

Believing and Receiving

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BELIEVE and RECEIVE

Galatians 3: 1-7, 13-14 (New Living Translation)

Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ's death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross. ²Let me ask you this one question: Did you **receive** the Holy Spirit by obeying the Law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you **believed** the message you heard about Christ. ³How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? ⁴Have you experienced [suffered] so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?

⁵I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you **believe** the message you heard about Christ.

⁶In the same way, "Abraham **believed** God and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." ⁷The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.

¹³Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." ¹⁴Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are **believers** might receive the promised [blessing of the] Holy Spirit through faith.

Everyone believes in something! The question is this:

'What do you believe ... and who do you believe in'?

- The tooth fairy
- A flat earth
- Santa Claus
- Horoscopes
- Good luck
- Fate...

Atheists and secularists claim that believing in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is akin to believing in some of the fantasy things I've just mentioned...

- They say that **believing** in a God who is active in people's lives is just wishful thinking

- They argue that **praying** to God is about as useful as ‘crossing your fingers’
- They dismiss a belief in **the afterlife** as a fiction to provide some comfort for the old, the sick and the dying
- They reject the **work of the Holy Spirit** in guiding and directing lives as a “crutch” for inadequate people, who can’t cope!

They **might accept** that there was a great teacher called Jesus from Nazareth ... but claim that His followers exaggerated and made up fanciful stories to boost His reputation, deceive a gullible people, defy the religious leaders and challenge the occupying Romans...

So what do **you** believe?

Jesus once asked Simon Peter for his opinion as to who He was...

- Peter replied “**You are the Christ (Messiah/Saviour), sent from God/ the Son of the Living God**”
- Jesus said that no human being had revealed this truth to him, only Father God

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, He emphasised the importance of BELIEF... For example, in John 6: 40...

For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

And in John 11: 25-26...

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?

And after Jesus appeared to the disciples following the resurrection where Thomas acknowledged that Jesus was alive by exclaiming: “**My Lord and my God!**” Jesus responded by saying:

Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed

So **belief** in God and in the person of Jesus Christ is essential for a transformed life and receiving the gift of eternal life...

However, it’s one thing to **believe** something or believe **in** someone... it’s quite another **to receive what is available as a result of that belief!**

A survey was carried out a few years ago to determine the percentage of **smokers** who believed that smoking causes serious health problems

- The vast majority agreed that smoking is bad for your health
- But the majority intended to keep on smoking!
- What they **believed** did not accord with what they were prepared to **receive** as a result of that

belief...

They BELIEVED that smoking could lead to life-threatening diseases but would not RECEIVE the 'salvation' that was available to them that would rid them of the habit and help them to start a "new life".

In a similar way, you may believe that Jesus Christ was and is the Son of God...

- You may believe that He is the Saviour of the world
- You may believe that He died so that your sins and mine could be forgiven and we can have "new life" in Him
- You may believe that He is the resurrection and the life...

But have you RECEIVED His gift of salvation?

I sometimes have a parcel delivered and have to sign to say that I have received the item. It may be a gift from someone. I could refuse to accept it and send the delivery driver away!

You would probably say that I was being selfish, ungrateful and rude!

- But I might argue that it could be a trick or too good to be true or that I don't want anything free because I like to work for what I get!
- I need to believe that the gift is free and without strings attached **and then receive it thankfully**

There's another aspect to receiving... Jesus wants us to have faith that will open the way for us to receive all that God the Holy Spirit wants to provide us, so that we can truly have "life in all its fullness".

So:

1. He wants us to **receive guidance and wisdom**, so that we can walk in step with Him along the straight and narrow path.
2. He wants us to **receive the fruit of the Spirit**: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control... so that our lives become more like Jesus
3. He wants us to **receive spiritual gifts**, so that the church can be fully equipped to serve Him.
4. He wants us to **receive power and endurance** to stand firm when the world opposes and criticises and condemns us.

All these benefits are available but are not 'automatic'... They require each of us to desire them and 'reach out' to God for them.

I suspect that too many of us are content to remain at "first post" (believing) and fail to receive all that the Holy Spirit longs to give us.

Perhaps all of us need to ask ourselves the question:

"Am I living wholeheartedly for Jesus Christ through receiving everything that He intends for my life? Or am I at the 'starting post' of believing but not receiving?"

There is a third word that I want to mention ... **DECEIVE**...

- Not as appealing as **believe** and **receive**... but important, nonetheless...

One of the most famous examples of being a deceiver is Isaac's son, **Jacob**...

- His name actually means "deceiver" and he lived up to his name!

Deception is an interesting word... One definition of deception is: **falsehood or the act of lying to or tricking someone.** An example of deception is when you tell someone you are 30 when really you are 40.

But **deception** takes many forms...

- There is **deception to get what you want**, regardless of how others may suffer... For example, defrauding an unsuspecting person, fund or charity... {I knew someone who carried out just such a deception and was jailed for 18 months!}
- There is also **deception to spare people from pain**... For instance, not revealing the extent of your health problem to a loved one to stop the person from worrying.
- There is **deception to keep something private**... You provide accurate but **incomplete** information... For instance, someone asks you what you think of a person (whom you secretly believe to be vulgar and unpleasant) and you answer: "Well, she certainly knows her own mind!" What you say is true but conceals your deepest feelings about her and thereby deceives the one who asked you the question.

So deception takes many forms... some of them well intentioned and others quite the opposite!

There are many instances in the Bible of being deceived by others...

- For instance, **Eve** in the Garden: "**The serpent deceived me**..."
- In **Deuteronomy 7: 16**... Don't let your heart be deceived so that you turn away from the Lord and serve and worship other gods
- And Jesus in **Matthew 24: 24**... **For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones.**
- And in **2 Samuel 3: 27**... When Abner (commander of the army) arrived back at Hebron, Joab took him aside at the gateway as if to speak with him privately. But then he stabbed Abner in the stomach and killed him in revenge for killing his brother, Asahel.

So deception can have serious consequences... but **MUCH MORE SERIOUSLY**... **Is it possible that as well as being deceived by others, I can deceive myself into believing that I am a Christian**...

- By mixing with Christians, attending church, singing enthusiastically, using the right terminology and giving every impression of being a believer... **and yet** only knowing **of** Christ and not truly **knowing** Him!
- By being born into a family where parents and grandparents are Christians and regular churchgoers... **yet never really accepting who Jesus Christ is and believing what He has done for you**

One thing's for sure... We cannot DECEIVE God? He knows!

CONCLUSION

1. We need to make certain that we genuinely believe what Jesus Christ says... and believe **in** Him as the Saviour of the world
2. If we have believed, we also need to ask God for the many gifts and benefits that He wants us to receive.

And we need to ensure that we are not being deceived... by others or by ourselves!

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