



## DOES IT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE WHAT I BELIEVE?

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Welcome to today's program. It's my privilege to be with you and to have the opportunity to speak with you about the word of God. Today, I would like to begin a short series of lessons that I hope will challenge us to give serious and thoughtful consideration to the things we believe and practice.

There are many words we might choose to describe the current religious culture and many of those descriptions would perhaps be accurate. One, however, that depicts the climate and, I believe, the crisis of our time, is the word: indifference. How many times have you heard someone ask, "Does it really make any difference" regarding this or that. And this becomes a way of dismissing any serious consideration of various scriptural propositions. It becomes our way of casually and lazily waving off any discussion of something that we do not want to consider because it might change the way we think, worship, or live.

Long ago, Pontius Pilate was confronted with one of the greatest claims and propositions of all, and that is that Jesus was a King. The Jewish leaders were trying to convince Pilate to condemn Christ based upon His claim that He was divine and sent and anointed by God to be their King. The religion of the Jews and the claims of one of their teachers meant virtually nothing to Pilate, a Roman governor, and a pagan. He wanted nothing to do with their religious disputes. But as he was grudgingly adjudicated the case of Christ, he asked Jesus if He really did see Himself as a King.

This conversation, as it played out in Pilate's judgment hall, is recorded in John 18:33-38. It says: ***"Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?'" Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this***

*world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all."*

The cowardly governor did not want to weigh the evidence and grapple with the question and so he waved it all off with the dismissive rhetorical question: "What is truth?". That's the question multitudes of people still ask today out of the same motive from which Pilate asked it centuries ago. Today, they might simply phrase it: "What difference does it make, anyway?" That question will be the basis of our short series here and today we will pose the question: Does it make any difference what I believe? Does it make any difference what we believe about spiritual matters? More specifically, does it really matter what we believe about bible doctrine? You won't have to search long to find folks who will say that it doesn't make any difference what we believe, as long as our heart is in the right place and our intentions are good. The question that arises though is: can our heart be in the right place if we say that it doesn't make any difference about what God has said in His word? I contend that our heart is not right with God if we are unconcerned with understanding what His word says. The apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5:17, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." If we wish to know God, to serve God, and to obey God, we should want to understand what His word says. It is simply indifference and laziness to dismiss reasonable and thoughtful discussion of God's word by saying "it doesn't make any difference what we believe." I contend that it not only makes a difference, but our relationship to God depends upon our desire to know what His word teaches and our desire to DO what His word teaches.

Jesus said, "you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." First, Jesus here affirms that truth can be known. Truth is not some mysterious and allusive thing, but it is knowable. Second, the Lord says that spiritual freedom only comes from knowing the truth. If you want to be free from sin, you must desire to know the truth. If you would be free from guilt; free from condemnation; free from ignorance; free from fear; then knowing, believing, and obeying the truth must be your objective. Now, Jesus said, as He prayed to the Father in John 17:17, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." So, if we are to know the truth and thus be made free, we must seek to know what God has said in His word. That alone makes what we believe important. Friend, regardless of how many people think so, one way is not as good as another. One religious teaching is not as good as another.

First, it makes a difference what we believe about what God says in His word, **BECAUSE GOD SAID IT**. This alone should be sufficient reason for us to want to know what the Bible says and teaches. The bible is not just a religious book. It is not just a collection of essays, poems, stories, and letters of people living in ancient times. It is the Word of God Himself. Paul said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The phrase "by inspiration of God" means 'God-breathed' or the "breath of God". God has spoken, in other words, through His word, and Paul tells us that this is where our doctrine or teaching is to come from and that the scriptures are sufficient to equip us to serve and obey God.

The Corinthian church was tempted to dismiss the teachings of Paul because they disputed his being a true apostle of Christ, but Paul told them in 1 Corinthians 14:37 "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of

the Lord.” Well, doesn’t that within itself tell us that it makes a difference what we believe about what the bible says? Listen once again to Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” The word of God was sent forth to create faith in the minds and hearts of those who hear it. (Romans 10:17) Satan doesn’t want you to have faith in God and so he does whatever he can to prevent the word from lodging in your heart and creating faith and obedience to it. Jesus said in the parable of the Sower in Luke 8:12, “Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.” Friend, if the devil can’t prevent you from hearing it in the first place, he will do everything in his power to take it away from you when you hear it so that it will never do what it was intended to do in your life and one of the primary ways Satan does this is to convince people that it doesn’t matter what God has said. That’s what he told Eve when he deceived her in the garden of Eden and that’s the lie that he continues to whisper into the willing ears of multitudes of people today. “It doesn’t make any difference what you believe about the bible, he says.” But it does make a difference because God said it and that makes it vitally important. Listen! God has not revealed one thing in His word that He doesn’t want you to know and understand.

Second, it makes a difference what we believe, **BECAUSE THE WORD OF GOD WAS MEANT TO BE UNDERSTOOD**. This is one reason many dismiss any discussion of truth and error because they don’t believe we can really understand the bible anyhow. So, instead of learning to read and understand the bible, they just assume that the bible cannot be understood and therefore it makes no difference what it says or what we think about what it says. Now, I’m not suggesting that you can read the bible like you read the newspaper. I’m not suggesting there are not challenges before us when we delve into the word of God. Admittedly, there are things in the bible that are challenging and harder to understand than other things in the bible. Even the apostle Peter acknowledged that some of the writings of the beloved brother Paul were hard to be understood (2 Peter 3:16) but notice Peter didn’t say they could NOT be understood but rather they were difficult to understand and had to be read and interpreted with care. The bible is not some cryptic and mysterious code. Again, Paul said we are to “understand what the will of the will of the Lord is.” He said in Ephesians 3:3-4, “how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),” Yes, the bible was written in ancient languages to people in another culture, but we have the tools to learn those languages and discover the cultures to which the word of God was originally written and the truths contained in that word are timeless and universal. The bible is written in different literary genres, but the message conveyed through those means is understandable and applicable to our lives even today.

Do you know what the real problem is? Jesus said, “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” (Matthew 13:19) He quoted Isaiah a few verses earlier saying: “And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘HEARING YOU WILL HEAR AND SHALL NOT UNDERSTAND, AND SEEING YOU WILL SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEARTS OF THIS PEOPLE HAVE GROWN DULL. THEIR EARS ARE HARD OF HEARING, AND THEIR EYES THEY HAVE CLOSED, LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, LEST THEY SHOULD UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEARTS AND TURN, SO THAT I SHOULD HEAL THEM.’” That’s the real problem with understanding the word of God. And in some cases, that’s why people claim it doesn’t make any difference what you believe because they don’t want to believe the truth, but rather they want to believe and practice their own error.

Third, it makes a difference what we believe **BECAUSE GOD’S WORD IS MEANT NOT ONLY TO BE BELIEVED AND OBEYED.** Listen now to James in James 1:21-25. He says, “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:21-25). And Jesus went even further to say that the word spoken will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). My friend, we will answer to the Lord one day as to whether we obeyed His word. Doesn’t that tell us that it makes a difference what we believe?

Number four, it makes a difference what we believe about the bible **BECAUSE OF THE CONSEQUENCE OF BELIEVING ERROR.** To say that there is such a thing as truth necessarily implies that there is such a thing as error, and the bible not only says that we will be blessed for knowing the truth, but it also warns that we can be condemned for believing error. Paul warns in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” Listen to that! Paul says there are eternal consequences for believing something that isn’t true. If that be the case, shouldn’t we want to know the truth? Shouldn’t we do everything we can to learn what God would have us to know, believe, and practice? “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

Fifth and finally, it makes a difference what we believe about the bible **BECAUSE WHAT GOD SAYS IS MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT ANYONE ELSE SAYS ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE.** Do you believe it makes a difference what your pharmacist says? Do you carefully read the instructions that come with the medicine he prescribes? You’re awfully foolish if you don’t. One pill too many might make you gravely ill or even kill you? Is suspect you think it makes a difference. Do you believe it makes a difference what your employer says? If you don’t, you probably don’t keep a job very long or go very far in the job you have. Do you believe it makes a difference what the laws of science governing physics, electricity, and so forth say? Try wiring a house without knowing how electricity works and knowing the codes. Do you believe it makes a difference what the U.S. Constitution says? If you want law and order and a civilized society, it matters. What if everybody in Washington said “no one can understand that over 200-year-old document. It doesn’t make any difference what it says and what the framers meant. It may seem like some in the country think that way, but we know that if someone didn’t stand up for the constitution there would be a complete breakdown in the rule of law. Well, the bible is the constitution of the Kingdom of Heaven. And it matters more what it says than what the constitution of any country says. The consequences are even more dire.

In their zealous desire for unity, many today have settled for ecumenical union instead, by saying that we should simply dismiss our disagreements and agree to say that doctrine is of little consequence and doesn’t really matter. But that’s a false idea of unity. God’s word says what it says and means what it means and we instead of shrugging and dismissing it, we should be striving to know it and follow it. And think about this: Not only does every action have a subsequent reaction, but every belief also has some consequence as well. What we believe or don’t believe about one thing will often determine what we

conclude about something else that may be of even greater consequence. What we believe determines the code by which we live. A careless theology will lead to a careless life.

I want to leave you with two warnings from the bible about what happens when we dismiss objective truth and faith to make that our goal and our standard for our faith and conduct. One is the disastrous time in the history of God's people known as the days of the judges. It was a time of confusion and chaos and when sin was rampant. The book of judges tells us "that in those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did what was right in his own eyes." In other words, it didn't make any difference what you believed. Every man just lived by the dictates of his own conscience. And then the wise man Solomon reminds us: "There is a way that seems right to a man but its end is the way of death."

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