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LESSON FOR SUNDAY, MAY 3RD, 2020

What Is The Difference Between Belief and a Saving Faith?

Understanding Saving Faith From The Book Of James

Scripture:

¹⁹ You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. (James 2:19 – NLT)

Many people say with confidence that they 'believe' in God. Many of these same people think that this is enough to guarantee that their sins are forgiven and gain them admission to Heaven. However, is this simple 'belief' in God enough? Is this 'belief' the same as the 'faith' spoken of in the Bible? Let us examine this concept a little closer.

True faith is more than simply 'believing'

While 'faith' surely includes the element of 'belief', they are not one and the same. Certainly, one must believe that something, or someone, exists before it is possible to put one's faith in that person or thing. However, I can believe some things that do not affect my life. I believe China exists, but I do not live my life any differently because of my belief. The Bible tells us that this type of 'belief' is not true faith and will not result in a saving relationship with God.

To put one's 'faith' in something, or someone, means that one is putting his or her trust in that person or thing. Who or what one trusts can have far-reaching, even eternal, ramifications. It means reliance on, dependence upon, that person or thing. I can say that I believe a plane can take me from here to there, but if I am afraid to get on it, I reveal that I have no 'faith' in that plane. Also, if I do not get on the plane, I have no reason to expect it to take me anywhere. I must exercise my 'faith' in that plane by boarding it if I am to receive the benefits it offers.

True faith results in a changed worldview

When we have true saving faith in Jesus Christ, we see the world and its system in an entirely different way. The Holy Spirit enlightens us as to the true nature of things and actually causes us to think differently, *"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit"* (Romans 8:5). We are instructed

to make this a goal of our spiritual life, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind”* (Romans 12:2). If we truly are Christians, dedicated followers of Jesus Christ, we will grow more to see our existence the way God sees it.

Faith results in changed actions

I have heard of, and have known, some people who claim to be followers of Christ; however, their lifestyle remained the same after they became Christians as it was before they became Christians. They still lived the same way, talked the same way, and had the same mindset as they did when they were living in rebellion to God. Were they exercising true faith? Jesus said, *“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments”* (John 14:15), meaning that our actions will reveal the change our heart has gone through when we became His true followers. Conversely, if our lives do not exhibit a change of allegiance from self to Jesus, we have good reason to doubt our salvation is real at all. John writes, *“And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments”* (1st John 2:3). True faith is evidenced by a change in the way we act.

Faith results in changed priorities

If anything in our lives is more important than God, our priorities are misplaced and we should examine ourselves to see if we have truly given our lives to Christ. If our lives are focused more on our jobs, our favorite sports team, the next new technological toy, our love life, or anything else that diverts the center of our attention away from God, we should question the validity, or at least the maturity, of our faith.

Some areas that reveal the focus of our hearts are:

Our finances: If we are so focused on how much money we are making, or how high up the corporate ladder we can climb, we must readjust our focus because our focus is on wealth instead of God. Also, on the other side of the coin, if we are so worried about not having enough money, our focus is on our need rather than on the One who provides for those needs.

Our thought life: What we spend our time thinking about reveals a lot about what we think is most important in our lives. While it is not wrong to think about things other than God, when we think about things to the extent that any thoughts of God are pushed out of our minds, we are in danger of shipwrecking our faith (1st Timothy 1:18-20). The Bible tells us to *“pray without ceasing”* (1st Thessalonians 5:17), which simply means keeping the lines of communication open between you and God at all times.

Our priorities: How we spend our time, money, and energy reveals what we think is important. Where does God fit into your life? How important is prayer and Bible study, as opposed to making sure you do not miss your favorite television show? The Bible tells us to *“seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matthew 6:33). Our relationship with God should be the most important thing in our lives, if we have true faith.

Lessons From The Book Of James On Faith

James deals with every area of our Christian life: who we are, what we do, what we say, what we feel, and what we have. A faith-filled life requires us to address each of these areas, and James gives us needed advice to experience the fullness of an active Christian life of faith.

Here are 10 lessons from the book of James on living out the Christian faith:

1. Rejoice in Trials - James 1:2-4

James calls us to rejoice in our suffering, but it is easier to fret. However, fretting stirs the pot of anger, resentment, bitterness, and an unwillingness to forgive; and when those emotions control our behavior, sin is the result. Trials serve God's purpose in our lives by giving us an opportunity to turn what we believe into action. Faith comes alive when we exercise trust and joy in God's presence in our lives. Rejoicing in our trials becomes easier when we can focus on the reason for our hope.

2. Resist Temptation - James 1:13-15

Desire is a strong motivator in our lives, and temptation plays it like a bow on a fiddle. It is as if it knows exactly which string to pluck at just the right moment. It is tempting to respond with hatred to the person who makes our life miserable because; after all, they deserve what they dish out. When this occurs, we need to be aware that our temptations are playing on the desire for revenge; remember, revenge doesn't glorify God. Instead, what does glorify God is overlooking an offense. Be aware of the tricks of temptation, and do not be deceived.

3. Rest in God - James 1:21-22

Resting in God is not passive, but full of action and adventure. James instructs us that living righteously involves getting rid of moral filth and evil in our lives. When our spirit is awakened to God's truth and we choose to do nothing with it, our hearts are filled with unrest. We must decide to live righteously, but then we must act on that choice and follow through. We must examine our lives for areas where we know we may not be applying God's principles for living right before Him, and as we make the changes to live righteously, our heart will know rest.

4. Accept Others - James 2:12-13

James tells us that when we show favoritism, we have discriminated among ourselves and become judges with evil thoughts. What do we do when we meet a cranky person in the store? Do we ignore them, but smile at the woman with the cute toddler because she seems more approachable? Both people need an encounter with the living God who is alive in us. Remember how God has accepted each of us, and then extend that acceptance to all. Mercy triumphs over judgement. We have received mercy, now we need to extend that mercy to others.

5. Assist Others - James 2:22

James features Abraham and Isaac as proof that faith and actions work together to make faith complete. Would it have been faith if Abraham had waited to obey God before He provided the sacrifice? It is obedience that grows, strengthens, and enlivens our faith. It takes faith to step out into the unknown as

an act of obedience. But our faith grows as God shows up in our obedience. Do we believe God enough to obey Him in faith? He will equip, provide, and come through for us. We must serve others as an act of obedience to God, and then watch as faith is strengthened.

6. Control Your Tongue - James 3:9-12

At first glance, James presents us with an impossible picture: the untamable tongue. He likens controlling the tongue to a forest set ablaze by a single spark. Our words have the power to bring life or destruction. If, with our speech, we praise God and curse man, how can we truly say that our faith changes our lives? We must let God redeem our speech by thinking before we speak.

7. Pursue Godly Wisdom - James 3:17-18

If our tongue is the untamable member of our body, then what must we do? The bridle for our tongues starts in our hearts, moves to our minds, and comes out of our mouths. A changed heart is a heart refined by God's wisdom, which is what gives us the right words to say at the right time. But how do we know the difference between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom? James provides us with the criteria to decipher between the two. Choose God's wisdom and let what resides in our heart be pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, good, impartial, and sincere. As we pursue Godly wisdom, our heart will be changed.

8. Submit to God - James 4:7-10

Our God is the God of love and victory, and the way to experience that love and victory is through submitting to Him. We submit to God's love when we recognize that the only reason we *live* and *move* and *exist* is because of His love. If we want to live from a place of victory, then we must submit to our commander-in-chief, which means that we might actually have to remove certain behaviors or patterns of thoughts from our lives. Submission leads us into a deeper grace with God because it requires us to humble ourselves before Him. God gives grace to the humble and opposes the proud.

9. Exercise Patience in Suffering - James 5:11

Maturing in faith requires patience and perseverance when we suffer. But who wants to be patient in their suffering? We run to the closest thing that gives us relief. We numb our emotions with food, drink, shopping, entertainment, and the pursuit of pleasure. But when the numbness wears away, we feel the suffering again, so we run back to our vices. Instead, we should be patient in suffering and persevere in our trusting of God. God is moving even when we cannot see Him.

10. Pray in Faith - James 5:13-16

James references Elijah, an ordinary man who God used to accomplish the extraordinary. In 1st Kings 17, Elijah prayed and God answered, stopping any rainfall for three years. We need to pray when we are sad, happy, mad, joyful, hurt, or pleased. We need to confess our weaknesses to God and ask for strength through our prayers Him. Confession stops shame's power, and the prayer of faith brings healing. We might be ordinary, but we serve an extraordinary God who longs to rise up within us to do extraordinary things through us.

Conclusion

“Belief” can be simply a passive mental acceptance which amounts to nothing when it comes to how it affects our lives. Simply to say “I believe in God” means very little if it is merely coming from the lips and not from the heart. People can, and do, say that they ‘believe’ in God, but their lives never change at all. However, when one has true faith in God, one’s life cannot help but reveal this truth. True faith in God (dependence / reliance / trust) reveals itself in our actions, our thought life, and our priorities. A saving relationship with the Creator and Sustainer of the universe can result in nothing less than a radical readjustment of our entire worldview. We will love God with all our heart and we will love others as we love ourselves (Matthew 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8, etc.). If we claim we are Christians, but this is not the attitude of our heart, it would be wise to ask God to search our hearts, cleanse us, mold us into the people that He wants us to be, and strengthen our **faith**.

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