

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for October 31: Making sense of faith

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There is a terrible notion in the world today that says as long as you are sincere about your beliefs that will make things right between you and God. The idea is giving those who believe it a sort of moral therapy in that it is making them feel good about themselves without having to change much in their lives.

This philosophy and its seemingly benefits are actually nothing new at all. In fact, as long as mankind has walked the earth, there has been a desperate attempt to work things out for oneself without respect or consideration of what God has said it takes to make things right between God and man.

And yet in past times and today, those who stand out are ones who willingly and obediently listen to God's plan for righteousness. Abraham was such an individual, as the Apostle Paul points out in Romans 4:1-3 when he makes clear that it wasn't anything Abraham did that made him right with God, but his faith in God and how he responded to that faith with action.

Abraham and Moses were held in such a high regard by the Jewish people that no one dared to speak a word against them. They were exalted and revered and the people needed to be reminded at times that Abraham and Moses were human. Paul makes clear that even Abraham in all his "righteousness" had to have an object of his faith in order for him to attain righteousness from God.

This word, righteousness, means the condition which makes you acceptable

to God. Did you get that? Righteousness is a condition; only God himself can change your condition. Our own humanity and culture continually tries to convince us that things must be earned because that's just how you get ahead in the world, so that is how one must get ahead with God.

The greatest gift you can give to God is to believe in Jesus and trust him. Look at how many times God repeats himself with the nation of Israel to remember his faithfulness to them in spite of their unfaithfulness to him.

Your faith will only be as strong and trustworthy as what you put your faith in. Read that again. Now think about all the things you put your faith in every day. And think about the things or people you don't put your faith in and why. Past experiences probably are what keeps you from trusting certain things or people.

When you put your faith in Christ you are doing so in the one person who is completely and perfectly trustworthy. He's never broken a promise or let anyone down. Sin is what nailed Jesus to the cross, believing in his resurrection to prove he had power over sin and death is what justifies you before God.

Faith requires action, change. Without a change, there is no faith. You can sit and look at a chair and believe it will hold you up and keep you from falling on the floor but something happens when you actually sit in that same chair. You are trusting that your belief is true to the point of being willing to risk falling on the floor. Taking the action to sit in the chair is a declaration of sorts, a way to let the world know that you're believing and trusting in this object.

What is your declaration to the world about your faith in Jesus? Paul tells the church at Rome you do that by using your mouth, confessing who Christ is. Another way someone makes the declaration of faith is by being baptized just as Jesus was baptized. In so doing, you are showing the world

you are following him and how he lived his life.

Some would argue you can simply believe, as in know. James, the half brother of Jesus, leader of the Jerusalem church, and writer of James, states in James 2:19 that even the demons believe and shudder. Get that, demons believe and know Jesus and yet there is nothing within that brings them into a right relationship with God through Jesus.

James is writing this to his church that has been scattered due to the intense persecution of Christians. He is reminding his people that knowledge does not save anyone in light of all the philosophers and religious leaders who are trying to convince them that enlightenment comes from knowledge.

Sound familiar to our own culture? When you act on your belief it becomes tangible, you can see it; otherwise people would not know what you believe. Doesn't it make sense for God to be so adamant about living out your faith then?

James even speaks of Abraham in 2:22 when he writes, "You see that his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did." James goes further and says, "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone" (v. 24). This isn't one of those either/or things, rather it's both/and.