

[18:22] But doubt? Very human. Doubt producing circumstances, part four.

If negative and painful circumstances can produce doubt in the life of a believer, and we are satisfied that they can, and often do, then who in all of history might have had more reason for understandable doubt than Job?

Job was a man who was a paragon of virtue and piety. Spiritually speaking, one could only conclude that Job really had it all together.

His acknowledgement and worship and devotion to God must have been known to all far and wide.

And Job enjoyed a great family, great possessions, great health, and just great everything.

Life was good. Really good. And Job also knew who was responsible for his good life. It was none other than the God of heaven himself. And then, and then, the bottom fell out of everything.

[19:28] Why? What happened? This all-benevolent God made some kind of a deal with his arch-enemy, Satan himself. Satan told God that the only reason Job worshipped him was because God had blessed him with everything he could possibly want.

Why wouldn't he worship you? But if you took from Job everything you have given him, he'll curse you to your face. This is in Job chapter 1.

So God told Satan, Okay, I'll let you take from Job everything I've given him, but I won't allow you to take his life. Go ahead and do your worst, and we'll see if Job's confidence and trust in me collapses as you say.

Satan relished the tax and soon got about it. With great evil proficiency, Satan emptied the life of Job of everything that meant anything to him.

His children were taken, all his livestock, a telling indicator of personal wealth, they were taken as well. Only one thing hadn't been taken from Job, but now, even it would no longer be there.

[20:39] His health. Afflicted with loathsome boils all over his body, all he can do is clothe himself in sackcloth, sit on a pile of ashes, and scrape his skin with broken pieces of pottery.

And in the midst of his wretchedness, no family, no livestock, and now, no health, what possible response to all this could such a miserable human being now have toward God?

His change in circumstances were so dramatic, Job becomes the all-time historical poster boy when it comes to suffering. Yet, he did not lapse into atheism or charging God foolishly, but he certainly did ask God, Why?

What's going on? What have I done to make you so angry? You have allowed everything to be taken from me. Can you imagine a greater change in circumstance than Job's?

And nothing so quickly moves us from faith to doubt as adverse and painful circumstances. God is still in complete charge. God still cares and loves you, but it certainly doesn't look like it.

[21 : 50] Slipping into doubt is not only likely, in most cases, it's even natural and predictable. And it's brought on by our negative and painful circumstances.

Moving from doubt to faith, part one. Since we are only human, we can only see as we do, and that's with a very limited perspective.

This limitation extends to our interpretation of what may be hard negative circumstances we are experiencing. So, what else can we do but doubt?

How can we not doubt the love and care of God when we are going through some excruciating experience that feels like it's ripping our heart out? And we will grant that doubt is the majority response in these cases.

And we will also grant that God is quite accustomed to this response of doubting Him when things go really bad. And no, God doesn't hate you for doubting Him.

[22 : 56] And yes, He does still love you with that everlasting love, even though you may doubt Him. But He isn't pleased either. This is because, more than anything else, God wants to be believed and trusted.

He figures He is really deserving and worthy of your trust, no matter what you are experiencing in negative circumstances. And this is because, even though we have our limited perspective as to what's happening, yet God has provided us with a fuller perspective in His Word.

And He wants us to trade in our limited perspective for His fuller perspective. And if we do, only then can we say with Job, though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.

That's Job 13. You can only do that when and if you have God's perspective and are not limited by yours. And you can only gain God's perspective from the Bible, which in part is given to provide God's perspective on all of life, including the negative circumstances that at time invade ours.

The inspired writer, Paul the Apostle, tells us in Romans 15 that whatsoever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

[24 : 22] By the way, this hope is not like our hope of today, which comes as a maybe with a big question mark. This is the biblical hope that conveys a certainty or confidence.

And of course, the confidence is in God and in His doing, which He wants us to have in Him, no matter what the circumstances. There is no greater way we can honor God than by trusting in Him, no matter what.

This is why the concept of faith is so terribly important all throughout the Bible and all throughout our life, even when those negative and painful circumstances come.

Our motto should be as Job's, Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. We cannot and will not be able to do this apart from gaining God's perspective on all these important issues as He reveals it in His Word, the Bible.

It is information not revealed through any other medium, and it always comes down to the issue of authority. What or whom do we accept as ours?

[25 : 27] If we are that authority, we can only wallow in the doubts we have and remain devoid of the peace and comfort we could have from trusting in Him with His perspective.

Moving from Doubt to Faith, Part 2 In several preceding sessions, we discussed our ever-ready inclination to doubting God in His existence, provision, and love.

Doubt is most commonly produced by the negative circumstances we may be experiencing at any given time. We may doubt regarding our salvation, particularly if we are not living as we know a Christian should.

We may doubt God's awareness of our situation or His interest and ability to do anything about it. We may doubt God's love or care when He does not intervene and release a loved one from suffering through perhaps a miraculous healing, or when the violation of an innocent child occurs, and perhaps you were even that child.

We may feel we have every right to doubt God or perhaps even deny Him or His existence altogether. Our reasoning seems to us to be very logical, especially when our perspective is applied to the situation.

[26 : 56] After all, what kind of a God could stand idly by and do nothing to prevent such awful calamities, we ask ourselves? Many Jewish people embraced atheism when the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed, some saying, in light of this human butchery, there can be no God, and if there should happen to be a God that would permit such a horrible event, I want nothing whatever to do with Him.

Atheism became the only option in their opinion. Let us be swift to acknowledge that there is no real rationale for thinking otherwise than the conclusion reached by so many in Jewry.

not unless you know something they do not know. Their own scriptures, the Old Testament, contains the same information about Job as does the Christian Bible.

The sad truth is, most Jews today know no more about their Bible and its contents than does the average Protestant or Catholic about their Bible.

This means that all those who are unaware of Biblical truth have shut themselves off from the only perspective that can give any real explanation for life's tragedies. Apart from the sure Word of God, we have only human perspective, human wisdom, human explanations, all of which are woefully deficient in providing any satisfying answers, or answers that may lead us from doubting or denying God toward a greater faith and confidence in Him.

[28 : 33] Thus, the Bible is not merely the remedy, it's the only remedy, and it is the chief purpose for God's even producing it, that we may know Him, His ways, and His plans.

For the sessions remaining, we intend to explore the several dynamics of faith itself, attempt to correct numerous misunderstandings regarding faith, and generally increase our appreciation for its necessity and its undeniable blessings.

You are invited to engage this critical issue with us. It will be truth that will stick to your spiritual ribs and open a new understanding of that without which it is impossible to please God.

Defining Faith, Part 1 There is little doubt that the word faith, like the word grace, suffers from a gross misunderstanding, in the mind of the public as a whole.

People assign a vagueness and mystery to grace and faith that the Bible knows not of. While it is true the depths of meaning for these words has never been plumbed by mortal man, still the Bible gives wonderfully clear-cut definitions of both words and how each is employed in hundreds of texts throughout both Testaments.

[29 : 58] We will let the Scriptures tell us much about the word faith. It's a God-given term that deserves so much more than the usual mystery and vagueness often assigned to it.

Besides the public at large misunderstanding faith and its implications, there is a fair amount of confusion about faith even among believers who have been justified by it.

Whether Christianity Clarified succeeds in actually clarifying faith, faith, we will make a good faith effort to do so. No pun intended.

Although we will consider several examples of faith in the Old Testament, we begin our consideration with the New because most are more familiar with its usage and examples than they are of the Old.

The main words for the word faith in the New is of course from the original Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written. The noun form of the word faith is pistis, P-I-S-T-I-S in English and it refers to the faith as in Jude's epistle when he said the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

[31 : 13] And here, faith is articulated. It contains the definite article that is rendered the faith. Here, it is a noun. In many cases, it is also used in the verb form as an action word, but it isn't rendered in the English by the word faithed or faithing.

It would sound strange to say they faithed the Lord Jesus Christ or they were faithing in Christ as their Savior. So here, pistuo, P-I-S-T-E-U-O in the English is the verb form and it is translated in the English with they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ or they were believing in Christ as their Savior. The noun form from the Greek word pistis and the verb form of pistuo came from the same root word in the Greek. So, whenever the text speaks of faith as a noun as in the faith once delivered, the word faith in English is used.

But when the text speaks of faith as an action word, it's translated believe. The difference is between something you have as in the use of faith and something you do as in the use of believe. The number of times each is used in the Bible is proof of their importance. Things the Spirit of God deemed most important as He inspired biblical writers to use them are the words that are found in great abundance.

[32 : 48] Faith and belief are near the top of the list and you will soon see why. Defining Faith Part 2 From the brief words study in the previous segment, we concluded the words faith and belief are quite synonymous.

There is no single word that best describes and is considered the same as faith as is the word believe. When Christ said O ye of little faith, He also meant O ye of little belief.

When Hebrews 11 states by faith Noah built an ark, it means because Noah believed he built an ark. In nearly every case where faith is used, belief or believe could be used as well.

And where believe is used, faith could also be used. They then may read awkwardly in usage, but the accuracy would be there nonetheless. It would be awkward, for instance, to tell someone, Faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we say, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The former is really just as accurate, but it is not as understandable, in this case, as is the word believe.

[34 : 09] Essentially, the words convey the same concept. Sometimes light is shed by using one rather than the other. The case of Noah and the ark illustrates this. Standard texts say, By faith, Noah built an ark.

It is not clarified to say, Because Noah believed what God told him, he built an ark. This phrase, Because he believed, can be used all through Hebrews 11, and it communicates more clearly as to what was meant by the words, By faith.

Clearly, it means, Because he believed, or, Having believed, he built the ark. There is nothing vague or ambiguous about, He believed, but to say, By faith, is not nearly so clear.

And what really matters in all of Scripture is to capture and understand the meaning. Faith and belief are words replete with meaning and great significance.

The context further disclosing their importance and interpretation. Words mean things. Words are the essence of all communication.

[35 : 22] Even where words are not spoken, as in sign language, words are still used through the signs and gestures that are used. We cannot communicate without words, whether spoken, written, signed, acted out as in a game of charade.

You cannot even think a thought without mentally using words. Just try it. God is so committed to communication and the use of words for doing so.

We read, The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. John in chapter 1 spoke of the incarnation of Christ, who is the essence of communication from God.

And John opens his gospel with, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Really powerful and meaningful concepts all conveyed by words about this one who himself is designated the Word of God.

He, being the essence of all the Father wanted to communicate to his creation, and to use the Word and words to do so. Why Faith is So Critical, Part 1 Why do Christians in particular talk so much about faith?

[36 : 45] What's the really big deal about faith? What it is? Who has it? And who doesn't? Good questions. All. Adding to the confusion is the fact that the word faith is often bandied about with the assumption everybody knows what faith is and why it's so important.

And add to that the irony that many times people using the term scarcely know themselves what is truly involved with the word faith. They have picked it up from others who often use it along with an expression of some religious belief.

Little wonder it's often perceived as a vague, mysterious term that is hardly ever nailed down. Christianity Clarified will attempt to nail it down in its several usages.

And you will discover a new appreciation of the word faith even as we gained a better comprehension of the word grace. So, what is the big deal behind the word faith?

We know it really is a big deal because Hebrews 11 tells us without faith it is impossible to please God. We cannot think of anything that could make it a bigger deal than the need to have faith or be unable to please God.

[38 : 03] Do we know of anyone more deserving or demanding and rightly so of being pleased than the creator and sustainer of the universe? We think not.

So, here for your consideration is the principal reason or rationale for the necessity of faith. It's because faith is God's operating system that was implemented when our first parents Adam and Eve were brought into existence.

Faith in God involves not only a belief in the person of God that is in his character and integrity but it also means believing whatever God says. His word is tied to his character and integrity.

And when Eve believed the serpent she simultaneously disbelieved God and what he had said. Her sin and Adam's after her involved their unbelief in the word that God had spoken and their belief or acceptance of the word from a lesser authority namely Satan himself.

Nothing has changed. Many people of today are ever more eager and willing to believe a multitude of lesser authorities than they are to believe the God of creation especially if these lesser authorities are dubbed to be experts.

[39 : 26] Faith or belief is that system of operation God has put in place for human functioning. Computer users can think of their own mind corresponding to the hard drive and faith being a software program.

Of course that's a poor analogy but perhaps one can get a general idea of how faith and the human mind and volition work together. After all faith involves the exercise of human volition.

We believe with our will or we refuse to believe with our will. Faith is therefore well within the purview of us humans. You may be sure God would not require faith if we were not able to exercise faith.

Why Faith is So Critical Part 2 The importance of faith is emphasized throughout the Bible in both Testaments.

God places a premium on faith because it is the exclusive way that man can connect with God. Exercising faith or simply believing what God has been pleased to reveal is the one and only way man can positively respond to what God has provided.

[40 : 42] And we do so by believing, accepting, embracing what God has said. Such faith is a non-meritorious expression of confidence and trust that delights and pleases the heart of God.

Refusing to believe is insulting to his very character and integrity. Some, even today, charge God with not sufficiently disclosing himself in such a way that all men would know for certain with no doubt that he existed.

Their thinking is that were God to do so, then everyone would believe. But were he to do that, then the entire principle of faith would be done away.

Proof positive requires no faith as the reality of proof provides a certainty where faith is not needed. And the time is coming when this kind of full revelation by God will be given and faith will cease to exist.

1 Corinthians 13 reveals that of the three virtues faith, hope, and love, both faith and hope will have realized all fulfillment and only love will remain into the future state.

[41 : 54] But for now, and ever since the fall in Genesis, faith is the operating plan for all of mankind in all ages following that fall.

A compelling example of how God regards man's faith is found in the Genesis account regarding Abraham. Of him it is said, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Did you get that? God actually accepted Abraham's believing him in place or in lieu of righteousness.

righteousness. The Apostle Paul uses Abraham's experience to prove that justification was not a new thing that he, Paul, was preaching as some of his opposing fellow Jews claim.

It's found in Romans 4 where the Apostle states that Abraham was declared to be righteous simply because he believed God. Was Abraham's faith perfect? By no means.

[42 : 57] Lapses of his faith are also recorded in Genesis. And even though Abraham's faith was not perfect, the declaration of his justification by God was perfect.

This is reflected in his justification purely on the basis of faith. Faith that leaves no possibility of doubt is not faith.

And the proof positive is what will be realized with God's full disclosure. Faith will then be an outmoded concept because the fulfillment and finality of all God promise will be realized.

That will be by sight. But now we walk by faith, not by sight, as stated in 2 Corinthians 13. Why faith is so critical, part 3.

It is imperative that we humans have an understanding of the subject of faith and its necessity. We have described the principle of faith as analogous to the software operating system or program for the computer.

[44 : 08] The mechanism of faith is that temporal or interim methodology God has ordained for man the creature to connect with God the Creator. It has been in place since creation.

Faith has always been a stopgap or temporary program that will be in place until God chooses to fully reveal himself so that faith will no longer be necessary.

It, like one of its companions called hope, will then simply pass off the scene. And this will be because all that faith and hope anticipated will no longer be an anticipation but a fulfilled reality. Meanwhile, between the creation and the culmination, faith is the order of the day. It is faith that constitutes God's operating system.

And while grace, according to Ephesians 2.8, is the basis for salvation, faith is the vehicle of travel by which God's grace comes to us. By grace, through faith, is the formula.

[45 : 14] Grace is God's part, faith is our part. In these two, we find a remarkable divine-human pairing or partnering. All the effort on God's part involved the unimaginable sacrificial death of a member of deity in the person of Christ.

All the effort on our part involved the admission of and repentance of our sin and the simple faith or belief in the person of our substitute.

We have described this transaction as God's providing the most difficult thing he could do in order to require from us the least difficult thing we could do.

And God's most difficult and important thing he could do required the provision of his own dear son as our substitute. The least difficult thing we could do was simply to respond what he provided with our simple belief or faith.

Is not this a most extreme and incredible example of the grace of God ever to occur? We cannot imagine anything coming close to exceeding this. This is why faith is so critical.

[46 : 27] It represents the very least we can do. Simply believe God. Yet, as remarkable as this entire grace provision is, many still have the audacity to fault God for doing the most he could do while requiring from us only the least we could do.

This is the most gracious gesture of the Almighty both in accomplishing the maximum of himself while requiring from us the minimum. This is all involved in the question as to why faith is so critical. Either part of the formula consisting of God's provision and man's response with simple faith, just believing, and why he did it, it all makes both grace and faith key components.

Because without grace there is no basis for requiring faith, and without faith there is no answer to grace. Everyone Has Faith Part 1 Faith is another term hard to separate from the religious sphere, simply because that is how it is most often used.

Over time, usage tends to define the meaning of a word more than its original meaning. Faith is another of those words like gospel and apostle, that were not originally used or coined for people in the Bible.

[47 : 54] These were terms that were well in place with everyday usage before people of the New Testament ever arrived on the scene. As the words like gospel, apostle, disciple, faith, and many others began to be applied more and more to biblical persons and situations, their usage over time became automatically assigned to the religious scene, and this includes the word faith.

Understanding the original meaning of the word faith will lead to some startling conclusions. For instance, did you know everyone has faith?

Did you know that even an atheist has faith, despite his denial of it? Faith means belief, trust, confidence, reliance, dependence.

Not only that, but faith is an inevitable mechanism employed by everybody day in and day out. We all exercise faith constantly without even realizing it, and we do so in a way that has nothing to do with religion of any kind.

Everybody, no matter who they are or what beliefs they profess, including so-called non-belief, uses the same mental mechanism.

[49 : 15] Shocking as it sounds, the atheist believes in the very same way as the Christian. Notice we said the atheist believes in the same way, not that the atheist believes the same thing.

In this sense, it is perfectly correct, logically and theologically, to say, the faith exercised by the atheist is the same as the faith exercised by the Christian.

How, say you, can that possibly be? Surely they differ, and they differ greatly. Oh, yes, they do. But the difference is not in the mechanism or application of faith, but it is entirely in the object of their faith.

You see, the Christian uses his faith mechanism and places or directs it to the person of Jesus Christ. He is the object of our faith.

While the atheist uses his faith mechanism the same way, but he directs it inwardly to his own mind. It is his confidence, his trust, or faith is placed squarely upon himself, his own intellect and reasoning powers.

[50 : 35] That makes he himself the object of his belief, trust, and faith. The mental mechanism he used is identical to the mental process of the Christian, but the objects of faith of each are dramatically different.

And so, of course, are the outcomes. More on this is upcoming on Christianity Clarified. Everyone Has Faith, Part 2 We have undertaken a basic but little understood meaning of the word faith. This definition really needs to be in place before we can pursue faith in its many and utterly beautiful applications in the Bible. In our previous segment, we explained the universality and commonality of faith among all peoples everywhere.

If one is a Buddhist, for instance, their faith is in the teachings of Buddha. If Islam, their faith is in Allah, and so on. For the Christian, his faith or trust is in the person of Jesus Christ.

The commonality among all these is in the exercising of their faith or belief that was accomplished in the same way by all of them. All persons everywhere have data available to them through their sensory perception, and they all hear information, see evidence, and possess reasoning and processing powers for that information.

[52 : 07] After mentally evaluating the information, they reach a conclusion that may be right or wrong, but everyone reaches a conclusion. And even if the conclusion is that there is no conclusion worthy of placing one's faith in, the one so concluding that has just placed his confidence in that conclusion.

So his confidence is in himself. All go through the same mental process. What makes the difference? It has a lot to do with the information one has received so he can submit it to the process.

Information then becomes very critical, which is, of course, why getting out the gospel is paramount. People cannot process information they have not received.

Missionaries and gospel preachers are simply dispensers of information. If people get false information and process it, they will reach a wrong conclusion and may place their faith in a wrong idea or person.

There would be nothing wrong with their faith, but if the person or teaching is unworthy of their faith, they are then led astray. Our contention is that in being provided the information about the gospel, processing it, and reaching a conclusion that is true, one may then place faith, trust, or reliance in the person of Jesus Christ.

[53 : 37] Thus, it would be correct, at least in this sense, to say, all exercises of faith are valid in that there is nothing wrong about the process, but that there may be conclusions that one's belief led to that are not valid or worthy of one's faith.

Again, this makes the information for processing very critical. Romans 10 states, How shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed?

And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And what does the preacher do? He provides information for the hearer to the process, to reach a conclusion and place his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

All faith works the same way in the process. It's the conclusion and object of faith that differs. Formulating bad faith.

It has been noted that when one exercises his faith or confidence in someone or something, even if that faith is misplaced, it is not faith that is the problem, but the object of one's faith that's the problem.

[55 : 00] Christians believe that making anything or anyone the object of one's faith other than the person of Jesus Christ has calamity written all over it.

We concluded that even if one reaches a wrong conclusion as to where or in whom to place his faith, it is not faith that's the problem.

It's the unworthiness of the object of his faith that is the problem. But this is all with the assumption that the faith involved is indeed good faith.

Does this mean there is a good faith and a bad faith? It certainly does. A good faith is when one reasons and processes information from a sincere and honest heart.

Such a one is open to truth and wants to follow the truth where it leads him. This is processing the information in good faith. The one processing and seeking really and sincerely wants to know the truth.

[56 : 06] Conversely, one may hear information and begin processing that information, but he only wants it to lead him where he wants to go. He has already determined what he wants to believe and he will reach only the conclusion that will confirm or support the position already held.

He is not at all sincere nor honest with himself. He is biased toward the position he already has.

This person is not processing the information he has received in good faith, but in bad faith.

He is actually skewing or spinning the information in a way that will allow him to hang on to the position already held. In reality, the man is conning himself.

He is self-deceived. He is actually selling himself a bill of goods by not being honest in his processing of the information. Such a one is bent on maintaining his already held position that he will not allow himself to honestly or sincerely evaluate the new information received.

Why would he do that? Is it not in his best interest to honestly seek the truth? Indeed it is. But the hardness or stubbornness of a man's heart always works against his own best interests.

[57 : 31] He is not engaged in a good faith effort, but a bad faith effort. And part of it is due to the fact he would have to admit to himself and others he has been wrong. And processing the information in good faith would prove him wrong.

Rather than do that and be forced to repent or change his mind, he sabotages the data or skews it in such a way that allows him to maintain his already held position.

The prophet Jeremiah describes this man in chapter 17 when he said, The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? It's a perfect picture of one who is exercising bad faith in his feigned search for truth.

What faith does. Hebrews 1.1 is often quoted as a definition of faith.

But in reality, it is not so much a definition as it is a declaration of what faith does. The text reads thusly, Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

[58 : 41] But what does this really mean? Faith is the substance of things hoped for. One translated it by saying, The future things we hope for are substantiated by faith.

That is, it is faith that gives a realness to that future thing we hope for. Faith solidifies it or gives a certainty to it that makes it just as real as if it were already fulfilled.

Faith does that. And synonyms like trust, reliance, and dependence further express that reality.

Faith always has a future to it, an anticipation of something to come.

What it is that gives us a confidence in the ultimate realization of what is promised is faith. And the thing that faith always connects with is what God has said.

The verse continues by saying, Faith is the evidence of things not seen. A better translation is offered by saying, Faith is the conviction of things not seen.

[59 : 48] Or, being convicted that yet unseen things are real, even though they do not yet appear, is to exercise faith.

This speaks of the futurity of faith. And it needs to be understood clearly that one's faith is not built upon fluff. It is not at all a case of wish fulfillment or a leap into the dark.

Nor is it a naivete that believes something with no good or sufficient reason for doing so. That would be incredulity or just plain nonsense.

All through the context of the letter to the Hebrews, in chapter 11 in particular, the basis for people of faith, believing as they do, is linked to the word.

The promise, the integrity of God himself. It is not sheer belief or trust in some vague pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by-when-we-die-die.

[60 : 49] The faith of a believer in the God of Scripture is the very most secure place it can be put. This God has an undisputed track record for making good on all he has promised.

The remainder of Hebrews 11 recalls the several historical records of numerous believers whose faith in God and his word was clearly vindicated.

The message then and now is simply this. God can be trusted entirely. There has not failed one good word of all he has promised.

Those who are not people of Christian faith are, of course, unbelievers. Their problem is the age-old issue of not recognizing the divine authority vested in the word of God.

This has been and still is humanity's besetting problem. What will man accept as his final authority? Faith is commanded by God.

[61 : 59] An interesting aspect about faith is found in 1 John 3. Not merely interesting, but in addition, faith is spoken of as obligatory.

Here is how the text reads, beginning with verse 23. And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. Faith is generally thought of as an option. We may believe or not believe. Well, it is true. Being a free moral agent, we may, with our volition, choose to believe the record God has given of his Son, or choose not to believe.

That is not taken away from us. At the same time, our belief or unbelief is followed by the consequences that our decision produces. With the text insisting that belief in the Son of God is actually a divine commandment, we can only conclude that one's refusal to believe is a direct violation of God's commandment.

Consequences of a willful violation of what God commands are certainly not pleasant to consider, much less to actually experience. Some might ask, How can God command men to believe when his existence and his plan are not conclusively revealed?

[63 : 26] But if they were, there would be no need for faith at all, in the light of an obvious reality. So, what God has done, and we believe the only way he could command belief, is to make certain that the evidence men require before believing is adequate.

While it is true, we do not have all the evidence we might want, we do have evidence of sufficient quantity that unbelief is inexcusable.

Therefore, unbelief is unjustifiable and stands in violation of what God commands. The Apostle Paul in Romans 1 confirms this in declaring that man is without excuse for his rejection of the one true God.

To be without excuse so that one is culpable and accountable is tantamount to his being in violation of God's commandment. God does not give suggestions.

He gives commands. His commands are not grievous nor unreasonable. Compliance with God's commands is well within the ability of man to fulfill.

[64 : 33] If not, God could clearly be charged as an unreasonable and demanding deity, a cosmic kind of bully who makes demands that men believe something devoid of sufficient evidence and then holds them accountable for not doing so.

Man may, as did Burton Russell, complain that God's evidence of his existence was not adequate. Therefore, he, Mr. Russell, did not believe.

Well, each will have to decide for himself whether God, who said man is without excuse, was right, or Dr. Russell, who said God did not provide enough evidence, was right.

We suggest that God prevails, hands down. If one really does not want to believe, he can find all kinds of reasons that to him justify his unbelief.

But the scriptures tell us God isn't buying it. Faith replaces disobedience with obedience, part one.

[65 : 39] A very telling statement of purpose is given by the Apostle Paul as to why it was God who encountered him on the Damascus road and called him to be an apostle. He gives us the divine rationale for his very existence at both the opening in chapter one and the conclusion to his letter in chapter 16 addressed to the church at Rome.

Please listen to what the inspired apostle recorded at the outset. We have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations.

This strongly implies they were already in disobedience and Paul's commission was to proclaim the gospel, which upon their believing would move them from disobedience to obedience.

This, says Paul, was the very reason God confronted him on the Damascus road and appointed him to be the apostle to the Gentiles or to the non-Jewish population.

Years later, after his Damascus road experience, Paul has opportunity to recount the whole story as a Roman prisoner before King Agrippa in Acts chapter 28.

[66 : 52] And as regards the issue of faith turning disobedience into obedience, Paul tells Agrippa that immediately after seeing his vision and hearing the commands of the risen Jesus Christ, he, that is Paul, was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but on the contrary, he began his new life of obedience.

Obedience to the very one to whom before he was disobedient. And now, with faith in Jesus Christ, his hostile disobedience has turned into a loving and full obedience.

He tells us how he kept declaring to those in Damascus and also at Jerusalem and Judea, even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God. Their repentance would have to include an acknowledgement of both Jews and Gentiles that, as regards the person of Jesus Christ, they had him all wrong, even as Saul of Tarsus also did.

And what Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the Apostle, had to do was change his mind, because the evidence certainly demanded it. He did that, placing his faith in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world, the very one he previously persecuted.

What could possibly bring about such an unimaginable reversal in the heart and mind of Saul of Tarsus? Now he is preaching, I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[68 : 30] Now, as Paul the Apostle, he glories and boasts in the cross of Jesus Christ and what it means to all. Now he is saying, he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Did you get that? Through faith. Absolutely nothing else could account for such a radical reversal, and not merely a reversal for the immediate, but into a lifelong commitment of spending and being spent for the proclamation of this gospel.

Faith does that. Faith replaces disobedience with obedience, part two.

There's no doubt about it. It has been vividly demonstrated in every generation since the creation of our first parents. Disobedience toward God results in disaster for man.

Always has, always will. The reason God requires man's obedience is because it not only honors God, but is also in the best interest of man.

[69 : 40] But because of man's warped intellect as a result of the fall, he just doesn't want to believe that, despite thousands of years of history repeatedly proving it.

Fallen mankind, which pertains to us all, is self-centered, self-seeking, and self-serving. And this is the recipe for discord in marriages and families, neighborhoods and workplaces, and even between nations.

Self-centeredness, being our natural focus, results in these predictable, even inevitable, conflicts and confusion. And what could possibly change man's focus, so as to produce harmony rather than disharmony?

What could change man's drive to be a servant of God and others rather than being so self-centered? He needs a supernatural makeover. And this comes about when he places his faith in the God of creation.

This moves the individual who believes from the sphere of disobedience to obedience. It changes man's focus, which dramatically changes his behavior, his agenda, and his attitude toward himself and his fellow man.

[70 : 55] Nothing else has ever done this. Nothing else can do this. God designed this principle of faith in him rather than self to bring man and his focus to where it needs to be.

It also brings about spiritual regeneration that takes place in the individual human spirit where only God can reach. It's where the new birth occurs.

And when our personal faith or belief system is repositioned so as to make God our center, all kinds of new desires and agendas arise for man's own blessing and benefit, as well as for honoring God through the obedience of faith.

It is this faith, the exercise of our personal volition, that moves us from disobedience to obedience. Faith changes everything, provided it is deposited in the right object.

And for the Christian, this object is exclusively the person of Jesus Christ. Our faith, placed in any other person or institution, can never produce the results longed for.

[72 : 04] The Apostle Paul reminds his Ephesian Gentile recipients of their former state when he writes them in chapter 2, that whereas they were spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins, and walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

And among them all, we all formerly lived in the lust of the flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind. It's not a pretty picture of the old life. Faith in Christ is that which brings the new life, moving from disobedience to loving obedience.

You've just heard another session of Christianity Clarified with Marv Wiseman. Preview of CD Volume 17 Upcoming The theological subject of faith, like that of the subject grace that preceded it on CDs Volume 14 and 15, cannot be adequately covered in a mere 20 segments of 3 minutes plus for each.

While we are aware that no number of segments we can include could adequately cover any of the great themes undertaken on Christianity Clarified, yet we cannot move on from the critical subject of faith without devoting additional sessions to it on upcoming CD Volume 17.

As already noted, the subject of both grace and faith involves so very many implications, and both are so very key to theology in general, we dare not skimp on the time we allot them.

[73 : 53] Consequently, upcoming, we will treat issues like a faith that overcomes the world, a faith that is tried and tested, a faith that is productive and what it is that faith produces, how faith counters adversity, and what about a lapse of faith and its remedy, or a faith that grows and how it does so, and outstanding biblical examples of faith engaged in by ordinary people.

Lastly, we intend to address the difference and the connection between grace and faith, because getting these two remarkable provisions firmly fixed in mind as to how vitally they work together, will enhance one's appreciation of both.

And nothing will increase faith and confidence in the Lord more than a clear understanding of what all He has provided for believers. This is the ultimate goal and purpose of Christianity Clarified, and it is a pure pleasure to expound on these great issues.

Your participation in listening and aiding in the free distribution of all of the CDs comprising Christianity Clarified is appreciated more than we can say.

This is Pastor Marv Wiseman saying, thank you so very much from the bottom of my heart. Thank you.