

Romans – What is Real Faith?

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I remember when I was a kid, I had to deal with losing my baby teeth. When I lost a baby tooth, I was told by my parents that it needed to be taped under my pillow and while I slept, a little tooth fairy would come and collect it. Every time I would have a baby tooth taped under my pillow, in the morning when I woke up, there would be no tooth, but a quarter and a small drawing of a tooth fairy. What I didn't know at the time was that my mom would make the small drawing of a tooth fairy. My parents also had put a quarter under my pillow. After the second baby tooth was put under the pillow and I had found the new items, I had faith that every time I put a baby tooth under my pillow, I would receive a drawing (always a different fairy) and a quarter under my pillow. It is said that the Vikings would carry their children's baby teeth with them for blessings and protection from evil spirits. During the 17th century in Europe, it was thought that burying a child's tooth under a tree would help cause their adult teeth to grow. Then, a small creature like a mouse was added to the story. This creature would look for lost teeth and would exchange a gift for the baby tooth. Then this story was upgraded to a fairy type creature which we have today. I actually thought that tooth fairy did exist. Now, I didn't have as much faith in Santa Claus. We never had a chimney, so I had a harder time believing Santa Claus. As we grow into adults, these childhood beliefs fade away. We then find new things to have faith in. It seems like we're always searching for something to have faith in. Something we can trust in. We try to trust our family or other adults we look up to. Most people try to have faith in themselves. We need something to have faith in. When we lose faith in something, we usually feel empty and lost. Faith plays a key role in the Christian life. In fact, John Wesley, John Calvin, Martin Luther, and many other leaders of the Church were greatly influenced by Paul's teaching on faith. In fact, the Scripture we'll be reading today helped to start the Reformation Period in history during the 1500's.

Let's turn to Romans 1: 16 where we read this, ¹⁶"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and

also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith,^[a] as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."(ESV – Biblegateway.com)

Now, let's turn to Romans 3: 21 – 26 where we read this from Paul through the Holy Spirit, "²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (ESV – Biblegateway.com)

Two weeks ago, we talked about how God is righteous and this was an important element in Paul's belief in God's character. God is righteous and because of that righteousness, sin has to be dealt with. Sin has to be forgiven so we can have a relationship with God. This is why God sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for us. He carried our sin to the cross so that our sins can be forgiven. His blood that was shed on the cross can wash our sin away and make us spiritually clean. God's righteousness shines light on sin. In April 28, 1867, Rev Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon on Justification by Faith and he makes this statement, "A man, when the Spirit of God is bringing him to Christ, discovers that his past life has been marred badly, by serious offences against the law of God. Before the Spirit of God comes into our soul, we are like being in a room in the dark: we cannot see in it. We cannot discover the cobwebs, the spiders, the foul and loathsome things that may be lurking there. But when the Spirit of God comes streaming into the soul, the man is astonished to find that he is what he is, and especially if he sits down and opens the book of the law, and, in the light of the divine Spirit, reads that perfect law, and compares with it his own imperfect heart and life – he will grow sick of himself (Spurgeon, 181)". We need that righteousness. We also talked about how we too need and should want to be righteous. In fact, Paul tells us in the Scripture we just read in verse 22 that righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. We are to be a righteous people through Jesus. Righteousness is wanting to live out God's standards of living – not our standards or the world's standards. Paul adds that ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (verse 23). For us to be able to live out the standards of God, we must be forgiven of our past sin. To be forgiven

of our past sin, we must “have faith” in Jesus Christ. When the Lord puts conviction on our heart and mind, we feel guilt for our sin. We have a choice to make, to get rid of that guilt through Jesus or to continue to live in it. Paul tells us in verse 24 that all can be justified (more on this term next week) freely by the gift of Jesus – through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the only way our sins can be forgiven. Just doing good works can’t make us right with God. Rev. Charles Spurgeon used to call salvation by works a criminal doctrine and he is right.

When Martin Luther was a priest in the Catholic Church, he had a problem with how the Catholic Church had allowed people to buy their way into heaven. When Luther read Romans 1: 16 – 17, the Holy Spirit spoke to his heart and he realized this was the only way to be made right with God – The righteous shall live by faith. Paul is quoting from the Old Testament here. The only way we can be made righteous is through faith in Jesus Christ.

So, what is faith? We always use Hebrews 11 as the base for our knowledge of faith and it is good. Hebrews 11: 1 – 3 states this, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.” ³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. (ESV – Biblegateway.com)”

We can’t see God, but we believe He created the universe through His Spirit. Just like the wind, we can’t see it, but we see the effects of it. Faith is believing in Jesus even though we can’t see Him. However, faith is more than that. The Greek term Paul uses for faith in Romans is “pistis” which means conviction on the truthfulness of God and the reliance upon Christ for salvation (Strong’s Concordance). In other words, when we feel guilty for our sin, we realize the righteousness of God and we realize our need for asking Jesus to forgive those sins. We realize the only way to God is through His Son Jesus who carried our sin to the cross. If you want to better understand, read the Book of John. It reveals the love of Jesus for us and why He had to die the sacrifice for our sin. So, we need to believe our need for Jesus in our life – this is faith in Jesus. Paul states this in Romans 4: 3, “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ (ESV, 1119)” Part of faith is believing in Jesus just as Abraham in the Old Testament believed in God. You are made right with God when you believe in Jesus Christ. Paul uses the Greek term “pisteuo” for “believe” which means to entrust (Strong’s Concordance). This is a strong

term Paul uses here. Not only do we believe, but we are to trust Jesus. We trust our life to Him or we entrust our life to Him. Abraham believed God so much, he trusted his life to God. When God told Abraham to sacrifice his son on an altar in the story found in chapter 21 and 22 of Genesis, Abraham believed God and trusted him so much that Abraham knew either God would provide another sacrifice or another son because God had told him he would be the father of many nations. Abraham not only believed God, he trusted God totally. God was testing Abraham and God did provide a sacrifice to take the place of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Paul wants the Christians in Rome to understand that faith is a critical element their relationship with Jesus. Not only are they to believe, but also they are to trust Jesus. When we believe, we also entrust our life to Jesus. We believe and trust that Jesus will forgive our sins when we ask for forgiveness because the Word of God tells us that Jesus will forgive our sins through faith in Him when we turn them over to Him. Also, the Word of God tells us that Jesus is the Word (read the first chapter of John). I hear many people say that they believe there is a Jesus. Satan even believes that. What the difference is have we entrusted our life to Him? We may believe in Jesus, but do we really trust Him with our life? Peter makes this statement in 1 Peter 1: 3 – 9 that goes along with what Paul states in Romans, “³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (ESV – Biblegateway.com).” In verse 8, Peter uses the same Greek term Paul uses for “faith”. This translation we just read uses the English term “believe”. Faith in Jesus is needed for salvation. Even though we haven’t seen Him, we believe in Him. We trust that since we have been born again, we have an imperishable inheritance waiting for us in Heaven. We trust Jesus is keeping our inheritance waiting us even though we get no retirement statements in the mail or email stating that. We trust in this living hope so much that we don’t allow this world to bring us down to its level. We believe and trust Jesus so much that we’re willing to hand over our life to Him. We have a hard time trusting people who we can see, sometimes I think it’s easier to trust Jesus who I can’t see. Why?

We looked at believing and trusting as major elements in having faith in Jesus. However, there is one more major element that is needed because it actually drives the first two. Peter states in verse 8 that though we have not seen Him, we "love" Him. Faith without love is an empty faith. It's a faith that doesn't grow. A loving parent will keep reaching out to their children in love because they want that relationship to grow stronger and stronger. Husbands and wives should want their relationship to continually grow stronger and stronger through love because that is what makes a marriage exciting and loving. This is what is missing from many Christian's faith today. Many don't love Jesus. When has been the last time you told Jesus you loved Him? If we truly love someone, we'll do everything we can to please them. Do we really do everything we can each day to please Jesus? We may love those around us and that is because we can see them and touch them. It makes it a lot easier at times. Peter tells us to love Jesus even though we can't see Jesus. If our faith doesn't include love, we're not going to "want" to trust Jesus. If our faith doesn't include love, then we'll believe in Jesus only to a certain point. Jesus tells us this in John 14: 15, "If you love me, you will obey what I command (NIV)." If we really love Jesus, we would want to live out Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. If we love Jesus, we would want to follow God's Standards which we talked about the other week as living out God's Righteousness. I'm not going to listen to the culture or the newest teaching that is going on. Since I love Jesus, my faith in Jesus will grow to where I'm wanting to live out the standards of God. Love helps our faith to grow. Do you love Jesus?

You may say it's hard for you to love Jesus like loving someone we can see or touch? If we go back to what Jesus said in John 14, Jesus continues, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth (NIV)." Paul tells us in Galatians 5: 22 that the fruit of His Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (NIV). Part of the fruit of the Spirit is love and faithfulness. All we have to do is ask Jesus to help build up our faith and His Spirit will help us to love Jesus so that our belief and trust in Him will grow. Jesus loves us so much; He wants to help us love Him back. Who else on earth would do something like this? So, it upsets me when I see people water down Scripture, water down sin, or teach false teaching. When Christians do this, that is not showing love toward Jesus. Loving Jesus should be our top priority. So, how is your faith in Jesus? Do you believe in Him? Do you trust Him? Do you love Him? Ask the Holy Spirit to help your faith to grow!

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