

Personal Integrity

Romans 14:22

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Romans 14:22, "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God; happy is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves." It's interesting the word "faith" in the Bible has two shades of meaning. One of them depends on the fact that the word "the" occurs before the word "faith" in the Greek. The word "the", if you remember your grammar from school days, is the definite article and "a" or "an" is the indefinite article. So, in Greek, if the word faith which is "pistin" has "the" before it, it has one meaning and if it doesn't have "the" before it, it has another meaning.

Now, when it has "the" before it, I'll show you what it means. It's in Jude 1:3, loved ones. You really need to be good at finding books in the Bible to get Jude because it's like some Minnesota towns, if you blink, you're passed it.

Jude 1:3, "Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." That's an example of it. There in Greek as in English, the word "the" precedes the word "faith" and that's what it means in that situation.

"For the faith which was once for all, delivered to the saints." There the word faith means the facts that we've delivered to you and that you've accepted as true. When "the" precedes the word "faith" that's what it means. It means the faith. The facts about God and about Jesus, the facts about his resurrection and his death, the facts about forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting, the facts about the Church and the Holy Spirit. That's what is known in the Bible as "the faith". And in Greek, the word is "hay" or "ha" and it means "the faith" and it always refers to the facts of the faith that we all believe.

Now loved ones, many of us are finding religion dry as a bone because that's the only thing we know as faith. That's what we think faith is. When we talk about our faith, we talk about the facts that we accept with our heads as true. The facts about God, the facts about Jesus, the facts about the Holy Spirit, the facts about salvation, and many of us are finding religion and going to church dry as dust because that's what we think of as our faith.

In other words, when we come to church on Sunday, it's more like a kind of pep session, where we talk about the things that we believe, the facts that we accept as true. We regard it more as a time for reinforcing each other in those beliefs. That, of course, gets pretty dry. It gets pretty dry when the only interest you have is in somebody telling you what you know is already true. The only thing that kind of excites you is, if they give a little twist to it in some way. That's one of the diversions that many of us find in what is otherwise rather a dry experience.

We find a little diversion on a Sunday in perhaps the Pastor giving a little slant to something that we didn't see before. If you remember what you do when you go home after that happens it tends to be a little knowledge experience. You tend to say, "Oh, I didn't see it quite that way." Which is not bad, it's not bad that you see something a little better but it still tends to be a little twist in knowledge. "Oh, I never thought of the resurrection like that."

Well, do you see the emphasis is still on the thought, on the thinking, "Oh, I am seeing something a little differently from the way I saw it before", and either the sermon or the bulletin gives you some little new insight into the knowledge of the facts that you accept as true and that you think of as "the faith." But I'd just push you again on it. It's primarily still a knowledge thing.

Now you may sit there and say, "Ah now wait a minute, Pastor, I have been seeing something more clearly, and it's not what it's all about." It's not all about just the facts of our faith and too often when we come to church, we are hoping that we'll see some of the facts of the faith more clearly and that our faith will be built up and we call that our faith. The objective fact that we accept is true.

The other diversion is of course through the music. Maybe someone sings some song or some hymn uplifts our emotions in some way and that also provides a kind of diversion for us from what is otherwise a rather dry experience. There are many of us here who experience religion in that dry way because when we think of the faith, we think of it as the facts that we accept as true.

In other words, we find ourselves always concerned with what we believe. Now loved ones, this is not the primary meaning of the word "faith" in this book. It is one of the meanings but is not the primary meaning of the word faith in this book. The faith for us who are Christians is not just a set of facts that Muslims don't believe; see it isn't. It is not just a set of facts that Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe.

In other words, the difference between Christianity and Islam is not just a different set of facts that we accept as true. Faith for us is something much deeper than that and this is the second meaning of the word "faith." It's the primary meaning really in the New Testament. It's a meaning that is far more intimate, far more personal, and far more dynamic than just a mental acceptance of certain facts as true and actually it's the meaning of the word "faith" in this verse that we're studying today. Now let's go back to it and I'll show you it, loved ones, because the verse is a very good description of this primary meaning of faith in the Bible. It's Romans 14:22, "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God; happy is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves." Now actually it might interest you to know that in Greek, there is no "the". There is no "the" in that verse in Greek.

The translators have put "the" in to make it kind of idiomatic English but actually there is no word "the" there. It is "faith" just on its own. So, in a way, the translation, the right translation is, "You have faith toward yourself; have it before God." That's really what the Greek is. Or, "What faith you have, have between yourself and God." Some people make it a question, "Have you faith? Have it towards yourself before God", that's what this verse is saying.

In other words, when you talk about "the faith", you tend to be talking about objective faith. When you are talking about "faith" without the word "the", you're talking about subjective faith. Now, Paul isn't saying be a closet Christian. He is not saying be a closet Christian. He is not saying, "Keep your faith just to yourself. Keep it between yourself and God; don't share it with anybody else." He is not saying that.

He is not saying, "Just keep your faith private." He is not saying, "Look, get wrapped up and preoccupied with your own subject of mystical experience and don't bother about other people." He is not saying that. He is saying, "Stop being preoccupied with what this person thinks of drinking

wine, with what this person thinks of healing, with what this person thinks of Christian education. Stop being preoccupied with what this person thinks of infant baptism. Stop being concerned with whether your church does communion right. Stop being wrapped up in what your brother does in some Christian practice. Stop being preoccupied with your brothers in what they think is right and wrong and start being concerned with how you're reacting to what God has shown you personally." That's it. That's what Paul is saying.

"Faith that you have, have it between yourself and God. Stop keeping your eyes on other people and seeing whether they believe the right thing or whether they practice the right thing and start being concerned with how you're responding to what God has shown you you should do in your life." That's what the verse means.

In other words, are you living personally in accordance with the things that God has shown you are right or wrong in your life? That's when your faith will begin to become a dynamic, realistic Christian faith. While you dabble around in what Oral Roberts [Preacher from the Southern States in America] believes or what Billy Graham is doing, while you dabble around in what the charismatics are doing, or what this guy says about this, or what this person thinks about drinking, or what this person thinks about smoking, or what this person thinks about extra marital sex, while you're dabbling around in those subjects, you're in the shallows, barely in the shallows of your relationship with God. You differ very little from a Muslim or a Buddhist except in the facts that you're arguing about. But your faith begins to be dynamic and alive when you start being preoccupied with how you're living in the light of what God has shown you, you should do in your life.

Even those of us who didn't study Shakespeare know the line in the Hamlet play. Old Polonius is a bit boring actually in some of the advice that he gives to his son. But there's one famous line, "This, above all, to thine own self be true and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." "This above all, to thine own self be true and it must follow as the night, the day. Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Faith, that makes religion come alive, is the honesty of your response to what God has done to you in Jesus' death and resurrection. That's it. Real Christian faith that makes religion come alive in your life is an absolute honesty on your part about what God has done to you in Christ and the things that he has shown you that Christ has borne for you, the sins that he has taken away from you. Your honesty about that enables a real living Christian faith to come about in you.

In other words, Christian faith is not concerned with whether speaking in tongues should be practiced by everybody. It's not concerned with whether children should be baptized or adults should be baptized. Christian faith is concerned with the consistency of your will with your conscience, that's it, the consistency of your will with your conscience.

The correspondence of your will – that, is your day-to-day activity and behavior with what God has shown you in your conscience you ought to be doing or ought not to be doing. That's real Christian faith and that's what makes religion come alive. Are you personally living up to what God has shown you? I think some of us tend to say, "Well I believe so, I believe I am." That kind of mixture of uncertainty and presumption actually stems from the way the RSV [Revised Standard Version] translators translated the second half of the verse. But don't be too hard on them because Luther was wrong too, he translated it wrongly too. But have a look at it, loved ones.

Romans 14:22, "Happy is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves." Now, actually

the word "happy" is the Greek word, "makarios" and it's the word used in the beatitudes "blessed." So, it really means "blessed." But even Luther said the same thing, "Blessed are you if you can't see anything wrong in yourself."

Well, actually the Greek doesn't say that. There is no reason in the Greek. The Greek is just, "Blessed is he who does not judge himself about what he approves or disapproves." So the Greek just says, "Happy is he who does not judge himself about what he approves or disapproves." In other words, blessed is he who does not do the judging of himself about his own behavior and beliefs, that's it. The great Lutheran commentator Lenski puts it like this, "He who does not judge himself means he who would not think of acting as his own judge but let's God judge him, ever submits his faith, his convictions and his actions to the judgments laid down by God in his word, in what he values." That is, "Tests out and approves and accepts its self as valuable." Then he adds, "Remember the Pharisees, who were those that justified themselves, acted as judges in their own case and of course acquitted themselves."

In other words, real Christian faith is not saying, "Well, as far as I can see, I don't see anything that I am doing wrong. As far as I can see I am obeying God." Real Christian faith is refusing to judge yourself in that way. It is refusing to regard yourself as an able and competent judge. It's putting yourself before God and saying, "Lord God, is there anything in my life that needs to go? Is there anything in my life that you have already convicted me of that I need to get out of my life? Lord, if there is, will you show me?"

Loved ones, there is a miraculous work whereby God can give you an assurance that far transcends any assurance you'll get for yourself. You know the assurance we get for ourselves. "Well, I am as good as him. I go to church -- and that guy, he doesn't go to church every week. I do give and they don't seem to give. My family is together; their family isn't together and look at the way people are living today. Well, at least I am above that level." That kind of assurance that we get from judging ourselves on the curve. We're better than the rest, it doesn't matter that we're all going over the cliff, we'll go over less quickly than they will. It's an assurance that has no certainty in it at all. It's the assurance of, "I am better than the next guy."

Loved ones, the Father doesn't leave us to that kind of assurance. That's why he puts this verse to us, "Blessed are you who do not judge yourselves or regard yourselves as your own judges; blessed are you who allow me to judge you and allow me to bring home to your heart where you're right or where you're wrong in regard to what I have shown you in your conscience." God has arranged a magnificent way of giving us assurance that is far beyond that human assurance.

Here is the truth. You've all been crucified with Jesus. We've all been destroyed and remade in him, that's an accepted fact. Now, if you accept that, in every way in which God has shown you it is true in your life, there is a miraculous work that occurs inside you and I'll show it to you. It's in Romans 8:16, "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God." When your will corresponds to your conscience. Lest there be any doubt about what that means: when you turn from the sins that God has shown are wrong in your life, when you abandon them, when you walk into obedience in the things that he has shown he wants you to do, that's it. That's what it means when your will corresponds to your conscience.

When you're abandoning the sins that God has shown you in your life, when you're walking into the obedience that he has revealed to you, his Holy Spirit bears witness in your conscience and in your spirit that you are his child. That's it. That's real Christian faith. It's an intimate

consciousness that God has nothing against you, that he approves of the way you're living and that he accepts you as his own child. That's what real Christian faith is.

That's what Paul is saying, "What faith you have, have it between yourself and God. Make sure you and he are right. Be clear about that, be clear that your conscience is constraining your will, be clear that your will is obeying your conscience, be clear that you're walking openly in all light, that you're abandoning all sins that he shows you, be clear about that. Walk in openness with your God. Have it between yourself and your Father and the Spirit of God will witness within you that you are his child." That's the heart of Christian faith. Everything else after that, is optional. That is the centrality of Christian faith. Loved ones, that's it. In other words, what David said is really what we are to be able to say if we are children of God. He put it this way in Psalm 7 and you might want to look at it because it'll stay maybe in your mind.

Psalm 7:8, "The Lord judges the people; judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me." That's it. Brothers and sisters, Christian faith is a consciousness that we have integrity before God. It is when we've turned from all sin that he has shown us, that's it. When we have that consciousness, the Spirit of God comes in and witnesses that our Father approves of us and accepts us.

"What faith you have, have it between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not judge himself but allows the Lord to judge him." Are you allowing the Lord to judge you? Are you allowing him to speak to your conscience clearly, and are you responding to that by exercising your will in accordance with your conscience? That's what Christian faith is.

That's real Christian faith and the moment you step into that, that moment there opens before you a world of life and fragrance and awareness of God and softness towards him and towards other people that transforms the old miserable, dry religion of what we believe, into a religion that is whom we trust and whom we know. Faith is not concerned with what we believe but whom we trust and whom we know and whom we obey.

I don't know about you but I find that it's very easy for either sins to creep into my life or for blindness to creep in. I don't know that the Father is too concerned with what way we put it but he is mostly concerned with us walking into light. So I just suggest to you that if you need to walk into some light this morning, if you do it, do it there where you're sitting, during the last hymn where we're standing or come to the altar and settle it with God.

My brothers and sisters, warm living faith is found not in knowing what we believe a little better but in knowing whom we believe because we've obeyed what he has shown us we should do in our lives. We have abandoned all sins that he has revealed to us and we've walked into all the obedience the Holy Spirit is showing us. Immediately we do that, the Spirit of God witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God and our whole relationship with him comes into life.

So especially for any of you who have had the experience I've had, who find that it gets a bit dry at times, there's only one reason it gets dry. That is because you are not honest with God. "To thine own self be true. "Be true to yourself and be true to your God, walk in integrity loved ones. Do not walk in schizophrenia, but walk in integrity.

So I would tell you, if you are involved in some sin that God has shown you is wrong, this morning, forsake it. Come up to the altar, leave it here and abandon it whatever the cost. If you're involved

in some attitude that is sinful, do the same. Come up, get rid of it, leave it there and walk back into Christian faith and out of a raw, dry, intellectual, religious faith. Loved ones, do it this morning. Don't wait. That's the key to Christian faith. It's no mystery. You walk honestly before God.