

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A BELIEVER

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Feb 8, 2008

Introduction:

- A. Our identity is something that is very important to us – In fact, we may even work hard to protect our identity because it is who we are:**
1. I love the “identity theft” commercial that depicts two older sophisticated women in their living room. When they start talking it’s the voice of two redneck sounding men who have just bought motorcycles. It’s Citibank advertising their identity theft protection services.
 2. From the time we were little we were encouraged by our parents to protect our identity – They would say, “Remember who you are and what you stand for. You are a _____... and I expect you to act like one!” We were to appreciate & honor who we were, our identity
 3. **Illustration:** Alexander the Great – “Change your name or change the way you are acting”
 4. Our spiritual identity should also be something that we cherish and protect – Not that someone would steal it, but that we’d appreciate who we are and strive to adhere to that identity:
- B. One of the simple ways the scriptures identify Christians is the term “believer” – What does this mean?**
1. This descriptive term occurs often in the scriptures (**1 Tim 4:12; 1 Thess 2:13; Acts 16:1; etc**)
 2. Obviously a believer is a person who believes in God, who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who even believes in the resurrection, but is that all there is to it?
 - a. Sometimes we’ll be talking to another Christians about a person we know and we will ask, “Is he a Christian?” and the answer is, “No, but he does believe” – Is this really true?
 - b. I know we don’t mean this, but we make it sound like having a mental assent to God’s existence, or some things the Bible says, makes up for not really being a Christian
 3. Believer means more than just acceptance in some truth or in God’s existence, let’s look at the Bible’s use of the term to gain a greater appreciation & understanding of what we are to be

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A REAL BELIEVER? HOW DOES THE BIBLE DEFINE IT?

A. A Believer Is A Person Who Fully Submits To God:

1. Luke describes a group as “all who believed” (**Acts 2:44-45**) – But who are these people? You have to back up and look at the context to see who this group is made up of:
 - a. Peter sermon on Pentecost focuses on Christ and he quickly gets to the point – You crucified Jesus, but God raised Him up... Now He is both Lord & Christ (**vs. 32-33, 36**)
 - b. The kingdom of Christ has now been established – The term kingdom actually refers to the rule and reign of Jesus. This is what is being preached in Acts 2 – He is king of kings and Lord of Lords. If a person wants to be saved, they must submit to His reign!
 - c. Having been convicted to the hearts of their rejection of Jesus and their desire to submit to His rule in their lives, they ask, “What shall we do?” – A cry for help! (**vs. 37**)
 - 1) The answer – “Repent and Be Baptized” – He didn’t say to pray the sinner’s prayer or rebuke them for trying to earn their salvation. He acknowledges the validity of their question by answering it, there was something to do (**vs. 38**)
 - 2) Repentance as part of submitting to the reign of Christ and entering His kingdom had been preached since the beginning of His ministry (**Matthew 3:2; 4:17**)
 - 3) Since Jesus had died & been resurrected, baptism into His death & resurrection was possible. It is now part of submitting to His reign & entering His kingdom

- d. Who were those people who believed? They were those who received the word of the kingship of Jesus, believed in Him, repented of their sins, and obeyed His gospel through baptism! This is what a true believer is – **(see verses 41-44a)**
- e. When you teach someone the gospel way of salvation they will sometimes resist the thought of needing to be baptized. Why do we read of no resistance among these people? They saw Jesus as Lord and submitted to His reign in their hearts!
- 2. Another example of what it means to be a believer is found in the Philippian jailer – He too asks the great question, “What must I do to be saved?” **(Acts 16:29-31)**
 - a. When some read this, they stop here... But becoming a believer, as we have seen, involves more than a mental acceptance of a truth, it involves a submission of wills!
 - b. Notice **verses 32-33** – Paul and Silas preach Jesus to him and then the jailer shows his acceptance of their message & repentance by washing their wounds.
 - c. Notice that it is after his baptism that he is called a believer, not before. Why? Because it is at that point that he has fully submitted to the rule and reign of Christ! **(vs. 34)**
 - d. This reads a lot like Acts 2 – He heard, believed, and obeyed. All summarized as believing!
- 3. Crispus, like the others, is a man who is said to have believed in the Lord **(Acts 18:8)**
 - a. Some may try to use this verse to say that he believed without being baptized, but did Crispus get away with not doing what the others did? Believed is a “inclusive” term
 - b. If Crispus is a believer, then Crispus did what the others did. In fact, we know that Crispus was baptized because Paul said clearly that he baptized him **(1 Cor 1:14)**
- 4. Fully submitting to the Lord’s will is a continually characteristic of the citizens of the kingdom who see themselves as clay in the hands of the Master Potter **(Jeremiah 16:1-6; Isaiah 64:8)**

B. A Believer Is A Person Who Continues In The Faith:

- 1. The Parable of the “Sower” illustrates for us that a real believer is a person who continues in the faith with patience and perseverance **(Luke 8:6-7, 13-14)**
 - a. This is another one of those passages we go to for evangelistic reasons. We point to how people are different types of soil and we have to remember that when teaching
 - b. This parable is not just about those people who we are teaching, but this parable is about us too. Each of us can be described as one of these types of soils. Which are you?
 - c. Those who are sown on stony ground, “believe for a while” – What does this imply? That as the testing came, they had no roots of faith, & as a result they quit being believers
- 2. The Hebrew writer describes the children of Israel as being a people full of unbelief, and yet as far as accepting the truth of God’s existence goes, they certainly believed **(Hebrews 3:7-12, 16-19)**
 - a. Think for a moment about the history of Israel, from the time of the 10 plagues until their refusal to go in and take the land. They had seen so much & had so much potential!
 - b. Every one of those people who left Egypt were bound for the promised land! But who among them made it? Only those who were 20 years old and under (plus J & C)
 - c. There were bones scattered all through that wilderness. What was their problem? They committed idolatry, they murmured, and more. But there was a bigger problem...
 - d. Unbelief! Did they believe in God? Certainly! God was more “real” to them than He is to many of us I’m sure. They quit trusting, living godly, & submitting to God’s will! So, When the time came, they saw the giants as too great & wanted to go back to Egypt!
 - e. Today, we must guard against the same kind of problem – Moving from belief to unbelief:

- 1) I doubt many Christians totally stop believing that God exists, but the wilderness is strewn with the bones of those who have developed a heart of unbelief!
 - 2) People offer many excuses – Death in family, loss of a job, problems in the local church, falling back into their sinful past, left home & went out on their own
 - 3) What really happened? They Quit Believing! They departed from the living God!
3. How can we build strong faith, the kind of faith that endures? (**Rom 10:17; Luke 17:5; Rom 5:3**)
- a. The kind of faith that perseveres comes from engulfing ourselves in God's word – It never fails that Christians who are weak and stay weak aren't spending time in His word!
 - b. We need to pray – Not that prayer replaces our effort... but pray for strength, wisdom, help, opportunities, providence, His interference with anything destructive to faith
 - c. Allow the difficulties to build our faith – Those who have enduring faith haven't gotten there with everything going their way. They let the difficulties strengthen them
 - d. Surround yourself with people of faith – Again, what happens when people start to develop that heart of unbelief? They cut themselves off from their brethren!

C. A Believer Is A Person Who Lives With A Hope For An Eternal Home With God:

1. In order to encourage the Christians not to give up their salvation, the Hebrew writer gives reason after reason not to go back to Judaism, but to continue living for the reward (**Hebrews 10:35-36**)
 - a. I think we overlook how difficult it was for Jews to set aside Judaism in order to serve Christ – Judaism was their life, it was all they knew, it was the religion of their family, and, unlike being a Christian, they had constant physical reminders of their religion
 - b. The Jews had the temple, special feast days, and other very visible and concrete reminders of their faith... They'd say, "Here's our temple, where do you worship?" and the Jew who has become a Christian would have to say, "At Aquila and Priscilla's house"
 - c. There was a danger in them "throwing away their confidence" by going back to Judaism and we face the danger of throwing away our confidence by going back to the world
 - d. What is the key? Staying focused on the reward and staying focused on God's promises
2. This is the context of Hebrews 11 – The focus of Hebrews 11 as it discusses faith is pretty specific... It's concern is with a faith that looks forward instead of backwards! (**Hebrews 11:1, 6**)
 - a. Various aspects of "saving faith" are emphasized throughout the Bible... Hebrews 11 seems to be addressing one particular aspect. We often talk about how it shows that saving faith is obedient faith, & it does, but the main point seems to be faith's focus
 - b. Faith is the substance of things HOPED FOR... It believes that God is a REWARDER of those who diligently seeks Him. It's about a faith that looks ahead instead of behind!
 - c. Consider three of the examples which are given to emphasize this part of real faith:
 - 1) **Verse 7** – By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen
 - 2) **Verses 8-10** – By faith Abraham... went out not knowing where he was going... living in tents... looking forward to the city that has foundations"
 - 3) **Verse 24-26** – By faith Moses chose rather to be mistreated with God's people than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin... for he was looking to the reward
 - 4) **Verse 22** – By faith Joseph gave instructions concerning his bones. There were many moments of faith for Joseph, so why record this event? It shows how he was focused ahead – This is not my people or my land, take me with you!
3. So we pass from these great examples of people who looked forward instead of backwards and then the Hebrew writer draws direct application those reading his reads (**Hebrews 12:1-2**)

- a. I'm sure we've all heard this described as a track meet, a marathon runner, and the witnesses of chapter 11 have filled the stands, cheering us on by their example
 - b. Notice again the focus is looking ahead instead of behind – Behind us lies our sins, our failures, our feelings of guilt and disappointment, our living for this world and ourselves... Ahead of us lies Jesus, our home in Heaven, and the throne of God!
 - c. But we must run this race of faith with endurance – The key to our endurance is the same key to the endurance of those witnesses before us. Our focus of our faith!
4. So who is a believer? He is a person who is holding tight his hope, the anchor of the soul, which reaches right to throne of God & anchors there. He's got a grip that won't let go! **(Heb 6:19)**