

WHAT do you believe?



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All scriptures are NKJV unless noted otherwise

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Summary: What are your core religious beliefs? How would you answer that question? In this teaching we look at examples we have from the early apostles.

****** **** (These notes are close to the audio, but not exact. You will always get more from actually listening to the audio.)*

If someone asked you, in context of your spiritual and religious beliefs and in context of your church that you belong to: “What do you believe in your church -- and you personally, what do you primarily believe?”. What would you say? How would you answer?

Those of you who pastor a congregation, why not ask your congregation that question and see what answers you get. I'd love to hear what you discover.

Many of us who believe in keeping the 7th day sabbath, for example, might immediately jump *to that* as your core and central belief. Many sabbath-keeping denominations even go by that key doctrine, so they're known as “Church of God 7th Day” or “Seventh Day Adventists” and more.

Many 7th- day keepers if asked their core belief might immediately say something like this:

- “Oh, **we don't keep Sunday. We keep the 7th day Sabbath** from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. We rest, pray, and attend sabbath services on Saturday, in other words, to be clear.

Then we might continue (though some 7th day denominations do not keep the 7 holydays):

- “And while we’re at it, let me tell you about **the seven annual sabbaths**, seven holy days or feast days of God, which are also days of rest and worship. I refer to Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets/blasts, Day of Atonement, The Feast of Tabernacles and the 8th day.”
- “Plus we *don’t* keep Christmas, Easter and New Year’s day or Halloween -- as they’re all very pagan. So that’s why you don’t see Christmas decorations and Christmas trees in our home, as they’re so pagan!”
- “And we certainly DO **keep God’s food laws – and would never eat pork, crab, shrimp, shellfish or lobster – not even** pepperoni, as that is made of pork.”
- “That’s about it. ... Oh, yes, though we deeply believe in God’s holy spirit, but in our church, **we do not believe in the Trinity**, three persons in one. We don’t believe the Holy Spirit is a separate 3rd “person” of a Trinity. Nor do we believe in the Secret **Rapture**, especially ‘Pre-Trib rapture’.”

Your answers may be very different than those. But what would you say about your core beliefs? Thirty or forty years ago I may have answered the question of what I believe the same way. But not for at least the past 20 years. Eventually those topics will come up, but those are not my most important central beliefs! *Yes, I do keep sabbath and the feast days and don’t eat pork, but those are not my most central beliefs*, though the sabbath indeed was one of the signs of God’s people.

I would base my answer on Romans 10. What did Paul teach the Romans? What were the priorities?

Romans 10:8-10

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): ***9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.***

10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

So today, if asked what constitutes my religious beliefs, the bullet-pointed list that I started this teaching with would NOT be my top of-the-list first comments. Today my top of the list comments would be about God’s plan to

save us from sin by Jesus Christ coming, living a perfect life, dying for us and being resurrected the 3rd day.

I would make very clear my central core belief is in my Savior and King Jesus Christ, who upon my repentance washes away my whole record of sin. I believe in Yeshua/Jesus. He is my life. He is my purpose. I want to revolve my whole life in him. I believe God Almighty raised him from the dead. And because of Jesus, I have come into close union with God my Father, who will resurrect his children to live eternally in his kingdom. The Son of God now lives in us who have accepted him and confessed him. I surrender my life to him each day and ask him to deliver me from the evil one, our Adversary. I want to shout from the rooftops how great is this Jesus!”

So that’s my starting point. Nothing else rises to this level as “starting point”. Now how about you, what would you say?

Now on the other hand, if I’m asked why I won’t be at this year’s Christmas party, then of course I answer that question. But even then, I’d be sure the one talking to me gets the right impression – and I’ll be clear, but I’ll also try to be more gentle than I might have been thirty years ago.

For example, if I’m discussing Christmas, nowadays I would often preface my statements of my belief by saying,

“Please understand: I believe in the virgin birth of our Savior Jesus Christ in Bethlehem and all the Biblical accounts of his birth.

“But we don’t believe Christ was born on December 25, and that’s confirmed by numerous sources like various encyclopedias and even the History Channel. So because I believe keeping Christmas is keeping old pagan Saturnalia traditions going, we don’t keep it. *That’s why I can’t come to Christmas dinners. And there’s absolutely nothing in the Bible that encourages believers to KEEP Christmas!* In fact Christ’s birth story is not even mentioned in two of the four gospels, did you know that?

When the deacon Philip went to Samaria, what did he preach? This was after the martyrdom of Stephen in Jerusalem and persecution was intense. Paul even says in Acts 26:9-11 that those arrested often ended up being put to death and that he also cast his vote against them.

Acts 8:4-5

“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. **Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.**”

Acts 8:12

“But when they believed Philip **as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**, both men and women were baptized.”

There can be no kingdom of God without Christ. He is the King of that kingdom. He's the door and the Way into that kingdom; the judge of that kingdom; the life of that kingdom.

When Philip later spoke to the Ethiopian eunuch, what was his central message about Isaiah 53 that he was reading:

Acts 8:34-35 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, **and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.**”

Then the eunuch asked to be baptized after stating his BELIEF in Jesus Christ and that he believed Christ is the Son of God. And yes, he was baptized.

When Peter spoke to the household of the gentile centurion Cornelius, what was his message? Was it about stopping Saturnalia observance or that he must stop eating pork? What was it?

And don't misunderstand me! I don't keep Christmas. I don't eat pork. But what's our central message? It's NOT Christmas and pork! Here's Peter explaining their high calling through Christ, son of God, raised from the dead.

Acts 10:34-44

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 **But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. 36 The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ — He is Lord of all —**

37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 **how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.**

39 And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

40 **Him God raised up on the third day**, and showed Him openly, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

Do you see the FOCUS of Peter's message? Yeshua/Jesus died and was resurrected for us and whoever believes in him will have their sins washed away. There was so much more yet he could say – but at that point God sent His spirit into these Gentiles (if you keep reading).

And what did apostle Paul preach in Gentile Athens?

Acts 17:18

Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," **because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.**"

Would that have been your central message to this legislative and judicial body? Jesus and the resurrection? That was Paul's central message, with the Parthenon not far away.

From there, in speaking to the ruling body in Athens on Mars Hill, he said:

Acts 17:22-31

Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

"Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

26 “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, **27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'**”

29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, **but now commands all men everywhere to repent,**

31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

Again, Paul spoke primarily of Jesus, that He is coming to judge the world , and that all will be raised from the dead to face him.

Remember he was speaking to Gentiles. He could have just as easily said, “You know what? You all need to stop eating eels! And get rid of all your idols! Smash them! And start keeping the 7th day as a day of rest! These are so important!”

And they are important, but even regarding idolatry, he says something so surprising: **“I’m going to speak about a God you already worship, but don’t know it, and don’t know HIM. You call him ‘the unknown god’.”** (See verse 23)

I find that strong – but gentle at the same time. I doubt I would have said it that way. “You already worship him without knowing it. I speak of your unknown God”. Sometimes we just come off too strong, and I have as well in the past. We want everyone to see more of the scriptures, and get impatient when they don’t “get it” right away.

I have a pastor in a 3rd world country who speaks on the radio. After hearing him on radio, **a prison warden** invited him to come speak several times to the 115 inmates. The question the pastor now has for me was: “What should I say to them all in my first message?”

My reply was this very message I’m speaking on today: “Tell them that in spite of what they’ve done wrong and how they’ve messed up their

lives, their life is not over. If they call out to the living God and acknowledge the error of their ways, and ask His forgiveness, and ask for his strength to get and stay on the right path – God *will* be there for them! Tell them to ask their Maker to cleanse them of ALL their sins, even those most horrible ones -- and read **1 John 1:7-9** and **John 3:15-17** to them, and show them they can be seen by holy God as CLEAN. Tell them they need to decide to turn their life around and start to pray and seek God's word. Tell them warmly that God WILL offer them a new life, a new start, and even eternal life if they turn to him and seek him and turn from their former ways."

John 3:16-17

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that WHOEVER believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. **For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world**, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Tell those inmates, I said, God will not and does not see them as condemned if they are seeking Him. Tell them, "it doesn't matter what ever you've done, it can be washed away and you can be new again in God's eyes." Repent means to turn around, go God's way now.

I told the pastor I certainly personally would not get into – in this first message to them – anything that might be interesting to long-time believers, like "where are Enoch and Elijah" or anything except the life that God is offering them – eternal life, a new start, and being washed clean of all the dirty stuff of our past life".

That's the central message of the Good news of the kingdom of God: that the door has been opened into it for all whom God is calling. The Door is Jesus Christ. He is also the WAY into that Kingdom. Amen!

Those thoughts certainly represent what I say and mean when asked "what do you believe?"

And by the way, are any of us going to visit prisons? Our Savior said when we do, we're doing it to him?

And let's learn to apply a lot more gentleness too. Do you remember **Naaman the Syrian leper** who was healed after dipping in the Jordan seven times? Read 2 Kings 5 on your own and get the whole picture. He came to acknowledge the God of Israel as the one true living God.

Again, the biggest point was more than healing leprosy. It was to let a high official in Syria know the true God was the God of Israel, not their false gods in Syria.

But now notice what "permission" he seeks from Elisha when he had to go back and help the king of Syria:

2 Kings 5:14-19

So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child's, and he was healed!

15 Then Naaman and his entire party went back to find the man of God. They stood before him, and Naaman said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant."

16 But Elisha replied, "As surely as YHVH lives, whom I serve, I will not accept any gifts." And though Naaman urged him to take the gift, Elisha refused.

17 Then Naaman said, "All right, but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except YHVH [the LORD].

18 *However, may YHVH pardon me in this one thing: When my master the king goes into the temple of the god Rimmon to worship there and leans on my arm, **may YHVH pardon me when I bow, too.***

19 "Go in peace," Elisha said. So Naaman started home again.

I don't think we represent God's high calling correctly to immediately be jumping into not eating pork, or keeping the 7th Day sabbath and holydays, and rejecting pagan holidays. Those will come out in time. But they're not primary. Too many of us, too often, "major in the minors".

But whenever I've asked people "in the church" how would you explain your primary doctrinal beliefs – those are the things so many jump right into: no pork, no Christmas, no Sunday; you gotta keep the 7th day sabbath.

I would also recommend we speak of love, God's love. And even more important than speaking of God's love and our love for others - is that they see us LIVING a life of love for others.

Remember we prove our beliefs by what we DO. *You prove obedience in all aspects of your life, visible to others – such as having a wonderful happy marriage. You're living it. You're a loving, forgiving person, just like your God. Your speech is 100% clean, 100% of the time. If we really are letting Christ live in us, he will live in us the same way he did before. There will be NO F bombs, no bathroom language, only words you would use if Yeshua was right there beside you – after all, He's IN you if you have God's spirit. Time we all let our Savior live in us, and I assure you, He would never use any F bomb words. So my brothers and sisters, let's clean up our tongues.*

*You **practice** what you believe such as truly stopping work and resting on the 7th day – and not just talking about it. They see we aren't getting drunk. We aren't gambling. We are at peace and we are happy.*

So are we applying God's teachings? Those are the ways we really show what we believe. *Do we help those who are sick in practical ways? Remember by doing so, we're doing these to Christ himself, as he explains in the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25.*

Do we continually help the poor? We here at Light on the Rock assist those in poor countries as much as we can, for our American "poor" are still wealthy by comparison. We'd gladly accept your help in helping them too. Thank you.

So when asked, get down to the true major beliefs first. "Don't major in the minors". The majors are like "there is a loving God in heaven who sent his son to live and die and be resurrected for us ..." and then you take it further from there.

I hope this gives you some food for thought. Let your central message about what you believe, to be about the love of our Father and the demonstrated love of our Savior Jesus the Messiah to save many, as he has not come to condemn us but to give us eternal life (John 3:16-17). And be sure to tell God and our Savior how much you love God. Say the words, "Father, I love you. Jesus, I love you. Help me love you more. And thank you for your amazing love."