

James 2:19

*“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that —
and shudder.”*

What do you believe? I'm not asking what this church believes. I'm not asking what the Methodist church believes. I'm not asking what your parents/grandparents lead you to believe. I'm asking each person here this morning what it is you believe. Since using the Social Affirmation of Faith, which says basically the same thing as the Apostle's Creed, I have had a few people ask me why we don't say the Apostle's Creed, the one we know. My first response was because for most people it's nothing more than rote memory, and rote memory comes from the head not the heart. If we change the wording to say the same thing it causes us to think about what it is we are saying we believe. Most people who say the Apostle's Creed just rattle off words they memorized years ago and think no more about what their saying than they think about what they will have for dinner next Thursday.

Over the next couple of weeks I am planning on covering the Apostle's Creed and what it is people say they believe when they recite the Creed. We will look at what it is we are saying and what it actually means. I also need to mention, some people liked the Social Affirmation. Some may have thought the Discipline tells us what we had to say and how to say it, it does not.

The Discipline only suggests what we could say, it does not mandate it.

Some did not like the Methodist Social Creed we started using a few weeks ago, probably because it caused them to think about what they said because they have to read it, and not rote recite it. Again I ask you, “What do you Believe?”

Do you believe in God? Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? ***“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder.*** Do you believe in the Holy Trinity?

Then why do many live as if they don't? I base this statement on what I hear people say to and about each other and how I see them treat each other. I base this on how I see people treating each other. We treat some people like true friends, and then others are treated as if it would not matter if they disappeared tomorrow. This may sound harsh, but it's the truth. Some would not even bat an eye if some, disappeared from our midst. If you believe in God like you say you do. If you believe in Jesus Christ like you say you do then you would treat everyone as a child of God, which they are, instead of just ignoring and brushing them off, or worse.

During my junior year in college I had a couple in several of my classes who were blind. They were married, the husband was considered legally blind but he could see some, and his wife was blind from birth. Asked how she did all she could do being blind. She said, “No big deal just a little help from my friends and the Good Lord.” Then she explained. “Her husband would walk her out to their moped and help her on. He would drive them to their classes. At times they had different classes, but she knew how many steps it was to the door of the building her class was in. She had then memorized how many steps from the front door of the building to the classroom. She had memorized steps to various places she needed to go. She still needed help from people with doors and if something had changed in her area of travel.” She had to rely on her memory she had no sight to rely on.

How does our belief system develop? Does it just happen? Where does such belief come from? Why do you believe what you believe? Maybe it comes from “Tradition?” Could it come from what you see done repeatedly?

Are you a Christian simply and solely because your parents/grandparents were Christians? Some only know of the Christian faith and how it works because of the joy and stability it gave their parents/grandparents.

Tradition allows us to enjoy the fruit of other people's experiences with God. It can and does give stability. It gives a framework to build upon, but it's not and should not be the basis of why we believe what we believe.

The Jewish people have kept the faith through the years by their adherence to strict tradition. Tradition has helped them keep their balance, and their identity. **BUT** Tradition has its limitations.

Perhaps our faith is not built upon tradition, but upon reason, upon intellect. There are people who attempt to come to God this way. These people look at the wonder and majesty of the creation and they believe, "There must be a God or Creator." Every single time Patricia and I look at the mountains, whether driving in them or just looking up from the parsonage we see firsthand the wonder and majesty of God's creation. How anyone could look out over those mountains and valleys and say there is no God is beyond me.

We look at the mystery of creation and we conclude that the universe could not have created something by itself. We stand in awe and believe with our whole heart there is a God!

Reasonable faith is also appealing, Christian faith is a reasonable faith, **BUT** only to a point. What about miracles? Are they reasonable? How about prayer? The Resurrection? And what do you do with the age old problem of suffering? In other words, what do you do when you reach the outer edges of your reasoning?

Even more troubling is the fact that there is very little, if any, motivating power in reason. Few people are driven to go out and turn the world upside down because they have reasoned their way to it. It's easy for us to rationalize inaction as action. Many people do it every day, all the while living with mostly inaction, and they say "I believe in God," but do very little, if anything to prove what they say they believe.

There are many who say they believe in God, but their belief is based on what someone else did/does or maybe something they use to do. They base their belief on what was done way back when. Many believe just because they come to Sunday School, some may even teach; Many believe

because they come to services on Sunday; Many believe because they come to services on Sunday, but yet never participate, never putting to action what they claim they believe.

“Tradition and Reason,” but still others believe due to warm fuzzys, or feel good services, services that make them feel good about what they do, or don’t do. What is done and/or not done shows what you believe. In a time of desperate need we all reach out and an unseen hand is there. On a beautiful mountaintop we feel a deep moving within. Perhaps, like St. Paul, we may even experience a blinding light.

What we need is an emotional element to our faith. Without an emotional element we become overly critical. They tear down and are critical of everything done within the church today. It should be noted these same critical people would never consider getting up and doing what they feel is not being done. Mainly, because it’s easier to sit in the shadows and complain and tear down than to put themselves on the line. And in the process of all their complaining they let everyone around them know what and who they believe in.

Feelings are just as essential to faith as reason or tradition, **BUT** warm and fuzzy feelings are not the end. Paul certainly qualified on the basis of a dramatic, emotional experience. He also had superior intellect, and no one worked harder at maintaining the traditions of his fathers than Paul. None of these were enough. What was enough? On what was Paul's belief built?

Listen as he describes the foundation of his belief in 1 Corinthians 2:2,5: *“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified...that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”* Paul's belief was built not solely on emotions, intellects, or tradition, but on his experience of Christ's power in and through his life. Paul did not spend his time telling everyone I did this and I did that, and God did this. Paul let his actions match his words.

Christ was present with him and through him in his preaching and in his many times in prison. Christ was with him in the fellowship of Christian friends and as he was being shipwrecked on a distant shore.

Tradition was important in Paul's religious development, reason was important in shaping his religious expression, his emotional experience on the Damascus Road was life-changing, but the overwhelming foundation of his belief was his daily sense of Christ's presence!

So it should be with us. Our walk of faith may very well have begun as walking in the steps of our parents. Or it may have begun as a search for an intellectually satisfying explanation for the origins of life. It may have begun with some dramatic emotional experience. As our faith has matured, however, we have become aware of the limitations of tradition, reason, and emotion. Now we see the necessity of a daily walk with the God.

Sometime back Guideposts magazine had a story about a member of Baseball's Hall of Fame. This member wasn't a player, though. He was one of the great radio announcers of baseball, Ernie Harwell. Ernie Harwell was tongue tied as a child. He had a terrible lisp.

His parents, in spite of the Depression, hired a tough speak teacher, and at the end of a year's hard work, Ernie Harwell took the class prize for speaking. It was a great day in Ernie's life. A greater day lay ahead; he had not yet reached his goal.

One day while he was away from home, and lonely, Ernie Harwell heard Billy Graham speaking on the radio. Ernie jumped into his car, and continued to listen to Graham 20 miles to where the crusade was taking place. When he got there, he opened himself to Christ's leading. Christ became the center of Ernie's life and, as he says, "It's made all the difference."

Paul would have agreed. *"For I decided to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified...that your faith may not rest in the wisdom of men but the power of God."*

It may have once been your parent's faith. It may have started as an intellectual affirmation or an emotional experience. **BUT** belief needs to be based upon a daily walk with Christ in which you experience His presence and His power in and through your lives. You will know it's real not because of what you have been told, or what you have figured out, or because of what you felt once upon a time way back when, but it's real because Christ will become as much a part of your lives as breathing or eating are.

What do believe? Do you believe in God? Does your life now, today, this morning, match what you say? ***“I believe in the Father Almighty.”***

Does your life give credence to these words, or does it take away?