

Holding the Faith of Christ

For more than three years, Jesus worked and taught among his own people in an almost futile effort to persuade them that he was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. It was not until after his resurrection that any of his four half-brothers became believers in him (cf. John 7:5; 1 Corinthians 15:7). As a believer, his half-brother James became a very prominent man in the church in Jerusalem, and he penned a letter especially designed to motivate Jewish Christians to be stronger, more dedicated, having a zeal that conformed to the will and purpose of God.

Among the many exhortations contained in the epistle that bears his name is one found in Chapter 2, Verse 1: "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality." There are possible attitudes on the part of man that are not compatible (will not blend) with "the faith of Christ," and no effort or excuse will change the matter. Therefore, whoever claims to be holding "the faith of Christ" must conform to "the faith of Christ."

What are we to understand by the "faith of Christ"? Let the apostle Paul answer that question. Writing to the church in Philippi, he described his honored position and zeal under the Law of Moses as that which did give "confidence in the flesh" (3:4-6). But he counted this all as "...dung, that I may win Christ and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (3:8-9). "The faith of Christ" is the system that replaced the law system, that gives the freedom from sin and spiritual life that the law could not give (cf. Galatians 3:21-26). "The faith of Christ" is referred to as "objective faith" (i.e., that which comes from God, the Speaker), as opposes "subjective faith" (i.e., that which proceeds from the hearer, from man).

A failure to understand this distinction has given rise to error in thought, understanding and practice. It is not unusual to hear someone being told that salvation comes by faith in Christ, i.e., at the moment one believes in Christ (the salvation by faith only doctrine). This exhortation is substantiated by varied statements equivalent to "believe in Jesus." The careful student of the Bible will recognize that Jesus continually called for a belief in him as the Messiah, which would then give reason for them to believe his teachings. That was the whole purpose of the Gospel of John (John 20:30-31). His teachings, the Gospel of Christ, contain the instructions as to how one may receive salvation (cf. Acts 2:38; et al). Salvation does not come at the point of believing Jesus is the Christ (cf. James 2:19); salvation comes by obeying the terms of the Gospel made valid because Jesus is the Christ. Note the point John makes in the beginning of his Gospel: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who are born...of God" (John 1:11-13). Again, "...that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life" (John 3:15 ASV). Believing in Jesus does not make one a child of God, believing in Jesus gives one the right to become a child of God. And that right is exercised through "the faith of Christ."

Now, having become children of God through "the faith of Christ," Christians, are not to hold "the faith of Christ" with "partiality." Favoritism, a special regard for the worth of one person over another due to that person's economic standing, social prominence, ethnical background, etc. is not a condition of "the faith of Christ." There is no respect of persons with God. In fact, James said, "Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (2:5). One's standing before God and recognition in our fellowship is not to be determined by his economic status, social standing or ethnical background. In regard to being heirs in Christ "...there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"(Galatians 3:28).

Since "the faith of Christ" is the system of justification from God through Jesus Christ, one can claim to be a Christian only by holding "the faith of Christ" without partiality -- not in conjunction with partiality.

By E. Russell King