

FAITH: THE KEY TO BELIEVING AND RECEIVING

Golden Text: Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Lesson Text I John 5:1-15

(1) Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and everyone that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

(2) By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

(3) For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

(4) For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

(5) Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

(6) This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

(7) For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

(8) And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

(9) If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

(10) He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made

him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

(11) And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

(12) He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

(13) These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know

that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

(14) And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us:

(15) And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

I. WHY FAITH IS SO BASIC TO REDEMPTION

Faith is included among the six foundation stones or first principles of Christ precisely because it is basic (primary).

A. Faith: God's Chosen Channel of Saving Grace.

Faith, like repentance, is a gift from God and is essential for a successful Christian life. Through his grace, or unmerited favor, God creates faith within us, which enables us to believe his word and to rely upon him as our saviour.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."(Ephesians 2:8-9)

B. Faith: A Major Key In Pleasing God.

Faith is not like money; we do not hoard it and present it to God in order to please him. Through acceptance of the plan of salvation through knowledge of his word, we come to know that he does indeed exist and that his word is utterly trustworthy. We please him by being willingly receptive.

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6)

C. Faith: A Way To Gain Access To God's Holy Presence.

Sin separates us from God; the blood of Christ offered a fresh way of approach. We must allow that precious blood to speak to our conscience.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Romans 5:1-2)

D. Faith: Our Means Of Becoming Stabilized In The Truth.

Until we develop a settled and firm conviction of what we believe, we will continue to be blown about by every wind of doctrine. We only begin to mature after we have committed ourselves by a definite personal decision to believing God's word.

"...If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." (Isaiah 7:9)

E. What It Is That We Are To Believe?

God plainly does not intend for us to have faith in what we feel is correct. Our faith is developed, not by exhaustive self-study, but by hearing the preached word of God.

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)

F. Our Confession Of Faith In Christ Qualifies Us To Receive Some Of Our Desires.

Very early in the history of the church, creeds became important. Why? A creed - from the Latin *credo* - is a statement of faith or confession.

Converts were required to verbalize what they believed before they were permitted to be water baptized or to take the Lord's supper.

"And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest (be baptized). And he (the Ethiopian eunuch) answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:37)

II. AREAS OF MAN'S LIFE THAT ARE AFFECTED BY FAITH

Just as in repentance, all four basic areas of life are touched: mind, emotion, will and spirit. Genuine persuasion creates right thinking about God, right feelings, definite decisions, and spiritual commitment. Faith activates the whole man.

A. Mind.

Faith is more than intellectual ascent; it is commitment with knowledge to obey the truth of the gospel. Men cannot believe until they have heard the message or "good news;" this is why preaching, teaching, and sound literature are essential. The mind must be informed of the truth.

"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? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?" (Romans 10:14-16)

B. Emotion.

Until our affections are captivated, mental ascent will not necessarily lead to change. We must be deeply stirred and our desires must embrace the truth about Jesus. Heart response is absolutely essential, for everything flows from the heart.

"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; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:9-10)

C. Will.

Real persuasion results in action. It is the will that sets us into motion. We may think things over and allow our emotions to dwell upon them with delight, but until we decide to act, we do not do anything about our faith. Christ requires obedience and this is impossible apart from the determination of the will. We must decide to become involved in Christ by doing what he has said to do.

"...(The Philippian jailer) said, Sirs what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." (Acts 16:30-31)

D. Spirit.

Faith makes us receptive to God and willing to change. The Holy Spirit produces within us the continued ability to believe God and enables us to grow in his likeness as we persevere in believing his word.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." (John 1:12)

III. FAITH IS NOT CONTRARY TO KNOWLEDGE

Faith is based upon a higher knowledge (revelation), which comes only from God. This revelation allows us to ascertain historical and scientific fact, and rests solidly on truth as God knows it and gives us spiritual understanding of all that is real.

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." (Hebrews 11:3)

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3)

Faith assists us in accepting God's truth as it is revealed to us. It is not limited to only that which is to be learned through our senses and instruments of science. God is Spirit. Some facts about him can only be spiritually discerned (I Corinthians 2:14).

A. Faith Is Not Gnosticism.

Gnosticism was an early cult and Christian belief that matter is evil and that freedom from bondage was attainable through faith or knowledge alone. The true believer knows knowledge or faith alone is not enough to release him/her from bondage. The channel of faith and revelation of the sacrifice that was offered removes any space for *gnosis* in the true Christian's life and leaves them open to receive the gospel truth.

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (I Timothy 3:16)

"Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." (I John 4:2)

B. Faith Is Not Pragmatism.

Pragmatism, a theory developed by William James, John Dewey, Charles Pierce and others of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, tried to avoid the necessity for commitment to faith as fact. They viewed pragmatism as a "working hypothesis" or practical way of solving problems which produced within us truth that works on our behalf, if we embrace it. Our faith will result in absolute commitment to that truth and to God, who cannot lie.

"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness: In hope of eternal life,

which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Titus 1:1-2)

C. Faith Is Not Existentialism.

Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. It regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's act. Our faith is much more; it is built upon God's living word and true record that we have, and we know that our existence is explainable.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us..." (I John 1:1-3)

IV. FAITH'S STRONGEST GUARANTEE

Faith is guaranteed by God himself, who is absolute truth. He cannot change and he cannot lie; that is what "immutable" means. To secure his promises and gospel, he backed them up by covenant oath sworn by none other than himself.

"For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." (Hebrews 6:16-18)

V. HOW JOHN RELATED FAITH TO FACT (I John 5)

The entire chapter describes faith as the result of real encounters between man and God. Faith is our reaction to the importance and value of having God in our lives.

A. Faith Produces Right Conduct (vv. 1-5).

We put faith together in mind, emotion, will, and spirit and come out with changed behavior. When we experience a genuine spiritual birth, we become new creatures and are able to learn to live accordingly in a Christ-like manner. We strive to keep God's commandments and to overcome the present world system.

B. Faith Creates Experiences Which Are Credentials To Believers (vv. 6-8).

The strongest credential for a believer is his own changed life. He has become a living epistle. It is written in his heart that God is faithful. We experience the reality of the gospel in three distinct ways: the blood of cleansing and forgiveness; the waters of baptism; and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

C. Faith Creates An Internal Witness (vv. 9-12).

In Romans 8:16, Paul describes the affect of this witness in producing inner assurance regarding our relationship to God. We have a deep sense of belonging, are truly his children and know it.

D. Faith Is The Proof Of The Confidence We Exhibit (vv. 13-21).

We believe our prayers are answered because God hears them and can act upon our petitions when we approach him in accordance to his word. Having this knowledge helps us to lift our prayer out of the realm of autosuggestions (the process by which a person induces self-acceptance of an opinion, belief or plan of action). Our reliance is not upon our prayers, but upon he who is able to answer them.

RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

Golden Text: Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Lesson Text Romans 4:1-8 (13-25)

(1) What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

(2) For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

(3) For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

(4) Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

(5) But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

(6) Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

(7) Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

(8) Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

I. DEAD WORKS AND SELF-RELIANCE DO NOT MAKE US RIGHTEOUS

We are only reconciled or restored to right standing through the work of Christ, and by faith we are proud to identify ourselves with him. This faith is based on a complete turning from self-reliance and dead works to a complete trust in the work of Christ. We only have faith toward God to accept Christ's work for us, to the extent that we have repented of dead works. Instead of working to merit righteousness, we agree with God that this is impossible. Then we accept his alternative, which is to credit us with the righteousness of Christ. We see this kind of faith exemplified in Abraham, the father of the faithful.

"For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." (Romans 4:3)

II. MAN'S INABILITY TO KEEP THE WHOLE LAW BECAUSE OF SIN

The righteousness God demands from man is spelled out in the law. If man could keep the entire law without one slip, he would be righteous, or in right standing with God. The problem is that man is unable to keep the law. By his own unaided efforts he cannot fulfill all of God's commands. The law is a totality; if it is not kept in its entirety, none of it is kept. God considers righteousness by keeping the law as a whole — it is either all or nothing.

A. If We Break Any Of The Law, We Have Broken The Whole Law.

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10)

B. The Law Was Given To Cause Us To See Our Own Inability And Need Of A Saviour.

"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." (Romans 7:7)

C. Man Possesses Nothing Good Within Himself.

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." (Romans 7:18)

D. God Has Found No One Righteous, But All Equally In Need Of The Gift Of Righteousness.

"...for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Romans 3:9-12)

E. The Law Makes Us Aware Of Our Sin And Declares Our Guilt As Legal Fact.

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:19-20)

All through the Old Testament God prepared his people for his provision of Christ for justification. Each time men sinned, they were to bring a sacrifice; usually a bull, a sheep or lamb, or a goat. The blood of the animal was shed and sin was covered. But since sin was only covered, not taken away, these sacrifices were often repeated and did not grant complete access into God's presence. Not until Christ was offered as the perfect Lamb was it possible for man's sin to be completely remitted. Through Christ, man not only obtained access to God by faith, but also acquired a union with him. Nevertheless, the same principle has held true throughout God's dealing with man: sin requires the shedding of blood, either the death of the sinner himself or a substitute.

"And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without the shedding of blood is no remission." (Hebrews 9:22)

"For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:28)

The blood of sacrificed animals only covered the sinner's sin: the precious blood of Jesus remitted them.

III. GOD'S RIGHT TO JUSTIFY WHOM HE WILL

An important part of God's own righteousness is his consistency in dealing with his creatures. He does not show partiality or respect any man's person when it comes to salvation. He does not set aside his law by him. His law is the expression of his own personal character — the revelation of his perfect holiness. He is not so somewhat above and outside the law, for the law is simply the judicial or legal manifestation of what he is. God can never change or deny himself.

A. The Law Demands The Shedding Of Blood (Death) In Payment For Sin.

"Behold, all souls are mine . . . the soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezekiel 18:4)

God's wrath is the expression of his holiness and righteousness. He must react against sin by demanding a penalty and payment in full — expiation. God decreed that since the life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11), payment for sin would be the shedding of blood. Either the person who sinned must die or he could present a substitute. Christ was offered as our substitute through death. His death completely satisfied God's penalty and payment for sin. Since he paid in our place, we call him our vicarious (in the stead of another) substitute or "vicar."

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." (1 Peter 3:18)

B. Peace With God Is Only Possible When His Wrath Is Appeased.

Sin is not simply a legal matter. It is a personal insult to God. Expiation (death) dealt with the legal satisfaction or payment for sin. The debt also has been paid. Propitiation (an atoning sacrifice) deals with restoring a personal

relationship and God's favor. Through the suffering of Christ, our substitute, we were offered a chance to be acquitted of a sentence of punishment we rightfully deserved through him granting us a pardon or forgiveness. The propitiation of Christ is pictured by the Old Testament Mercy Seat on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. God considered the Mercy Seat his place of meeting with his people. Underneath was the broken law, but it was covered over by the sprinkled blood of sacrifice.

"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:24-26)

C. Justification Means That We Are Legally Declared In Right Standing With God.

Justification is God's legal action to reconcile sinners to himself. It does not set aside the law or violate his holy character in any way. He simply declares that since Christ has fully satisfied the law's demands, God is now free to restore man to right standing on the basis of what Christ has done in his stead. Instead of holding us accountable for our sins, God deliberately charged all sin to Christ's account, leaving us free from both guilt and penalty. All that is required of us to receive credit for Christ's righteousness and to transfer our guilt to him is our repentance, and the acceptance of the application of justification to us.

"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." (James 2:23)

We stand legally declared righteous.

"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Galatians 3:6)

IV. IMPUTATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

This refers to a system of divine bookkeeping by which sin or righteousness may be transferred from one person's account to another's. This principle is behind the whole ideas of vicarious sacrifice and justification by faith. When God justifies us through our faith in Christ, he does not impute, account or reckon our sins to us any longer, but transfers this to Christ's account. The word imputation comes from the Latin *imputare*, which means "to consider, to reckon, to think, to account."

Imputation is a legal decree or transaction. It becomes fact because God declares it to be his decision.

"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."
(Romans 5:18-19)

V. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

The righteousness of God is, first of all, his own character; it includes his internal consistency and his fairness or justice in all his dealings. Secondly, this righteousness is applied to man as "right standing" with God in terms of covenant relationship. There is no understanding of righteousness apart from understanding his covenant. The Old Testament teaches that righteousness on the part of either God or man consists of fulfilling the promises contained in the covenant or agreement between them. Righteousness is a gift of God to man received by faith; it clothes him like a garment, making him acceptable in God's sight, while God works on the inside by the Holy Spirit to change his character, until he, too, is right and fair in all his dealings.

A. God Himself Becomes Our Righteousness.

"In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Jeremiah 23:6)

B. The Gift Of Righteousness Is The Gift Of Christ Himself To Us.

There are no degrees of righteousness in redemption because God has reduced us all to the same level: we are all sinners apart from the gift of Christ. The reason for this legal declaration is to eliminate the boasting that is natural to man.

"That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." (I Corinthians 1:29-31)

C. The Righteousness Of God Describes Our Change Of Position In Relation To God.

We have right standing with God on one basis only: we are "in Christ." We are no longer approaching him on our merits, which are totally repugnant to God, but our acceptance is in his beloved Son alone.

"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." (Isaiah 64:6)

We receive this new position of right standing by faith when we agree with God that even our best is worthless and rest our entire weight upon Christ.

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but

that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Philippians 3:7-9)

D. Righteousness Is Imputed To Us By Justification, Imparted In Sanctification.

Laying the foundation stone of faith toward God means accepting the imputed righteousness of God. By faith we agree with God's decree that we are in right standing with him on the basis of Christ's work on our behalf. This allows God to work a total change of character in us. He must first apply the blood to us before he can move in to remake us by the Holy Spirit.

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." (Titus 3:5)

This gradual process of conforming us to his likeness in character is called sanctification. It is done as we cooperate in a continuing faith. Little by little, God gives himself to us as a practical righteousness. All this is only possible because of the initial act of declared righteousness, or justification.

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (II Corinthians 5:21)

EFFECTIVE AND ACTIVE FAITH

Golden Text:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Lesson Text
Romans 5:1-11
James 2:24, 26

(1) Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

(2) By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

(3) And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

(4) And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

(5) And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

(6) For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

(7) For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

(8) But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

(9) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

(10) For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being

reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

(11) And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

James 2:24, 26

(24) Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

(26) For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

I. JUSTIFICATION GIVES US ASSURANCE

Assurance is an inner sureness resulting from our exercise of faith in God. Justification is a judicial decree or declaration of God, and is the exact opposite of condemnation; it is God's ruling of acquittal of condemning charges in our favor. Justification gives us assurance of peace with God.

A. Justification Eliminates Any Legitimate Source Of Condemnation.

*"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."
(Romans 8:33-34)*

B. Justification Changes Our Position In Relation To God.

God no longer looks upon us apart from our union with Christ. Since he sees us in him, our acceptance is complete and final.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1)

"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Ephesians 1:6)

C. Justification Includes Forgiveness Of Sins On The Basis Of The Penalty Already Paid By Christ.

God's wrath has already been fully placated (propitiated), and his holiness perfectly satisfied through Christ's self-sacrifice in payment for our sins (expiation). Christ declared that his work was finished; God continues to consider it finished.

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." (I Thessalonians 5:9-10)

"Whom God hat set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:25-26)

II. GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is closely related to justification. God takes the initiative in forgiving (pardoning) us of all sin and iniquity, apart from anything we can do to merit this forgiveness. It is given freely as grace. But like justification, forgiveness is only given to us in the form of pardon from the penalty and release from guilt, because sacrifice or atonement has already been paid. Forgiveness does not mean, as so many seem to think, that the penalty is set aside. To the contrary, in both the Old and New Testaments, forgiveness follows the payment of penalty as prescribed.

". . . as he did with the bullock for a sin offering, so shall he do with this: and the priest shall make an atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them." (Leviticus 4:20)

"For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:28)

The effectiveness of forgiveness differs in the Old and New Testaments for the simple reason that adequate payment of sacrifice to completely remove sin was not available until the offering of Christ himself. Sins under the Old Covenant were forgiven and covered by the blood of animals offered as substitutionary sacrifices for the sinner, who both confessed these sins and exercised faith in God's promise to forgive him. Under the New Covenant, God is free to entirely remit the sinner's sin, washing all remembrance of it away. "Remission of sin" is the popular term often used to translate the same Greek word for forgiveness, *aphesis*.

The central purpose of God's forgiveness is to restore his fellowship with man. By destroying all remembrance of sin, God can demonstrate his love and favor without restraint. God guarantees under the New Covenant to forget our sins, if we allow him to.

*"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."
(Hebrews 8:12)*

"But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:37-39)

III. THE MEANS BY WHICH WE WERE JUSTIFIED

God's decision to declare sinners righteous came from his own initiative. Nothing made him do it. But from before the foundation of the earth — even before all men sinned — God had planned a means of reconciliation through Christ. He had determined to justify man by identifying him with Jesus Christ.

A. By Grace (Unmerited Favor).

"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24)

B. By The Blood Of Christ.

"Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." (Romans 5:9)

C. By The Resurrection Of Christ.

"But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." (Romans 4:24-25)

D. By Faith.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)

E. By Works.

"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." (James 2:24)

IV. ARE GRACE AND WORKS COMPATIBLE?

Not in the sense of relying upon one or the other for salvation and God's favor. Grace by definition means "unmerited favor, something we cannot earn or repay." There is nothing man can do or give to God to secure his favor. Instead, man must be receptive. Faith is simply our outstretched hand to receive all grace he has to give. As the result of grace working in us, changing our nature, we become able to do the good works God always purposed from the beginning of the world. But apart from redemption, we could not fulfill God's plans for us. These good works are only the result of his working in and through us. All else are but dead works and abominations in God's sight.

A. Grace Is Not A Reward For Works.

"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but

believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (Romans 4:4-5)

B. Reliance Upon Works Nullifies Grace.

"And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." (Romans 11:6)

C. The Salvation We Receive By Faith In Grace Expresses Itself In Good Works.

". . .work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12-13)

D. One Part Of The New Creation Is Being Able To Fulfill God's Will.

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

E. Now That We Have Been Justified, Our Faith Must Go To Work And Become A "Living" Faith.

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." (James 2:17-18)

V. THE LAW OF MOSES IS NOT APPLICABLE TO BELIEVERS UNDER GRACE

This fact has caused more controversy than any other doctrinal area in the New Testament. Judaizers were constantly insisting that Christians submit to the ordinances of the Jewish law in order to be saved. This included not only observing the Sabbath, but physical circumcision and dietary restrictions. In Christ, these requirements are all done away with, and all reliance is put upon him to save us.

A. Historically, This Question Was Settled At The Council Of Jerusalem Once And For All.

After Paul and Barnabas had reported notable success preaching among the Gentiles, certain leaders became concerned that these Gentile converts conform to the law of Moses. Controversy continued until the apostles all met together. Finally James became the spokesman, voicing the direction of God when he said:

"Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." (Acts 15:19-21)

B. Those Who Keep The Law Place Themselves Under A Curse If They Fail To Keep All Of It.

The law is a whole system to itself. You cannot decide to do some of the commandments and neglect others. The blessings and cursings of the law depended on submission to the total Mosaic covenant.

"Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen." (Deuteronomy 27:26)

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Galatians 3:10)

C. Jesus Christ Ushered In The Dispensation Of Grace.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. ... For the law was given by

Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:14; 17)

D. Men Fall From Grace When They Attempt To Follow Both The Law And The Gospel.

God will tolerate no mixtures. It is either grace or law. You can add nothing to grace. The urge to add works to grace usually comes from inadequate trust and lack of assurance.

"For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Galatians 5:3-4)

E. The Ceremonial Law As Fulfilled By Jesus Christ.

"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; ... Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." (Colossians 2:13-14; 16-17)

F. Jesus Clearly Defines The Works Of God As Believing Or Relying Upon Him.

"Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." (John 6:28-29)

G. Faith Works By A Love That Only God Can Give To Us.

The law is summarized in the one word, "love." Some of the church fathers sought to make love the work that justified. But this cannot be for the simple reason that man cannot love God or others, apart from the gracious

working of the Holy Spirit within him. Love is a fruit of our union with God. It is an outworking of the new relationship we enter into by faith.

*"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."
(Galatians 5:6)*

"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." (Romans 5:5)

REDEMPTION THROUGH FAITH IN THE POWER OF THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

Golden Text:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Lesson Text Ephesians 1:5-16 Psalms 49:7-8

EPH. 1(5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

(6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

(7) In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

(8) Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

(9) Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

(10) That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

(11) In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

(12) That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

(13) In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were

sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

(14) Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

(15) Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,

(16) Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

PSA. 49(7) None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God ransom for him:

(8) (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:)

I. HOW IS REDEMPTION EFFECTED?

Our English word "redemption" comes from the Latin *redimere*, to buy again or redeem. The prefix, "re," means "again;" the root, "emer," means "to buy, take, or acquire a possession." Webster lists four meanings which apply to the theological use of the verb "to redeem:"

1. To buy back or repurchase; to regain title by purchase;
2. To liberate from slavery or captivity by paying a price;
3. To release from alien claims or clear from debt; and
4. To repossess upon fulfillment of an obligation.

Redemption is the effective power of salvation resulting from our faith toward God. Justification is a legal decree of acquittal from guilt and penalty. Redemption is the actual transaction resulting in our deliverance from sin.

Redemption, whether by purchase or by power, requires the personal intervention of a Redeemer. (See Romans 5:12-21.)

A. Redemption - The Payment Of A Set Price Or Ransom To Secure The Release Of One In Debt, Bondage or Slavery.

*"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."
(Mark 10:45)*

When man sold himself into the slavery of sin, he lost not only his covenant inheritance, but his personal freedom. He was unable to come and pay the price of his release. Christ gave himself as our ransom.

B. Redemption - The Basis For Justification.

"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." (Romans 3:24-25)

Only because the blood of Jesus Christ fully satisfies the demands of God's justice, is he free to declare us righteous. When we look at this satisfaction from a priestly standpoint, an accepted sacrifice or expiation or propitiation, we are dealing with the idea of atonement. But when we look at this same satisfaction in terms of a payment price to repurchase a lost possession, we are dealing with the idea of redemption. In either case, the blood of Jesus Christ met all demands.

C. Redemption - The Personal Intervention Of The Nearest Of Kin To Restore Persons Or Property To Those With A Rightful Interest In Them.

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)

God never intended for his people to continue as slaves under foreign dominion, or to lose their family inheritance through poverty and indebtedness. He made provisions for regaining personal possessions and maintaining family honor. Christ became man and our elder brother in order to be our nearest of kin.

D. Redemption - The Exercise Of Power To Effect Deliverance.

"Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore." (Exodus 14:30)

When those who hold God's people do so unlawfully, God may not pay a price to redeem them. Instead, he may exercise his Almighty power and bring them out of bondage and captivity by his outstretched hand. The exodus from Egypt is a beautiful picture of our deliverance from the power of darkness.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW DEFINING RIGHTS OF REDEMPTION — OUR REDEMPTION IN CHRIST

The Old Testament specified rights of redemption to the nearest of kin regarding both close relatives and property. These rights were carried out when Boaz took Ruth as his wife and thereby restored the family inheritance and preserved the honor of the family name. This and many other examples of redemption rights in the Old Testament were types picturing the "rightness" of God's repossession of his people through the blood of Christ.

The kinsman-redeemer or Goel had several specific rights under the law. Everyone had to respect his rights. He could either exercise them or neglect them as he chose. The Goel had these options:

- a. to purchase back a forfeited inheritance (Leviticus 25:23-28) or,
- b. to ransom his kinsman from bondage to a foreigner (Leviticus 25:47-49).

Christ bought us back, and also restored our right to share an inheritance in God. He not only set us free but made us heirs, joint- heirs with himself.

Sin is an aberration; it is a foreign taskmaster. We are not designed to be enslaved to sin. Christ gave himself to pay the price of God's justice; but he went even further and effectively destroyed the power of sin over us.

- c. to avenge the death of a slain kinsman to maintain family honor (Numbers 5:8; 35:12; Deuteronomy 19:6; I Kings 16:11).

We were dead in our trespasses and sins. But God had always purposed that we should be his children, members of his family and household. He destroyed the murderer and made us alive again together with him.

- d. to marry the widow of the deceased kinsman (Deuteronomy 25:7-9; Ruth 3:12; 4:1-14).

Christ not only bought the church with his own blood (Acts 20:28) but made her his bride.

III. DELIVERANCE THROUGH HIS REDEMPTION

Redemption is the full recovery of God's people, a complete restoration of his possession. To make this possible, Christ strips every competing claim of power and cancels every lien of debt. Deliverance in Christ is total and complete and we are:

A. Redeemed From Sin.

"Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." (Psalms 130:7-8)

B. Redeemed From The Law And Its Curses.

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." (Galatians 3:13-14)

C. Redeemed From Death.

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: ..." (Hosea 13:14)

IV. REDEMPTION RESULTS IN A CHANGED LIFE

Redemption only becomes real to us as we appropriate it by faith toward God. As we realize that the blood of Jesus was more than a sufficient price to purchase us, we begin to enjoy the liberty he purchased for us as children of God. But liberty, even when it is real and objective, is not enjoyed until it is accepted as fact and acted upon. We have many stories on record of liberated slaves or prisoners of war who remained in their sad condition because freedom seemed too good to be true. When we embrace the gospel (or good news) by faith, we experience our freedom of redemption in these practical ways:

A. We Have A Zeal For Righteousness.

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus 2:14)

When we are sluggish about serving the Lord, it is often because redemption does not seem very real to us. We are more aware of our continuing hang-ups than the fact of deliverance. The term "peculiar" here means "of great value." It comes from the ancient practice of valuing things in terms of how many cows it would take to buy them. God has made us a people of his own possession valued in terms of the blood of Christ! What more do we need to become enthusiastic?

B. We Have A Spontaneous And Joyful Return To God.

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel." (Isaiah 44:22-23)

Many times our spontaneity and joy in the Lord are quenched because we allow doubt and condemnation to put a wet blanket over our faith. God has blotted our sins out of his remembrance. We must forget them also, as a disciple of faith. We will look forward to times of fellowship with God when guilt is not nagging inside.

C. We Have Forgiveness Of Sin.

"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:" (Colossians 1:13-14)

Through redemption, we are entitled to even more than forgiveness upon repentance: we can have habits broken through the authority of the name of Jesus Christ. This deliverance was purchased and becomes ours when we receive the faith to accept it and stand in our right to freedom.

D. We Have A Deep Knowledge Of Belonging To God.

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

We no longer belong to ourselves. The redemption makes us God's property. He has the right to decide what to do with us. This means we must use our bodies, personalities, and spirits as he desires. Not until we realize the fact that we are God's possession and that he comes to live in us do we have the motivation we need to live holy lives.

E. We Have Peace Within.

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The children of Israel and the children of Judah were oppressed together: and all that took them captives held them fast; they refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of is his name: he shall throughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to

the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon."
(Jeremiah 50:33-34)

V. IS THE EXPERIENCE OF REDEMPTION COMPLETE?

No. Just as salvation is past, present and future in all of its applications, so also is redemption. While we have received forgiveness of sins, we are still finding release from the power; and we have yet to receive complete removal of the presence of sin — "the redemption of our body."

A. The Redemption Of Our Body Takes Place At Christ's Return.

"And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." (Romans 8:23)

Lesson 12

FAITH IN GOD: A WAY OF LIVING

Golden Text:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Lesson Text

I Peter 1:3-5

(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

(4) To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

(5) Who are kept by the power of
God through faith unto salvation

ready to be revealed in the last time.

I. CONTINUAL EXERCISE OF FAITH IS A NECESSITY

The human body can be used to exemplify, or amplify in demonstrating spiritual truths. Muscles in the body only develop and are maintained through sustained activity. By the same token, the basic principles of faith toward God can only become a reality in the Christian life through exercising what one has been taught. Strength and stamina are obtained through positive activities within the guidelines of God's word. The scriptural passage, "the just shall live by faith," appears once in the Old Testament and three times in the new in basically the same meaning, although more substance is added to each proceeding reference. The journey to heaven, indeed, is a walk in the principles of life on the foundation laid by Christ. And faith is a non-stop, progressive walk, trusting God to the utmost, thereby receiving benefits from God.

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." (Colossians 2:6-7)

A. Living By Faith: Hoping For God To Perform What He Said.

Although we have not received all of God's promises yet, we are residing upon a foundation upholding each promise; one that is a formidable, reliable platform. What we have already received should serve to fortify our hope and anticipation for what is to come. What God has promised his legal children will surely come to pass. Living by faith is an active cementing of oneself to the promises and allowing them to mold our expectation by willing submission to them.

"For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul

which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." (Habakkuk 2:3-4)

B. Abounding, Multiplying In Trust Through Knowledge.

The more God opens up our intellect and comprehending ability in his word, the more we have to lean upon or trust. Experience is flesh on the bone, lending credence to God's word. Each time we experience the faithfulness of God to his promises, the easier it becomes for us to look for help from God in time of trouble, and only wonder about how and when he'll do it. Faith begets faith. The gospel has no respect of persons.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)

C. Living By Faith Means A Turn From Confidence In Self.

When we have faith toward God, we cease from trusting in ourselves (Proverbs 3:5) and lay all of our cares on the Lord. Confidence in self is not to be confused with self-esteem, which is the bedrock of humanity's healthy mental and physical existence. Rather, it is leaving the "I did its" aside and thanking God for deliverance from the problem (Philippians 4:13). When we say "I know I can do it," that suggests a degree of some kind of faith — but it is in the wrong object. We cannot earn the benefits of God's freely given grace, nor can we add anything to what the atoning power of the blood/life of Jesus Christ has already made provision for.

"But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them." (Galatians 3:11-12)

D. A Powerful Concoction: Believing Mixed With Patience.

The instant nature of our society breeds attitudes of impatience. We want everything now. But spiritual maturity does not happen overnight. Waiting is a fruit of the Spirit called long-suffering or patient endurance.

Allowing God to develop this characteristic in us gradually forms within us a secure anchor when the stormy trials of life arise. We are able to hold steady in God, and maintain boldness in prayer.

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." (Hebrews 10:35-38)

II. "WHO NEEDS A JOB? I'VE GOT FAITH." ...WRONG!

It is not uncommon to hear the opinion expressed that not needing to work for gain is proof of super faith. These are ignorant worshippers, but not a new train of thought. The apostles in the early church had to deal with those creating trouble - through idleness. But one cannot find this concept in God's Holy Book. The church is comprised of believers as members of the body of Christ, each with something to contribute personally and financially.

"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." (II Thessalonians 3:10-11)

"Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not." (I Timothy 5:12-13)

III. IS SALVATION ETERNALLY GUARANTEED?

The doctrine of Jesus Christ is a precise work of beauty. In its entirety, the range of principles combine to make the individual's salvation complete. It is made alive in the believer through the spoken, anointed word of God delivered by a minister sent by God. Indeed, Romans 10:17 speaks of faith

imported in us through hearing the word of God. It is an expansive concept that progressively grows as we remain in the truth and we make adjustments in our conduct to correspond with that inner growth. We are convicted, persuaded all the more as God feeds our character (Acts 20:32) with the necessary ingredients of patience and confidence to persevere therein. Faith is a gift of God whose perfect end and aim is adulthood in Christ — and a Christian ready for a heavenly home.

As Christ was pure, so are his precious words of life. Anything added to them or taken away pollutes or dilutes it from a life-giving compilation of God's laws to a destructive force. Continuation in the faith is a doctrine in itself. It is called "perseverance," and the English word for it comes from the Latin *perseverare*, which is synonymous with persistence and steadfastness. The Greek word *proskartereo* is defined as "to persist in adherence to a thing, to be intently engaged in; to remain constantly in a place; to continually attend upon." This doctrine has been subject to pollution and perversion, in that some have wrongfully proclaimed it to be a "once in, never out" phenomenon. It has otherwise been called unconditional eternal security.

There is security in Christ, and it can be eternal — but this is with conditions. God made man with a mind to accept or reject what is offered, including salvation. God will not force himself on the unwilling. Man is saved or condemned by his own choice. A look at Mark 16:15-16 shows that man had a decision to make. He was not unconditionally elected by God, or drawn by some irresistible force of grace. Verse 15 states that every man has an opportunity to hear the gospel. Choice arises in verse 16 — he that believeth (the suffix "eth" meaning on a continual basis) and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned.

Acts 2:37 shows that the first grace message posed a question to the Israelites: What shall we do? Decision time. And in Acts 2:41, the choice was made by those who gladly received the word of Peter to accept salvation, and were baptized in Jesus' name and received the Holy Ghost. Three thousand others did. But, no doubt, many others chose to go about their business. (See also John 3:3-5)

God gave Adam a mind or will of his own, and gave him instructions in Genesis 2:16-17. In Genesis 3:6 he and Eve chose to obey Satan. Generations after the fall of man, Christians today have the same ability to choose our

spiritual fate. Grace has laws, and those laws are guidelines God has for us in the scriptures. God set up the conditions we must meet if we want salvation — which means deliverance from sin.

God's redemptive plan has no limits — it is for whosoever will. Man, cut off from God in the loins of Adam and born headed for eternal hellfire, has a way out through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ and the system of salvation God set up. God in his infinite wisdom and power, knows from the beginning who will accept and who will reject salvation; and those who accept it and later decide to renege on that decision and go back. No one is kept eternally secure by God.

Staying within the boundaries of his word (John 15:5) once we have come out of the starting blocks of the born-again experience, and latching onto the baton of the law of holiness, we are to fulfill the Christian race that will get us to the heaven we say we want to go. James 2:14 plainly states that faith without action is dead. And Romans 8:1 shows there are two kinds of people who are baptized and have the Holy Ghost.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1)

John 1:12 states that men and women converted have power to become the Sons of God. This is power to be more than what we are; yet we can remain what we are — a babe full of selfishness, and still headed for hell with Jesus' name and the Holy Ghost on the inside (I Corinthians 3:1-3).

A. Salvation Through Faith.

Salvation comes by stepping out by faith on God's promises, and then receiving the benefits. God's word promises that grace. (II Peter 1:2-4; Romans 10:17; II Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:6). Hebrews 10:25-31 demonstrates that a Christian can leave God, for even then some had already stopped assembling themselves together. The writer explains the results of leaving the truth that brings salvation if you disobey.

B. Backslide, Or Fall Away.

Man charts his own destiny by his conformity or non-conformity to the gospel. Eternal life with God in heaven and on earth is the destiny of those who conform to the truth. (II Peter 2:19-22). The faith necessary for salvation will be overthrown for some believers according to II Timothy 2:16-18. Also, in II John, verse 8, the believer is cautioned to be alert, lest he or she lose a full heavenly reward. Verse 9 bluntly states that whomever steps across God's divine boundary line and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. Demas was specifically singled out in II Timothy 4:10 as having departed from the church because he loved worldly things more. In the 6th chapter of John, many of Jesus' disciples turned their backs on him in droves because they said they could not or would not conform to his word (verses 60, 66).

C. "Anything Goes" Mindset.

The mode of thinking that accompanies unconditional eternal security philosophy promotes an "anything goes" mindset. It is grounded in a belief that could lead to thinking that grace allows one to do whatever he or she wishes, since salvation is claimed by some to be eternally secure in Christ. Romans 6:1-2 has the answer for that.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans 6:1-2)

Romans 6:23 reminds the Christian that the payoff for sin is death — spiritual death — forever floating in the lake of fire.

Continuance cannot be overemphasized. It is a spontaneous and natural result of faith.

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." (Acts 1:14)

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42)

IV. FAITH SUPPLIES SECURITY IN CHRIST

Faith is a gift from God, like repentance. The Almighty God who imported the necessary beginning faith in the converted man is able to sustain the input of persuasion every step of the way. When the Christian does his part of using the gift to make the correct decisions, God is faithful in doing his part of never leaving nor forsaking his child.

"Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (I Peter 1:5)

Redemption is a lasting work of God. Following are some anchor or foundation scriptures that extol the virtues in specific terms.

- a. The blood of Jesus (I Peter 1:18-19; Hebrews 9:12).
- b. The everlasting covenant (Hebrews 13:20-21).
- c. Christ's continuing work as our high priest (Hebrews 7:21; 25).
- d. The earnest of redemption, the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14).
- e. The unchanging word of the Lord (I Peter 1:23; 25).
- f. Our position of being hid in Christ (Colossians 3:3-4).
- g. God's enduring love freely shown to us in Christ (Romans 8:38-39).

A surrendered life grounded in faith and reliance on God will result in a finished product ready to go back with Christ when he returns, because the system of salvation God set up is designed for victory.

V. INVESTMENT IN FAITH PAYS OFF

A total commitment or investment in the promises of God pays awesome dividends. There will be many times when human logic and natural odds conclude that there is no way out, and withdrawal is the only option. But this total trust in him, living by faith, means the Christian puts

that faith to work and walks daily in a manner like he or she can already see the things promised for the future. Below are some Biblical character examples of those who made such investments, some of which were so solid in faith that their names appeared in Hebrews 11, the "roll call of faith" chapter.

Abraham left a comfortable life in Ur of the Chaldees for a land he had never seen, that God promised to his seed (Genesis 12:1-4).

Noah invested 120 years in building the ark, and scores of years preaching for God when no one would hear him outside his family.

Moses refused to remain identified with Egypt, choosing rather to join himself unto God's people, believing God's promise of deliverance. (Hebrews 11:24-25)

Jeremiah, not regarding the present environment of despair and hopelessness, purchased a field in Anathoth immediately after prophesying Judah's 70 years of captivity in Babylon. He latched onto God's word, believing that God's people would again return to the land. He stepped out on faith and bought real estate. (Jeremiah 25:8-11; 32:6-9)

Faith in itself is a building block from which model Christian conduct and character springs forth, according to II Peter 1:5-8. Also, faith is among the three pillars that also include faith and charity, in the circle of required virtues.

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." (I Corinthians 13:13)

"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (II Peter 1:5-8)

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Golden Text: Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Lesson Text Luke 3:2-6; 15-17

(2) Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

(3) And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;

(4) As it written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

(5) Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth;

(6) And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

(15) And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;

(16) John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

(17) Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his

garner; but the chaff he will burn

with fire unquenchable.

I. JOHN THE BAPTIST: A TURNING POINT IN HISTORY

In politics, during a campaign for political office, the candidate has staff members called "advance men." Their purpose is to travel ahead of the candidate to the next city or campaign stop to supply information to newspapers and other media, set up rallies and events to push the name of their man. These advance men play vital roles in the success of their candidate by generating advance publicity and implanting the name and ideas of their man in the minds of the people.

In a sense, John the Baptist was the most important advance man in history. His ministry is highlighted in the gospel of Mark as "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Indeed, he was the vessel chosen of God to be the prophet to introduce the long-awaited Messiah, God's sacrificial lamb for the sins of mankind. John came with a new message, departing from the format of the Old Testament prophets who stressed moral applications of the law. His message was simple: "All things in the kingdom are ready — are you?"

A. John's Ministry Was Prophesied in Old Testament Scripture Twice.

1. Following four centuries of silence from heaven, God spoke again through the mouth of a prophet, but this time with a new twist. John's message told of a king who would arrive on the scene with a new law. This new way, termed *derek* in the Hebrew, meant a course of life, a mode of action; a pathway or highway. Derek is synonymous with *hodos* in the Greek, found in the scripture in John 14:6 (where Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"). The prophet Isaiah foretold of John's key role:

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall

be made straight, and the rough places plain:" (Isaiah 40:3-4)

2. God's children were not to hear God speak directly concerning the Messiah. God's way was to send a messenger before the Messiah. Jesus was the messenger and mediator of the new contract between God and men. John the Baptist was the preliminary act before the main attraction. It was his job to condition the minds of the people by telling them help is on the way, so prepare your minds to receive your saviour.

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, of whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 3:1)

B. The Drawing Power of John.

The ministry of John had the same vital principles and character, and ability that Elijah had (Luke 1:17). He was blessed with a special anointing from God to draw people, and his comparison to Elijah was a fulfillment of scripture.

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6)

C. John's Ministry Prefaced The Transition Period Between The Law And Grace.

When Jesus' earthly ministry began, he pointed people to himself, away from the law, and toward grace. John's vocation was to point people to Jesus.

"The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." (Luke 16:16)

II. WHAT DID JOHN HAVE TO SAY?

John preached the introductory, temporary pre-grace theme of Jesus' gospel message — the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus' words of life represented the highway to heaven, while John's represented the on-ramp to that highway, the passageway into the kingdom.

The kingdom is the sphere, or realm of God's rulership and authority. In order to receive a passport into this kingdom, you must prepare yourself by means of repentance and baptism. If you had enough faith to receive the message, you stepped out on that faith in obedience to it. John and Jesus preached the same theme: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). In a nutshell, John's theme was, "Repent, and demonstrate your repentance by obedience to baptism."

A. People Were To Lose Their Embrace Of Religious Customs God Frowned Upon.

Until this time, God's relationship with man was tied to tenets of the law, the Priesthood and the Temple. But now God was getting personally involved. He was declaring the entire system of Judaism nil and void because the law would be fulfilled by Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:13-14). If men were to receive the benefits in Christ, they would have to take off their blinders and step out of their set-in-concrete ideas about God.

Religious groups in this day were caught up in religious duties and traditions that were empty of producing power when it came to redemption. These are called dead works. These customs were men-initiated acts that God will not accept, such as the tradition of the elders that the Pharisees embraced. They claimed these were laws Moses received orally from God that he did not write down. They claimed they and they alone had this revelation.

It was this mode of thinking that had to be rejected in order to accept the new. John baptized in the River Jordan, a stark contrast to the warm water, indoor baptisms in most 20th Century baptisms. When the people journeyed outside the sacred city of Jerusalem to be totally submerged in the

murky, grimy waters of River Jordan, it was meant to be a statement of genuine and sincere change of heart.

John received the authority to preach and baptize from God, not from men. Therefore, when religious leaders felt threatened by his ministry, they opposed him.

"And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." (John 1:33)

"The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet." (Matthew 21:25-26)

B. Baptism Was No Empty Gesture.

Under the law, many of the ceremonies performed, such as washing of hands, were outward symbols of necessary inward purification. However, the religious sects stressed form and fashion, an outward show that the Pharisees especially were infamous for (Matthew 5:20; 23:23-28). In contrast, John's baptism was action-oriented, and much more thorough than the Jewish traditions and ceremonies. People who were baptized by John professed their faith in the Messiah to come by confessing their sins, and their sins were remitted, because of the evidence of their repentant hearts. As a result, the root cause of sinful nature in man is dealt with through belief in the one who came to take our sins away.

"Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." (Luke 3:8-9)

C. Baptism Symbolizes Public Acknowledgment Of Sin.

Willingly partaking of John's baptism demonstrated some elements of humility necessary for salvation under grace. The acceptance of being immersed in the river was like one blaring out a trumpet that Judaism and its dead works paid no dividends, no benefits. A deeper cleansing was needed from God, an inside job. This was the declaration in one's actions in submitting to baptism.

The costs of the baptism were personal pride, sacrificing or giving up your ideas of what is right (Isaiah 64:6). Confession of sins during John's baptism (Matthew 3:6) in the Greek means to externalize that which is inside oneself by communicating it verbally. The companion scripture is below:

"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins." (Mark 1:4-5)

III. WHAT DOES REMISSION MEAN AND WHAT ARE ITS BENEFITS?

The word remission is the Greek word, *aphesis*, which means "sending away, release, forgiveness." This remission was a contrast to the mere covering of sin available under the law. It was baptism based upon the blood of Jesus Christ, for God was looking ahead to the completed redemption. Thus, those who entered the waters of baptism through John's transition baptism expressed faith toward God's system at that time, and experienced the benefits of the coming Messiah.

A. John Highlighted The Lamb of God.

Under the law, when one's fellowship was cut off from God by sin, the relationship could be repaired or restored through sacrifice. Here, God accepted the blood of animals sacrificed in the stead of the death of the child of God that committed the sin; for sin's penalty required death. However, the limit of the system was that the blood of bulls, goats and lambs provided only a temporary covering of sin, and the ceremonies had to be performed repeatedly after each offence.

But Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice, the perfect sacrifice, the final sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10-14). John's baptism and his message was included on a map covering God's redemptive plan. And at this juncture in the road, signs pointed by John were straight ahead: Jesus Christ, the avenue to truth and eternal life (John 14:6). John focused his listeners' attention, their hope and expectation upon Jesus' upcoming work as the Lamb of God.

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

B. No Permanent Stopping Place In John's Baptism.

One could not stop on the redemptive journey and take up permanent residence. John's ministry was transitional. It was a tent set up on a campground for a time that demanded pulling up stakes and moving on.

John's message and purpose was to weaken the strength of religious tradition and ready it for the knock-out punch in a new message hot off the presses from God. John did not project himself, although some still held onto John's baptism (Acts 19:2-4).

"And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. . . . He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:26-28;30)

God had executed a shift of gears, and the meaning of John's baptism (Acts 19) during grace was void, dead, of no profit.

IV. SO, WAS JOHN'S BAPTISM AND MINISTRY ALL FOR NOUGHT?

God said in Isaiah 55:9 that his ways are higher than our ways. God had a purpose in John's ministry even though those baptized under John

were required to be rebaptized in Jesus Christ's name under grace if they wanted continued fellowship with God.

John's ministry was preparation or conditioning for those seeking to enter into God's kingdom. Their minds and hearts were free, not imprisoned by public opinion and religious ideas. They had attitudes characterized by meek, tame and teachable natures, and were not rebels who would buck the doctrine of the coming Messiah.

A. They Were Not Puzzled By The Meaning Of Water Baptism.

When Joel 2:28 was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost and the Age of Grace dawned, baptism in the name of the resurrected saviour was required. Those familiar with the purpose of baptism unto repentance under John could relate to this. Undoubtedly, many of the 3,000 souls converted by Peter's first grace message had their memory banks and hearts jogged by what John said.

B. They Knew What Was Coming After Water Baptism.

John spoke of water baptism and of the Holy Ghost in the same context, emphasizing who would do the latter and diminishing his own role. What Peter spoke of in Acts 2:16-17 concerning the outpouring of the Holy Ghost was within the guidelines of the final instructions Jesus gave the apostles just prior to his ascension (Luke 24:46-49). In Acts 2:37-39 Peter preached of the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost to those who would submit to water baptism.

V. WHAT NAME DID JOHN USE WHEN HE BAPTIZED?

There is no record that John used a name during his baptism ritual (Luke 3:16-17). He merely continually pointed to Jesus. Our saviour conquered sin, through death, on our behalf. Under grace, the name of Jesus Christ is synonymous with the precious, pure, sinless blood life of the sacrificial lamb he gave that remits our sins when we submit to the right baptism in water.

John's baptism in its day indeed was important. It was a transitional bridge between the Old and New covenants. As people fastened their eyes on

the prophet John, he in turn pointed ahead to their true and permanent hope, our Lord Jesus Christ.