

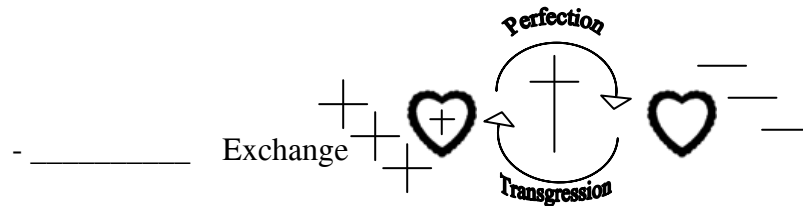
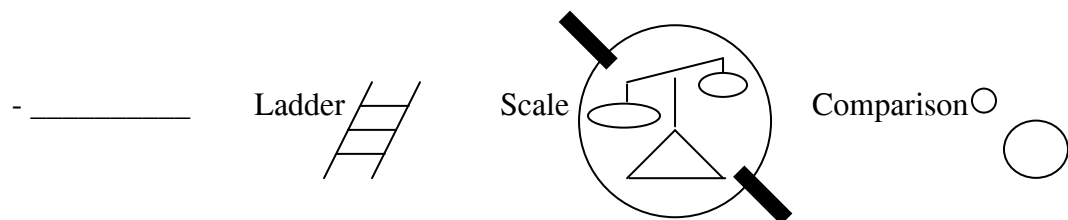
A) Introduction

In the middle to late 1800's there was a famous daredevil by the name of Blondin. He was especially known for his daring tightrope walks across the Niagara Falls. He'd do all sorts of amazing things on the tightrope (stilts, bikes, cooking...) including pushing a wheelbarrow across from one side to the other.

Before one of his attempts, in his effort to work up some excitement with the crowd, he asked them three questions. The first, "How many of you believe I can push a wheelbarrow on a tightrope across the Niagara Falls?" The crowd responded with loud cheers. It seemed all of them believed! Then Blondin asked, "How many of you believe I can push a wheelbarrow with a man in it on a tightrope across the Niagara Falls?" The crowd shouted again with belief! They all thought he could! But then Blondin asked, "So, which of you wants to be that man?" And with that the crowd fell silent. Not one of them volunteered. Not one believed in him that much. With that, he simply smiled and went on his way.

Questions to Consider...

- 1) What does this illustration teach us about the kind of faith God is looking for with us?
- 2) When it comes to having a right relationship with God, can you guess what two things people turn to in order to be reconciled to God? (There really are only two...)



B) CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is distinct from all other religions and philosophies in that the Bible proclaims that people receive a restored relationship with God (are saved) entirely apart from doing good works. Salvation is by faith alone in the Savior God, Jesus Christ. In other words, the dividing line between heaven and hell is "faith in Christ" and not good works, as many people believe.

John 3:16-18 (BELIEF = SALVATION) ¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

Illustration

Let's say you had a son who led a terrible life and was on death row and had no hope that he would get out of his death sentence. Except that you were a person of great importance and you were able to provide a pardon for him free and clear.

How would you react to your son if he should return home and claim he earned his spot back in the family and at your house? Even more, how do you think he'd react to you when first seeing you at the door, if he had that impression?

Now let's say he realized how terrible he had been during his life and that he deserved his sentence, and let's say he also trusted that his pardon was real and entirely provided by your great sacrificial effort... What do you think his attitude would be when returning home and seeing you for the first time?

Question... Wouldn't the former be one who has a "work righteous" undesirable attitude (non-belief) toward God and the other be one who has a "faith in Christ" desirable attitude (belief)?

C) Characteristics of Saving Faith.

James 2:19 (KNOWLEDGE + ACCEPTANCE)¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

Romans 3:20-25a (+ TRUST)²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

* NOTE: It is through faith alone that we receive forgiveness and salvation. Good works play no part in our salvation. (That includes even accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior - 1 Corinthians 12:3 "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.")

**NOTE: Good works, then, are a response faith produces out of thanks for all God has done. Good works will always be present among believers for "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26).

***NOTE: Faith cannot be seen (1 Samuel 16:7). We can only go on what a person's confession is.

Illustration: Apple trees bear apples, or they're dead. Christians bear good works, or they're dead. Just as fruit doesn't give life to the tree, works don't give eternal life to a Christian. They're just signs of life. We'll touch on this more with a different discussion on God's Ten Commandments.

D) Beware of Unbelief.

Matthew 7:13-14 (UNBELIF IS COMMON)¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

John 10:28 & Luke 8:13 (FAITH CAN BE LOST) I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

* NOTE: We conclude that nothing will be strong enough to tempt us away from Christ **against our will**, but we can willingly leave Christ by denial (unbelief) or by persistent willful actions against his will (impenitence). A common way this happens is when people treat the gospel carelessly.

E) The Source of Faith is the Word of God, in particular, the Gospel

I. Faith Comes from hearing the Word Alone

Romans 10:17 (THE GOSPEL) Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

*NOTE: As you read the Scriptures you will find two main messages, Law and Gospel. The Law tells us what we are to do and, therefore, shows us our sin (Romans 3:20). The Gospel tells us what Jesus did to make us perfect in God's sight (2 Corinthians 5:21). It alone is referred to as "**the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes**" (Romans 1:16).

II. The Bible is all sufficient for our spiritual needs and for reflecting our faith in Christ

2 Timothy 3:14-17 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is **God-breathed** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

*NOTE: It gives *salvation* and it *teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains* for *every* good work. There is nothing more which is needed.

III. The Bible is inspired (God breathed), 100% without error, divinely written = reliable for faith.

2 Peter 1:21 (Not Made Up) For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:16 (God Breathed)(See Above under Letter B)

Proverbs 30:5 (Flawless) Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

John 10:35b (The Resurrected Lord Said) ...and the Scripture cannot be broken...

*NOTE: Although men wrote the Bible some projected 40 authors, God, in a miraculous way, inspired **every word** for them to write in their own style so that we can rightly call it **God's Word**.

**NOTE: A look at the history of how the Bible was transferred down from age to age shows that there wasn't any room for error. (See Josh McDowell's "The Reliability of Scripture" video in our library.) On top of this, no variants from early manuscripts conflict with any teaching of the Bible.

Conclusion: The Bible is our sole authority since it alone creates and preserves faith.

Isaiah 8:19-20 ¹⁹When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

Extra Study: Read Hebrews chapters 11-12 (a portion about Faith and the Life of Faith from another epistle/letter) and Psalm 119 (an OT hymn about the Word).

THE OLD TESTAMENT (39 Books, between 1500-400BC, Hebrew & Aramaic)

A. The Historical Books (Genesis-Esther)

These books cover the history of the children of Israel from creation (4000BC?) to their return from the Babylonian Captivity (400'sBC). Among many valuable lessons they show us...

1. God remains faithful in the face of man's unfaithfulness.
2. God preserved the Jewish nation so the Savior could be born.
3. God increasingly revealed his plan of salvation to the world as he revealed more and more of Christ.

B. The Poetical Books (Job-Song of Solomon)

These books contain valuable truths in poetry. The book of Psalms was the hymn book of the Old Testament people. These are also filled with prophecies of Christ.

C. The Prophetical Books (Isaiah-Malachi)

Most of these books were written in the period of history covered by 2 Kings-Nehemiah (750BC-440BC). They are the sermons of that day. To understand them fully, a person has to read them in connection with the portions of the historical books that report on the events happening which lay behind these sermons. These books also contain many wonderful prophecies concerning Jesus.

GENESIS 1:1-2 (HEBREW: ORIGINAL LANGUAGE)

פְּרָאשִׁית פָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:
וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתְּתָה תְּהוֹ וְנֹב הוּא וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹמֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:

THE NEW TESTAMENT (27 books, 27-90AD, Greek)

A. The Historical Books

Matthew – John are the Gospels because they describe the ministry of Jesus. The book of Acts describes the acts of the early Christian church directed by Christ through the Holy Spirit.

1. Matthew – He wrote for Jewish Christians. His gospel emphasizes the way Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies as the promised Messiah.
2. Mark – He wrote for Roman Christians who were suffering persecution. Thus he stresses the sufferings of Jesus. Here we see Jesus as the suffering Servant.
3. Luke – He wrote mainly for Gentiles. In Luke's gospel, we see Jesus as Savior of all mankind.
4. John – Written later than the other three gospels. John's gospel emphasizes the fact that Jesus was the Son of God. He records more of Jesus' words than the other gospels.

B. Epistles (Romans-Jude)

Most of these epistles (letters) were written by St. Paul. They explain to us the significance of Jesus' life and death – and show us how we respond gratefully to God.

C. Prophetical Book (Revelation)

In a symbolic way, it shows that believers will always be persecuted but that the Lord has and will conquer all foes as he protects them until the end of time. This book must be understood in light of the other books.

JOHN 1:1-3 (GREEK ORIGINAL)

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.
πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν

*NOTE: Our choice of translation, therefore, needs to be made on its faithfulness to and clarity of the original Scriptures. We've found the KJV and NIV to be such types.

**NOTE: We teach that the Scriptures are to interpret Scriptures and nothing else. The reason there are so many different Christian denominations is over the fact that other church bodies use tradition, reason, emotion, or the idea that the Bible has errors to decide what the Scriptures truly teaches.

The Reliable Testimonies of the New and Old Testaments

A Wonderful Proof of God's Providence: The 4 Gospels and the NT Canon (Standard/Rule)

It's not possible to cover the topics of the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, the reliability of the Scriptures, internal and external evidence of the divine Author, how the Canon was formed, and the textual transmission of the Scriptures over the centuries in one lesson – all of which have had volumes written on them. But the following was put together to help uncover the tip of the iceberg in a study of this area. It's the prayer of the author that the reader goes away thanking God for his providence in preserving his Holy Word for every generation as he promised...

1) The current writings in the earliest manuscripts we have today of the 4 Gospels are less than 80 years in a gap of time from the originals. Some suggest even less than 50 years. (Mark's Gospel was written around 50AD and the earliest copy we have of it is from 134AD.) Now, when comparing this gap of time to secular works by Aristotle, Tacitus, Plato, and Aristophenes - which no scholar doubts as to their authenticity and reliability - the proof of the superiority in reliability of the 4 Gospel witnesses is astonishing. The original copies of each of those secular writers are separated from the earliest copies we have of them today (900AD) by a 1,000 years or more. Obviously, there's no comparison between those secular writings and the 4 Gospels/NT in the reliability of the copies we have today.

2) By 100AD the 4 Gospels were collected and distributed. According to tradition and early writings, the Apostle John would have still been alive to be a witness of this and to verify each book and reject that which was false for the comfort of the churches. (By the way, by 80AD Paul's letters and the book of Hebrews were collected by the Church at Corinth and distributed.)

3) Due to the Marcion heresy (Pitting the Old Testament against the New Testament - 140AD) the Church was forced to define the canon – with no other Gospels but the 4. By 200AD, most books, including the 4 Gospels, were agreed upon and by 400AD there was a formal recognition of the books – not out of necessity but out of the thought that it would be fitting and proper.

4) Manuscript evidence for the reliability of the 4 Gospels as well as the entire New Testament is also unbelievable, especially as one compares them to secular writers: *(By the way, it's a general rule that the more manuscripts you have of a document, the easier it is to authenticate the original.)*

Caesar and the Gallic Wars – 10

Plato – 7

Tacitus Annals– 20

Sophocles – 193

Suetonius – 8

Herodotus – 8

Thucydides – 8

Aristotle – 49

Aristophenes – 10

New Testament Manuscripts – 24,970

** Even better: If you were to destroy all the Bibles in the world and all the manuscripts too, within 150-200 years after Christ, you could still put all but about 11 verses of the NT back together. How? The early church fathers quoted the NT so profusely, that it's all found in their works/letters.*

5) The above is just a brief overview of a fraction of the scholarship which has gone into the study of the formation of NT canon and its absolute reliability. The deeper one studies this topic, the more one realizes that the Christian's trust in the Scriptures is hardly out of *blind* faith and that God has not only worked to save us but has insured that the possibility of knowing our salvation would be just as certain.

6) The OT preservation is also an amazing subject to study as to the certainty we have of knowing the original. Jesus testimony (the main proof) to it along with the modern find of the Dead Sea Scrolls just adds to the absolute certainty that God's revelation to us has not been corrupted in any way.