



SERVANT LEADERS

99.99%

by Sara Tusek

Recently my husband, Jarda, and I have been in the throes of a major transition. This is nothing new for either of us, as we are not so young anymore and have weathered a number of changes, both of our own choosing and not.

But this transition has a feeling of historical significance for us, as we are determined this time not to move until we know, for sure, God's will for us. This strong desire for certainty has led us, and especially me, into some lines of thinking that most Christians will encounter in their lives. I therefore hope that our own historically significant time of change may prove useful as an example for others, as we attempt to answer the question, "How can a Christian be 100% sure of God's will?"

God's Grace

In John Wesley's theology, belief in God and His Son Christ is, first of all, an act of grace on His part. Without His grace, we would not even know we were lost sinners. Through the Holy Spirit, God speaks to our innermost self and lets us know He exists. He speaks this way to every person He created.

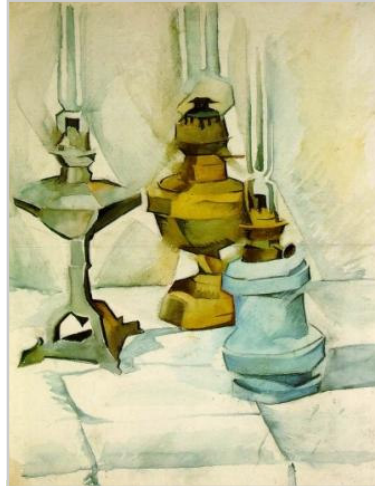
You might think that having heard God's own voice, humans would immediately follow His instruction. This is not the case. Many people, sadly, never give God a chance. They may hear His voice, feel better for a while, and

wonder why they are happier. Being rational, they may give credit to their fortuitous circumstances, their own intelligence, another person's attention, a substance that can be ingested, a state of meditation or simply a "passing fancy" for their brief contentment. It seems to be a real stumbling block to most people to connect the dots between inner peace and God.

Thus, hearing God's voice is not enough, in itself, to make one into a believing Christian, let alone a committed follower of God's will. What else is needed? Faith.

What, then, is Faith?

Faith is, as the author of the Book of Hebrews says, "*the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*"



Painting by Juan Gris

This innocently-expressed idea is often done up in needlework, as if it were a rule of life on the level of "waste not, want not." It seems to be a harmless aphorism that can be pulled out of context and admired on its own.

But it's not. When examined, this verse is a challenging comment on the true nature of faith. Read it carefully and you see it's actually 2 paradoxes: how can you have substance, a tangible thing, for hope, which is an intangible idea? How can you have evidence for something unseen?

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One way to look at faith: a one-time decision

In many Christian circles, faith is perceived as an act, a deliberate decision to accept a particular idea.

Making this decision is often presented as a onetime act of will. The implication is that, once one accepts God's offer of salvation and guidance for life's choices, the deal is settled.

Then there's no more need for faith, as you are now one of God's own and He will lead you into His paths of righteousness. This view of faith is similar to a contract, in that an action on the part of one party (you, acting on faith through your free will) calls forth an action by the other (God, Who responds to your act of faith). Indeed, many Christians would call this a covenant, which is a particular type of permanently-binding contract that cannot be broken by either side.

Faith and Doubt

However attractive it may be to view faith as an entry method into a solid, intellectually-understandable contract with God, in which faith is no longer the key component, this view is contradicted by the verse in Hebrews:

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1, KJV

If faith is transformed into certainty when a person enters a contractual relationship with God, then this verse makes no sense. There's no need for faith when "things hoped for" become reality, or when "things not seen" can be seen. If we can clearly see what God is doing, as in a contract where all is specific and written out, then we don't need faith. But we do need faith! We are told that "Faith, hope and love" are the greatest gifts, in I Corinthians: 13.

This indicates that even after accepting Christ and pledging that we will follow Him, we still need faith.

Why? Because of doubt. This seems counterintuitive, if not heretical. I know sincere Christians who would assert that true faith leaves no room for doubt, and that doubt is from the evil one. Yet how else can you explain the continued need for faith after conversion? Obviously all doubt does not flee—we still have a shred of it—maybe .01% of doubt against 99.99% of faith—but that tiny portion of doubt can't be satisfied through our rational minds.

No matter how long we follow God, there is still a grain of doubt, simply because we are human. I fervently hope that when we die, and are carried home to God, that little nugget of doubt will be destroyed, as I don't like it one bit. I want certainty.

Free Will

But, as my older, wiser husband tells me, we cannot have certainty, as then we would have no need to exercise our free will, which chooses whether to believe God or go our own way. In other words, faith is the flip side of free will: we have free will to choose our own destiny, and we have to call on faith to exercise that free will in order to follow God.

I'm all for the tidiness of believing that we only have to use faith once, to become right with God. But the Bible says, and my experience confirms, that we have to exercise our faith daily. And doubt is the spur that forces us to exercise faith. Our faith, at best, is 99.99%; the .01% of doubt is just as necessary as the faith, to allow us to show God that we are choosing to follow Him in all we do.