

DOCTRINES: WHAT WE BELIEVE

Salvation

What is Biblical Faith and Belief?

Highlight (Scripture references and Introduction.)

TEACHERS: Begin the class by asking these questions:

- ☐ What is the difference in faith and mental belief?
- ☐ What is the difference in saving spiritual faith and reverence?
- ☐ Name key religions where Jesus is a central figure but which such religion is not Christianity.
- ☐ What is a Protestant?

The Protestant Reformation was predicated upon the return to a biblical understanding of faith alone in Jesus alone, for salvation.

It was in 1517 that a Catholic priest by the name of Martin Luther had his spiritual mind and heart opened to the biblical imperative and truth that salvation comes by faith alone in Jesus alone. Luther was reading in Romans 3:27-4:3 and recognized that the Bible speaks of Abraham believing (having faith in) God and how God credited that faith as righteousness toward Abraham – It was by faith and faith alone that Abraham was able to know God.

Upon hearing God speak through His own words – the Bible – Luther then began to recognize and think through many of the false doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church. In total there were ninety-five such false teachings and practices; that list has been referred to as Luther's 95 Thesis.

Upon compiling that list he *protested* the Catholic Church by nailing it to the front door of the church at Guttenberg. Don't miss the key term, *protested*. That *protesting* of false teachings and practices gave birth to the *Protestant* Reformation – all who seek salvation by faith alone in Jesus alone are Protestant; Protestants are those who have a biblical understanding that salvation comes by faith alone in Jesus alone! Faith in Jesus plus anything else is NOT the gospel, and that false message should be *protested*.

CRUCIAL! Never assume that just because Jesus is a key figure or part of a particular religion/faitth that it's Christian or a "part" of Christianity. Jehovah's Witnesses believe in Jesus, but they are not Christians. Catholics definitely believe in Jesus, but they are not Christians. Jews believe in Jesus, but they are not Christians. Mormons believe in Jesus, but they are not Christians. The writer doesn't say this with malice and in a demeaning spirit; however, we need to be clear about what true, biblical Christianity is.

Don't be confused or compromised on the above point - denominations are not the same as versions. In the U.S. we have one currency that is made up of several denominations of bills (\$1, \$5, \$10, etc.). If someone tries to invent their own version of currency they will starve to death and end up bankrupt! Likewise, within Christianity (Protestantism) there are different denominations. These exist due to different worship norms and leadership models – not differences in core doctrines. There are NOT different versions of Christianity. Christianity is about salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus alone. As a matter of fact, much like the resulting bankruptcy in



attempting to print a “new” version of national monetary currency, to attempt to define a different version of Christianity/gospel is impossible and would leave someone spiritually bankrupt.

TRANSITION: The word and concept of faith is, in one sense, like that of love – the true meaning of it has been misunderstood; therefore, it has been misused and misplaced; thus, we have a false love that pervades. As Martin Luther discovered, it is crucial that we understand what biblical faith is and the role it plays in salvation. It is truly a matter of life and death!

In today’s lesson we will learn what Biblical, saving faith is.

Common Substitutes for Biblical Faith:

There are three types of people in the world: Those who *do NOT believe* in God at all, those who are attempting to *earn* a relationship with God, and those who have come to God by *faith alone* in Jesus alone. While we should be concerned about the first group, it is the second group that needs clarity on what true, biblical saving faith is. For the sake of limited space, the writer regrets not being able to give the scriptural rebuttals to each of the following substitutes. The following are some substitutes for biblical faith.

- Church Membership: This is known as a grace/salvation conferring sacrament in the Catholic Church. However, it is also common to hear professing Christians rationalize their salvation based upon the fact that they have joined the Church. WRONG! Church membership is NOT synonymous with biblical, saving faith.
- Church Activities and Christian Disciplines: You may have heard the old southern euphemism that states: the chicken closest to death is the one running around with his head chopped off. The principle is glaring – busyness doesn’t equate life. Church activity and Christian disciplines are NOT synonymous with biblical, saving faith.
- Ordinances: As Christians, Southern Baptist in particular, we believe that Jesus ordained two ordinances for the Church. Those are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We practice those as a *picture* of the salvation that we have already received, not to *provide* salvation. A professing Christian can partake of the Lord’s Supper until his waistline bulges and remain in the baptistery until his skin withers, and still not be saved.
- Sacraments: Christians, in contrast to Catholics, do not practice Sacraments. Sacraments are compared to Christian ordinances; whereas ordinances are for the purposes of *portraying* saving grace, sacraments are practiced for the purpose of *providing* saving grace. Again, WRONG!
- The “Sinners Prayer”: Simply put, there are no magical or special prayers that can save someone. Certainly, we are aware that words do convey meaning; however, God knows what is in the heart. No matter how well crafted, eloquently delivered, and emotionally charged a person’s prayer is, unless there is biblical, Spirit generated faith, there can be no salvation.
- Easy Believe-ism: This is simply giving mental – and perhaps heartfelt – acknowledgment to all that the Bible says about God, man’s sin, and Jesus’ life, death, burial, and resurrection. But, as the Bible says, “*Even the demons believe*”.
- Moralism: This may perhaps be the most subtle and deadly of all of the substitutes. Moralism is an attempt to find eternal security and salvation based on one’s moral life and virtue. When answering the question “How do you know that you will go to heaven when you die?” the moralist will answer along the lines of “Because I *do* this, and I *do* this, and I *do* this” or “Because I *don’t* do this, and I *don’t* do this, and I *don’t* do this”. It has never occurred to the moralist that if they are so good then they don’t need Jesus at all.
- Ministerial Confirmation: This substitute may not be as obvious in Christianity as in other religions, but, man’s salvation cannot be pronounced upon him or for him by a minister, priest, pope, or preacher.

Explain – Context and Commentary

Key Faith and Believe Texts:

Romans 3:27-28; Romans 4:3-5; John 1:12-13; Romans 10:9; Eph. 2:8-10; Romans 3-4

Read all of Romans 3-4 and make note of how many times the words faith and belief are used.

Key Words:

Faith and **Believe**: Both of these words come from the same root word and mean the same thing.

- Faith is a NOUN – *pistis* (Greek)
- Believe is a VERB – *pisteuo* (Greek)

Their Meaning: acknowledge, trust, surrender, accept, receive, depend, obey, or to follow. **How they Relate:**

If you have placed real *faith* in God for your salvation it is because you are truly *believing* in Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection as the only hope for eternal life. Likewise, if you are *believing* in Jesus as your only hope for salvation it is because you have *faith*. **You cannot have one without the other:** if you have saving *faith* it results in *believing*.

What does it “look like” to have true, biblical saving faith and belief?

Consider 5 Aspects of Biblical Faith and Belief

1. Intellectual – to hear the gospel, learn truth and doctrine, and acknowledge the truth.

While this is good and necessary, the danger is “easy believism” – simply mental facts and insight. In His book *Futurecast*, pollster George Barna says **76% of Americans profess** to be Christian – NO WAY! But, they may have the intellectual part (p.124). **Faith does involve the mind:** “*Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom. 10:17). “***Even the demons believe***” (James 2:19).

DISCUSSION:

- ☐ How can knowledge alone be a hindrance salvation? (John 5:39; 1 Cor. 8:1)
- ☐ How would you respond to someone who can only tell you about their beliefs *in* God and nothing about their life lived *for* God?

2. Emotional – This emotional aspect of faith/belief means: to be stirred, moved, convicted; to respect, revere, adore, and admire; to feel guilt, shame, and remorse. No doubt, when a person hears the gospel there should be some emotional stirring within them – especially if God is drawing them to Himself.

- Acts 2:37 tells us what happened emotionally after the crowd heard Peter share the gospel: “*After hearing this (the gospel) they were pierced to the heart...*”
- Luke 24:32 And they said to one another, “*Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?*”

2 Ways We Are Emotionally Stirred

- Positively: honoring Jesus, respecting Jesus
- Negatively: Recognition of personal sin and realizing you have NO HOPE without Jesus.

NOTE: While these first two aspects of faith are real and necessary for true faith, it cannot end there. If the only thing a person has is an intellectually induced emotional experience after hearing the gospel, they are still lost in their sin. They have a DEAD FAITH. True faith and belief is more than these two.

DISCUSSION:

- How can heartfelt sentimentalism, a feeling of guilt, and religious reverence hinder salvation?
- What is the difference in emotional stirring and spiritual brokenness?

3. Provisional – The very faith that we have that leads us to believing in Jesus is provided by God Himself.

- **It's a Gift:** Eph. 2:8-10 - "...and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God..." Teaches that both salvation and the very faith to believe in Him are provided for us by God – WOW!
- **You Must Hear:** Rom. 10:17 - "So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ" This teaches that hearing the gospel helps to birth saving faith in the hearer.
- **Leads to Humility:** "...So no one can boast" (Eph. 2:10) "...where is your boasting?" (Rom. 3:27)

DISCUSSION:

- Why can't a person generate faith and belief on their own (Eph. 2:1)?
- How should we respond when we realize that we are spiritually dead?

4. Volitional – the mind and heart have been stirred by hearing the gospel (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12), but God enables the person to respond to His invitation and call (John 6:44).

This is where biblical faith and belief lead to salvation.

- *Faith* (Noun) and *Believe* (Verb) = acknowledge, trust, respond, surrender, turn, accept, receive, depend, obey, follow

KEY: The doctrine of depravity necessitates that faith cannot be generated or produced from man himself (Rom. 3:11 – 18). Depravity does not totally eliminate all traces of moral potential within man; there are still traces of "*the image of God*" within man – thank God that we can still produce some level of goodness. Where would our world be if this were not so? Of course, even on our best day our good is as filthy rags compared to God's holiness and righteousness (Is. 64:6). Still, apart from Jesus, we are spiritually dead! (Eph. 2:1ff). However, after God has illumined a person's heart concerning God's holiness, man's sinfulness, and eternal life offered through Jesus (Rom. 10:17) – God graciously gives a person the capacity to have faith and to believe – this is all God's doing! But, then each person must exercise their free will to place faith and belief in Jesus alone for his salvation – this is man's responsibility and choice. In summary, God's gives the capacity to have faith and believe and man must exercise that faith by placing it in Jesus alone for salvation. "...If you confess with your mouth (exercise your will) *Jesus as Lord and believe* (have faith) *in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved*" (Rom. 10:9)

Saving Faith Is Expressed Like This:

- **Acknowledge** What? You are a spiritually dead sinner in need of a Savior.
- **Depend On** What? His blood as the only sufficient payment for your sin (Rom 3:21-22) and His resurrection power as that same power available to you (1 Cor. 15).

- **Turn from** What? Your Life of sin – repent! (Acts 2:38).
- **Surrender** to Who? Jesus as the Lord He already is (Rom. 10:9-10) – He becomes Boss!
- **Respond** to What? His call to salvation (John 6:44).
- **Accept** What? His gift of son-ship (John 1:12-13) – be adopted into His family.

John 3:16ff; Rom 10:9-13; Mark 2 - The Paralytic – had to come to Jesus by faith! He responded.

Josh Patrick and Bobby Harrington capture the volitional aspect of faith when they write: “Faith is more than an intellectual agreement with facts. It is a warm, heartfelt trust and commitment to Jesus, who He is and what He has done for us.”

In Jesus’ own words, this volitional aspect of faith truly sums up biblical faith as *receiving Jesus as one’s Lord and Savior* (John 1:12 - 13).

DISCUSSION:

- ☐ Why do we often fail to actually call someone to make a decision/choice right then?
- ☐ Why would you say this volitional aspect of faith is where a person moves from death to life?

5. **Progressive** – Remember, true saving faith results in an ongoing, progressive lifestyle of becoming more and more like Jesus (Phil. 1:6).

If you call yourself a Christian and you still are what you have always been, you will never be what you think you are

True Faith is Progressive In Two Ways:

- In Time: “*He who endures to the end will be saved*” (Matt 24:9-14; Col. 1:23- key doctrine called the Perseverance of the Saints)
- In Transformation: “*If any man be in Christ Jesus old things have passed away and all things have become new*” (2Cor 5:17) This teaches that true faith leads a Christian to progress in their life of faith and believing.

- ✓ “*from faith to faith*” (Rom 1:17) – Every moment of each day is lived in saving faith. Each moment is a faith moment.
- ✓ “*work out your salvation*” (Phil 2:12-13) – If God has worked it *in* you then work it *out* – progress, verify, grow!
- ✓ “*created in Christ Jesus for good works*” (Eph. 2:10) – God gets glory by our life of faith and works
- ✓ It’s Faith AND Works (James 2:17; John 15:5, 15-16)

Since, in the coming weeks, we will talk about how sanctification and glorification transforms the follower of Christ, the writer will share only one comment on this idea of transformation. Writer and Pastor Francis Chan is pointed when he says:

It's impossible to be a disciple or follower of someone and not end up like that person. Jesus said, *"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."* (Luke 6:40) That's the whole point of being a disciple of Jesus: we imitate Him, carry on His ministry, and become like Him in the process."

We should never have to wonder if someone has placed biblical, saving faith in Jesus – they start to *look* like, *talk* like, *think* like, and *live* just like Him!

Application – what does God want me to do?

The seriousness of this subject should still us all. The writer trembles at the notion that it be oversimplified or inadequately explained – for, again, it is a matter of life and death! However, in order to insure that we end this lesson with a definitive, concrete, and clear grasp of what biblical, saving faith looks like, consider this as summary:

Salvation is like a coin with two different sides. On one side is God's provision *for* and offer *of* salvation. Jesus is the provision (John 14:6) and Holy Spirit makes the offer (John 6:44). On the other side is man's response. When God reveals each person's sin to themselves and Jesus' provision of cleansing for that sin, that person can make one of two decisions. First, they can reject God's offer of salvation; this may be done with defiance and hatred toward God or more subtly by simply employing some of the before mentioned substitutes for biblical faith. Second, and certainly this would be God's desire, they can receive God's offer of salvation, by faith alone in Jesus alone.

When someone asks a true believer how they are sure they will spend eternity with God, the only biblical answer is: I have placed my faith in Jesus and Jesus alone for salvation.

Response – what specific commitment will I make?

The questions before us are profoundly simple and eternally urgent: Have you placed biblical, saving faith in Jesus alone for your salvation? Are you sure you haven't employed some of the substitutes that were mentioned in the beginning of our lesson? Does your life today look like you placed faith in Jesus at some time in the past? Are you willing to be a loving, kind, and responsible voice for God concerning the meaning of true, biblical faith?

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