

# Decisions of Faith—Can Faith Survive in an Age of Doubt?

By Bob Young

## Introduction

A. I was assigned this title for a presentation a few years ago.

The title assigned says at least three things:

1. We live in an age of doubt
2. There is a belief crisis in our age
3. The very survival of faith/belief may be in jeopardy.

B. To understand the problems confronted by faith in our world today, one must understand the concept of **syncretism**—intermingling or mixed belief systems. We are experiencing syncretism all around us today.

C. There is a **belief crisis** in our world. Such crises have occurred in the past. Eph. 4:13-14.

D. This belief crisis results also in a **values crisis**, bringing wrong choices and wrong lifestyles.

E. We face peer pressure, numerous problems, and a changing world.

## I. Why is it important what I believe?

A. Beliefs or principles are the foundation of a person's entire life.

B. Values grow out of the beliefs we hold.

C. Our behavior and way of life grows out of our values.

## II. What is the Problem?

A. The problem is not simply that there are **conflicting belief systems** so that one can demonstrate which is true. The problem is different now. We are faced with the **intermingling** belief systems, mixing truth and non-truth.

B. There is a problem of **distorted beliefs**. We live in a time of half-truth, twisted belief systems, beliefs based solely on personal subjectivism.

**1. Distorted beliefs.** This is especially obvious in distorted beliefs about God.

Adolescents in the US:

- 80%, that God created universe
- 84%, that God is personally involved in people's lives
- 63%, that Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, and Christians pray to same God using different names
- 87% believe Jesus was a real person
- 78% affirm the virgin birth
- 46% believe Jesus committed sins
- 51% say he did not rise from the dead, that is, they deny the resurrection.

**2. Redefinitions of beliefs.** Truth is redefined according to cultural settings.

**3. Personalization of beliefs.** People develop their own personal belief system based on what works for them, like a cafeteria. They are seeking an individualized faith, another evidence of the individualism of our society.

**4. Relative beliefs.** Many affirm that truth is relative, they deny the existence of any objective truth system, whether seen or unseen, recognized or unrecognized.

**5. Filtered belief systems.** The filter says that all truth is subjectively and personally determined. Most do not consult the biblical text for truth and for faith, but look within themselves. This is a denial of absolute, objective moral truth.

C. Today there is a cultural worldview (postmodernism), difficult to describe or define because it is developed negatively, that is, by what it is not. Previously education in our world focused on science and reason while rejecting superstition, emotion, religion, and the occult. The new world view repudiates the existence of objective reality or truth.

D. Postmodernism reflects a world of doubt.

- No objective truth.
- It is not possible to discover truth in a narrative or ideology that integrates the world, postmodernism rejects any integrated explanation of truth.
- Truth is created by a specific culture or community.
- Individuals are the product of their cultures.
- All thinking is “constructed by the society.”
- Those who claim objective truth seek to judge the values, beliefs, and lifestyles of others. Such claims are efforts toward cultural domination.

E. The challenge of **distorted beliefs** leads to **distorted values**.

E1 Without doubt there are serious problems in our nations and our world today.

→The number of divorces each year in the US now exceeds one million.

→82.5% of marriages end “in the court or in the heart” (from a study done at Ohio State University)

→70% of marriages between adolescents end in divorce within the first five years.

→Computer generated projections indicate that marriages today have a theoretical percentage of survival around 50%.

→In the US, one marriage in three does not survive. In some parts of the nation, the percentage is 50%--one marriage out of two does not survive. But when a family attends church regularly, the percentage is 2-3%. And, if the family not only attends church but also shares a family life with daily devotionals and prayer times, the percentage of failure is one marriage out of 400. –Billy Graham

E2 The following information is from a front-page article, “Sex in the Body of Christ,” written by Lauren F. Winner, from “Christianity Today” (May 2005, pp. 28-33). The title is “Sex, Virginity, and Christianity—Illegitimate Sexual Relationships “out of control” in Christian Institutions.”

→About 65% of US youth have sexual relations before they graduate from high school (before age 18).

→With millions of members, Internet sites that promote social relationships between young people encourage them to choose companions not only to go dancing but have casual sexual adventures.

→41% of US women between the ages of 15 and 44 have cohabited with a man, according to the CDC.

→Between 1960 and 2000, the number of couples who cohabit without marriage increased tenfold according to the 2000 census. Between 1990 and 2000, the number increased by 70%.

→52% of US women have sexual relations before they are 18 years old. 75% have sexual relations before marriage.

→According to a study done by the Kaiser Foundation for the Family and “Seventeen” magazine, more than 25% of adolescents between 15 and 17 years of age say that they practice sexual intercourse “almost always,” “almost all the time”, or as part of “casual sexual relations.”

→The Christian community is not immune to the sexual revolution. Three surveys conducted in the decade of the 1990s among single Christian men and women reflected much premarital sexual activity. Approximately one third of those who responded were virgins, which indicates, of course, that two thirds are not.

→Sex in Christian colleges, institutions, and universities, that is, those affiliated with a church or Christian organization. All the ministers with whom we talked who work in this type of organization say the same thing: the students, even those who are leaders and at the head of the Bible classes, are sexually out of control. –Greg Thomson, pastor of Reformed University Fellowship, University of Virginia.

*(Information from [http://www.editoriallapaz.org/sexo\\_datos\\_2000\\_2002.htm](http://www.editoriallapaz.org/sexo_datos_2000_2002.htm). The original Spanish version appears at the end of the sermon.)*

F. The result is a **distorted belief about reality**. This is seen in the pragmatism of our societies. Whether something is right or wrong is determined by whether it works in your life. In comparison, we used to think: I know that God’s truth will work in my life.

### III. The solution is in understanding Conviction.

A. There is hope. We must understand what we believe and why we believe it.

We must develop our faith. We must deepen our beliefs to the level of CONVICTIONS. We must move from belief and trust to a proactive level of CONVINCED and CONVICTED. We must reeducate ourselves in the foundations of the Christian faith. Christianity has the power to overcome subjective beliefs, the loss of moral absolutes, and distorted perceptions. Christianity has the power to transform our lives and behaviors—when beliefs exist at the level of CONVICTIONS.

Conviction is a better synonym for faith than belief.

B. Our question: Can faith survive in a world of doubt? I am not sure. This I know: convictions can survive. This is why convictions are important.

1. Faith that is mere belief, affirmation of intellectual assent, will not survive.

Conviction will survive.

2. We must do more than believe the right things.

3. Believing is not enough. Most Christians have accepted or adopted Christianity not because they have judged it true and worthy of acceptance, but because of one of two reasons.

- They have always been Christians and know little of other options.
- They judge it the best option encountered to date. The problem with #1 is that Christianity is inherited as a belief without conviction.
- The problem with #2 is that when another option appears, such Christians leave the faith. Mere belief is not enough. Not because believing is not important, but because beliefs that are only intellectual assents or preferences are not enough.

#### C. How can we develop convictions?

To have conviction is to be so convinced that we must admit truth.

Do you believe God exists or are you convicted?

Do you believe the Bible or are you convicted?

John 16:8, do we merely think sin is a problem or are we convicted?

#### D. Examples of convictions.

1. The Bible is filled with the stories of people of conviction.

- Joseph; Gen. 39:7-10; “day by day”, God with him. Determination, decision.
- David; 1 Sam. 16:7,13,18; 17:37, God with him, dependence on God, 45-46
- Daniel; 1:8; different, distinct, decision.
- Mary, 1:28, with her; dedication, ck. 1:46ff

2. The difference between belief and conviction is that convictions act.

- Convictions result when evidence is examined and we commit ourselves to the truth. Thomas wanted evidence before he committed himself to Jesus (John 20).
- An enigma is that faith and unfaith exist side by side in our hearts (Mark 9:22-24).
- Paul was convinced of what he believed, who he believed (2 Tim. 1:12).

E. Definition of Conviction: being so thoroughly convinced that you act on your beliefs/convictions regardless of the consequences.

- Convictions will hold us firm and steady in a godless culture of doubt.
- Convictions are deepened faith concepts. Convictions are the source of victory.
- Convictions will lead us to live out our beliefs in relationship with others.
- Convictions about God and his truth unlock our origin—where did I come from?
- Convictions about Jesus unlock our true identity—who am I?
- Convictions about the resurrection provide us a sense of destiny—where am I going?
- When Jesus returns, all will be convinced (Jude 15; Phil. 2:9-11).

#### **Conclusion**

May we Christians find convictions that will move us forward in the greatest cause on earth! Can faith survive in a world of doubt? Yes, if we understand Biblical faith. But if the church continues in mental assent without the depth of belief that brings conviction, we will not long survive.

E1. Sin ninguna duda hay problemas en nuestros países hoy día.

\*El numero de divorcios cada año in los Estados Unidos ahora sobrepasa 1 millón.

\*El 82.5% de matrimonios terminan “o en el corta o en el corazón” (de un estudio conducido en Ohio State University)

\*El 70% de matrimonios entre adolescentes terminan en divorcio a dentro de primer 5 anos.

\*Proyecciones generadas por computadoras nos indican que matrimonios hoy tienen un teórico porcentaje de sobrevivir alrededor del 50%.

\*“En los Estados Unidos, un matrimonio de tres no sobrevive. En algunas partes de la nación, el porcentaje es 50% -- un matrimonio de dos no sobrevive. Pero—cuando asiste una familia a la iglesia con regularidad, el porcentaje es entre 2-3%. Además, si la familia no solo asiste a la iglesia, sino también comparte una vida compuesta de devocionales diarias y tiempos de oraciones, el porcentaje es un matrimonio de 400.” -- Billy Graham

E2. La información adelante es de un artículo de primera plana, “Sex in the Body of Christ –El sexo en el cuerpo de Cristo”, escrito por Lauren F. Winner, de la revista “Christianity Today –El cristianismo actual”, Páginas 28 – 33. Mayo de 2005.

El titulo es: Sexo, virginidad y cristianismo--relaciones sexuales ilegítimas “fuera de control” en instituciones “cristianas”.

\*Alrededor del 65% de los jóvenes americanos tienen relaciones sexuales antes del tiempo de su graduación de la escuela superior, o sea, antes de tener 18 años de edad.

\*Contando con millones de miembros, los sitios de Internet que promueven relaciones sociales entre jóvenes, los animan a escoger compañeros, o compañeras, no meramente para salir a bailar sino para tener aventuras sexuales casuales.

\*El 41% de las mujeres americanas entre la edad de 15 a 44 ha cohabitado con algún varón, según el Centro de Control y Prevención de Enfermedades.

\*Entre 1960 y 2000, se multiplicó diez veces el número de parejas que cohabitan, sin casarse, según el censo del año 2000. Entre 1990 y 2000, el número aumentó en un 70%.

\*El 52% de las mujeres americanas tienen relaciones sexuales antes de cumplir 18 años de edad. El 75% tienen relaciones sexuales antes de casarse.

\*Según un estudio realizado por la Fundación Kaiser de la Familia y la revista “Seventeen”, más del 25% de las adolescentes entre 15 y 17 años de edad afirman que el coito sexual se practica “casi siempre”, o “casi todo el tiempo”, como parte de las “relaciones casuales”.

\*“**Las comunidades cristianas no están inmunes a la revolución sexual.** Tres sondeos conducidos en la década de los 1990 entre solteras y solteros cristianos descubrieron mucha actividad sexual prenupcial. Aproximadamente un tercio de los que respondieron eran vírgenes, lo que indica, por supuesto, que dos tercios no lo eran.”

\***El sexo en colegios, institutos y universidades “cristianos”, es decir, afiliados con alguna iglesia u organización “cristiana”.** “Todos los pastores que ministran a (este tipo de institución) con quienes he conversado, dicen lo mismo: **sus alumnos, aun los que integran grupos de líderes, o sea, personas al frente de clases bíblicas, etcétera, están sexualmente fuera de control**”, comentó Greg Thomson, pastor de la Reformed University Fellowship, de la Universidad de Virginia.

(de [http://www.editoriallapaz.org/sexo\\_datos\\_2000\\_2002.htm](http://www.editoriallapaz.org/sexo_datos_2000_2002.htm))