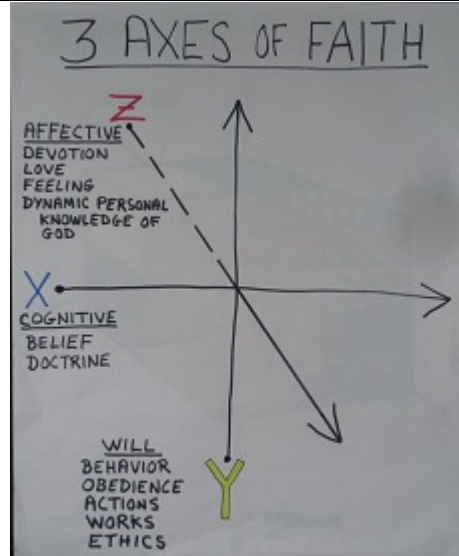


Eph 2:8-10; Jas 2:14-20; Matt 28:18-20; John 14:23-24—THE THREE AXES OF FAITH: BEHAVIOR

INTRO: Last week we began to consider the question: “What is the nature of true, saving faith?” What does real Christian faith look like? This is important for both nonbelievers and believers to know. Nonbelievers need to know what they might be getting into or what they are rejecting. Believers need to be able to assess their own lives and faith-walks to see “am I really in the faith” and to determine where they are weak and where they are strong.

Our template is that there are three basic axes or dimensions of real Christian faith [CHART]:



a cognitive aspect—what we believe; a behavioral aspect—what we do; and an affective aspect—where does our heart lie/what are we devoted to. Last week we looked at the X axis, the belief axis, which focuses on who Christ is & what he has done, all as validated by his bodily res. from the dead. This week we will consider the Y axis: the behavioral component of faith. Next week we will talk about the Z axis: the devotional aspect of faith.

O/S: I want to follow the same basic format today as I followed last week, namely, as we consider the Y axis of faith, I will: (1) Look at 4 brief passages in the Bible that go to the heart of the behavioral component of the Christian faith; and (2) Consider some of the implications of this for our lives.

I. Scriptural bases of the Y axis of faith.

There are many passages that implicate the behavioral dimension of faith and show its connection with the cognitive/belief axis of faith. Here are four important ones:

Eph 2:8-10. Many people are familiar with Eph 2:8-9, but v.10 is an important part of the thought. [READ] This passage tells us at least 2 important things:

- First, as we discussed last week, Christianity is all about what Christ has done for us, not what we are supposed to do for him. Thus, v.10 explicitly tells us “**we are HIS workmanship.**” We come to him with NOTHING to offer. We *appropriate* our salvation by faith—but even that is not something that we conjure up on our own but is a gift of God’s grace to us. The reason is, as we also talked about last week, on our own our hearts are inclined against God and revolve around ourselves. We are controlled by what the Bible calls the “**lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.**” Consequently, left to ourselves as Paul tells us in Rom 3, “**There is none righteous, not even one...there is none who seeks for God...there is none who does good, not even one.**” What God does is he changes our heart. He inclines it toward himself. As the Bible says, he takes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh. And when he does that, we respond by calling out to him in faith.
- Second, this passage tells us that, although God receives us as we are, he does not leave us there. He saves us for a reason. We are created in Christ Jesus “**for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that [or, in order that] we would walk in them.**” You cannot work your way to heaven no matter how many good deeds you do. BUT your works are evidence of your faith. As Martin Luther put it, “We are saved by faith alone, but faith is not alone.” God has crafted us for a purpose. Last week we talked about how the fact of the resurrection gives meaning and purpose to our lives now. Ephesians

is saying the same thing. When we are in Christ **v.10** is telling us “We are here for a purpose. We are part of God’s plan. And that plan, and our part in it, was ‘prepared beforehand’—before the foundation of the world—so that we would become more and more like Jesus and do the things he has designed for us and will show us.

- In this aspect of our behavioral lives, everyone is different. I am doing something—going to Africa—that I never would have dreamed about 10 years ago. Nancy has found her passion and calling teaching people with dyslexia how to read. Again, she never would have imagined this. And God did not speak with an audible voice “Jonathan/Nancy these are the works I have prepared beforehand for you to walk in them.” But through various events and circumstances he was working in us and through us and leading us in the way he wanted us to go. And he will do the same for you. **Eph 2:10** indicates that.

Jas 2:14-20. [READ] Notice 3 things about this passage:

- First, real Christian faith is more than just cognitive beliefs. **V.19** makes that clear. You can say the words “Jesus is Lord,” but if that belief simply remains in your head and does not change your life, it is no better than the beliefs of the demons. In that case the words and the belief are empty and are *not saving faith*.
- Second, v.18 explicitly makes clear that our behavior, our works, is the evidence of whether or not our faith is real. As James states in both **v.17** and **v.20**, “**faith without works is dead or useless.**” IOW, mental, non-life-changing beliefs in theological propositions is *not saving faith*—even if the propositions themselves, such as God is Trinity, Jesus is fully God and fully man, the Bible is the word of God, etc., etc., are true.
- Third, notice the examples of the works James is emphasizing: they are relational; they are the acts of love and compassion to help people in need. Why? Because such acts demonstrate that we in fact have been born again, that we are in Christ, because Christ himself had a heart of compassion. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the perfect representation of the Father. It also says that “**God is love.**” **Rom 8:29** tells us that the whole purpose of our lives is to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Since that is true, how do we know whether we are becoming conformed into the image of Christ? As we see ourselves developing his heart, his compassion, and doing the things that he did. It is a very clear test so that we will not be in doubt as to our spiritual state.

And this is the test that we will have at the final judgment. The test will not be a written theology exam. The test will not be his asking us, “Did you say these words ‘I accept Jesus Christ into my heart as my personal savior.’” No, in **Matt 25:31-46** Jesus describes the judgment [**explain the sheep and the goats**]. The “faith” of the goats was mental; it didn’t change their lives. The faith of the goats is no better than the faith of the demons. The faith of the sheep penetrated deeply into their souls so that they naturally started living the life of Christ without even realizing it. And the biggest evidence of that was how they treated people, especially people in need.

Why is that the test? The reason, I think, is because all people have been created in the IOG. How we treat God’s image shows what we really think of him.

- Please note something about good works. There is a difference between the works of **Eph 2** and **Jas 2**. In one sense, as we mentioned in **Eph 2**, the works God may have called you to do and what he has called me to do may be different—because we are all different people, with different abilities, different passions, living in different circumstances. God is pleased by the great variety of people and gifts and works. But in the **Jas 2** sense, we are all called to be people of love, helping the needy, caring for the least of these. Regardless of our different vocational callings, every Christian is called to love our neighbors as ourselves. Think how radical that statement is. If taken seriously, it means, “I want you to spend the same time, money, and effort at caring for other people as you spend on caring for yourself.” That is something we cannot do without God, but we can begin to approach it as we draw upon Him.

Matt 28:18-20. [READ] This is what many people call the “Great Commission.” Many people, when they hear the phrase “the Great Commission” think of evangelism. That is true, but that is only a very small part of what the Great Commission is all about. Notice what it really says:

- **V.18**—Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. As we saw last week, Jesus is Lord of all. That’s the X axis of faith.
- But the X axis implicates the Y axis. Christians are not to be passive recipients of God’s grace. Rather, in **v.19** Jesus is saying “You’re now connected with me—I’m your Lord—*therefore* go into all the

world.” IOW *because* Jesus has all authority over the entire world, he commands us to go into the entire world to be his representatives, to spread the gospel, to spread his image. That’s why we have to be conformed into his image.

- **Note vv.19-20.** We are not just to make converts, but are to make “disciples”—students, learners, and are to “teach them to observe—by which he means ‘to do’—all that I have commanded you. The mark of a disciple is that he or she strives to be like the master. That means to be like Jesus. To have his heart; to have his mind; to have his values; to do the things he does. If we do not, in no sense can we be called disciples of Jesus. The Y axis of behavior is intimately connected to the X axis of belief.

John 14:23-24. [READ] Notice here how Jesus makes “keeping my word” (IOW, “doing what I say”) the litmus test for whether one truly loves him or is connected with him. See how he says **“If anyone loves me, he WILL keep my word.”** Jesus is not fooled by lip service. All of these passages are consistent. We are saved by faith alone, but faith—true faith, saving faith—is not alone. Real Christian faith transforms our life. And the proof of that is by what we do and don’t do. Our behavior is the “outward and visible sign of our inward and spiritual state.”

PROP: What all of these passages are telling us is: **“How we live proves what we believe.”** Christianity is holistic. Faith is not merely the mental assent to certain doctrines, however necessary and important that is. Rather, faith is designed to transform our lives and our behavior. If it is real, it will do that.

II. Implications of this.

Since “how we live proves what we believe,” we need to seriously assess our lives. Let me speak first to Christians and then to nonChristians. Here are 3 suggestions for those who call themselves Christians:

- **First, look at the broad course of your life.** By that I mean, if you are a Christian you should be able to see regular markers of changed behavior over the course of your Christian life to show you—and show everyone else—that you are, in fact, following Jesus. Another way you might do this is to ask yourself: “If I had never received Jesus as my Lord, would my life be any different?” If you can’t see how Christ has made a significant difference, then there is reason to question whether he really is your Lord.
- **Second, how are you doing on the two “good works” behavioral scales of Eph 2 and Jas 2?** Remember, the **Eph 2** scale is the more individualized “good works” that God has prepared beforehand for you to do. That can be vocational or anything else. Are you being led in ways in which you see his direction in your life? The **Jas 2** scale is the general scale of compassion and helping the poor and needy that applies to all Christians equally. Remember: **“faith w/o works is dead.”** What are you doing with your money, your time, and other resources in this regard?
- **Third, look to one area in your life where you know you have to make a change to do what Jesus says, and make that change.** It may be forgiving someone. It may be apologizing to someone. It may be stopping doing something you know you shouldn’t do or starting doing something you know you should do. I don’t know, but you know what it is. Whatever that one thing is: DO IT! That’s the test of faith.
- **And if you are not yet a Christian, but want to know if Jesus is real, that same test of obedience will help to reveal himself to you.** Rebecca Pippert used to work for Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship on college campuses. Let me read to you something from her book, *Out of the Saltshaker*. **[READ REBECCA PIPPERT “THESIS DESK” EXAMPLE]**

CONCL: Christianity is designed to be holistic. “How we live proves what we believe.” As we will see next week, our behavior is not the end of the story, but it is vitally important—because as we see the changes in our lives that come from obedience to Christ, we can go through our lives with confidence that—for all our flaws and errors—we are in the palm of his hand. We can have security and confidence and joy as we see what he is doing in us and thorough us. And other people will see too. And God will be glorified. That’s the way he planned it from before the foundation of the world.