

HEAD KNOWLEDGE VERSUS HEART REALITY

2 Thessalonians 1:8 (NKJV)

8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those **who do not know God**, and on those **who do not obey the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ. (emphasis mine)

In the church where I grew up there was a large poster placed prominently on the front wall with John 3:16 on it. I would look at that verse and in my rebellious heart say to myself, “*God can’t send me to hell because I believe.*” Little did I know that there is a kind of faith that doesn’t save (cf. Jn. 2:23-25, Lk. 8:13-15, Titus 1:16, Ja. 2:19). Years later I was truly converted. One day I was reading through Romans 10 and I saw that it is “with the **HEART** one believes unto righteousness.” (Rom. 10:10 – emphasis mine). It was an “aha moment”.

Earlier in life I had an intellectual assent but there was no heart commitment and consequently my life remained unchanged. Saving faith involves a response of obedience from the heart. The gospel is the TRUTH of the Person and Work of Christ that must be obeyed! The response demanded is “the obedience of faith”. A saving faith involves knowledge of gospel truth and obedient submission to it (cf. Rom. 10:2-3; 1 Tim. 2:4).

The book of Romans presents the most systematic presentation of the gospel found in the Bible. The theme of the book is THE GOSPEL OF GOD. “Bookends” for Romans are found in 1:5 and 16:26 where Paul emphasizes “obedience to the faith”.

Paul’s calling was “for obedience to the faith among all nations” (1:5). Paul’s mission was to share the gospel with people and call them to respond to it in faith. At the end of the book, he says that the gospel has been made manifest according to the command of God “for obedience to the faith” (16:26). The goal is to see people respond obediently to the gospel.

The key verses in Romans are 1:16-17. Lots of people quote verse 16. ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...”***

But the gospel believed effects a life-changing reality. Verse 17 goes with and flows out of verse 16. ***“For in it [the gospel believed] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”*** When the gospel is truly believed it ***“is revealed from faith to faith.”***

We are saved by faith but then saving faith colors the way we live. This is invariably true “from faith to faith”. The just all live by faith!

The gospel believed is revealed from faith to faith in the lives of those who live by faith (cf. Rom. 1:16-17). This is the fruit of “**obedience to the faith**” that Paul introduced in 1:5. In Romans 6:17 Paul says to the saints in Rome “**you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.**” Here Paul highlights the reality that a true saving faith involves an obedient response of the heart.

The doctrine in view is the gospel truth of Christ as developed in the book. It is the truth of Christ as Lord and Savior (cf. 3:24-25, 4:24-5:1, 6:23, 10:9-13). We are saved by faith alone, but it must be THE RIGHT KIND OF FAITH!

As Paul comes to the end of the book of Romans, he reiterates what God has done through him “*to make the Gentiles obedient*” (Rom. 15:18). In view again is the obedience of faith. Paul began the book of Romans by thanking God that the faith of the Roman Church was “*spoken of throughout the whole world*” (Rom. 1:7).

He concludes by saying, “*your obedience has become known to all*” (Rom. 16:19). In view throughout is the issue of obedience to the faith. For Paul, to come to a saving faith was to come to the place of obedience. It is this obedience of faith that is the ultimate issue in Romans! We are NOT saved by the obedience of works, but we are saved by the obedience of faith!

A true saving faith is not merely an intellectual issue, but rather an issue of the heart. It is an issue of the will. It involves choice. It is a matter of obedience. This is why the word BELIEVE in the gospel of John is always a verb. Saving faith involves an active response of the heart. It is the obedience of faith.

To truly call “**on the name of the LORD**” is to be saved (Rom. 10:13). This involves an obedience of the heart (cf. Rom. 10:9-10). Recognition of Christ as Lord and Savior involves OBEDIENCE - the OBEDIENCE OF FAITH. Those rejecting the gospel are “**the sons of disobedience**” (cf. Eph. 2:2, 5:6).

Even the demons believe intellectually, and they tremble emotionally. What is missing is a true heart commitment (cf. James 2:19).

The world is rushing towards judgment day (Acts 17:30-31). And what will be the great issue on that day? It will be the reality that those under judgment did NOT OBEY THE GOSPEL.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 (NKJV)

8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those WHO DO NOT KNOW GOD, and on those WHO DO NOT OBEY THE GOSPEL of our Lord Jesus Christ. (emphasis mine)