

"I believe..."

by Hendrik Joubert

Religion is considered a personal matter and discussions on the subject are avoided or reluctantly entered into. May I suggest that the underlying reason for this reluctance is the fear of change and the commitment it requires? Everlasting life – *immortality* – is an attractive concept which many cannot ignore. The concepts *faith* and *grace* are manipulated in order to keep God at a safe distance from where we remain in control of the *relationship*. We do it our way, as long as we *believe* in God – or incase God.

Another reason for avoiding a discussion of the issue is it may remove ignorance and the *innocence* associated with it. *Sorry, I did not know... being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;... (Ephesians 4:18)* This unfortunate misconception is not new: ***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. (Hosea 4:6)***

Naturally we do not consider our *darkened understanding* the result of the *hardness of our hearts*, or a *rejection of knowledge...we just did not know*. Avoiding knowledge however, is willful. When describing the elements which make up the character of one who will find God so as to be blessed, Jesus says: ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."*** (Matthew 5:6)

The commitment suggested by this statement is intimidating. Consider the fact that, in spite of salvation being *by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8)*, Jesus *personally* warns that the way which leads to life is ***narrow***, therefore ***few*** will ***find*** it. (Matthew 7:13-14) This warning follows an admonition against judging others by our frivolous standards (Matthew 7:1), and serves as a prelude to a warning that many who were convinced they had a relationship with Christ will learn: ***"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practices lawlessness."***

We may assume more that we can prove when we consider ourselves as having a relationship with Christ. The level of confidence is remarkable; they will reason with the Lord in person: ***Many will say unto Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord,...*** Merely recognizing Him does not amount to faith. Salvation is as a result of, or by faith in that it causes one to respond in a specific way. This fact is illustrated in **Hebrews 11** where the actions of the individuals are introduced repeatedly by the phrase ***"by faith."*** It is the one who actually demonstrates faith in God and His Son by doing the will of the Father in heaven who will inherit eternal life. (Matthew 7:21-23; James 2:14-26)

When a discussion on the subject is engaged in the phrase "I believe..." is often used to introduce perceptions each may have, and it is this phrase I would like for us to consider in order to see the simplicity of *salvation by faith* in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. (**John 3:16; Matthew 16:16; Romans 1:4**)

We act as we believe; a principle vividly illustrated by **James** in chapter **2** of his letter. Notice the simplicity of the principle as he poses the dilemma of the one who argues for his faith, however he does not act upon it so as to demonstrate it: ***But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."*** (**James 2:18**)

One may talk of having faith in Jesus as his *personal Savior*, however due to his actions the Lord may well ask: ***"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"*** (**Luke 6:46**) It is Matthew who records more details of the conversation: ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."*** (**Matthew 7:21**)

It is those who demonstrate their faith by acting upon the words of Jesus who will be saved, and not those who merely *call* Him Lord while failing to live as He demands. James explains that these actions make our faith *alive* so that it may save. Without the obedience the faith remains ***dead*** and therefore ***useless***. (**James 2:17; 20**) I may solemnly and with zeal declare my faith in Christ, however if I do not do as He says, I do not recognize Him as Lord.

Notice also the urgent warning in **John's second** epistle, and in **verse 9**: ***"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son."*** The principle that one should do only as God directs is timeless, as is illustrated when Jesus quotes what God said through the Prophet Isaiah: ***'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'*** (**Mark 7:7**) When men make the rules, worship becomes vain.

This brings us to another important thing to notice when I make the statement "*I believe...*" I need to be able to illustrate from the Scriptures why I so believe as: ***So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*** (**Romans 10:17**) If I cannot find what I do in worship to God in the word of Christ, I cannot effectively use the phrase *I believe* in Christ. (**Matthew 15:9**)