

Faith

Happy Sabbath to all. Today's study is taken from the book "Lessons on Faith," and the chapter we are examining today, written by E. J. Waggoner, is entitled simply, "Faith." You cannot get more basic than that for a title or a topic, and yet the simplest concepts in doctrinal discussions are almost always the most important.

Waggoner begins with a number of Bible verses, and then goes into his study, so let us begin there, reading:

[quote]

"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Rom. 14:23.

Therefore it is that "being justified"--made righteous--"by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. 5:1.

Faith, not works, is that through which men are saved. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8, 9.

"Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay; but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Rom. 3:27, 28.

"The gospel excludes boasting, and boasting is a natural consequence of all attempts at justification by works; yet the gospel does not exclude works. On the contrary, works-- good works--are the one grand object of the gospel. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:10, with margin."

[endquote]

Waggoner explains these statements in his next paragraph, but one of the things that struck me is how clearly one of the characteristics of the "natural man" is pointed out here. We have been told, in inspiration, that all religions except for genuine Christianity are works-based. If that is the case, then we will be able to find some evidence of "boasting" in every one of them. The boasting may not be overt; in fact, it may be extremely subtle, but if you examine it deeply enough, you will find a core of "self" at the heart of even the most "devout" adherent of a religion whose members are not really born again.

This is often a very difficult thing to explain to people, who are used to looking at the outward appearance. I have spoken to individuals, for example, who were highly favorable to the CSDA message... until they brought up their favorite preacher, and asked what I thought of him. I was generally diplomatic... but at the same time, I made it clear that if they were not teaching victory over sin - without compromise - and if they were not advocating obedience to the Commandments (for many were not even Sabbath-keepers), they were not truly messengers of Christ.

Last New Moon, we examined a particular form of the Laodicean spirit that looks very much like dedicated, even zealous, Christianity. Individuals may be highly motivated, very active, and "talk a good game;" but when presented with the genuine Gospel, the genuine choice, the genuine issues facing Yahweh's Spirit-led people in this generation, they could literally not care less. They are lukewarm when

it comes to the matter of the Mark of The Beast vs. the Seal of Yah, and this identifies them, whatever else they may be, as Laodicean.

You see, they are “proud” of the work that is involved in their “calling,” and that kind of pride is very easy to disguise as conviction. But if their work is not, specifically, what Yah has called them to do, then their best efforts are like the work of Cain (and we looked at that a couple weeks ago as well), with a core of “self” and not of “faith.”

Waggoner continues, discussing the fact that despite justification by works involving boasting, the Gospel does not leave out the necessity of the convert being involved in “works.”

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“There is not the slightest contradiction here. The difference is between our works and God’s works. Our works are always faulty; God’s works are always perfect. Therefore, it is God’s works that we need in order to be perfect. But we are not able to do God’s works, for He is infinite, and we are nothing. For a man to think himself able to do God’s works is the highest presumption. We laugh when a five-year-old boy imagines that he can do his father’s work. How much more foolish for puny man to image that he can do the works of the Almighty.”

[endquote]

In this, we see the sin, and the foolishness, in works-based religions. The non-convert does not boast about God’s works, which are perfect, but rather his own works, which are flawed. If only they could see the irrational foundation of their beliefs, if only they could experience a moment of clarity and realize it, perhaps they would seek after the truth, instead of the tradition.

The individual who accepts a false religion will say, “I keep the Sabbath. I don’t eat unclean foods. I donate a lot of money to my ministry. Surely, if anyone deserves to go to Heaven, I do.”

If the thought is, “Because I have done X, I *deserve* Y,” that is evidence of a works-based faith. The phrase “I deserve” reveals the “self” at the core. The genuine Christian says, “I do not deserve anything I have, and yet Yah has blessed me with faith, and salvation, and joy. As a result, I am compelled, by a good conscience, and a holy Spirit, to labor in the service of my Lord, who gives all His servants good gifts.” Out of love for my fellow man, I want all of them to receive the same benefits and blessings that I have. But there is never any sense of “I am entitled to” anything. Anything that I CAN do for my Father in Heaven, He has given me the ability to do. I may boast, yes, but in His good works... never my own. As Paul says, “But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” (2Cor 10:17)

We continue...

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“Goodness is not an abstract thing. It is action, and action is found only in living beings. And since God alone is good, only His works are of any account. Only the man who has God’s works is righteous. But since no man can do God’s works, it necessarily follows that God must give them to us, if we are saved. This is just what He does for all who believe.

When the Jews in their self-sufficiency asked, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" Jesus replied, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. John 6:28, 29. Faith works. Gal. 5:6; 1 Thess. 1:3. It brings God's works into the believing one, since it brings Christ into the heart (Eph. 3:17), and in Him is all the fulness of God. Col. 2:9. Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8), and therefore God not only was but is in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. So if Christ dwells in the heart by faith, the works of God will be manifest in the life, "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Phil. 2:13."

[endquote]

The end, the result, of Yahweh's work is to reconcile "the world unto Himself." It is to save human beings from destruction. All the work that Yah does on the earth is in harmony with this great object, and the more closely we understand that, and are in harmony ourselves with that goal, the more His work will be stripped of its strangeness, and the more perfectly we are enabled to follow the Lamb.

And again, this can only be done if the focus is not on our work, on what we are able to do, but on His. It is when the ministry of spreading the Gospel is more important to us than reputation, income, family obligations, and personal freedom... that is when we know we are operating on faith.

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"How this is done is not within the range of our comprehension. We do not need to know how it is done, since we do not have it to do. The fact is enough for us. We can no more understand how God does His works, than we can do those works. So the Christian life is always a mystery, even to the Christian himself. It is a life hidden with Christ in God. Col. 3:3. It is hidden even from the Christian's own sight. Christ in man, the hope of glory, is the mystery of the gospel. Col. 1:27.

In Christ we are created unto good works which God has already prepared for us. We have only to accept them by faith. The acceptance of those good works is the acceptance of Christ. How long "before" did God prepare those good works for us? "The works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall"--i.e., they, the unbelieving, shall not--"enter into my rest." Heb. 4:3-5. But 'we which have believed do enter into rest.'"

[endquote]

We have heard it said that Yah knows "the end from the beginning." Before He created the world, He already knew the full course of history – every event, every triumph and trial of each human that has and will ever lived. A few weeks ago, Giselle shared with me a quote from the book *Prophets and Kings* that – at least to me – is extremely comforting in both its direct statement and its implications. It reads, "God has a purpose in sending trial to His children. He never leads them otherwise than they would choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose that they are fulfilling." [*Prophets and Kings*, Page 578]

I hope you each realize fully what this means. If we knew what Yah knew, and had His perfect character, we would make the same choices that He makes, including those choices that lead us to trials, to troubles, even at times to heartache and suffering. When we look back at what we have endured, we will be

thankful, and we will acknowledge that we ourselves would have done the same thing, even though we did not fully understand those choices at the time. But until we have that insight, and that hindsight, we must trust that this is indeed so. We must walk by faith.

Continuing, where Waggoner addresses a specific, but related, issue...

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“The Sabbath, therefore--the seventh day of the week--is God’s rest. God gave the Sabbath as a sign by which men might know that He is God and that He sanctifies. Eze. 20:12. 20. Sabbath-keeping has nothing whatever to do with justification by works, but is, on the contrary, the sign and seal of justification by faith. It is a sign that man gives up his own sinful works and accepts God’s perfect works. Since the Sabbath is not a work but a rest, it is the mark of rest in God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

“No other day than the seventh day of the week can stand as the mark of perfect rest in God, because on that day alone did God rest from all His works. It is the rest of the seventh day, into which He says the unbelieving cannot enter. It alone of all the days of the week is the rest day, and it is inseparably connected with God’s perfect work.

On the other six days, including the first day of the week, God worked. On those days we also may and ought to work. Yet on every one of them we also may and ought to rest in God. This will be the case if our works are "wrought in God." John 3:21. So men should rest in God every day in the week, but the seventh day alone can be the sign of that rest.”

[endquote]

When I was a mainstream SDA, we had a saying, I think I first heard it said by Doug Bachelor, that Adventists are often accused of basing their faith on “works” for keeping the Sabbath, when what we are trying to do is to get people NOT to work on that sacred day. It’s a good point, but as a CSDA we can appreciate an even deeper meaning to this matter, and that is the issue of the Sabbath also commemorating Yahweh’s own rest. The “rest” at the end of Yah’s labor was not one of restoring health or energy after exertion. It was not the natural consequence of labor. The rest into which our Father entered was a celebratory one, in which the work was honored for its perfection.

In the same way, a Sabbath-keeping Christian honors Yah’s work in his or her heart by ceasing to work on the holy day. We rest from our labors, and we draw near to our Father, not because we are justified by doing so, but because we are celebrating justification... the work that is both perfect and perfect-ing. We can do nothing to save ourselves, and so we do “nothing,” in a sense, and let our spirits commune with the Father and Son. The day, and the blessing placed upon the day, is the seal of perfect-ness, foreshadowing the Seal of Yah placed upon us when we settle irreversibly into the Gospel truth.

We continue.

[quote]

“Two things may be noted as self-evident conclusions of the truths already set forth. One is that the setting apart of another day than the seventh, as the sign of acceptance of Christ and of rest in God

through Him is in reality a sign of rejection of Him. Since it is the substitution of man's way for God's way, it is in reality the sign of man's assumption of superiority above God and of the idea that man can save himself by his own works. Not everyone who observes another day has that assumption, by any means. There are many who love the Lord in sincerity and who accept Him in humility, who observe another day than that which God has given as the sign of rest in Him. They simply have not learned the full and proper expression of faith. But their sincerity and the fact that God accepts their unfeigned faith does not alter the fact that the day which they observe is the sign of exaltation above God. When such hear God's gracious warning they will forsake the sign of apostasy as they would a plague-stricken house."

[endquote]

Although Waggoner is speaking here of the weekly Sabbath, we may well apply it to any controverted doctrine. And indeed, haven't we all been asked questions like the following? "Don't sincere Christians keep Sunday as the Lord's day?" "Don't sincere Christians disbelieve the Victory over Sin doctrine?" "How come must sincere Christians have never even heard of the New Moon?" "Are you saying that a sincere Christian will be lost if he or she doesn't join the Covenant you are teaching about?"

The fact that Yah will accept the worship of a sincere Christian is a testament to our Father's love, not to the validity of the faulty practice, OR to the sincerity of the misled Christian. We must not forget that; human sincerity is NOT a sanctifying force. It does not have the power to make anything that is unclean into something that is clean. Our Father may receive sincere worship given in ignorance of His proper will, but this does not justify that ignorance. It does not make a lack of knowledge worthy of either emulation or acceptance. In other words we, who know better, have a responsibility to teach the truth, regardless of what most sincere Christians may accept as "the truth."

We may well answer those questions we are often asked with, "Well, let's find out," and then we tell them the truth and see how they react. Their reaction will reveal their level of sincerity, and no matter what, our Father will be glorified.

We continue...

[quote]

"The other point is that people cannot be forced to keep the Sabbath, inasmuch as it is a sign of faith and no man can be forced to believe. Faith comes spontaneously as the result of hearing God's word. No man can even force himself to believe, much less can he compel somebody else. By force a man's fears may be so wrought upon that he may say he believes and he may act as though he believed. That is to say, a man who fears man rather than God may be forced to lie. But "no lie is of the truth." Therefore since the Sabbath is the sign of perfect faith, it is the sign of perfect liberty--"the glorious liberty of the children of God"--the liberty which the Spirit gives, for the Sabbath, as a part of God's law, is spiritual. And so, finally, let no one deceive himself with the thought that an outward observance of even God's appointed rest day--the seventh day--without faith and trust in God's word alone, is the keeping of God's Sabbath. "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

[endquote]

That is the end of Waggoner's study, and I like the way that he uses one or two specific issues, such as the Sabbath, to highlight an important element of faith. I would, however, like to address one sentence because, though it is true, it may potentially lead to some confusion in those who are studying the subtler points of our faith.

Waggoner states, "Faith comes spontaneously as the result of hearing God's word. No man can even force himself to believe, much less can he compel somebody else."

While it is true that we cannot "force" ourselves to believe something, we can – freely and without force – *choose* to believe something. The distinction here may be subtle, so I will try to simplify it. If someone said to me, "The grass is purple," I would have a hard time believing that. All the evidence I have points to the contrary, including the evidence of my senses, and the knowledge I have of "grass" from text books and general knowledge. If I tried to make myself believe that grass is purple, because there is a conflict with evidence that I have accepted, there would be quite a bit of "force" that I would need to employ...

And even then, and I could make myself SAY that grass is purple, I would deep-down know that I was merely trying to convince myself of a lie. I have used "force" on myself in an attempt to ignore evidence, and this will naturally fail.

But now, if I am between two opinions, between two "truths" for which the evidence can be legitimately seen in more than one way, then I have a choice. We can choose to believe, for example, that Yahweh created the world a few thousand years ago in several short events of divine power. We can also choose to believe that life developed, on its own, over millions of years. Because we do not have evidence of our senses regarding either of these things, and because the information we have about the past is subject to interpretation in a number of ways, we have a choice here that does not involve "forcing" ourselves to reject or ignore anything. The consistent Christian will choose to accept the Bible as a source of legitimate information about the past. Similarly, we can choose to believe statements about the future, such as, "In Christ, I will commit no sin."

One of the things that people do, when they do not WANT to choose a certain option, is to seek to avoid evidence that would free them from their suppositions. To use Waggoner's example of the Sabbath, some of you may recall an incident that I related to the Church several months ago.

I was invited to a Bible study by a Sunday-keeping Church here in my home town. They were having some sort of door-to-door drive, and of course... I accepted the opportunity to discuss the Scriptures. So, I attended an afternoon session, where they were doing one-on-one conversations with their evangelists. I seem to have pulled the oldest fellow there, and from some things I overheard before he got there, it seems like he was held in fairly high regard by the others.

We began by speaking about the need for faith, and the work of the Apostles, and a number of other things about which we basically agreed. But we began to have problems when he suggested that after the apostles, there was no more "voice" of God directly on the earth. I got him to admit, after some back-and-forth, that it was, in fact, possible to have latter-day prophets. Then we got into the Sabbath, and it went as such discussions typically go. Near the end, when he realized he could not convince me that a "new testament" did not mean a "new law," I asked him, "So, if I could show you a Bible verse, in the New

Testament, that reveals the Christians were keeping the seventh-day Sabbath sacred AFTER Christ's death, you would not accept that verse?"

He said, "No."

I wasn't sure I heard him correctly, so I asked him again, "Let me clarify this. You are saying that if I showed you a verse showing that Sabbathkeeping was a practice kept after the cross, you would reject that verse. Is that correct?" I was thinking, of course, of Luke's verse where the women preparing the Messiah's body rested on the Sabbath "according to the commandment," as it's stated quite plainly.

He said, "That's correct."

I said, "Well, then I don't think there is anything you can teach me." And I left. In hindsight, I could also have added that He shouldn't be teaching ANYBODY under the guise of a Bible-believing Christian... but what I want to point out here is that he deliberately rejected evidence, because it would have freed him from his NEED to believe in a Sunday Sabbath.

Those who are not born-again, I should point out, are afraid of true freedom. They are comfortable in their traditions, and in their sins, and were we to convince them that they could be free, and that they could truly be responsible for their own actions, with no excuses, they would be terrified. We have seen it so many times... but the fear is often disguised, as anger, as indifference... The cure for that fear is faith. The cure for bondage is faith. We have trust in our Father to lead us, and the work that we do, as a result, is worthy of "boasting," because it is not our work at all, not our flawed, limited work. It is our Father's workmanship, and it is perfect.