

# (Ephesians) the Incomparable Wonder of Being a Christian

by Jeff Noblit

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*Being a saint is not about being exceptionally good in man's eyes, but about God's sovereign purposes and divine activity setting you apart as his own possession.*

**Duration:** 1:14:44

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Luke 24:27, Romans 3:12

**Topics:** "Ephesians"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of spreading the Gospel and following Jesus' example. He highlights the three elements involved in accepting the Gospel: understanding with the mind, feeling with the heart, and making a commitment to Christ. The preacher also acknowledges that all humans fall short of God's standard and that our behavior is inherently evil. He warns against the idea of claiming everything without understanding the need for a heavenly future and emphasizes the interconnectedness of believers as members of the body of Christ.

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## Transcript

Ephesians chapter 1, let's turn there this morning as we are studying through this wonderful New Testament epistle. The word epistle means letter. Most likely the Apostle Paul when he wrote this letter to the church in the city of Ephesus, he was in a Roman prison and he's writing to them to follow up the work that he and his associates Aquila and Priscilla had started there in the city of Ephesus.

He spent about three years with this congregation, which was very unusual, which makes it a very special, special congregation. And it begins in verse 1, giving us some introductory things. And I've been looking at that with you.

And before I read the text, let me just share this with you. One of the shows or movies that my girls seem to like the most is the movie Beauty and the Beast. Have you been through that yet? And we watch it over and we watch it over and we watch it over and we watch it over.

They even, I didn't get to do this part. They even loaded up and went to Atlanta to see the play Beauty and the Beast. I hate that I missed that, but they got to do that without me.

But it really, the wonder in that little story is, is, is magnificent, isn't it? I mean, here you have this, this Prince and he lives in this marvelous castle palace back in the woods. And he's been cursed because he did something wrong. And he's been turned into this awful, mean, ill-tempered beast.

And then here comes the lovely Belle, the damsel in distress, and she gets ushered into this castle. And, and then the relationship begins. And lo and behold, thing after thing happens.

And finally he's transformed back into the beautiful young Prince and he and Belle are wed together. And then you have them living happily ever after. And I guess for a child's mind, that's just a wonder of a thing, but that's the stuff that fairy tales are made of.

But you know, as a Christian, there's an incredible, unfathomable wonder of what we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. And that's something of what Paul wants to bring out to us in that last phrase of verse one, as he's writing this letter to the saints in Ephesus, he says this, let's look at all of verse one again. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Now just a casual reading, you'd miss a whole lot there, but it's very important for us this morning to grasp all the wonder that is in that last phrase. He says, you guys at Ephesus, you're saints and you are in Christ and you are faithful. There is a world of exciting and wonderful truth in those three concepts.

And by the way, this isn't just true for the saints in Ephesus. We are saints, we are in Christ and we are God's faithful. And I want us to look at this together today.

And I've entitled this message, the incomparable wonder of being a Christian. The incomparable wonder of being a Christian. There is nothing more awesome, more wonderful, more awe inspiring than grasping what we have as Christians and what we are in Christ.

Now we're certainly not going to do an exhaustive view of all that it means to be a Christian. We're going to take these terms that Paul uses and lay out for us some of the great wonder of being a child of God. Now, first of all, he says there to the saints, and that makes our first major point.

And that is Christians are saints. We're set apart by God for the God, for God. It's going to be very important before we go any further to spend quite a bit of time talking about what it means to be a saint.

Because what the world says ain't a saint. What the world's view is wrong. The world's view is unbiblical.

Let me just give you this statement. Every saint is a Christian and every Christian is a saint. Now, but what we need to define that concept further and find out what makes one a saint and then contrast that to two leading or major misrepresentations or false concepts of what a saint is.

Here's the first one that we want to talk about the first wrong concept. And that is you are not a saint because you are an exceptionally good person in man's eyes. That has nothing to do with the biblical concept of sainthood.

You are not a saint because you are exceptionally good in man's eyes. Now we use this all the time. It's something of a figure of a speech and we'll say, boy, he's a saint.

Man, she is a saint. Or boy, she's a saint. And if anybody gets into heaven, he's going to get into heaven.

But everything about that viewpoint is from man's perspective and not from God's perspective. And that's the problem. And we're so prone to do that.

We are so prone to put ourselves in the middle and view things from our perspective instead of with a diligence and a discipline going to the Word of God, kicking out our viewpoints and implanting in our minds God's viewpoint and God's perspective. And in this area of being a saint, and I'm telling you, it's been greatly used of Satan to beat up, to discourage, to cause Christians to be downcast and doubtful and wondering and anxious about the security of their salvation. It's just another area Satan has used to defeat and hinder God's people.

Well, it's a figure of speech and it's based on a man-centered view. Let's look at some things that refute that viewpoint of man looking on the outward appearance and man saying, well, that's a saint because he's good. First of all, first Samuel 16, seven and first Samuel 16, seven, the Bible says, but the Lord said to Samuel, do not look at his outward appearance or the height of his stature because I have rejected him for God sees not as man sees for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

Now this person had everything outwardly going for them. And God said, well, you've got to remember as my child, you stop looking at the mirror outward appearance and look as I look. And that is on the heart.

Matter of fact, God is the only one who can look on the heart. So often when we judge and evaluate things, we judge wrongly because we're prone once again, to look just at the outward appearance. And from some person's perspective, looking at a person from an outward appearance, you might say, well, now that's a saint, but that's not at all what the Bible means when it calls the saints.

Second Corinthians 10, 12, notice how Paul is dealing with these false teachers who are running him down and criticizing him and saying he never measures up. And here's what he says about those guys. He says, for we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves, but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

He said this common thing that we all are prone to do to say, well, now I'm better than this guy, so I'm pretty good, or I'm better than most people. I'm a saint. This, this common approach to life whereby we're constantly comparing ourselves with others to make ourselves feel good is false.

The Bible says, if you're doing that to believe that that gives you some sort of status or standing, you're without understanding. So here, these Judaizers were telling Paul, he didn't measure up because they, what they did was they set themselves up as the standard. And so they always measured up and then all Paul always fell short.

And so they could always make Paul look lesser than he really was. And have you noticed, I guess, to some degree, every single one of us have that tendency to always sort of set ourselves up as the standard that way we always achieve that way. We always meet the standard and everybody else kind of is a little bit lower, but that's man's viewpoint.

That's the way man would analyze that's man's perspective. But the only true perspective is God's perspective. The only standard by which all should be and will be measured is by God's standard.

Now listen to me. And when we compare ourselves with God's standard, we all fall woefully short. Now, let me just touch on this a little bit because I just don't believe in this day and age of shallow, mild, weak,

anemic Bible preaching that we can get enough of these truths out there because about the time I preach it with this world, and even maybe through some other ministers, you'll get a contradictory message.

So let me hit on a couple of things about us again, that reminds us, we all fall woefully short of God's true standard. Number one, our behavior is evil. Our behavior is evil.

Romans 3, 12 says, all have turned aside together. They've become useless. There is no one who does good.

There's not even one. So if we're prone to look at somebody and say, now they're a saint, God looks at him and says, there's not one that does good. Not even one, even all of those that you would say now that's a saint.

God says, no, not my eyes, not from my perspective. You're all a fallen short. Turn over to Ephesians chapter two.

We'll get there in a couple of years. Maybe look at verse three among them. We all, how many of us all formerly live that's before your conversion in the lust of our flesh, indulging in the desires, the flesh and of the mind.

And whereby nature children of wrath, even as the rest, what a state we are all in. But not only is our behavior evil. Secondly, our hearts are evil.

Our hearts are evil. Jeremiah 17, nine says the hardest, more deceitful than all else. And it's desperately sick and who can understand it.

So God says, from my perspective, I look at all your activities and all your behavior. That is the activities and the behaviors that we do out of our own ability and our own strengths to try to please God. And he says, you all fall woefully short, none of you measure up in my sight.

Then God says, then I look on the heart. And when I examine man's heart, I find that every man's heart is desperately wicked and deceitful of beyond all things. So, you know, like Isaiah 64, six says, for all of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like filthy garments.

Now, this is not self-esteem preaching today. This is not build you up today. Matter of fact, God's word tears us down so that Christ might come in and he brings us up.

We don't get up in our own strength and ability in our natural natures. We get up in Christ. So God's standard, the only true standard, listen, eliminates even the possibility that any man in his heart or in his deeds could be considered a saint.

We can't be so banished. The thought that a saying is someone who's an exceptionally good person from man's viewpoint. That's not in the biblical sense.

What a saying is at all. Now, number two, another thing that a saint is not be, you are not a saint because the Roman Catholic church declares you a saint. You're not a saint because the Roman Catholic church declares you a saint.

Now, you know, they have a, an elaborate ecclesiological service. And in this service, they a deem one in the sainthood. And basically how it goes is this.

They find some exceptionally good person. And I think I'm correct on this. That must be dead.

They're dead and they've been real good. Then they may call a service. And then when they call this service, they'll have a nomination.

And this person is officially nominated within the church. And then they'll have either another service or an extending of that same service. And they'll have one person who will stand up and plead the virtue of this man or woman.

And then another person will stand up and he's called the devil's advocate. And he'll try to tear the person down. And after, after that is completed, then if it is established that they are indeed worthy, then they are then declared officially a saint by the Roman Catholic church.

Now, according to scripture, nothing could be further from the truth. Listen to me. Being a saint is a real and true and exceedingly important thing, but it has absolutely nothing to do with what may happen during a church service.

Now it may have happened in a church service, or it may have happened in a car, or it may have happened in your home, or it may have happened a thousand, one different places, but it's not something that's bestowed by an ecclesiastical body during a church service. Becoming a saint has nothing to do with that. Listen, becoming a saint is the exclusive activity of God toward us.

Did you hear that? Becoming a saint is the exclusive activity of God toward us. Now, what have we all of a sudden done? We've taken man out of the center of this thing, and we've put God in the center of it. And said, okay, God, who do you say a saint is? And how does one become a saint? Well, let's go to our third point.

We've seen the two misconceptions about what a saint is. Let's talk about now the truth. See, you are a saint if God has set you apart as his own possession.

You are a saint if God has set you apart for his own possession. In other words, this is completely the action of God toward you. It's not God doing something and you doing something.

It's not God meeting you halfway and you meeting him halfway. This is the activity of Almighty God. It's not based on a change of nature.

In other words, you didn't say, okay, God, watch me. I'm going to change my attitude. I'm going to change my motivations.

I'm going to change my heart about things. I'm going to clean myself up. And so God, can I then become a saint? That's not what it means.

It doesn't mean, okay, God, not only am I going to change my heart, God, I'm going to change my behavior. I'm going to stop cursing. I'm going to stop smoking.

I'm going to stop chewing. I'm going to stop dipping. I'm going to stop drinking.

I'm going to stop being cruel to my wife and my family. I'm going to stop missing work. I'm going to change my behavior.

I'm going to clean up my act. And then God, can I be a saint? Has nothing to do with that. And I just want to say that about a hundred times because we're just indoctrinated with the opposite.

Now, I'm not saying that it's sinful or wrong to you to use that phrase, boy, he's a saint. I'm not saying that sinful as long as you have the maturity in Christ to understand that has nothing to do with biblical sainthood. That's what's important.

And we ought to be more careful, I think, as the people of God, not to throw around biblical terms in unbiblical ways, because Satan used that to start muddying our thinking and get us off track again. Get us into that man-centered changing of nature or man-centered changing of my behavior or my merit before God. And that makes me a saint.

Now here's some proofs of this. First of all, Exodus chapter 13, verse 2, where the Bible says that the firstborn of every family of the nation of Israel, now this is the old dispensation, and the firstborn of every family was to be holy or appointed set apart. That's the same Greek or it's the Hebrew word that corresponds with the Greek word for saint.

And it means holy or become a saint. So they were to take the firstborn child in a special way that child was set apart for God. It was a saint or a holy one.

Now, did that child change his nature? Absolutely not. Child can't change his nature. Did that child change his behavior all of a sudden? No, child can't change your behavior.

It was just that he was set apart in a special way to be a servant of God, the firstborn of Israel. Well, secondly, Exodus chapter 40, verse 9, referring to the oil and the temple furnishings, these instruments and utensils and metal utensils, and some were made out of stone perhaps. All these things were used in the Old Testament temple and they were considered saints.

Same Hebrew word. Now, when the priest was to take the items or articles that were made of gold and silver, some were made of wood, some were made of stone or marble, and he was to say, now these are set apart for God's use. Did any of those things change their nature? Did any of those things change their behavior? They can't change their behavior.

No, all it meant was they're the same wood, they're the same metal, they're the same stone that they were. They're now set apart for God's special use. And that's the same Hebrew word that is used there when it says they're consecrated or considered as holy or a saint.

And then John 17, verse 9, here's our Lord Jesus talking. And our Lord Jesus in His high priestly prayer says that for our sakes rather, He sanctified. Same Greek word is to become a saint.

It sometimes can be translated holy or sanctified or saint. And He says, I'm going to make a saint of Myself or sanctify Myself or set Myself apart. Now, let me ask you something.

Did Jesus change His nature? He couldn't become more holy. He was already as holy as you can get. Did Jesus make His behavior more honorable to God or more holy? He couldn't do that.

He was already honoring God and pleasing God. He's just simply saying, now I set Myself apart for the main part of my ministry here on earth, that is to go to the cross and die for the sins of our people. So it had nothing to do with changing nature, had nothing to do with changing behavior.

In 1 Corinthians 1, verse 2, one of the many, many times the entire church are called saints, just like it is in Ephesians 1, verse 1. They're all saints. So it has nothing to do with a change of heart, a change of nature. It has nothing to do with a change of behavior.

It's the activity of God whereby He sets you apart as His own special possession. And there's strong biblical foundation. Are you with me? You're listening.

The strong biblical foundation to conclude that He did this before the foundation of the world. Let's get God in the center of this thing and quit thinking that man is the center of all things. By the way, friend, I want to tell you something.

Man is not the center of anything. God is. Everything is about God.

Everything is for God. Everything is to glorify God. And like Paul Washer reminded us when he was here with us and he said, you know, I would pray about my little baby and I would say, God, God, I pray that this little baby will glorify you.

And he said, it's as if God through His word spoke to my heart and said, I will be glorified by this little boy. I'll either glorify myself by judging him for his sin. I will glorify myself by saving him through the blood of my son, but I will be glorified in this boy.

My friend, you just better write it down on the tablet of your heart. Everything is about God. Now, listen, and everything about God is about God's glory, not about man.

A God centered viewpoint is what we so desperately need in Christianity today. And as I read church history, I find that this was common a couple of centuries ago. And then we drifted along in humanism and self-centeredness and self-consumption kept coming into the church.

And to today there's a prominent man centered view in the church. That's that's permeating everything. And we're so accustomed to it and we're so used to it.

We think it's normal Christianity and it's not. We need to keep divorcing ourselves from a man centered perspective and keep committing ourselves to a God centered perspective. Here's what God says.

God says, and Paul writing to the church at Ephesus says, you guys are God's saints. God in his sovereign purposes and by his own divine activity has set you apart for himself. That is an awesome thought.

Well, that's just because I'm so special and I have so many gifts and I'm so unique and God can do a lot through me. No matter of fact, God often picks the less desirable so he can show how mighty he is in changing the less desirable into something more desirable. But if you're a child of God and you're truly saved and you belong to him, you are someone that God has chosen in his own sovereign will to reach down and grab you in a sense and set you apart and say, that one's mine.

That's a saint. Nothing you did had anything to do with it. That's a saint.

Well, when and how does one become a saint? Well, I've been talking about that, but let me read from my notes, a little statement when the sovereign Holy spirit regenerates the heart and draws that person into the company of God's church. That's when you become a saint. When the work of God through the preaching of the gospel works on the heart and there's the birthing of spiritual life in your heart, then at that

point, you're set apart as gods.

You're a saint at the moment of regeneration. At the moment of new birth, we immediately become a saint of God. Now listen to this as a saint, everything has now changed.

Now you can imagine you've been plucked out of the kingdom of darkness, out of the kingdom of Satan, out of the kingdom of this world. Now listen, and you've been placed into the kingdom of light and into the kingdom of God, which lasts for forever. That means everything now is radically changed for you.

Everything is radically changed. You've been set apart over there for God, in his family, for his glory, and it's going to be wonderfully for your own good. Now listen, a saint possesses a new nature.

You're given a new nature when you become a saint. A saint now has a new Lord. Now where everyone is under the Lordship of Christ, before you're saved, you're at enmity with the Lord.

Once you become a Christian, you're in harmony with the Lord. You have a new Lord. You have a new purpose.

That's why you sit under the preaching of the Word of God and have your quiet time and study the Word of God. So from the Word of God, you can begin to understand and comprehend the glorious new purpose we have in Christ as his saints, as his set apart ones. We have a new family.

That's why God puts a high premium on joining a local congregation. You're to sign up with, join up with these pilgrims, these strangers, these aliens. These are Bible words.

These people according to a new way. These people that live in the world, but not of the world. They're strange and weird to the rest of the world.

Maybe some of those things they say about us, they're really true. We are weird. We are strange.

We are different. And all I can tell you this is this, as I look at the world and the status of professing Christianity, I'm glad we're different. And I'm glad people notice that we're different.

God forbid we get proud and think we've arrived. We're just pilgrims journeying onward for God's glory. Well, new nature, a new Lord, a new purpose, a new family.

What about a new destination? Amen. A new destination. Right now I'm still sojourning in foreign territory, but I have an ultimate home waiting for me, a new destination waiting for me.

Now listen, new nature, new Lord, new purpose, new family, new destination. Now these things do not make me a saint. These are mine because I am a saint.

And I became a saint by the activity of God setting me apart for his own possession. But Jeff, I can't comprehend all that. You see, it's God-centered, it's not man-centered.

You're not supposed to comprehend all of it. You're supposed to by faith rejoice in it and glory in it. Now listen to this, all saints are not necessarily good people.

But Jeff, I could have told you that. I've dealt with some of them saints. All saints are not necessarily good people, but listen, they are better than they would have been if they'd not become one of God's saints.

And also they will increasingly mature to show the character of Christ in their lives. And that's why assurance of salvation and evidences of salvation is not based on something that you did at some little point. It's based on a pattern of evidence in your life as time goes by.

Our Puritan fathers would teach us to always continually examine yourself to see if you're in the faith. Continually look at the Word of God and look at your heart disposition, look at your lifestyle, look at what you can get by with and what you can't get by with concerning sin and find out if there are actually the marks and the evidences, you know, I'm one of his. Now that's not to cause doubt and it's not to cause anxiety.

It's just a healthy biblical exhortation. You continually look at your life to see if the marks of true regeneration are there. Again, that's a God-centered view of the thing, not a man-centered view and that's what we so desperately need.

So all Christians are saints. Now listen, and all saints must increasingly become saintly. But becoming a saint was the activity of God whereby He set you apart for His own.

Now you see, you and I have 2,000 years of Christianity under our belts in a sense. And in addition to that, we live in the Bible Belt. And in addition to that, we've been in evangelical churches and there's wonderful good things and wonderful blessings about that.

But there's also some curses to that. And the curse is that we can fall into certain patterns and viewpoints and conceptions about things that aren't really biblical. But you know, when Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, these folks just came out of raw paganism.

And so when Paul wrote to them and said, you're a set-apart saint for God's own position, they didn't wonder about it, debate about it. They didn't think, well, don't I have to work and don't I have to perform? No, they just gloried in it. Hallelujah.

That's what it is. That's what we are. So he starts off into these guys and said, you're saints who are at Ephesus.

Now let's go to the second thing here. Not only are we saints, and that's one of the incomparable wonders of being a child of God, is that we are set apart as God's own possession. We're saints.

We're holy ones unto Him. He also says, who are faithful, who are faithful. So, and really this word has two meanings.

And so I'll word it this way. Christians have faith and will continue in faith. That's all bottled up in that word faithful there.

Christians have faith in God, in the gospel particularly. Secondly, there are those who continue that walk of the lifestyle of faith. That word *pistos* is the Greek word for faith there.

*Pistos* means both that faith in the gospel to be saved and both that trusting lifestyle faith that I live now that I've become a child of God. So it means both exercising faith in the gospel, that is believing the gospel, being saved, and then continuing in faith or perseverance to walk with God through the ins and outs, ups and downs of this life. Let's look at both of these.

And I'm going to spend a little time here because it demands a little time. And that's the first sub point. That is Christians possess or have faith in the gospel.

Christians possess or have faith in the gospel. And I want to share with you three parts of saving faith. When we exercise this saving faith, this faith that saves, what is it composed of? And let's look at this.

Number one, there's the mental part, our intellectual part of saving faith, the mental or intellectual part. But I want to turn to Romans chapter 10, look at verses 14 through 17. Romans chapter 10 verses 14 through 17.

Now Paul is giving something of a summary of how people come to saving faith and notice what he says here. Verse 14 of Romans chapter 10, how then will they call on him and who they've not believed? How will they believe in him and whom they've not heard? There's got to be hearing intellect mentally. You've got to hear it.

And how will they hear without a preacher? He's not saying that the only way you can get saved is hearing preaching, but that is God's basic primary means of spreading the gospel. Verse 15, how will they preach unless they are sent? That's a good missionary emphasis there. We've got to make sure the funds and the prayer support are there so we can send preachers to proclaim the gospel.

Just as it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things. Verse 16, however, they did not heed the good news for Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report. So faith comes from a hearing and hearing by the word of Christ or hearing the word about Christ.

Faith comes from hearing. There is a mental or an intellectual part of faith. In other words, listen, it is not faith that saves it's faith in Christ that saves.

And there has to be the mental or intellectual understanding of who Christ is, what we are and what he's done in order that we might place faith in those things. And it's been my conclusion looking at things for a while that we have often in sincerity sort of dumbed this thing down and sort of remove the intellect out of it. And if someone just sort of throws a little faith towards some concept of God or Jesus, we call that salvation.

And that's not necessarily. So I don't know how much a person has to know to be saved, but I know the Bible emphasis is teach and preach and guide and instruct them in the word. The more intellectually they understand the truth of the gospel, the better off they're going to be.

Don't ever just say, well, it didn't take much. So I'm not going to be involved much. That is not God's method of spreading the gospel.

Jesus, for example, in Luke chapter 24, verse 27 says, then beginning with Moses, Moses, and with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning himself and all the scriptures. Here he is on the Emmaus road talking to these two disciples and Jesus goes to great lengths to start with the first five books of the Old Testament and exegeting and explaining all the truths in those first five books so that these folks on the Emmaus road could mentally or intellectually grasp who he was and how he was the fulfillment of all those things. A great emphasis on the mental understanding of the gospel.

In Acts chapter eight, we have the Ethiopian eunuch who was leaving Jerusalem. He had been there for a feast and he's reading the prophet Isaiah and Philip joins the eunuch with him and begins to explain to him

what this means. The intellect is involved mentally.

You have to understand. And he was gloriously saved. If I had to put it in a nutshell of what one must grasp, and I'm not talking about certain depths of these particular areas, but these particular areas must be grasped.

Number one is sin. We must know and understand what sin is and that we are sinners. And then therefore we must know and understand who Jesus is and what he's done to be the savior.

Mentally and intellectually, those things need to be taught and communicated. Also, we need to understand what it means to be lost. That we are without God.

We are without his wisdom. We are without his guidance. We are without his presence.

We are lost. We're separated from our creator. And therefore a person must also understand something of him being Lord.

I want to say something to you. A person that believes that they've come to saving faith with little concept and no commitment to his lordship has not exercised saving faith. Matter of fact, the word Lord is used a whole lot more in the Bible than savior.

And I'm not saying you have to have this deep concept of lordship, but there has to be some concept of I'm losing control of my life. It's given over to him. I'm surrendering my lordship and I'm yielding to his lordship.

And so there must be the preaching of the word of God to communicate. That's an essential part of conversion. So there is the mental part of conversion.

Now, I want to spend a little time here talking about, well, why does the Bible say, if you can come like a little child, you can enter the kingdom of heaven. I was curious about that. And it seemed like God stirred my heart about that as I was studying this.

And, and, you know, I found out the Bible does not say, if you have faith as a child, you'll be saved. Doesn't say that at all. But haven't we heard that it really in one sense or another over and over again, if you have faith like a child, you'll go to heaven.

That's not what the Bible teaches. Let's look at some of those texts together right quick. And we'll not be long, but look at Matthew chapter 18.

Would you turn there? Now I'm not saying children cannot be saved. Don't put words in my mouth that I'm not saying, but a child must gain some understanding before he can intellectually know what he needs to know to be saved. Matthew chapter 18 and look at verse one.

At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and said, who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Now that's very important to stop right there and get the context. He's not talking about how you get into the kingdom of heaven.

He's talking about these guys who are already in it. And who's the greatest once you're already in it. These are fellows who are already converted.

They're already saved. And they're in the flesh right now, arguing about who's superior in that context. Jesus uses the analogy of a little child verse two.

And he called a child to himself and said, sent him before them and said, truly, I say to you, unless you are converted, that's first and become like children. That's heaven. In other words, you must have the understanding of the gospel in your mind and you embrace that by faith.

Now, listen, after you embrace that by faith, then you say like a little child would yield to his parents. I yield to my Lord. All right.

He's not saying child ish faith here. He's saying a humble dependency on God, like a child, not a child, like understanding in your mind. Now, listen to me.

Listen to me. Are you thinking this morning? Isn't it appealing to the old flesh nature to say, don't have to know much, don't have to understand much, don't have to study anything, don't have to listen good at church. I know two or three little facts.

I believe on Jesus. I'm safe from going to heaven. So the rest of my life is kind of mine.

I'm going to chill out until I get to heaven. Are you hearing me? Wouldn't the flesh kind of like that? But see, the word of God teaches right the contrary. The word of God, God over and over, teach, reproof, rebuke, instruct, exhort the word of God, the word of God, the word of God, the word of God.

So why in our minds, we can understand the truth of the gospel and trusting it by faith. Then like a child, we just lean and depend on the truths we've received in our hearts and minds. Well, let's continue in Matthew 18.

Look at verse four. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he's the greatest in the kingdom. Once you become Christians, as Christians are to live with one another, the one that's greatest among us is the one that denies himself and humbles himself and puts the Christians first.

We're not talking about conversion here at all. But I've seen these kinds of passages used to sort of illustrate that, you know what, getting saved is just like a little child. Not necessarily so.

Children can be saved, but they need the understanding in their minds of the gospel. Now, look at another text. If we look it up, Mark chapter 10.

Mark chapter 10, look at verse 13. Mark 10, 13. And they were bringing children to him so that he might touch them.

I didn't say they were bringing children who are believing on him for salvation. No, this was, this was a time in Jesus' earthly ministry when he was feeding thousands of people. He was performing miracles for thousands of people.

He was teaching thousands of people and many of them were never saved. And now these children are coming just to get in on the blessing of being around him. And the disciples rebuked them.

But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, permit the children to come to me. Now he's not saying come to me for salvation here. He's just saying, let them come physically and be in my presence and be blessed.

Do not hinder them for the kingdom of God belongs to these. That's not what he says. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

In other words, one of the marks of a person in the kingdom is they humble themselves with great trust and dependence upon God. They don't walk with arrogance and pride. They walk in dependence and yieldedness like a little child would upon God.

He's not putting a virtue on a childlike understanding. He's putting a virtue on a childlike dependence and trust once you have the understanding. It's a big, big difference there.

Verse 15, truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all. So listen, and here's the way I like to view it. He's not talking about childish faith.

He's talking about childlike dependence and trust. For example, you can take a little child, you sit a little child down and you teach him about Jesus. They'll believe in Jesus almost every time.

He's wonderful. He's, he's what the Bible says. He did all those miracles.

He, he loved people. He's wonderful. But also you can teach that little child about Santa Claus and they'll think Santa Claus is wonderful.

You can teach them about the tooth fairy and they'll think the tooth fairy is wonderful. You can tell them about the Easter bunny and they'll think the Easter bunny is wonderful. And say to them, it's just these people that are bigger than life and it's all special and neat and wonderful.

That's childish faith. But that's not what the teaching. It's not that he's just some force out there and some good guy and someone that's going to just keep me out of hell.

We need to have a good understanding of the gospel in our hearts and minds. And then when we have that, that understanding in our hearts and minds, we have a childlike dependence in the gospel that we've already come to understand mentally. Matter of fact, on one occasion in Matthew chapter 11, I'll not look that up for time, but in Matthew chapter 11, Jesus rebukes childlike understanding.

He tells those Pharisees, he said, first of all, I came to you and I wasn't fasting at me and my disciples were excited. We were doing miracles and it was fun. You rejected us.

They said on another occasion, John the Baptist came, he was fasting, not having any fun. You rejected him. He said, you're just like a bunch of little children.

You're just shallow and fickle like a child. You shouldn't a child just shout. So he's saying, no, I'm not making a virtue of childish understanding.

And today I believe in our churches. You know, it's amazing to me as I've grown and studied how often we can just some guy come through town and preach and use one or two verses of scripture and never refer to it again. And about 17 stories and all these people are getting saved.

I'm not saying they did not get saved. I'm just saying that's not God's primary method. We need to thoroughly teach the truth of the gospel because there's a mental aspect to being saved.

You need to understand mentally in your mind, the great truths of the gospel. You say, am I saying all those facts? No, but that's a part of saving faith. And no wonder in our churches where there's good Bible preaching, you have children who get saved when they're little, then they get saved when they're a teenager, then they get saved again when they're a young adult very often.

And why? Because the learning has come in. The learning has come in. Then they understand really what the gospel is.

They say, I don't know that I placed my faith in that. So what I'm saying to you is let's urge people to be saved. Let's urge people to come to Christ.

Let's urge them to trust, but let's keep teaching and instructing and guiding and getting them in small group Bible studies, opening the word of God with them and studying it and getting them to under the preaching of the word of God. So in their minds, they're receiving God's truth and then they'll have something to place their faith into. So everything about scripture is teach, instruct, exhort, reprove, rebuke, give them God's truth.

So they'll have the conception in their minds. And I probably could ask for a raising of hands. I'll not do this, but I probably could ask those to raise their hands who are saved since they become at least young adults.

And they'll probably say, Brother Jeff, that's exactly where I was. I meant it, but really I had a childish faith. But as I stayed into the word of God and got older, God used the word in my mind.

And later with a full understanding, I have now trusted in Christ with a childlike dependence on the truth as I know him in his word. Now, secondly, another essential part of conversion is the emotional part, the emotions. Now, when you look, read the Bible, you'll find the word heart mentioned all the time.

If you believe with all your heart, Philip told the Ethiopian eunuch. Well, in scripture, the heart is the mind, the emotions, and the will. It's the innermost or deepest part of man.

But what I'm talking about here is that part where you actually feel something. Now I am not talking about emotionalism, which I absolutely abhor, which I believe is a satanic counterfeit that it's invaded many good churches. Emotionalism, that is, if we can whip it up and work it up, and if there's enough tears, it was God.

May be God, may not be God. Emotions doesn't mean either way. You've got to examine why they're emotional to find out if it was God or not.

And if you'll watch your television, some of the religious programs on television, they're about 98% emotionalism and about 2% truth. So I abhor emotionalism, but don't misunderstand me. If a person say their emotions get involved.

Here's what I mean by that. You can't begin to understand the truth of sinfulness, the truth of your ungodliness, the truth of your standing as a just, justly condemned sinner before God. And the Holy Spirit start bringing that to light in your heart and mind without you feeling deeply that sin and deeply your lostness and deeply your sinfulness and your guilt before a Holy God.

That deep feeling should and must be there. How deep does it have to be? I don't know. I just know when I talk to someone that's experienced saving faith, it's just real and you can tell it.

There's no pretense. There's no explaining away. There's no blame shifting.

I ought to go to hell, brother Jeff. There's nothing good in me. I'm a wicked sinner.

That is what I mean by the emotions being involved. You feel that deeply. And then thinking about Christ, a unfathomable gift in grace and in love and mercy.

He died for us and in our place took our sins. And that breaks the heart of the man who has saving faith. It stirs something in him.

And I want to say to you this evening, if you've been saved one day or a one month or one year or 100 years, when you hear the preaching of these truths, there's still something in you that says, I don't deserve that. That's wonderful. That's your emotions.

And the man that has saving faith or a woman that has saving faith will have some emotion to that. Oh, Vance Havner used to say, we won't have revival till brother Amen and sister wet eyes comes back to church. There's nothing wrong with feeling deeply the truths of God.

Amen. Who wants a dry, barren, stale intellectualism? I don't. On the other hand, I don't want any emotionalism with almost no emphasis on study and thoroughness concerning Bible teaching.

Why can't we have both truth, but deeply felt and understood truth with a passion. That's what we need. So when a man is saved, remember the man in the Bible, by the way, the publican who is at the temple and the Bible says he's beating on his chest.

He feels deeply. He feels deeply. And he says, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

That's all he could verbalize. I guess that's the center's prayer. I don't know.

He just called out to God. I'm a sinner. And what does the Bible say? The Bible say he went home.

What justified, but see the emotion. He felt the depth of his wickedness and his wrongness. I told you before I had a well-meaning Sunday school teacher months after my conversion, who said, you need to quit talking about how wicked and awful and lowly and unrighteous and ungodly you are.

So I can't help it. I see it and I know it and I feel it, but also know I'm fully forgiven and free in Christ. And one of our old Puritan fathers said that, that, that contrition, that humility that we ought to carry with us through life is like the ballast in the ship.

And when the storms rage and the waves crash, if the ballast is right in the bottom of the ship, it may move, but it stays on course. And that's what keeps us on course in our Christian life. That ever awareness that we're wretched, lowly, undeserving, hell deserving sinners, but Jesus saved us.

That contrition, that lowly, that starts the moment you have saving faith and it stays with you. Now it may be times you're more sensitive than others, but as a pattern, you'll see that in your life. Saving faith has that emotional element.

We feel deeply the guilt. We feel deeply our danger before a Holy God. Oh God, help us in our churches to return to the kind of preaching and the kind of work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts where people come to Christ, fleeing the wrath of God, aware of who he is and what we are and crying out to him for grace and mercy.

And I want to tell you something, every man, every woman, every boy, and every girl that will cry for mercy will find mercy every time. Oh, but I'm sick to death of this dignified conversion, this walking down the aisle and keeping your pride and in love with yourself and just adding Jesus on so you don't go to hell. That's not conversion.

It's a brokenness over sinfulness and waywardness and lostness and unworthiness. Oh, that ought to be there. And I just want to say this to you again.

I know it sounds like I'm beating this horse to death and I don't mean to to overemphasize. I don't want us to go to any extremes. I just want us to be in balance.

But that is, I know that I have led many a person to pray a sinner's prayer and they weren't even near broken over nothing. They just prayed a prayer. And I'm convinced when they got through, they were still a sinner who prayed a prayer.

Don't misunderstand me. Urge them to call on the Lord. But tell them about the truth of what ought to be there if they're really exercising saving faith.

Then, of course, not only a deep guilt and a deep danger and a deep awareness of their helplessness, but also they will feel deeply the joy and the peace and the forgiveness of Christ. Have you been there and seen that? When a person is fully aware of their wretched wickedness, but fully aware that Jesus has saved me. Now the world will say that's a paradox.

But those two go hand in hand in God's economy. And saving faith will have both. You remember the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried his feet with her hair and they were rebuking her? What was the point? And Jesus says, you don't understand.

This woman feels very deeply the gratitude and the joy and the forgiveness of her salvation. And, you know, sometimes it's true, those of us who have really lived in outward wickedness and evil, we feel more deeply the forgiveness and the peace of Christ, don't we? Others who may not have experienced the outward evil, they're just as wicked, but perhaps they don't feel it as deeply. But you will feel it.

The emotions are involved and if a person is not stirred in their emotions about these truths, they have not exercised saving faith. Three, the volitional element or the will. The mind must understand the truths of the gospel.

The heart, the emotions will feel these truths. And then there is that point when with the understanding, you have the understanding in your mind, you have the stirring in your heart and you make that commitment to Christ. I commit to you my sins.

I commit to you my unworthiness. I commit to you that I can't save myself. And by the way, Christ, if you don't save me, I'm sunk.

I just committed all to you. I can't tell you how many times a week I say that to my Lord. Lord, if you don't do it, I'm sunk.

I just committed all to you. And there's a point in time when that starts in your life. You just hand it all over to Him.

Trusting Him, having faith that He died to save you and forgive you of your sins. And then secondly, to follow Him as Lord of your life. There is no saving faith if there's not an understanding to some degree that I am giving my life to Him, for Him to lead me and guide me and rule me from this day forward.

And our evangelical churches are full of people today who've prayed a prayer or maybe shed a tear, but had no commitment to Lordship when they came to Christ. And I submit to you, there's very valid, solid evidence that says they never came to Christ. They wanted Christ to fix something.

They wanted Christ to remove a pain. They wanted Christ to fix a consequence of some rebellion in your life, but it wasn't coming as a sinner that my nature is rotten. I'm woefully undone.

I need Christ to forgive me and cleanse me. Now, you know what I found in my life? I didn't understand these things the moment I was saved, but as I heard them, they clicked in my spirit. As I heard them, I said, yeah, that's right.

Yes, that's me. Yes, that's true. Oh God, I know that's true.

And there's a growing understanding as we sit in the word of God. And that's why you are in one sense, gaining the assurance of your salvation every day of your life. As long as you live, you're more deeply grasping, comprehending, receiving, and understanding these truths.

And the Holy Spirit keeps affirming them to you and says, yes, that's the way I feel. And that's a mark of a child of God. Well, let's hurriedly go to the second sub point.

He, he talks about the saints at Ephesus who are faithful in Christ Jesus. And this aspect of being faithful means to continue faithfully following Christ. That's B on the outline.

Christians continue faithfully following Christ, which this means to keep the faith or the theological term is perseverance. We use the phrase once saved, always saved. I like that phrase, but I like the phrase perseverance of the saints better.

Perseverance does not mean you're perfect, but it means you can watch your life after genuine conversion. And there's a general pattern of you going on with God, slipping sometimes falling sometimes, but not falling headlong, getting back up, asking God to forgive you and going on for God. A perseverance of the saints.

Matthew 10 22 speaks of this perseverance. In Matthew 10 22, he says, and you will be hated by all on account of my name. But it is the one who has endured.

You could say persevered to the end who will be saved. Well, but as if that means works, it doesn't mean works at all. He's talking about the end time tribulation when persecutions of Christians will greatly increase.

And he's saying under that kind of persecution and that kind of threat, all the false professors will fall by the wayside. All the unsaved who are just going through the motions and putting on the outward cloak of Christianity, but there's no true conversion that's happened in their heart. They'll fizzle out.

He's saying, but you'll know my true children because they'll persevere to the end. That's what he's saying. You see, God has committed that since we are chosen and elected in him, and he's redeemed us through the blood of his son, he's placed this Holy spirit in us as a pledge or a down payment of what we're going to have when we get to heaven.

There's a little touch of heaven in us right now. We're going to get all of heaven later. God has committed those that he began the good work and he will perform it or perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

He perseveres with us. We are to persevere in faith toward him. And the Christian does that.

A faith that is full to the end. Now let me hurriedly go to our third major point. The third wondrous truth of Christianity that Paul lays out here.

He's talked about saints. We're saints. Then he talked about we're faithful.

And now thirdly, he's going to talk about us being in Christ. Christians, a Christian's whole being is in Christ. In Christ.

This phrase, in Christ or in him, in some form, this phrase is used 164 times in Paul's writings. That's almost three times as much as the phrase saved. And I got to wondering to myself, why did we keep the word saved? When we want to ask somebody, do you know Christ? We say, are you saved? Now there's nothing wrong with that.

I'm not asking you to stop, but I was curious. Why don't we just ask, are you in Christ? But are you in Christ? Are you in Christ? You see what would be wrong with that? And I think I do know part of the answer. And I want to get to that in just a moment.

You see saved emphasizes what has been taken away from us. Not every time, but most of the times when you say the word saved in the Bible emphasizes what has been taken away. The wrath of God has been taken away.

Sin has been taken away. Our blindness to God has been taken away. Our lostness taken away.

And so that's a wonderful, glorious truth. But you know, leave it to man to mess things up by getting things out of balance. We want to emphasize conversions.

What do you get taken out of your life? That's negative. And we don't realize conversion is more so what you're added to that's positive. I'm not only saved from wrath, from Satan's kingdom, from sin, from eternal loss.

I'm saved to Christ. That's why we say in Christ. And maybe it would be healthy for us to start using that phrase a little more.

Are you in Christ? Are you in Christ? You see, while saved emphasizes things taken away that are negative, in Christ emphasizes rather to whom we have been united. That's glorious. I'm afraid some people got a half salvation, which is not salvation at all.

They came to get some stuff out, but they didn't come to get in somebody. Well, you can't really get out unless you got in. It's both and.

Saved includes in Christ. In Christ includes saved, by the way, you really can't separate them. But in scripture, there's times when it's perhaps vital for understanding to separate them as we're describing them.

So in Christ means more than just being saved. Now, here's what I want you to think about when we talk about being in Christ. And I want you to, I want you to just open your brain up real big.

And I want to shoot this in there. Then I want you to close your brain up and never lose it. All right.

Have you got your brain open? Now watch out. Don't let it fall out. In Christ means a vital union or connection, a vital union or connection.

It means I'm connected to Jesus Christ. The moment I'm saved, the moment I'm saved, the moment I'm in Christ, the moment I'm converted, I am taken out of sin, wrath, judgment, hell. That's all taken away, but I'm united.

There's a vital relationship established to Jesus Christ. It's mystical in a way. We're in the sphere of being in Christ.

Now listen to this statement. I have such a vital union or a vital connection to Christ that what is true of Him is true of me. And what becomes of Him will become of me.

And it's hard for me to compose myself when I think on that. I'm vitally united to Jesus Christ. I'm in Christ.

Now listen, I'm not trying to get in. I'm not hoping to get in. I'm not working my way in.

I'm in. And whatever becomes of Jesus becomes of me. By the way, He's going to be glorified for all eternity.

And we're going to be the little trophies of grace all around Him for all eternity. Whatever happens to Him happens to me. How the Father views Him is how the Father views me.

I'm in Him. The Father cannot view me any way other than through the veil of His Holy Son, Jesus Christ. Wow! The incomparable wonder of being a Christian.

Well, the Bible gives several images to illustrate this vital union. First of all, in Ephesians 5, we won't look there, but he talks about marriage. And he says, you know, you humanly people ought to understand the vital union of husband and wife and the binding oneness.

It's so binding. It's so one. You can no longer view yourself as two separate persons.

You're one flesh. He said, hey, that's the way it is with Christ and His children, Christ and the church. Christ is the head and the church is the body.

I don't know about you, but there's a vital union between my head and my body. You can't separate those. He also uses the vine and the branches in John 15.

He says, I am the vine, you're the branches. I have some muscadine vines at my house and I have many more than I want to have. And sometimes I'll just get my chainsaw and just like just start cutting them down.

But I found that didn't do a whole lot. As a matter of fact, I even prune them and make them better unless I go all the way to the source to the major vine. Well, that's the way we are.

We are connected as one with Jesus Christ. What comes through that vine goes out to that branch. The nutrients and nourishments that comes up that vine must go to the branch.

And so it is what comes to Jesus flows out to us. Everything that he has, we have. Everything that he's going to get, we're going to get.

Every blessing that he has, we get to be blessed by it too. Not all right now. We need to help our charismatic friends.

You don't get it all right now. Some of them believe something so strongly. If they got everything they named and claimed, there wouldn't be any need for heaven.

And I don't mean to be ugly. I'm just thinking about if everything is available now, if you just claim it, why go? We'll just go to Texas and deer hunt and have everything we need. Now, don't misunderstand me.

There's wonderful people in that group. And I thank God for the preaching of the gospel. But my friend, we don't get heaven down here and up there too.

We've got a heaven coming. We're going to get everything that Jesus gets. Well, Ephesians chapter two, he talks about the body.

He says, we're all members of the body. And again, he's the head of the body. We're all interconnected.

There's a vital oneness in your body. Every organ is interconnected with every other organ. They all depend upon each other.

And then the body. And, uh, uh, well, I just mentioned that that's the fourth one there. So those are some images that illustrate this vital union that in Christ represents.

Now I want to look at just real quickly at some of the wonders of being in Christ in Ephesians chapter one, these are some things we'll be dissecting quite thoroughly as time goes on. Look, first of all, at verse three, he says, blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now I'm in Ephesians one who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

In other words, because you are in Christ, you are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Well, what does that mean? Here's what it means. Everything good in heaven is yours.

Well, how much good is in heaven? Everything in heaven is infinitely better than anything good down here. And because you're in Christ, you get all the blessing that heaven can bestow. Is that not incredible? Because you're in Christ.

Well, let's look at verse four. Just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love. Because we're in Christ, we are the chosen ones.

You could use the word elect there. It's the same thing. We are elected or chosen by God.

And we were elected and chosen by God when? Before the foundation of the world. But Jeff, I can't comprehend that. Don't have to comprehend it.

Just rejoice that you got in on it. And those who he chose in him before the foundation of the world, he will redeem in time. We live in time right now.

And in the eternity future, we're going to be holy and blameless before him in love. All that's because you're in him. You're in Christ.

You have a vital union with Jesus Christ. Look at verse seven. In him we have redemption through his blood.

Now, your redemption occurs at a point in time. Your redemption occurs in this life when the Holy Spirit does that work in your heart and you repent and believe in the gospel. In him we have redemption through his blood.

The forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace. Look at verse 10. With a view to an administration, really you have to get the last part of verse nine.

He purposed in him, then verse 10, with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times. That is the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. That means the uniting together of everything in Christ.

We get to get in on that final coming day when everything that belongs to God and the only people that belong to God are those who are in Christ. And we'll all be united together for all eternity. I hope all of us are there.

Is that not going to be wonderful to finally be with a fellowship of believers where everybody loves Jesus? Everybody is surrendered to his Lordship. Everybody wants him to get all the glory. Well, we're going to have that one day in him.

We're even going to get rid of our own stinking self-centered flesh nature when we get there. Look at verse 13. In him, you also, after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise, the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

He says the Holy Spirit in him is given as a pledge. That means a deposit, a down payment, if you will. We have a down payment of the Holy Spirit in our lives now, and we'll have the full experience of God's presence when we get to heaven.

Then later, all of that is because we are in Christ. You know, in today's world, if someone asks you, are you in business? You know what they mean. You understand that.

But it's tragic that today almost no one knows what it means to be in Christ. We sort of like the word saved better here in this Bible Belt Southern Christian culture. You know why we like saved? Because saved doesn't talk about being in him and walking with him and yielding to him and honoring him.

Saved sort of allows me to forget about him and just think about what I don't want negative. Don't want to go to hell. I want to be saved from hell.

I want to be saved from wrath. I want to be saved from judgment. And by the way, the flesh likes that.

Do you know anybody wants to go to hell? No lost person wants to go to hell. So if we're not careful, we can get on one balance of total conversion and spend all our time camping there and not emphasize the uniting to the one that conversion is all about. And that's coming to Christ.

You know, it's almost like we want to be saved from hell and we want to be saved from wrath, but we don't want to get too serious about this in Christ thing until the day comes when there's only two options. When I'm going to leave this world and it's only in Satan in hell or in Christ in heaven, I want to be in Christ then. But until then, just let me pray my prayer, believe my little belief and just run my own life.

I'm saved, but I worry about being in Christ. There's no... The New Testament has no concept of that. That's not Christianity.

You're saved from hell to be in Christ. To walk with Him and fellowship Him with Him and love Him and honor Him and be with Him forever. I guess one way to view this is these are two sides of the same coin.

On the one side of the coin, you're saved from wrath, judgment, hell, Satan, His kingdom. You're saved to be with and in Christ for all eternity. Starting right now.

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