

True Believers

by Chuck Smith

The sermon teaches that true salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not through rituals or works.

Duration: 36:12

Scripture: Joel 2:13, Matthew 23:25

Topics: "Belief"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that God is not concerned with outward appearances, but rather with the condition of our hearts. He compares circumcision and baptism, stating that just as being circumcised does not guarantee salvation, being baptized multiple times does not either. The preacher highlights the importance of tearing our hearts instead of our garments as a sign of repentance and turning to God. He concludes by emphasizing the simplicity of salvation through believing in the gospel message of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and that it is a gift that cannot be earned or deserved.

Transcript

Acts chapter 15. Paul and Barnabas have returned to their home church, that is the church in Antioch, from their first missionary journey. They had gone from Antioch to the island of Crete, throughout the island of Crete, then on over into what is present-day Turkey, more or less into the heart of the country, which at, of course, that time was sort of the frontiers, you might say, of the world, they were like the Wild West, not much law, not much order, but they carried the gospel and established churches throughout that region.

Now they've come back to Antioch, to their home church, and they are again ministering to this church, which is comprised mainly of Gentile believers, but it's a combination, Jewish and Gentile believers, and so we read that there were certain men which came down from Judea, and they taught the brethren and said, except you are circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. Now in the church in Jerusalem, which was comprised mainly of Jews, there were those who held to the Jewish belief that it was impossible for a Gentile to be saved. Only Jews would be saved, and thus, to be saved, you would have to become a Jew, and to become a Jew, to proselytize and to become a Jew, one of the actions that had to be taken was that of circumcision.

And so these people were coming from the church in Jerusalem, and they were creating a division in the church there in Antioch, teaching the people that unless you've been circumcised according to Moses, you can't be saved. Now today, we have those who are saying, unless you have been baptized after the

manner of the church of Christ, you are not saved. Others who are saying, unless you have been baptized in the name of Jesus only, you are not saved.

These are the same type of people who came to the church in Antioch and created division. They are really the same differences. The one is preaching circumcisonal regeneration, the other is teaching baptismal regeneration.

But both of them are teaching that salvation comes by keeping rituals. But a ritual is a work, and thus, both are teaching salvation by works. There are those who say that if you do not worship on Saturday, you're not saved.

They declare that Sunday worship is the mark of the beast, and all that worship on Sunday are worshipping the mark of the beast, and thus, there's no hope of their salvation. This also is salvation by works, which should lead us to the question, how am I saved? And to this we should go to the scriptures for the answer. Paul, writing to the Ephesians said, by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves.

It is a gift of God and not of works, lest any man should boast. When the Philippian jailer came to Paul trembling, and he asked him, what must I do to be saved? Paul answered him, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. He didn't say believe on Jesus Christ and be circumcised, or believe on Jesus Christ and be baptized, or keep the Sabbath.

He just said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Writing to Titus, Paul said, it's not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, he has saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. If there were works that we could do that could earn us salvation, then it would no longer be a gift of God.

But salvation is God's gift. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. As a gift, it can't be earned.

It can't be deserved. It can only be received. There is a great similarity in the scriptures between the rite or the ritual of circumcision and the ritual of baptism, because they both signify the same thing.

The Bible teaches that the life of the Spirit is the superior life. The Bible teaches that to live after the flesh is death, but to live after the Spirit is life. And you can't really do both.

You have to either live after the Spirit or live after the flesh. So the circumcision, the cutting off of the flesh, the ritual that God gave to Abraham to identify those who would live by faith in God, the family of Abraham. God gave this ritual and it was indicating that they were to be a spiritual race of people.

They were to be a people who would live and walk after the Spirit, rather than living and walking after the flesh. Baptism symbolized the death of the old nature. No longer going to live according to the desires and all of my own nature, but I'm going to live after the Spirit.

And so baptism was saying the old nature that once ruled, I reckon that to be dead. I'm going to bury that so that I will live now a life after the Spirit. I'm going to live a spiritual life rather than a life after the flesh.

So they both symbolized the same thing. One to the Old Testament believers and the second to the New Testament believers. But basically it was a renouncing of the life of the flesh and a committing of myself to live after the Spirit.

And so these rituals, both of them symbolized the same thing. Now, as Paul was writing to the Romans concerning, and to the Jews actually, concerning the ritual of circumcision that they held so important. In fact, you see, they had come down and they said, look, unless you've been circumcised after the manner of Moses, you can't be saved.

And so they were making salvation dependent upon the ritual of circumcision. And so Paul, when he was writing to the Romans concerning circumcision, he said it profits if you keep the law. But if you're a breaker of the law, then your circumcision is just as though you weren't circumcised.

Thus, a few questions. Does circumcision make you spiritual? And of course, we realize, no, the ritual doesn't make me spiritual. It is a symbol of what I should be, but it doesn't make me spiritual.

Does that mean that everyone who has been circumcised is spiritual? No. There have been many who have been circumcised who live like the devil. And thus, the same questions.

Does baptism make me spiritual? Does that mean that everyone who has been baptized is dead to the old nature, to the old flesh? And again, we realize the answer is no. The ritual doesn't do it. The ritual is only a symbol for what I trust God to do in me and for me.

What about the person who is living a spiritual life, yet they have never been circumcised? Does this mean then that they are really unspiritual? Is spirituality dependent upon circumcision? And take it with baptism. What if a person is living a deeply spiritual life and yet they've never been baptized? Does this mean that they are unspiritual, not saved? Is spirituality or salvation dependent upon baptism? Is circumcision an outward or an inward experience? Is baptism an outward or an inward experience? Writing to the Romans, Paul said, chapter two, beginning with verse 28, for he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart and in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Circumcision in the scripture, though it was a physical ritual, yet the true circumcision was in the heart. And God said in Deuteronomy, circumcise therefore your heart and be no more stiff necked. And the Lord thy God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your children to love the Lord thy God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live.

What is God most interested in, your outward man or your inward man? Through the prophet Joel, God said, now rend your heart and not your garments and turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness, and it repents him of the evil. Now to show despair hopelessness, grief, they would tear their clothes. God said, no, don't tear your clothes, tear your heart.

God is interested in what's going on inside, in your heart. Jesus said, woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites, for you make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within you are full of extortion and excess. You blind Pharisees, cleanse that which is within the cup and platter that the outside of them may be clean also.

Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites, for you are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so, ye also outwardly appear righteous unto man, but within you're full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Now what would you say God is most interested in? How you look on the outside or how you look on the inside? As God looks at you today, is God looking at your outward appearance or is God looking on your heart? You

remember when Samuel came down to the house of Jesse to anoint one of his sons to replace Saul as king.

The oldest son Eliab came in, handsome, big, and Samuel thought to himself, surely this is the one that God has anointed as king. And the Lord said to Samuel, look not on his countenance or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord sees not as man sees, for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

Tonight the Lord is looking at our hearts. There are those who may appear very righteous unto men, but God's interested in your heart and what's going on inside. Now what is true about circumcision is true about baptism in water.

It's possible for you to be baptized a hundred times in a hundred different ways and still not be saved. The ritual of baptism cannot save you. You say, oh gotcha pastor, because Peter wrote, the like figure wherein to even baptism doth also now save us.

And you just said baptism doesn't save, where Peter plainly said, baptism does save us. Well I would just encourage you to read the rest of that verse. You see that's the problem.

Many people stop right there, where Peter said, whereas baptism doth now save us, but they don't read the rest of the verse. As Peter went on he said, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God. In other words, not an outward baptism, but the inward baptism, the good conscience towards God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

True baptism is something that takes place within the heart of an individual. And if it hasn't happened in your heart, all of the dunking in water, all of the formulas that might be declared as being baptized are not going to save you. It's what has happened in your heart, in your relationship with the Lord that brings salvation.

Now are you saying, well then are you saying that we shouldn't be baptized? No. You definitely should be baptized if you receive Jesus Christ. And it's a beautiful, beautiful experience.

But it doesn't save you. But it is just a beautiful symbolism that old life that was governed by my flesh, that controlled me, that old life, I reckon that to be dead, crucified with Christ. I want to live a life that's governed by the Spirit.

I want Jesus to rule within my heart. I want to live a new life in Christ. And so if any man is in Christ, he's a new creation.

The old things are passed away, everything becomes new. Know ye not that your old man was crucified with Christ? That the body of sin should no longer reign as king. So what do you do with a dead corpse? You bury it.

So baptism, the symbolism is as many as you as were baptized were buried with Christ in the water of baptism. So it is a beautiful thing to have this new life in Jesus Christ and to determine to live after the Spirit and to follow after Jesus. And so to go down and say, Lord, that old life that I once lived governed by my flesh with all of its meanness, Lord, that I reckon to be dead.

And I want to bury it, Lord. I want to just bury it. And to go under the water as going into the grave and just thinking it's dead.

It's over. The old life governed by the flesh, it's over. I'm going to live now in the newness of life in Christ Jesus.

And so even as the symbol of being buried with Christ, coming up out of the water is risen with Christ and living now that newness of life in Christ Jesus, the risen resurrected life. And thus it becomes an extremely meaningful and beautiful experience. But going down to the ocean and going into the water, if it hasn't happened in your heart, it's not going to happen in the ritual.

If it hasn't happened before the ritual, the ritual is meaningless. And so baptism doesn't save, but it is just an outward kind of symbolism of what the Lord has done within your heart, living now a new life as we follow after the Spirit and live after Jesus Christ. Paul was very forthright when he wrote to the Galatians on this subject.

He said, Galatians 5, stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I, Paul, say unto you, that if you are circumcised, and that is circumcised for the purpose of being righteous or in order to be saved, he said, Christ shall profit you nothing. Now again, circumcision, baptism, I believe that they are interchangeable.

For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. And Christ has become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are who are justified by the law, you have fallen from grace. If you're seeking for a ritual to save you, a work to save you, because rituals are works, then you have fallen from grace.

For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but it is the faith that works by love. It is my faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, where he made atonement for my sins, and that is sufficient for my salvation. And so I put my trust and my faith fully in Jesus Christ and his work for me.

Now, having put my faith in him, having surrendered my life to him, I now seek to please him. And thus I seek to obey his commands. And because he commanded salvation, or he commanded rather baptism, then I submit and I am baptized because I love him and he has commanded me to be baptized.

But the baptism doesn't save me. I was already saved. Otherwise, baptism is meaningless.

I received an email just the other day from some fellow who is local, who said that he met some people from Calvary Chapel, and they didn't seem to understand baptism. And he's been a disciple now for six years. And I knew where he was coming from.

I knew that he is no doubt one of the disciples of Christ, and he was talking about baptismal regeneration. And I congratulated him for being a Christian for six years, thought that was tremendous. I told him I have been a disciple of Christ for well over 60 years, and I learned a few things in that time.

But I did not, and I don't, you know, people hung up on things. I told him I discovered that it doesn't really have any value in arguing over scriptures, and foolish and unlearned questions avoid the only gender strife. And his whole tome was that, you know, purpose was to gender strife.

And this is for strife. Certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren and said, except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. What was the result? When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with him.

I mean it turned into a big argument, and those things usually do. And you don't convince the other one that you're right, and they don't convince you. It's just a big argument, and it's of no value.

But I did point out that if baptism was essential for salvation, I can't understand the Apostle Paul. When he wrote to the Corinthians, and he said to them, I thank God that I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius, lest they should say that I baptized in my own name. And I also baptized the household of Stephanas, but beside I know not whether I baptized any other.

And Paul is thanking God for this. Now if baptism were essential for salvation, Paul would be blasphemous to say, I thank God I didn't baptize any of you, except Crispus and Gaius, the house of Stephanas. If there's any, I don't remember them.

And so you see, immediately it shows that that isn't essential for salvation, or Paul would be speaking in a very blasphemous way. But Paul said, for Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel. You see, salvation is in the gospel.

The gospel, Paul said that I preach unto you, how that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day. This is the gospel. And to believe the gospel is to be saved.

And Paul recognized that that's sufficient, just believing the simple message of the gospel, that Christ died for your sins. That though he was buried, he rose again the third day. For if thou shalt confess with thy mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

And as I said, once I am saved, once I've come into the family of God, the knowledge of Jesus, surrender my life to Him, I want to do those things that please Him. And so I am baptized. But I'm not baptized to be saved, I'm baptized because I am saved.

And, and, and that's, that's the big issue here. So, it caused problems, it caused divisions. And we are told to mark those which cause division.

We read in the Scriptures that there are six things that God hates, and yet seven are an abomination. And one of those is those that would cause discord among brethren. So we'll talk about divisions in the church in our next lesson.

And differences are going to come and offenses are going to come, but make sure that we're not the ones who bring the offense or, or the division. Father, we thank you for the wonderful experience of baptism. Realizing, Lord, that you've done a beautiful work within us.

And that old life of the flesh that once ruled is reckoned dead. We want to live, Lord, after the Spirit. We want to walk in the Spirit.

We want to be led by the Spirit. And so we want, Lord, to put an end to the old life, to bury it, and to rise in the newness of life in Christ. To be filled with the Spirit and to walk in the Spirit.

And we thank you, Lord, for that wonderful privilege and blessing. Lord, we do pray that those that want to make a big issue and just argue and are looking for some kind of a dispute, Lord, let them go someplace else. And just keep us free, Lord, in your love and walking in your love and walking after the Spirit.

And Lord, we just rejoice in what you are and what you've done for us. That inward work, and may it work itself out from us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Shall we stand? One of the big differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament, in the Old Testament, of course, the Old Covenant was the law. And if you do these things, I will be a God unto you and you shall be my people. But it was in the doing of the law.

Now, it was hoped that by the doing of the law outwardly, it would work itself within the individual. But it was the outward working in. The New Testament, the work is done within and it works its way out then in my life, outer life.

But it is a work that begins within and goes out rather than the other, the Old Testament, from without working its way in. By keeping the law, working its way into a position of righteousness. New Testament starts the other way.

It starts within the righteousness, imputed, and then works its way out in my life. And so, hopefully, as the Spirit of God has worked in me, it will be worked out through me and in the actions and so forth that come from what has happened within my heart. Tonight, the pastors are here in the front to pray for you who might have a need this evening, no matter what it is.

Our God is able to supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. And that just covers a wide gamut of things. And so, if you are in need of prayer tonight and you just feel like you want someone to just agree with you and join with you in prayer over a specific issue, maybe it's healing, maybe it's finances, maybe it's problems within the family, and maybe it's a problem at the job, maybe in school or whatever, they're here to pray for you.

And so, we would encourage you, as we're dismissed, make your way forward and let them join with you in prayer that you might see the wonderful work of God wrought in those difficult places in your life. And may the Lord be with you, watch over you, bless and keep you, and may you just abound in all things in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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