

MERE 'BELIEVER' OR BELIEVING FOLLOWER?

In many polls, a majority of Americans still claim to hold to some form of Christianity. Yet in one survey, when asked follow-up questions, only a small percentage of those claiming to be born again could be classified as having any credible “biblical worldview”. For example, only a very small percentage agreed that “Salvation is a gift of God and cannot be earned.” Survey upon survey and poll after poll repeatedly show that for all their professions, American “Christians” don’t generally live any different than the world. Conclusion: Most professing Christians are not really Christian.

Titus 1:16 (NKJV)

16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

In their daily activity, most professing Christians consistently commit spiritual treason. With their mouths, they profess Jesus as Lord, but with their actions, they demonstrate their true allegiance to sex, money, and self-fulfillment. In short, it’s all about THEM instead of being all about HIM!

The great scandal of our time is the development of a theology that says you can live like the world and still be a Christian. This great scandal says you can be a “believer” without being a follower of Christ. Just one problem: That is patently unbiblical and heretically false!

To be clear, we are not saved by following, but if we are saved, we will follow. We will not follow perfectly. The issue is not one of PERFECTION, but rather one of DIRECTION.

Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (cf. Jn. 10:27). That is characteristic of those who truly belong to Christ. First John 2:3 says, “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.” Liars claim to know Christ, but do NOT obey Him (cf. 1 Jn. 2:4). Faith obeys and follows!

One critical error of those in the “Easy Believism” camp is that they claim one can be a believer without being a disciple. I would argue that when you truly believe at that moment, you become a disciple...a fledgling disciple, to be sure, but a disciple nonetheless.

In the Great Commission text of Matt. 28:18-20, Jesus began by asserting that He has all authority in heaven and on earth (cf. 18). Building on that truth, He commands, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (v. 19).

Note it carefully! Jesus commands that they baptize DISCIPLES.

Without exception, in the NT, when people believed in Christ, they were IMMEDIATELY baptized. Were they baptized as mere believers, or were they baptized as disciples? Of course, they were baptized as disciples, just as Jesus instructed. They were immediately seen to be those who recognized Jesus’ sovereign authority (Matt. 28:18) and were baptized as “believing followers.” Even the fact of their baptism demonstrates the truth that they are now believing followers.

Lots of people want to claim to believe in Jesus, but the real issue is whether they have a faith that follows. Do they have a faith that seeks to obey? Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” (Mt. 7:21).

Many profess, but the genuine are those (to quote Jesus) who do the will of the Father. To believe on Christ as Lord and Savior is to recognize His sovereign authority! True believers have a FAITH THAT FOLLOWS!

We are saved by faith, but there is a kind of “faith” that doesn’t save! (cf. Ja. 2)

Terms such as obedience, surrender, commitment, submission, yielding, cost, hard, etc., when used in conjunction with discipleship, should be qualified. In saving faith, which results in discipleship, these concepts relate to the will (heart) and not to outward physical works.

Works are the fruit, not the means of salvation. BIBLICAL TERMINOLOGY IS SAFE TERMINOLOGY.

But we should note that saving faith itself is an act of obedience. Paul both begins and ends his great treatise of Romans by emphasizing “obedience to the faith” (Rom. 1:5; 6:17; 15:18-19; 16:25-26). We are not saved by the obedience of works but rather by the obedience of faith (cf. 2 Thess. 1:8-9). But having the obedience of faith then demonstrates itself in the obedience of works. A saving faith is a faith that works.

In salvation, Christ is believed on (acknowledged, recognized, appropriated) for WHO He is as LORD and SAVIOR! This results in the person becoming a disciple who is a believing learner/follower/adherent of

the Lord Jesus Christ. Recognition of Christ's Lordship authority involves abdicating self (dying to self) in recognition of His sovereign authority over all that I am and all that I have. Allegiance to Him is SUPREME! As one's God/Lord, He is also one's MASTER! By faith, He is embraced, and one enters into the lifelong school of learning from the Master Teacher.