

San Juan church of Christ

1414 Hawk Parkway, Unit C
Montrose, CO 81401 | (970) 249-8116

What Does God's Word Say About...

Belief, Faith, and Obedience

Belief can be defined as a deep, abiding trust and confidence in God that through His word one can be saved from their sins. God "gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Faith is defined by scripture as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it" (Rom. 8:24-25). "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe [trust His word] that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

The definition of obedience is to comply with, and be submissive to the wishes, instructions, or commands of one who you are serving and are in subjection to. "And having been made perfect, He [Jesus] became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9).

In the Bible the words belief, faith, and obedience are interchangeable with each other. "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were being obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Paul wrote that the apostles had received grace and power from God to preach "about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake...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; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:4-6, 16:25-27). The New American Standard Bible correctly identifies the Greek text when it says "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

Belief, faith, and obedience do not exist in isolation of each other. For instance, faith is a living, active ingredient of one's character. It effects the believer's conduct for good. James 2:14 poses two critical questions. "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" These are rhetorical questions; requiring no answer. A "faith" that does nothing cannot save anyone. "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder" (James 2:19). Therefore, faith needs something else to make it complete. James sights the example of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to God and asks, "You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:22, 24).

Any definition of faith that excludes an obedient heart has failed to consider God's word completely. But at this point, a note of caution is in order because some men incorrectly deem that "faith alone" does save, while others ignore faith and belief and say one is saved solely by one's righteous acts which lie in obedience. Both views are scripturally wrong. No one will ever be justified before God on the basis of his obedience alone, for no one's obedience is perfect (Rom. 3:23; Gal. 3:10-11). Obedience for the sake of "scoring points" with God is an exercise in futility. The only obedience that God will accept is that which is born of our faith in Him. The obedience of faith is that service which is motivated by our trust that God knows best, and our desire to honor His will.

Paul never taught "rote" obedience in keeping with a ritualistic traditionalism. Instead, Paul taught that we can only be saved by recognizing our sinfulness, seeking the grace and mercy of God, and coming to Him through a faith in Christ that is willing to meet His conditions of pardon. Man's salvation through faith should not be confusing. The most natural thing in the world ought to be our willingness to obey the God in whom we have faith. If we have come to redemption through the sacrifice of God's only Son, how can we fail to humble our spirits before His word? A belief and faith that refuses to obey is really no faith at all.

Send comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to:
info@sanjuanchurchofchrist.org