

How Shall We Live Part 4 *The Sustaining Power of Faith*

“So, when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: “I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!” — Martin Luther

We have talked about the major societal upheavals every 500 years ... and that we are in the midst of one right now.

We’ve mentioned the Protestant Reformation that began in the early 16th century ... but what you need to understand is that none of these 500 upheavals occurred in a vacuum historically or geographically.

What I mean is this:

When the Protestant Reformation broke out in the 16th century it had been coming for a long time and in all places.

- In 14th century England **John Wycliffe** declared that the Word of God as the supreme source of spiritual authority, denied the “works based” salvation of the Roman Catholic Church, and translated the Bible into the language of the common people... for this, in 1406 he was declared a heretic and his writings were burned and banned.
- In 1406, two Bohemia students brought a copy of those writings to Prague and gave them to **John Hus** who was rector of the University of Prague. The impact was undeniable. He agreed with Wycliffe that the Bible should be translated into the common language of the people and he condemned the wickedness of the Papacy and the false teachings of the Roman Catholic church. For this the church declared him to be a hypocrite and they burned him at the stake in 1415.
- Early in his career as an Augustinian monk **Martin Luther** was rummaging through the stacks in the library and happened upon a volume of sermons by John Huss. Luther would later write. *“I could not understand for what cause they had burnt so great a man as John Huss. He explained the Scriptures with so much gravity and skill.”*
- A year before Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the Church in Wittenberg a Roman Catholic Priest in Switzerland named **Ulrich Zwingli** received a copy of

Erasmus' translation of the New Testament. Soon he began to preach the message of salvation by faith that Martin Luther would be preaching a year later.

A hallmark of the Reformation was the recovery of biblical preaching.

Zwingli's unique contribution was his approach of preaching through whole books of the Bible in a method called "lectio continua."

... Acts, Timothy, Galatians, 1 and 2 Peter, Hebrews, the Gospel of John, and the other Pauline letters before turning then turning to the Old Testament...

The impact of his preaching was so profound that Zurich broke all ties with the Roman Catholic Church and his 67 articles were adopted as the city's official doctrine.

Some of the main points of Zwingli's teachings were:

- The Word of God alone is our authority and that the laws of the land are binding insofar as they agree and do not conflict with the teachings of scripture.
- Christ alone is the head of the church.
- He challenged Catholics by denying that the water of baptism can have the power to wash away sin.
- The bread and juice of communion do not become the body and blood of Jesus, but that Jesus is present in His people when they take it together.

In a world filled with great financial moral, and spiritual corruption in the church, every local city state was in conflict with every other city state, great outbreaks of malaria, syphilis, and the black plague ...

The Reformers were guided by the conviction that the Roman Catholic Church had drifted away from the essential, original teachings of Christianity...

The various reformers all across Europe sought to re-orient Christianity on the original message of Jesus and the early church.

For when man through repentance has come to the knowledge of himself, he finds nothing but utter despair. Hence, wholly distrusting himself, he is forced to take refuge in the mercy of God. Then Christ appears, who has satisfied the divine justice for our trespasses. When once there is faith in Him, then salvation is found. -Zwingli

Faith ... this is what we want to look at today.

What exactly is faith?

The reformers said that faith was made up of three things **knowledge, belief, and trust.**

1. Knowledge is necessary to have faith

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1)

What are the things hoped for?

Is faith a leap in the dark as the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said?

Are the “things hoped for” those wishes you make or dreams you have?

No, the things hoped for are the promises of the Bible to the Christian.

One of the great things about this verse is that Hebrews 11:1 is not the first verse of this book.

In fact, we are given this definition after having first read 10 chapters of explanation about the object of our faith.

Let me see if I can explain...

Look at the word “assurance” and I want us to think about how the book of Hebrews has already used this word... because this word gives us the object of our faith.

The Greek word for “assurance” is *hypostasis* and this is the third time it is used in Hebrews.

For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance (hypostasis) firm until the end, (Heb. 3:14)

... the writer says that we have the assurance of confidence of being partakers together of Christ.

But there is more, because Hebrews begins with another use of this same word.

And He [Christ] is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature (hypostasis), (Heb. 1:3)

So, Christ is being called the exact imprint of the hypostasis of God.

In other words, faith is an assurance (*hypostasis*) that Christ is the exact representation of the nature (*hypostasis*) of God.

This is why Hebrews 11 tells us that Moses valued Christ more than the treasures and pleasures of this world.

In other words, Christ is the object of their faith because Christ was the way that they knew about the hypostasis of the Father

... their assurance was in Him because they knew of Him.

What I'm trying to illustrate is this: In order to have faith you must have knowledge.

You must know what you are to believe in order to believe it.

Saving faith begins by knowing the depth of your sinfulness and the height of God's grace.

... In simpler terms we need to know the law and the gospel.

Knowing the law means seeing the standard which we cannot meet and knowing what a just God must do to those who break the law.

... **Knowing the gospel** means knowing that **faith is an empty hand.**

When we come to Jesus for pardon and justification, we don't bring Him anything in exchange

... we don't need to clean up our act ... make any sacrifices ... do any good deeds.

We come like a beggar would come before a king with nothing but an open hand to receive a gift from the king.

Now here is the problem

We forget about the “empty hand.”

Once the Christian life has begun suddenly it’s all about what you do.

To be a “good Christian” you do this or that or you don’t do this or that.

In other words, “faith alone” turns into “faith plus.”

Because we are born in sin and self-centered this is our natural tendency ...

... but this is the root of all moralism, legalism, and self-righteousness.

This is exactly what happened to Peter in Galatians 2.

I want you to remember this because (just like Peter) every child of God has to fight against this impulse.

What God requires of you is not trying hard, not sincerity, but perfect obedience to all his law.

James says, *“If you break one law, you have broken all of them”* (James 2:10).

This is not just true at the beginning of your Christian life It is true to go to heaven.

Only the perfect will enter heaven.

... If you have ever broken the law even one time in your life, then you are not perfect, and therefore you cannot enter heaven.

... heaven is infinitely holy, and God is infinitely perfect.

The point of this truth is to shatter your sense of self-goodness before a holy God.

The purpose of the law is to break us ... to leave us helpless and begging for mercy, instead of asking, “what can I do?” !

“God have mercy on me a sinner” the publican asked in Luke 18:13.

... That is all we can do.

(1 Cor. 15:1-4) Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

... notice how Paul says the gospel is “received” and by it they are being saved and by continuing to believe they have hope.

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Now what did you do here? NOTHING!!!

This is all about Christ!

... Christ died for our sins; he was buried; he was raised; and he appeared.

This is the Gospel. It is historical, factual, and 100% outside of you or me!

And ... even though perfection is necessary to be in heaven, imperfect people are somehow brought into it without God compromising his holiness or justice!

By grace, God through Jesus Christ has made it possible that our deserved judgment and punishment has been overcome.

... We who were enemies of God can become citizens of the heavenly kingdom and co-inheritors with Jesus Christ.

... not through good works

... not through anything we do but by faith alone!

This is the Knowledge that is necessary for saving faith

2. You must believe the knowledge is true

(Heb. 10:38-39) ³⁸ BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Atheist have knowledge about God ... the problem is they don't believe it is true.

(James 2:19) You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

You don't just need the knowledge of salvation by faith alone ... you have to believe it is true.

Here is where I have a real problem with the "woke" culture in the modern church.

The legalism in the book of Galatians is about people who had knowledge of the truth but didn't believe it ... so they added circumcision.

Legalism is always about filling our hands with something in order to "earn" salvation.

In my youth it was that you had to believe rock music, women wearing pants, going to the theater, was a sin and when you went to church men had to wear a tie and have a KJV bible.

Today the list has changed but it is the same old legalism...

- You have to believe in global warming
- You have to be for social justice
- Don't be against abortion
- It's alright to appropriate the appearances and characteristics of a different gender but you must not appropriate the appearances or characteristics of another culture

The writer of Hebrews says, “My righteous one shall live by faith.”

Who is God’s righteous one? EVERY BELIEVER!

God’s righteous one has only two options, they can either live by faith or draw back.

Regardless of which they do they will still be God’s righteous one.

You’ve seen it happen ... this may have happened (or be happening) in your life.

It is possible, as a child of God, to love the things of this world too much ...

... it is possible to not care for spiritual things

The writer of Hebrews is putting you on notice ... God will not have pleasure in such a life.

... God will not approve of such a life.

I believe this is true of individuals, churches, and Christian ministries.

We have knowledge ... but we don’t believe... and every time we try to put something into the empty hand of faith, we prove that **we do not believe what we say we know.**

3. You must trust the knowledge is true for you

Salvation is not by knowledge or belief alone ... it is by FAITH alone.

(Heb. 12:1-2) Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Let us ... fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith...

Salvation requires the knowledge; you must believe the knowledge ... but even more than that ... you must believe that Jesus had done this FOR YOU!

Do you believe that Jesus has done this for you?

That is the question.

God sent His son, they called Him Jesus;
He came to love, heal and forgive;
He lived and died to buy my pardon,
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives!

That, my friend, is saving faith.

Believing that Christ and all of the riches of his redemption is given to you.

“Faith is chosen by God to be the receiver of salvation, because it does not pretend to create salvation, nor to help in it, but it is content humbly to receive it. Faith is the tongue that begs pardon, and the hand which receives it, but it is not the price which buys it. Faith never makes herself her own plea, she rests all her argument upon the blood of Christ. Faith becomes a good servant to bring the riches of the Lord Jesus Christ into the soul.”—Charles Spurgeon