

BEGINNING PRINCIPLES

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Terms commonly heard to describe our Christian walk are **repentance, salvation, baptism, faith & works and grace**. When I hear one of these words used by a brother or sister, I often ask what they mean. For instance, “We need to have faith?” What is faith? Almost without exception the answer comes back, “Believing.” Is this how you understand faith? I would like to suggest that each of the words mentioned above involve a concept rarely taught by shepherds, and little understood by the flock. However, understanding the concepts are important building blocks which form the foundation on which we are to build our spiritual house. Notice how the writer of Hebrews rebukes the church of his day:

Heb 5: 11. *Of whom we have many things to say (about Christ), and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. 12. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the **first principles** of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat (solid food). 13. For every one that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. 14. But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age (spiritually mature), *even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.* (Comments added for clarity).*

The underlined portions emphasize some of the points made. Apparently, many had reached a point of no longer advancing in truth. What does he mean, “dull of hearing?” He is saying their spiritual ears are not listening. The words “first principles” can also be expressed as “beginning elements”, meaning the basic, or beginning principles of the Christian faith. The writer names some of them in the next chapter:

Heb 6: 1. *Therefore leaving the (beginning) principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, 2. Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.* He calls these ‘beginning principles’, or ‘milk’ - stuff for spiritual babies. Do you understand from the Bible, the five concepts mentioned in paragraph one?

Jesus said: *...whosoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon [the] rock:* (Matt 7:24), [Greek]. In Ephesians chapter two, Paul wrote that the foundation of the church was the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. What the apostles and prophets wrote gives us our foundation by the inspiration of the Spirit of Jesus. As we study the Bible we are to follow the impressions of the Spirit. And don’t be surprised if some of those impressions contradict some of your thoughts and things you have been taught.

REPENTANCE

Jesus made a very interesting statement regarding repentance: Matt 9: 13. *But go ye and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* But I thought scripture says ALL are sinners! (Rom 3:23). Who are the righteous of whom Jesus is speaking? It is the Pharisee. It is the person who thinks there is nothing wrong with self, so they will not listen. So, the Lord is calling ALL to repentance, but some are not listening. What is repentance?

Heb 12: 16. *Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. 17. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

Remember the story of Esau, how he had more interest in his hunting and bowl of soup than the birthright? The marginal reference says that Esau ‘found no way to change his mind’. His habit of seeking his own way had become so ingrained in his thinking that he could not change. So **repentance** is a change in the direction of your thinking. (Did you know your feet represent the direction of your thinking?)

I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, said the Lord. The Jews were literally offering sacrifices for their righteousness. They had forgotten the symbol of what the sacrifice represented. Today, we may have many sacrifices for self. For instance, I have worked lots of overtime so I could make more money and buy more toys. I allowed my wife to work too, instead of raising our child. Have mercy on self and others. Love your neighbor as self. What ever you do, do for the glory of God.

Rom 12: 1. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.* 2. *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* Repentance is the beginning of your transformation into the image of God.

SALVATION

2 Cor 7: 10. *For godly sorrow works (brings forth) repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world works (brings forth) death.* There is sorrow and trials either way we choose to go. However, when we choose to follow God, He will allow trials to teach us spiritual lessons and direct our paths. Several years ago I was seriously seeking an alternative way of earning a living which would free up more time to do the Lord’s work. A series of major and traumatic events took place in my life that put me into the ministry. Only by looking back could I see the hand of the Lord in those things. The Lord was directing my path so as to advance me in spiritual understanding.

So, ...*godly sorrow works (brings forth) repentance to salvation...* Since repentance is a ‘change of mind’, then **salvation is mind re-formation**. Thoughts produce feeling, feeling causes action... Every thing we say or do begins with a thought - whether conscious or subconscious, voluntary or involuntary. If our way of thinking changes, then what we do outwardly will change. Isa 55: 7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* 8. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.* 9. *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.* Memorize these verses. They will be with you forever.

BAPTISM

Mark 1: 4. *John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.* This scripture is rich with spiritual meaning! The word ‘baptize’ is a English transliteration of the Greek - baptizo. The English meaning is ‘immersion’. Yes, John was literally immersing people in the wilderness area of the Jordan. But spiritually, John was immersing the people with spiritual concepts (water) and changing their minds (repentance) for deliverance (remission) from their sins (a corrupted way of thinking). The wilderness is the spiritual place to which we come when we turn from the world (Egypt). We wander in darkness and confusion until such time God can correct our understanding (enter the promised land). The we begin to kill the enemies in the land (sin problems between our ears).

Matt 3: 11. *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:* John was a figure of the ‘spirit of Elijah’. As a baby we began the process of mind reformation, but we did not recognize that it was the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Jesus Christ calling us. While we might have answered an altar call by the pastor, our hearts were being pricked by the Holy Spirit. However, there comes a time when we wake up to the fact that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the Son of God (2 Cor 3:17). It is the new mind set the Father perfected in His only begotten Son (Heb 5:8-9). Then, and only then, can God begin to immerse us with the mind of His Son (Phil 2:5). The fire represents the trials which the Lord puts us through to remove the dross (sins) from the silver and gold. So baptism in water is symbol of immersion in spiritual things. Literal baptism is only a symbol for the real stuff. Which had you rather have?

FAITH & WORKS

There is gross confusion in understanding of faith and works. The following two examples appear to contradict each other. Yet, these statements by different men will serve to teach the lesson of faith by which we are to live.

Jam 2: 21. *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22. See thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23. And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. 24. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

Rom 4: 1. *What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? 2. For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. 3. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. 4. Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. 5. But to him that works not, but believeth on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

James and Paul both quote Genesis 15:6, using Abraham as example of faith. Yet, James says faith must have works; Paul says you are not justified by works. This is not a contradiction. They are both right! James is stating that the works Abraham did was based on his faith, and perfected that faith. Paul is speaking of Abraham’s works of the flesh (a son by Hagar, etc). This should generate some questions about the concept of faith. What is faith? How do we obtain it? Works, we know, is outward. Is faith outward, or inward?

We walk by faith, not by outward appearance, 2 Cor 5:7; The heart is cleansed by faith, Acts 15:9; We are sanctified (cleansed, purified) by **faith that is in Christ**, Acts 26:18; Rom 5:1. Notice it is **faith that is in Christ** by which we are sanctified. **Gal 2:16:** *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith⁽⁴¹⁰²⁾ of Jesus Christ, even we have believed⁽⁴¹⁰⁰⁾ in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ...* ‘Believed’ is a verb (*pisteuo*⁴¹⁰⁰) derived from the noun of ‘faith’ (*pistis*⁴¹⁰²). So the function of faith is to cleanse the heart of sin, and we believe in Jesus to be made righteous by His faith. Believing is not faith, but a result of faith. And saving faith comes from Jesus Christ.

Note: Some versions of the Bible render Galatians 2:16 as ‘faith in Jesus Christ’. This is a blatant error and one source of much of the confusion.

So, if we are saved by Christ's faith, what is it? Matt 16:5-9: *5 And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. 6 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. 7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. 8 Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? 9 Do ye not yet understand,...* Jesus was speaking to the disciples in a figurative language which they did not perceive. He described their condition as of "little faith" or "lack of understanding". Notice the parallel in Mk 8:17-18: *17 And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? 18 Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?* The lack of faith is the lack of understanding, which also Jesus equates to a "hard heart". Additionally, He questioned their spiritual eyesight and hearing.

So faith = understanding. And the understanding by which we are saved is that of Jesus Christ. So, when we read and study the Bible we are to seek God to send the Spirit of Jesus. Phil 1: 19. *For I know that this shall turn to my salvation (mind reformation) through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ...* Remember the quote from Isa 55:7-9? It is God's thoughts we need, and it is His Son who reveals the thoughts. Therefore, if we have the faith of Christ (his way of thinking) our works will not be of the flesh (sin nature), but of the Spirit of Christ (his divine nature).

GRACE

When asked, "What is God's grace?," the most popular answer seems to be "Unmerited favor." True, but there is a much deeper meaning. Scripture implies meanings like favor, pity, mercy, compassion and acceptance. These attributes can be applied between humans as well. But what of statements like, "spirit of grace" (Zech 12:10); words are gracious (Eccl 10:12); instruction as an ornament of grace; and word of His grace (Acts 20:32). Grace seems closely related to faith, repentance, salvations, etc.

Eph 2: 8 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:* Grace is not something we get on our own. It is a gift from God because of His love for humanity. It is also God who gives us repentance (Acts 5:31; 11:18; Rom 2:4). It seems reasonable to assume, since all good things come from God, that salvation, truth, faith and glory are also gifts. 1 Cor 1: 4. *I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of [the] God which is given you [in] Jesus Christ; [Greek].* Grace came by Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17). God's favor, pity, mercy and compassion were manifested in the giving of His only Son, full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14).

Rom 5: 1. *1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: 2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* Not only are we 'justified by faith', but we have access to grace through the faith of Christ. Now we know that faith is understanding. So it is by Christ's understanding that we have access to grace.

Eccl 10: 12. *The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious.....* Pr 22: 11. *He who loves pureness of heart, grace is on his lips.....* (Hebrew Interlinear). Jesus Christ is the "wisdom" of God (1 Cor 1:24, 30). Pr 4: 7 *Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. 8 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honor, when thou dost embrace her. 9 She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.* Grace, faith, glory are synonymous. The ornament of grace and crown of glory have to do with the thoughts. Christ's experiences are His riches which we receive when we hear and do (Mat 7:24).

The 'spirit of grace' is the spirit of Christ poured upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Zech 12:10), who are inhabitants of Christ's way of thinking. It is by His spirit that the spirit of man is formed within (Zech 12:1). Acts 20: 32. *And now, brethren, I commend you to [the] God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.* Jesus is the word (Jn 1:1), and through Him we are reconciled to the Father to receive an inheritance as sons and daughters by adoption. What are we getting when we receive the 'word of his grace'?

2 Pet 1: 2. *Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,*
 3. *According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:* 4. *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* Verse two is saying that 'grace and peace' are to be multiplied to you through the Father's and the Son's knowledge - NOT knowledge about them. Yes, we have knowledge about them, but it is their knowledge and Divine power that gives us grace. Grace, then, is the Divine influence or power that guides us into true knowledge. And true knowledge applied in our lives is the spirit of the law of life which frees us from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2).

Eph 2:8: For by 'divine influence' are you saved through Christ's 'understanding'. The Divine influence comes from the Father calling you to worship the Son. The Son, in turn, brings us to the Father. My prayer for you is that you might be filled with the God's knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Grace and peace to all the saints abroad. Amen!