

One God And Father

Ephesians 4:4-6

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:2-6)

As we have been studying through these words over the past two or three weeks, we have seen how devout men and women can read and believe these words. But as they begin to work them out in their common understanding, they arrive at very different interpretations and applications.

Last week, we considered how church leaders from the various doctrinal backgrounds, especially those who would follow after the teachings of Calvin, and of Arminius, disagree strongly on matters of how the souls of men come to a saving faith in Christ.

And their disagreement is so strong that they separate themselves into different churches and different denominations, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodists, Pentecostal, and on and on.

And again, these dear folks are all truly saved and will see each other in heaven. But for now, they disagree.

We also spoke of strong arguments currently underway regarding the works of the Holy Spirit, John MacArthur publishing his beliefs in a book entitled “Strange Fire”. And again, these are all very devout men and women, believing and loving God, but having strongly opposing views about the God they serve and about how worship should take place.

And may I say, none of this is new. Such differences have been broiling throughout all of church history.

This week, may I take our discussion one step further and speak about two much lesser levels of belief in our God, but both very present and influential within our church settings and within our daily lives.

The first is one that we have studied about in the past week or so in our Sunday school class, and it involves the Children of Israel as they came out of bondage in Egypt and were being given opportunity to enter into the Promised Land of God.

We don't know how much the Israelites held to and practiced their beliefs in God during the 400 or so years they were in Egypt, many of those years which were served in

slavery. But there is evidence that some, perhaps most of them had tried to maintain their beliefs. We know that they held to their understanding of the necessity for sacrifices because as they were being freed from their bondage, they offered up a Passover sacrifice.

And they were all witnesses as God did mighty miracles to convince Pharaoh to set them free, all the many plagues, the frogs, the flies, the locusts, the boils, and then the passing over of the “death angel”.

But we find that as they journeyed out into the desert, a severe weakness was found within their “faith”, especially as they considered going over into the Promised Land. There were “giants” in that land and they were greatly afraid of them.

And they also showed many other forms of “unbelief”, grumbling and murmuring and back-biting, so much so that God refused to allow them to enter in. And so, they then seemed to merely “exist” in a low estate of “spiritual mediocrity” for the next 40 years.

And you will recall that only two of all the adults over 20 years old, Joshua and Caleb, were allowed to eventually go on in and take possession of the new land.

Listen to how God addressed their difficulties of “spiritual mediocrity” in the Book of Hebrews. He said there,

16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. (Hebrews 3:16-19)

Unfortunately for us, the problem of spiritual mediocrity that God experienced with these Israelites then is just as prevalent today within the hearts and souls of most all of us, His “nowadays Israelite”, you and me.

And yes, the “one body, one Lord, one God and Father still hold true. You and I truly are just as much “Israel” as were those Israelites then. In Romans chapter 9, we are reminded that it is not just those who have descended from the “flesh” of Abraham that are the “seed of Abraham”, but rather, just as Isaac was a “child of the promise”, so also are you and I “children of that same promise”. When we accept and receive Christ as our Savior and Lord, we immediately become his “seed”, His beloved “children”, “children of the promise”.

And in John chapter 1 we are told . . .

12 . . . to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

As adopted children into the family of God, we are “Israel”, the same “Israel” that God is speaking to when we read scriptures like those in Deuteronomy 6, saying,

4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

And with that being said, we are also very often plagued with the very same problems of “unbelief” and spiritual mediocrity that so beset those Israelites there in the desert and caused them to be denied entrance into the Promised Land.

May I quickly add here that those who fell there in the desert were not all blatant unbelievers! Many, many of them were really true believers! And they were surely allowed to go to heaven. We know that because one of them was Moses. And he surely is in heaven. The evidence of that is his appearance on the Mount of transfiguration with the Lord Jesus.

So then, yes, many of them believed, but yet they still suffered from a severe “lack of belief”. And because of their unbelief, their mediocre faith, they were denied the enjoyment of a complete and full fellowship with God while they remained in this life.

And again, may I say that as much as you and I might want to be different, if we will examine our own souls, we will find that each of us is often much in the same condition as many of those Israelite. We believe, but yet we “waver” when we are tested. And just as with these Israelites, we do not “hold fast to our faith”.

And just as with these Israelites, “fear” is a likely stumbling block to our faith. Whether fear comes as a natural weakness of our flesh or it comes as a weapon of satan, it works all too well to cause us to fail.

And “fear” can come in any number of ways, we can fear losing relationships with our loved ones or in our workplace if we hold too strongly to our faith. We can fear losing our significance among friends if we voice our love for Christ. And the elements of fear go on and on. Fear is a favorite “weapon of choice” in the hands of satan, keeping us in a continual state of unbelief.

And folks, it is a simple truth that the seeds of unbelief are always present within our hearts, and if we are not diligent to put them to death they will bear a bitter fruit in our souls.

And may I say again, these “bitter fruits” are an effective weapon in the arsenal of satan. “Very saved” Christians can spend most all the days of their lives in a very mediocre relationship with Christ, all because of a weakness of faith, again, saved yes, but barely so.

These words in Hebrews 3 and 4 go on to tell us that God has a very special blessing in store for all who would dare hold fast to their faith as did Joshua and Caleb. God calls that blessing, His “rest”. And in verse 11 of Hebrews 4, He urges us to step out of our mediocrity and labor to enter into His blessed “rest”. Listen!

11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:11)

I confess that although I desire greatly to live all my moments within God’s special “rest”, I have scarce few, allowing instead, the world, the flesh and devil to have their sway. But when I do deliberately and diligently reach to enter into His “rest”, my life becomes joyous beyond measure.

Returning us back to the thoughts we began with in this message, that of the differences within the belief systems of our churches, we find that this one fits very well into the dilemmas that beleaguer our congregations.

We have some within the church pews who are strong and do very well. But unfortunately, just as with the Israelites, many of us are subject to falling short when we are tested.

And then also, we have those within our churches who busy themselves with “unprofitable” arguments about whether they are Calvinists or Arminian or Charismatic, about whether they were “predestined” to salvation or as with the Armenians’ believe, they made all the choices by themselves; and then both of those arguing with the Pentecostals about whether anyone should shout or talk in tongues or lift up their hands during the church service.

How such things must grieve our God as He looks down upon His beloved children.

Before we close these thoughts for the day, may I address one more condition of men’s souls, and this condition is not necessarily one within the walls of the church, but affecting our lives nonetheless; because some of these dear souls are beloved members of our own families? This last condition is the condition of “complete unbelief”.

Unlike we who come into church each Sunday wanting to know and worship God, these dear souls simply refuse to believe in God altogether. And their priorities are different

from ours. While we who believe try our best to “not love the world and its fineries”, these dear ones allow themselves full access to the enjoyments of the world.

And when discussion comes to them about God, they simply say, “well I just don’t believe the things that you believe”, as if by their refusing to believe they can somehow do away with the existence of God; and by so doing somehow nullify any consequences that might come to them for their refusal to believe; similar in some ways to the little child who covers his eyes and pretends that just because he can’t see you, you are not really there.

Foolishness beyond measure!

Why do I bring this group of folks into our discussion today? They don’t seem to fit into our consideration of

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I bring these dear ones into our discussion because they are part of who we are in our daily lives. Many of them are our beloved family members, our sons and daughters and our grandchildren, and other loved ones.

And as we congregate each Sunday and encourage one another to believe in God because in God we have

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:5-6)

All of these many other factors are always impending upon our faith and influencing the way we react to the many demands upon our faith.

I would venture to say that each one listening to my words right now has some or all of the factors that I have mentioned today rolling around in your heads. Why do I believe that? Because I do in my head!

But folks, when all is said and done, these words of our text are our only hope and remedy, holding fast to our meager faith and not wavering as the turbulent waters of life crash against us.

For those who don’t want to believe in God at all, their unbelief will not nullify His existence. He is still God whether they choose to believe in Him or not.

And for those of us who do believe, we must steadfast and bury our heels into the dirt and command our souls to listen to the words of our Lord and to believe them with our whole heart, so much so that we will obey all that He commands us at every turn.

And we must diligently labor to enter on into God's special "rest" where

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Folks, any differences that we have in our beliefs are petty as compared to the "so great a salvation" that God provides to each of our sinful souls. And we should rejoice in what we have rather than finding reasons to disagree.

And so as we close, may I call us back to this one simple understanding. There really is but

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And listen to these words from Deuteronomy 30 that God has so graciously given us . . .

15 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. 16 If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you. (Deuteronomy 30:15-16)

19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, 20 loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)