

God's Sweet Sixteen – Part 7

Welcome to God's Sweet Sixteen, part 7, July 30, 2008. For the past six weeks (today being the 7th) we've gone through these things. Pray, praise, seek, surrender, rejoice, repent, rest, humble, obey, give, forgive, thank, and tremble. So today we move on in the Sweet Sixteen and we'll do trust and testify. And then when we meet again (two weeks from today), we'll finish up with to teach. I've written the Sweet Sixteen (you'll recognize) in verb form, words of action so to speak, not names of things. I've also chosen words that could be grouped beginning by their initial letter. So I have five "T's" and that makes it easier for me to remember the Sweet Sixteen.

That's why I've chosen trust rather than other related words. Of course faith is one of those words that could have been used. So what is faith? Thankfully the Bible tells us. Hebrews 11:1 – Faith is the conviction of things not seen. That means the absolute certainty of things not seen. For instance I Timothy 6:16 tells us that no man has seen God. We cannot see God with our physical eyes; but we have total certainty of His existence. Psalms 19:1 teaches us that we see God in what He has made. The creation testifies of the creator God. Romans 2:14-15 tells us of the internal witness of the conscience. II Timothy 3:16 tells us of the inspired Word, the testimony of the Word written by God for the benefit of man. And then John 5:39 (Jesus says) – The Scriptures testify of Me. Because the written Word of God testifies of the incarnate Word Who is God, the second member of the Trinity, the Son of God. Now notice that faith is a noun. It's a thing. It's something that we have; thus, faith is what you possess. It's not a verb. You don't faith something; you have faith. It's not something you do; it's something that you possess. Trust is the closely related verb form. Faith in God is to have confidence in the unseen God that, in fact, does exist. To trust in God is to place your total confidence in God as a lifestyle. So trust is what you do when you have faith. When you have faith, you do trust. Trust, therefore, becomes the exhibition of faith.

There are other closely related words like belief and believe. Belief is the noun form; belief is something that you have. Believe is a verb; it's something that you do. Believe is to regard as true. Thus, to believe is the exhibition of your belief. It's to exhibit that which you truly have as a belief. As a Christian I believe in Jesus. That's how I exhibit my belief that Jesus is Who He said that He was. So words like that are all related. They're so closely related that you can distinguish them, but not fully separate them. You cannot have confidence in that which you do not regard as true. You cannot trust that which you do not regard as true. You cannot believe that which you do not regard as true. So truth is the underlying congealing word, and remember truth for the Christian who is God determined, is truth is what God is and how God views everything else. That at its foundational level is my belief as to what truth is. To not believe in Jesus (which is a verb) is to have no belief in Jesus which is a noun. You cannot have faith in Jesus as a noun, as a possession; and you cannot trust Jesus if you do not have faith. That's why Jesus would talk from time to time when they would say increase our faith and He would turn the question and say if you have faith, here's what it will look like.

So these four words can be distinguished but not separated because they're tightly yoked in their meaning and understanding. When we do not trust God, that is exhibit a lifestyle of trusting God, we displease God because it's not to exhibit the faith which He has placed in each one of us. Though we have faith, we're still given a choice within certain confines in each circumstance

of life as to whether we exhibit the faith that we have by trusting God or by trusting something else, be it wealth or whatever. Hebrews 11:6 – Without faith it is impossible to please God. In fact, we live in either/or every moment of our lives. We're living out of the faith that we have been given by grace; or we're living out of faith in something else other than faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 14:23 tells us – What is not of faith is sin. And that doesn't mean just faith; it means faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, the Life, and so on, the Son of God. So with every thought we are either placing our trust in Jesus Christ or we're placing our trust and our lifestyle and our decision-making in something else which is not of faith and is, therefore, sin. All men walk by faith. When you really get down to the root of any man's approach to life, you always get to that which cannot be proven and it is rooted and grounded in something that is unprovable. So God has designed man, since man is not omniscient and omnipotent and omnipresent, to walk by faith in something. That is a God given characteristic in the way we're created. So we will either walk by faith that we have been given in the Lord Jesus Christ or we will walk by faith in something else. And what is not of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is sin. It's either/or.

Faith is the fuel, remember, that runs all things spiritual in the kingdom of God. It's a living and daring confidence in God. Faith says I believe God and not my circumstances because God has the final say, not my circumstances. My circumstances are in constant flux, a state of change. But God is not. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. All of my circumstances are transient; but my God is not transient. That's why I can have faith in a God because that God is not a transient God. He is real. He is eternal. He is unchanging. And He is sovereign. And I'm simply to exhibit placing trust in the faith in that God that I have been given as a gift by grace. Faith simply says, as an expression, in spite of all circumstances that appear to the contrary (such as the recent flood in Cedar Rapids), I stand in full certainty that in the Lord Jesus Christ I have been given every spiritual blessing. And my eternity is secure and everything is going to work for good no matter how adverse it appears in the physical realm.

Next poster. This poster takes us back to remind us of the three critical essences or essential characteristics of God. To have faith in the God of the Bible is to have faith in all three of these critical essences. This is to worship the God of the Bible as He has described Himself to be. We're to worship God in truth. And this is the truth about how God has described Himself to us. When we do not walk by faith in this God, including these three critical essences, then we are walking by faith in a lesser god that we have self-designed him to be (a god with a little "g"). And here's how the human race functions in regard to this lesser god—this designer god I call it. The self-designed designer god is just big enough to decrease our anxiety about flesh and blood existence and all its pitfalls including death; but never big enough to shatter our self worship. That's why Lenin would look at the exhibition of religion and call religion the opiate of the masses; because he had the perception, more perception than most religious people to see how people were using religion to decrease their anxiety. So he didn't believe in God at all; but he could see the truth about how religion was playing out in the human race. It was being used by the human race with a designer god of their own creation to decrease anxiety to a tolerable level; but never big enough to shatter self confidence and self worship. That's why there's such a huge gap when you look at polls of Christians between these two things. The percentage of Americans who believe in God is very high; 80-90%. But the percentage of Americans who display real fruit and evidence that they believe in the God of the Bible as He has described

Himself to be is almost infinitesimally small and we wonder how can that be? It's because the 90% who believe in God are believing in a designer god of their own self-creation out of their fantasy life to decrease their anxiety to a tolerable level; but not to reach the threshold of shattering their self worship. So belief in god is not belief in the God of the Bible.

Next poster. Here I'm taking the same three critical essences and linking them to some of the words that I've used so far in this presentation. To believe, to trust, and to fear the God of the Bible means that these three verbs actually apply to all three of the critical essences of God. To make a point, though, I'm going to select to link each of these words to one of the critical essences so that we can understand how faith in the God of the Bible is to work. First, I believe that He is Truth, the source of truth. I'm linking that to the fierce, but righteous Judge; because God can only judge righteously if He is Truth; because if there's deception in Him, or He doesn't have omniscience, then He can't be counted upon to judge righteously in every circumstance. Thus, I've applied to believe to His essence as the fierce, but righteous Judge because I'm regarding Him as Truth. Truth is what God is and how God views everything else. That's how he can judge righteously. I trust His motive. God is Love. I can only trust His motive if I know that He is Love and that He loves me. He doesn't just love in some vague ambiguous cloud of love; He loves me. Thus, I have applied to trust to the essence of God as the passionate Lover. I fear His power. I stand in awe and reverence of His power as the sovereign, majestic, creator King. So I've chosen to link the word fear of God with His power as the sovereign King of creation.

Now I'm going to give a simple-minded real world child-like example to make the point of how this works in the spirit realm and how faith in the God of the Bible has to include all three essential characteristics revealed about God by Himself to us in the Bible. Pretend that I'm in New York City at a busy intersection. I'm disabled and in a wheelchair. I think slowly; I move slowly. There's tremendous traffic flow-by and all travelers are impatient. I need to cross the street; but I cannot do so safely. I have no confidence in my ability nor in their self control to allow me to cross the street safely. A young man walks up and offers me help across the street. He's the same young man that I saw snatch a purse a block down the street last week. I believe him when he says he wants to help me across the street. I believe that he's telling truth at least in that aspect of truth. I fear his power. He is young, athletic, quick, coordinated and able to get me across the street. So I believe his offer to help me across the street is truth as far as he has expressed truth. I am in awe and reverence of his power to do so; but I refuse his offer. Now why would I refuse his offer? It is because I have no trust in his motive. I do not believe that he loves me and wants to get me across the street safely for my benefit with no gain to himself. Therefore, I believe that he wants to get me across the street, yes; but he then wants to push me into the alley so he can steal my billfold. I believe. I fear; but I don't trust his motive; thus, I do not go with him. So though I have linked to two of the three critical essences, I don't have faith in him; because faith to move has to include linkage with all three of the critical essences.

Secondly, a young child offers to help me across the street. I believe that he's telling me the truth that he wants to get me across the street safely for my benefit and not some secondary gain of his own. I believe he's telling me the truth about what he wants to accomplish. I trust his motivation that he's operating in my best interest; but I don't go with him. Why not? I do not have fear of his power. I'm not in awe of his strength or quickness or authority or decision-making or grasp

of total truth even to guarantee that he can help me with my passage across the street. I believe that he is true insofar as he knows truth. I trust his motive. I do not fear his power; thus, I do not accept his offer. Again, I believe and have confidence in two of the three essential characteristics required for me to move out in faith; but it takes all three to exhibit true faith; and thus, to shape your life based on it. I do not have faith in him.

Thirdly and lastly, a policeman offers to help. I believe that he is truthful, that he wants to get me across the street safely. I trust his motive that he's doing it for my benefit as a servant of society and not doing it for some payment to himself; not operating in his own self interest so to speak. I fear his power. He is strong. He is athletic. He's a burly cop. He is confident that he can do so and he possesses authority. He can stop traffic at the raise of a hand. I do accept his offer to help me across the street. I believe that he is the source of truth. I trust his motive in doing so and I'm in awe and reverence of his power to stop traffic and get me across the street. Thus, I have faith in him. I have faith in all three critical essential characteristics.

It is the same with God. You cannot have faith in the love of God and really shape your life based on it unless you regard God as truth and God as sovereign. When you start eliminating one-third of the critical essential characteristics of God, I can guarantee you that you will not walk by faith in that God through the circumstances of life; because it takes all three to accept His offer to help you through those life circumstances. When you do that, you have faith in God as He has declared Himself to be. That is to have faith in the God of the Bible. Anything less is not of faith in the God of the Bible as He has described Himself to be. So anything less than that is to walk by faith in your lesser god that you have self-designed him to be to diminish your anxiety; but not to reach the threshold of shattering self worship. So faith in God is encompassing all three of the critical essential characteristics and that is to preach the whole counsel of God—not a fragment of God that pleases and tickles the ears of man. Designing your own god is self worship. That's why it is sin; because it is not of faith in God as He has described Himself to be. So what is not of faith is sin; and that's some amplification about that and how it's to play out to be a fruit as a member of the Sweet Sixteen.

Now we'll move on to the second and last topic for today—that is to testify. To testify is to give expression to all that God is and all that God has done for you in your life. Your testimony includes a personal aspect. Your personal aspect of testimony is not a vague theologic abstraction with which people can argue. Abstractions are always debatable; but a changed life is not debatable. John 9:24-25 – They called the man who had been blind and said to him give glory to God. We know that this man who gave you your sight, Jesus Christ is a sinner. And he, the blind man, answered whether He's a sinner or not, I don't know. But this one thing I do know. Before I was blind and now I see. That is the irrefutable, personal testimony of what God has done in your life. You've heard the saying always be prepared to give testimony and when all else fails, use words. That reminds us that our most effective testimony is that of a changed life that models the character of Jesus Christ to the world. There is power in the Word of God. There is power in your personal expressed testimony. And there's power in a changed, transformed life that is reflecting the character of God. We are called to release that power in all aspects as part of our testimony here on Earth.

The thief who no longer steals may be asked how or why. Then he can explain. I now know Jesus and He's not a thief. How can I bear witness of my provider God by stealing? The liar who no longer lies can say I now know Jesus and He is Truth. How can I bear witness of my truthful Savior by lying? The rapist who no longer does so can say I now know Jesus and His meekness. How can I bear witness of my meek Savior by forcing myself on other children of His creation? The adulterer who no longer does so can say I now know my faithful Jesus. How can I bear witness of His faithfulness by my being unfaithful? The murderer who no longer murders can say I know Jesus. He came to give life, not to take it. How can I bear witness of the One Who came to give life by my taking life? The coveter who no longer covets can say I know that in Jesus I have every spiritual blessing and therein is my contentment. How can I bear witness of my contentment in my Savior by being discontented about my possessions? Every perversion that exists in the life of an unbeliever or in the life of an immature believer is a powerful testimony waiting to happen. Satan functions to try to kill every potential testimony.

Next poster. I've selected to make this point the poster that I call overcoming because in Scripture that's the word applied to this particular verse. Revelation 12:11: It tells us that they overcame him and the "him" is Satan the accuser of the brethren. They overcame him by three methodologies. First by the blood of the Lamb, secondly because of the word of their testimony, and thirdly, they did not love their own lives even unto death. Let's address the first one. Satan cannot successfully accuse us as Christians before our Holy God of a single sin because the blood of the Lamb has paid for every single one. If we feel accused and live in self condemnation, it simply means that we are choosing to live by placing more power and value to our sin than we are attaching power and value to the blood of the Son of God. That is to intentionally choose to diminish the cross of Jesus Christ. That is to judge God, to judge that the price paid by His Son on that cross is inadequate to pay for my sins; so therefore, I'm still in condemnation. That is nothing more than continued self worship. That is why they overcame the accuser of the brethren by the blood of the Lamb; because he couldn't accuse them of a single sin. When you live that way, by the blood of the Lamb, self condemnation will never enter your thought life. But when you do otherwise, that is not of faith and it is sin. So self condemnation is sin that needs to be confronted and not meekness that needs to be applauded.

Secondly, the word of their testimony. That may mean giving the testimony by expressing the Word of God. It can mean giving personal testimony of what God has done in your life through Jesus Christ. In regard to condemnation, that could include saying to yourself and to others, I was condemned; but there is no condemnation in Jesus Christ. The power and the value of the blood of the Lamb of God, the Son of God exceeds the power and value of all sins of all men of all time. It is of infinite value. Truth for me is what God is and how God views everything else and this is what God has told me about the value of the blood of His Son. I was blind; but now I see. My value comes from Him and not from the opinions of others, not even from my opinion of myself as I have in the past lived in self condemnation; because there is no condemnation in Christ. That is a powerful testimony waiting to happen.

Next, they did not love their own life even unto death. That becomes the final testimony of all Christians. Your final exam is death; and it's your greatest opportunity to give testimony. Will you die in cynicism, anger, and fear? Or will you die in love and joy and peace while declaring that to die is gain? Will you die while taking offense at God that somehow He should have

prevented your being in this situation? Will you die while desiring revenge? Or will you follow Stephen who followed Jesus Who died by saying forgive them for they know not what they do? That's how we are to conclude our testimony.

But before death we're still here as children of God on planet Earth. So here's some things we are to testify to. I have peace that surpasses understanding. Let me testify to you as to the how and the why. I set my love upon you unconditionally not dependent on your response toward me. Let me testify as to the how and the why. I forgive you. In fact, I forgave you before the transgression; because forgiveness for me is a state of being, not an individual act waiting to be performed. Let me testify as to how and why I hold that attitude. I have joy that is resistant to circumstances. Let me testify as to how and why. I constantly give better to others than they earn. Let me testify as to how and why. I not only give, I give cheerfully. Let me testify as to how and why. I'm an earthen vessel to bring the how and the why. I'm a living epistle to tell the true story in my testimony of the how and the why. I'm an ambassador here to represent the how and the why. We testify in all these avenues because that is our purpose for being left here after salvation. We're here to bear witness of Jesus. We're here to give glory to Jesus. We do those when we testify. Mutism is not an expression of testimony.

Not to testify is to do the following. It is to self determine that you have a higher purpose for being left here on planet Earth than the purpose assigned to you by the Holy God Who created you and saved you. Can you imagine a greater act of self worship than to declare that you have a greater vision of your purpose for being here than to testify to the Holy God Who created you and saved you? As Paul would say, may it never be; because to testify is definitely one of God's Sweet Sixteen.

So my time is up today and I thank you for yours.