

Make Church a Part of Your Life

WEEKLY SERMONETTE

"Beyond Belief"

By Pastor Kirk Kasson, Almena Congregational Church

"Believe in God. Believe also in me." John 14.1

"You say you believe in God; you do well, but I tell you, even the demons believe and they shudder." James 2.19

"Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes shall have eternal life." John 6.47

Do these verses conflict? Demons believe? Believe in Me? He who believes shall have eternal life?

I'm afraid this phrase "believe in" has been the source of a lot of confusion, primarily because it can be used in two very different ways.

The first thing "Believe in" can mean is "mental assent to the existence of something". One can "believe in" dinosaurs without have ever seen one. The same can be said of believing in oxygen molecules, the tooth fairy, Bigfoot, baby pigeons, and people from Vermont; just because you've never seen something does not mean you can't believe it exists.

The second thing "believe in" can mean is "the act of putting one's trust in some idea or thing". (To help distinguish between the two, I will call this second meaning "BELIEF".) You can BELIEVE in "trickle-down economics" or your "insurance company or a healthy exercise program. If someone says "I don't BELIEVE IN" all these presidential reforms" they are not saying they don't believe the reforms exist, but that they don't BELIEVE (trust) they will work.

It get's trickier. The problem lies in the fact that sometimes you can use this phrase in either sense about the same thing.

One can say "I believe in global warming" to say they believe it exists, that the earth is getting warmer and that the cause is manmade. In the same sense a person can say he doesn't believe in global warming, either to say the earth is not getting warmer, or that the cause of any warming is not manmade. Either way, "believe in" refers to the assent that something exists.

However, if a person were to say "I BELIEVE IN global warming" in the second sense it would mean something entirely different. It would mean that he trusts global warming, that it is the answer to our problems, that he likes it. "Global warming" this person might rationalize, "will cause a rise in the earth's humidity, giving us a tropical planet such as the dinosaurs enjoyed. We will see the deserts flourish, and whatever coastal areas we lose will be replaced by habitable arc regions. Global warming is the answer to the

problems of overpopulation and hunger. I BELIEVE IN global warming!!" Do you see the difference?

If a woman says "I believe in God" we generally assume she believe that there is a God. If the same woman says "I believe in Barack Obama" we would assume she means not only that he exists, but that he is the right person for the job of president. It would be absurd to assume she meant "I believe Barack Obama exists."

And so, the apostle James says to his audience, "You say you believe in God,"

(in the first sense), "good and well. But you may have no more faith than a demon. You know as well as I do there are no atheist demons. The difference between a Christ follower and a demon is BELIEF, not belief. Start acting out your faith as a BELIEVER."

Let's imagine that a hero has returned from war. Each evening he runs along the river for his exercise. He sees the ice on the water's surface and after a prolonged cold spell comes to "believe" that the ice is strong enough to support his weight.

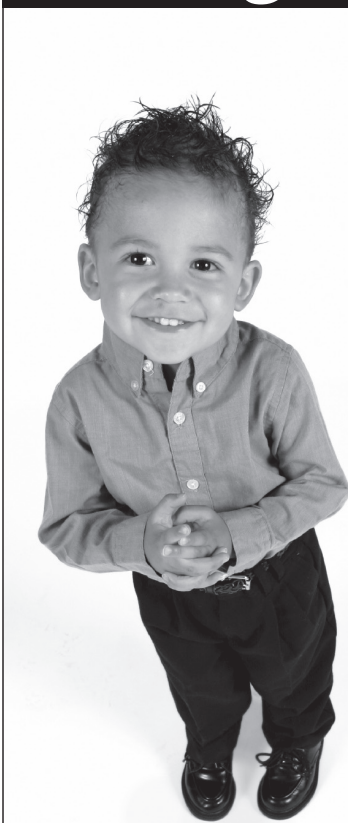
However, one day his belief is challenged to become BELIEF. He sees two punks assaulting an elderly woman on the opposite bank. He has no doubt that if he were on the other side he could handle the hoodlums and save her, but can he cross the river? First, his belief in the ice's strength may be unfounded; he may be incorrect in the existence of its sufficient strength. But we will never know unless he demonstrates BELIEF, trusting the ice enough to run across its surface to the other side.

What you must understand is that Jesus requires more than belief; he requires BELIEF. Thinking correct thoughts is of little value if you deny proper actions. Faith without works is dead.

When Jesus told his disciples "Believe in God, believe also in me" he was using this second sense of the phrase. "BELIEVE in God. BELIEVE also in me." He was not saying "Believe God exists, believe I exist", but "Trust God, trust me. Live according to me. Change your actions, your priorities, even your desires, to line up with what I am teaching you. Don't stay on your side of the river. Run across the ice to where I can use you. Trust me. BELIEVE IN me. If you do you will have eternal life."

Do you believe in God or BELIEVE in God? A Christ follower BELIEVES, a demon believes.

Setting an Example



In some instances a good example can make a great difference. As children, we learn by the example of those closest to us. As we grow, we live and interact with our peers according to those early observations. Our future is already greatly influenced while we are still young.

How can we set the best example for our young ones? There are some instructions in God's Word. In John 13:15, Jesus says, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." And in John 13:34 "... As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Wouldn't you like to ensure a better life for yourselves, your children, and the next generation? You can be a model of good deeds; begin setting the example. Worship as a family this week.

Sunday 2 Corinthians 3.1-18	Monday 2 Corinthians 4.1-15	Tuesday 2 Corinthians 4.16-5.10	Wednesday 2 Corinthians 5.11-6.13	Thursday 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.16	Friday Ephesians 1.1-23	Saturday Ephesians 2.1-22
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