

Session six: Finding our identity as part of God's family & combining heart and life in discipleship

(Chapters 7 & 8)

Goals for Today

1. Understanding the nature of faith.
2. Understanding what it means to be in the family of God.
3. Understand the whole, positive measure of being a disciple and where to get the motivation to be one

Before we get into today's text...let's look at the nature of faith, which is so important to be able to accomplish what we have been talking about all these weeks. A firm understanding of faith is critical for happiness in our lives.

A. W. Tozer, famous writer of the past, writes of faith:

Faith is the least self-regarding of the virtues. It is by its very nature scarcely conscious of its own existence. Like the eye which sees everything in front of it and never sees itself, faith is occupied with the Object upon which it rests and pays no attention to itself at all. While we are looking at God we do not see ourselves—blessed riddance. The man who has struggled to purify himself and has had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when he stops tinkering with his soul and looks away to the perfect One. While he looks at Christ the very things he has so long been trying to do will be getting done within him. It will be God working in him to will and to do.

Faith is not in itself a meritorious act; the merit is in the One toward Whom it is directed. Faith is a redirecting of our sight, a getting out of the focus of our own vision and getting God into focus. Sin has twisted our vision inward and made it self-regarding. Unbelief has put self where God should be, and is perilously close to the sin of Lucifer who said, "I will set my throne above the throne of God." Faith looks out instead of in and the whole life falls into line.

A. W. Tozer. *The Pursuit of God* (pp. 50-51). General Press. Kindle Edition.

What is it like for you when you try to have faith? How might you increase your faith?

Moving back to the text...



The Christian life is like a two-sided coin

One side of the coin is the cross.

The other side is the empty tomb.

Can you explain this in Wesley terms?



The cross to repair our broken relationship with God through pardon.

The empty tomb to share the very life of Christ in persistent growth and holy love.

Wesley emphasized the experiential nature of becoming a Christian, and drew a sharp distinction between believing things about Jesus and God, and believing them to be true for yourself as a member of God's family. In other words, it's one thing to believe that God is merciful, and another to know that you have accepted and experienced God's mercy for yourself.

- ***Have you experienced this distinction? If so, how?***

Wesley was clearly an evangelist. The author speaks of essentially "closing the sales call", or asking for a response from your listener.

- ***How well do you think we do about this as Christians when we speak about our faith? How can it be done in our present culture? What's hard about it?***

Going further, our current chapters have to do with Wesley's beliefs about internal change that happens when one becomes a Christian. He said that one of the ways that we can know we are Christians is from the assurance we have within us that we are children of God. However, this emphasis grew a little less with Wesley as time went on. Our author indicated that Wesley came to see that he had likely caused some harm from this emphasis.

- ***Thinking back, did you experience the assurance Wesley spoke of when you began your Christian journey?***
- ***What do you imagine this harm to be that was mentioned in the book? Have you experienced something some of this harm?***

Wesley also made a distinction between coming to God as a servant and coming to God as one of God's children.

- ***What do you make of this? Is this distinction real?***
- ***Have you ever thought of yourself as an actual child of God?***

On the one hand, it's easy to turn faith into a good work that is exhausting. Similarly, since the Christian life includes good works...

- ***...what can keep them from being exhausting also (in a negative way)?***
- ***What place does faith play in our motivations, directly or indirectly?***
- ***What does it mean to be both a disciple of Jesus and a child of God?***
- ***In one of those conjunctive pairs of viewpoints that can be difficult to merge, Jesus said both that his burden is light and that we should pick up our cross daily and follow him. How do you reconcile these two sayings?***

Homework

- Read chapter 9
- Continue to pray that you will get from this course what you need.