

Elementary Truths of Christianity – Faith in God

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- Let's continue our study of the elementary truths of Christianity according to Hebrews
- We must all learn the basics of anything before we become mature
 - Learn to ride a bike with training wheels before learning to ride a bike without training wheels
 - Education – algebra & trigonometry come before calculus
 - Christianity is no different
- **Hebrews 5:11 – 6:3** describes for us 6 elementary teachings about Christ
 - In our first lesson, we discussed how all of these revolve around Christ
 - In Acts 8, in the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip taught the eunuch about Christ (vs 35)
 - The exact details are omitted, but we know that baptism was a part of that discussion
 - In vs 36, we read that the eunuch spotted water and requested to be baptized
 - So we know that baptism was included in the teachings of Christ from reading this
 - It makes me wonder what all else Philip taught the eunuch – perhaps it included many or all of these 6 elementary truths
 - The point is: we can read Acts 8 and confirm that baptism is about Christ, just like all the others are
 - A wise man once told me if you have an idea about what a Biblical subject could mean and that idea is correct, you will be able to confirm it with other Scriptures. Similarly, if you have an idea that is incorrect, other Scriptures will not support your idea. The idea is that there are no contradictions in the Bible and the Bible is the best commentary on the Bible
 - In our most recent lesson on this subject, we discussed repentance
 - How when we realize that we have been living our lives in sin, we can turn to God and He will be waiting for us to come to Him (Luke 15)
 - In fact, the only reason that He has not sent Christ back yet is because He is waiting for all to come to repentance who will do so (2 Peter 3:9)
- In this lesson, we're going to discuss the elementary truth listed second – faith in God
- Let's begin again by defining our terms – what is the Biblical definition of faith
 - Hebrews 11:1 – *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*
 - As a Christian, there are lots of things to hope for
 - You can enjoy the peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7), knowing that whatever life has in store for you – God is going to take care of you in eternity (Hebrews 13:6, Romans 8:31-39)
 - Hope for an eternity in heaven when this life is over (Romans 5:1-5)

- This hope is based on God’s promise of eternal salvation to those who have been obedient and have lived a faithful life (Romans 5:6-11)
 - 2 Corinthians 4:18 – *“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*
 - We cannot see heaven while on this earth
 - As humans, we cannot comprehend how wonderful heaven will be (Isaiah 55:8-9)
 - In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul describes a man who was caught up to the third heaven (perhaps this was Paul himself) – regardless, this man was caught up to paradise (the same place spoken of in Luke 16)
 - This is clearly not an earthly place, but an eternal dwelling place
 - This man heard inexpressible things – things that man is not permitted to tell
 - Much like John in Revelation 10:1-5 – the things that the 7 thunders spoke, he was not permitted to write down
 - The Bible describes heaven in a way that our puny minds can comprehend the fact that it is going to be so absolutely wonderful
 - I don’t think our minds can truly understand just how wonderful it is going to be
 - All this stuff – we can have faith in
 - We can be certain of the things that we cannot see (Hebrews 11:1)
 - Because God has promised a Sabbath rest for those who spent life on earth working for the Lord (Hebrews 4:9-11)
- I always say these things lovingly, but many in the religious world will tell you that faith is mere mental assent – but is that true?
- Let’s examine what the Bible says on the topic
- **Matthew 7:24-27**
 - Those who hear the words of God and by faith, puts them into practice – he is like the wise man who built his house on the rock
 - When the storms came, the house stood strong because it had its foundation on the rock
 - 1 Corinthians 3:11 says that Jesus is the foundation
 - Psalm 127:1 states that unless the Lord builds the house, the buildings laborers do so in vain
 - But those who hear the words of God and do not put them into practice – they are like the foolish man who built his house on the sand
 - When the storms came, his house was destroyed
 - Because it did not have a strong foundation – the 1 true foundation, Jesus (1 Corinthians 3:11)
 - So if you hear the words, and let’s say you even believe them (that is you provide your mental assent – yeah, this is true) and if you don’t put them into practice – that idea does not have Jesus as the foundation
- **Romans 3:21-31**

- The first 8 chapters of the book of Romans discuss the fact that the justification that man desperately needs comes only through the gospel of Christ – not the old law of Moses, not the patriarchal system before that, but the gospel of Christ alone can justify
- Vs 21 – a righteousness from God has been made known, separate from the law (referring to the old law of Moses), but the law and the prophets testify to this
 - John 5:39, Luke 24:27 – the law and the prophets (what we now know as the Old Testament) point to Christ, it points to the Messiah
 - Passages like Isaiah 53 and Genesis 3:15 clearly describe Jesus – and those are just 2 out of 100's
- This righteousness from God comes through faith in Christ Jesus to all who believe (vs 22)
- The rest of this passage of Scripture contains Paul's continued evidence that justification comes through faith in Jesus (following the gospel of Christ – the new law), not the old law of Moses
- So, going back to Hebrews 6 – Jesus clearly is the center of our faith
- But what does this faith look like? Again, is it mere mental assent? Let's continue reading

- **Romans 4:1-8**

- Paul takes us to the example of Abraham
- Abraham was not justified by his own works (vs 2) – nothing that Abraham did was of his own accord, everything he did was at the instruction of God
- There's nothing that man can think of that will lead to salvation
 - If I say that I must learn the calculus curriculum perfectly – then God will save me as a result
 - You can see the nonsense in that – that holds no water
 - Because I, a man, thought of it – that is not instituted by God
- Rather, Abraham was justified by his faith in God which was demonstrated when he was obedient to God
 - Hebrews 11:8 – God tells Abraham “You don't know where you're going, but just go and I'll guide you” (a reference back to Genesis 12)
 - Abraham says “OK, I believe you – I'll go as a result”
 - Hebrews 11:17 – God tells Abraham “Offer your son Isaac as a sacrifice” (a reference back to Genesis 22)
 - Abraham says “OK, you told you me you would give me descendants as numerous as the stars – I believe that and I'll offer my son Isaac as you told me to”
 - A true faith in God is demonstrated by obedience and if you are not obedient to God, do you truly have faith?
 - In Hebrews 11 (we just read a portion of it), every example goes something similar to the following: “By faith ... did something” not “By faith ... believed God

and did nothing about it in claims that obedience to God's Word is teaching works salvation"

- Sticking to Hebrews, Hebrews 3:7-19 tells us of the Israelites in the wilderness after they had been led out of Egypt by God's mighty hand
 - Specifically vs 16-19: the Israelites rebelled, they sinned, and they were disobedient
 - And then vs 19 says, that they were not able to enter the promised land due to their unbelief
 - So God is saying here that unbelief leads to disobedience, sin, and rebellion
 - No he is saying that disobedience, sin, and rebellion is unbelief
 - So if God tells me to do something and I don't do it, I don't believe
 - If disobedience = unbelief, then belief = obedience
 - Think of your logic class back in high school/college, one of the basic rules is that if $\sim p = \sim q$, then $p = q$
 - So when God tells us that we must hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized, and submit to Him for the remainder of our lives – we aren't teaching works salvation
 - We're teaching that you need to put your faith in God and be obedient as a result
- Abraham's faith was completed by his obedience to the word of God
- But God was not in debt to Abraham
 - It was not the case that "OK, Abraham was obedient to me – I owe him something"
 - Absolutely not – God owes man nothing
 - Luke 17:10 – even when we are completely obedient to God's instructions, we are still unworthy servants, we have only done our duty
- Salvation is a gift even after we've done all that God has instructed us to do
- It is only the man who God has forgiven that will receive justification –and that justification comes from obedience to God, not anything that we come up with
- Vs 9 – 25 go on to explain how this applied to both Jews and Gentiles –whether you are a Jew or whether you are a Gentile –the gospel applies to you
- If you believe and are obedient to God, you are one of His people
- Let's continue this example of Abraham in James 2
 - **James 2:14-26**
 - Does faith alone save? Absolutely not –vs 14
 - If I walk into someone's home –pretend I'm visiting an elderly person
 - I notice the dishes piled up
 - I notice the home is dirty because of the elderly owner's inability to properly clean

- I notice there's trash in places that trash should not be in perhaps because the elderly owner thought they had thrown it away
 - And I say as I leave "If you ever need me to do anything, just call"
 - What good is that? Do those words clean the dishes, the house, the trash? Clearly not
 - But when I combine that attitude with action – then I've got something good going on (vs 15-17)
- James says - "You show me your faith without actions and I'll prove to you by my actions that I have faith" (vs 18)
- You see – even the demons believe that there is one God, but they take that knowledge and they shudder (vs 19) – they do nothing with that knowledge
 - They are not obedient
 - You can know the word of God and you can believe it all you want, but if you aren't obedient – what different are you than the demons? I ask that question as lovingly as I know how
- This is likened to Abraham beginning in vs 20
 - In regards to offering his son Isaac – when was he considered righteous? When he said "OK, God – I believe your instruction is good" or is it when he obeyed God's instruction when he offered his son Isaac?
 - Vs 21 says it is the latter
 - His faith was made complete by what he did (vs 22)
- Vs 23 – *"And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend."*
 - So when was this scripture was fulfilled?
 - It was fulfilled when Abraham's faith was made complete by what he did (vs 22)
 - So can you logically say from this verse that belief requires obedience? Absolutely
- A person cannot be justified by faith alone (vs 24)
- Rahab was used to further this idea
 - **Joshua 2:8-21**
 - She made these spies promise that her and her family's lives would be spared when God gives Jericho to the Israelites
 - The spies agree but there were conditions
 - Tie a scarlet cord in the window
 - Her family must be in the house
 - She must keep their plans a secret
 - Did she believe these men? Absolutely – vs 21 tells of how she tied the scarlet cord to the window after they left
 - It was because of her belief that she was obedient – what if she'd have believed but not tied the cord to the window?

- “I believe you spies”, but tying the cord – that’s adding man’s work to my belief – work isn’t required. Did she have that attitude? If so, what would have happened?
 - Her and her family’s blood would have been on their own heads (vs 19)
 - **Joshua 6:22-23**
 - Again, Rahab not only believed the spies, but she obeyed
 - The spies pulled her entire family out of the house
 - If they pulled them out, they must have been in the house as instructed
 - James 2:26 – *“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”*
- Interesting how a scarlet cord saved Rahab and her family
 - There was nothing special about this cord
 - Only the fact that this is what the spies told her to do – and God was with the spies (vs 11)
 - There’s nothing special about the waters of baptism – it’s just water
 - What makes it crucial is the fact that God told us to do it
 - That is how we are graciously granted access to the blood of Christ (Romans 6:1-11)
- Isaiah 1:18 – *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”*
- **Isaiah 53**
- We are cleansed by the precious blood of Christ
 - Only in the gospel of Christ will we be justified (Romans Ch’s 1-8)
- But it’s not enough for us to put our faith in that and then claim “I’m good, I believe”
- Take Hebrews 11 for instance – many examples of people discussed in the Bible and their faith
 - Each example goes something like the following
 - *“By faith ... did something”*
 - Not *“By faith ... sit back and waited for God to deliver His promise to me, when He told me to do something and I didn’t do it – because I have faith, I don’t need to do any work”*
 - Every one of these people had faith in God and it was proven by their responsive actions to God’s instructions
 - Our faith must be no different
- You’ve noticed by now, that I always end my sermons with the gospel plan of salvation because following it is the most important decision you can ever make
- Our faith is completed by our obedience to the gospel plan of salvation
 - **Step 1: Hearing the gospel** – *Romans 10:13-17*
 - Gospel = Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, arose, and appeared to many – *1 Corinthians 15:1-8, Romans 1:16*
 - **Step 2: Believing the gospel** – *Mark 16:16, John 3:16*
 - **Step 3: Confession that Jesus is Lord** – *Romans 10:8-10, 1 John 1:9*
 - **Step 4: Repentance of sins** – *Luke 13:3, Acts 2:38*
 - Repentance: a turning away from sin, disobedience, or rebellion and a turning back to God. Change of mind that produces a change in action.

- **Step 5: Baptism into Christ** – *Galatians 3:27, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:1-10, 1 Peter 3:21-22*
 - Before you can be raised with Christ, you must die – I’m not speaking in a physical sense, but a spiritual sense
 - Your old self full of sin is crucified with Christ in the form of baptism according to Romans 6:4
 - Romans 6:4 also states that when we rise out of the waters of baptism, we arise into newness of life just as Christ was raised from the dead
- **Step 6: Live faithfully** – *Revelation 2:10*
- In conclusion, another wise man once told me that belief is the mere mental assent that tells you “I believe I can swim across this river”
 - But you don’t have faith in that until you jump in the water and start swimming
 - This wise man was Ken Goodmiller and believe me – if you knew him, you didn’t have to rely upon his word telling you that he was a Christian – he proved it to you
- You can tell me and anyone else that you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God until you lose your voice, and you’ve got faith in that
 - But if you aren’t obedient, what different are you than a demon? (James 2:19)
 - James 2:18 – *“Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.”*
 - And what I do is going to be the work of the Lord (Ephesians 2:10)
- I hope you’ve enjoyed this sermon and as always – please contact us at the Covington Church of Christ if you need anything