

Soteriology
Lesson 13
The Prerequisite of Faith Part One

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Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your love and Your grace, Your mercy, Your kindness to us. Thank You Lord for all Your many blessings. You bless us more than we ever have understood. You tell us You daily load us with benefits. We thank You Lord that You want to use us more than we want to be used. And we ask You Lord to raise up an army of people who will plant churches and that many will come to know You. And thank You for all You've done for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Hebrews 11:1-3. Let's talk about faith. If there's anything that's crucial to the whole issue of salvation, it certainly is this. And yet faith seems to me, in this culture, to have lost its meaning. It's been stripped of its meaning. You know faith to a lot of people is like whistling in the dark. You know, hoping that something is so but you really have no evidence. And that is not the faith of the Bible. The faith of the Bible demands an object. It doesn't exist by itself. People say, "Well, I sure hope I have faith." They're talking about the ability to believe something. They're not talking about an object in which they have put their trust. And there's a lot of difference between those two things.

In Hebrews 11:1-3, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." And that comes to mean, conviction or assurance. Faith is the ground upon which you believe the things that have been promised to you are going to take place. If the promise of God to you has not come yet—such as the Second Coming or heaven or whatever—what's the ground in your life that causes you to believe it's actually going to take place? Faith. But if that faith doesn't have substance, a basis to it, an object upon which it's resting, then it's wishful thinking. It's mere fantasy. And that's a part of what we've got to understand about the faith that brings us salvation.

Many people say they are saved by faith, but the more you hear them talk, you're not sure what they're talking about. It's also "the evidence," he says, "of things not seen." Now that's a

very interesting point because evidence is usually tangible or observable, objective facts. Yet God says our faith in what God says is in fact all the evidence we need of things we cannot see. By the way, one of which is God Himself. So when you begin with the Bible, “In the beginning God created” (Genesis 1:1), you have to have faith that that’s a true statement, don’t you? So is your faith based on solid evidence? Well, there’s a lot of evidence for the existence of God, but you’ve never seen God; but you say you believe in God.

If you try to talk to a culture that does not have a personal God in its concept, it becomes more difficult to communicate. Why do you believe that there’s a personal God? Sometimes people bring forth arguments like cosmology. The solar system, the arrangement of things or teleology, which means, from *telios*, the end or purpose of something, that has to have purpose because of its mathematical design in orbiting. There’s even anthropology, the study of man, that man’s own nature requires a God on the basis of what we call ‘being’ or ontology. I exist, therefore something exists that made me to exist. These are all philosophical attempts by man to somehow explain the fact that we believe in a God that we have not seen.

But it’s interesting in the Bible the issue is your faith in what the Bible says about that. So it isn’t something that operates independently in your own nature. It isn’t your ability to believe something, but it’s whether or not you believe what God said. In Romans 10:17 it says, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”

Let’s keep reading in Hebrews 11:2 says, “For by it [meaning faith] the elders [the leaders of the past] obtained a good report.” What kind of good report they had is described in chapter 11:7-8. Abraham left the country where he was, crossed the river, went six hundred miles to a land he didn’t know anything about. How did he do that? The Bible says, “by faith.” Noah believed that God was going to bring a flood.” How did he do that? By faith! Faith in what? Their faith was in a direct revelation from God. Isn’t it interesting that even in the issue of salvation you’re back to the issue of bibliology, the Bible itself.

If you can destroy the Bible, or at least people's confidence in it, then you destroy faith. And people don't like that. They say, "I have faith no matter what the Bible says." Well, you're talking a human emotional response, but you're not talking about the faith that has evidence that rests upon an object.

Notice that you've got three different kinds of main words dealing with faith. There are more in terms of the construction, but these are three main ones. One is 'I believe,' the other one is the noun 'faith,' and the other one is an adjective meaning 'faithful'. You've got way over five hundred times and it's a big subject. This is just New Testament; it doesn't count anything in the Old Testament. And all of the illustrations of this, according to the New Testament, all come out of the Old Testament. Learning to walk by faith is not an easy matter.

So what's the definition? Now notice that we're going to give you the usage of it and an understanding of it. And I want you to know this because I believe it's become more critical than ever before. First of all, when you speak of faith, you are sometimes talking about a quality of one's life. We even know there's a fruit of the Spirit, don't we? Galatians tells us in 5:22, that the fruit of the Spirit, one of them, is faith. And it comes to mean faithfulness, a quality of one's life and it's used that way in Galatians 3:9, a quality of one's life. It says, "So then they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham." He showed, he demonstrated, by his following through what God told him, he showed and demonstrated that his faith was real. So sometimes faith is a quality of your life that means you are faithful to what God has instructed you to do or to believe.

The second thing is that it's an object. This is its primary usage. That is, there is something that you believe. That which is believed becomes the issue of faith, like Galatians 2:20. "I've been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me [past tense] and gave Himself for me" [past tense, referring to the cross]. So the object that I believe is the work of Jesus Christ at the cross.

Jude 3 says, “We are to earnestly contend for the faith, which was once and for all delivered unto the saints.” In other words, the whole gospel is the issue of “the faith.” It is an object, that which we believe. I am committed to the faith of Christianity. And so that faith represents the doctrines I believe that bring salvation.

Now, it’s also an act of believing something. Like in Acts 16:31, when the verb says, a command, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” But notice again the connection with number two, that the object which that act has to have. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” so the Lord Jesus Christ is the object of my believing.

And it’s also a gift of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. He gave various gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:9, “To one He gave the gift of faith.” Now what that is, nobody’s really sure. We have some people who say, on the basis of the usage of ‘faith-moving mountains’ in prayer, and the connection in 1 Corinthians 13 that if I have the faith so that I can say to these mountains, “Be thou removed,” the faith that removed mountains therefore, might be the gift of faith. In the context of that illustration, the issue is casting out a demon. So it may mean that the spiritual gift of faith is the ability to trust God to cast a demon even out of somebody. See, there’s a lot of ways to look at this. Some people call it the spiritual gift of prayer. You know, they can really believe and trust God for things. I’m not sure what it really means. I’m just trying to look at the Bible like you do. But we do know there is a gift of the Spirit called the gift of faith.

Now in understanding faith, you’ve got both negative and positive factors to look at. Negatively, it isn’t mere intellectual ascent. Please, do not read that incorrectly. Never say to somebody, “Well, faith is an intellectual ascent or agreement.” It is intellectual agreement. It’s not merely or only intellectual agreement. In Christianity, the operation of the soul with its mind and its volitional choices and its emotional responses are not separated into three separate categories. You don’t have faith of the mind, and faith of the will, and faith of the emotion. We are one integrated person and when we believe, it’s all working together. So you don’t, as I often say, “Check off your brains at the door in order to believe in Christianity.”

People say, “Well, I don’t know about all that, I just believe it.” Now you are the authority. You just set yourself up as the authority; that somehow because you believe something it makes it true? Now I may believe that you believe it, but I don’t believe what you believe. There’s a difference. I do believe you really believe it. But I don’t necessarily believe that what you believe is true. There are a lot of people like that.

I just talked to a guy and I definitely don’t believe what he believes, but I believe he really believes it. And he is out of touch with reality. And bless his heart; I don’t know if he was on something or what. But he was way out, he was gone. And I had a hard time bringing him back. He said, “I know it’s true.” He didn’t give me one fact, but he knew it was all true. “And if you had the insight I have, you would know it too.”

But you know, some people are gone, they can’t think any more. And somewhere along the line, people are told, “You don’t really have to understand it. You’ve just got to believe it.” People actually witnessing tell people that. And we wonder why we have so many people that have accepted Christ that aren’t real Christians at all. Why Jesus said there would be many people in the last day that would claim to be His but in fact aren’t (cf. Matthew 7:21-23). Well, we make it so ridiculous sometimes. And some guy may be asking us a sincere question.

“Well, never mind that, you’ve got to believe this with all your heart.”

“Are you talking about the physical organ that pumps blood?”

“You know your heart.”

“That’s the Greek word *cardia*, from which we get ‘cardiac.’ Is that where belief comes from?”

You know, I have problems with this because in the Bible the heart thinks, it perceives, it understands, it comprehends, it knows. That sounds like the mind to me and yet there are a lot of people who say “Christianity can’t just be in your head, you know. You’ve got to believe in your heart.” “Oh, there’s a big gap about eighteen inches between your heart and your brain.” And we

listen to that. It's not even medically sound! We spread this around and everybody buys it. You know. "I don't know about all that, I just believe." Really?

Listen folks, wake up. These are strategies of the enemy. No, you don't ignore the facts of the gospel and just say, "Well, I believe it...since Jesus came into my heart. I believe it with all my heart." Well, you can believe in Buddha the same way. I believe in Buddha because he lives in my heart. Or the Mormon says, "I have this burning in my heart."

Do you understand? Now, I may be doing a number on some of your pet theories about it, but I just want us to get serious. I want us to be real and stop faking our way through the kingdom of God. God gave you a mind to think and He expects you to think. And to think about the issues of the gospels is critical. There is intellectual assent, but not mere intellectual assent. What do we mean by that? It's kind of like James 2:19, it says "The devils believe that there is one God, and they tremble." The devils aren't saved because they believe. So there is a usage of the word believe that means only intellectual agreement.

For instance, if you consider all the facts both within the Bible and outside the Bible, it is intellectual suicide not to believe that Jesus Christ actually existed. So I could say to you that I believe in Jesus Christ as surely as I believe in George Washington, Abraham Lincoln or whatever, you know. But I don't believe they're saving me from my sin. You know, the problem is that there's a difference isn't there, between recognizing the fact that He existed.

You could also really be hard pressed intellectually to deny that He died on the cross. You may not believe why He died, but you'd be pretty hard pressed intellectually to deny the crucifixion. It permeates all of culture and pagan culture as well. And historically it's well established. We probably have a little more question about the resurrection. But the resurrection in fact, according to Lord Lyndhurst of British law is the most well-attested fact in all of British and American history. There's more evidence to the resurrection than any other fact previous to the printing press, where you had of course, more copies to evaluate.

It's very interesting, you know, when you start really thinking things through. And we have to be careful because in Acts 8 we have a guy who probably—well, let's look at it—let me not comment without you looking at it. He's the sorcerer. Remember that?

We know this certain man called Simon. He's in witchcraft, sorcery. He was bewitching all the people of Samaria, according to verse 9, Acts 8. And they even say he is the great power of God. So apparently he has some demonic ability here. Verse 12 says, "When they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also."

Now, if you stop right there and say, "Oh Simon became a Christian!" No, he was even baptized. Do you think there are people that are lost that have been baptized? Sure. And it says, "He wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done" (Acts 8:13).

18 When Simon saw that through laying on of the apostle's hands, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money

19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee. [Literally, to hell with you and your money!]

When you tell people you're an apostle, you've got direct revelation from God and you're telling them that this guy is headed for hell, he's probably not a believer, would you say off hand? "Because that thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money" (Acts 8:20). Now look at this, if you still think he's a Christian. It says,

21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee.

23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

No, he's not saved! But back there in verse 13, he believed. What did he believe? Well, he believed that miracles were taking place. He saw that and he wanted to get that power. So it's not mere intellectual assent, but I think perhaps a more serious issue among church and religious people is to say negatively it's not a meritorious work. For some people to believe in Jesus Christ means that you and I do something. It's the old argument of faith and works. Go to Romans 4, in verses 4 and 5. Romans 4 discusses the faith of Abraham as it relates to our faith in the Lord. And in Romans 4:4 and 5 it says, "Now to Him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." We're saved by grace. Grace gives us what we don't deserve.

This is a clear example in the Bible in Romans 11. If it's of grace, then that's what it is. It's grace. Grace gives you what you don't deserve. If it's of works, then the issue is dead. I mean, you're rewarding the person for what they have done. Now grace cannot be works and works cannot be grace. And if faith is of grace, it cannot be of works. Yet there are some evangelical Christians telling people that faith is a work of man. No, it's not. It's not a work of man.

You say, "Well then it's a gift of God." You don't have to say that either because what a thing is, it is. Is faith work? No. Otherwise it's not faith. You don't have to do anything to have faith except believe whatever is being said. Yes sir?

A student's voice: "Are you saying that God puts conditions on salvation?"

Well, I don't know. That's a hard question, but it's a great question. But I think if you answered is salvation conditioned upon believing in the Lord Jesus Christ? The answer is yes. But that doesn't make it conditional salvation. It is unconditional in that God chose you "before the

foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). To put it another way, everybody that God chose is going to be saved. We don’t have God choosing somebody He can’t reach. You’ve got an incompetent God. We know in the Old Testament there were blessings and curses and you’d say that was conditioned on man’s response, whether he obeys or not.

Here’s a problem. Do you believe that God—this is to try and illustrate what I’m saying. Do you believe that God will save Israel ultimately? Yeah. Paul said, “When the Redeemer comes so all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26). Right? Does that mean every Israeli is saved? No. But there’s certainly going to be a lot of them that are going to be. Is that promise of God conditional or unconditional? If Israel does not believe, they will be lost. So is the choice of God choosing that believing remnant, which has to be unconditional because it’s rooted in God: “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:29). Does that mean that Israel doesn’t need to repent in order to be saved? No. You see, it’s difficult when you look at that issue to look at conditional and unconditional; it depends on what you mean.

Let me ask you another question. Do you believe that everybody that God wants saved will get saved? If He wants everybody to be saved, then why doesn’t He save them? You mean, God wants something that He can’t affect? Poor God, He’s up in heaven wishing they could all be saved, but He just can’t pull it off.

Okay, all people are propitiated but only believers are redeemed. The death is sufficient, but it is only efficient for those who believe. And those who believe are going to believe because God chose them before the foundation of the world. God doesn’t wait for you to believe and then choose you. Otherwise we have a contradiction. It’s hard to understand. I realize.

Once again, is God going to save everybody He wants to have saved? Of course He is. Does that mean there are some that are not going to get saved? Yes. Paul said, “He’ll have mercy on whom He will, and He’ll harden whom He will” (Romans 9:18). Well, why did God harden some? So, that His power and His wrath might be demonstrated throughout the whole world!

If everybody got saved regardless of how they responded, what would heaven be? A toleration of evil! Yes?

A student's voice: "Does God bless you based upon what you do or does God bless you regardless of what you do?"

Yes and No, both. Well, it's not an either or question. First of all: "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him" (Psalm 34:8). So, blessing comes to those who trust in Him. Right? But God also will bless the nation of Israel in spite of their rebellion and sin, because He has an unconditional covenant promise to them. So you see, trying to make this an either/or is going to get you in an intellectual trap.

No, blessing is not based on their obedience. It's based on His faithfulness.

Listen, the Bible brings a lot of insight into all the speakers you have heard. Just read the Bible. Sometimes people wax eloquently about that which they've always heard too. Part of the problem of being a student of the Word of God is facing the fact that you have to contradict yourself.

A guy came into my office with a tape I did twenty years ago and he said, "You disagree with this tape."

I said, "I know, it's one of the worst tapes I've ever heard."

He looked at me and said, "What?"

I said, "Yeah. I was totally wrong on that."

He said, "What made you think you were wrong?"

I said, "The Bible. It really helps."

There are so many things like this in Christianity that we just all parrot, things we've heard and said and whether or not they're in the Bible, that's another issue. And we sometimes get in trouble, don't we?

Let's come back to what we know. Rather than what we don't know. Positively, when we understand faith, you've got three things operating according to the Bible. You've certainly got

belief. I mean, that's like the most obvious of all. John 20:31 says, "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God and believing you have life through His name." 1 John 5:1, "Whoever is born of God is he who believes that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), born of God." So it's like saying, "I believe the truth about Jesus Christ."

Now class, where is the truth about Jesus Christ found? It's in the Bible. Be careful, because some people say, "I believe" but they're not talking about the Jesus that's in the Bible.

The second thing is what we call appropriation, used by words like, "I take or receive." It's the same Greek word, "to take or receive," in John 1:12. By the way, there are people in evangelicalism who believe this is not a part of faith. They think this brings carnality into it. But it's very obvious. Jesus said, "As many as receive [or take Him] to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:12). So it does mean to take or to receive.

What does that mean? Isn't there a difference between intellectually agreeing with the truth is in the Bible...so this person has come a long way. He's gone through his intellectual doubts. He now believes the truth of the Bible about Jesus. Is he saved, just because he acknowledges that truth? And the answer is, no. He's got to appropriate it. To believe in Christ means you take and receive Him as your only Savior from sin.

But there's one that I think is missing today. In 2 Timothy 1:12, it's a part of what *pisteuōs* is in Greek and that's commitment; where you literally say, "I commit my life to Jesus Christ." Often when I'm leading a person to receive Christ and maybe they're praying the words I might say publicly, "And I commit my life and future to Him who alone can save me." And sometimes, I'll have a new convert stop right there. "Wait, what do you mean by that?" It's interesting, I can say, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" And get a "Yes!" Now are you willing at this moment to commit your life and your future into the hands of Jesus Christ? People want to stop and think about that.

Commitment, in 2 Timothy 1:12, “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” Did you know the word belief can also be translated committed?

For instance, in John 2:23-25, the Bible says that because of the miracles the people believed in Him. But the next verse says, “But Jesus didn’t commit Himself to them.” It’s the same word in both cases. People did believe in Him because of the miracles but Jesus didn’t believe in them, because they were only believing because of the miracles. They had not committed themselves, they had not bowed the knee, they had not confessed Him as their Lord; all they realized is that He did miracles.

You’ll find a lot of things like John 2:23-25 in many, many Scriptures that will cause you to stop and think: “Wait a minute, what does it mean to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?” It means I intellectually agree with the facts about Jesus Christ that are in the Bible. Secondly, it means that I personally receive Jesus Christ into my heart and life. And third, it means that I commit my heart and life, my future to Him who alone can save me.

A gentleman came up to me last week while I was in New England. He said, “I thought I was a Christian until I just heard you.” That kind of bothered me, you know. But I do remember that Paul said, “Examine yourself whether you be in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). He started talking to me about it. It was clear. He had never committed his life to Christ. He had been insecure for many years. Somebody had “led him to Christ”... just say, “I believe in Jesus Christ.” Well, he believed He existed and died and all that, but he had never personally committed himself to Christ at all.

I asked him, “What do you think Jesus meant when He said, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me?” (Luke 9:23).

His first words out of his mouth were Freudian: “Oh, that’s talking about Christian discipleship.”

“Oh in other words, that’s something different than believing in Jesus Christ?”

“Oh yeah,” he said, “You can accept Him as Savior and not accept Him as Lord.”

Really? Is that what the Bible says? No, if you don’t confess Him as Lord, you’re not saved (cf. Romans 10:9). This was an interesting discussion. He was a brilliant guy. College graduate and he’d heard all the little Christian messages, you know. And the fact of the matter, just talking to him, he was far from God. He was in an immoral lifestyle, been on drugs all kinds of stuff, but had “accepted Jesus as his Savior.”

And I said, “On the basis of what you’ve told me, I could not possibly count you as a Christian brother.” And he started to cry. Tears came in his eyes.

He said, “You mean if I died now, I’d be in hell?”

I said, “Exactly right!” Now, praise the Lord, he repented, confessed his sin, and committed his life to Jesus Christ! It was like a heavy, dark cloud lifted right off that guy. I mean, the joy that came immediately into his heart. A burden was lifted. But see, all his life somebody told him, “All you have to do is ask Jesus to come in your heart.” Really? Is that all you have to do?

You know, the first time I was told that, I was just a little boy and I believed that. And when I asked Jesus to come into my heart, I believed the whole package. But you know, some other people who might have had a different background, you tell me ask Jesus to come in your heart and the question is, which Jesus? What Jesus? What are you talking about? What are you willing to do? What are you saying here? And some little children, I believe, in all the sincerity of their innocent response to God, are in fact believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and everything the Bible says, and God saves them as children. I believe that. But you know when you get adults who can think through the issues of their life and have maybe been involved in things they shouldn’t, and all of a sudden you say, “All you gotta do, man”...that’s Freudian right there! All you got to do. What are we doing? We’re cheapening the gospel. All you gotta do is ask Him to come into your heart. “Okay, I do.”

No wonder many people are insecure and not sure if they're saved. I recommend this to people who struggle with doubts and insecurity, if you will read through the gospels—try to do it at one sitting at least take one book at a time at one sitting—just read through it and ask the Lord to show you what it really means to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. What does it mean to be one of His? It's interesting what you will see. Just read the Bible. Don't listen to anybody else.

Class, what we're talking about is a crucial issue. I would just feel terrible to know that some students might be sitting here and in our class and really, you've never committed your life to Jesus Christ. It's easy to happen in a good Christian church and circles and family and etc. It's easy to go along with it but never to have made that confession and commitment yourself. Just kind of assume it all along. Or that what you said years ago wasn't really that great.

It's like the twenty-six year old guy that accepted the Lord when he was in high school in church. But he primarily did it because everybody else did it. Walked the aisle, emotions of the moment, asked Jesus to come into his heart, but nothing happened in his life. And he got all messed up. You know, that happens to a lot of people. And I don't know where you stand on this, I really don't. But it would be my prayer that you really know the Lord because I know the warnings that Jesus gave. And I want you to know the Lord. I want you to go to heaven, not hell. So I just take this moment to say to the entire class, I hope you have truly, not only intellectually believed that Jesus Christ is everything the Bible said, but that you have confessed Him as your Lord and Savior; that you, in fact, have committed your life and future to Him. And you have no hesitancy about that at all. That's salvation!

It's not a work but it can be a big struggle. People can vacillate over that issue as to whether you really have done that. Something to think about, huh! Amen?

Well, let's take a break.