

Faith, the Foundation

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[0 : 00] We have been looking at the necessary ingredients of the salvation of a soul.

! When dealing with such an important topic, we have to keep two things steadfastly in mind.! All of the great theologians, beginning with Jesus, moving through the apostles, the church fathers, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edward, Spurgeon, MacArthur, Pink, Sproul, Lawson, and so on, are in agreement and have produced books and sermons on this central theme of salvation.

When it comes to salvation, God is absolutely sovereign. And man is absolutely responsible.

Now, our finite minds, our fallen minds, if you will, reels at such a thought because they seem to be mutually exclusive.

They seem to cancel out one another. But they don't. The short answer is they do not cancel out one another. And the longer answer is they do not cancel out one another.

[1 : 29] Now, on God's side, which is His sovereignty, we have the Ordo Salutis. That's a Latin term, meaning the order of salvation.

And that includes such doctrines as predestination, election, calling, regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, or preservation, and glorification. Now, again, that's God's side of the house. As our sovereign God, the Lord does all these things, and I'm sure much more, to save us.

And over the course of the next several months, we're going to be covering some, maybe even all, of those great doctrines. We'll see. But we've got to remember the other side to the salvation equation.

And that side is human responsibility. Spurgeon talked about, and I heard A.W. Pink do the same thing, but Spurgeon said there were two parallel tracks, similar to railroad tracks, running through human history.

[2 : 49] Now, I'm sure that most of you in here memorized the Euclidean definition of parallel lines. I know Mike did. And I did pretty well in geometry.

He's a nice, smart girl next to me. In Euclidean geometry, the definition of parallel lines is that they extend infinitely long in both directions without intersecting.

They just keep going forever, for infinity. That is similar to God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

One track is God's sovereignty. The other is human responsibility. And they're very similar with one gigantic exception. In heaven, the lines intersect.

Now, that seems impossible to us, but it has all worked out in the mind of God. He's got that figured out. Now, in our lessons thus far, we've been talking about human responsibility.

[4 : 02] We've just concluded a look at repentance, which is the major ingredient in the salvation of a soul. It is an absolute requirement for a man or a woman to be saved.

You must repent. But remember, in our first lesson, we read several scriptures. It is an absolute requirement for a man or a woman to repent.

But there's another ingredient in the mix. And we describe this as two sides to one coin.

We have a salvation coin, but like any coin, it's got two sides. They're inseparable in the sense that they are a part of one coin. The scriptures are very clear.

For a man to be saved, he must repent. He must repent of his sins. That the other side of the coin is this. For a man to be saved, he must believe.

[5 : 04] We have to repent and believe, or believe and repent. But many verses speak to this truth here. Let me give you two of them. Mark chapter 1.

Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe the gospel. That's the God of the universe. That's the God who cannot lie. The Lord Jesus Christ. And then in Acts 17 verse 30, the Holy Spirit recorded this.

Truly, these times of ignorance got overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent. Another important distinction is this word believe.

In Greek, the language of the New Testament, it is the same word for have faith. Believe or have faith. So whether we are talking about belief or faith for our purposes, we are talking about the same thing.

[6 : 13] Now in the Old Testament, the Hebrew concept of belief means to stand firm, to trust, to be certain or sure about something or someone.

And in that regard, we can learn much from Abraham in Genesis. In Genesis 15 verse 6, it says, And Abraham believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

God filled Abraham's account with righteousness because Abraham believed in the promises of God. Abraham stood firm.

And he trusted in what God had promised him. He did not waver on this point. We have a similar point that comes through in the writings of the prophet Habakkuk.

It says, The just shall live by faith. Great verse of Scripture. And I'm going to put a slight spin on that verse.

[7 : 20] It's been rolling around in my head anyway. And still I hope remain faithful to the text. What about the justified shall live by faith?

If we've been justified, our lives should be marked out by faith. Now the word in Habakkuk's passage means steadfastness or steadiness.

And in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, three things show through concerning belief. It is being certain about what God has promised.

It is to trust in what God has said without wavering. And it is to stand in firm reliance upon His word. Those three things come out. Now, some might think, well that's really just three ways of saying the same thing. But all three of these sayings are important and can stand on their own.

[8 : 25] In the New Testament, the word believe or have faith means to perceive something as true and persuaded to it to the degree that we trust and place our confidence in it.

Thus, our confidence is in the character and the promises of God. It is to our great benefit that the New Testament does not leave the definition of faith to our own imaginations.

There are many passages that speak or define faith. And one of the greatest of these is from the writer of the book of Hebrews, 11.1.

Many of you could quote it. Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Now, I knew this day was coming. I've known this for years. And it's finally arrived. I really have never known what that verse of Scripture means.

[9 : 43] I've got to tell you, I have struggled with that for decades. I've taught on it in here, but without any deep understanding.

Not able to really comprehend. And actually, I need to be a little more specific than that. I've never been able to fully figure out this crucially important passage until this past weekend.

Now, as is my habit, I get up around 1 o'clock in the morning. I step till 2 or 3, reading, studying.

And I got up, and we were in Rob's house, and our room is downstairs.

And Diane was asleep. I knew she was asleep. And I closed the door, and I went and turned on a light, and I started reading. I got to this.

And I was reading material from John MacArthur and Paul Washer. And all of a sudden, that Scripture made sense to me. It made sense.

[10 : 51] And here's what I did. And I'll tell you where my hang-up has been. It's been on the word substance. No, I'm not going to write substance up there.

We've got a lot of chairs in this room. Now, the writer of Hebrews would write the word substance in there. But I didn't do that.

I didn't do that. Here's what I did. Because my hang-up's always been the substance of things hoped for. Substance means something different to me.

It's what we arrest people. We found substance in their pocket. It's a white powdery substance. We think it's cocaine. We're going to send it to the lab. That has a whole different meaning to me. And I just couldn't grasp.

I've never been able to get past that. But as I'm studying Saturday night, Sunday morning, it suddenly came to me that this is a Greek word.

[12:08] And you can get out of that. And it's got one of like 68 definitions. Because Greek is very expressive, as is Hebrew. It's a support or a foundation.

And when I said foundation, it all, the light bulb came on. It's a foundation. What do you do on a foundation?

If you build a foundation, what are you going to do? You're going to build on it. You're going to build on it. And when I did that, suddenly the lights came on.

And it made sense to me. And further, I discovered as I kept studying that the word assurance in Greek means that which is placed under something, such as a substructure or a foundation.

And that word assurance is used to denote a steadfastness of mind, a firm resolution, a confidence or conviction about something being true as opposed to being false.

[13:21] Now let's define the passage this way. Because of our foundation, which is Christ, we may define biblical faith as the Christian's assurance or confidence that what he hopes for is or will become a reality and the conviction or certainty that what he has not seen actually exists.

You know, there's not one of us in here that have ever seen Jesus with our physical eyes, but I rather imagine we would all, in a certain circumstance, be willing to die for him, be willing to be martyrs rather than deny him.

So we are certain or convicted because of this foundation and what we've built on there, what the Bible's building for us, that we believe it even though we haven't seen it.

Now to answer those questions, we have the example of Abraham, and this is when he was written about by the Apostle Paul. And I'll apologize in advance.

I don't like just to read to you, but I kept trying to break this up. I couldn't find a place to break it up. This is Romans 4. And I hope you'll bear with me and listen attentively.

[14:40] What then shall we say was gained by Abraham our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

In a few weeks we'll be talking about boasting. For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Your version may say it was reckoned to him as righteousness. God declared him righteous. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due.

And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Did you hear that? He justifies the ungodly. We got anybody in here that's ever been ungodly? He justifies the ungodly. His faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

[16:11] Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised or also the uncircumcised? Is this only Jewish or Jews and Gentiles? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.

How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he'd been circumcised? It was not after, but before. You see, he wasn't even in the covenant yet.

And yet God took this man, father of the Jewish nation. By the way, he was from Iraq. He looked more like Saddam Hussein than David Ben-Gurion. I tell my Jewish friends, you know the founder of your nation was an Iraqi.

That starts a lively conversation. How was it then counted? Was it before or after circumcision? No, after. Not after, but before. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

[17:29] The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised so that righteousness would be counted of them as well and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but also walk in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham, the faith he had before he was circumcised.

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath.

But where there is no law, there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all as it is written, I have made you the father of many nations in the presence of God in whom he believed who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist.

In hope he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations as he had been told. He believed the promise.

[19 : 02] So shall your offspring be. He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body which was as good as dead since it was about 100 years old or when he considered the bareness of Sarah's womb she was about 90.

No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God but he grew strong in his faith and he gave glory to God fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness but the words that was counted to him were not written for his sake alone but also for ours. That's us guys.

It's been imputed to us. The Lord's righteousness. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Now that's a lengthy passage. I know that. It is worth reading and contemplating. I'd suggest read it some more this week. Here we learn that biblical faith is more than wishful thinking.

[20 : 28] Abraham knew he was going to have a son. How did he know that? God promised it to him. He said, you're going to have a son. He's an old man 100 years old.

Abraham knew this though. The God that he served was able to keep his promises.

Now how did he know that? Because Abraham had already seen God keep promises. Kierkegaard, and people call him the Christian philosopher. I dropped Christian.

Maybe he was. I don't know. But he was a philosopher. He wrote a book about or talked about Abraham's blind leap of faith. in the killing of Isaac, or offering Isaac.

Wasn't anything blind about it. Abraham had seen God. He'd heard from God. He'd talked to God. God had made promises to him.

[21 : 28] And he'd seen many of them fulfilled in his lifetime. Now it wasn't an easy thing to go to Mount Moriah to offer his only love lovely son, Isaac.

And every step that he took toward there was as if Isaac was already dead. But Abraham said, you know, God said Isaac, the promise would come through him and he would be the father of many nations.

So, after I kill Isaac, God is going to raise him from the dead. Now that's not exactly what happened. We know that. God stopped his hand when coming down.

But, but, he said, God will raise him from the dead. If I kill him, in obedience to his command, God will raise him. God will raise him. So, we find Abraham believing in something that is entirely humanly impossible.

He is a hundred years old and he is approaching death. When you're a hundred, you're closer to death than you are to life.

[22 : 39] Heck, when you're 70, you're closer to death than you are. His wife was 90 and her body well beyond childbearing.

But, from that example, we extract five truths. And, let's get it more personal. Let's leave Abraham, he's in glory.

What about those of us in this classroom? We can have assurance of what we hope for if God has promised it to us in his word.

We can be assured. We can have conviction that the things we have not seen are real because God has revealed them and made them known to us in his word.

A lack of assurance about what God has promised or made known in his word is unbelief.

Assurance about something God has not promised is presumption.

[23 : 58] We're just presuming then. You know, God didn't say that. Ask Eve, did God really say you can't even touch it? God never said that. She presumed that.

five, genuine biblical faith is not based upon feelings, emotions, or human wisdom, but upon what God has revealed and made known to us in his word.

God never said. Now, there's a lot there. And we could study that for the rest of our lives and not plumb the depths. But armed with this knowledge, where does this leave us? Where does it leave us? Well, to be saved, we must repent of our sins. And we looked at that in depth. And we looked at a number of characteristics of repentance. But to be saved, we must also believe and trust in what God has done for us through his Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 09] Christ. Those are essentials. There's no way around those. And this is why in the Reformed world we say Christ plus nothing.

It's not Jesus and good works. It's not Jesus plus church membership. It's Jesus plus nothing. We must forsake any confidence we have in anything else for our salvation.

And I put in parentheses here at the risk of offending maybe one or two. I hope I don't. But if I do, I'll live with it. We must forsake any confidence we have in anything else for our salvation, including the sinner's prayer as an example.

And I'll tell you, that really hit me going over. I was thinking about this lesson. I think about you guys all the time. And you know, it suddenly dawned on me. I mean, I've prayed the sinner's prayer. I bet most guys in here have.

But you want to suddenly hit me and I never realized this before. That's a human work. And you're never saved by a human work. I did that.

[26 : 24] I did that. Another human told me to do it. But that was a human work. I thought I was saved on the basis that I did something great for God.

I said the magic words. We look to our salvation in trust, and we trust exclusively in the person and in the finished work of Christ Jesus.

Exclusively. There's no other name under heaven by which we are saved. We must believe that what He did, He did for us individually.

And because of it, we have been reconciled to God and granted eternal life. And sometimes guys will say, you know, I believe all that, but I just don't feel worthy of eternal life.

I don't feel like I've earned eternal life. Show me in here where we will ever feel worthy. Or where we'll ever earn it. I remember when Dr. McGee, a young pastor came to Dr. McGee when he was still living.

[27 : 39] I mean, we'd go to him after he died, but he said, I'm getting out of the ministry. He said, have you failed morally? No. You've trained for this? You thought God put a calling on you?

Oh yeah, absolutely. No, he did. Why are you getting out? He said, I'm not worthy to preach that. He hands him his Bible, which was like 40 pounds, you know, and Dr. McGee had notes everywhere, and he'd show me one sentence or one word in that book that says you'll ever be worthy to preach his word.

He said, it's not in there. So we, so do we have any promises from the Lord? We've been talking most of the evening about the promises made to Abraham.

What about you and I? Do we have any promises from the Lord that we can place on our foundation, our substance, I like that word foundation, up there to build on, and then we can build from there based upon promises?

promises. Well, rather than read you 600 scriptures, I chose two. John 6, 37.

[28 : 55] All that the Father gives me will come to me. And whoever comes to me, I will never cast out until they mess up.

Doesn't say that, does it? All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

Put that on your foundation. Take back the refrigerator in your homes and get all the grandkids stuff off or kids and put a foundation and add that verse.

John 6, 37. I'll give you another one. Hebrews 13, 5. Be content with what you have, for He said, the Lord Jesus, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

How long is never? And if anyone ever deserved to be abandoned, it's me. And I'm not making that up. The problem is I know me, and the Lord knows me.

[30 : 11] Just start with those two as part of the foundation or the substance, and then we can build from there a building not made with human hands.

This is made by God, God. And this is part of the faith that God has given us.

It is substance. It's a foundation of things hoped for. And by the way, that word hope is interesting. It's a settled hope. God said it.

We believe it. God's going to do it. And I like the other way. God said it. It doesn't matter if we believe it or not. He's still going to do it. faith is the foundation or the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

And we're going to build more from there next Monday.