

The Tanner St Church of Christ meets each Lord's Day beginning with Bible classes at **9:30 AM**. We continue with our worship at **10:20 AM** and again at **5:00 PM**. We also meet each Wednesday evening at **7:00 PM** for Bible study and worship. Our meeting place is located about ¾ of a mile from I30 at 1512 Tanner St in Malvern, AR.

If you have questions about what we believe and teach, please visit our website, **TannerSt.com** to listen to sermons or read past articles from our bulletin. Or you can contact us and we will be glad to find a convenient time to study with you.

Phone: (501) 332-8806 Email: preacher@tannerst.com

Consider: 1Corinthians 14:33

Needed News

Dolline Fain is not doing well at this time. They may need to start using a feeding tube as she is still not eating. Lack of use is causing her leg to stiffen up. They are using a brace on her leg for 2 hours of therapy each day.

Ricky Ragsdale is doing about the same with slow improvement. **Phyllis Jackson** will be staying with him the end of this week while Theresa attends meetings in Little Rock.

Adene Gray is visiting with her daughter, Carolyn, in Oklahoma for a few weeks. The **Simpson** family is in Star City this weekend.

Joyce Venable feeling tired. Her sister, **Daisy Nelson**, has not been doing any better health-wise.

Conrad Harris, Joyce Venable, Thelma Echols, as well as family members of many who attend with us, also have ongoing health issues. We need to remember all of these in prayer and keep in touch with them as we find opportunity.

Would you be interested in a Bible study? Do you have questions about practices or teachings that you would like to discuss? Do you have a topic suggestion for future sermons or Bible class? Pass the word to Dan Henderson. He would like to help you in any way he can with Bible knowledge.

Seeking His Righteousness

"...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.." Matthew 6:33

November 2015

Volume 4 Number 43

The Test Of Genuine Faith

Steven Harper

Ask just about anyone who 'goes to church' regularly, and they will tell you that they believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. They will tell you that they are a Christian, or at least a believer. Most will even tell you that they believe we should follow the Bible. Most people who claim to be part of one of the so-called 'Christian' denominations will tell you that they have faith, though I have found that many do not even know what real faith is. I don't mean my definition, either. I have observed that most of these same religious and sincere people do not have, or even understand what it means to have, the faith of the Bible -- faith as God defines it.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to sit down with five people within a seven-day period to talk with them about their 'faith.' These five people all claimed to be followers of God's word, yet they were a part of three different denominations. Two called themselves 'elders' of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [Mormons], two called themselves Jehovah's Witnesses, and the other one thought she wanted to be a part of the Roman Catholic Church. I asked each one of these people the same question: How do you know that what you believe is right? Each and every one -- every one -- said, in one way or another, that the test of their faith came down to how they felt! Not one of them said it was based on what God's word said. Not one opened the Bible and pointed to Scripture to show their beliefs and practices were approved of God and not one used Scripture for the defense of their 'faith' or to show that their 'faith' had anything more substantive than a feeling they had. 'Faith,' to these five people and many more people with whom I have studied, is a feeling you have that just tells you it is right. Some, when asked, say something along the lines of "Well, I just can't put it into words" to describe their salvation 'experience.'

Hopefully, you see there is something terribly wrong with this idea that faith is a feeling. God has defined faith as *"the assurance of things*

hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) By God's definition, faith is when we have a basis for what we believe, with strong enough evidence to convict [convince] us that it is true, or real. In other words, we have either seen or heard something that has caused us to believe, and it was strong enough evidence to convince us of its truthfulness. For example, I have never been to Paris, but I believe it is real. Why? I have seen enough pictures in books and magazines, and heard enough testimony from those who have been there, to believe it is a real city. I have faith that the city of Paris, France, really exists. I do not have a 'feeling' that is the basis of my faith, but evidence.

Let's go back to my five friends. These five people follow three different religious groups, who hold and teach widely varying doctrines. The Mormons revere Joseph Smith, Junior, but neither Roman Catholics nor the Jehovah's Witnesses would ever care to heed his writings. The Roman Catholic doctrine teaches that the pope is the head of the church, but neither the Mormons nor the Jehovah's Witnesses would ever recognize him as such. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Governing Body is the only true interpreter of the Bible, but Roman Catholics and the Mormons would dispute such a claim. Yet all five told me that they believed they were right! They all believed [sincerely, no doubt] that their faith was genuine. How could this be? If you know anything about the doctrines of these three denominations, you know they could not be any more different. In fact, the doctrines of these three denominations often contradict each other! Can you imagine someone hearing this who was searching for the truth? He would be so confused he would probably throw up his hands and surrender!

Faith, in the way God has defined it, is based on evidence that is strong enough to convict the hearers [or readers, whichever the case may be]. In particular, it begins with the conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that, as His disciples, we are to follow His teachings. But how does one come to this conclusion? Let's look once again into the word of God to find out!

Paul wrote, *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)* Faith [conviction based on evidence] comes by hearing the word of God -- not a feeling! Only when one reads [or hears] the word of God can they have faith, and only when they are convinced by the word of God can someone have faith. But the word of God is enough. Regarding the very things that he wrote about Jesus, John said, *"These are written that you may believe that*

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:31) If someone has never heard the word of God, it is certain they would not have the evidence enough to convict them, and it is just as certain they could not have faith. Contrary to popular opinion and modern-day practice, faith does not come by a 'bolt out of the blue' or before ever hearing the gospel message. Some today claim to have faith, though they have never heard the gospel message. Some claim to believe in Jesus never having known Him. Such claims of faith must be recognized as false claims; this is not faith at all. It is not until one hears [or reads] the gospel message that one can have faith. It is not until an individual has heard [or seen] the evidence that they can have a basis for their faith. Lacking this, whatever you may feel in your heart is not faith, though it may feel 'right.'

The test of genuine faith is not based on how you feel. The apostle Paul, of all people, would know this, for he was a man who did many things thinking he was right, but was, in fact, going against the will of God. Paul was a man who once persecuted Christians, threw them in prison, had them beaten, took their personal possessions, ran them out of town, and even condemned some to death [Saul, **Acts 8:3; 22:3-5; 26:9-11**]. But in all these things, Paul said, *"Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." (Acts 23:1)* How could he say that?!? He could say it because he did it *"ignorantly in unbelief." (1Timothy 1:13)* Though Paul [Saul] felt he was right, he was, in fact, doing these things *"contrary to the name of Jesus."* Was he sincere? I imagine he was, but sincerity and his personal feelings did not matter!

Friend, take a look at yourself. Ask yourself: Do I have real faith? Is my faith based on the word of God -- or a feeling? Am I doing the things found within the written word of God, or am I merely following what I feel is right? If someone were to ask you today how you knew what you were doing was right, what would you say? Would you point them to the Bible and show that each thing you teach and each thing you practice is in harmony with God's word? Or would you pat your hand over your heart and say, "I just feel it is right"?

Feelings are a poor measure of genuine faith. You may be sincere about what you believe, and you may truly feel that what you are doing is right, but unless it is in harmony with the word of God, it is not real faith and you are still in your sins! If you want the test of genuine faith, compare your beliefs and practices with the word of God. Test yourself (**2Corinthians 13:5**).