***Does what we believe matter, or just that we believe?***

* A study recently released by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, suggests that most religious people in America think *what* they believe isn’t so important. (June 2008)
  + According to the report, eighty-three percent of people identifying themselves with mainline Protestant churches believe that many religions can lead to eternal life.
  + Fifty-seven percent of people identifying themselves as evangelicals believe that many religions can lead to eternal life?
  + Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses have stronger convictions about their beliefs being the true ones than do evangelicals.
  + Thirteen percent of evangelicals surveyed believe God is an impersonal force.
  + Six percent of atheists surveyed believe in a personal God, and twelve percent believe in heaven
* In our current culture specific beliefs are becoming the property of the believer, not of the religion itself.
* But belief doesn’t only apply to “religions”
* Everyday we’re influenced by our own worldview
  + ***What is a worldview?***
    - A worldview is how I view everything in life.
      * What is reality?
      * What is man?
      * How can we know?
      * How are we supposed to live?
  + A faulty set of beliefs can be disastrous
  + There are various beliefs or views of how we see the world
  + ***What are a few of these worldviews? (hint: isms!)***
    - Materialism
      * This can be summarized in the word More. More, more, more. That worldview is called Materialism.
      * Materialists believe in the purchase of happiness and if I can’t afford it, that’s ok, I’ve got a credit card.
      * The materialists confuses their value with their valuables.
      * But Jesus said *“A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”*. (Luke 12:15)
    - Individualism
      * ‘I’ve got to think of Me First’. We live in a ‘Me First’ mentality world.
      * Individualism says I don’t really need to care about you.
      * I can’t get involved you see- I’ve got to think of me
      * But, Jesus taught a totally different worldview. He said this *“If you try to keep life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for Me you will find true life.”* (Mark 8:35)
      * Jesus says you only begin to live when you begin to give your life away.
      * Significance in life does not come from serving yourself, not from status, salary, or success.
      * Proverbs 21v17 *“Are you addicted to thrills? What an empty life. The pursuit of pleasure is never satisfied.”*
    - Pragmatism
      * ‘Whatever works for you’ / ‘If it feels good, do it’
      * In other words it may not be my thing but if it works for you, fine.
      * It doesn’t matter if it’s right or wrong. It doesn’t matter if it hurts anybody or not. If it works for you, fine.
      * There’s a problem with that. There are things that work - that are evil.
      * But the Bible says this in Proverbs 21v16. *“There is a way that seems right for a man but in the end it leads to death.”*
    - Atheism
      * God doesn’t exist. Or if He does exist He doesn’t matter
      * I just believe that everything in life is a result of chance. We’re all accidents of nature.
      * But, if God doesn’t exist and God doesn’t matter, it follows *you* don’t matter.
        + That’s the logical, conclusion of that worldview. We are just an accident of nature.
        + If there is no plan, no purpose, no design in life then life doesn’t matter, we’re of no value.
      * The Bible says this in Romans 1v20 *“From the beginning of creation God has shown what He is like by all He has made.”*
      * Psalm 14v1 *“The fool has said in His heart ‘There is no God.’”*
    - Humanism
      * ‘You are your own God’
      * If we don’t worship God, we worship something. Sometimes we just make it ourselves.
      * This idea of you’re your own God is very popular.
      * I am the master of my fate. I am the determiner of my destiny. I am in charge
        + It’s a lot of self-help stuff. A lot of new age stuff
        + “You’re divine. You’re a god. God is within”
      * It feeds our selfish desire we love to hear that.
      * It was the original temptation when Satan told Adam and Eve,“Eat this and you’ll be like god.”
      * The Bible says this in Romans 1v23 *“They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and they worshipped created things rather than the creator.”*
    - Theism
      * God made me for His purposes.
      * Theism comes from *Theo*, which is the Greek word for God.
      * The Bible says that God created us for a purpose.
      * Judaism and Christianity both are theistic worldviews that God made us for a purpose.
      * Colossians 1 says this *“For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, everything got started in Him and finds its purpose in Him.”*
      * Everything! Absolutely everything was created by God, for a purpose. By God and for God.
      * Until we understand that, life never fully makes sense!

So again we come to the question: ***“Does it really matter what I believe as long as I believe in something?” or, “As long as your belief helps you, isn’t that all that matters?”***

* The idea behind statements such as these is that there is no absolute truth to believe in, and thus the act of believing is all there is.
  + The idea of finding any truth or meaning to life has escaped modern man.
  + Even though we all continue to have definite beliefs, the climate seems to be the act of belief rather than any real object of belief.
* Belief will not create fact. Truth is independent of belief.
  + No matter how hard I may try, believing something will not make it true.
    - For example, I may believe with all my heart that I want it to snow today so classes could be canceled, but this will not guarantee snow. Or I may believe that my Kia van is really a new BMW, but my belief won’t change the fact.
* Belief is only as good as the object in which we put our trust.
  + Someone may come to me and say, “Hey, let’s go for a ride in my new plane!” If I come to find out that his plane hardly runs at all and he does not even have a pilot’s license, then my faith, no matter how much I have, is not well founded. My faith won’t create a great pilot out of my friend once we are in the sky! However, if another friend of mine comes along and makes the same offer, but he is a certified pilot with a new plane, then my trust has a much more solid base. So it does matter what I believe, for my believing it does not make it true.
* The Bible emphasizes that what one believes is vital.
  + Jesus said, “If for if you do not believe that I am He*,* you will die in your sins.” (John 8:24).
  + “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).
  + Thus, the stress of the Scriptures is not so much on the act of belief as on the object of belief. What is emphasized is not so much the one trusting, but rather the One trusted.
    - Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6).
* One of the darkest periods in the history of Israel recorded in the Bible occurred in the time of the kings. During this time, there was a contest between God and Baal, a highly regarded cult deity. The story is told in 1 Kings 18.
  + Because King Ahab was unfaithful to the God of Isreal—the one true God, Yahweh—the rain had ceased to fall. Elijah, God’s prophet, had foretold the drought, which lasted three years. In desperation, the king sent men to find Elijah. When he was finally found he challenged the King’s false prophets to a battle of the gods.
  + God’s prophet Elijah set the rules: An altar was to be built with wood and an oxen laid upon it as a sacrifice. The god who answered by fire and consumed the sacrifice would be acknowledged as the true god in Israel. Elijah let the prophets of Baal go first.
  + If anyone should have been able to start a fire from the sky, it was Baal—the nature god who controlled the weather, rain, thunderstorms and lightning. The priests of Baal paraded around the altar all morning and until late afternoon. But Baal did not respond. The fire remained unlit.
  + Elijah taunted them, saying that perhaps their god was asleep or busy with private matters. He suggested that they may need to be more passionate in their request to Baal. In frenzied worship the false priests jumped all over the altar, cut themselves with swords, danced with their greatest effort, raved and pleaded all day. Yet nothing happened. No-one can say they were not sincere or did not believe. They gave up.
  + Finally, it was Elijah’s turn. In supplication to his God, Elijah didn’t jump or shout or do anything outstanding. He just stepped forward and prayed, “Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again” (1 Kings 18:37).
  + God answered. Fire burst from heaven, the altar exploded and the sacrifice was consumed. The false prophets of Baal were then slain. If sincerity and belief saved, these prophets should have been spared. But they were not. These prophets had their trust in the wrong object. They had rejected the truth. God requires people to put their faith in Jesus; nothing less will satisfy either them or Him.

So we now ask the question: ***“Why isn’t sincerity good enough?”***

* When it comes to having a relationship with God, sincerity is necessary, but sincerity alone is not enough.
  + A good father outlines the rules (both specifically and in general) which his children are to follow. He does this through consideration of all of his family and, particularly, for the sake of his children, whom he loves fervently. The children will have ideas of their own and these will often conflict with their father's rules. The children love the father, but sometimes feel that they have reason to ignore or disobey his rules. They know that their father loves them and they honestly believe that the thing they want to do is good, and that good will result; surely (because it is good) their father will be pleased and will not punish them for breaking the rules. The father is more knowledgeable and mature than the children. Because of his greater experience the father knows that the thing that was done was not good, and he is displeased. Should he punish, or should he commend his children?
  + The 13th Chapter of I Kings, tells of a prophet whom God ordered to make a journey to destroy an altar which was being used by King Jeroboam in worship of idols. The prophet was not to eat bread, drink water, or return home the way he came. The altar was destroyed and the prophet started home as commanded. But an old prophet met him and lied to him saying that an angel had commanded that the traveler was to come home with the old prophet and eat bread and drink water. The prophet believed him and went home with him and ate bread and drank water. The prophet was sincere and honestly believed that he was acting in accord with the will of God. He believed he had good reason for he was told that the instruction had come from God. He was honest and sincere, however, God destroyed him very soon afterward because of this disobedience.
  + The ardent Jewish Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, persecuted the church in the days soon after it's establishment, and brought many Christians to trial and death. He did Christ a very great wrong because he wanted to please God. But Saul did all these things with a sincere and honest conscience;
* Men still say, "God will be pleased with your life and your worship as long as you are honest and sincere in your heart".
  + Honesty and sincerity are not always the key to being pleasing to the one in authority.
  + The actions of sincere and honest people are not, necessarily, pleasing to God, and if God is displeased these actions will result in punishment.

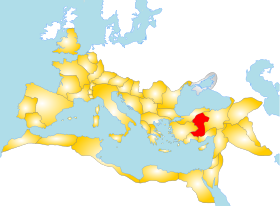
***Then how do I know if what I believe is true? And if it isn’t, how do I find the truth?***

* ***What is Truth?***
  + Truth is universal.
    - Come up with a statement that is both true and false at the same time.
    - Truth, by definition, has to apply to everyone, or it’s not true.
  + Truth is objective.
    - What’s true is true, whether anyone believes it or not.
  + Truth is verifiable.
    - Our belief that Jesus rose from the dead is not based on folklore; it’s based on eye-witness accounts of a historical event.
    - Jesus verified his words as truth by rising from the dead.
  + Truth works.
    - 2+2=4
    - Aspirin
    - We can believe the things that work practically.
      * Don’t be afraid to apply practicality to your faith!
    - If a belief or doctrine or theological theory doesn’t work in the real world of day-to-day living, then it isn’t true.
    - A certain cult that claims diet choices can grant everlasting life—when one of the cult’s members lives to be 500, it will be proven true, but until then…
    - The Christian message—that Jesus came into the world to save you from your sins and give you life to the fullest—is true because it works and it’s been proven to be true time and again.
* David Wells lamented this loss of doctrinal teaching in churches in his 1993 book, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* 
  + One problem some people have with a strong concern for doctrine is that it tends to divide Christians.
  + In so far as we *do* segregate ourselves from other Christians over non-essential beliefs we are in error.
  + Unity is very important. But nowhere in Scripture are we taught that unity is to be preserved regardless, at the expense of truth.
  + After exhorting the Ephesians (4:3-6) to be unified in the bond of peace, Paul lists what we are to be unified around: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.
    - We aren’t to be united around the conviction that when it comes to religion, to each his or her own.
* What does it mean to give up on the importance of specific doctrinal beliefs?
  + First, and very obviously, we have abandoned biblical Christianity.
    - In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul states specific beliefs that are essential: “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (verses 3-5).
    - Jesus made the bold and definitely non-politically correct claim that he was the *only* way to God (John 14:6).
    - Paul says that salvation comes to those who confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9).
    - Throughout both Old and New Testaments, we are presented with claim after claim presented as being true.
  + Second, we must hold fast to the historic teachings of biblical Christianity if we are to have anything to offer the world.
    - One of the most significant results of liberal watering down of Christian distinctives is that, over time, attendance in mainline churches dwindled; they had nothing to offer that was different from what people could get outside the church.
    - We’re doing well in the arena of social relief; we’re doing very poorly in training our people in basic Christian beliefs *as beliefs that are true for all people for all time.*
  + Consequences of the loss of doctrinal conviction.
    - First is simply the loss of conviction. What do we stand for?
      * You’ve heard it before: A person [or church] that stands for nothing will fall for anything.
    - Second is the loss of what might be accomplished when spurred on by a theological vision.
      * Is being nice and doing good the substance of our marching orders?
    - Third is the loss of any really meaningful sense of what “evangelical” means.
    - Fourth is the loss of unity with the spinning off of individual interests.
* If Christianity doesn’t have *the* truth about how one might obtain eternal life, it has nothing more to offer than religious experience (whatever that might be for a given individual).
  + It has lost all its substance. Since it *claims* to be the only way to God, what has been aptly said many times bears repeating: either it is true *for* all, or it is not true *at* all.

***Is it, then, enough to believe the right thing, and rest content?***

* By no means.
* The Gospel believed and obeyed in baptism, introduces a man to a position in which he can do what was before impossible
  + Christ can now be the ruler of his life; for, without this, the day will come when Christ will say: "I never knew you; depart from me" (Matt. 7:23).
* "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure ... Add to your faith virtue ..." (2 Peter 1:5-10).
* "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).
* "Ye are my friends it ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14).
* "Teach them (who believe) to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20).
* "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

Intro to Galatians

* Author
  + Apostle Paul
    - (Galatians 1:1)
    - Also, the letter’s style and theology
  + A few scholars have considered that “Paul” was a pseudonym
    - Arguments are usually foundationless
* Date and Occasion
  + Destination
    - 
    - Celtic peoples of northern Galatia
    - All of Galatia
    - First and second missionary journeys
      * (Acts 13;14;15:36-18:22)
      * Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (South Galatia)
      * Early in his career, after first journey, around the time of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15; Galatians 2:11-14)
      * 49 AD
    - Third missionary journey
      * Ethnic Galatia in the north
      * After passing through “Galatia and Phrygia” (Acts 18:23)
      * During the two year stay in Ephesus (Acts 19) or when he was traveling through Macedonia on his way to Greece at the end of his journey (Acts 20:1-6)
      * 54, 55 AD
      * Equal to 2 Corinthians, Romans and perhaps Philippians (similar content)
  + Written to answer specific problems
    - Not long after the Galatians accepted the gospel, agitators came and attacked Paul personally (4:17)
      * Preached a distorted form of Christianity
      * Required circumcision for salvation
      * Jewish pressure (Jewish groups becoming increasingly intolerant of Greeks, last half of first century – Josephus) and human pride
      * Tried to discredit Paul
        + Paul was a renegade who defied his superiors (the Jerusalem apostles)
        + Said that Paul had argued with Peter on Gentile -> Jew -> Saved
        + Said Paul originally preached circumcision for salvation but had recently changed his mind to accommodate the gentiles
    - Galatians began to abandon the gospel and God himself (1:6,7)
      * Wanted to be under the law (4:21)
      * Become circumcised (5:2)
      * Dissension in the community (6:3-5)
    - Paul wants them to return to living in the truth of the gospel (the gospel of grace) (2:5, 14)
      * Faith in Jesus Christ
      * No other requirements can adulterate this gospel (1:8,9)
      * Salvation is the gift of God’s grace