

Not Only Believe—But Work

*“This is the work
of God, that ye
believe on him
whom he hath
sent.”*

—*John 6:29*

THE SCRIPTURES TELL US

that without faith it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6) This is understandable, for we see the same principle exemplified in human relationships. If faith in one another is requisite to a genuine friendship among human beings, how much more essential it is to have faith in God if we expect to please him and enjoy the rich benefits of being his friends. Abraham was called a friend of God, because he was faithful and believed the promises God made to him. (James 2:23) Throughout all the ages of his plans and purposes, faith in God has opened the door of divine favor to all the blessings and honor his wisdom and love are pleased to provide to his people.

There is no other approach to a close relationship with God except by faith. All works of righteousness,

apart from faith, are “as filthy rags” in his sight. (Isa. 64:6) Any attempt on our part to cooperate in his plan which is not based upon full confidence in him and a belief that his will and way are best, is unacceptable. Additionally, our faith in him must be absolute—so full and complete that whatever he reveals his will to be, even though it may lead to privation, hardship, suffering, or death, we will do it. A faith that trusts God only when the sunshine of joy is brightening our lives is not the kind of faith which constitutes a basis of true friendship with God.

So fundamental to at-one-ment with our Creator is true belief in him that in our text Jesus indicates it to be the sum total of everything which may properly be considered “the work of God.” In this passage, the test of true belief in God is shown to be the acceptance of Jesus, whom God had sent. The full force of the thought is more readily grasped when we remember that it was addressed to a people who considered themselves specially chosen of God in the earth, the ones to whom God had committed his work of blessing all nations.

The Israelites claimed Abraham as their father and Moses as their lawgiver. They believed that the promises made to Abraham concerning his “seed” were to have fulfillment through them. They considered themselves to be God’s royal nation, his special people, and that the Messiah would exalt their nation to prominence in the earth. They felt that all other nations, in order to receive God’s promised blessings, would have to bow down to them. As they understood the matter, this was God’s program for the human family, the “work of

God” in the earth, in which they assumed they would have an assured part.

Moreover, the Israelites supposed that they were qualified to be God’s servants through their keeping of the Law. Indeed, they viewed their many ceremonies as being properly a part of the works of God. Israel as a nation had never been faithful in keeping the Law, but they made a show of outward obedience to it and its ceremonies. They failed, however, to exercise genuine faith in God, and this was displayed throughout the entire period of their national existence. It kept them in the wilderness for forty years after leaving Egypt. It prevented their entering into rest under the leadership of Joshua. It led to the loss of national independence when taken captive by Gentile nations, and hindered them from accepting the Messiah when he came to them at his First Advent. They thought they were the true servants of God, and they could have been, but their lack of proper belief in God hindered their participation in his works.

PARTNERS WITH GOD

There is work to do for God, and the Scriptures refer to those who are “workers together” with him. (II Cor. 6:1) However, God will not use anyone in such an exalted work who does not have full faith and confidence in him. Quoting again the words of our text, Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” This struck right at the root of Israel’s most damaging weakness. They presumed to be the nation to whom, and through whom, the Messiah of promise would come. They professed to be God’s coworkers in the earth,

yet all of their professions, claims, and ambitions were meaningless unless they believed on the Messiah whom God had sent.

Whether Jew or Gentile, no one can be a coworker with God except through Jesus. All things are of the Father and through the Son. (I Cor. 8:6) “In the dispensation of the fulness of times” God will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” (Eph. 1:10) Belief in Jesus is essential, both to our salvation and as a basis of acceptable service to God. The entire plan of God—all his works—is for the purpose of gathering mankind into Jesus, through belief in him. It is a work which will not be complete until the close of the “dispensation of the fulness of times.”

To “believe” on Jesus is much more far-reaching in its implications than many have supposed. It was so for the Jews at the time of his First Advent. They looked for a Messiah who would exalt their nation to a position of glory among the other nations. Hence, they were not prepared to believe on the one who was “despised and rejected of men.” (Isa. 53:3) After Jesus was raised from the dead he said to two of his disciples that they were “slow of heart to believe” all that the prophets had said concerning the Messiah. (Luke 24:25) They had exulted over the promises of the Messiah’s glory but had not believed the prophetic record telling of his suffering and death.

The Jews were “slow of heart” to believe that which was not to their liking. In all ages this has constituted the supreme test of genuine belief. Abraham demonstrated his living faith in God by

an obedience which caused him to leave his own people and his father's house. It was certainly no alluring prospect for Abraham to leave his home in Ur and to start out on a long journey to a land of promise, "not knowing whither he went." (Heb. 11:8) However, had he not done this, he would have given no evidence that he truly believed God.

All Israel would readily have believed on Jesus if he had come in glory and in conquering power. However, because he was meek and lowly, a friend of publicans and sinners, and a reprover of unrighteousness, they "hid as it were" their faces from him. (Isa. 53:3) Those who did believe did so at great cost. They lost their standing among their fellows. Their names were cast out as evil. Their belief made it incumbent upon them to become witnesses for the despised Nazarene, not only in Judea but to the uttermost parts of the earth. Had they side-stepped their belief, it would have been an evidence that their profession of faith was not wholehearted and sincere.

NO FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

James declares that "faith without works is dead." (James 2:20) This is evidenced along all lines of Christian discipleship. When Jesus said that the works of God were accomplished by believing on him, he did not mean that a mere lip profession of belief that he is the Messiah and Redeemer of the world is all the works of God his followers are expected to perform. Jesus said too many other things in explanation of true discipleship to permit us to misinterpret this one statement so totally as to find in it an excuse for an easy way of living the Christian life.

Jesus' disciples believed on him. They had confidence that he was the Messiah and visualized the glory of his kingdom. They wanted to be with him in that kingdom. The mother of two of them, ambitious for her sons, asked that one might sit on his right hand and the other on his left hand in the kingdom. Jesus asked them, "Are ye able to drink of the cup" of trying experiences "that I shall drink of, and . . . be baptized with the baptism" unto sacrificial death "that I am baptized with?" (Matt. 20:22) Here was something far beyond merely giving mental assent to the fact of his Messiahship. In this was the real test of their belief—a severe test—one of willingness to suffer and to die with him.

To believe on Jesus in the full, absolute sense is to believe that through him the entire plan of human redemption and salvation is to be carried out. It is to accept his leadership role in this plan by faithfully following in his steps. It is to accept his headship in a body of which we are the members, directed by his will. It is a willingness to obey his commands, to be guided by his principles, and to die as he died. It is to work for God and to speak the things he gives us to proclaim, as Jesus did. It is our faithfulness along all these lines that proves our sincere belief in Jesus, the one "sent" of God.

In brief, the real evidence of belief is our willingness to do God's will as expressed in and through Jesus, even when his will runs contrary to our own natural inclinations. The sermon on the mount contains many expressions of the divine will which are not easy to carry out in our lives. For example, we are instructed to love our enemies and to do good to those who despitefully use us and persecute us.

Instructions like these run counter to the will of the flesh. If we believe in Jesus, however, we will obey them, no matter what the cost may be.

A SEVERE TEST

In this connection, we have seen the inspiring examples of consecrated believers who have refused to speak ill of, or denigrate in some way, those who oppose them, because it is contrary to the Master's instructions. To have taken such a stand no doubt has cost these followers of Jesus a great deal. They have been looked down upon by their unbelieving friends and relatives. Some no doubt have been treated unjustly and with ill will. All of them have most likely suffered in one way or another—sometimes cruelly, and in other cases less severely.

Why is this so? It is simply because these faithful Christians have believed on Jesus in the full measure which leads to obedience. By contrast, many profess to believe but claim that the Master's teachings on love are not practical for this day and age, feeling that if he were here today he would probably change his instructions in this regard. In this way, many professed believers draw near to the Lord with their lips, but their hearts are far from him, even as the prophet foretold would be the case.—Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8

When Jesus first sent his disciples into the ministry, these believers were given what has always appeared to the half-hearted Christian very radical instructions. He told them, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat," or how you shall be clothed. (Luke 12:22; Matt. 6:25,31) Their willingness to obey these instructions was the practical

test of their genuine belief in Jesus' leadership. It was a severe test, because the idea was contrary to human wisdom, which concluded it to be unsound and foolhardy reasoning. It is the same test shown in the course of Abraham when he left his own people and his father's house. However, as with Abraham, so it was with these disciples—their obedience to the instructions of the Lord was the proof of their belief.

Later, at the close of his ministry, the Master inquired of these faithful ones, "Lacked ye any thing?" (Luke 22:35) No, they had not. There is never any danger of lacking either temporal or spiritual blessings so long as we are faithful to the Lord's commands, for the promise is that "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."—Ps. 84:11

It is nearly two thousand years since Jesus gave instructions to his disciples, and many of the circumstances of life are now quite different from what they were at the time of his First Advent. Yet, the underlying principles of these instructions are the same, and obedience to them is still one of the severest tests of our faith. As disciples of Jesus today, we are also called to be his ambassadors, his representatives. Our belief, leading up to full consecration to do God's will, puts us in harmony with God, and with truth and righteousness. We are told plainly that we are no longer the servants of self, but of God. Our approach to the entire array of life's experiences is therefore changed.

The chief concern of the man or woman in the world is to "make a living." From childhood begins the planning, educating, and working for temporal

needs of home, food, clothing, and finally for ease and security in old age. This is all legitimate for the natural man. However, belief in Christ, if it is genuine and complete, changes the whole outlook and approach. The wholehearted believer notes the instructions of the Scriptures which reveal that his chief concern now is to serve the Heavenly Father. He still recognizes that he needs food and clothing and that his family does also. In doing so, however, he sees the main purpose of his life is to do the will and work of God.

It is not easy to make this change in our hearts and lives. Only an unbounded faith in God and in Jesus will enable us to do so. It is a radical change, and to the extent our unconsecrated friends know about it they will think we are foolish, and that our judgment is unsound. Religion is all right, such may say, when kept within bounds and in its proper sphere. It is all right, they say, to go to church on Sunday and to send our children to Sunday School. It is good for our children, and an hour inside the church will not hurt any of us, but to make religion the chief thing in our lives, that is all right for the minister. It is his business, and he gets paid for it.

Thus it is that the true believer finds himself at odds with the world and with many professed Christians. However, his true belief leaves him no choice. He rejoices to have a share in the commission given: "We are ambassadors for Christ," and have a "ministry of reconciliation." (II Cor. 5:20,18) From this and other instructions, he knows that he has been called to be a minister, and as a minister of God his chief work is the service of the Almighty. He does not expect a salary for his services, for

they are to be given freely and without bounds, in order that others might be blessed.

THINGS NEEDFUL

For some it is a severe test of faith to wait upon the Lord. The knowledge of God and of his plans and purposes is so inspiring that we want to tell it out far and wide. If we presume we are handicapped because of scriptural responsibilities toward our families, we might be tempted to neglect these obligations in order to devote ourselves more fully to the service of the Lord. In such an event, the test of our belief would be our obedience to the instruction and warning that “if any provide not for his own, . . . he hath denied the faith.”—I Tim. 5:8

This might well be a difficult test of faith. We might see the need of workers in the vineyard and, feeling that we possess ability for some particular part of the work, be inclined to reason that surely the Lord would not want us to neglect this opportunity merely because we have a family to support. However, this would be the reasoning of the flesh. Any service that is rendered contrary to the clear instructions of God’s Word, such as given in the foregoing text, is not acceptable to him and evidences a lack of confidence in the divine arrangements.

Moses waited forty years before the Lord was ready to use him. Jesus waited eighteen years. At the age of twelve he was desirous of being about his Father’s business, but not until he was thirty could he properly enter upon that ministry. Thus, if the instructions of the Word of God and the circumstances of life seem, for a time, to restrict our activities in the Lord’s service, we should wait

patiently. Meanwhile, we should make the very best use possible of whatever opportunities we may rightfully enjoy. Thus we will demonstrate our true belief and proper heart preparation for greater privileges of service in “due time,” according to God’s leading and direction.

BELIEF AND CONSECRATION

As we have seen, true and full belief implies action. Belief in Christ, therefore, means full consecration—and its daily renewal—to do the will of God as it is expressed through his Son. If we say, “Yes, Lord, I believe,” it is the equivalent of saying to him that he should take our lives and use them to his glory. Any other attitude would come short of revealing a genuine and full belief.

Let us think of what it is that we profess to believe. We believe that Jesus is the Son of the Almighty Creator and God of the universe, and that he was with the Father from the beginning and shared in the work of creation. We believe that the human race was created to live upon this earth forever, and that sickness and death entered into the world only because of sin. We further believe that the Creator of the universe, whom we call our Heavenly Father, sent his Son into the world to redeem the dying race and restore mankind to life. We believe that Christ’s followers of this age are invited to share in his sufferings now and are promised a share in his kingdom glory—if they are faithful unto death.

All these things are included in our belief in Jesus, for he is the embodiment of the entire plan of God. Is it not evident, then, that such a belief is

bound to change our entire perspective of life? Of what value are the transitory toys and joys of this present and uncertain human life when compared with the privilege that is ours of being “workers together” with God? (II Cor. 6:1) Once we permit the power of our belief to take proper hold upon us, there is nothing we can do except place ourselves entirely in God’s hands to be used according to the wise decisions of his will.

To truly believe means much. It must inevitably lead us to the complete surrender of ourselves to God and to the devoting of everything we have and are to the doing of his will. It is thus that we share in “the work of God” according to his plan of the ages, and fully “believe on him” who God sent to be our Redeemer, instructor, and perfect example, that we may be ministers of reconciliation both now and when exalted to kingdom glory. ■

“My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips: when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches.”—Psalm 63:5,6

Whoever has time for meditation will receive a great blessing if his thoughts shall turn toward the Almighty, acknowledging his goodness, seeking to give praise to God for all his manifold mercies. . . . We should think of God as the personification of all that is just, loving, kind, wise, in character and principle. This should stimulate us to be like him. The more we appreciate a noble character the more we desire to emulate it. The more we see of God’s mighty works in nature and his mercies toward us, in that same proportion our hearts and lips shall praise him.

—Songs in the Night, September 24