
Words of Truth

A Willingness To Study Doesn't Equal Faithfulness

By: Brian A. Yeager

Throughout the years I have had many, many conversations wherein someone thought that a person or congregation was faithful because they knew the truth. What they fail to see is that people can know the truth, have practiced the truth, and still fall away (II Peter 2:20-22). Individuals and groups of people can even know and speak what is right while all along being wrong (Isaiah 29:13 and Titus 1:16).

After the things just mentioned are noted, someone looking to justify the erring will often say, "but they're willing to study and learn." God said this to the prophet Ezekiel: *"Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: **for they hear thy words, but they do them not.** And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them"* (Ezekiel 33:30-33).

Knowledge is certainly of great importance (Proverbs 19:2, I Corinthians 15:34, and Colossians 3:10). Faithfulness includes having a desire to learn (Matthew 11:28-30, John 5:39, Acts 17:10-11, II Timothy 2:14-18, and II Peter 3:18). Faithfulness includes saying the right things (Matthew 10:32-33, Ephesians 4:15, and James 3:1-18). However, knowing and saying the right things is not all there is in being a faithful disciple of Christ or a faithful congregation. Demons were willing to listen and say the right things from time to time (Matthew 8:28-32). Remember, wolves try to sound and look the part of the faithful to blend in (Matthew 7:15). How you know them is not by their willingness to study, or their speech, but by examining the fruit that comes from what they do (Matthew 7:16-20). It is what a person or congregation does that shows whether or not they are faithful.

Action Is What Matters Most

We read this in this inspired letter from James to early Jewish disciples of Christ: *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if*

any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:19-27).

When you consider what James said the point is settled. You must hear, but then you are required to take action based upon what you have learned (Luke 11:27-28 and Philippians 4:9). There are those who are ever willing to learn, appear to have a form of godliness, but are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (II Timothy 3:1-7). There have been those who know the right things to say, but do not do those right things (Isaiah 48:1).

A whole chapter of the Scriptures covers the type of people who say the right things, but are hypocrites because they do not practice them (Romans 2:1-29). Doesn't that tell us something? Doesn't that tell us that people will know how to look and sound right, but not really be right? Don't sleep on these facts. Understand that faithfulness is shown through full obedience to God. A disciple of Christ is shown to be such by their learning and continuing in the truth.

"Then Are Ye My Disciples Indeed"

*"As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, **If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed**; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:30-32). Jesus didn't identify His followers by their willingness to hear and believe the things He said. He identified His followers by their willingness to continually practice what they learned. This is taught throughout the New Testament (Luke 8:4-15, John 14:21-24, John 15:10, Acts 14:22, Romans 11:22, Colossians 1:23, I Timothy 4:12-16, II Timothy 3:14, Hebrews 3:1-14, Hebrews 10:36-39, Revelation 1:3, etc.).

Obedient disciples of Christ can be identified through their walking as Jesus did (I John 2:3-6). To walk as Jesus did means to live in a manner pleasing to God (I Thessalonians 4:1-2). Follow the example we have in Jesus (I Peter 2:21). Even the world gets this principle. People of the world will often say things like, "he talks the talk, but doesn't walk the walk." Shouldn't we, the people of God, understand this better than people of the world?

Conclusion

From our study you should realize that when some person or congregation is willing to "study the truth", that doesn't mean they are willing to practice it. The fact is, most often the willingness to study is a just a way to put off the need to act. Jesus talked of hearing and doing (Luke 8:19-21). This ought to be our manner of thought and action as well. The faithful of the Lord are identified by doing God's will (Revelation 22:14)!