

## Confidence In The Flesh Versus Faith

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Fox News carried an article by mainstream Christian pastor Chris Sonksen titled, "Americans still believe in God. So why do so many of us see church as just optional rental car insurance?" Sadly, this article is also applicable to the greater churches of God. We do not always put our best foot forward and we do not always feel it is necessary to meet together. Quoting from this article:

According to PEW research, 80% of Americans believe in God. They may not agree on theology or church practices, but they believe in a higher power. At the same time, many stats point to how church attendance is decreasing. It seems Americans are leaving the church but not an awareness of God.

Why are believers leaving church but not "faith"? I'm sure there are many reasons but I can't help but wonder if it's an age old problem. As humans we often put unrealistic and unhealthy expectations on things or people. When an expectation is unmet, it leads to hurt. As humans we are built to avoid pain and seek comfort. When the church doesn't meet a person's expectations, it can be easy to give up on the church. The thought is, "I can just do this at home."

Many treat church the same way as rental car insurance. . . it's optional.

With the rise of podcasts and online sermons the pull to attend a service is shrinking. The thought is, "why go to church when I can have instant access to content anytime I want." Not only that, we have access to the Bible ourselves.

At one point in history, a person had to attend church to learn about the Bible. Today you can pull up a Bible on your phone and then

Google any questions you have about it. Unrealistic expectations destroy genuine community when we expect the pastor to be at our beck and call, it is a selfish dream. When we expect church people to be perfect, it is a selfish dream.

Many have unhealthy expectations about the church. It's not perfect. There are issues in every church. There are annoying people. There are people who think differently. There are people in every church that you will not agree with. Instead of having true community, many have left it because it's easier to worship God at home.

The problem is that God did not wire us to be alone. We are truly better together. It's in community that we grow, are challenged, stretched, and inspired to truly live for Jesus. It's messy, difficult, and at times frustrating, but it's so worth it. God works within community. Sure, you can believe in God and not go to church. You can also play sports by yourself, talk to yourself, and high five yourself. Just because it's possible, doesn't mean it's better. Life is meant to live with others in community.

Please turn with me to Galatians 5. Please now notice what the apostle Paul says is necessary to live with others in community. This specific example concerns circumcision. However, the spiritual principle is universal here.

**Galatians 5:5-10** For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

**Galatians 5:12-15** I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off [or it might say, remove themselves]! For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

Paul was quite pointed in that because it is such a serious thing and there are many ways that we can hinder one another. So faith working through love is necessary to live with others in community. But you must be on guard and aware that there are always those who hinder your efforts to obey God. And this contrary influence does not come from God. That is, God does not hinder your obedience.

Turn with me now please to Hebrews 10. But anyone who does hinder your faith and obedience will answer for his own action. For example, you should never allow a friend or acquaintance to talk you into not keeping the Sabbath properly or not attending Sabbath services with the brethren. We also have conflicts between brethren. That is a way that you hinder the whole congregation when you do not bring peace between yourselves. Now, this brings to mind what the apostle Paul wrote to all members of God's church.

**Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Put others first, serve others before yourself, encourage others instead of whining.

What promotes this confidence in the flesh that hinders faith? Turn with me to Romans 10. Now, the challenge to a member of God's church is to acquire so clear an understanding of how the world really works that God's role in our lives becomes obvious, or in other words, seeing and hearing of the world's confidence in the flesh along with its foolishness and repeated failures should strengthen our confidence in the Word of God along with its wisdom and successes. And this helps build faith.

**Romans 10:17** So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Now for another scripture, I Thessalonians 2, verse 13. Please turn there with me. Now the path to knowing God is through the inspired written Word of God, which is a comprehensive blueprint of all reality. This is not a book of stories that many view as nothing but mythology for children or at best for adults with childlike minds. No, it is the majestic and mysterious spiritual truths contained therein.

**I Thessalonians 2:13** For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you receive the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

God's laws are every bit as binding as is say Sir Isaac Newton's famous Law of Gravitation published in 1666, which is to say, they do not *prescribe* as much as they *describe* the laws of God, describe the inevitability of cause and effect over time in human societies. Now, it would be silly to suppose that until the 17th century people were free to float above the countryside like untethered helium balloons until Newton ruthlessly suppressed their freedoms with his oppressive new gravity law. God created gravity in the physical world which can be artificially countered, but God's spiritual laws are immutable and eternal.

Likewise, God's laws are binding whether we wisely accept them as the rules of the game or whether we attempt to temporarily dismiss them with a defiant shake of the fist. It is the difference between living what seems to be an absurd and random existence and living in an ordered world of rules that are never easy but always consistent.

God's laws are designed to do far more than promote decency. They are intended to produce holiness. And if a nation's leaders are hedonistic, the people will become depraved. For the people to be decent, the leaders must be righteous.

Now, without conviction and an ultimate spiritual deliverance by God, it would be hard for hope and optimism to exist. We would all wallow in the gloom and pessimism that now mostly pervades secular left progressivism. They need their safe spaces because they do not know where their

deliverance would come from because they do not believe in God. So they live in a state of fear and the society encourages that state of fear.

Well, let us shift gears here. Please turn to Philippians 3. In the third chapter of Philippians, Paul says that he has learned to count all human confidence and effort as loss that he might win Christ. To state these truths he uses the figure of a balance sheet, showing assets and liabilities, showing pluses and minuses, showing positives and negatives. He says that he has learned to reckon all the assets he had earned before he knew Christ as liabilities and to enter into his new column of assets the name of Jesus Christ alone.

**Philippians 3:3-8** For we are the circumcision [or you could say we are the saints], who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. [Paul speaking] If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so [so then he describes himself and his assets as we continue on]: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

What we see here is Paul totally rejecting his past life and all the things he did good and recognizing the things that he did that were evil. We must realize that human righteousness is nothing when measured against the righteousness of God revealed in Jesus Christ and that God is right to insist upon His standards though.

In the first place, human righteousness falls short of the standards set by God and anything short of those standards is unrighteousness. Righteousness is one of those things like perfection that loses its meaning entirely if you divide it up. Perfection is a whole. Righteousness is the same. You are either completely righteous by God's definition or you are not righteous at all.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus Christ said in Matthew 5:48, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." That is the standard; all fall short of it and falling short of it, they miss it all.

If you have a boat tied up to a dock by a chain that has 10 links in it, you must break only one link to set it adrift. If you have a churning torrent 50 yards down river, the boat will go over it and be destroyed just as easily with one link broken as with them all. It is the same spiritually.

Some break all the links of God's law and we call them criminals or murderers. Other people carefully pry open just one of the links and we try to overlook it since all of us are at least that guilty, but all are adrift and headed toward the torrent. That is what is meant when we say that all are equally unrighteous from God's point of view.

There is a second reason why human righteousness is not adequate when measured against the goodness of God. Human goodness, even at its best, is polluted by sin. So too with human righteousness. We do good things but all of our good deeds, even the best of them, are contaminated by sin. And because sin is there, sin can always lead to death. That is why the noblest ideals and the most sublime ideologies of human beings lead away from God. God must pronounce a curse upon them in order that true righteousness might be established through the work of Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 3:4-8 Paul illustrates these principles from his own experience. Humanly speaking, he had acquired all the assets that anyone could imagine. He was a Jew and the Jews had always had a special place in God's dealing with humanity. He had real advantages in terms of salvation. Paul came to admit that these things had actually kept him from God. He writes,

**Philippians 3:7-8** But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ.

Paul lists seven achievements in these verses and they fall into two categories, those that were inherited and those that were earned. The first of the inherited assets was that Paul had been born into a Jewish family and had been circumcised according to the Jewish law on the eighth day of life. He was not a proselyte who had been circumcised in later life, not an Ishmaelite who was circumcised when he was 13 years old. He was a pure-blooded Jew born of Jewish parents.

In addition, he was an Israelite. Israel is the covenant name, of course, of God's people. And just as the word Jew emphasized their racial origins, so Paul claims to be a member of the covenant people. He was also of the tribe of Benjamin. When civil war came that divided Judah from Israel after the death of Solomon, Benjamin was the one tribe that remained with Judah in the South.

Now, the northern tribes separated from God's revealed religion and set up divisive altars where blood sacrifices were performed in direct violation of Leviticus 17. That chapter says that sacrifices were to be offered only at the great altar in Jerusalem. Benjamin resisted this and remained loyal to the house of David. And Paul took justifiable pride in his ancestry.

Then too, Paul cites the advantages that he had won for himself. First, regarding the law he was a Pharisee. This was a matter of choice. The Pharisees constituted the most faithful of all Jewish sects in their adherence to the law. And Paul writes that he was blameless where the law was concerned. So he had the admiration of all the Jewish people in what he was doing, what he accomplished, and what his birthright was.

Furthermore, Paul was a zealous Pharisee. His zeal is seen in the fact that he was a persecutor of the church. A great big negative to us, but to the Jewish leaders at that time, a major plus. In fact, he was so zealous for the law that he killed people who disagreed with his conception of it.

That is a real list of assets from a human's point of view. But the day came when Paul saw what this was in the sight of the righteous God. It seems that the most important word in the entire third chapter of Philippians is the word that begins verse 7: "but."

That "but" marks Paul's experience on the road to Damascus when Paul first saw Jesus and learned what God's righteousness was. He thought before this that he had attained righteousness by keeping the law. But when he saw Christ, he knew that all his righteousness was as filthy rags. And then whose righteousness did he have?

God works in the human heart. Paul came to the point where he opened his ledger book, he looked at what he had accumulated by inheritance and by his efforts, and reflected that these things kept him from Christ. He then took the entire list and placed it where it belonged: under the list of liabilities, the list of negatives. He called it loss and under assets he wrote: Jesus Christ alone. Notice that he did not count them lost merely for Christianity, but for Christ alone.

Turn with me if you will please to I Corinthians 1. If we were judged righteous, then whose righteousness do we have? Christ is our righteousness. Have you exchanged your assets for Christ? is the question we ask. Or are you trusting in the kind of goodness that will never be accepted by God—the human goodness. If you are, let me warn you that your goodness will take you to the grave. But if you will lay your goodness aside, counting it loss, God will credit Jesus Christ to your account.

**I Corinthians 1:30-31** But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "He who glorifies, let him glory in the Lord."

Flip over a few pages to Philipians 3. God will provide the washing and Christ will be counted as your one sufficient asset forever.

**Philipians 3:9** And be found in Him not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.

Philipians 3:9 is a summary of the book of Romans because it deals with the heart of salvation. In one verse, the biblical principles involved are these. First, there are two kinds of righteousness. The righteousness or the right

doing that comes from man and the righteousness that comes from God. Second, God cannot be satisfied with any righteousness that comes from human beings. Third, God is satisfied with His own righteousness, which He offers freely to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

It is not easy to describe the righteousness of God because it is an aspect of His character and sin limits our knowledge of Him. Yet we know that the righteousness of God is related to the holiness of God and that both are seen in the law of God and in the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ.

The law is not God's righteousness, but it is an expression of it just as a coin is an expression of the die and the mint that produced it. In the law we see the impression of God's purity, His holiness, love, integrity, and perfection.

Now, the righteousness of God is also seen in Jesus Christ. We see God's power in nature. We see God's principles in the law, but we see God's personality in Jesus Christ and it is infused with righteousness. John 8:46 records that Christ said to His enemies, "Can any of you prove Me guilty of sin? And they were silent." A few verses earlier in John 8:29 He had said of God His Father, "I always do what pleases Him."

So it is important to emphasize that the righteousness of God that is seen in the law and in Jesus Christ is different from human righteousness or human right doing. Human beings would like to think that they can attain God's standard of righteousness merely by adding to their own. But since the two kinds of righteousness are different in nature, this is impossible.

Most people believe that all goodness can be placed on a scale. On the bottom are those whose righteousness is on a very low level, murderers, thieves, perverts. These are there are others whose righteousness is a bit higher. These are average citizens. There are a few whose righteousness is very high. Then, so they think, there is God whose righteousness is the highest of all.

In reality, it is not this way. God teaches that there are two kinds of righteousness—His righteousness and human righteousness—and that the

accumulation of human righteousness, no matter how diligent, will never gain anyone eternal life. Salvation is a gift from God. It has conditions, but it is a gift.

The accumulation of human righteousness is a bit like playing Monopoly. The game has colorful money and is enjoyable to play, but only a fool would take Monopoly money and go into town to buy groceries. A different kind of currency is used in the real world. It is the same or similar spiritually. There are people who think they are collecting assets before God when they are only collecting human righteousness. God tells them that they must leave the play currency to deal with His goodness.

Most people will not believe that. Therefore, much of the Bible is given over to showing why human goodness will never please God. The book of Romans is the primary example. The opening chapters of this book probe to the depths of human sin, exposing our spiritual illness, and indicating why human remedies will not heal the mind.

Paul says there are three types of people and each one needs God's righteousness. If you classify people based on their income, you can have as many levels as there are brackets on the Internal Revenue scale. If you classify them by intellect, you get as many points on the Intelligence Quota scale. But if you classify people spiritually, you get only three types and it is these that are discussed in Romans.

The first type of person is described in Romans 1:18-32. This is the person who says the only standards of conduct that I recognize are those that I devise for myself. I determined to live for myself for whatever pleasure I can find. But Paul says that this person needs the truth because he is on a path that is leading him away from God. God describes this path clearly in Romans 1:21-28. Let me just summarize it at this time.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to Him. But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God to

images made to look like mortal men and animals and birds and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over to sexual impurity, to shameful lust, and to a depraved mind.

Please turn with me to II Corinthians 10. The first step along this path is described as a vanity of the imagination that results from turning from God. The word imagination is a translation of a Greek word from which we also get our popular English word "dialogue." It occurs 10 times in the New Testament, each time with a bad connotation. It is that activity of the human personality that exalts its own reasoning against God. In another place, Paul says that this way of thinking is to be resisted by Christians.

**II Corinthians 10:4-5** For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

So in spiritual things we must submit to God's wisdom.

Now, the second step along the path of the person who lives only for himself and by his own standards is that his heart is darkened. God is not only truth, God is light. And when people turn from Him, they walk in darkness just as a person walks in his own shadow when he turns his back to the sun. The farther he gets from the light, the longer the shadow becomes and the darker his journey.

The third step, although they claim to be wise, they became fools. No one who turns to his own reason instead of God's truth and thus has his heart darkened says, "I'm living only by depraved human reasoning and my foolish heart is darkened." He says, "I am becoming wise. It is the believers in Jesus Christ who are foolish." This is acute self-deception. It was actually the way in which Satan induced Eve to sin because he said, "Your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Now turn over to Romans 1, verse 22 please. The fourth and final step along the path of unbelievers is an exchange of the worship of God for the worship of man, which leads to an abasement of human beings themselves.

**Romans 1:22-23** Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creepy things.

You notice there that was included in the summary of verses 21 through 28. But this means that if a person will not allow Jesus Christ to begin to make him like God through grace, that that person will attempt to make God like human beings. If a person will not worship the true God, he will construct something else in God's place and the substitute will become more and more repellent the farther it gets from the holy, just, loving, and sovereign God. This is what we saw happen with the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God. People went on their own, some formed large groups, some formed small groups, and some went on their own individually or by family. And many, many took this path. They created God in their own image so that they would feel comfortable. Very sad.

If you come to a fork while driving down the road and take the wrong turn, the only sensible thing to do is turn around and go back. It is the same spiritually. Some go gently down the road I have just described, never going very far and frequently stopping to fool around with sin. We saw this with many of the children who grew up in the church years ago. Some go down the same road at a terrific speed and are miles away when the others are just beginning to round the first bend. But it is the same road and the cure is identical. All must first stop, then they must turn themselves around and go back.

This is the true meaning of conversion. The immoral needs the gospel because his own way takes him away from God. But that only happens or is only able to happen when God calls a person. Otherwise they continue down that road to perdition.

Now, the second type of person described in Romans who also needs the gospel is the person who leads an ethically superior life. He is the moral person by man's standards and his case is set forth in Romans 2:1-16.

**Romans 2:3-8** And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourselves wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, "who will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath.

**Romans 2:13-15** For not hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things of the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves [I think it is interesting how in business today, through experience, businessmen find that certain ways just work and it is amazing how often those ways that just work are biblical principles. But they do not realize that.], who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.

Perhaps you are like this person. This is the person who would say to Paul, "I'm not like the corrupt person you just described, I do not live only to myself. I pursue high standards. In fact, I pursue the highest standards I know and therefore your call to repentance does not apply to me." Well, Paul's answer to this is, "Yes, it does. It does for two excellent reasons." The first reason is that no matter how high your standards may be, they still fall short of God's standards. And that is the difference between playing with Monopoly money and using real currency. Of course, on a much higher standard. That is a physical example of a spiritual principle. The second reason is that you fall short of your own standards, no matter how high or low they may be.

What is your ethical standard? Maybe your standard is the Sermon on the Mount. Do you live up to that standard? Of course, you do not. In Matthew 5: 48 Jesus said, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father is perfect," and no one is perfect. Perhaps your standard is the Ten Commandments. Do you keep them? Of course not, because you covet things that other people have most of the days of your life and you break many of the other commandments. Also, you may not break the letter of the law, but you break the spirit of the law. Christ says, if you hate someone, you have murdered him in your heart. And so each one of those Ten Commandments has a physical application or a letter of the law application and also, and more importantly, a spiritual application which comes from the heart. And that is what God is interested in, not the outward, but the internal, that comes from the heart.

Is your standard the Golden Rule? If so, you break that because no one always does for the other person what he would like to have done for himself. Perhaps your standard is merely the lowest common denominator of human relationships, the standard of fair play or we may call that partiality. Do you do that? Not always. So you stand condemned by even the lowest of the ethical standards.

Here is a very familiar story for you. One day when King David was on his roof in the heart of the city of Jerusalem, he saw a girl who was bathing on a roof not far away. Her name was Bathsheba. After discovering who she was, David invited her to the palace and had sexual relations with her. But Bathsheba was married and when he discovered she was pregnant, David arranged to have her husband killed in battle so he could marry her. This was a great sin, the greatest sin of David's life, and the time came when God sent the prophet Nathan to him to expose the crime.

Nathan first asked for his judgment on a hypothetical problem. Paraphrased, Nathan said there were two men who owned sheep, one poor and one rich. The rich man had many sheep and the poor man had just one. One day, a stranger came to the house of the rich man seeking hospitality and the rich man did not want to feed him by diminishing his own herd. He therefore took the sheep of the poor man and served it. At this point in the story, David grew angry and declared the man who did this deserves to die. Nathan replied, "You are the man!"

Wow! Can you imagine that? Can you imagine being in David's shoes at that time? David condemned himself to death by his own words. Be careful when you erect a standard of your own, of your righteousness, and say you will live by that. You will be condemned by that standard, whatever it may be. You must clear your mind of the idea that you can earn eternal life and you must admit that you too need God's righteousness.

As I said earlier, eternal life is a gift, but there are conditions.

Now, there is one more type of person discussed in Romans.

**Romans 2:17-23** Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You therefore who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?

This type of person is the religious person. He says, "Yes, I know that all the things you have said are true and that they are true of me. I fall short of those standards, but I'm religious and I place my trust there. I've been baptized, I support the church." But Paul says, "Well, good for you. But you need the gospel of Jesus Christ also because God is not interested in outward things alone—church membership, service, stewardship. He is interested in what is within.

As Samuel searched for the first king of Israel God gave him guidance and established the standard.

**I Samuel 16:7** But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

God knows what is going on within. People look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. God is looking at your heart and mine. And what does He see? Does He see deeds, even religious deeds that are not backed up by a spiritually righteous life within? Or does He see His own righteousness imputed to you and beginning to work its way out in your conduct? Spiritually, you cannot fool God with human righteousness. If you are trusting this, He must say to you as He says to all what Paul tells us in Romans 3.

**Romans 3:10-12** As is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside, they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one."

So you and I must turn from our alleged goodness to God's. That does not mean we do not have to do anything to try to be good. We must, but we must do the spirit of the law as well as the letter of the law.

Paul accepted God's verdict and turned to Him for the righteousness He gives us. Paul says that his desire was to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but having that which is through faith in Christ—righteousness from God by faith.

God's verdict upon the human race includes all people: the hedonist, the moralist, the most religious person, and you, whatever you may be. And it is one that declares all human righteousness unable to satisfy the righteous standards of God. We in God's church have a higher standard to live by because we have God's Holy Spirit to help us to live the right way, to live God's righteousness where the world does not.

You may be feeling the most acute spiritual pain because of it. But you must know that your new sensitivity is the first step in your spiritual recovery. Your recovery will take place completely as you come to God to receive a righteousness that comes from God Himself; and is entirely untainted by sin. And that righteousness comes by faith in Jesus Christ. You must come to God through Him.

**Philippians 3:9** And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.

What is faith? All true teachings of the Word of God must stress that God alone is responsible for the gift of our salvation. But when this is said, anybody may appropriately ask, how then does this apply to me? Since God offers His righteousness to those who lack it, what must I do to receive this righteousness? By what means does this wonderful salvation become mine?

Turn with me, if you will please, to Hebrews 11, verse 6. The answer to all these questions is that God's righteousness becomes yours personally through faith. Remember this is a personal relationship.

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

Paul tells us in Romans 1:17, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

Faith in Christ and righteousness by faith. These phrases speak of the human responsibility of our salvation. Although salvation is a gift of God which cannot be earned, it is conditional on our faith, repentance, obedience, overcoming, worthiness by which we are judged. Sadly, many people are puzzled about this thing called faith, although there is no need to be puzzled by it. On a physical level, on its basic level, faith is simply belief. If you believe in a thing, you have faith in it.

Thus, faith is one of the most common realities of life. It is far more common, for instance, than romantic attraction, artistic insight, exceptional intelligence, and similar things. These things are true for only some people. But faith is a reality that all people experience. Despite this truth, there have been many attempts to discredit faith by turning it into something that is not really faith at all. Every attempt to define faith as believing something you know is not true is an example of this distortion. In this case, faith becomes delusion.

Despite this truth, there have been many attempts to discredit faith by turning it into something that is not really faith at all. And as I have said, this faith becomes delusion. And when one of the many sects that cling to the edge of the truth of true Christianity tries to teach that sin, evil, and sickness do not exist and that faith can overcome them by denying their reality, such faith is not true faith. Those who follow this nonsense will be disappointed both in this life and in the life to come.

Another substitute for faith is gullibility. Gullibility is the attitude of a person who will accept something as true apart from evidence, simply because he earnestly *wishes* it to be true. Rumors of miraculous cures for some generally incurable disease encourage this attitude in many deceived people. But gullibility is not faith either. It is not that God does not heal these incurable diseases, but generally He does not, not at this time. He may very well in the near future.

The most common distortion of faith in our day is the attempt to make belief subjective. This is the faith of existentialism and it is at the heart of all religious feeling that is divorced from the objective truth of Scripture. Against all these distortions the Christian must reply that real faith is far more tangible than this. There is evidence and it is not at all based on a person's individual feelings.

When you drive a car across a bridge, you have faith that the bridge will hold you up. You have faith in the engineers who designed it and the workers who built it and maintain it and the inspectors who guarantee its safety. If you have doubts about the safety of the bridge on any of these counts, you do not drive across it. If you step onto a bus to go home at night you have faith that

the bus is safe, that the driver is an employee of the transportation company, that the sign on the bus is a true indication of where the bus is going. If you buy a ticket to a sports show, you have faith that the show will be held as advertised and that the ticket will gain you admission.

In every one of these examples, faith is believing something on the basis of evidence and then acting on it. This is the basic definition of faith.

By far, the greatest example of basic faith is the way a man and a woman commit themselves to each other in marriage. The man says, "Will you marry me?" And the woman says, "Yes." The whole conversation only takes five words but between two persons who know and trust each other, the words constitute a pledge of faith that will last until death or that should, if the right choice is made. Such faith is personal, very, very personal. So it is no accident that the pledge of a man to a woman and of a woman to a man has been taken in Scripture as an illustration of that bond and faith that exists between a Christian and his Lord.

In Ephesians Paul speaks of marriage as an illustration of God's love for us.

**Ephesians 5:32-33** This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Faith is believing in someone or something and acting upon it. We can believe God like we believe others, but God is absolutely reliable and perfectly believable, unlike human beings. The difference between the kind of faith that people exercise every day and what we might call saving faith is that saving faith is absolutely certain because it is faith in the only one in the universe who is absolutely faithful and who will never break His promise.

James, the Lord's brother wrote,

**James 1:17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Turn with me, if you will please, to I John 1, verse 1. The apostle John was interested in evidence. His gospel speaks of seven types of witnesses to the revelation of God the Father in Jesus Christ. His first epistle begins with a reminder that he speaks as an historical witness.

**I John 1:1** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life.

Well, John ends the epistle with the statement that he has written these things to Christians that they might be certain of their salvation.

**I John 5:13** These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

John has been speaking about the evidence for faith. What is the greatest evidence? John answers that in,

**I John 5:9-10** If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.

What does God most want from us? God wants to be believed. We believe people, we trust people with our lives, our health, our families, our wealth every day of our lives. Why should we not believe God? At the best, people are only partially reliable. They can be trusted partially, but God is *entirely* reliable. He is eminently trustworthy and He is the only personality in the universe whose word is always His bond. And He calls upon us to believe that He gives eternal life to everyone who will believe in His Son. Belief in the Son of God requires that we listen intently to Him and diligently do what He says. Faith without works is a dead faith. So we have to get to work as we are already doing and be even more diligent.

What does God call upon us to believe? Well, first of all, God demands that we admit without reservation that we are less perfect than Himself and that we should therefore be separated from His presence forever. God is perfect and anyone who fails to meet that standard deserves to be separated from God. This principle is hard for the non-Christian to accept, but it should not be because we recognize the principle in many things that are accepted naturally. God has a right to His requirements. They are summed up as perfection. And in Romans 3:23 God says through Paul that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Consequently, human beings deserve separation from God.

The second thing that God asks us to believe is that He loves us in spite of our sin and that He acted in Jesus Christ to remove the penalty of that sin and to restore fellowship between Himself and those who believe, those who He calls.

**Romans 5:8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

There are two parts to this transaction. On the one hand, we are sinners and sin must be punished. God says that Christ died to bear that punishment. The second part is that on the basis of Christ's death, God now comes to us and offers us His righteousness entirely as a free gift. Before we were clothed in sin, now we are clothed in righteousness. Before we were aliens, now we are citizens of heaven. Before we were separated from God, and now we have fellowship with Him and our life here and now is transformed by His presence. That is salvation.

We have already been guaranteed that salvation should we fulfill the conditions. And that is, we must become like Christ and allow Christ's Spirit and God's Spirit in us to transform our lives. But we have to work with Them. If you truly have faith and genuinely repent, then God will remove the spiritual penalty of your sin and enter your heart through His Spirit. God will begin that moment-by-moment transformation of your life that is His perfect will for you and that will lead in God's own time to your final transformation when you will be made like Jesus Christ forever.

There is one more thing to be said. We have considered the initial moment of saving faith when faith first seizes upon the facts of God's salvation. This is of tremendous importance, but we must never think that faith stops there. Faith is not something that you have once and then you have overcome it and you move on. Faith is an aspect of life and it is certainly a continuing aspect of the life of the Christian. Faith is belief and belief grows stronger as it comes to know the nature of the One it trusts.

Turn with me to Hebrews 11. Faith does not start strong, but it is meant to *become* strong. The faith of Abraham is an illustration of this principle. When the call of God came to Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go into a land that he would afterwards inherit, the book of Hebrews says,

**Hebrews 11:8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

This was faith, but such faith did not need to be strong. It was only belief in the ability of God to lead the patriarch into the land. Yet notice what Hebrews goes on to say.

**Hebrews 11:9** By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.

Such faith was stronger because it was belief exercised in the face of famine and danger and the delay in God's complete fulfillment of His promise.

Two verses farther in the chapter speak of the faith through which Sarah received strength to bear her son when she was past the age of childbearing. By this point faith was strong because it had come to know God as the God of miracles. In the last verses, we read of a faith that conquers doubt even in the midst of great emotional suffering and the seeming contradiction of all that had been believed previously.

**Hebrews 11:17-19** By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Faith enables us to accept the godly paradoxes of the Christian life.

Now for a final scripture, please turn with me to Romans 4. Abraham believed that God was able to perform a resurrection, and it is in reference to this last event that God says of Abraham,

**Romans 4:20-21** He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was able to perform.

He was fully convinced. Such is the normal growth of faith. If you are a new Christian, you are somewhere at the beginning of the road that Abraham walked. If you are a more mature Christian, you are farther along that road. Your faith may be weak or strong. But the overriding fact is that your faith is in God the Father and in His Son Jesus Christ.

Come to know God and spend time with Jesus Christ, the Word of God. You will find, as God intends you to find, that your faith will grow on from such strength to strength. The glory of it is that the strength of your faith will lie, not in you, but in faith's object. It will lie in God, in the One you are coming increasingly to know.