

6. The Faith Required of Believers in the 21st Century

Faith and the similar words *belief* and *believe* carry at least three important meanings. To give mere credence is one meaning, as in the statement, “Even the demons believe that—and shudder.” James 2:19. Another meaning is the one given by the Hebrew writer in Heb 11:6, “6 And 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.” This definition takes the meaning of believe beyond mere credence to the place where one believes but also earnestly seeks God. Finally, faith is a revealed system of belief, which is what Jude meant in Jude 3, “I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”

What Jesus and the Apostles Taught about Faith

Jesus preached his offer of salvation on the fact that the believers must obey. He stated clearly in the great commission in Mark 16:16, “16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Even those who hold faith enough to claim great things in the name of the Lord are still not justified. Jesus taught in Matt 7:21-23:

“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'”

The key to the proper understanding of faith and obedience is that we must hold exactly to the teaching of Jesus; for many who do not hold to the teaching of Jesus are people who believe. Jesus spoke to such a group of people in John 8:31-32, “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” The passage clearly asserts that these Jews believed on him, yet they were not saved as indicated in the rest of the story. In John 8:42-45, Jesus, speaking to this same group of Jews who believed, condemned them as children of the devil:

42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. 43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!”

True belief is belief that fully holds and obeys the teaching of Jesus. John 12:42-43 illustrates this same point: “42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.” Many today claim to have faith that saves, but they do not fully obey the teachings of Jesus, seeking earthly favor and approval.

Whether baptism, the Lord's supper, the work and worship of the church, or any other matter of faith and practice, man cannot be saved by faith alone. James taught in James 2:24: “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” He concludes in James 2:26: “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

What Some in the 21st Century Teach about Faith

In the 21st century, many have come to believe that the commands of the Lord do not necessarily have to be obeyed. The most common example of this is baptism. Where Jesus required people to believe, repent, confess, be baptized, and be faithful unto death in order to be saved, modern folks follow ideas that exclude these commands of the Lord. Some of the positions taken in the religious world today negate the need to obey exactly what the Lord has commanded.

Call on the name of the Lord. The idea that a person need only to call on the name of the Lord to be saved is common in the 21st century. Radio evangelists of the 20th century popularized this idea as they asked people to place their hands on the radio and call on the name of the Lord and they would be saved. They simplified the demands of their gospel to make it easy for their audience to respond. There was in this doctrine, as is common in all perverted teaching, an element of truth. Peter quoted the prophet Joel to say in Acts 2:21:

“21 And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Joel was prophesying when salvation would come to all people. Peter preached that this time had come on the Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection, and with that preaching told them exactly what to do. In fact, they asked Acts 2:37, “37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” That they were cut in the heart and asked shows that they had believed. Yet that was not enough to save them. Peter’s answered their question and told them what they must do to call on the name of the Lord and be saved: “38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:38-39.

Accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior. Justification by faith only has as its common invitation, “Accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior and be saved.” This contrived command is not found in the Bible, yet is the common plea among those that believe in faith only. The scriptures require faith, repentance, confession, and baptism in order to be saved, in order to have the forgiveness of sins, and in order to be added to the church. If one were to confess only, it would not be enough. If one were to repent only, it would not be enough. If one were to be baptized only it would not be enough. And if one were to have faith only, it would not be enough. One must do the complete will of the father. Remember, Jesus taught, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Matt 7:21.

Be a born again Christian. Much is made of being a born-again Christian. In the New Testament, being born again is not a sudden, mystical feeling that overcomes the recipient. Being born again is the direct result of obeying the gospel of Christ in all its fullness. Jesus introduced the concept to Nicodemus in John 3:3-8. In John 3:3, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” Nicodemus asked in John 3:4, “How can a man be born when he is old?” To which Jesus answered in John 3:5, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” Being born again requires *water* and the *spirit*.

Paul explained how we are born of the water in Rom 6:3-4, “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” The only path to the new birth is

through the water of baptism into the death of Christ in order to have the new life.

In 2 Cor 5:16-18, Paul explained this new birth is not from a worldly point of view, but from the spiritual point of view:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God.

God has given us the new life as new creatures in Christ. This spiritual aspect of being born again in Christ connects once again to baptism. Paul wrote in Gal 3:27-28, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." In Christ is where we are new creatures. One not baptized is one not in Christ, not a new creature, and not born again.

Conclusion

New Testament belief, as taught by Christ and the apostles, is belief that actualizes one to obey all the gospel of Christ. Belief without this obedience is dead.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. James 2:19: How do the devils manifest their belief?
2. Heb 11:6: What must one have to please God? How must one seek God?
3. Jude 3: For what must we contend?
4. Mark 16:16: What two things must one do to be saved?
5. Matt 7:21-23: Will everyone enter the kingdom of heaven? Who will be included? Who will be excluded?
6. John 8:31-32: What does it really take to be a disciple of the Lord? What must one know to be set free?
7. John 8:42-45: Why did Jesus say that these who believed on him had the devil as their father?
8. John 12:42-43: What would not these Jews who believed do? Why would they not do it?
9. James 2:26: What is faith without deeds?
10. Acts 2:21: What happens to those who call on the name of the Lord?
11. Acts 2:37: What did the people of the day of Pentecost ask Peter?
12. Acts 2:38-39: What was Peter's reply? What did they receive?
13. Matt 7:21: Will everyone enter the kingdom of heaven?
14. John 3:3: Who did Jesus say could enter the kingdom of heaven?
15. John 3:4: What did Nicodemus ask?
16. John 3:5: Of what must one be born?
17. Rom 6:3-4: What does it take to live a new life?
18. 2 Cor 5:16-18: What is true if we are in Christ?
19. Gal 3:27-28: How is one clothed in Christ?