

# Faith Pleases God

(12/22/24)

Please turn to *Hebrews 11:6*.

## **FAITH is what pleases God.**

- Does He want us to read & study His Bible. Yes.
- Does He want us to have solid doctrine and theology? Yes.
- Would He like us to memorize and quote verses of the Bible? Yes.
- Would He like us to go to church on a regular basis? Yes.
- Would He like us to share His good news with others? Yes.
- Does He want us doing good things in our communities—acts of charity? Yes.
- Would He like us to pray more? Of course.
- Does He want us laying hands on the sick & prophesying? Uh-huh.
- Does He want us being compassionate and generous to each other? Oh yeah.
- Does He want us living holy lifestyles, casting off sin and embracing righteousness? Yes.

All that being said, *here's what Jesus is looking for when He returns to earth:*

**[Luk 18:8 KJV]** 8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily [2nd Coming]. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, **shall he find faith on the earth?**

**You can only “find” something that you’re looking for.** Jesus is telling us that when He returns riding on His white horse He’ll be looking for FAITH in people.

Here’s today’s verse I asked you to turn to:

**[Heb 11:6 ESV]** 6 **And without faith it is impossible to please him,** for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Faith pleases God and must come first before “practice.”

**“Practice” is the fruit of Faith.**

**Faith is both a gift and fruit that comes directly from and is produced by the Holy Spirit and always directs us to Christ.**

## **Therefore Faith is only Faith when its both true AND reveals & exalts Jesus.**

EXAMPLE. Suppose you've lived on a remote tropical island your whole life, completely isolated from the world. One of your fellow villagers decides to visit the world for a few days and reports back. When he returns he talks about how bizarre and overwhelming it was and one thing he claims is that some worship "the God on the Cross." When you ask him for details he has none: doesn't know the name of this God, what He did, what He said, nothing.

Much later **your village is attacked** by another and things aren't going well. You're hiding in fear for your life and something comes upon you in the spirit. For whatever reason, *you BELIEVE in "the God on the Cross" and cry out to Him to save you.* Miraculously, you are spared.

**What happened was a matter of faith** and, BTW, I took this example from a testimony I heard very similar to this decades ago! The person in the scenario didn't even know Jesus' Name. Had never read the Bible, never gone to Church, and had likely prayed to demonic spirits before this. What happened? **When this person believed in the Truth—Who is Jesus—the Holy Spirit granted faith.** Even in their "ignorance" of theology & details.

## **The Truth is a Person and His name is Jesus.**

### *Facts are different story.*

After the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, the Apostles had their hands full and **converted Jews were plying them with questions such as:**

- Do we still adhere to Jewish Dietary laws (restricting certain foods)?
- Would eating the restricted foods make us "unclean"?
- Do we still keep all the High Holy Days: the 7 Feasts, New Moon, and the Sabbath?
- If we don't keep these days will God be angry?
- Do we still circumcise our boys? (Sign of being in covenant with God.)

**There were Jewish converts to Christ and GENTILE ones too which presented a big issue:** Gentiles weren't raised under the Old Covenant. They were already eating things Jews considered "unclean" and didn't celebrate ANY of the high holy days God had commanded: Passover, Firstfruits, Tabernacles, etc. They most certainly didn't observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy. And none of their men were circumcised!!

## Yet they were still being filled with the Holy Spirit.

- God had clearly forgiven and accepted them into His Kingdom.
- They were now claiming to worship the same God of the Bible, the same One Who instituted observance of dietary restrictions and high holy days. (Jews still bring this up to this day whenever a Christian claims we worship the same God.)
- Gentiles were now reading the same Bible and calling it God's Word and saying they had a Jewish Messiah.
- They were now looking forward to a resurrection from the dead and for Messiah to bring His Kingdom to earth as it was in Heaven!

## **WHY were they “clean” when they continued to eat pork** (and even food that had been sacrificed to pagan idols!)?!

- How did they maintain covenant with God and please Him when they refused to keep the Feast Days and the Sabbath?!
- How could God possibly be happy with them when their men said “no” to being circumcised (Titus was one of them!)?

Some of the Jewish converts became offended and angry over this, approaching the Apostles and demanding answers.

**[Gal 2:3-4 ESV]** 3 But even Titus, who was with me, **was not forced to be circumcised**, though he was a Greek. 4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in--***who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus***, so that they might bring us into slavery--

## **A few of them even posed as Apostles themselves and went to the various churches Paul & others planted, trying to place PRACTICE before faith.**

- They preached that boys needed to be circumcised or they weren't Saved.
- They taught that the Feasts and Sabbath must be observed or they weren't in covenant with God.
- And they said that eating unclean foods—especially those sacrificed to idols—made one Unclean—which is to being spiritually corrupted perhaps even losing one's Salvation.

***Bless God because Paul recorded his answers in his letters*** that we know as the New Testament epistles! He cleared this matter up for anyone—Jew or Gentile—who has received Jesus as Lord and Savior.

**[Col 2:16-17 ESV]** 16 **Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.** 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, **but the substance belongs to Christ.**

The context of verse 16 are the ***things God commanded under the Old Covenant*** in this order: 1) dietary restrictions and 2) observing the specific high holy days that God commanded. Under the OC adherence to these things were considered acts of faith and obedience and to violate them rendered one “unclean.”

**Paul is telling the Colossians they’re under a NEW covenant** and that the Old one has passed away. Jesus took away uncleanness & defilement and was the fulfillment of all the Feasts and Sabbath.

**If you were raised observant Jewish** who never ate pork, kept all the Feast days, and didn’t work on the Sabbath, and now received Jesus as your Messiah, you were no longer “required” to do those things.

- Not doing these things was no longer “sin” that would corrupt you.
- Doing those things wouldn’t please God.
- ***You learned that your faith in Him is what pleased Him!***

### **Now imagine this:**

- Suppose you lived as an observant Jew your whole life and have now found the freedom to eat a pork chop and not feel “defiled.”
- You choose not to observe the Sabbath this week and didn’t lose your Salvation.
- You even ate some food that was sacrificed to some pagan god and it didn’t affect your standing with God one bit.

**Now picture another Jewish convert** to Christ who **doesn’t feel the same way.**

- If he were to eat pork he would feel unclean.
- If he were to miss observing a Sabbath, his conscience would bother him.
- If he ate food sacrificed to some pagan god, he would feel as if he committed a grievous sin.

**Now imagine the same person coming to you and saying:**

- *“You can’t eat that! It will make you unclean!”*
- *“You must observe Passover and the Sabbath or you’re not honoring God!”*

**If that happened, how might you respond?**

- Would you become fearful that you’d done something wrong?
- Would you be concerned that you had sinned or become corrupted?
- OR would you confidently reassure the other person and yourself that it’s about FAITH?

**Let’s apply this to Christmas** and for the sake of today’s message I’ll assume you honor some of the traditions like a tree, presents, and hanging a wreath.

**Suppose you finished decorating your tree** and another Christian says *“you can’t do that! Don’t you know that Christmas is a holiday with pagan roots that have nothing to do with Jesus?! If you’re serious about Christ you need to leave these things behind!”*

**They quote Jeremiah 10** (which is about making idols and not putting up a tree). They show you a well-prepared YouTube video of a passionate preacher who seems to make a compelling case for the paganism of Christmas and how the majority of Christians have been “deceived” by this tradition...*and might even inadvertently be worshipping Satan.*

This can be cleared up very simply: what does Christmas mean to you?

- WHO are you choosing to honor during the season?
- Whose name are you speaking at that time?
- What event are you thinking and talking about (the birth of Jesus)?
- What literature are you quoting from and reading?

If you’re talking about Jesus, His birth, that Him coming was the hope of the world, reading Matthew, Luke, Isaiah, and Micah, and experiencing a sense of joy and peace...*then your faith is in Christ.*

**Christ is being exalted, Christ’s name is being spoken, the Word of Christ is being quoted, the story of Christ’s birth is being retold.**

**Your faith is solid, your covenant with God secure, and your Salvation intact.**

**You haven’t defiled yourself, you’re not unclean, and you haven’t committed a sin.**

*Even if a Christmas tree is in your home, a wreath hanging from the wall, and you’re sipping egg nog and hot cocoa.*

**Why haven’t you sinned and become unclean?**

- Because you believe in Jesus and have faith that He’s the only Savior and Lord of this world.
- You realize that this season is about Him being born into this world to eventually go the Cross and rise from the dead.

**Let's talk about the Christian who claimed Christmas was pagan** and told you it was sin. The same one who stopped practicing these traditions when they discovered it was "satanic." *To THEM it is sin and DOES defile them.*

The Apostle Paul states a person like that is WEAKER in conscience....

**The church at Corinth asked Paul the questions** I mentioned earlier in this sermon: "*do we adhere to OC dietary laws? Will eating food sacrificed to pagan idols defile us?*" etc. Let's read his answer:

**[1Co 8:4-8 ESV]** 4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." 5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"-- 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. 7 However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 ***Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.***

In other words, there were some newly converted Christians *who still thought this was a sin and that eating said food somehow connected them to pagan gods*, perhaps believing it gave said gods some level of power or influence over them. Therefore their consciences counted it as a wrongdoing which would result in guilt and shame...**not from God, but from their own weak conscience.**

**What do you celebrate at Easter?** Speaking for myself and my family, we immerse ourselves in the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We're not worshipping Ishtar.

- Even if we waved around a plush bunny or decorated some eggs (which we don't do), we're not "inadvertently" committing a sin or corrupting ourselves *because our hearts belong to Jesus.*

On the flip side, **a Christian whose watched YouTube videos about how Easter is really worship of the god Ishtar and participating in a pagan fertility rite**—their consciences will count it as "sin." They'll refuse all participation and may even start telling others to do the same.

Next time one of them wags their finger at you, *ask them to name the days of the week*...because all of them are named after pagan gods. “Thursday” is “Thor’s Day” for example. Ask them to name the 9 planets: all named after pagan gods. Ask them if they’ve properly renounced these labels and now call them something else?

The truth is, however: if a Christian is celebrating the resurrection of Jesus on “Easter Sunday” that’s an act of faith, and faith pleases God.

Speaking for my family only: *we’ve never told our kids there’s an Easter bunny or given them a basket*. Not because we think its sin, but we’d rather place the emphasis on Jesus beating death! That’s it.

**Just to draw a line I consider important:** holidays like Halloween have nothing to do with Jesus. Christmas is about His birth, Easter is at the time of His death and resurrection...but Halloween isn’t linked to any event in Christ’s journey.

*There are Christians who believe you should have service on Saturday,* because it’s the Sabbath. That’s fine for them, I have no problem with that. That being said: **gathering together to praise, worship, sing about, pray about, and hear about Jesus and His Word is an act of faith.**

**Faith pleases God!** He’s not less pleased because we do it on Sunday vs. Saturday. We could have church on Monday as long as we were gathering in faith!

**How we live & speak is to be the result of having faith.**

- We’ll want to read and study our Bibles.
- We’ll desire to be generous and compassionate to others.
- We’ll strive to live a holy life.
- We’ll be inspired to lay hands on the sick and prophesy.
- We’ll be motivated to serve our church and community.

**If Jesus’ birth is the reason for your Christmas season, amen!**

**If His sacrifice on the Cross and victory over death is what you’re thinking about during Easter, praise God!**