

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages		Pastor/Teacher
Text:	2 Peter 1:12-15		Gary L. W. Johnson
Date:	December 30, 2018 (a.m.)		

BELIEF IN GOD (Part II)

The word “faith” may indeed be the most important word in the Bible. It is certainly one of the most crucial. Hebrews 11, as we saw last week, stands out in the New Testament as the “faith” chapter. Why was it that these Old Testament men lived such effective lives for God? Because they were men of faith – they did not have the bare minimum of faith whereby they could receive the grace of God, but they were, as we are told in the case of Abraham, *strong* in faith. The faith to which Paul refers here is not the body of Christian beliefs (for which the term is used in 4:13), but basic trust in God – the faith in Christ that appropriates salvation and continues to bring blessing and strength as it trusts Him for daily provision and help. The substance of Christianity is believing that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6); putting total trust in His Son as the crucified, buried, risen, and ascended Savior, obeying Scripture as His infallible and authoritative Word; and looking forward to the Lord’s coming again. Habakkuk’s great declaration that “the righteous will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4) is quoted and reaffirmed twice by Paul (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11) and once by the writer of Hebrews (10:38).¹

B. B. Warfield informs us that “the English word ‘faith’ came into the language under influence of the French, and is but a modification of the Latin ‘fides,’ which is itself cognate with the Greek ‘pistis.’ Its root meaning seems to be that of ‘binding.’ Whatever we discover to be ‘binding on us is the object of ‘faith.’ The corresponding Germanic term, represented by the English word ‘believe’ (and the German ‘glauben’), goes back to a root meaning ‘to be agreeable’ (represented by our English ‘lief’), and seems to present the object of belief as something which we ‘esteem’ – which we have ‘estimated’ or ‘weighed’ and ‘approved.’ The notion of ‘constraint’ is perhaps less prominent in ‘belief’ than in ‘faith,’ its place being taken in ‘belief’ by that of ‘approval.’ We ‘believe’ in what we find worthy of our confidence; we ‘have faith’ in what compels our confidence. But it would be easy to press this too far, and it is likely that the two terms ‘faith,’ ‘belief’ really express much the same idea. In the natural use of language, therefore, which is normally controlled by what we call etymology, that is, by the intrinsic connotation of the terms, when we say ‘faith,’ ‘belief,’ our minds are preoccupied with the grounds of the conviction expressed: we are speaking of a mental act or state to which we feel constrained by considerations objective to ourselves, or at least to the act or state in question. The conception embodied in the terms ‘belief,’ ‘faith’ in other words, is not that of an arbitrary act of the subject’s; it is that of a mental state or act which is determined by sufficient reasons . . . that is to say, with respect to belief, it is a mental recognition of what is before the mind, as objectively true and real, and therefore depends on the evidence and cannot arise apart from it. It is, therefore, impossible that belief should be the product of a volition; volitions look to the future and represent our desires; beliefs look to the present and represent our findings.”²

Martin Lloyd-Jones, one of the great preachers of the 20th century, insightfully wrote, “I sometimes think, as I read the Bible, and meditate upon it, that the fact of sin, and the biblical doctrine of sin is more clearly demonstrated and manifested in this matter of memory than perhaps in any other respect. For is not this the simple truth, that we always tend to forget the very things we want to remember, and conversely we find it almost impossible to forget the things we would like to forget? I have instanced certain things which we would like to remember. These, alas, are the things that

somehow seem to slip out of our memory and that we tend to forget. But there are other things of which we say we would give the whole world at times if we could but forget them; certain base actions, certain unworthy motives, certain things that one has said in the heat of the moment; things we have done, or something that some else has done to us. We know perfectly well we should forget it. But we see the person and back it flashes upon us. We may not have thought about it for years, and then something happens and back it comes. Now all that, I say, is a manifestation of sin. That is what sin has done to the human race; that is how it perverts. That is the accursed element in sin, and that is where sin is so hateful and so annoying. It stands between us and that which is best and highest; and nowhere does it show itself more than in this particular matter of memory.”³ This is a theme that is repeatedly highlighted throughout Scripture. We are called to remember because failure to do so is grievous. Peter devotes much of his attention to this very subject.

I. PETER’S PRIORITIES. The need for constant rehearsing the doctrines of Christ and the cross in the ministry of the church, and *not* the pandering to always be bringing in something new and relevant – designed to meet felt-needs. What is Peter stressing here? The word translated *precious* in the KJV is the Greek word *isotimon*, which is a compound adjective (*isos*: equal, and *time*: honor, value). The ESV thus translates *faith of equal standing*. In light of this is worth noting how Calvin captures this, “He calls it a *like precious faith*, not because it is the same in everyone, but because by faith everyone possesses the same Christ and His righteousness, and the same salvation. Although the measure of faith varies, that does not prevent the knowledge of God and the fruit that comes from it being common to all. Thus we have a real fellowship of faith with Peter and the apostles.”⁴

A. ***Precious Faith (v. 1), which leads to knowledge of God and Christ (v. 2).*** Old John Brown notes, “there is just one other point with respect to this first characteristic of true Christians, which requires to be attended to. They did not always possess this faith. It was not on innate principle in their mind, nor was it the natural development of any such principle. It did not grow up spontaneously in them – it was implanted. Its origin was from without, from above. They “*obtained like precious faith*” with the apostles. No natural growth of the human heart is anything like so precious as this faith. Indeed nothing precious of a spiritual kind grows there. All, of a spiritual kind, which unchanged human nature, ‘that field nigh unto cursing,’ produces, is vile and pernicious. Out of the heart spontaneously come many things, but faith like precious as that of the apostles is not one of them.”⁵

B. **The Content of This Precious Faith.** Note the emphasis on the righteousness of God and Savior Jesus Christ. There is in Greek grammar a rule called the Granville Sharp rule, which states that when you have two nouns (not proper names) connected by the word “and,” and the first noun is preceded by the article “the,” but the second is not, then both nouns refer to the same person. This was formulated by Granville Sharp in 1798. But long before that, the noted Puritan Thomas Goodwin clearly understood this as well. He writes, “There are those that say they believe on Christ as a Savior, believe on him as an intercessor and mediator, and yet notwithstanding, deny him to be God. Now, although we are not saved by believing that Jesus Christ is God, but by believing on his righteousness, and on his satisfaction and obedience, as the Scripture expresseth it, yet, notwithstanding, we cannot savingly believe the one if we deny the other. And the truth is, those that deny Jesus Christ to be God, they do clearly, be they who they will be, take away the gospel and the foundation thereof, and the satisfaction of the wrath of God for sin made by Jesus Christ, which the gospel holds forth, and which is the object of our faith. That place in 2 Peter 1:1, which I quoted before to another purpose, is a place that affordeth abundance in it to the present purpose: ‘To them,’ saith he, ‘that have obtained like precious faith with us in (or on) the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.’ Here you see he describeth the faith of the primitive Christians, that special peculiar faith, which yet was common to all them that were true believers; it was upon the

righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Now here is the question, Whether that our God and our Saviour be two distinct persons, or whether it be meant only of Jesus Christ? For in the original it is, and so Beza reads it, our God, and Our Saviour Jesus Christ. To decide this, it is clearly meant one person, viz., Christ. For, first, the article clearly carries it; it is not said, ‘of our God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ,’ but ‘of our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.’ And then secondly, you shall find that this is the style of the new testament, that when it speaks of God the Father in Eph. 1:3, saith he, ‘the God and father;’ God and father they are one person, and speaks not of two but of one; for (which also confirms the first reason) the article it is put before God, but not before Father, it is not the God and the Father, but God and Father, speaking of one; the like you have in 1 Cor. 15:24, and in Col. 2:2. This, I say, is the proper style of the New Testament concerning God the Father. Answerable, when Scripture speaks of Jesus Christ he is called God and our Saviour; so you have it expressly in Titus 2:13, ‘Looking for the appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.’ As by God and the Father is meant God the father, so by God and our Saviour is meant Jesus Christ. Here now is the faith, the common faith of the primitive Christians; it is faith on the righteousness of him who is our God and our Saviour, and men can never truly believe upon his righteousness unto salvation unless they believe that his is a God as well as a Saviour, for he had never else been a Saviour had he not been God, and his righteousness had never been the righteousness of a Saviour had it not been the righteousness of God; and therefore to deny him to be God is to deny his satisfaction, and he that denies one denies the other.”⁶

- C. **The Difference Between Being Aware of Something and Really Knowing It.** Note Peter’s language in verse 12 (compare with James 4:17).
- D. **The Memory Needs to Be Stimulated (verse 13).** The word translated “to refresh” in the NIV is the infinitive form of *diegeiro*, to wake out of sleep, to stir up (as in the ESV). The preposition in compound is perfective so that the actual meaning is “to stir up or wake up thoroughly.” (The same word appears in 3:1, where it is translated “to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.”) Old Bishop Ryle wisely wrote, “Half our doubts and fears arise from dim perceptions of the real nature of Christ’s Gospel . . . the root of a happy religion is a clear, distinct, well-defined knowledge of Jesus Christ.”⁷ Thomas Manton long ago wrote, “the memory is the cofferer and treasurer of the soul; what the understanding taketh in, the memory layeth up; and actually we are said to remember when we set the mind awork upon such notions as we have formerly received. And particularly to remember God is when we stir up in our minds clear and heartwarming apprehensions about his nature and will.”⁸

CONCLUSION: Peter is not exhorting his readers to live in the past. He is not urging them to live simply by memories. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones has observed, “that is an attempt to walk forwards looking backwards at the same time, and it is something that is wrong in and of itself.”⁹ Remembrance, in the biblical sense, is more than simply a recollection. Peter is calling his readers to actively engage their minds so that they understand and, therefore, do not forget the nature and content of their precious faith. “The business of the church and of preaching is not to present us with new and interesting ideas, it is rather to go on reminding us of certain fundamental and eternal truths.”¹⁰ Finally, listen to the counsel of John Calvin, “It is not usually given to us to foresee our end, but those who are given intimation of the shortness of their life by such indications as advanced age or failing health ought to spur themselves on more eagerly to carry out in good time what the Lord has laid upon them. Indeed even those who are in the most robust health and who flourish at the prime of their years and who yet do not give God such daily obedience as is to be desired, ought to provoke themselves to the same kind of solicitude by remembering the approach of death, so that they do not miss the opportunity of doing good by giving only negligent and thoughtless attention to their work.”¹¹

ENDNOTES

¹ J. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians* (Moody, 1986), p. 358.

² B. B. Warfield, "On Faith In Its Psychological Aspect," *Biblical and Theological Studies* (rpt. P&R, 1968), pp. 375, 377.

³ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermon on 2 Peter* (Banner of Truth, 1983), p. 54.

⁴ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries XII* (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 327.

⁵ J. Brown, *Parting Counsels: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1980), p. 17.

⁶ *The Works of Thomas Goodwin VIII* (rpt. Tanski Publication, 1996), p. 283.

⁷ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on The Gospel IV* (rpt. Zondervan, 1955), p. 80.

⁸ *The Works of Thomas Manton, VII* (rpt. Maranatha Press, 1977), p. 78.

⁹ Lloyd-Jones, op. cit., p. 56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57. Listen to the advice of the old Scot, John Brown: "There is something very far wrong in Christian teacher's estimate of his duties and responsibilities if he can be heard, even for a very few Sabbaths in succession, without putting his hearers in mind of the great elementary principles of Christian faith and duty, by which both saints and sinners are most likely to be stirred up -- the things whereby men live, and in which is the life of the soul." *2 Peter: Parting Counsels* (rpt. Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), p. 163.

¹¹ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries XII* (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 329.