

Believe or Make-Believe

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Have you ever watched children playing make-believe? Although there is no smoke or fire, a little boy is putting out a flaming inferno and rescuing trapped residents from a burning building. He is holding a high-pressure water hose with all his might to keep it from whiplashing like a writhing snake. No sooner does he put the imaginary fire out and wipe his brow then he is off chasing a run-a-way herd of cattle on his trusty steed on some western range. Now he is a cowboy. The cowboy has forgotten all about the fireman. That's "make-believe." It's just a game. It's all imagination.

Our Christian faith and life must be more than make-believe. The life of a believer is not the life of a make-believer. The difference between the two is that one is real and one is fantasy. One is a game and the other is reality. One takes off its fireman's hat and cowboy boots and becomes something else, the other is the same twenty-four hours a day.

The church is filled with too many make-believers. Christianity for many is nothing more than putting on a sweet smile, or singing a song, or making a donation. Then, as with the cowboy boots of our little friend, the Christianity comes off and another role is played. With all too many, the Christian life is one of make-believe.

There are many ways that one can tell the difference between the real and the pretend. God uses trials and adversity as the acid test of genuine Christianity. Job could be the patron saint of adversity. He lost everything except his faith in God. He lost his family, his wealth, and then his health. He survived the accusations of his friends and enemies. We can only wonder how well Eliphaz would have stood up had the roles been reversed. Job was tested and proved in adversity. His faith was real.

There are many other tests of true belief, from the ark to the fiery furnace, from the cradle to the cross. God's true believers have always learned that the trials of faith are "much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire."¹ There have always been those who believe and those who "make-believe." Science tells us that the human mind cannot tell the difference between the two. Experiments with a placebo have demonstrated how the mind can be fooled. God, however "is not mocked,"² or fooled. Children learn early to pretend. Their world is a stage filled with super-heros, and teen-age mutant ninja turtles, babies



that grow in cabbage patches, and ponies that fly. But children are not the only ones who play pretend. Adults pretend to be happy when they are not, they pretend to believe the soap powder they sell is really better than brand X, when they know it is the same stuff. They pretend they have put a check in the mail, when in fact it has not even been written yet. They pretend to be better than the next guy, when all the while they know it is not so.

The Christianity that turned the Roman Empire upside down was not "make-believe" Christianity. The first Christians did not pay lip-service to forsaking the things of the world, at the same time they were trying to store it away. They were more like their Old Testament brother Moses, who was willing to give up the treasures of Egypt and seek God. The first century church wanted to win the world, not own it. The early church was willing to face the ferocious beasts of the arena, rather than offer a pinch of incense on Caesar's altar. They longed for Christ's return and said "even so come Lord Jesus."³ The "make-believer" is having too good of a time in this world to look for any second coming. And since for them it is only make-believe, they don't expect him to come anyway.

You need to but scratch the patina of the pretender to see that for him it is only pretend. Pleasantness, cordiality, and kindness are merely a thin film covering an unchanged and unregenerate heart. The believer is real to the core and lives by a power not his own. He looks for and longs for Christ's coming.

How is your faith these days? "But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and the he a rewarder of those who diligently seek him."⁴

¹ 1Pet. 1:7; ² Gal. 6:7; ³ Rev. 22:20; ⁴ Heb. 11:6.

Keep it Real