

Does It Matter What We Believe?

FINGER POST No. 27

It matters a great deal if we are to accept the teaching of the Scriptures: and what other teaching is worthy of acceptance? A poet has written (and the people like the sentiment):

"For forms and creeds let senseless bigots fight,
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

It will be impossible to produce such a sentiment from the writings of the apostles. While "forms and creeds" are odious enough in the hands of bigotry, in their right place they are absolutely essential. As to forms, another leaflet in this series shows that baptism is a divinely-required form of obedience which any man will neglect at his peril.

"Creed" means belief, from credo, "I believe". The general sentiment is that it does not matter at all what we believe if only we are sincere. This sentiment is foolish, because wrong belief can lead to wrong actions. It is also dangerous, because it diverts attention from God's life-giving word. It really means that there is nothing in which we can finally believe at all. What we believe matters.

1. Because it has pleased God to make salvation conditional on believing certain things.

"It hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). The Gospel is "The power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). "That the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (Gal 3:22). "And by him, all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39).

2. Because it is required of us that the "certain things" be none other than those preached by Jesus and the apostles.

"Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). "It there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house" (2 John 10).

3. Because the apostles preached definite things styled gospel, or glad tidings, and therefore "the gospel" is the means to be employed in our salvation.

"The gospel which I preached unto you ... by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:1).

"The gospel is ... the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16).

4. Because the things so preached were the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and those things that concern the Lord Jesus Christ.

"When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12).

"Paul (at Ephesus) spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). Paul (at Rome) for two whole years preached the kingdom of God, and taught those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31).

5. Because disbelief of the gospel makes our condemnation certain.

"He that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words ... the word that I have spoken ... shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

6. Because ignorance of the gospel leaves men in a state of darkness in which salvation is impossible.

Other Gentiles "walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them" (Eph. 4:18). "At that time ye were without Christ, being strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope" (Eph. 2:12).

7. Because belief is faith, without which it is impossible to please God.

"Faith is the substance (or conviction) of THINGS HOPED FOR" (Heb. 11:1). "He staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief, but was strong in faith" (Rom. 4:20). "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6).

SOMETHING MORE

Is it, then, enough to believe, and rest content? By no means. The Gospel believed and obeyed in baptism, introduces a man to a position in which he can do what was before impossible - "work out his own salvation". To do this he must make the commandments of Christ the rule of his life; for, without this, the day will come when Christ will say: "I never knew you; depart from me" (Matt. 7:23).

"Give diligence to make your calling and election sure ... Add to your faith virtue ..." (2 Peter 1:5-10). "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). "Teach them (who believe) to

observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).