

Acts 9:1-19

Authentic faith

(Saul's conversion and ours. See also Acts 22:1-16; 26:9-18)

Introduction

1. The **emerging church** movement in our time is drawing attention to issues that are at least interesting if not vital to authentic Christianity.
2. What are the criteria of authentic faith? In an age where intellectual confession is cheap and often divorced from true zeal, deep conviction, and bold action, we ask, "What is vital to authentic faith?"
3. I sense that the emerging church is a corrective movement responding to:
 - (a) **two weaknesses in Western evangelical Christianity.**
 - **Propositionalism** - There is a tendency in American evangelicalism to emphasize "correct doctrine" while neglecting the importance of "authentic life style." "As long as your doctrine agrees with ours, you are welcome."
 - **Pragmatism** - There is a tendency in American evangelicalism to emphasize "pragmatic ministry" while neglecting the importance of "integrity in community relationships." "If it results in numerical church growth it must be good."
 - (b) **two characteristics of Western culture.**
 - **Pluralism** - There is a movement in American culture away from "common truths" (in the area of values) toward "common behaviors." This results in a movement away from universal truths to communities of common purpose, perspective, and preference. It is often labeled as "**postmodernism**." "We must be careful to not exclude anyone." "Our communities are defined by common experiences and common ethical agendas."
 - **Pantheism** - There is a movement in American culture away from rationalism and propositional revelation (in the area of values) to deeply personal mysticism and naturalism. It is often labeled as "**new age**" spirituality. "Wholeness, fulfillment, and personal happiness require a healthy spiritual life and historic Christianity can be **one of many** ways to that life."

A. False criteria for authentic faith - zeal, certainty, and action.

"¹ Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, ² and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

1. Paul's religion was:
 - Sincere – he was deeply committed from the heart.
 - Zealous – he backed his faith up with action.

- Established – he was a part of a long standing tradition grounded in Scripture.
 - And WRONG. It is not enough to be sincere, zealous, and supported by tradition.
2. The objective of the Kingdom is not:
 - To promote sincere faith in whatever. “Its not what you believe but do you believe.”
 - To promote spiritual formation however. “Its not what religious tradition you take to spirituality but rather are you moving toward fulfillment.”
 - To promote ethical responsibility wherever. “Its not the basis of your life style but the goodness of your life style that is important.”
 3. Paul’s theology of total depravity. Rom.3:9-11 “9 what then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10 as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one; 11 there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God;”
 4. Paul’s testimony of total depravity. Phil.3:6 “6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ,”
 5. Christianity faces a challenge from a culture that is:

- **Pluralism - Religion is good so long as it is not exclusive.**

Christians respect
Tactical pluralism
 (Social, Legal)
 There is a common truth even though we may disagree on what it is.

Christians resist
Strategic pluralism
 (Ideological, Spiritual)
 There is no common truth just subjective preferences.

- **Pantheism – Spirituality is good as long as it is humanistic.**

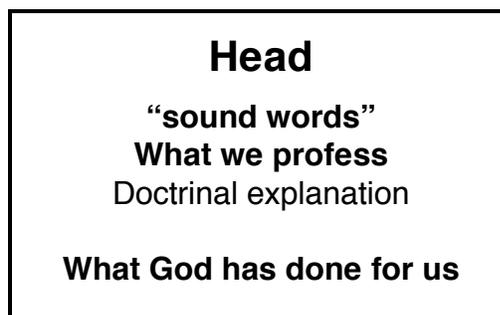
Christians spirituality
Christ centered
 (Personal and Social)
 The integration of our confession, experience, and behavior with God’s image.

New Age spirituality
Creation centered
 (private and subjective)
 Self-realization, personal potential, happiness.

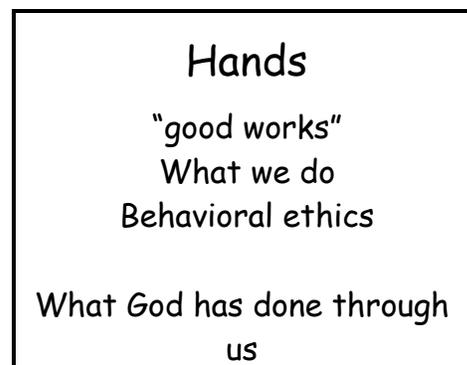
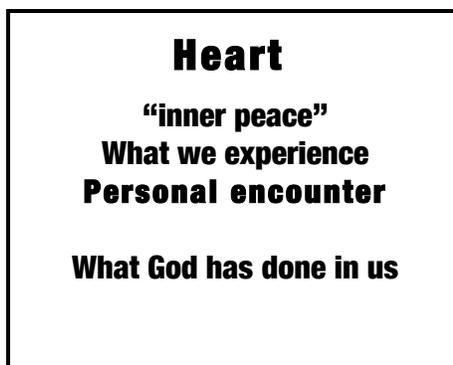
B. The central issue in authentic faith – the light of the living Christ.

3 And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He {said,} "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6 but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do." 7 And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. 8 And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

1. Jesus so identified with his church that he shared their pain in persecution.
Matt.25:40 "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did to one of these brothers of Mine; even the least of them, you did it to Me."
2. The first step in making any change is to identify and own the problem. "If you can't convince them, at least confuse them." Saul, who thought he saw everything clearly had to be blinded by the light to see that he was spiritually blind. Encountering the resurrected Christ can lead people to see themselves and God in a different way.
3. Encountering the living Christ is not about objective facts **only** but also about subjective experiences.
4. The light is not only something we hear but also something we observe in others. I Cor.2:4 "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."



Authentic Christian faith



“¹³ Retain the standard of **sound words** which you have heard from me, in the **faith** and **love** which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.”

5. When we communicate the Gospel story for some people it is like the light that blinded Saul. II Cor.4:3-4,6 “³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. . . . ⁶ For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

C. The role of God and man in authentic faith - Believers not only choose to believe in Christ but also are chosen by Christ to believe.

¹⁰ Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold, {here am} I, Lord." ¹¹ And the Lord {said} to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight."¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name."¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

1. God chose Saul before Saul chose to follow Jesus. This is a good example of God's sovereign election and human volition. **Rom.9:15-16** “¹⁵ For He ways to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ ¹⁶ so then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.” **Rom.10:13-14** “¹³ for ‘whoever will call upon the name of he Lord will be saved.’ ¹⁴ How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”
2. Paul was a “chosen (elect) instrument” of Christ’s ministry. His call would include suffering. While it is clear that Paul was called for a special ministry there is no indication that this was the pattern for every believer. See theology notes #705, #704, #714, #402 in apptoteach.org

D. The place of community in authentic faith. Authentic faith is notarized by the Christian community.

¹⁷ And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and he took food and was strengthened.”

1. In Acts 2 the early church grew as it displayed the light of Christ in its life style and community.
2. We are a light on a hill that should not be covered but displayed to the world.

