

Message 05-03-2020

This week I am going to take a somewhat different direction. Instead of trying to look at a passage of scripture and see how it may be applicable to our lives today I would like to look more in depth, or rather have a discussion about Faith , about Christian faith, about our Christian beliefs and how they relate to our faith now. Christians use as their sacred scriptures both the Hebrew Bible (some refer to this as the Old Testament) and the New Testament. I looked up a couple of definitions of “Christian” In the dictionary it says:

Noun

1. *a person who believes in Jesus Christ; adherent of Christianity.*
2. *a person who exemplifies in his or her life the teachings of Christ:*
(Dictionary.com)

This next comes from James Dobson's organization Focus on the Family.

The term “Christian,” as we understand it, refers to anyone, man, woman, or child, who trusts in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord and who strives to follow Him in every area of life. As evangelicals, we place great stress on the importance of an individual’s personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We believe that this relationship is lived out by way of prayer, study of God’s Word, fellowship with God’s people, and service to others in Jesus’ name. There’s an important sense in which Christian faith has to be expressed in the context of community with other believers. But in the final analysis, it’s an intensely personal and individual matter, not a question of church membership or doctrinal orientation. The Bible

backs us up in this regard: " Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13; Joel 2:32).

(Focus on the family)

So what does it mean to be a Christian? Does it require ascribing to particular beliefs/creeds/confessions? A lot of different denominations have articles of faith/creeds or confessions of faith which list what those beliefs are and what is accepted theology. So again I want to ask you What does it personally mean to you to be a Christian. Does it mean having certain beliefs or does it mean something else to you? Is being a Christian active or passive, or both or neither?

Another question I have is what are the fundamentals of Christianity for you in your own personal faith and what do you believe are fundamentals within Christianity or within Western theology as we know it.

Within a conservative or more orthodox in outlook (not Orthodox) there are five fundamentals which are:

- 1. The virgin birth and deity of Jesus (meaning that Jesus is god).**
- 2. The substitutionary death of Jesus (that he died on the cross for our sins).**
- 3. The resurrection of Jesus Christ (that he was resurrected in physical form).**
- 4. The verbal inspiration of the Scriptures (the Scriptures are inerrant and absolute).**
- 5. The second coming of Christ (that Christ will return and return on this planet for a thousand years)**

So those are some of the beliefs held by more conservative Christians. In many mainstream denominations, we share many of the same beliefs. The Virgin birth, atonement and the Resurrection. What I wonder is are those beliefs, required beliefs for you in your faith and how does that shape your faith? These are just some of the things I would like you to think about.

I am going to go next to three scripture passages and it is going to be in reference to what we are talking about here. They are reflecting on 3 different things of what is required to be with God. The first passage is from:

Romans 5:6-8

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The second passage is one that is very familiar to us.

John 3:16 (NIV)

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The final is from:

Luke 10:25-28 (NIV)

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

“Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’[a]; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’[b]”

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

So when you look at these passages they say three different things about what it takes to gain eternal life. In the very first reading we have a letter to the Romans from Paul. And Paul said that God demonstrated his love for us by sending us Jesus who was his son and Jesus dies on the cross for our sins. so that is one of the reasons we accept Jesus Christ as Savior. The second one coming from John says that whoever believes in his son shall not perish but have eternal life. and when we go into Luke we are also talking about eternal life and how you gain eternal life. In this passage the lawyer is replying to Jesus`is to love the Lord your God and to love others as yourself. so there are three different things that they are talking about but all are ways to attain salvation.

Now in our Christian faith we have a system of beliefs. we got beliefs about original sin, we have got the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, the Trinity, the Virgin birth. There are many beliefs which became doctrinal in the sense that there were a lot of different sects in the early church and it gave rise to a lot of infighting. When Constantine became the Emperor of Rome, he decided to get as many bishops as he could from across the Empire to find some unifying beliefs that would bring the church together and stop all of this unrest. So this was the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and from there they came up with The Nicene

Creed and Apostles Creed. Also at that time there certain scriptures, certain epistles (letters from Paul), certain gospels that were being used to spread the message of Jesus. Also at this time they had several books of the New Testament that were agreed upon and for the Catholic church, the whole canonization of the New Testament came into effect for them in 382 AD at the Council of Rome. After this point it was translated into Latin by St.Jerome and is known as the Vulgate. While this was going on, different doctrines were also being developed. Augustine was not the first espouser of the fall of Adam but he honed this doctrine. These doctrines became accepted beliefs and soon they became to be required beliefs for a Christians.

So we have these beliefs that have been shaping our Christian faith and we have what is inside this book, The Holy Bible. Inside this book there are stories about a group of people God had chosen, there are stories about Jesus, there is Jesus instructing us to do different things, Jesus telling us how to live our lives and their are instructions from God especially in the Hebrew Bible about we can please God and God also gives a set of laws to the Hebrew people.

On one hand we have this set of beliefs, these creeds and confessions of faith and on the other side we have what is written in the Bible. Now a lot of these doctrines are based on scriptures in the Bible and they are based on someone's interpretation of what that scripture means. Now for me personally, sometimes I have difficulty in understanding how they came up with that particular interpretation but it has become an accepted interpretation. When I think about our faith now and how our numbers are declining

especially with younger people, i think about how it was in the past for us. when we were growing up we didn't have this much access to information and young people do now. It was much more difficult to access information. There were a few accepted views about anything and as time went on and we began to meet more people from other places and experienced other cultures, our viewpoints are naturally broadening. The idea of questioning our faith, our reality, is all around us. There are many skeptics out there but that number seems to be growing with the increasing access to information. Young people are less likely to take things at face value. They know where to go get information and they can share ideas through chat rooms and other such venues. So young people can go to these places and say, "Hey, some of this stuff doesn't make sense to me." I can understand their confusion.

On one hand we have this book where we learn about Jesus, his heritage and his message and on the other hand we have these confession, creeds and doctrines which we are also asked to believe if we want to be a Christian. Some of these doctrines can be a stumbling block for younger people and difficult to accept. One example is the virgin birth. Going to church 30, 40 50 years ago things were different. Things seemed much more authoritative and we were not encouraged to question our faith and I don't know if we were even given the opportunity to do so. Nowaday we have more focus on small groups and bible studies, so those allow us to explore our faith but usually we are not in discussion about those things with our children.

If we want our faith to grow and if we want to pass our faith onto younger people or want them to have a life with faith then we have to be willing to answer some of those questions and willing to address some of those issues within the bible that are hard to reconcile. By questioning your own faith and understanding what is at the core of your faith, what are the fundamentals of your faith , what are the things you cannot compromise on, those non-negotiable. your faith will strengthen because your roots become more solid. With respect to those non-negotiable, and doctrines , would it be difficult for you to accept another as a Christian if they did not share your fundamental beliefs? If they are living out a life of faith, if they are living as Jesus asked them to live, to love God and to love others as themselves, is that enough for you to accept somebody as a Christian? The question I am asking is if you can be Christian by just ascribing to a set of beliefs, reciting creeds and making confessions of faith **OR** just living life following those two commandments. Can you be a Christian with just one or the other or does being a Christian require both? What would it take to reverse your position? If you find you are unable to change your position, what is holding you back or which belief is unchangeable?.I would just like you to think about some of those questions and be a little introspective.

So to conclude this message, what is faith to you? Is it solely for eternal life or should it have some impact on your life now? Are you looking for faith to impact your life? And finally how can this Christian faith be made real for you?