

Does It Make Any Difference?

Joe Slater

I remember a display case in my High School with a stuffed “Snoopy” dog and the caption, “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere.” I’m not sure Charles Schulz agreed, but that’s what it said.

It sounds nice, though, doesn’t it? It exalts the virtue of sincerity and appears to encourage us to be tolerant and flexible. We could use a good dose of that in the current social environment.

In fact, however, we have exaggerated our freedom to believe as we wish. We’ve almost forbidden God Himself from telling us what to believe and do! Does it make any difference to God? Is sincerity all He requires? What does the Bible say?

Beyond all doubt, God wants us to believe something! Words like believe, believed, belief, etc. are found hundreds of times in Scripture. Equally certain is that God requires sincerity. Who received more withering denunciation from Jesus than hypocrites?

But Biblical belief/faith isn’t simply an opinion. It’s a confident trust based on the word of God. *“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17).

Opinions may be based on prejudice, tradition, or some other source. My opinion that restaurant “A” is best may conflict with your opinion that “B” is better. But that is a subject upon which God has not spoken, so conflicting opinions are fine!

Where God has spoken, however, my opinion and yours are irrelevant. We must never equate our own “think so” with God’s “say so”!

(More next week)

A Clean Heart

How does a worm get inside an apple?

Perhaps you think the worm burrows in from the outside. No, the worm comes from the inside.

But how does he get in there? Simple! An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom. Sometime later, the worm hatches in the heart of the apple, then eats his way out.

Sin, like the worm, begins in the heart and works through the person’s thoughts, words, and actions.

For this reason, David once wrote, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God.”*

--Author Unknown (via Bulletin Digest)

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Club Membership

I have never been a member of a club. I have known members of various clubs (the Lions, the Rotary, the Kiwanis, and even the Odd Fellows). I am told that these clubs offer enjoyable fellowship and that they engage in worthwhile service projects. But this week I learned something else. Most of the clubs have rules regarding attendance. If a member skips meetings he may have to make up for the missed meetings in some way. I never knew that; but Sinclair Ferguson included the rules of the Trenton, N.J. Rotary club in his latest book, *Devoted to God’s Church*. Why did he do that? Well, I am sure that it was not because he wanted us to join the local Rotary Club. He was making a point and making it rather well. People think that they are entitled to

drift in and out of the church when and as they please. They want to be considered members and want to be granted all the benefits of membership, but they do not want to be held accountable to any standard of behavior. They certainly do not want to be told that they must attend meetings of the church, or that they will suffer any consequence if they are sporadic in their attendance.

Do you really believe that church membership is less a privilege and blessing than is membership in the Rotary Club? If Rotary members accept the premise that you must attend the meetings to continue as a member in good standing, why would anyone question the same principle in connection with the church? If a Rotary member moves from one local branch of the club to another, he accepts the fact that he must acknowledge this shift in the location of his membership. Why do so many Christians put up a fuss over a similar expectation in the church?

To drop the club illustration and use a more biblical one, Christ is the vine and we are the branches (John 15). Every branch must be firmly connected to thrive; and to be connected one must make that connection at some given point along the length of the vine. It is possible to move a branch from one part of the vine to another. If a branch is cut loose from one part and carefully grafted in somewhere else on the vine, it may thrive in the new location. But a branch that is moved from one part of the vine to another, but is never firmly connected in the new location, will not thrive and may well die.

We need to take our membership in the body of Christ more seriously. Christ died for the church (Acts 20:28). We are called to live for the church.

--Thayer Salisbury (Toledo, OH)