

The Core Doctrines of the Gospel – 4

What must I do to be saved?

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Up to this point in this sermon series we have discussed the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man that separates us from God, and God's sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, for forgiveness of sin, so that we could be reconciled to God. Today we will talk about how we as sinful man take hold of this gift of grace and make it our own.

In Acts 16 the Apostle Paul and his companion Silas are unjustly beaten and thrown into a Philippi prison. The story continues in verse 25: *"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened."* The story then tells how the jailer saw the damage, and thinking that the prisoners had escaped, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But the apostle Paul cried out, *"Do not harm yourself, for we are all here. And the jailer called for lights and rushed in and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

That is the question of today: **What must one do to be saved?** How does one receive the good news of Jesus Christ? In this story the Apostle Paul responded with these words, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."* In John 6:47 Jesus says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life."* With Nicodemus, in John 3:16, Jesus says, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* Throughout scripture we see this same truth. Whether the biblical writer uses the word *belief* or *faith*, we can see that we are saved by trusting in Jesus Christ.

With this in mind it puts away all other definitions. Attending church regularly does not make a person a Christian. Giving money to the church or to people in need does not make a person a Christian. Being from a family or country that calls themselves Christian does not make a person a

Christian. Praying, fasting and reading one's Bible does not make a person a Christian. Being baptized does not make a person a Christian. Saying a prayer, walking down an aisle or even volunteering at church does not make a person a Christian. All of these things are good and should flow out of the Christian life, but even trying to be a good person does not make one a Christian. We all have sinned against God in many ways and this sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). We are all deserving of death and condemnation (Romans 3:23; 6:23). The only way one can become a Christian is by fully trusting in Jesus Christ.

Some might ask, why is it saving faith, and not saving love or saving obedience or saving forgiveness? If salvation was through any of these, it would have been earned, but there is nothing we can do to deserve salvation. Jesus, through His death and resurrection, did everything that was needed for us to be reconciled to God. So, we are saved by simply believing. God stirs in our hearts, draws us to Himself, reveals the truth of the gospel, grants us faith, and as we believe we are saved.

Now, if belief is how we are saved, in what are we supposed to believe? In Romans 4:24-25, the Apostle Paul writes this: ***"It (righteousness) will be counted to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."*** Salvation rests on our belief in God. Not just any god, but Yahweh God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and what He, God, did through Christ Jesus our Lord. We must believe that "Christ was delivered up for our transgressions." This means that we believe that Christ took our sins upon Himself, and paid for our sins by dying on the cross. We also must believe that Christ was "raised for our justification." That means that we must believe that God raised Christ from the dead as proof that God has accepted His death as full payment for our sin, and we are now counted as righteous.

Christ took our sins upon Himself. The wages of sin is death. If the punishment for our sin was not fully paid, then Christ would still be in the grave. But God has raised Christ from the dead as proof that the penalty for our sins has been fully paid. If we believe this, we will be saved.

We use the word belief in different ways. We believe it is going to rain tomorrow. We believe that our favorite football team is going to win the game. We believe that we will get a job promotion. In the case of saving faith, what does believe actually mean?

A saving faith or belief is more than just believing historical information. It is more than just believing that Napoleon lived or that World War II was a real event. It is putting your full trust in Jesus Christ for today and for eternity.

Belief always starts with God. It is He who wills and acts in us according to His purposes (Philippians 2:13). In John 6:44 Jesus says, ***"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."*** Romans 1:20 tells that what can be known about God has been made plain to see. ***"For His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made."***

Through nature and by other means God brings Himself to our attention and begins to open our hearts to the possibility of His existence. We then have the opportunity to search for more. God promises that

when we seek Him we will find Him (Matthew 7:8). That means that He begins to draw us to Himself and as we respond by seeking more of Him, He makes sure that we find Him.

Faith is a gift that depends on God. Scripture shows us time and again that we cannot believe on our own. Without the Spirit's leading, man will always view the gospel as foolishness. It is only through revelation that we come to believe.

Matthew 16:15-17 is an important verse as we seek to understand how one comes to salvation in Jesus Christ. At one point Jesus asked His disciples, *"Who do you say that I am?"* Simon Peter replied, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* And Jesus answered him, *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."*

This is God-given faith, saving faith. Not just believing that mankind has sinned, but that I have sinned. Not just admitting that Christ has paid for sin, but Christ has paid for my sin. Not just believing that Christ is Lord, but submitting to Christ as my Lord. Not just knowing that one can be saved by believing in Jesus, but actually believing in Jesus and being saved.

Faith is made up of knowing, agreeing and applying. Imagine a person who is visiting an airport for the very first time. They sit and stare out the window astonished that a metal vehicle that big could actually get off the ground. They then watch another plane take off, and another and another, until they are thoroughly convinced that planes can fly. At the same time, they are also seeing other planes that are landing safely. This idea of planes flying seems to really work. Then they notice that people, real human beings, are actually getting in these huge metal flying vehicles. Not just a pilot, but a whole line of people are waiting for and then entering these planes. He observes this even longer, watching planes take off and then others landing safely, until he is thoroughly convinced that people are safe flying on planes. He now understands the idea and agrees that it works. Now comes the application. The man goes to the checkout counter and buys a plane ticket. He then goes to the gate, boards the plane, puts on his seatbelt in his window seat and is overcome by fear and awe as the plane speeds down the runway, lifts off and leaves the earth behind. He understands, agrees, and then applies.

Biblical faith has the same components. Through God's Word one learns about who Jesus is and what He has done. The Holy Spirit then comes and convinces her of the truth of scripture's claims that mankind can be saved through Jesus Christ. She then personally applies the truths of salvation through Jesus to her life by putting her faith in Him.

This is belief, knowing, agreeing and applying who Jesus is and what He has done for us.

While there are various verses that teach us that salvation is based on faith, there are other verses that say that salvation is through faith and repentance. Let's take a moment to look deeper at this idea of repentance.

We see this in Jesus' words in Mark 1:15: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* This thought is also found in Paul's words in Acts 20:20-21, *"How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and*

from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

When we look deeper in scripture we find that faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. Let me explain.

The New Testament Greek word for repent is *metanoeo*. It has two parts, *meta* and *noeo*. The second part, *noeo*, refers to the direction of one’s heart, one’s natural inclination in regards to God, self and the world around them. The first part, *meta*, means change or turning. When you put the two parts together, it means the turning of the direction of one’s heart or nature.

Because of our sin nature, all of our hearts originally desired the things of the world, its priorities and living a life without God. In scripture, this natural man, without Christ, is described as blinded by the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). Our minds were futile. We were darkened in our understanding. We were alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in us, due to the hardness of our hearts (Ephesians 4:17-25). To us the message of the gospel was foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18). That was the original condition and direction of our hearts.

When we believed in Jesus Christ, *metanoeo* occurred in our hearts. Our hearts, our inner nature, turned from desiring sin and the world, and now desired Christ and holiness. At salvation scripture tells us that we received a new nature, a new natural way of living.

As one puts his faith in Jesus Christ, it is accompanied by a repentant heart, a heart that has been turned away from its original direction of self and sin, and now desires Christ and holiness. A Christian is a new creation. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Christian is a new person. Yes, they still look the same and have some of the same characteristics, but at the core of who they are they have been made new. They have been forgiven. They have been freed from their selfish desires and their “old selves”. They are no longer slaves to sin. Something totally new has come. The old sinful person has died. Galatians 2:20 states, *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”*

Because of repentance, true faith results in good works. This is not adding a second requirement, faith plus works, for salvation. It is merely describing what saving faith entails. Saving faith will always be accompanied by repentance that results in life change. Scripture gives us no other option. Ephesians 2:8-10 tells us, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

Paul tells of how we receive grace through faith, not through works. We cannot earn grace through good behavior, but true faith will always be accompanied by good works in a believer’s life.

In scripture we see where some in the early church were claiming belief in Christ with their lips, but then their lives didn't resemble Jesus at all. James writes these words into that situation. *"Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead . . . Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder"* (James 2).

James is saying that belief without fruit of repentance is not saving faith at all. This type of belief is one that seems to acknowledge God with their lips, *"but their heart is far from God."* Even the demons understand that Christ is Lord over all, but they were not willing to live submitted to His lordship on an ongoing basis. It may be someone who says they believe in God, but they live as if there is no God. The biblical understanding of a faith that leads to salvation is one that begins with repentance, and results in life change.

Hebrews 11 is a great example of a faith that results in works. Every example of faith resulted in acts of faith:

"⁷ By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household . . . ¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son . . . ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin . . . ²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land."

The chapter goes on to list many more people of faith, and in every case faith resulted in actions of faith.

We see this approached from the opposite direction when Jesus encountered the rich young ruler. Jesus said, *"Sell all you have and give it to the poor."* Jesus was not presenting salvation through works, He was in search of a saving faith. Jesus could have told the rich young ruler to believe, and the young man would likely have answered, "I Do." So, Jesus instead of talking of the internal faith, starts with the actions that should come from saving faith. For the rich young ruler to inherit eternal life, he must relinquish his idol of money and put his trust in Christ instead of money. He could not, so he walked away sadly.

Some might argue that spiritual fruit is not mandatory in every Christian's life, but biblically we do not see any example of a Christian who has no sign of salvation in their lives. In the words of Jesus in Luke 6:43-45, *"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit . . . The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."*

Once one believes in Jesus Christ, the work of God takes over in one's life and it cannot be revoked. Those who are believers are given the Mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Their minds are renewed (Ephesians 4:23). The Holy Spirit now guides the believer into all truth.

In Christ they are saved. They are bought by His blood. They are forgiven of all sin (Colossians 2:13). They are declared righteous before God (Romans 4; 5:1). They are redeemed and ransomed (1 Peter 1:18-19). They are justified by faith (Romans 5:1). They are promised eternal life (John 3:16). They are adopted as God's children (Galatians 3:26-4:7). They are a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). They are born again (John 3:3).

They are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 8:1-4). They are sealed by His Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). They are given a new nature (Colossians 3:10). They are in Christ and He is in them. They are renewed in the spirit of their minds, and created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24).

The Spirit of God dwells in them (1 Corinthians 3:16). They have been given direct, unlimited access to God (Hebrews 4:16). Their inner man is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). And they have been granted repentance, a turning of their hearts away from sin and towards Christ.

All of that happens when one puts their trust in Jesus Christ. The result of salvation will always be a repentant heart that results in good works.

So, what if a believer's faith is not resulting in good works? This is a good question. All believers have likely walked through a time in their lives that seemed more like a spiritual wilderness, where temptation was stronger and sin was more frequent. To think biblically about this we must go back to what we have already discussed. If a person is truly a believer, then their heart, their nature, has been permanently turned towards God. That does not mean that they are perfect, but when they sin they are convicted by the Spirit. Even when they sin they still acknowledge that God is the authority over their lives. Even in those times that they don't desire God they wished they did. They have a basic understanding that they have drifted away from God and that they are not where they are supposed to be in relation to Him. Christians are not perfect, but deep down they know their place in relation to God.

It might be similar to a child's relationship with their parents. At times the relationship is going to seem distant or the child may even be rebellious, but even in those moments there are relational truths that are still in place. The child knows that they belong to the parents. They know that the parents have the position of authority. They know that their parents love them in spite of their disobedience. They know that the parents have the right to discipline them and the responsibility to provide for them. Deep inside the child longs for the love and the approval of the parent, even though they may never let their parents know that.

While not a perfect example, this helps us to see that as followers of Christ we have entered into a relationship with God that now binds us to Him and eternally binds Him to us. Nothing can take us out of His hand (John 10:28) and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39). Yes, we may sin, but we are still relating to God in the midst of the secure relationship that we have with Him. As we grow in our knowledge and experience with our heavenly father, our sin should be the exception and not the norm, and should be continuing to decrease in regularity. His continued grace will drive us towards continued repentance.

On the other hand, there will be some who claim to be in the faith, but have no fruit. Christ seems to have gotten no traction in their lives. They pursue the desires of the world. There is no sign of faith. They do not see Christ as supremely valuable. They relate to Christ as Rescuer, because they like being rescued. They relate to Him as Healer, when they need to be healed. They call out to Him as their Provider, because they long for His provision. As a last option they turn to Him as Counselor, because they need a solution to their situation. They turn to Him as Protector, because they need protection. But they don't submit to Christ as Lord and Master and do not realize Him to be more satisfying and glorious than anything the world offers. There has been no repentance or turning of their hearts away from the world and towards Christ. There is no desire for Christ and holiness. Their supposed faith is rooted in selfishness and personal gain.

A person in this situation very likely was described in Matthew 7:21-23 by Jesus: ***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"***

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36).

In either case it is helpful to go back to the idea of repentance. If we have been saved, then our heart and our nature has been turned towards Christ. While we may sin from time to time, the general direction of our hearts and our actions will be Godward. If we are not in the faith, then while we may do a "good work" from time to time, the general direction of our hearts and actions will be characterized by sin. For additional insight on this matter it might be helpful to review Jesus' story of the four soils in Mark 4:1-20. Those who are truly in the faith will endure to the end, remaining in the faith. Those who turn away were never truly in the faith at all.

So, what do we do now? Evaluate the condition of your faith. Ask God to help you discern if you are truly in the faith or not. Then act on what God reveals to you.

If you are a believer in Christ, be reminded of the gospel. Remember the old life of sin from which we were rescued and allow the amazing grace of God to drive you to a greater love of Christ and even greater good works. If you are a recent believer, consider taking the initial steps of the faith. Maybe it would be helpful by formalizing your new life with Christ vertically in a prayer to God. Or maybe you would like to formalize your faith in Christ horizontally by making your decision public by being baptized. Join a church. Begin to read your Bible and pray daily. Get involved with a small group with whom you can grow in your faith. Nurture your faith and let God grow it to maturity.

If you have humbly searched your heart and realized that you are not a true believer in Christ, then believe today. Put your trust in Jesus Christ. As the Holy Spirit moves in your heart, turn to Jesus and believe. Trust in the One who gave his life to pay for your sin and was raised to life as a sign that the penalty has been fully paid.

The Bible is clear. What must one do to be saved? Believe. May today be the day of your salvation.

Discussion questions:

- 1) What in this lesson did you find most interesting?
- 2) If believing is how one is saved, in what are we supposed to be believing?
- 3) Based on the definition found in scripture, how would you define repentance in your own words?
- 4) In your own words, how would you summarize this phrase? "Saving faith will always be accompanied by repentance that results in good works."
- 5) From a biblical perspective, if a person's faith is not resulting in good works, what may be true of the situation?
- 6) Would you say that you are a believer in Jesus Christ or still in the process of becoming a believer? Why do you answer in this way?
- 7) As a group, answer this question, "What must a person do to be saved?"
- 8) What do you think God wants you to remember from this lesson?
- 9) How can we pray for you?