

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 20, 2011

Do You Have Faith, or Merely Agreement?

by Dan Trygg

"What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no actions? Can that faith save him?" James 2:14
"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." Matthew 16:24
"If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me..." John 12:26
"To the Jews who had believed in Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My followers, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." John 8:31,32
"...make followers of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you ." Matthew 28:19-20
"...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into mature people with a maturity measured by Christ's fullness." Ephesians 4:13

What did Jesus mean when He said, "whoever *believes* in Him will have eternal life" (Jn. 3:15)? As I look at the church that I see around me, and listen to much of the gospel preaching being promoted, I fear that many, if not most, of those who say they believe in Jesus don't understand what Jesus meant by the word, "believe". It is quite clear when you read the Bible that God is not just interested in *convincing us* that He exists, or that He has graciously offered us an incredible opportunity to find salvation through His Son. *Convincing* is not enough, though it is part of the process. You see, Jesus did not come to just give us a ticket to avoid the consequences of our sin. He came to save us from our sin and our self-directed lives. We were lost and living in hostility toward God and His purposes for us. Jesus came to offer us a hope to change all of that. He came to offer us a chance to be reconciled to God and to learn to live differently. What sense would it make for us to acknowledge Jesus, but still live in rebellion and evil? If we were lost, does Jesus want us to continue wandering around, or does He want us to come back home? If we were drowning, and Jesus threw us a lifeline, is it enough to say that we believe it is a lifeline, or do we need to grab hold of it and leave the chaos and danger of the churning storm? In the context of John 3, when Jesus talked about believing in Him, He went on to say that "this is the judgment (the "separating things out" or the "ability of distinguishing"), that the light has come into the world, but people loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil (petty, worthless, careless, thoughtless, indifferent, ordinary, valueless, morally bad or unethical things) hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his actions might be exposed. But the one doing the truth comes to the light, in order that it might be seen that his actions are having been brought about by God" (Jn.3:19-21). Notice the difference, we either hate and withdraw from the light, or we value and love the light. Our knowledge of truth presents us with a choice: Do we ignore and reject the light, or do we value and pursue the light? **Knowing the truth does not save. Knowing the truth is not the same as faith. Faith involves trust and commitment, ...the application of truth in your life. Biblical faith starts us on a journey.**

We see this distinction in Jesus' teachings in John 6. The people had seen Jesus multiply the bread and fishes. They had eaten to the full of the miraculous food. After Jesus had left, the people crossed the lake to find Him. What they wanted was more bread. Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life, the one coming to Me will not hunger, and the one believing in Me will never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me, and do not believe. ...the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (vss. 35-37). Then He said, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on (perceives, recognizes) the Son and believes in (trusts in, commits himself to) Him might have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." It is not sufficient to recognize who Jesus is, or what God has made available in Him. There has to be this recognition, yes, but it must be followed by a commitment to and trust in Him. It is the beginning of a journey, ...a journey of "coming toward" Him, ...a pursuit or following Him as the Source of your life. A couple of verses later, He again reinforced this distinction between knowing and true faith. He puts it this way, "Every one hearing from the Father and learning comes to Me" (vs. 45). Note it is not enough to hear, you must learn. What does this mean? The word for "learn" indicates "know by application" or by "putting it into practice". In other words, "the one who hears and heeds will come to Me." Again, the result of faith will be the pursuit of Jesus.

Faith produces a change of direction. It is not enough to know, if you do not do. If you do not pursue Jesus, do you really have faith?

In John 8, Jesus addressed this very question. He told some of the Jews who had believed in Him, "If ever you might continue in (live in, abide in) My teachings, then you are genuinely My disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (vss. 31,32). These people had been convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, yet when

challenged with the need to learn and follow Jesus' teachings, they became offended. By the end of this chapter, these same people were ready to *stone* Jesus. **Knowledge of who Jesus was did not keep them from their pride and arrogance. They were unwilling to put aside their self-superior attitude to change and learn** from the Master. In Matthew 16:24,25, we have Jesus' call to discipleship, contained in all four gospels (Mk. 8:34,35; Lk. 9:23,24; Jn. 12:25,26), "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save (preserve) his self-life will lose it, but he whoever will lose his natural-self-life for My sake will find it." Clearly, **to be a disciple of Jesus means to be willing to put aside your self-agenda to follow Him. If you are not willing to do that, then do you really trust in Him?** Or, are you like the Jews from John 8, *convinced* but *unwilling to follow*?

The obvious implication of "coming to Jesus", or "pursuing Him", is that ***you cannot follow Him and stay where you are at the same time. If you are going to pursue Him, you have to leave something behind.*** Something has to change. This is true with regard to our use of time, our thinking, our friends or any of our decisions and activities. **If we introduce a new direction in our lives, it should change something, don't you think? Otherwise, if there really is no change in our activities at all, aren't we just kidding ourselves?** If all of our religious activities produce no practical change in our lives, ...in our speech, our behavior, our values, our treatment of others..., then *are we really trusting in and applying what we learn?* Are our hearts being changed? Are we seeing new fruit in our lives? If not, then *something is missing!* We need to check to see if we are sincerely *wanting* to follow Jesus, or not. We might *know* He is the Lord, but do we really *believe* in Him as Lord? Do we trust that His way is best? If so, then why do we continue in choices that run counter to His way? **If we say we believe in Jesus, and He tells us to learn His teachings and follow Him, but we don't do that, then how real is our faith in Him?** If we say we believe in Jesus, how is that being worked out in our lives?

How far is this supposed to go? I mean, how religious do I have to get? **This is not about being religious, per se. It is about being changed from the inside out by the power of the Holy Spirit inside of us.** The change we are talking about is not about keeping rules, but changing the direction and motivations of the heart. If *that* changes, then everything else will begin to change. **How far are we to take this? Jesus said disciples were to be trained to do all that He said.** Romans 8:29 says that God set us apart to *become like Jesus*. Ephesians 4:13 says the same thing. **We are to grow into a fully-developed person, one that is like Jesus. God wants to work the fruit of the Spirit into our lives.** He wants us to be loving, joyful, peaceful, full of patience, kindness, and helpful-goodness, ...people who are faithful and who can exercise self-control (Gal. 5:22,23). **The Spirit of love has been poured out in our hearts,** if we truly know Jesus. If we yield to His leading, He will cause us to be patient and kind. He will turn us away from jealousy, being arrogant or foolish bragging. He will teach us to not be offensive to others, and to defer to them instead of demanding our own way. Love will keep us from getting defensive or argumentative. The Holy Spirit will teach us to forgive, and not hold a record of what people have done to hurt or offend us. We will find that unrighteous things that we used to take pleasure in are no longer appealing, but even sad or revolting. The Holy Spirit will cause us to rejoice in the truth, to delight when others do well, and when justice wins out. The Spirit will enable us to put up with the failures and disappointments of others. He helps us to see the best in people, and to do what we can to encourage them to grow, no matter how many times they fail. **The Holy Spirit will work these motivations and leadings into our minds and hearts. If we truly want to be like Christ, we will value these stirrings and choose to follow them** (Phil. 2:12,13). He injects new thoughts and insights. We, then, can choose to *trust in* Him, and follow those new leadings, or we can choose to continue in our old ways. We either walk in faith, or we disregard Him.

"**The righteous person will live by faith**", says the scripture (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17). **Faith is not what we know. It is more than just assent to the truth.** James says that even the demons believe in God, ...so much that they shudder (2:19)! Their knowledge of God does not motivate them to trust in Him, or follow Him. No, *knowing* the truth, or being convinced of the truth is not the same as faith. **Faith is when we are so convinced that something is true that we change our ways.** Many people know that smoking is bad for them, but they do not really believe it if they continue to smoke. Many of us know that overeating is unhealthy, but we still choose to do so. When we do this we are in denial or unbelief. **There are many ways in which we do not live as though we really believe what we know to be true in our heads. We often choose to disregard the truth for some temporal pleasure. We create elaborate excuses and explanations to justify our behavior.** Unfortunately, we can fall into the same mind games with our relationship with God. Some *think* they believe in God, but they have made no practical changes in life to indicate that they really do. Almost all of us have areas where we are not walking in true faith. We make excuses for our lack of involvement or discipline, or the lack of Christlikeness in our lives. **God has made available to us all that we need for complete victory in our lives** (II Pet. 1:3,4), **but we choose to disregard Him.** C'mon! Don't get distracted or miss out on all that is yours in Christ. **Pursue Him! Go after more, and apply what you learn. That is where faith gets real.**