

What we believe influences how we act—whether we know it or not. And it doesn't matter whether what we believe is true or false. It could be a false belief. It still influence how we act.

The set of beliefs we have influences how we act. We may call the set of beliefs a creed or doctrine, and it may not be a very exciting thing. It may not be the kind of thing that draws a crowd. Nonetheless, what we believe influences how we act.

We see this all throughout our lessons today. Jesus talked about the cost of discipleship. It's not just about belief, it's about putting those beliefs into action and the two are intimately connected. **GOOD DEEDS FLOW FROM GOOD CREEDS.** That's what we'll learn today, especially as we look at our epistle text.

And we see our epistle text, Philemon. One chapter, but there's a lot to be learned in this one chapter book. The book Philemon details the situation of a rich householder who has an escaped slave. We see I. Paul trusted Philemon's deeds would flow from his creed.

Philemon was a householder. Paul addresses this letter to the church in Philemon's house. In those days they didn't have dedicated church buildings. Homeowners would host a church. These were rich homeowners who could have multiple people in their house. They maybe had manservants, maidservants, and a whole family in their four walls.

What happened was Philemon's servant or slave, Onesimus, likely stole something from Philemon and escaped. We don't know all the details and that's about as much as we can infer from what Paul wrote. Onesimus as he escaped met Paul. Paul, even in prison, taught Onesimus the Faith. Onesimus became a Christian, and from there, Onesimus was freed, not only physically, but also spiritually. Paul throughout this letter encourages Philemon for his beliefs to match his actions, to treat Onesimus as a brother in Christ, not as a slave, and to forgive Onesimus.

Yet Satan tempted Philemon to compartmentalize things: to make home life different than work life, different than church life. Satan tempted Philemon to take his ball and go home, to say to Paul, "You know, this is not how I do things. I want to do things my way. I was wronged by Onesimus. If you are going to demand that I free Onesimus, well, no more church at my house." That kind of withdrawal would have made the Gospel ministry suffer in Philemon's town if he were to stop the church from gathering at his house.

Yet we see Paul is smarter than that. Certainly, God has outwitted Satan. I want to focus on verse 6. **"and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ."** When we look at the phrase "the sharing of your faith" Paul isn't just talking about the sharing of Philemon's personal faith, but rather Philemon's

participation in the truths of the Bible. Philemon’s acknowledging of the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. As Philemon participates in the truths expressed in the Creeds, in doctrine, that is going to be effective to, or to literally give him the energy to realize all the good that is among us in Christ.

We think of the three articles of the creed each dealing with each person of the Trinity. We think about the first article of the Creed which deals with the gifts of Father creating and sustaining us. Philemon could thank God for his wonderful house, for his servants, for his family, for his influence and reputation in his town.

We think of the second article gifts: the gifts of Jesus who redeemed Philemon, forgave Philemon, who died for his sins, who gave him His righteousness, that Philemon would no longer need to fear his eternal salvation.

As we think of the third article gifts: the gifts of the Holy Spirit who called Philemon to faith, who gave Philemon a community of believers, namely, the church that was in his house. The Holy Spirit gave Philemon the means of grace: the Word to proclaim that He is forgiven, Baptism to wash away his sins, and the Lord’s Supper to feed him on his journey. The Holy Spirit even gave Philemon the gift of good works, that he might forgive and welcome Onesimus.

One commentator put it this way, “The Word of the Gospel itself—which Philemon, Onesimus, and all the assembled Christians were privileged to hear regularly—would bring forth the longed-for repentance, forgiveness, and healing between the estranged Christians.”

Because Paul knew that Philemon knew his doctrine, and Paul was positive that Philemon was aware of “...**every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.**” Thus, Paul was bold to ask Philemon, “**So if you consider me your partner, receive [Onesimus] as you would receive me.**” Because of all of this, Paul could write, “**Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.**” From the solid base of knowing doctrine, that is, knowing God, Paul is confident to appeal to Philemon to do the right thing.
GOOD DEEDS FLOW FROM GOOD CREEDS

So too, we consider the Church today. II. The Church's deeds flow from her Creed. Satan wants us too to divorce our deeds from our creeds and vice versa. If the pastor doesn’t choose the right carpet color, or the board of directors makes the wrong decision on a topic, people in the church exercise their right to vote. They may not vote in a voter’s meeting, but they may vote with their feet as they stop attending services. They may vote with their wallets. I heard one story of a church with a contentious election for congregation president, and the losing party stopped making offering contributions.

Satan wants to separate creeds from deeds, so he will make us bored with doctrine. In commenting on this text, Luther talks about the fanatics who think once they’ve heard the Word once, they’re filled with the Holy Spirit and are good

to go. Perhaps we are tempted to think the same thinking that confirmation is a graduation from learning rather than the start of a life of discipleship in the ways of the Bible.

Luther points out that Satan works tirelessly to make us bored of doctrine. However, it is this implanted word of God, this sharing of the faith that combats the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. Paul’s prayer for Philemon is my prayer for you today, from verse 6: “**...that [your participation in the faith] may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.**”

Every jot and tittle is written for your benefit, for your learning, for your comfort. “**but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**” “**For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**” True doctrine leads to true doxology. True teaching, true creeds lead us true comfort, to truly glorifying our God, and to true energy in the faith to go forth with obedience and joy.

As we realize “**...every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.**” Those things we wouldn’t necessarily consider to be churchly things we realize flow from God who gives us every good and perfect gift: possessions, honor, family, even skills that we may earn our keep as workers.

Second article gifts: knowing first and foremost that all of this flows from what Christ has done for you. He who looked at you, saw your wretched state: knew the mistakes you would make and the mistakes you are going to make later today, next week, next year, your whole life, looked those straight in the eye and said, “I want this one. I want to die for you. I want to rise for you so that you, a poor, miserable sinner would be made a holy and righteous child of God beloved by the Father.”

Third article gifts: the Holy Spirit has called you to this Gospel, not just to be a pew warmer, not just to be someone who attends Christmas and Easter only. You are somebody called by the Word and Sacrament to be forgiven, to be sustained, and to participate and take joy in the communion of saints that we have here at Faith Lutheran Church & Student Center and that we have in the church at large. As you know all the good that is in you in Christ, you can then live out the example of Philemon, Paul, and Onesimus.

GOOD DEEDS FLOW FROM GOOD CREEDS. “Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.” Dear Christian friend, I am confident that as the knowledge of God inspires you to see all the good that is among us in Christ, you too will gladly and willingly do the right thing just as Philemon did also.