

True Faith Works

The Gospel Truth – Part III

Romans 1:5

Introduction

Our text for today is Romans, chapter 1, verse 5. Look at that verse.

through whom . . .

(that is, verse 4 has already told us, through Jesus Christ our Lord)

. . . we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake

Anytime there is a biblical discussion about the nature of the truth of the gospel, the subject of faith and of works usually enters in sooner or later.

So, just what is faith? And, what does faith have to do with works? Are these two subjects always to be left separate from each other or are they both a part of the gospel message?

The careful reader of this verse is immediately struck with an odd phrase that seems almost out of place. It is the phrase, “the obedience of faith”. If it seems unfamiliar to your eyes and ears, it is because, in fact, it only appears one other time in the entire New Testament. The other location is in this letter to the Romans, as well.

Turn to the last chapter of Romans, or chapter 16, and look at verses 25 and 26. By the way, you will notice how similar Paul's last paragraph is to his first paragraph, which we have been studying.

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith

Notice the similar themes; that is, the gospel, which is summed up in the person of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ was announced in the Scripture by the prophets and is to be preached to the nations. This leads to the obedience of faith.

There it is again. What is Paul saying? Is he saying that faith and obedience are inseparable? Is he saying that disobedience reveals the absence of true faith? Is he saying that genuine faith, as delivered in the gospel, cannot exist without obedience?

I have been asked similar questions in words like these:

- “Is it possible for someone to be a Christian, when they refuse to live like a Christian?”
- “Is it possible for someone to have a saving faith, when they are not evidencing a spiritual walk?”
- “Is a person really a Christian, if they don't pray, read their Bible, and go to church?”
- “If someone says they were saved years ago and yet, they have never grown in the Lord nor do they seem to have a desire to grow in the things of Christ, are they really saved?”
- “What do you say about a man or woman who says they have accepted Christ, but, in their later years, say they have no desire to follow Christ?”

In order to answer these questions, we need to understand what Paul meant in chapters 1 and 16 of Romans, when he spoke of the obedience of faith. In order to do that, we must understand something of the nature of true faith.

I want to begin by defining, as clearly as I can, genuine saving faith. Let us step back and take a look at faith in general, and cover ground that is familiar perhaps, to many of you.

Faith – What it is Not

I will begin by saying what faith is not.

Faith is not mental acknowledgment of truth

1. First, faith is not mental acknowledgement of truth.

If salvation consists in nothing more than believing that God exists, that Jesus is His Son, that heaven is real, etc., then every demon is a believer. James wrote, in chapter 2, verse 19,

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

The demons believe the truth about Christ. They know He is God in the flesh; they believe heaven and hell are real; they believe God, through Christ, created the universe. In fact, according to the book of Job, they were created before the world existed, so they saw creation take place.

However, even though they believe those things, the demons are not on their way to heaven. They are simply believing what is historically true.

They believe in God in the same way that I believe in Julius Caesar. I believe he lived and conquered most of the known world of his time. I believe he was a military genius. I have personally stood on the coast of France and looked at a huge monument of granite with marbled pillars that have his name etched into them as the great ruler of the world. However, I have never met Julius Caesar personally. And, I surely have never bent my knee to him and said, "Caesar is Lord; and I will do your bidding as your loyal subject."

You might say, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," but it may mean nothing more than the demons would mean by that. They also believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but will not bend their knee in worship to Him.

What is the difference today, between you and the demons? Saving faith is not mere mental affirmation of historical truth!

Faith is not temporary assurance in trials

2. Secondly, faith is not temporary assurance in trials.

More than half of the people polled by Gallup Jr. in a recent survey, said they believed in God. Only a fraction of them, however, believed that the Bible had any authority over their lives or morals.

If you asked them why they believed in God, as I have asked hundreds of people during my years of ministry, you would hear answers such as, "Well, when I lost my job, I prayed and got another one. That let me know God was listening." or, "When my child got sick, I prayed that God would heal her and she got well. So, I know God is in my life."

Other answers will include talk of some dream, or some miracle, or some vision, or some near death experience, or some rescue from danger, and so on. Their assurance has nothing to do with the gospel of saving faith, but rather temporary assurances that

have everything to do with life on earth. Their assurance has nothing to do with how to get to heaven.

Our world is filled with deceived people. They want nothing to do with the claims of the cross, but instead, want assurance of heaven and their sinful lives at the same time. They want to choose what's right or wrong and yet, believe that God will smile on them one day, and usher them into His presence. They latch onto anything that looks spiritual as their claim to heaven, while, at the same time, never evidencing a spiritual hunger or any thirst after righteousness.

John wrote in I John, chapter 3, verse 10,

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God . . .

That does not mean a believer cannot or will not sin. That does not mean a believer cannot or will not disobey. The key word is the word "practice". It is one thing to practice righteous living and fail. In fact, that is the description of the believer in Romans, chapter 7. It is another thing to not care about God's standard of righteousness and to practice a lifestyle of sin, while, at the same time, claiming to be a Christian.

For those who claim to know Christ, but live in sin, refusing to follow Him, it is not my job to give that person hope, but to warn them that they may have no hope. The apostle John did just that, as he referred to those who had abandoned the faith and openly rebelled against the Lord, even though, at one time, they were part of the church and seemingly related to Christ. He uses these sobering words, in I John, chapter 2, verse 19,

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher in England, wrote, one hundred years ago,

If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows the Lord's will, but does not mean to obey it, you are not to pamper his presumptions, but it is your duty to assure him that he is not saved.ⁱ

Faith – What it is

What is saving faith? Let me give you four thoughts.

Faith is trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness and eternal life

1. First, saving faith is trust in the living Lord Jesus Christ alone for personal forgiveness and eternal life.

Look at Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 8 and 9,

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one can boast..

We sing that great doctrinal truth in the hymn of the church,

*My faith has found a resting place,
not in device or creed;
I trust the ever living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.
I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
it is enough that Jesus died
and that He died for me.*

Faith that brings salvation is in Christ apart from any works, yet produces works

2. Secondly, faith in Christ apart from any works brings salvation, yet, at the same time, genuine faith works.

Ephesians, chapter 2, continues on to declare, in verse 10,

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

In other words, real faith will always produce righteous works. The lack of righteous desire and deeds indicates the lack of real faith.

Faith that brings salvation does not have a condition of good works, but has a consequence of such

3. Thirdly, good works are not the condition for salvation, but are the consequence of salvation.

Paul wrote, in Titus, chapter 2, verse 14,

[Christ] gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Faith that brings salvation is God's gift of grace to us, while good works are our gift of gratitude to God

4. Finally, salvation then, is God's gift of grace to us; good works are our gift of gratitude to God.

Paul wrote, with great rejoicing, in Romans, chapter 6, verses 17 and 18,

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Douglas Moo wrote these insightful words,

We can understand Paul's words "obedience" and "faith" to be mutually interpreting: obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience. Paul called men and women to a faith that was always inseparable from obedience – for the Savior in whom we believe is nothing less than our Lord, and to an obedience that can never be divorced from faith – for we can obey Jesus as Lord only when we have given ourselves to Him in faith. Faith and obedience are not separate stages of Christian experience.ⁱⁱ

In other words, it is impossible to have one gift without the other.

Types of Faith

Now, how can anyone, who has received the precious gift of eternal life from God, care nothing for Him? The Bible refers to several different types of faith.

Dead faith

1. The first is dead faith.

In the book of James, chapter 2, verse 17, the Bible refers to dead faith. In fact, faith that is considered dead, is faith that is not revealed in works.

Deceived faith

2. Secondly, there is deceived faith.

In Matthew, chapter 7, verses 21 through 23, the Bible has a horrifying description of deceived faith.

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. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you.”

Talk about subjective experiences; talk about those who had visions; talk about those who did not just see miracles, but performed them, and all in the name of Jesus. Yet, Jesus Christ, the Judge, says to them, “I never knew you.”

Peter describes these people, I believe, as those who merchandized the gospel. That is, they gathered a following by their miracles and prophecies only to profit from them financially. They did not feed the sheep; they fleeced the sheep. Or perhaps they did it to boost their pride, or to get a following, or to get rich, or many other reasons. They displayed faith, but they did not have genuine faith.

Perhaps that is why it is so important that every one of us have the next kind of faith.

Examined faith

3. Thirdly, there is examined faith.

Look at II Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 5,

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test?

Have you ever asked yourself, “Am I truly a Christian? Do I have, in my life, the evidences of Christ living in me?”

I like to ask these questions of people in this way, “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you in a court of law?”

Genuine faith

4. Finally, there is genuine faith.

Actions of genuine faith

What are some of the passions or actions of genuine faith?

We are to live by faith

- We are told to live by faith!

Romans, chapter 1, verse 17b, says,

... the righteous man shall live by faith.

Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 1, verse 8,

... I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

These believers understood the gospel and they had a living, submissive, obedient, trusting faith in the living Lord.

What is it in your life that you are trusting God for today? In what way are you depending on Him for tomorrow? If the Spirit of God were removed from your life, how long would it take for you to figure it out?

We are to keep the faith

- Secondly, we are to keep the faith!

Paul wrote, in II Timothy, chapter 4, verse 7,

... I have finished the course, I have kept the faith

In other words, he was faithful to the gospel truth all the way to the finish line.

We are to communicate the faith

- We are also to communicate the faith!

II Timothy, chapter 2, verse 2, says,

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

We are to contend for the faith

- We are to contend for the faith!

Jude, verses 3 and 4, talk about protecting and defending the truth of the gospel against those who, Jude warns, will appear within the context and under the guise of the gospel, but who are, in fact, deceivers and false teachers.

We are to fight the good fight of faith

- Finally, we are to fight the good fight of faith!

I Timothy, chapter 6, verse 12, tells us,

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Summary of the relationship between faith and works

Let me summarize the relationship between faith and works:

- faith is that spiritual, *internal* reality,
- which brings about physical, *external* results;
- God initiates faith, which is *essential* for salvation,
- man initiates works, which are the *evidences* of salvation;
- faith is the *attitude*,
- works are the *action*.

Obedience of Faith

Now, having, in effect, expounded on the meaning of Romans, chapter 1, verse 5, let us have one closer look.

through whom we have received grace and apostleship . . .

We have previously dealt with the subject of Paul's apostleship, and I want to deal with the subject of grace when we get to verse 7. Continue to read in verse 5,

. . . to bring about the obedience of faith . . .

Let us discuss "the obedience of faith".

Obedience of faith is the unhesitating action of our faith

1. First, Paul refers to this unhesitating action of our faith.

To obey is seen by Paul, in this verse, as the inseparable substance of faith. He cannot fathom a person of faith being anything other than a person of obedience.

When Paul, himself, encountered the saving work of Christ on the Damascus road and was blinded with the brilliance of the risen Savior, he discovered that he had been persecuting the true followers of Christ.

He discovered, in a moment, that Jesus Christ was indeed, Lord and Messiah. And his very first words to the risen Savior reveal the changing of his mind, the repentance of his heart, and the evidence of his genuine faith, as he said to Christ, in effect, "What do you want me to do, Lord?"

Today, in the church, we seem to be enamored with better methods and ways for getting God to do what we want Him to do. We are told to pray the right prayers; we are instructed to get others to agree with us; we are told to claim it, and name it, and speak it and then, God, the eternal butler, will deliver the goods.

Ladies and gentlemen, genuine faith has God doing the talking, and us doing the "butlering". We do not ring Him for our whims and wishes; He rings us for His. And, the obedience of faith says, "Whatever you want me to do, Lord, I will do."

Obedience of faith reveals the unlimited arena of our faith

2. Secondly, Paul reveals the unlimited arena of our faith.

Paul's next prepositional phrase, in verse 5, reads,

. . . among all the Gentiles . . .

What an amazing passion – the Gentiles! Paul had been a Pharisee; that is, a Jew who would have shuddered at the thought of God loving a Gentile. The Jews would not let their robe brush against an ordinary Gentile. Every morning they would thank God that He, among other things, had not created them as a Gentile. Paul, like all of his contemporaries, believed and taught that Gentiles were "fuel for the fires of hell".

Now Paul is saying, in effect, "Hey, I want you to know that my faith has so revolutionized my heart, that I must tell every Gentile that I can about the gospel of Jesus Christ."

In the same way, the gospel is not for us to keep to ourselves, but is to be shared and lived, as if on display, before the entire world.

Obedience of faith is for the ultimate ambition of our faith – to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ

3. Finally, the last phrase of verse 5 reveals the ultimate ambition of our faith. Paul writes, ***. . . for His name's sake.***

In other words, our obedience of faith is ultimately, for the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Application

Let me make two final comments, by way of application.

You will never tally, on earth, the effects of your faith

1. You will never tally, on earth, the effects of your faith.

When Paul told these believers, “Listen, your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world,” they had no idea how. None of them would ever have believed that two thousand years later, we would still be talking about them!

You have no idea of the lasting impact you are making on that child, that player on your team, that student in your class, that coworker on your floor, or that neighbor by living your faith.

You will never regret, in heaven, every act and attitude of faith

2. You will never regret, in heaven, every act and attitude of faith.

Recently, I had lunch with two men. One of them said to me, “Stephen, fourteen years ago, I started a business out of my pickup truck. This year, we’ll do twenty five million dollars worth of business. But I have to tell you, I’m not satisfied with where I am spiritually. I’m not ready for this kind of pressure. I need to grow in Christ to a deeper level. Can you tell me what to do?”

I was listening to a man whose faith was being demonstrated by obedience.

The other man told me, over a bowl of soup that he hardly touched, “Stephen, I’ve been so convicted with my lack of passion for God. I was not living for Him at the job and before my family. But God has arrested my heart. Just a few weeks ago, I went home and confessed my unfaithfulness to the Lord and to my wife. We began to go through the house and throw things away; such as, CD’s, video movies, anything that didn’t contribute to righteousness. We were up until three a.m. throwing stuff away.”

Then, with tears in his eyes, he said, “I’m tired of playing games. I want to be real for God.”

That, my friends, is the obedience of faith. His was a faith that was in desperate need of an examination.

You might say, “Well, didn’t he say he had accepted Christ when he was a little boy? Why didn’t you tell him, ‘Hey, don’t worry so much about it, you’ll get into heaven’?”

No. I was hearing him tell me that he had examined his faith and his faith was failing the test.

Some of you, as a child, signed that card, joined that church, got wet, got a Bible at the age of twelve. My friend, where is your living, obedient faith?!

By the way, neither one of the two men who spoke to me, threw anything away – they gained everything.

With the attitude of obedient faith in place, Paul writes, the arena of influence in a man or woman’s life will spread outward. This is just as Paul desired in Romans, chapter 1, verse 5, and it will ultimately, give the name of Jesus Christ our Lord due glory, honor, and praise.

There is an old hymn refrain that combines the two elements of faith and obedience. The lyrics are simple and profound in saying,

Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

That, my friends, is the obedience of faith!

ⁱ Charles H. Spurgeon, The Soul Winner, quoted by John MacArthur in Faith Works, p. 208.

ⁱⁱ Douglas Moo, New International Commentary, Romans (Eerdmans Publishing), p. 52.