***What is Saving Faith?  
  
Colossians 1:3-8  
  
COL-041***

Please open your Bibles to the book of Colossians. Our subject is "Thanksgiving for the Colossians," segment number 19 in Colossians 1:3-8.

**Love**

The faith in doctrine of the Colossian Christians, and their spirit of love for one another, was a source of great joy to the apostle Paul. It was important for them to have this grasp of what the Bible calls here in this passage "the faith" – that which constitutes the Christian viewpoint, because it is from the faith in doctrine (that positive volition to the truth of God) that love is able to originate. If you do not understand the Word of God, you are not a loving person. And you should put that right down, if you're taking notes – right at the head. If you are not versed in doctrine, you kid yourself when you think you are a loving person.

Now, Jesus made this very clear when he said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." The inference there is very clear: "If you don't know My commandments, you cannot love Me," because love is an expression of obedience to the principles of the Word of God and the standards of God. God's ways are always the ways of love. Satan has instilled into our society ways that are his. They're the ways of hatred. And yet, society calls him love. It is the Bible that makes it very clear to us that those who obey the laws of God are the people who are treating others in a loving way. Those who do not obey the laws of God are treating people in an ugly, mean, and hateful way.

So, when the apostle Paul says, "I'm so happy. I'm euphoric over the fact that the report I get about you people is that you are fanatics for doctrine. You're not fans of all kinds of things you could be fans of, but you are fans of the Word of God, and you grasp it to your heart, and this becomes your life. Consequently, you're a people who are stable. You are capable of walking through the ups and downs of life. You are capable of being nobody's fool. And you are capable of having that mental attitude goodwill of love that doctrine produces in the soul.

**Eternal Life**

This exemplary faith and love, which characterized these Colossian Christians, came from their awareness that they had eternal life reserved for them in heaven. So what does that mean? If you have eternal life preserved for you in heaven, then that means that you are God's people. Colossians 1:5: "Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the Word of the Truth, the gospel." God's people, under the awareness of what their destiny is in heaven, are expected to act different from Satan's people. Satan's people reject doctrine. Therefore, Satan's people hate righteousness, and they hate righteous people. Good conduct is better than bad conduct if you're interested in happiness. If you are not, just blow it off. But if you want to experience God's perfection, then you have to do it His way. Good conduct, based upon the principles of the Word of God, is better than bad. That is the point that Paul is elated over relative to these Colossian Christians. God's people are part of His royal family, so they do not act like the coarse people of this world.

It is very rare in any area of entertainment to find anything that is dignified and ennobling. And anytime I hear somebody who attends the motion picture theater regularly, I know that that's a person that is not too refined in his soul, because to do so is to have something inordinately coarse pouring into your life by your deliberate choice. Who are you following when you do that?. You're following Satan. You're following this world system. You are thumbing your nose at God, your Father, and saying, "I like the dirty life better." You may say, "Oh, sure, I'm mature. I'm sophisticated. I don't have to worry about hearing things that are filthy and suggestive and demeaning and degrading." But that's not what the Word of God says. The Word of God says, "If you're a loving person, then you will obey the Word of God, and you'll separate your separate yourself from Satan's evil ways.

I read recently of a motion picture that is out, and the article was written by one of these reviewers. And he said, "I expect that this picture will become the Academy Award picture of the year." Well, I thought that was interesting, and I wondered why. Then he went on in the article to say, "Because it's so clean and wholesome." And Hollywood is so aware of the fact now that it is dirty and coarse, and Satan's production, that they want to pick a real nice picture of the year to show that they're not like that. And what they're doing is trying to fool all of you with such a selection.

Well, it is a picture of a great novel written in the previous 19th century. And 185 years later, this particular story bears such impact on the people who see it. And it is quite an ennobling story, and it is fascinating from one end of the other. And there is not a dirty word or an ugly implication in the whole book. So, Hollywood comes along and says that they've made a good movie of it: "We want to dignify ourselves by clothing ourselves in something wholesome."

However, in Romans 12:1-2, you have a dramatic call upon us Christians to act in a certain way compatible with our calling. It says, "I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and a holy sacrifice acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world." Now, that means: "Don't pour yourself into the world's mold." It means: "Don't put out a piece of cloth on the table, and then take a worldly dress (if there is such a thing), and put it down, and take your scissors, and cut the cloth to the pattern of that worldly dress, because that's exactly what the Greek means here. It's taking an external pattern (the world system – the world's way of doing things). It is the very thing about which Paul says, "I'm so happy that you people are devotees of the Word of God, and therefore, you're capable of acting in love. You don't hurt yourself; and, you don't hurt anybody else. You're a joy to be with".

However, it says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Of course, that's the key there. You have to get divine viewpoint in your mind. So, we're back to square one – the learning of doctrine: "Be transformed by the renewing your mind so that you may prove what the will of God is; that which is good and acceptable, and the perfect will of God in your lives."

It is also interesting that this word, "transform yourself," . . . is a Greek word which talks about an internal transformation. It does not say, "Act on the outside this way, and then all will be well with you." It does not say, "Act on the outside this way, and you will then be right with God." Churches are full (especially biblical churches) – they're full of people who walk in; they look around; and, they see how the crowd acts, and that's the dress they put on the outside. That's the manners they put on the outside. They may be rotten to the core on the inside in mental attitude sins, and everything else. But the suckers in the congregation all say, "Oh, there's a godly person," because they don't have the discerning mind to look through to something deeper. It is easy to put the outside on. But Paul says here in Romans that that is not the pattern to which we're called. We are called to be those who are transformed on the inside. We have an internal change upon us.

It is also interesting that later on, in the book of 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul observes that there are false teachers in the world. And he says, but it's no surprise, because even Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. And here's the beauty of the Greek language. The word for "transform" there is a word that deals with transforming on the outside.

So, here you have, in this tremendous passage in Romans 12, and in 1 Corinthians, this comparison. The world system puts on the good front on the outside. That's how the devil transforms. But that's not what Paul is commending these Colossians for. He's not commending them that because, when they're with the church crowd, they put on the outside. It is that no matter where they are, there has been an internal transformation. And I'll guarantee you that don't decide to do that. You're dead if you think that's how it is. You get it because you have learned the principles of doctrine, and then you have followed James' principal to go positive to it, and act upon it.

So here's this tremendous challenge, to us as Christians, not to be like the world system, but to be people of doctrine, and people who consequently are capable of expressing mental-attitude, goodwill love. Common decency requires that we Christians act with total submission to the Word of God, and with dignified love toward all mankind. In other words, don't spit on God. All the entertainers do. Don't spit on God. We rise to the royalty we are. And why do we do that? Well, Paul says that these Colossians do it because they know where they're going. They have a hope in heaven. They are destined for eternal life. They are destined to enter their kingdom because they're members of the royal family.

Remembering who we are as Christians, and where we are going, will make a very big difference on how we live each day. It will determine whom we accept as our close friends; our associates; our advisors; and, our role models. And for you parents, you'll be careful whom you permit your children to associate with as their close friends; as their advisors; and, as their peers who become their role models.

**Lot**

The all-time great sad example in the Word of God is Abraham's nephew Lot. When Abraham and Lot's herdsman came into conflict with one another, Abraham was not a greedy gut. He knew that there was plenty out there that God had for him. There was plenty of room for Lot and his herdsman. Abraham says, "Lot, take your pick. You go in one place, and I'll go in the other. We're going to stop this conflict between our staff and our people out there in the field." So, Lot steps up and he looks over that magnificent Jordan Valley – that lush, beautiful territory. And there at the heart of it is the magnificent cities of the plain Sodom and Gomorrah, surrounded by lesser cities. But they are a brilliance of human viewpoint culture and achievement. And they spit on God. They know not the Word of God. And they're glad that they don't know it. And they are very proud of their intellectual abilities. And they make their own rules. The cities are hotbeds of homosexuality. Finally, the time comes when God must deal with it.

However, Lot looks out there, and he sees that there's a lot of money out there. There's a lot of money to be made in the territory of Sodom and Gomorrah. So, that's where he goes. He packs up his family, and puts him under the secular influence of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 13:10-13 puts it this way: "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw all the valley of the Jordan – that it was well-watered everywhere". This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah." That's kind of an ironic (almost an ominous note) for the spirit of God to insert there.

Genesis 13:10-13: "He lifted up his eyes, and saw all the valley of the Jordan – that it was well-watered everywhere." And to be watered in that part of the country was very important. You understand that. It was a fertile, lush, terrific place before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. It's nothing but a desert now. The Dead Sea covers Sodom and Gomorrah. The whole thing is a disaster area: "Like the garden of the Lord." This is like Eden.

So, this seemed very attractive, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zohar: "So, Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan. And Lot journey eastward. Thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley and moved his tents as far as Sodom."

So what's wrong with this? Verse 13. "Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly, and sinners against the Lord." Lot says, "Let's go family. We're going to move to a really nice big-time city." And the dollar signs were dancing like sugar plums in Lot's head. So, he moved into that society. It was a secular society based on human viewpoint values and human viewpoint rules. They spit on God, and nobody cared if they did.

Well, if you're going to be in a place like this, you have to go along, or you're going to be excluded. Lot did not want to be excluded. He wanted to be part of the moneymaking machine. Therefore, he became part of the social fabric. The influence of Sodom and Gomorrah for evil on Lot's family over the years was inevitable, and it was enormous. Lot himself was a righteous man. He disapproved of the lifestyles of Sodom and Gomorrah. He disapproved of the evils that he saw there. But he loved the good life that money could bring him. Furthermore, because he became part of the social fabric, they elected him to be a judge. So, here he is– sitting at the gates of Sodom and Gomorrah. If you had a legal case, you came up to Lot. What a great honor! He was no small man in the society. He didn't approve of what they were doing. He was going to make it better by his influence, perhaps he thought. But what he did was sacrificed his own family to a culture that he chose to be part of.

The time came when God sent a delegation of two angels. They looked like ordinary men. They went to Lot's house to warn him that God was going to destroy the homosexual culture that had developed in the Jordan Valley. And as Lot extended hospitality to the two angels, he asked them to stay for the night, and they agreed. And as they were there in the house following their dinner, the homosexual crowd gathered outside the door, pounding on the door, and telling Lot that they wanted those two men to come out so that they could have sexual relations and activities with them.

Lot, in verse 6, goes outside and shuts the door. Genesis 19:6-7: "He went out the door to them, and he shut the door behind him. He said, 'Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly." Now what kind of an expression is that to a society as low as Sodom and Gomorrah was: "Please gentlemen, don't act wickedly." Wickedly was the only way they knew how to act. That was their life. And anybody who didn't act wickedly was an oddball.

Then he goes on in the verses there, and shows what a hypocrite he is, because Lot says, "Here are my two daughters – these two young women. Why don't you take them and have fun with them tonight, and don't mistreat these guests that are in my house.

The reaction of the homosexuals was in verse 9: "Stand aside Lot." Then they ridicule him, saying, "Here you are – an alien. You're already acting like a judge among us. We let you do that, and now you're going to tell us what to do? We're going to treat you worse. So, they proceeded to break down the door to take the men by force.

The angels reached out and grabbed Lot – one by each arm; opened the door; jerked him through; and, shut the door." They proceeded to put blindness upon the men out there. And from here on, things rapidly deteriorated. Lot's wife didn't like the idea of leaving the good life that she had there in Sodom and Gomorrah. And the family had all gotten used to this. And the angel said, "You have to hurry. We're going to carry out God's destruction. Your Uncle Abraham is going to see this whole valley covered with smoke, because it's going to be fire and brimstone from God.

So, in Genesis 19:15: "At dawn, the angels urged Lot to get out, and they said, 'Don't look back.'" And they forced him outside the city."

Verse 17 says, "It came about, when they had brought them outside, that one said, 'Escape for your life. Do not look behind you. Do not stay anywhere in the valley. Escape to the mountains, lest you be swept away.'" And Lot's wife, to the end, could not give it up. Lot finally started walking, and he pulled the family with him. Verse 26: "His wife from behind him looked back, and she became a pillar of salt." When God said, "Don't look back," He meant, "I want you to condemn the place. I want you to say, 'God is just in what he is doing.'" Instead she looked back. What do you think she looked back for? With longing? Just think of all the fine things she had accumulated in her house that were going to be destroyed that she had left there. What good was it to spend her life accumulating that, when suddenly it's all going to be destroyed? And the result was that she never walked another step, and was turned into a pillar of salt.

The rest of the story becomes very sad because, from the two daughters through their father, Lot, were born the worst of the enemies that Israel ever had: the Moabites; and, the Amorites.

So, when the Word of God commends these Colossians Christians for the fact that doctrine is their life, and consequently, they are capable of the highest and the deepest expressions of love, it is a very great thing to be able to have that said about you. And the Bible is full of the examples of Lot-like type of people who think that God's word is not that significant, and that man's rationalism and man's empiricism has found a better way. In short, what pleased Paul was that the Colossian Christians obeyed the principle of 1 John 2:15-17: "Do not love the world nor the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

You cannot love this world. You cannot love one speck of it, and say, "I love the Father." You cannot have an "agape" love. You cannot have an attitude of no antagonism, free of bitterness, and free of ill will. This is what Jude says, as we learned in our recent trip to Winter Park in our evening studies: "To contend for the faith like a fighting tiger." You do not stand around shuffling your feet, looking down at your shoes, like some mealy-mouthed little wimp when you are faced with what is evil. But you confront it, and you declare it, but you're going to have to take the flak. People will forgive you anything except portraying the Word of God in a realistic way. If you ever put people downwind of themselves, they'll never forgive you for that. You've robbed them of the illusion that they have created for themselves of what they are, while they're thumbing their nose at God. Don't love the world: "Don't love the world. Don't love the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

What does he want you to love? It's what he says in Colossians later on: "Up. Get your eyes up there. That's what I want you to love. I want you to be like these Colossians who love the hope of eternal life." That's what they were going to.

So, things were okay. They came; they went; they were useful; and, they served their purpose, but they weren't in love with those. And everything that they had, and everything that they were was being pushed upward toward heaven. That's where their focus was. They weren't living Lot's life among coarse people, imitating them, and being accepted by them, and living just as if they too were going to the lake of fire.

It is always helpful for me to listen to people in authority – people who have influence and decision-making powers over our lives; to put in perspective what they say, and to realize that these people are going to spend eternity in the lake of fire. So, who are they to speak if the Word of God speaks otherwise?

**God vs Satan**

1 John 2:16 says, "For all that is in the world: the lusts of the flesh; the lusts of the eyes; and, the boastful pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world (that is, from Satan), and the world is passing away, and also its lusts, but the one who does the will of God, he abides forever." The world belongs to Satan, and it stinks. God is love. Satan is hatred. God is happiness. Satan is misery.

The Colossians remembered who they were as the royal family, and they remembered what was waiting for them in heaven. And because they were destined to that eternity, it guided their lives, and it controlled their decision-making mechanism. And the apostle Paul was pleased how this has expressed itself in their conduct and in their "agape" love.

**The Gospel**

The hope of eternal life in heaven is an area of God's truth which is known as the gospel. And that's where Paul brings us at the end of verse 5. He talks about this hope that they have in heaven as being the result of what they previously heard in the Word of Truth – the gospel. The gospel refers to the good news of free grace salvation. That is God's way of getting into heaven. That's why it's the truth. Any other way is not. No one can go to heaven by believing a way which is not the truth of God. God alone has the truth about how to get into heaven. A false gospel is indeed, Paul points out in one of his passages, not a gospel at all because there's only one gospel. It's the true way into heaven. Everything else is a false way. Therefore, it is not good news. And that's what gospel means: "Good news." It can't be good news to follow a religious path that is going to take you into hell. Good news is to get into heaven. Bad news is to get into the lake of fire. Only in the Bible can the true gospel way of free grace salvation be found.

Rationalism creates a false way of salvation. Empiricism (your senses) create a false way of salvation. Always when man's thinking comes in, works are somehow associated with the gospel. It is either like: with the Mormons, your works prove your worthiness to be saved; or, like the Catholics: your works of good conduct prove that you are saved. Either way is a false element as far as salvation is concerned: whether you have it or don't have it. Next time, we will get into the big question of whether we have it or we don't have it. But the issue right now is what Paul is focusing on – this thing called the gospel. Only in the Bible can you find the truth.

Disobedience to any truth of God in the Bible implies that one does not think that God is telling the truth. What was the basis of the first sin in the human race? What was Eve's sin? She didn't think God was telling her the truth. Anytime somebody does not obey the Word of God, you are telling God that you don't think He's telling the truth. Disobedience can also be made by not letting the Bible say what it says. This is the way the liberals create disobedience in theology. They change the words. They say, "The words don't mean what they say. The words have symbolic meaning." Consequently, they interpret the word differently, mostly by their emotions. So, even if a person is practicing a principle that violates the Word of God – if he's a nice person, or if she's a nice person, then it's okay. But if they're not nice, then it's not okay to violate the Word of God. It's a peculiar idea.

All of a sudden, I'm hearing that from Christians: "Oh, this is such a nice person." And you can say, "Yea, but he violates Scripture." They will say, "Yeah, but he's such a nice person." And you can say, "But still, God says that he's doing something disgraceful." They will say, "Yeah, I know, but he's a nice person."

This is where we go in thumbing the nose at God, and ignoring the fact that when you do not obey, you're saying, "You are lying to me, God." What does 1 John 2:5 tells us about that? Anybody who doesn't believe the gospel, does it because he's saying that God is telling a lie.

I always get a little emotional twinge when we sing hymn #110 in our song book, "O, Could I Speak the Matchless Worth." What was it that so moved these Colossian Christians as a result of having their eyes on the fact of where they were going? We sang this recently, and when we got the third verse, I had to stop and gulp – an emotionally moving verse to me: "Soon the delightful day will come, when my dear Lord will bring me home. And I shall see His face. Then with my Savior brother friend, a blessed eternity I'll spend: triumphant in His grace; triumphant in His grace." His grace makes it all possible: "Soon the delightful day will come (the day of the rapture), when my dear Lord will bring me home." The time will come that He will pick me up, and He will take me out – my mission completed: And then to see His face."

Well, if I remember that, perhaps I'll do a little better job in how I live; in how I think; in how I conduct myself; and, in how I associate with people who are not my Lord's friends: "~I shall see His face. And then I'll spend eternity triumphant in His grace; triumphant in His grace." That grace is the basis of salvation. There is no other salvation except free grace salvation. And I don't care who tells you otherwise. You will not find that in the Word of God. There is no other way. This is our hope as Christians, and nothing else. This destiny through grace is the gift of salvation by grace alone. It's absolutely free.

**What is Saving Faith?**

So what is saving faith? If you and I are the ambassadors of God, and we have to be the agents of giving the information, we better know what we're talking about, because if Satan cannot get you to reject salvation, and you go ahead and get saved in spite of him, then he will get you to try to be ignorant of the Word of God. And if you won't do that, then he will try to get you to distort the Word of God. He'll go in those three steps. He'll get you to twist some portion of the Word of God so that it doesn't click right, and so that it doesn't have any impact. And nowhere does he do that more than in the gospel. Nowhere is that hand of Satan more easily seen: the twisting and distorting. What is saving faith? What actually gets a person to heaven? Satan has done such a magnificent job of it, that Jesus could say that few ever find their way into heaven. Now that's pretty sobering. Few ever find their way into heaven. Why? Because Satan has so beclouded and brought confusion on where the gate is (which is Jesus Christ alone), and what the road is (which is Christ – the path) in grace salvation. Jesus is the door into the sheepfold. And He is the road into eternal life.

Many people who claim to have faith in Jesus Christ for salvation are actually trusting in a church organization. They're trusting in their religious rituals; they're trusting in a system of beliefs; or, they are simply hoping for the best. But they do not have saving faith. There are plenty of people in churches who do not have saving faith. They're structured on some secondary thing to carry them through.

**Just Believing What is True?**

Now, you may believe that what is revealed in the Bible about Jesus Christ is true. You should understand that. Yet you may not be saved. That in itself is not saving faith, because, as the book of James points out to us, the demons believe all that. They know that all this is true about Christ. They have no doubt that He is Who He is: He is a God man; He is the Savior; and, He is the One Who has done that – all that He claims to have done. They know that. And it says that they shake. . . They're in fear. They quake in their boots, or whatever they wear. But saving faith is not what they have.

Saving faith which results in personal regeneration and eternal life includes three elements. So that's what we have to get straight. If these three elements are not there, you don't have it.

1. **Knowledge**

The first thing to have saving faith is that you must have knowledge. A lost sinner has to be told the good news (the gospel) about grace salvation. It's all there is to it. Anybody in any part of this world who dies without hearing the gospel goes to hell. You have to have the gospel message of free grace salvation. You have to have the knowledge, or you will not have saving faith. You cannot believe in Jesus Christ until you know something about Him. And the Bible places hearing the information about Jesus Christ before believing in Him.

Notice Acts 15:7: "And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days, God made a choice among you that by my mouth, the gentile should hear the word of the gospel and believe." This is the debate that the first church council held in Jerusalem. Some of the Jews who even were Christians were saying, "You have to obey all the laws of Moses. You have to live a certain kind of life, or we know you're not saved. If you don't live this life, you're not saved. So, suddenly they were already, early on, interjecting that if He's not your Lord, He's not your Savior. And of course that's not true, as we shall see. But the point is that the issue here was that Peter said, "I was sent to Antioch. I met the gentiles. And I preached the Word of God to them." He was sent to Joppa first, where Cornelius experienced the meeting with Peter. And the first thing Peter did gave was to him the gospel. When they gave them the gospel, then they could believe. You have to have the doctrine of salvation first before you have anything to believe.

So, the Bible always places knowledge before believing. If you don't have knowledge, you have nothing to believe. Acts 18:8 reinforces this: "And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, when they heard, were believing and being baptized." It was after they'd heard that they were able to believe.

One more: Ephesians 1:13 says, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth (the gospel) of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." That is a very important expression there: "In Him (in Jesus Christ), you also, after listening to the message of truth (the gospel of your salvation)." This is the same combination of words that Paul uses. Here in Colossians, he says, "The gospel is the truth" (the gospel of truth) of your salvation. After you had heard that, and you believed it – now, that's salvation. And there is nothing else. You sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise. Salvation is the result of the believing.

In the book of the gospel of John, at the end of the book, John says, "I wrote this book to tell you how to go to heaven." The book repeatedly tells you how to go to heaven. The book never calls you to do one thing – not even repent. Isn't that a shocker? The book never says, "Repent so that you can go to heaven. It only tells you to say, "God, You're telling me the truth. I'm a piece of low-life and I want to become a piece of high-life. I want my mind to be renewed. I want to become a real member of the royal family of God. Now I'm a believer, and that's all I am. Now I'm going to start developing myself into a quality person. And I do that by making you my Lord. Every time I step out of line of what I know is right and wrong, I confess it. And confession, of course, means "ceasing and desisting." That's the implication.

So, here you have that beautiful system that God put together, but it all begins with knowledge. No knowledge – no salvation. The knowledge that you need to be saved is contained in the work of Christ (the good news). 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 is one summary of it, where it says that: "Christ died, carrying our sin, and rose again". This is not a Jesus Christ which is created by human opinion polls, but one which is revealed in the Bible. This is the Jesus Christ Whom John 20:31 indicates is God. This is Jesus Christ about Whom 1 John 4:2 indicates His true humanity. This is the Jesus Christ Who died to pay the penalty of death for the sins of mankind (Romans 5:8). This is the Jesus Christ who bore the sin of the world; arose from the dead; and, thereby demonstrates the acceptance by God of the payment of his sins. Romans 4:25: "He who was delivered up on account of our transgressions, and was raised on account of our justification." The reason He died was because He bore our sins. The reason He was raised from the dead is because the price had been paid; the mission had been successful; and, death could not hold Him. We were justified. And we received that justification by believing the Bible's testimony – that He has done this successfully in our behalf.

So the lost person must know the gospel in order to be saved. You may look up these verses to find that repeatedly stressed: Acts 4:12; John 14:6 (no other way except through Christ); Acts 10:43; and, 1 Timothy 2:5.

So you need a Christian messenger to transmit the knowledge of the gospel to the lost. And that's what Romans 10:14-15 is all about. That's where we come in. Romans 10:14-15: "How then shall they call upon Him in Whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher (you)? And how shall they preach unless they're sent (given a commission – the great commission of the gospel). Just as it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things."

So, the first thing to have saving faith is the knowledge of the gospel – a knowledge of a true gospel.

1. **Mental Ascent**

The second thing you need is mental ascent. The gospel about Jesus Christ must be accepted as a truth. You have to say, "Yes, it's the truth." Those who do not believe that the Bible is an inerrant book from God will not feel compelled to accept as true the gospel that it proclaims. If the Bible is not the inerrant book, you can't trust it. You have to create your own way into heaven. And Proverbs 14:12 says that lots of people do that, but the result is death. This is the verse on the back of our evangelism brochure: "There's a way that seems right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death." Mental ascent is more than just understanding the gospel. The demons understand the gospel all right, but they don't believe it. They don't accept it. This is listening and understanding by accepting what is said. You can hear the message, but you don't accept it.

Many years ago when our daughter, Heidi, was about a two-year-old, we were on a vacation trip, and it was our custom to stop at Howard Johnson's Restaurants when we could. So, we were someplace (I don't remember where now), traveling along, and we were looking for lunch, and we were looking for a Howard Johnson Restaurant. And the boys were looking and seeing if we could see it. Everybody was saying, "No, I don't see anything." And this little squeaky voice comes from the back: "There's a Howard Johnson's." And we were saying, "Boy, I can't believe that they wouldn't have one in a town like this." And she said again: "There's Howard Johnson's." And we were saying, "There has to be one here. Are you guys looking up and down the side streets?" They would say, "Yeah, dad, but I don't see one." And she again said, "There's a Howard Johnson's." And all of a sudden, somebody said, "What did you say, Heidi?" And she said again, "There's a Howard Johnson's." And we all looked at her finger, and there was a Howard Johnson's. And we had all heard that several times, but we didn't believe it. What can a squeaky voice like that know? You can hear it, but that doesn't mean that you believe it. And you can understand it.

So, the two Greek words in the Bible tell us what to do with the gospel. You believe it. You have faith in Jesus Christ. They are related these words in the Greek. You must believing the gospel. Don't use any of that nonsense of the pop-art Christianity type, where you "invite Him into your heart," or "into your life," or and all those other phrases. We'll get into those a little later. All you do is believe it. And boy, the doctor says, "Congratulations, you don't have to pay any more income tax. You're going to heaven." You've got a deadly disease. You're doomed. You're through. You're on your way. And what do you do? You lean back, and you relax in great joy, because you have cast your soul on Jesus Christ. You have believed His gospel message (His invitation). You have accepted it. And free grace salvation – you keep your grubby hands off of it. You didn't try to prove you were saved by how you lived – to botch it up. You just lived as you developed your Christian maturity. But you knew that your position was in Christ. That was your security. It was not the fact that you managed to have some ups and downs in your life. And when you were up, you were in; and, when you were down, you were out.

Somebody recently was telling me that they were speaking to somebody, and they shocked the man with the idea that God's grace is the kind that saves you, and then carries you from there. And he said, "Well, no. If you sin, you're out." So he pressed him, "Well, what kind of sins?" He said, "Well just sins." And our man said, "Well, how bad must those sins be." And he said, "Well, just kind of bad sins." And our man said, "Well, what do you do then? Do you get saved again?" And then he was completely flustered. This is man's reasoning. It's so ridiculous. If you start bringing works of human effort into the salvation process, before or after, you're going to completely contaminate what God had in mind.

So, it requires mental ascent. It requires saying, "Yes, it is true. I agree. I have a mental ascent that this is the truth."

1. **Trust**

Then it involves the third factor, which is to have trust. You say it's true. Now, the third factor of saving faith involves trust. Those are the words for "believe" or for "faith:" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Both of these words ("believe" and "faith") mean that you depend on Christ. It means to cast yourself upon Him as the object of your hope. And while you may have knowledge of the gospel, and the good news, you have to accept it, and you may even accept it as true, but you still don't commit yourself to it. You just have an opinion. You have to say, "I'm ready to go out of this life, and I'm going to go on: no works; but all of Christ." I'm going to accept that He did it. And it has all been done for me.

That's the way you have to do it. The Bible identifies the Lord Jesus Christ as the object of that trust (that faith – that salvation (John 3:16, John 3:36). So saving faith involves trusting in Jesus Christ, and the payment that He made for our sins on the cross. It depends on Him alone, with no works added, before or after. You have faith. Faith in itself, please understand, does not save. When I say "trust," you understand that that's also the same word for "faith." You depend on it. It's like what you did when you walked in here today, and sat on these comfortable cushioned chairs. You didn't check it. You just sat right down. You trusted. You believed that it would hold you up.

Now, what if the chair failed you? Then your faith would've been put in an ill object. And there was one occasion when a man walked in, and he was kind of a little bigger guy, and he sat on a chair in the back row, and the chair just gradually sank to the floor – one of these nice chairs. It was defective, and just went all the way down. That was trust that was ill-placed. You couldn't depend on it. It didn't hold you up. Christ is never going to collapse under you. He's going to hold you up to the end.

So, saving faith involves depending on Christ alone, with no human works added to it. And the object of our trust is the Lord.

So saving faith then is these things. The biblical gospel about Jesus Christ – you have to know that. Accepting this gospel is true. And third is trusting in Christ for personal salvation from hell through the forgiveness of your sins, and through the imputation of absolute righteousness to your account.

Let's close it with an analogy. It's like this. There are people that at sea on the ship. On that ship are four people. They're in the middle of the ocean, and the response of the passengers to the lifeboat, the instrument of their salvation, is going to determine whether they survive or not. In this analogy, Jesus Christ is the lifeboat.

One man lacks complete knowledge about the availability of a lifeboat on the ship. He doesn't know there's a lifeboat. He's never heard of it. He doesn't know where it is. He doesn't know how to get to it. He has no knowledge of it. He goes down with the ship. He's lost.

The second man knows that there is a lifeboat on board the ship, but he doesn't believe that it is seaworthy. He doesn't believe it will save him. So he ignores it. He doesn't see how a little dinky thing like that could preserve him in those heavy waters. So, he has no mental ascent about Jesus Christ, in effect. The first man had no knowledge of the lifeboat: no knowledge of Jesus Christ. The second man has no mental ascent; that is, no confidence in the lifeboat: no mental ascent about Jesus Christ.

The third man knows about the lifeboat. He believes that it is seaworthy, but for some reason, he finds it beneath him, and undignified to go crawling on his hands and knees into that lifeboat in order to escape being lost at sea. He has refused to trust the lifeboat. He knows it's there. He thinks it could save him, but he has a better way. He's going to swim it on his own, because something could happen to the boat. He's going to swim it. He has a better way of his own. He has no trust in Jesus Christ, but he has great trust in himself.

The last man knows about the lifeboat. He believes that it is seaworthy, and can save him. He gets into the boat; swings over the side; goes into the sea; the ship goes down; and, he is saved. He trusted himself to the lifeboat. He added trust to his knowledge and his mental ascent. And when he trusted, and cast himself upon it, that's what grace requires: faith – believing. If you miss it at this point, you're going to go down with the ship. When you tell people the gospel, get it straight. Their eternity is dependent upon it. God, our Father, we thank You for this Thy Word. We pray that Thou will seal these things to our souls, our minds, so that we will be people of grace, and therefore, usable to the Holy Spirit. We want our lives to count for Thee. We want our lives to be exemplary as those who can be trusted when we tell people about salvation, because it has worked for us. Make us an evangelistic people in the circle in which we move. We pray that You burden our hearts to grab those Berean evangelistic books by the fistfuls, and leave a trail of them behind us every week of our lives. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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