



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“What is Faith? or, What Does it Mean to Believe?”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the word of God and for the opportunity again to gather and to open its pages and ponder its teachings. And we thank Thee for the way in which thou hast communicated that word to us. And we thank Thee for the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. We thank Thee that he illumines the pages and illumines our hearts as we read and as we study. And again, Lord, we ask thy blessing upon us tonight as we turn to the word. May he again teach us and may our time fruitful and profitable for each one of us.

And we ask in our Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for tonight is really a continuation of our last two studies, “What Must I do to be Saved?, or The Terms of Salvation.” And you will remember that last week we got down to Roman VI in the outline which I had given you of the various terms that had been suggested by men as the basis upon which we receive everlasting life or obtain everlasting life, believe and do good works. And we sought to show that that was wrong. Believe and repent and we sought to show that that was wrong. Although there is a sense in which that is right. We talked about the meaning of the term repent. We also talked about believe and confess Christ. And we said that that was wrong.

Believe and be baptized and that that was wrong. Believe and surrender to God and that too was wrong. And we discussed believe and make Christ the Lord of your life, and last week we especially stressed the fact that to make Christ the Lord of our life is the work of sanctification. While it is true that if we are to be saved, we must acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Lord. There is a great deal of difference between acknowledging that he is Lord, that he is divine, that he is the supreme God, the second person of the trinity. There it’s a great deal of difference between acknowledging him as Lord and making him the Lord of our life. We may acknowledge him as Lord out faith and trust in him and pass from death unto life, but making of Christ, Lord of our lives is the work of sanctification and that is the work which the Holy Spirit carries out through the remainder of our Christian life. And, furthermore, for as long as we are in the flesh he is never, so far as I can tell, completely Lord of our lives.

Now, of course, these are, it appears on the surface, matters in which we quibble over terms. But there is a great deal of difference between these two things, to believe acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the Lord and to believe and make Jesus Christ Lord of our lives. Sometimes the greatest of theological differences may be found in words that almost appear to be identical. It is by such counterfeits and such tricks that Satan is able to mislead so many.

Now, then I had as roman VII on our outline, remember, simply believe. For I believe that that is the proper term for salvation. In other words, God requires that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. He does not require anything else. Faith alone is the proper term for salvation. But now since the question of believe or the question of faith is such a big question rather than deal with roman VII of our previous outline I want to expand our studies into the present study tonight. And so this is a special study on what is faith. “What Must I do to be Saved? or the Saving Efficacies of Faith Alone.”

Now, we are still studying the human side of the question, how do we come to Chris? From the divine side, the answer is, of course, the infallible grace of God as is set forth in passages like 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 13 and verse 14.

Now, I have been enjoying speaking on election so much over the past six months that I know that in Dallas I have overdone it. The reason I know it is because my wife told me so. [Laughter] She said last week after I came back from Longview having spoken again on the subject of election there. She said, “You know, I think, you have really spoken enough on that subject recently.” My first reaction, of course, is to reply in one of Spurgeon statements “Men love God everywhere but on the throne,” but I managed to hold my tongue. And decided that that wouldn’t gain anything and I just rejoiced in the fact that I’m not preaching in Dallas right now. And so I’m going around the country speaking of election everywhere else. So you cannot say that I have overdone it there.

So this past week I was over in Jackson, Mississippi, speaking on Friday night and Saturday night. And then three times on Sunday and sure enough the Lord led me to speak on the topic of election. And I had some interesting people in the audience in that church because they are not so used to hearing such strong doctrine on election. And we got them all stirred up over the subject of election. And I think maybe even converted a few of them. [Laughter] But one of the young ladies amused me. She was a very attractive person who actually is on TV in Jackson. She comes on the TV in order to advertise the Oldsmobile automobiles. And she is a very intelligent person. And after the message, she came up to me and I had put down on the overhead projector by the pulpit “grace.” And I had said that it is through invincible grace that we are brought to Jesus Christ. And I had also said it is through infallible grace that we are brought to Jesus Christ. And had I used another parallel term through special grace. And, finally, I had said through efficacious grace. And she came up to me after and she said “You know, I thought you would never use that term efficacious grace. I was just waiting for you to

use it.” And I said “Well where did you learn that? She said, “I don’t know where I learned it but I just knew that efficacious grace was the grace that brought us to Jesus Christ.” And she said “I have it hear in my Bible somewhere.” And she may have looked at the place where she had made some notes. And I said “I know where you got that.” She said, “Where?” You got it from some of my tapes. And she said “Well, that’s right. I’ve been listening to your tapes.” And so we are managing to reach out and touch others in various other places. And it looks now as if I’m going to have to stop speaking on election in other places too because I would be overdoing there.

Now, you see that the human side of coming to Christ or the terms of salvation are not these; believe and do good works, believe and repent, believe and confess Christ, believe and be baptized, believe and surrender to God, believe and make Christ the Lord of your life. The biblical term is believe and believe only or faith only. As the Apostle Paul put it in Romans chapter 3 in verse 28 in the passage that we have looked at at least once or twice. He says, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith.” Luther added remember alone “By faith alone; without the deeds of the law.” Or as we read in our Scripture reading last time Acts chapter 16, verse 31 when the Philippian jailer said to Paul, “What must I do to be saved?” He did not say believe and be baptized. He did not say believe and do good works. He did not say believe and repent, believe and confess Christ, believe and surrender or believe and make Christ Lord of your life. He said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now, there is the acknowledgement that he is Lord. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

Now, of course, the question for us is what is faith? What is it to believe? It’s simple for us to say believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved but what does it mean to believe. And that is the subject that we want to look at tonight. And for our Scripture reading I’m going to ask that you turn with me to John chapter 6 and listen as I read verses 26 through 29. John chapter 6 verse 26 through verse 29. This is in the

midst of our Lord’s great discourse on the bread of life. And we read in verse 26 in answer to question,

“Teacher when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” You’ll notice these words. Jesus suggests that they are to seek after everlasting life, “Which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, what shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” And they evidently mean by this, what might we do in order that we might have God’s divine favor, that we might have this everlasting that you have suggested. “Jesus answered and said unto them, this is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” What shall we do that we might work the works of God? This is the work of God that you believe on him whom he had sent.”

Now, let’s consider then what it means to believe. It apparently is of supreme moment theologically for Jesus says that it is the sole duty of man. This is “the work of God” that you believe on him whom he had sent. And it is evident that our Lord places the greatest significance upon the expression this is the work of God that you believe on him whom he hath sent. It is so significant that if we were to ask our Lord what is the primary duty of man with reference to God, he would have said “this is “the work of God” that ye believe on him whom he had sent.” That’s a remarkable statement and later on I want to say a few more words about it.

But let’s turn briefly to consider some introductory matters. And roman I, the doctrine of faith in history before the Reformation and after the Reformation. Let me just say a few words about this. I realize that for most of us these questions are not really too significant and so I’m going to try and pass them by with just a word. Before the time of

the reformation in the sixteenth century, faith was regarded as important but there was not clear conception of it in the apostolic fathers. In the later fathers, such as Tertullian and even in Augustine, although Augustine studied faith a great deal more than others, most of the early most apostolic fathers were confused to some extent by the term faith and ordinarily included in it in some way its expression in love. And, consequently, they tended to mingle faith with works. Out of this, of course, arose a doctrine of faith which ultimately in the Roman Catholic Church is a doctrine of, really of works.

Now, after the Reformation, Roman Catholics began to take faith to mean assent, and the seed of faith was considered to be the understanding. Calvin, however, with other Reformers took it to be trust, and the seed of faith not to be in the mind only but in the will. Now, faith was to Calvin an instrument for the obtaining of the merits of Jesus Christ. It was primarily a gift of God and secondarily an activity of man’s dependence on God. Later on the Arminians together with men like Schleimacher and Ritschl, who were almost brothers, begin to conceive of faith as a meritorious work. Well, let’s drop it at that. That’s not really as important for us as some of the other things.

Roman II, the idea of faith among men. As you know, the term faith is not an exclusively theological term. Among men we use the term faith quite frequently. Sometimes it has simply the sense of an opinion. For example, it may refer to an opinion that is not based upon knowledge at all, just the persuasion that is based often upon a feeling even a persuasion that is based upon a hope. We might say next year I have faith that the Dallas Cowboys will win the NFL championship.

Now, that is just a mere opinion, but we know what we mean when we say, I have faith in the Cowboys. We don’t mean we have any knowledge of what they are going to do. It’s merely an opinion. So the term faith is not necessarily a religious term. It has come over into our ordinary language. So it sometimes means just opinion among men. Sometimes it means a sense of immediate certainty and even scientists use the term faith. They refer to something that they believe is true but which they cannot really

prove. It’s one of those things that they intuitively accept as a scientific fact but which they acknowledged that they cannot demonstrate. And so faith has the sense of immediate certainty. And then it also among men has the sense of a conviction based upon testimony and includes trust, in other words, almost precisely the religious sense. So the term faith is not simply a religious idea. This is all I want to say here that we use the term as expressing from opinion the ideas from opinion all the way to conviction based upon knowledge and certainty.

Roman III, the idea of faith in Scripture. I would like just to say a sentence about this. In the Old Testament, of course, we have the revelation of the faith of the Father. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the eleventh chapter of his letter expounds the significance of faith in the Old Testament. So faith is not just a New Testament idea. It is also an Old Testament idea. In fact, it is rather surprising but, nevertheless, true that the greatest example of faith in the Bible is not a New Testament character, if we may for a moment exclude Jesus Christ, but an Old Testament character, Abraham. He is the supreme illustration of faith. He’s the great type of all true believers. In fact, in the New Testament we read that when we in the church age believe in the Lord Jesus we are called the sons of Abraham because we follow in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had.

Now, there is a difference between the faith of the Old Testament and the faith of the New Testament because you see in the Old Testament there is a progression in the revelation of God’s plan of redemption and so it is only natural that the idea of faith should become more specific. And it reaches its climax in the coming of Jesus Christ and it’s rather remarkable, I think, that in the New Testament the coming of Jesus Christ is called the coming of faith.

Now, will you take your New Testaments and turn with me to Galatians chapter 3. Galatians chapter 3. Now, let’s just read verse 22 through verse 25. Galatians chapter 3. Paul writes, “But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of

Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came,” now notice before faith came. Now, Paul does not mean there was no faith in the Old Testament but he means that when Jesus Christ came there came such a revelation of what faith really is and with the coming of our Lord there came the completion of God’s message to men so that faith took on such a new light that it is almost as if faith came with Jesus Christ. “But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.” So you see that the apostle in thinking of faith regards the coming of our Lord Jesus as a climax and the institution of the new age as an institution of an age in which we can say faith has now come because there is the complete revelation of the significance of faith.

Now, remember Paul said in Acts chapter 19 when he met the disciple of John the Baptist that in the Old Testament men looked forward to the coming Redeemer. He said that they were to look forward and believe on him who would be sent but after all the liniments of the one who was coming were not so clear. There are many prophecies of the coming of Christ but nowhere in the Old Testament is it stated that his name should be Jesus of Nazareth and his mother’s name should be Mary and his father Joseph. So real climax came in the program of God when Jesus came and there came such a revelation of faith that his coming can be called the coming of faith. So what we want to say then about this is that the idea of faith in the Scriptures is largely the same but it is colored by the development of doctrine. So that when Christ comes there is a final and complete revelation of the nature of faith.

Roman IV, the terms for faith and first the Old Testament term. Now, I don’t want to be too complicated here because we don’t have time to go into detail and I don’t think it’s tremendously important for us. Let me just put down the terms that are used for

“faith” in the Old Testament. And if you are interested in putting them in your notes, you can do that. The most common word in the Old Testament for faith is the word *aman*.

Now, I’m going to transliterate this this way. That’s, of course, a word from which we get “Amen.” “Amen.” Now, this is not quite the right way to transliterate it. I hope you will realize that, but it’s close enough for our purposes and it will be accurate, *aman*. Now, *aman* means basically this. I’m getting caught up here. *Ama*” means, of course, to believe but it originally meant to support or to nourish then to be made firm or to be made sure. To be carried as a nurse was one of its rare meanings but in that particular stem think of tense when you say stem. In the particular stem in which it is found in the New Testament, it means to trust or to believe in. So this word means to trust, “amen.” When we say “amen” we are saying verily but the verb means to trust.

Then the second word is the word B-A-T-A-C-H, *batach*. Now, *batach* is a word that also means to trust, but it originally meant to lie extended on the ground and hence it had the idea of repose, to rest upon, but its basic idea is also to trust in or to rely upon. Let’s just say to rely upon. And then there is also a word *chacab* which meant to hide oneself and thus came to mean to flee for refuge. Let’s say to flee for refuge. Now, you can see the basic idea of these terms is the idea of trust reliance upon, refuge in. So the Old Testament word to believe connotes that force.

Now, let’s think about the New Testament for a moment. By the way this first word “aman” is the word that is the most important. And it is the word that is used of Abraham when God took him out, told him to look at the stars and to see if he could number them and then added “And so shall thy seed be.” And we read “And Abraham believed God.” Dr. Chafer used to like to say that is the word from which we get “amen.” And so I would like to render it “amened” God. Abraham “amened” God. In other words, he said so be it Lord. He trusted in the Lord. He put his trust in the God whose been called the things that be not as though they were.

In the New Testament the word for believe is the word the noun *tistis*, T-I-S-T-I-S, or the verb, T-I-S-T-E-U-O, *tisteuo*. Now, these words, as you can see, are the same. One is simply the noun and the other is the verb. And the word *tistis* is a word that means to, if it is used in one type of construction, it means to give credence to. If, for example, it is used with a dative case, it means to give credence to. That is to believe a person’s word. If someone were to come to me and say, assuming I had not seen the papers, UCLA won the NCAA basketball championship. And someone were to say to me do you believe him? And I should say I believe him. This is the kind of construction that would be used. In other words, to give credence to a person. But it is also used with a series of prepositions. And when it is used with prepositions, it has a slightly different meaning.

Now, I wish I had time to deal with all they types of constructions but I’m only going to use one. I’m only going to refer to one because it is so common in the New Testament. When it is used with preposition, *eis*, E-I-S, which means “unto.” It means to believe into, literally. Now, to believe into is to put one’s trust in a person in the sense that there is a kind of mental movement toward that person and an reliance upon that person. Now, this is the characteristic expression in the Gospel of John. To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is to, in your faith, in your trust, move toward him and rely upon him. The idea of motion is involved in this construction so to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him;” that is, to believe into him, to believe in a mental movement by which you turn from yourself and move toward him and rely upon him. That is to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. That’s the force of believe.

By the way, that is something unique too. In the Old Testament in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, we do not have that construction. It is something which the New Testament expresses in order to get over the idea of union with our Lord Jesus which is produced by faith in him. So you can see then since this is perhaps the characteristic New Testament expression that the Old Testament terms and the New

Testament terms express the idea of the transference of trust from ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ or to God in which we and by which we rely upon the divine person. Now, that is the basic idea of faith in its terms.

Now, Roman V, the figurative expressions for faith. Have you notice in the New Testament that there are various figures that are used for faith. For example, there is the figure of looking. I have it over here capital A, the figure of looking. Let’s look at a couple of these. Let’s turn to John chapter 3 verses 14 and 15. John chapter 3 verse 14 and 15. Here is a familiar text which most of us know. Jesus is apparently still talking with Nicodemus and explaining his answers to Nicodemus’ question. And in the course of his reply he says in verse 14, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” And here we have the idea as Moses lifted up the serpent and the children of Israel looked, so we are to look to our Lord Jesus Christ which he defines as believing. And you remember that in the Old Testament we read statements like this “Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth.” I think that’s out of Acts chapter 45 in verse 22. So the idea of faith is expressed figuratively by looking.

You now in the Old Testament it is evident that we referred to here in John chapter 3 verse 14 and verse 15, all Israel had to do in order to receive physical healing was to take a glance toward the serpent that Moses had put upon the pole. They did not have to make any confessions. They did not have to believe and go through any kind of ritual right. They did not have to believe in and join the congregation of Israel. They didn’t have to believe and make any new revelations. They didn’t have to believe and make the Messiah the Lord of their lives. All they had to do was to simply take a look to that serpent on the pole. And that is Jesus’ own illustration of the saving faith here. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so that men looked at him and lived. So we are to look to the savior who died upon the cross in order that we might have everlasting life.

Now, that is a wonderful figure because it illustrates the simplicity of saving faith in Jesus Christ. I think it is an act of perception because, of course, as we look to the cross we must recognize who is dying there and why he is dying there. It also has its volitional element because it involves a deliberate looking to the cross. And it has its emotional element because in the Bible this is presented as a continued looking and thus a satisfying looking. But it is a most significant figure because it’s a wonderfully expressive of what it is to believe in Jesus Christ. It is to look unto him. And you know when you read the epistle to the Hebrews in the 12th chapter and he tells us to run the race. He says, “Laying aside the weight that so easily encompasses us and let us run with patience the race that set before us looking unto Jesus.” Looking that is the attitude of faith. That means simply to rest and rely upon him. It’s to do nothing more than that. Look to him. Rely upon him.

Now, another figure that is used in the New Testament is the figure of hungering and, of course, being satisfied and thirsty and drinking so hungering and thirsting or eating and drinking. Let’s turn over a few pages in the Gospel of John to chapter 6 and let’s read verses 50 through 58 in which our Lord himself mingles with these figures. John chapter 6, verse 50 through 58, “This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Now, notice verse 35 at this point. Notice that he’s speaking of himself as bread and that we are to eat. “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” So to eat bread, to come to him, is to believe on him. Well, let’s continue reading here. Verse 52, “The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” They do not understand that this is a figure. “Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye

have no life in you.” By the way, this has absolutely nothing to do with Lord’s Supper. This is a reference to faith in our Lord by thinking. “Who so eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” Notice eating flesh, drinking blood. “For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.” So we have the figure hungering and thirsting, eating and drinking. These are ways by which the Lord Jesus seeks to explain what he means by believe. He means “to look.” He means to eat. He means to thirst and to drink. And then, of course, the figure of coming to Christ we saw that from verse 35. So to come to Christ is also to believe in him.

Now, we have come to the heart of what I want to talk to you about tonight. In Roman VI, the nature of saving faith, and first of all the concepts of religious faith. Now, when I use the term religious faith I mean faith in the spiritual sense. But since some of the faith that is found in the New Testament is not saving faith, I’ve used the term religious faith. These theological distinctions must be made.

There are actually four concepts of religious faith. There is, first of all, historical faith. Now, historical faith is pure intellectual apprehension. It’s like faith in the facts of history. It may be orthodox, it may be scriptural but it is not rooted in the heart. And, consequently, it is not saving faith.

Now, you’ll never understand the New Testament if you do not understand that the word, “believe” does not always connote saving faith. I want to give you an illustration. So turn with me to Acts chapter 26 and we’re going to read verses 27 and 28, 26, 27 and 28. Paul is defending himself before Agrippa and we read in verse 27, “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

By the way, whenever I read that text there reminds me of some exams they used to give in Britain on Scripture. Every graduate of Oxford and Cambridge years ago used to have to take a Scripture examination. They ought to still do that in all of our universities. A man is not educated if he doesn’t know anything about the Bible whether he’s a Christian or not. We used to get some strange answers and, of course, many of these were taken and were separated from the exams and all Britain got a good laugh every now and then of the things that were said. Just like I said last time the person who answered what are the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luther and John and Sodom and Gomorrah were ancient lovers. Well, now, one of those people in Britain was asked a question about the animals of the Old Testament and speaking. It was something like this “What animal of the Old Testament spoke with human words?” And the answer, of course, was to include the serpent and some other animals of the Old Testament. And one of them put as the answer “The serpent and the whale which swallowed Jonah.” And the next part of the question was “What did they say?” And for that he replied “The whale said almost I persuaded thee to be a Christian.” [Laughter] So every time I read this text I must confess I think about that.

But now notice, here is the use of the term “believe” but it is not saving faith. All Agrippa does is believe that the prophets are generally true, but that doesn’t save a man. This is historical faith. Then there is miraculous faith or faith in the miraculous but faith in the miraculous is not saving faith either.

Let’s turn over to Acts chapter 8. Acts chapter 8. Now, the chapter of the book of Acts gives us the case that Simon the sorcerer. And remember when the ministry of Philip had such a telling effect in the city of Samaria that Simon the sorcerer was greatly impressed by what happened. And we read in verse 12, “But 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: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs

which were done.” Now, if you had only that verse you would think that Simon Magus was a member of the church which began to meet in Samaria because it says he believed.

But if you’re careful you will notice that Luke says that basis of his faith was the miracle that he saw. For example, we read, “He also continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.” What he believed was that there were miracles performed and he was greatly impressed by this fact. And since he was a sorcerer and was a professional who wanted to have authority and influence over people it is only natural that he would desire to have this power for himself. And so one day while Peter was there he went into the hotel where Peter was staying, it was not a Holiday Inn, but he went in walked in, put down some money on the desk in Peter’s room and said what will you give me for the Holy Ghost. And listen to Peter’s reply verse 20, “Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee.” Now, the word perish is the word that is used in the New Testament for a person who is lost. And so Peter said your money go where you are going. In other words, let your money go to hell with you. That’s what he said. Now, I imagine he probably said it even more startling way then that if I know Peter. But that’s what he meant, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.” Simon of Magus was not a believer. He believed in the miracles, but he was not a possessor of saving faith as Peter’s words show.

Now, in the Bible we have miraculous faith. There is also temporal faith or temporary faith if you like. And, of course, the basis of this is the parable of Thesaur which our Lord tells. Let’s turn back to chapter 8 of the book of Luke and let’s notice what our Lord says. Luke chapter 8. And in our Lord’s words of explanation of the parable we read in Luke chapter 8 in verse 11, “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root,

which for a while believe, and in time of temptation.” Apostatize, the word for fall away is the word from which we get apostasy. It is the New Testament word for apostasy. So believe for a while but apostatize. So you see it’s possible to have a temporary faith but temporary faith is not saving faith.

Now, the fourth concept of religious faith is saving faith. That is a conviction wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit as to the truth of the gospel and a firm reliance upon Jesus Christ genuine reliance upon him.

Now, Capital B, the elements of saving faith. So let’s forget about temporary faith. Let’s forget about miraculous faith. Let’s forget about faith of a historical character only and let’s now think about saving faith. Now, saving faith is the activity of the whole man. It’s not the activity of the head only. It’s not the activity of the heart only in the sense of the seat of the emotions. It’s not the activity of the soul only. It’s not the activity, of course, of the will only. It is, however, a firm reliance upon Jesus Christ. It contains three elements.

Now, let me erase for a moment here because I want to put these words on the board since they are rather important for understanding faith and also for understanding the history of the doctrine of faith. The Reformers said that saving faith contained three elements and I think they are right. They said it contained the element of perception.

Now, the Reformers were not as simple as this, of course. They used the Latin term *notitia*, perception. They also said it contained the element of ascent. Again, they were not so simple as to use an English word. They used the Latin word. And as reformers lived, educated people knew something about Latin. When I was in high school and college, educated people knew something about Latin. In the modern age, nobody knows anything about Latin any longer. So I have discovered. So perception and ascent and then trust.

Now, they did not use trust. They used *fiducia* from which we get fiduciary of course. *Assensus*, ascent. *Notitia* means perception. Now, the reformers said that these

three elements were found in saving faith. Now, the first element is the element of perception. That is the intellectual element. In other words, we must have something to believe, if we are to properly believe. We cannot just say I’m a believer. You know a preacher can get in a pulpit and pound on a pulpit and say, “Believe, believe, believe. believe.” And pretty soon you go out after you’ve heard and say that fifty or a hundred times and someone says are you a believer? Yes, I’m a believer. What do you believe? I don’t know. [Laughter] That’s the way a lot of people are. Now, faith includes an intellectual element. You have to have something to believe. That’s the trouble with a lot of preaching in the twentieth century. They don’t give anybody anything to believe. They urge men to believe but they don’t give them any content.

Now, the first element in saving faith is the element of content. Now, the Roman Catholic Church, as a rule, does not expect us to have a certain special content. They just want us to believe what the church teaches. And so, naturally, in the Roman Catholic Church the important thing in faith is ascent. You don’t have to understand. You just ascent to what the church teaches. But in the reformation churches they taught that a person must, if he believes, have an intellectual element to his faith.

You know there’s a famous story goes all the way back long past Mr. Spurgeon about an ancient reformer who was asked by someone what did he believe. He said I believe what my church believes. And then his friend said what does your church believe? Well he said the church believes what I believe. And then he said well what in the world do you and the church believe? He said we believe the same thing. [Laughter]

Now, we must have some content to our faith but content, of course, is not all. By the way, this is a biblical thought. Will you turn to Romans chapter 10 in verse 14? Romans chapter 10 in verse 14.

You know the time is really flying tonight. You know I was preaching in Jackson last night. I had the most beautiful audience that I’ve ever had in all my life. I preached for about an hour and they were just hanging on the edges of their chairs, believer it or

not. And then I said I wish I had another hour and there was a great outcry from the audience. At least two people said go on. [Laughter] Go on. Go on. And afterwards, they were really mad those two people that I had not gone on. Time really flies.

Now, notice verse 14, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard.” So in other words we must have something to believe. Now, there are other texts, of course, that say the same thing.

Now, secondly there must be the idea of ascent in our faith. Now, ascent is according to many an emotional element. Now, this is not too easy to distinguish from the first. I rather like to think of this as something that is intellectual, primarily, and this that is something that does touch the emotional part of man. It’s conviction. Not only intellectual faith in something but conviction regarding the truth of that and faith includes that.

But, finally, and I guess most important of all faith included the fiduciary element or the trust element, the element of reliance. This is what Paul means in Romans 10 when he talks about believing in the heart. Romans chapter 10 verse 9 and 10, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” He’s talking about belief from the central part of a man. A belief that is a volitional element from the faith by which a man deserts trust in himself and gives himself over to reliance upon someone else and the works that that person has done for him. So faith includes knowledge, it includes conviction, and above all it includes reliance. It is an active mental movement of a man, whereby, he turns from himself and turns to Christ believing and relying upon him and what he has done for us on the cross. That is saving faith.

Now, let me illustrate. I used this illustration a long time ago when I was preaching on another subject that some of you may have heard it, but even if you’ve

heard it it’s still a good illustration. And it illustrates the point. Let’s just suppose for a moment that a ship during the last war is torpedoed by the enemy in the midst of the ocean. And let’s suppose that, finally, the survivors come down to four men: a captain and three of his crewmen. And they have one lifeboat and let’s just suppose for the sake of an illustration that the lifeboat is small and it will only hold those three men.

Let’s suppose the captain says, now men, there is an island over there about five miles away. I want you men to get in that boat and I want you to get over to that island and you will be saved. I must stay with the ship. The first man says I don’t believe the boat will take me there. Now, that man does not have he, of course, has had the information, the captain has told him the boat will take you there. The boat is safe. The island is only five miles away. All he has to do is to row. So in a sense he has an intellectual comprehension of the message which the captain has given him but he replies I don’t believe it. Now, the second man replies differently. He says captain I believe that message that you have given me, but he says I do not want to get in that boat and go. Now, that man has belief but he has not really reached the place of well let’s put it this way. I’m confusing the illustration. The first man has heard it. He says I believe it. I hear your message but I don’t believe it. The next man says I hear your message I believe it but I’m not going to get into the boat and go. And so he has belief but he does not have ascent. Let’s suppose the third man says I’ve heard your message. It’s come through plain and clear captain. I am convinced that it will take me there and, furthermore, I’m going to get in it and go. And he does.

Now, that is the man who has faith. That is the man who has saving faith. He has perception of the message. He is convinced of its truthfulness and he has relied upon it. The second man has not relied upon it. He may even know the message. Be convinced that it is a true message but if he does not rely upon it it is not saving for him. And so when we preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ it is possible for a person to hear the message and just say I don’t believe it. He has had an intellectual comprehension of what the

message is. It is possible for a person to say I have heard the message. I see that you are saying believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and, furthermore, I am convinced that if a man does believe he will be saved but I’m not going to take that chance. That man is not saved. A man is saved who hears the message, who is convinced of the truthfulness of the message, and who commits himself to that message. That’s the difference between saving faith and faith that is not saving.

Well let us say there is a child in a burning building and the man stands down at the bottom to save the child with a net. And the child is urged to jump. The child must not only know that the man is there. The child must be convinced that the man is strong enough to catch the child, and then finally in order to be saved the child must take the step of reliance upon him.

Now, that is saving faith. Capital C, real quickly. I think we can cover the rest fairly quickly. The object of saving faith. Now, the object of saving faith in a general sense is the word of God, but in a special sense the object of saving faith is Jesus Christ or God. By the way, we could lay a great deal of stress upon the fact that the object of saving faith is the person of our Lord. The ground of saving faith ultimately the ground of saving faith is the truthfulness and faithfulness of God the Holy Spirit. That is the ground of saving faith, the truthfulness of God, his faithfulness. The source of saving faith, now, remember, when we talked about regeneration we said the order of the divine work is the implantation of the seed, the conception of light by the coming of the word, and spiritual birth. The life of trust and the life of good works follow. The source then is God who gives faith.

We have some good texts for this. I have referred you to some of them like Philippians chapter 1 verse 29, “It is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” It is given. Faith is something that is given by God. 1 John chapter 5 in verse 1, have you ever notice that text? William G. T. Shedd makes a

great deal over this text to show us that faith is a gift of God, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ has born of God.”

Now, in the Greek text in 1 John chapter 5 in verse 1 let me read it for you. I really translated it then, “Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.” In other words, the birth has preceded the believing. Everyone who goes on believing that Jesus is the Messiah has already been born of God. And so it is evident that the faith that is referred to there is the product of birth of God.

Now, we talked about that and we saw that Lazarus was John’s illustration of that fact. Lazarus is made alive so he could hear. He heard and then he came forth. The same thing is true in our spiritual life. We are moved upon by the Holy Spirit. The birth takes place and it expresses itself in faith in the Son of God. Now, we cannot separate all of these elements as far as our experience is concerned occurs simultaneously. We’re talking about the logical relationship.

Now, the subject of saving faith. The subject of saving faith is man. I believe, God does not believe. I believe. Faith is a mental movement by which I put my trust in Jesus Christ but it is initiated by God. And finally, the result of saving faith, of course, is all the things that have to do with the Christian life. We renounce our own righteousness. We come to love Jesus Christ and we come to obedience for him.

Now, I don’t have time to talk about the illustrations, but I would suggest you put in your notes Romans chapter 4 because the great illustration in the New Testament is Abraham and you will discover by the way that all these elements of faith are true in Abraham’s case. He believes in God. He believes himself, his faith was a faith that receives promises. It involves ascent. He was convinced of the truthfulness of the word of God and he put his trust in God. And Paul says he’s a great illustration of faith. But I did want to say one thing and I’m going to take a couple of minutes to say it. From John chapter 6 verse 28 verse 29 the text that I read for the Scripture reading. So turn back there for just a moment for a couple of points before we close. John chapter 6 verse 28

and verse 29. Remember that Jesus said, “What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus said, This is the work of God.”

Notice they were looking for works, plural; some mighty deed by which they might gain merit before God. Jesus said there is one work and that is the work of faith. By the way, that text is a good text for the deity of Jesus Christ. Suppose someone else had said that. Suppose someone were to come to me. Suppose you were to come to me and say “Dr. Johnson what must I do that I might work the works of God? What must I do that I may gain the necessary acceptance before God so that I know I have his approval?” And suppose I were to say to you this is the work of God that you believe on me. Now, even if I were Isaiah the prophet that would be ridiculous. In other words, I’m saying the whole relationship of man to God depends upon his relationship to me.

Now, this text is a tremendous affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ. If anyone said this, if any man said this claiming to be the sole mediator between God and men, the sole stepping stone to eternal life we would laugh to scorn but Jesus said this. And he says this is the work of God.

By the way, he does not say that believe is a work in the sense that the works of the law are works. Paul says were not saved by works of law. We’re saved by faith. When he uses the term work here he means the sense of a mental movement. It is activity and in that says a work but it is not a confidence in ourselves, it is a confidence in our Lord. And so it is the transference of confidence of oneself to confidence in Jesus Christ in what he has done.

By the way, why did Jesus say why did he say this is work of God that you believe on him whom had sinned? Why did he deny that it was possible for anyone to do works to please God? You know why? Because it was too late for anyone to work his way to heaven. It’s too late now for you. For you see if we work ourselves to heaven we must be one hundred percent righteous from the moment we draw our first breath as an infant to our last breath as an adult. And only then having completely perfectly kept the

complete law of God could we have any hope of life, you must believe. There is nothing left for us to do but to rely on someone else’s merit and fortunately to the saving work of Jesus Christ there is a merit for men who will believe. Let’s close with prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for Thy word. And we thank Thee that the sole condition, the sole work is to believe on him who Thou hast sent for we recognize Lord that there is nothing in us that merits eternal life. And we thank Thee and praise Thee for the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to the place where we transferred our allegiance to ourselves to him. And we pray, O God, that if there should be one person in this audience who has not yet believed in him, O Father, we pray that the Holy Spirit may work in them so that they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For his name’s sake. Amen.