

Faith Beyond Mere Belief

By: David Burruss

Last week, I wrote about how you cannot approach God's Word on your own terms. Many who identify as Christians argue that baptism is merely a "work," claiming that salvation comes through grace alone. Others believe that simply asking Jesus into one's heart is enough for salvation. However, these views overlook the clear biblical teaching on baptism. Often, people cite John 3:16 as the "golden verse" of the Bible, emphasizing belief as the sole requirement for salvation. But the original Greek word for "belief" (pisteuo) goes beyond mere mental agreement; it also implies compliance and obedience, showing that genuine faith in Jesus includes following His commands.

If belief alone were sufficient for salvation, then even the devil who certainly believes in God would be saved, but that is clearly not the case. The difference lies in the true meaning of biblical belief. The devil and his demons fully acknowledge God's existence, even recognizing His power. James 2:19 makes this clear: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder." This passage illustrates that simply believing in God's existence is not enough for salvation. Believing about God is not the same as believing in God as the Bible defines it.

True biblical belief goes beyond intellectual acceptance; it requires obedience, trust, and a transformative relationship with God. Genuine faith in Christ leads to action, as Jesus said in John 14:15: "If you love me, keep my commandments." Real faith is not just about recognizing who God is but about surrendering to His will and walking in His ways.

While the devil knows God exists, he rebels rather than submits, rejecting the obedience and trust that define saving faith. This is why, despite his belief in God, the devil cannot be saved. The kind of belief that leads to salvation is not just knowing God exists but a commitment to living in submission to His will.

You may be thinking, "what about the thief of the cross"? This argument is often used to claim that baptism is not necessary for salvation. But here are key points that refute this argument:

There is no evidence in the Bible that the thief on the cross was not baptized. It is possible he could have been baptized under John the Baptist's ministry, as John preached repentance and the coming kingdom, which the thief seems to have known about (Matthew 3:1-2; Luke 23:42).

There are many unknown details about the thief, such as his name, where he came from, or if he was baptized. Without this information, claiming that the thief was not baptized is unprovable and weakens the argument against baptism.

The thief lived and died before the New Testament and the Great Commission (Mark 16:15-16). Jesus had not yet instituted New Testament baptism, nor had He been buried and resurrected, meaning baptism into His death (Romans 6:3) was not applicable to the thief.

While on Earth, Jesus had the authority to forgive sins directly (Mark 2:10), as He did with the thief in Luke 23:43. However, this authority ceased after His death when His new covenant took effect (Hebrews 9:16-17), meaning the example of the thief does not apply today.

So, thief on the cross does not provide a valid argument against the necessity of baptism for salvation, as it occurred under different circumstances before the New Testament was established.

The devil wants people to believe that there are many ways to Heaven, or that simply believing is enough for salvation. But the Bible clearly teaches there is only one narrow way, and few will find it (Matthew 7:13-14). It's vital to recognize that when we stand before God, we will be judged based on the instructions He has given us in Scripture, not on human opinions, traditions, or creeds.

No one wants to hear the words, "Depart from me; I never knew you." If your worship or beliefs are grounded in man-made traditions, opinions, doctrines, or creeds that distort or add to God's Word, it's time to leave those behind. Instead, let's commit to following the Bible's teachings as God intended.

Sinners are welcomed at North Main church of Christ. If you're struggling, have any needs, or are simply seeking a loving Christian family, we invite you to come and see us.