

6 Ways You Can Separate True Faith From Spiritual Fantasy or Presumption

What is the difference between faith in the invisible God and fantasy? Or the difference between faith and presumption? The lines that separate faith from fantasy and presumption can be fine, but they are definite, and they are clear. Failure to recognize those lines can be the difference between life and death, between truth and error, between a solid, fruit-bearing walk with the Lord and spiritual deception.

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) teaches that “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” Faith is essential and foundation in our relationship with God.

Yet many would claim that this very act of faith—putting our trust in something or someone that we cannot see with our natural eyes—is an act of fantasy and self-deception. In the eyes of many skeptics and atheists and agnostics, believing in the God of the Bible is no different than believing in an alleged Flying Spaghetti Monster, as the so-called Pastafarians satirically argued.

Some believers would respond that there is massive, scientific and logical evidence that points to an intelligent designer. So it is hardly irrational to argue for the reality of Hebrews 11:6.

But however compelling those arguments may be—in my view, they are quite compelling—they are not the *basis* for our faith. They may contribute to our faith and supplement our faith and support our faith. But they are not the *foundation* for our faith, which requires us to take some kind of step in response

to our beliefs. This kind of faith is illustrated in numerous biblical passages, in which the hearer was required to do something tangible in response to a word from the Lord.

Examples would be the man with a shriveled hand who stretched it out at the command of Jesus (Mark 3:1-5). Or the man who had been lame from birth responding to Paul's call to, "Stand up on your feet." The Scriptures state, "At that, the man jumped up and began to walk" (Acts 14:10a).

On a deeper level, true faith requires us to leave our own ways and put our complete trust in the character of God and the trustworthiness of His Word (see Luke 9:57-62). Sometimes true faith requires us to overrule our own logical thinking, trusting in the faithfulness of the Lord (see Prov. 3:5-6; for an example, see Luke 5:5-10).

How, then, do we separate this real and true faith from spiritual fantasy?

Surely all of us know people who have been deeply deceived. How do we know that we are not deceived?

And how do we separate this real and true faith from presumption, where we take action—supposedly faith-filled action in response to God—by our own fleshly initiative?

We separate faith from fantasy by doing spiritual reality checks that are ruthlessly honest. We separate faith from presumption by walking in deep humility and serious accountability. At the same time, we do not let these checks and balances stop us from exercising true faith, which often involves risk. After all, it's challenging to get out of the boat and walk on the water at the Lord's directive! (See Matt. 14:22-31.)

For a present-day example of spiritual fantasy, note these words from a pastor who prophesied that Trump would be reelected as president in 2020, spoken in May 2023 before a

large church audience: "To all of those who said that we as prophets missed it when we prophesied that Donald Trump would be voted back in a separate term, you're wrong. We did prophesy that he would be voted back in and he was voted back in by almost 80 million votes. And in the eyes of God the president of the United States right now in the courts of justice in heaven is not Joe Biden but it's Donald Trump." (At this point, the audience, also deceived, cheers its approval.)

The pastor continued, "Now, whether he's in the office or not doesn't matter but prophecy had to be fulfilled, and so God fulfilled the prophetic word. And so whether you occupy it in the physical sense or not does not matter. What matters is did God say it and did God do it, and He did."

This is complete rubbish. It is self-deception at the highest level. It is sheer fantasy.

I have addressed the false Trump prophecies at length elsewhere, but for the moment, let me simply say this. First, these prophets did *not* say that Trump would be voted in but not sit in office. Not for a moment. They made very clear that he would continue in the White House for four more years. To put some ridiculous spin on it after the fact is to deny reality.

Second, the whole issue is who sits in the White House and runs the country. That's what we were concerned about, and that's what we were voting for. Who cares about the alleged president of the United States in the alleged "courts of justice in heaven" when the one making crucial decisions for our country right now is the man who currently sits in the White House, namely Joe Biden? That's what matters in reality.

Third, if these prophets had really heard from the Lord, why didn't they tell us the most important part of the story, namely that (in their view), Trump *would* be reelected but the election would be stolen? Wasn't that the real issue? This

would be like me prophesying to you that tomorrow, the Lord would give you a brand-new car, only to fail to tell you that it would be stolen before it was delivered to you. In the end, you're still without the car.

Cults have grown out of false prophecies like these, including some that set dates for the Lord's return. When the prophesied dates didn't come to pass, rather than acknowledging their error, they built whole theologies on the alleged spiritual nature of His return.

True faith gets true results, because it is based on truth, including the truth of God's existence and the truth of Jesus rising from the dead. And because we find God and His Word to be utterly reliable, beginning with His transforming work in our own lives, we can trust Him in the face of temporary, contrary evidence. Soon enough, that faith will turn to sight. Soon enough, our trust will be vindicated.

In the case of spiritual fantasy, things continue to spiral out of control until we have lost touch with reality. We will still "believe" no matter what, and no amount of factual, contrary evidence can convince us. Careful!

When it comes to presumption (for a well-known biblical example, see Num. 13-14), this arises when we act on our own impulses rather than God's directives, often because of our spiritual immaturity or pride or stubbornness or carnality.

We can avoid this dangerous attitude by:

1. Constantly praying, "Not my will, but Yours, Lord."
2. Walking in humility towards others and being quick to receive correction.
3. Not over-exalting our own importance or spirituality.
4. Having a submissive and honoring attitude towards authority.

5. Being immersed in the Scriptures and renewing our minds to what is written.

6. Establishing a solid track record of stepping out in faith, by which you can learn to differentiate between our own impulses and the Spirit's voice.

In the end, we dare not draw back from true faith because of the dangers of spiritual fantasy, and we dare not try to show off our faith by acts of presumption.

The key, instead, is to cultivate intimacy with the Lord and instant obedience to His voice, learning from our experiences (including from our failures). True faith yields amazing results in this world and glorious fruit in the world to come. True faith overcomes the world. (See 1 John 5:4.) {eoa}

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