

In Defense of the Gospel (3)

Introduction:

Let us read the first 15 verses of Romans 1.

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to *the gospel of God*² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,³ concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,⁴ and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.⁵ Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;⁷ to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit *in the gospel of His Son*, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,¹⁰ making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

¹³Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. ¹⁴I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. ¹⁵So, as much as is in me, *I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.*

Today is the third Lord's Day in which we have considered this very important topic, "In Defense of the Gospel." I hope that we can complete this rather short study today.

We have already shown from the Scriptures that the gospel is a rather fragile thing. It can be easily and quickly corrupted (Cf. Gal. 1:6f). The gospel can be stripped of its content and thereby diluted of its potency. What remains of the message of good news may be true, but it is no longer the whole truth. And thankfully God will bless His truth (even when it may be mixed in a measure of error), but to the degree our "gospel" ceases to reflect the content of the biblical gospel, we can expect the lessening of God's blessing upon our truncated message to further His work of salvation in our world. And so, there is the ever present need to defend the biblical gospel, and while doing so assure ourselves that the gospel we understand and promote is in accordance with God's Word.

Last Lord's Day we sought to show from the Scriptures just how far evangelicalism has departed from the gospel. We set forth that the Holy Scriptures present *the gospel of Jesus Christ to be vitally connected with the promised Kingdom of God*. Jesus Christ is Lord. The Kingdom of God is a theme that is central to the story of the Bible from the earliest chapters of Genesis through the last chapters of the Revelation. The gospel is the good news that God has brought into realization the long-promised kingdom foretold in the Old Testament, begun to be realized in the Gospels and the early church, that will be fully realized with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We read of the culmination of God's purpose in history in 1 Corinthians 15:24ff, which read,

²⁴Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. ²⁶The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. ²⁷For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. ²⁸Now

when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

A book that I would highly commend to you that is a thorough treatment of the theme of the kingdom of God in the Holy Scriptures, is that of Thomas Schreiner, entitled, *The King in His Beauty*.¹ Although he acknowledged that “no one theme adequately captures the message of the Scriptures”, nevertheless, in his book he argues that “The phrase ‘kingdom of God’ thematically captures, from a biblical theology standpoint, the message of Scripture.”² Here is a brief introduction and dense of his assertion:

Perhaps it will help if I sketch what I mean by “the kingdom of God.” First of all, it designates the rule of God. In one sense, God is always the King of kings and Lord of lords, reigning over everything that happens. But in another sense, God’s rule has been flouted since the fall of humankind, and the Scriptures tell the story of the kingdom regained. The objection to seeing the kingdom is central is that it does not seem to fit with the Writings of the Hebrew Bible--for example, the book of Proverbs. I will argue in due course that Proverbs (and the other books from the Writings in the OT) fits with such a notion, even though the term “kingdom” is virtually absent in Proverbs. I will demonstrate that the Wisdom literature features the supremacy of God in everyday life, showing that he rules over the particulars of our very existence. We will see that Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes teach that the fear of Yahweh (the proper name of God, commonly called Jehovah) is the beginning of wisdom. To fear the Lord is to live under his lordship. The focus on God as King is evident in the regular refrain found in Scripture, particularly the OT, where God is identified as the Lord. As Lord, he is the sovereign one, the creator of all, the one who deserves praise and obedience. In other words, saying that the theme of Scripture is God’s kingship is verified and confirmed by the constant refrain that God is the Lord.³

We read a few moments ago the opening words of Romans 1. Here we have underscored for us the truthfulness of what we have said about the content of the gospel. Paul had written to this church in Rome, a church he had never visited, but for which he had the desire to instruct and encourage in the Lord. In his opening words he referenced the centrality of the gospel to his own calling and ministry. **Verse 1** contains Paul’s introduction of himself and the gospel: “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to *the gospel of God*” (Rom. 1:1).

And then, without hesitation or delay, in the very same sentence he defined the content of that gospel, which is contained in verses 2 through 4. **Verse 2** reads, “which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.” The pronoun, “which”, is a reference to the gospel. Paul declared that God had promised the gospel in history through the prophets as it was recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. And then in **verse 3** he began to set forth the content of the gospel: “concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ.

But what specifically about Jesus Christ--the gospel-- that Paul gave focus? **Verse 4** records for us, “*who was born of the seed of David* according to the flesh, ⁴and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” Here Paul reveals that the gospel has to do with Jesus Christ being the promised King of Israel, the Son of David, of which the prophets foretold would one day arise to rule over the Kingdom of Israel, that is, the kingdom of God. When Paul said that Jesus Christ was declared to be the “Son of God” with power upon His resurrection, he was declaring that Jesus Christ had been inaugurated as the promised King over Israel. When the Lord Jesus arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven. He came to the Father, “the Ancient of Days”, Who bestowed upon Him His kingdom, the long promised and anticipated King who now sits upon the throne of David.⁴ The promised restoration of the kingdom of Israel, ruled over by the promised Son of David, had come into realization.

¹ Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty; A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. (Baker Academic, 2013), pp. 714. Schreiner has agreed to be one of our Bolton Conference speakers in 2017, along with Michael Haykin.

² Ibid, p. xiii.

³ Ibid.

⁴ I would argue that this is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel 7:13 and 14, which reads, “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of

And then in **verse 5** Paul wrote of the end or the result that God purposed to bring to pass through his ministry of the gospel: “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name...” This is the purpose or end to which God intended for the gospel. He would have a kingdom comprised of Jews and Gentiles who are brought into a life of obedience born by faith in Jesus Christ, who is the enthroned, promised, Son of David, over the kingdom of God.

Paul next expressed his desire to travel to Rome to proclaim this gospel. We read this in verses 8 through 12.

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit *in the gospel of His Son*, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, ¹⁰making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Paul wanted them to be established in the full understanding and realization of what God was doing in history in bringing to pass the promised Kingdom of God. He wanted them to understand the blessing that God was accomplishing through them His purpose in history, that they be brought to “obedience to the faith among all nations for His name.” And so, he desired to travel there and impart this glorious news to them, as we read in verses 13 through 15,

¹³Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. ¹⁴I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. ¹⁵So, as much as is in me, ***I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.***

And so, the entire *introduction* of Romans underscores the content of the gospel is the good news that the promised kingdom of God has been brought into realization by Jesus Christ through His life, death, resurrection, and enthronement.

And then the unfolding of the contents of this epistle of Paul to the church at Rome is the setting forth of how God is bringing into realization this world-wide kingdom. Paul wanted to travel to Rome to be able to better teach them that their church, comprised of both Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ, was the realization of God’s purpose in history through Jesus Christ. God was saving His people from their sin, pardoning them of their sins, bringing them into a state of justification through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, sanctifying them by the power of the Holy Spirit that their King imparts to His people, even until the day when He glorifies them upon their passing from this life and their participation of the future resurrection from the dead.

And so, all of what we have said today, underscores the definitions that set before us last week. In answer to the question, *What is salvation?*, biblical salvation is the work of God to save His people from their sin unto Himself through Jesus Christ. And therefore, *What is the gospel of salvation?* The answer is that the gospel is the good news that God brings sinners salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. But more precisely, *What is the content of the message of the gospel?* It is the good news that God is saving His people from their sin through His King, even our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, so that they may be a people who love God and obey God.

Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.” This event is also played out in very vivid detail in all of Revelation 5, which is not a prophecy of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, but a revelation of the glory of Jesus Christ conferred upon Him as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Rev. 5:5).

Here is an excellent synopsis of the message of the kingdom of God as set forth in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in Luke's sequel, the Book of Acts:

The Synoptic Gospels and the book of Acts, despite all their diversity, have something in common. All of them proclaim that the king has come, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Messiah, the final prophet, the true Israel, and the Lord of all. Jesus fulfills the promise made to David that his dynasty would never end, that a king would always sit on the Davidic throne. By virtue of his resurrection and exaltation he is now seated at God's right hand and reigns from heaven.

The kingdom promised in the OT has come, for the king has come. The day of fulfillment has arrived in the ministry, death, and resurrection. The age to come has invaded history, for Jesus is risen from the dead. By virtue of Jesus' death forgiveness of sins (cf. Jer. 31:34) is available for those who belong to him. The presence of the kingdom manifested itself in Jesus' healings, exorcisms, and nature miracles. These miracles anticipate the new creation that is coming, the day when all that is wrong with the world will be made right. Amnesty is offered to all those who have defied the king's lordship, but the day of forgiveness will last for a limited time, for the king will return to the earth and finish what he has started. That the devil and his cohorts will be destroyed forever, though the crushing blow (cf. Gen. 3:15) already was delivered at Jesus' death and resurrection.

Luke particularly emphasizes, though the theme is not absent from Matthew and Mark, that the kingdom advances through the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel of the kingdom will be heralded to the ends of the world, and Acts testifies that such a mission is carried out through the work of the Holy Spirit, animating and strengthening disciples to testify to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The people of God consists of all those who belong to Jesus Christ. The twelve apostles represent the new and restored Israel--the new twelve tribes, so to speak. All those who accept the apostolic testimony about the Christ are members of God's kingdom. The restored and new Israel is not limited to the Jewish people. Gentiles who repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ and are baptized in his name also belong to the new people of God. Luke particularly emphasizes in Acts the expansion of the people of God. The promise that Israel and Judah would be reunified is fulfilled when the Samaritans believe (Acts 8; cf. Ezek. 37). The folding in of the Gentiles fulfills the universal blessings pledged to Abraham and the other patriarchs.

Those who are members of the kingdom repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ. They submit to Jesus' lordship and his reign as disciples. True disciples are obedient to God and do what Jesus commands them to do. They live a new life as members of the kingdom, bearing fruit that is pleasing to God.⁵

Now what we have asserted several times in the past few weeks is our conviction that this biblical gospel is not widely understood or proclaimed by evangelicals. Just as **J. I. Packer** had written back in the early 1960's that he believed the gospel then needed recovery, for it had been lost,⁶ so we would argue that the gospel of the kingdom needs to be restored to us today. The gospel most often proclaimed is but a shell of what had been proclaimed formerly, when the Lord had greatly blessed the gospel to the conversion of many. May the Lord help us to be right in these matters, and may He bless our proclamation of His gospel to the furtherance of His kingdom.

Now having established what is true with respect to the Bible's message, let us consider what is defective about common presentations of the "gospel." We began to do so two weeks ago when we spoke about the common heresy of corrupting the true meaning of grace--legalism and licentiousness are false

⁵ This is an "Interlude" that Thomas Schreiner included at the end of his treatment on the Synoptic Gospels, just before his chapter on the Gospel of John. I somewhat apologize for such a lengthy quotation, but I found it to be concise and thorough. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, pp. 499f.

⁶ See the Introduction to the reprint of John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1963).

teachings that are commonly heard and which must be refuted. But there are other ways that the biblical gospel suffers.

I. The gospel may be perverted by redefining the nature of salvation.

It is very lamentable that the gospel has been corrupted in the minds of many because the nature and meaning of salvation has been stripped of its biblical content. Rather than proclaiming the salvation that the Bible teaches, which is salvation from all of the effects of sin, it is common for *salvation to be reduced to the promise of God's forgiveness of sins only*. The gospel that is taught to bring about that truncated salvation has been reduced solely to a presentation of how to obtain the forgiveness of sins, as though this were all that is necessary for biblical salvation. But in proclaiming this "gospel", the true gospel has been distorted in the minds of many professing Christians.

Now certainly it is true, that one of the great needs in God bringing us to salvation is to extend to us the forgiveness of sins. Sin is the great barrier between the true God and fallen man. Our sin calls for God's just judgment upon us. Just as it was with ancient Israel, so it is with the entire human race. Isaiah wrote:

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened,
That it cannot save;
Nor His ear heavy,
That it cannot hear.

²*But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
And your sins have hidden His face from you,
So that He will not hear.*

³For your hands are defiled with blood,
And your fingers with iniquity;
Your lips have spoken lies,
Your tongue has muttered perversity.

⁴No one calls for justice,
Nor does any plead for truth.
They trust in empty words and speak lies;
They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.

⁵They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web;
He who eats of their eggs dies,
And from that which is crushed a viper breaks out.

⁶Their webs will not become garments,
Nor will they cover themselves with their works;
Their works are works of iniquity,
And the act of violence is in their hands.

⁷Their feet run to evil,
And they make haste to shed innocent blood;
Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;
Wasting and destruction are in their paths.

⁸The way of peace they have not known,
And there is no justice in their ways;
They have made themselves crooked paths;
Whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

⁹Therefore justice is far from us,
Nor does righteousness overtake us;
We look for light, but there is darkness!

For brightness, but we walk in blackness!

¹⁰We grope for the wall like the blind,
And we grope as if we had no eyes;
We stumble at noonday as at twilight;
We are as dead men in desolate places.

¹¹We all growl like bears,
And moan sadly like doves;
We look for justice, but there is none;
For salvation, but it is far from us.

¹²***For our transgressions are multiplied before You,
And our sins testify against us;
For our transgressions are with us,
And as for our iniquities, we know them:***

¹³In transgressing and lying against the LORD,
And departing from our God,
Speaking oppression and revolt,
Conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.

¹⁴Justice is turned back,
And righteousness stands afar off;
For truth is fallen in the street,
And equity cannot enter.

¹⁵So truth fails,
And he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. (Isaiah 59:1-15)

Clearly sin is a very, very, big problem for us. God is holy, just, and true in all His ways. No one who is guilty of sin will ever dwell with Him. Sin has separated us from Him and has incurred His wrath upon us for all eternity, unless God Himself grants us the forgiveness of our sins. And we may praise God that in bringing us salvation; He pardons all of our sin. God has promised His people,

“I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me.” (Jer. 33:8)

And thankfully God’s forgiveness of sins is extended graciously, even freely through faith in Jesus Christ. The prophet Micah voiced the wonder that God would pardon the sins of His people:

¹⁸Who is a God like You,
Pardoning iniquity
And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?
He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights in mercy.

¹⁹He will again have compassion on us,
And will subdue our iniquities.
You will cast all our sins
Into the depths of the sea.

²⁰You will give truth to Jacob
And mercy to Abraham,
Which You have sworn to our fathers
From days of old. (Micah 7:18-20)

King David wrote a song to celebrate the free forgiveness of sins, which in part reads:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,

Whose sin is covered.

²Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit. (Psa. 32:1f)

But it is wrong to think or to tell others that they may have the free and full forgiveness of sins if they but believe only that Jesus Christ died for sinners. For biblical salvation involves much more than God forgiving our sins. The salvation that God bestows includes the deliverance from the love and power of sin in a true believer's life. When people are saved from their sins, they no longer live to serve sin but rather, they serve God. Jesus Christ is their Savior and their Master. He directs their lives. When people are saved from their sins, they are brought to experience new life and they come to enjoy all that life offers them in their church, among the other people of God who have also been saved from their sins. People will readily "believe" a message that God will freely forgive them, but if you tell them that forgiveness of sins comes alongside with their departing from sin, it comes with joining with the people of God, learning from and living according to this Book that He has given us, your offer of forgiveness will be declined by most people. But it is a sad thing that most presentations of the "gospel" are mere offers for forgiveness. If people are not willing to turn from sin, they should not be promised that they have received pardon for sin from God.

This easy "gospel" can often be presented like this: The soul winner confronts the sinner with the reality of his sin. He shows him from the Scriptures that all are sinners and are, therefore, under the just judgment of God. Perhaps "the soul winner" will even use the law of God to show very clearly and convincingly that he is a transgressor. But rather than presenting a full gospel message that Jesus Christ is Lord over a kingdom in which He calls and enables sinners to leave their sin and become righteous through faith and to live in righteousness through faith, the sinner is told that if he merely believes that Jesus died and rose for sinners, he, too, will be forgiven of his sins. This sinner will often "accept" this "gospel." He will go forth with the assurance, for he had just been told by "the soul winner", that God has forgiven him of his sin. But he continues to live in sin for the power of sin still reigns. Salvation has not come to him, even though he was told that it had been. He has been deceived. He has deceived himself. Jesus Christ is no Savior to whom He is no Lord. Rather, the biblical gospel promises that

the free and full forgiveness of sins is conferred upon the one that believes and submits to Jesus Christ as his Savior and his Lord.

Many proclaim this aberrant and abbreviated "gospel" because they do not understand or believe in what God has revealed concerning the inauguration of the Kingdom of God, as we have considered above. Many have this twisted view of the gospel, promising the forgiveness of sins while failing to proclaim the kingdom of God. Many have done so because they do not believe that God has established Jesus Christ as King over the Kingdom of God. We have spoken about this before. This is largely due to the legacy of **dispensationalism**.

Dispensationalism, which has dominated evangelical theology since the early 20th century, denies that the Lord Jesus is presently reigning as the promised Son of David. They teach that God's promise to David that he would have a Son to sit on his throne, was not the promise of a kingdom realized during this church age, but rather, it was a promise of a physical kingdom that will be fulfilled in a future 1,000 year Jewish millennium on earth. When the Lord Jesus returns, it is claimed that He will be then be seated on a literal, physical throne in earthly Jerusalem, and from that throne He will reign for 1,000 years over a revived Jewish nation that is supreme over the gentile nations. They teach that God had offered this kingdom to the Jewish people when Jesus the promised Messiah came and ministered among them. But when and because Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God withdrew the offer of the kingdom and in its place inaugurated this church age. The promised kingdom was not inaugurated upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, rather, the promised kingdom was postponed. This church age is a great parenthesis in God's program. Given this doctrine, it is understandable their belief that "the gospel of the kingdom" is not the gospel of Jesus Christ that we proclaim to the world today. They will tend to offer a gospel of forgiveness of sins, but that offer will not be tied to Jesus Christ as the exalted, reigning, Son of David, that is so clearly set forth in the New Testament.

Now another common way in which the gospel is distorted is that...

II. The gospel is often perverted by redefining the nature of saving faith

Of course the Holy Scriptures testify throughout its pages that faith is the instrument through which God saves His people from their sin. Most everybody can quote Ephesians 2:8 and 9.

For by grace you have been saved **through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Faith is essential. It pleases God when a sinner believes the gospel that God has revealed and declared to the world. The writer to the Hebrews declared the necessity of faith:

But **without faith** it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Heb. 11:6)

Faith is the instrument through which God extends to us the forgiveness of sins and the resultant state of peace between Him and us.

Therefore, having been justified **by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:1f)

This faith is also the instrument by which Christians live before God. We trust Him to do for us and in us that which we cannot do ourselves. As Paul wrote of himself,

“I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me. (Gal. 2:19)

But the Holy Scriptures not only state the necessity of faith by which God brings us salvation, **the Bible also defines and describes the nature of saving faith**. This is important, for not just any kind of faith is saving faith. The apostle Paul set forth the faith that saves as an aspect of his calling as a bondservant of God and apostle of Jesus Christ. He wrote,

Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, **according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, ²in hope of eternal life** which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, ³but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior; (Tit 1:1 NKJ)

There is a faith of God's elect. None but the elect of God have this faith. This faith involves acknowledging the truth. But this faith is also in accordance with godliness, that is, it goes hand in hand with godliness. Saving faith leads to and accompanies godliness in the true believer.

But though the Scriptures instruct us on the nature and content of the faith that saves a sinner from sin, many in evangelicalism have reduced their understanding of saving faith as only an acknowledgment of historic facts of who Jesus is and what He did in dying on the cross. It is assumed that this kind of faith is saving faith. But the Scriptures speak of many who have “faith”, but it is not saving faith. The faith they have does not rise to what the Scriptures set forth as the kind of faith that brings salvation to the sinner.

The Holy Scriptures set forth faith as the instrument through which God saves His people by His grace. Saving faith is a product of God's grace. God's power sustains the faith of God's elect unto their

final salvation. Given the important place faith has in our salvation, it is critical to have a right understanding of what constitutes true saving faith. It is essential for us to know what saving faith is and what it is not. It is all-important for us to know what the Scriptures declare to be the kind of faith that brings salvation to the sinner, lest we find a rude awakening on the Day of Judgment and we find ourselves in our sins. And so let us consider the nature of saving faith, the kind of faith that justifies the sinner before a holy God. *What is the nature of saving faith?*

1. Saving faith embraces Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

There are those who will tell you that they have faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior, but they do not trust in Him alone for salvation. This is not saving faith. True faith embraces Jesus Christ alone, plus nothing. The true believer does not trust his actions or another's actions to save him. It is not Christ plus his act of baptism. It is not Christ plus his love. It is not Christ plus his tears. It is not Christ plus his church. It is not Christ plus anything. The true believer casts his only hope, all of his hope, upon the Lord Jesus Christ alone for his salvation.

2. Saving faith leads a sinner to repent from sin.

The initial act of faith on the part of the guilty sinner is the calling out to God, and trusting Him for the free forgiveness and promise of life that is in Jesus Christ. *That initial act of faith also contains in its very nature the faith that leads that sinner to turn from his sin.* The believing sinner repents of his sins; that is, he turns from his love and practice of sin and submits himself to Christ. It is not the act of turning from sin that results in his forgiveness by God and God's declaration that he is no longer guilty but righteous in His sight. Nor is it in the sinners resolve to turn from sin. The Bible does not teach penance for sin, but repentance (turning) from sin. But repentance is not the ground of justification; faith in Christ alone is what justifies the sinner. Justifying faith is the act of faith in which the sinner comes to God confidently on the merit of Jesus Christ alone, due to His life, death, and resurrection on the sinner's behalf. But the faith that pleads and clings to Christ alone is the same faith that leads that sinner to repudiate sin and turn from serving sin in his life.

Since the faith that alone justifies the sinner also leads the sinner to turn from sin, then commands to turn from sin (repentance) may be linked directly with receiving forgiveness of sins--even salvation--without conflict with the teaching of justification by faith alone. Since this is the case, repentance from sin may be seen as evidence of being the children of God and in possession eternal life. But even more, since the very nature of saving faith leads one to repent of sin, *warnings may be given to Christians to repent from sin else they will encounter the wrath of God.* We can command Christians to repent from sin for we know that if they have been justified by faith alone, that faith present with them will lead them to repent of sin and turn back to God. Therefore, the teaching of repentance, the turning from living for sin unto living for God, is not inconsistent with the teaching of justification by faith alone; it is compatible with it.

3. Saving faith leads a sinner to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord.

The initial act of faith on the part of the guilty sinner is the calling of the sinner for free forgiveness and promise of life that is in Jesus Christ. But *that initial act of faith also contains in its very nature a faith that leads that sinner to respond in obedience to the will of God.* He embraces the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord. The believing sinner repents of his sins; that is, he turns from his love and practice of sin and submits himself unto Christ the Lord. It is not the act of repentance that results in his forgiveness by God and God's declaration that he is no longer guilty but righteous in His sight. Nor is it in the sinner's resolve to turn from sin and promise to obey Christ. Justifying faith is the act of faith that comes to God solely on the merit of Jesus Christ alone due to His life, death, and resurrection on the sinner's behalf. But the faith that pleads and clings to Christ is the same faith that leads that sinner to repudiate sin and *resolve to obey the will of God.*

4. Saving faith perseveres throughout life.

Please do not misunderstand this point: The *time* at which the sinner is justified is upon the first act of faith as a sinner for his own justification before God. ***It is upon the initial act of faith that God reckons righteousness to the sinner.*** But that is different than saying that it is the *only* act of faith upon which you are justified, that is, brought into a state of righteousness before God. God takes into consideration a lifetime of believing in His justifying you. It was indeed a single act of initial faith by you, but the nature of that faith which you exercised was a continuing, persevering kind of faith. There was inherent in the faith that you initially believed on Christ a quality that is enduring in nature. What I mean is this: God had in view in that initial act of faith a respect to a persevering kind of faith that was contained in that act of faith. Since the initial act of faith on the part of the sinner that justifies him contains a persevering, life-long kind of faith, the Scriptures can speak about the necessity and the responsibility of continuing in faith in order to be saved in the Day of Judgment. They can do so without being inconsistent with the teaching of justification by faith alone.

5. Saving faith is a faith that abides in Christ

The faith that brings us salvation does not merely believe rightly who Christ is, believing rightly what He did on behalf of sinners, and entrusting oneself to Him. There are multitudes that have that kind of faith, but who do not have saving faith. Although they may believe their faith has justified them, it has not. Saving faith unites the soul to Christ and it moves the sinner to continue in Christ. Saving faith must be seen to have this quality: it clings to Christ and does not let Him go.

We might put it this way: (1) the initial act of faith resulted in you being joined to Christ through faith. (2) It is necessary for you to continue to be joined to Christ by faith to receive the benefits of his life on your behalf. (3) To have justifying faith is to have a faith that continues to cling fully to Christ. John 6:53ff records,

⁵³“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.’”

Since by its very nature the faith that saves the sinner is one which clings to Christ maintaining that union with Christ, ***exhortations and commandments about the necessity and responsibility to remain in Christ may be found in Scripture relating to our salvation.*** While these commandments and exhortations are set forward as necessities for salvation in the Day of Judgment, they are not inconsistent with the teaching of justification by faith alone. For example, we read that the early American theologian, **Jonathan Edwards**, said it this way:

As it is needful that the branch should abide in the vine in order to receive the lasting benefits of the root, so it is necessary that the soul should abide in Christ in order to receive those lasting benefits of God’s final acceptance and favor. John 15:6-7, “If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.” Verses 9-10: “Continue you in My love. If you keep (or abide in) My commandments, you shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.”

If it (union with Christ) should be begun without remaining, the beginning would be in vain. In order for the soul to be now in a justified state, and free from condemnation, it is necessary that it should now be in Christ, and not merely that it should once have been in Him. Romans 8:1: “There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

In order for persons to be blessed after death, it is necessary not only that they should once be in Him, but that they should die in Him. Revelation 14:13: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.”⁷

6. Saving faith leads a person to order His life in a manner consistent with the Law of God

The very nature of the initial faith that justifies the sinner has the quality within it that leads the sinner to obey God’s Law. This is because that faith unites the sinner to Christ, Who gives to His people the Holy Spirit, Who Himself moves and enables the justified sinner to obey the righteous requirements of the law of God.

1 John 3:24, “And he that keeps his commandments dwells in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.”

Since this is the case, obedience to God’s commandments may be seen as *evidence* that an individual has exercised justifying faith.

1 John 2:3, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.”

1 John 5:2, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.”

This also means that a man who is a transgressor of the Law, that is a purposeful lawbreaker, who rebels against the laws of God and does not repent of it, does not have eternal life in him. He does not have saving faith.

1 John 2:4, “He that said, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

1 John 3:15, “Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”

This means, therefore, that obedience to God’s commandments *may be expected* and *even demanded* by God with view to the Day of Judgment, all the while not being counter or inconsistent with the teaching of justification by faith alone.

Romans 2:8, “But unto them that are factious, and *obey* not the truth, but *obey* unrighteousness, (shall be) wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that works evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek.”

7. Saving faith will be revealed in the life of the true believer on the Day of Judgment when he is judged according to his works.

What this means is that, although indeed we are justified by faith alone and that there is “safety in appearing on the Day of Judgment in the righteousness of Christ”, the demonstration that we have the righteousness of Christ imparted to us by faith alone will be manifest through *a judgment of works*. As believers we will be saved from God’s wrath on the Day of Judgment based on the righteousness of Christ alone that was imputed to us through faith alone. The demonstration that we have that *imputed* righteousness will be the demonstration of the *imparted* righteousness that will be manifest in us on that great Day. 1 John 3:7, “*Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.*” Since this is true, the Lord could say,

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone* (Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), p. 89.

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” (John 5:28f)

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Cor. 5:10)

“But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” (Mat 12:36f)

May the Lord enable each of us to rightly claim:

“I have the faith of God’s elect. The grace of God has taught me and enabled me to believe the gospel. Through faith I have turned from my former life in sin to live for Jesus Christ as He enables me by His grace. He is my Lord. I look to Him to forgive me, but also to cleanse me. I trust Him to strengthen me, sustain me. I trust in Him that He will stand for me on that great Day of Judgment that is coming upon the entire world. I claim with the apostle, ‘I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. (2 Tim. 1:12). Amen.”

Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song,
And His praise in the assembly of saints.
Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
Let them praise His name with the dance;
Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp.
For the LORD takes pleasure in His people;
He will beautify the humble with salvation. (Psa 149:1-4)
