



Chapter 6:


Our Response

Up to this point in the course, we have described the condition of man and God's initiative in saving man from his dire predicament. In this week's material, we will examine how one personally responds to God's offer of salvation.

INADEQUATE VIEWS OF SALVATION

Before we talk about our proper response, we need to discuss some common misconceptions regarding salvation. In fact, the Bible encourages a self-examination regarding this most important matter.


2 CORINTHIANS 13:5

 ⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.


1. "I was born as a Christian. I was born into a Christian home and have been a Christian my whole life."

Read the following verses.

ROMANS 3:23

 ²³ ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

ACTS 3:19

 ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out

Q. What does the Bible say about the possibility of someone being naturally born a Christian?

2. "I believe everything the Bible says."

Intellectual understanding or belief in God by itself is insufficient for salvation.

JAMES 2:19



¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder

Q. How does James 2:19 demonstrate the inadequacy of mere intellectual belief in God?

As supernatural beings, demons believe the truthfulness of statements such as "Jesus is the Son of God" and "Jesus died for mankind's sins" with much greater certainty than human beings can ever achieve. However, we would all readily agree that their intellectual understanding of Jesus does not necessarily equate to them being saved.



3. "I cried and felt the presence of God in my life."

See James 2:19 again.

Q. What emotional response did the demons have regarding their knowledge of God?


Emotions can be meaningful, but they do not equate with salvation.

4. "I have assurance of salvation."

Many people have been so solidly taught to never doubt their salvation that they think that having assurance is the same thing as being saved. Take a look at the Pharisees (a devout religious group during Jesus' time). They are the prime example of people who were sincere about their assurance of salvation. Tragically, they were sincerely wrong.

Read Matthew 23:13-15.


MATTHEW 23:13-15

 ¹³ But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. ¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

5. "I am very active in the church."

Read Matthew 7:21-23.

MATTHEW 7:21-23

 ²¹ Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Q. What are some of the things that people thought would get them into heaven?





6. "I accepted Jesus as my savior at a church event once, but after that I continued to do whatever I wanted with my life... but I still have a ticket to heaven."

Saying the right things, doing the right things, and even having spiritual experiences do not necessarily mean that you are saved.

Matthew 7:21 says that many who never had a saving relationship with Jesus will call him "Lord, Lord." Jesus also said that you can know a tree by its fruit. In other words, the genuineness of conversion to Christ cannot simply be determined by a few words a person once said but more importantly by an examination of one's life after the decision. A one-time confession, a simple prayer at a retreat or at the end of a gospel presentation, may very well be the point of genuine salvation. Or, it may have been just empty words, fleeting feelings and nothing more. After all, through our emotional highs and lows, all of us have said words in the past that we didn't really mean.

So how can one know if that was a genuine decision? If such a confession was not based on an understanding of the gospel, or if it was not followed by obedience to Christ and a continuous walk with him, then it's doubtful that anything genuine happened at that point.

Q. Do any of the above inadequate views of salvation apply to you?

BIBLICAL VIEWS OF SALVATION

Salvation is a Free Gift

First and foremost, salvation is described in the Bible as a gift from God. Ephesians 2:8 says that becoming saved “is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

A gift, by its nature, can neither be earned nor demanded (as is the case with wages). There is nothing we can do to earn the gift of salvation through good deeds or religious rituals. The gift needs to be simply received with gratitude examination regarding this most important matter.

“Salvation is NOT merely a free admission ticket to heaven.”



Salvation is a Relational Gift

However, when we think of gifts, our minds automatically conjure up nicely wrapped products – items that become ours to keep and use. But, salvation is the gift of a relationship with God. It is not an object that you can grab and walk away with. It is the grant of an undeserved relationship—like an orphan being adopted into a family. When people don’t understand that salvation is a relational gift, they end up treating salvation as some kind of a free admission ticket to heaven that they can put in a bag, and move on with their lives largely unaffected.



This is one of the inadequate views of salvation, where salvation is viewed as something that one acquires upon saying the right prayer. Perhaps it is the subtle connotation of the word “gift” that causes us to objectify salvation in that way. However, when we read the Bible, it becomes clear that salvation is an offer of a continual relationship. And this makes sense since the essence of our sin is the rejection of a love relationship with God. Thus, being saved from that would mean being reconciled to Him relationally.

To illustrate this point, let’s take a look at a story of a king adopting a beggar boy as his heir. One day a good king, as he is traveling throughout the countryside, comes upon a beggar boy. Out of his compassion, the king befriends the boy and asks him to become his adoptive son. The boy looks at the king, and somehow, he believes that the unbelievable offer of the king is not some cruel joke. In response, the boy entrusts his life to the king by climbing aboard the king’s carriage.

At that moment, the boy understands that his beggar days are over. He does not cling onto his beggar rags or his old ways of stealing and begging – as much as these may have served him well in the past. How absurd it would be if the boy accepts the offer, but instead of going with the king to the palace, insists that he prefers his present life and would never dream of parting with his tin can? If that were to happen, in what sense would the boy be accepting this invitation from the king?

From the moment the beggar boy climbs aboard the king's carriage, he enters into a new relationship with the king as his father. Acknowledging this relationship on a daily basis, the beggar boy begins a life of obedience, respect and love for his father, the king. Embracing his new relationship of being an adopted son enables him to adopt the qualities and values of the royal family.

The gift of salvation is a gift of God's love and grace. It is a relational gift, very much like the proposal for marriage or the offer of adoption extended by a gracious king to those who have rebelled against him.



JESUS IN MY PLACE

Specifically, the gift that enables me to become a child of God is the gift of Christ's righteousness attributed to me. His worth is credited to me, and I am clothed in his righteousness. Author J.D. Greear explains:

The gospel is that Christ has suffered the full wrath of God for my sin. Jesus Christ traded places with me, living the perfect life I should have lived, and dying the death I had been condemned to die. Second Corinthians 5:21 says ["For our sake he made him to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"] that He actually became my sin so that I could literally become His righteousness.

Saint Athanasius called this "the great exchange." He took my record, died for it, and offers me His perfect record in return. He took my shameful nakedness to clothe me with His righteousness. When I receive that grace in repentance and faith, full acceptance becomes mine. He lived in my place, and died in my place, and then offered to me a gift. Theologians call that "gift-righteousness."

Jesus' death has paid for every ounce of your sin; His perfect life has now been credited to you. ... Christ's obedience is so spectacular there is nothing we could do to add to it; His death so final that nothing could take away from it. Scripture says that we are not to come into the presence of God timidly or apprehensively but with "boldness." The boldness that comes from knowing that God sees us according to the accomplishments of Christ."¹

JD GREAR, STOP ASKING JESUS INTO YOUR HEART

So, how does one receive this offer of salvation? The Bible uses three terms to describe our response of receiving salvation: repentance, faith and lordship. These are actually three aspects of one decision.



REPENTANCE

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). These are the first words that were preached by Jesus Christ.

See also Acts 2:38 and 3:19.

ACTS 2:38



And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

ACTS 3:19



Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out

Q. What were Jesus' promises upon repentance?

CONFESS THE TRUTH

Think about someone you are close to. There are probably very few secrets between the two of you, making it easy to be fully open and real with that person.

Q. On the flip side, can you feel a sense of closeness with those whom you have deceived or kept a false image in front of? Why not?



Closeness in relationships cannot happen among people who deceive one another or who are in denial of something serious they've done. Truth and confession are necessary for any close relationship.

Imagine that a terrible wrong has been done to you by a friend, but you have made up your mind to forgive that person. However, as you seek to meet with this friend, he keeps avoiding you. Finally you catch up to him face to face. There you are, eager and willing to forgive him and continue the relationship, but he begins to make small talk. You try to bring it up indirectly but he keeps changing the subject. Finally you are forced to directly mention it. And when you do, he flatly denies it.

Notice that no amount of willingness to forgive on your part can overcome a flat refusal to admit the truth. Likewise, God's gracious willingness to forgive must be met by an admission of guilt. Forgiveness can only be conferred when the parties agree on the truth. Avoiding repentance and stubbornly remaining in the realm of falsehood only serves to deprive us of the one source of true fellowship and liberation.



Q. What can you conclude about God's heart toward us from the fact that He invites us to confess and tell the truth about ourselves?

Uttering the truth about ourselves is the first step of repentance. The frank and humble confession – admitting the truth about our sinfulness, the sins that we committed, but more importantly, the sinner that we are – is the key to receiving forgiveness. We find authenticity scary, knowing that full disclosure of ourselves will reveal a lot of ugliness. Yet, deep within each of us is the desire to be genuinely known for who we are. Ironically, we both want and do not want to be truly known. We desire it and fear it. God comes to us already knowing everything about us, with a desire to forgive and love us.

Read Isaiah 1:18 and 1 John 1:8-9.

ISAIAH 1:18



"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

1 JOHN 1:8-9



If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Q. What is the promise given to those who confess their sins?

LUKE 5:31-32

And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

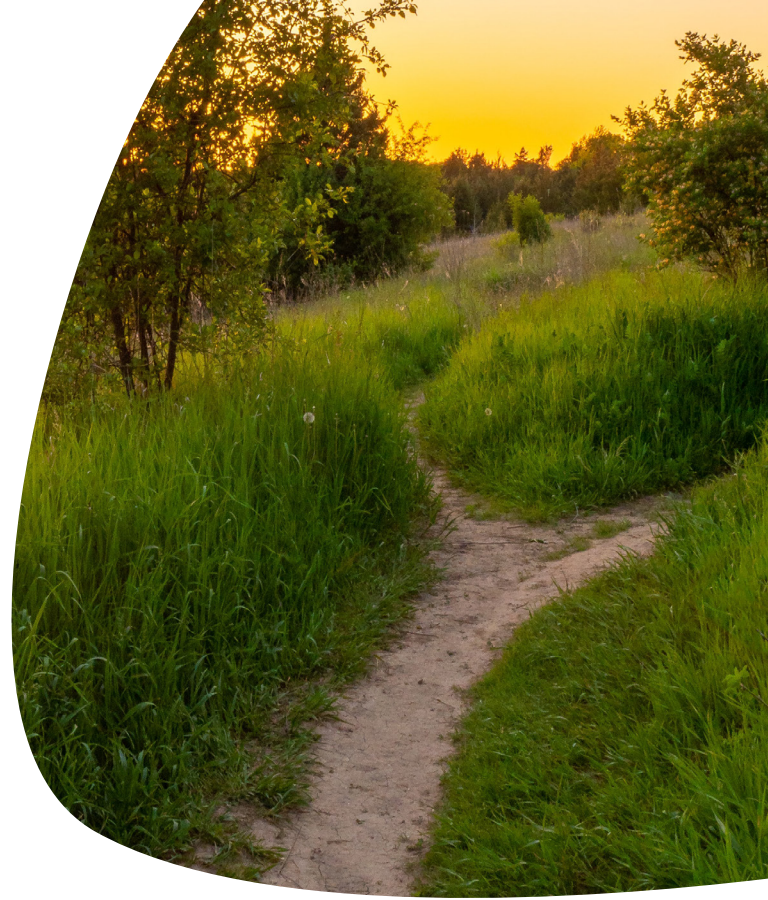
Q. What kind of people did Jesus come to save, according to Luke 5:31-32?

Therefore the question becomes: Who are you? Are you righteous? Do you claim to be without sin? Or are you a sinner?

Then the call to repent is addressed to you. Take your place in the dust at the Savior's feet and acknowledge your guilt. Say, like the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:11-14) and see how quickly He will pardon and bless you.²

D.L. MOODY, THE WAY TO GOD

Q. What truths about yourself would you need to admit to in order to receive God's gracious offer of forgiveness?



MAKE A U-TURN

Repentance, however, is more than the bare confession of sinfulness.

Evangelist D. L. Moody defined it as "right about face!" It involves making a "U-turn" away from a self-directed life and toward a God-directed life.

Further, it involves the whole person (every aspect and part of that person) and brings about a whole new direction and purpose in life. It does not mean fixing a few habits or changing a few plans for the weekend. It means a total change from an old way of life controlled by "you" to a brand new life controlled by Jesus Christ.

Repentance is NOT...

Feeling sorry about our sin. Shedding tears over sin does not equal repentance...Perhaps they are tears of shame, regret or self-pity. Or the embarrassment of being caught. These emotions might eventually lead to repentance, but they are not, in and of themselves, repentance.

Confessing our sin...Many people weep their way through a confession, but go right back to their sin. Their confession is not a “change of mind” about their sin; it’s more of an emotional catharsis...An emotional catharsis may feel redemptive...[but it] cannot reestablish your relationship with God. Only Jesus can do that. Salvation is not about making you feel better, but about actually removing your condemnation before God.

Getting religious...Religious activity can be an attempt to “pay God off” in order to keep Him at a distance or to conceal the true state of our hearts...

Repentance IS...

Not the Absence of Struggle; It’s the Absence of Settled Defiance...[It] is acknowledging that Jesus is Lord of everything as a matter of who He is. Whatever your disagreement with Jesus, He is right and you are wrong. While you may not understand all of His ways yet, you recognize that He makes the rules. Period.

Not Just about Stopping Sin, but Also, Starting to Follow Jesus... Many people interpret repentance as merely stopping bad things, to cease and desist the breaking of the commandments. Jesus, however, called us to be His disciples, which means actively pursuing His agenda and mission... Discipleship is not a passive posture in which we stop a few bad things.³

J.D. GREER, STOP ASKING JESUS INTO YOUR HEART

Jesus told a story called the Prodigal Son, which illustrates the act of repentance. Please read Luke 15:11- 24. In particular, pay attention to what happened in verses 17-20.

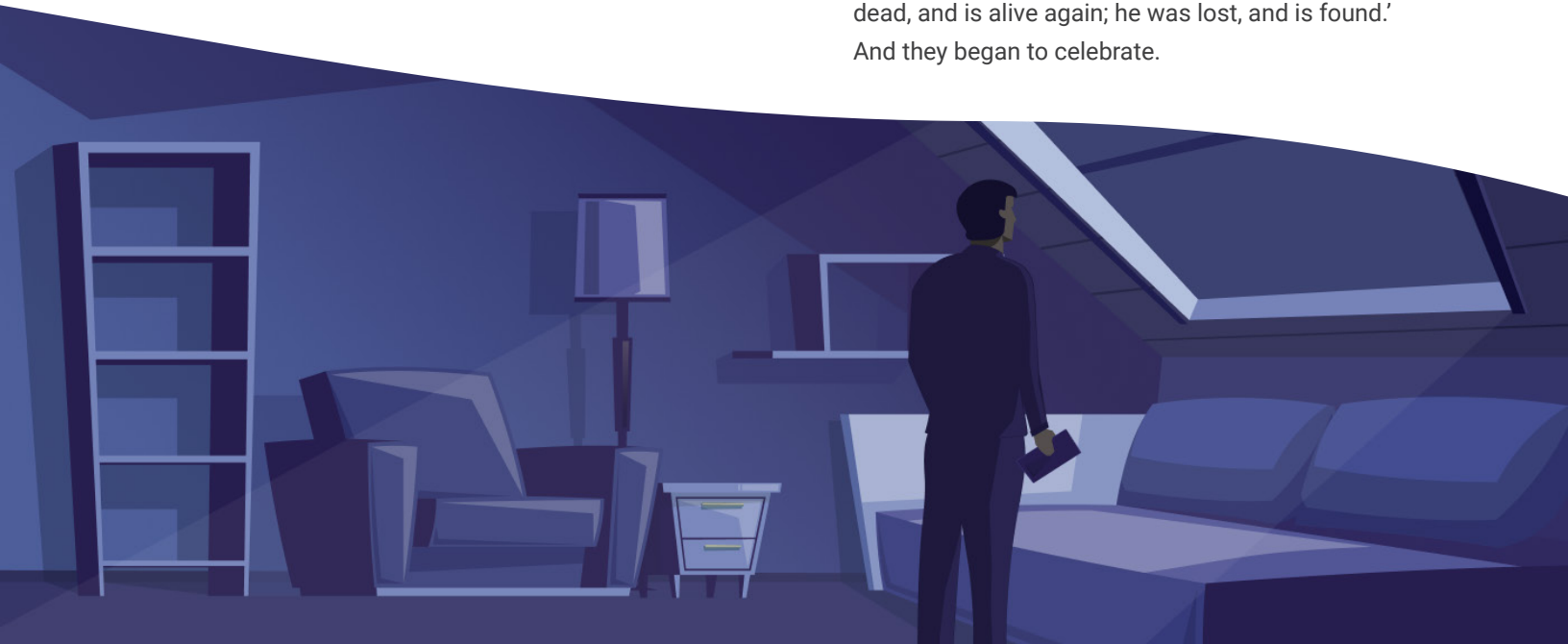
LUKE 15:11-32

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

¹¹ And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.





REPENTANCE IS TOWARD GOD

The story of the prodigal son highlights one of the most important facts about repentance. Repentance is toward God. A repentance, which is a form of self-loathing or a desire for self-improvement, is not really repentance. Forgiveness of sin can only come from Him against whom all sin is ultimately directed. This is a frequent pitfall of those who recognize the ugliness of their sinfulness but who are not yet ready to deal with God. It is as if the prodigal son in the story comes to his senses and realizes that he's in a pigsty, but he just sits there sulking or makes plans to improve, without thinking about his father or going back home.

All sin is sin against God (please review Chapter 5 on this point). The root of all sin is a rebellion against God, and a turning away from Him as God. Since sin is against God, repentance involves recognizing this, saying sorry, and turning back toward God. God and God alone can condemn sin, and therefore He alone can tell us the loving words: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11).

Q. What were the elements of his turn-around?

Intellectual

Emotional

Volitional

The Prodigal Son story also highlights the redeeming quality of human beings that sets them apart from the animals. Even though the son ended up living like an animal, he could not make peace with that fact, and he "came to his senses." The story conveys a very hopeful message: that even in the midst of a pigsty, as human beings we can come to our senses and begin to long for our heavenly Father.

A vertical illustration of a sky and sea scene. The top half shows a dark blue night sky with white stars and a large, bright, white, cloud-like shape. The bottom half shows a teal sea with several small, dark, fish-like shapes swimming. The entire scene is framed by a white, curved border on the right side.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who
fear him;

[illegible]

FAITH

The three aspects of salvation (repentance, faith and lordship) are not three distinct ideas, but they are an integrated whole, such that each aspect would not make any sense without the others.

Implicit in our discussion of salvation is faith in God. A turning from sin is not possible unless there is a trust in God to whom you are turning. It would be nonsensical to talk of repentance (making a U-turn) and not trust the God that you're turning toward.

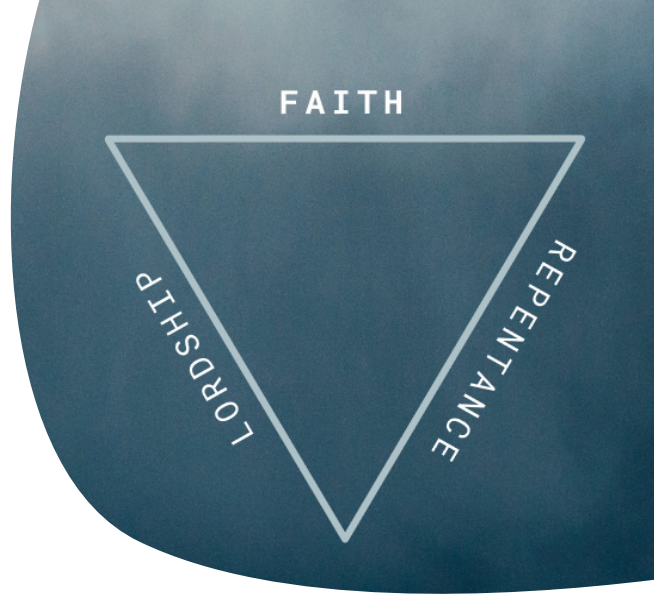
Man's fallen state began when Adam and Eve decided not to trust in God's words and His generosity. They began to entertain the thought that God was holding something back from them, and decided to trust their own judgment in defiantly taking the forbidden fruit. Thus, faith represents a reversal of the Fall. It is the re-establishing of that lost trust relationship with God.

WHAT DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE?

We hold to many beliefs about many facts: we believe that there are other planets in the solar system, and believe in the benefits of flossing regularly. But we hold to these beliefs only casually; they do not anchor our lives in any significant way. Likewise, a person could just as lightly claim that he believes that he is a sinner, that Jesus is the Son of God, and that he died and rose again. However, let us think for a moment: does it make sense for someone to hold such beliefs "lightly," without having these truths drastically affect his or her life?

Imagine that a person claimed that he believes that the building that he's currently in is about to collapse. But you observe that this person is spending his time decorating his wall and re-organizing his desk.

How would you assess this person's "belief"? What might be going on internally that causes such an inconsistency?



The Christian is one who believes the gospel as the most central truth in his life, so that he aligns his life and actions according to that truth. This is called faith. In fact, given the scope encompassed by the gospel, and the personal stakes involved—eternity!—the message is simply too important for anyone to merely believe it without becoming entirely engaged in it and finding his life's core meaning and identity utterly bound up with it.

Examine your own faith. Is your "faith" just head-knowledge or is it acted out in a life that relies on God? Is it merely casual belief, or is it faith?

HOW MUCH FAITH?

We can be intimidated by the word "faith," mistakenly thinking that we must somehow conjure up certainty of belief out of thin air. Some of us find it easy to have a high degree of certainty about things based on a few facts; others of us can amass a lot of evidence but only manage to draw tentative conclusions from them. However, it is not the quantity of faith that is important, but who or what we have faith in. Again, this is why faith should be properly understood as trust.



Faith must have an object. When it comes to salvation, that object is Jesus Christ. If you were to take Jesus Christ away, then you wouldn't have salvation. The object is what gives value to the faith.

Let's say you see a frozen lake. It's only about a quarter of an inch thick, but if you really believe the ice will hold you, will it? Of course not. You can have all the faith in the world, but if the object of your faith, the ice, is unreliable, you will fall into the lake.

But suppose the ice is two feet thick. You, however, have little faith. You say, "I really don't know if I could walk out there. But by faith, I guess I'll do it." Your faith is small, but the object is trustworthy. You go out on the ice trembling, but the ice holds you.

This comes back to who Jesus is. If He is who He claimed to be – the divine and human Son of God – and I exercise faith in Him, placing my trust in Him as Savior and Lord, then I am saved. I have a relationship with God. My salvation is not based on my faith; it is based on who Jesus Christ is and what He did on the cross. Jesus is the basis of my salvation.⁴

JOSH MCDOWELL, FALSE CONCEPT OF FAITH

TRUST – THE KEY TO RELATIONSHIPS

We can trust the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the "thick ice," the solid rock who will not let us sink. So we do not need to try to conjure up a certain amount of "faith." We only need faith enough to trust him for our salvation and take a step. When we place our faith in Jesus for our salvation, it means that we believe he is the divine son of God, that he died and rose for my sins, and that God will forgive me and receive me because of Jesus.

Trust is the indispensable ingredient in every relationship. We call it by different names—love, in families; loyalty, in friendships—but, in essence, all relationships are built on trust. God beckons us to place our trust in him, for trust is the baseline of all of our relationships, including our relationship with God.



LORDSHIP

The third concept the Bible uses to refer to salvation is the idea of submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This should not be a new concept, if you think about the implications of faith and repentance. If we repent, make a U-turn and trust Jesus with our lives, then it only makes sense that we obey Jesus as our Lord.

SAVIOR BUT NOT LORD?

When the Bible talks about receiving Jesus, it always means receiving Jesus as Savior AND Lord. As theologian John Stott laments:

The astonishing idea is current in some circles today that we can enjoy the benefits of Christ's salvation without accepting the challenge of His sovereign lordship. Such an unbalanced notion is not to be found in the New Testament.

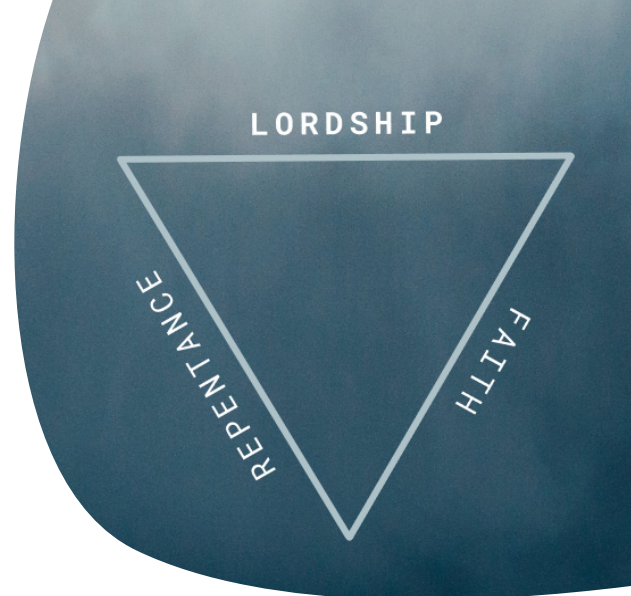
"Jesus is Lord" is the earliest known formulation of the creed of Christians. In days when imperial Rome was pressing its citizens to say "Caesar is Lord" these words had a dangerous flavor. But Christians did not flinch. They could not give Caesar their first allegiance, because they had already given it to the Emperor Jesus.⁵

JOHN STOTT, BASIC CHRISTIANITY, P. 112

Some people think of "being a Christian" in an extremely compartmentalized way. When it comes to leisure activities, they make choices a certain way. When it comes to sexual ethics, marriage, career, and future, they have another way of thinking. And then when it comes to the category of religion, they check the box "Christian." This makes Jesus out to be a religious figurehead, not the reigning Lord over their lives.

To make Christ Lord is to bring every department of our public and private lives under His control. What is certain is that God calls every Christian to "ministry," that is, to service, to be the servant of other people for the sake of Christ. No Christian can live for himself any longer.⁶

JOHN STOTT, BASIC CHRISTIANITY, P. 113



The Bible does not give us an option to receive Jesus as Savior only and not as Lord.


The truth is that Jesus is Lord.

The truth is that God is the Creator and therefore owns all of me; he has a legitimate and total claim over all that I am and all that I have. The truth is that God is not my genie or my slave, or an occasional idol I need to bow to so that things will go smoothly for me. To receive Jesus in any other way would be equivalent to conjuring up some false picture of Jesus in our minds and receiving that lie rather than Jesus himself.

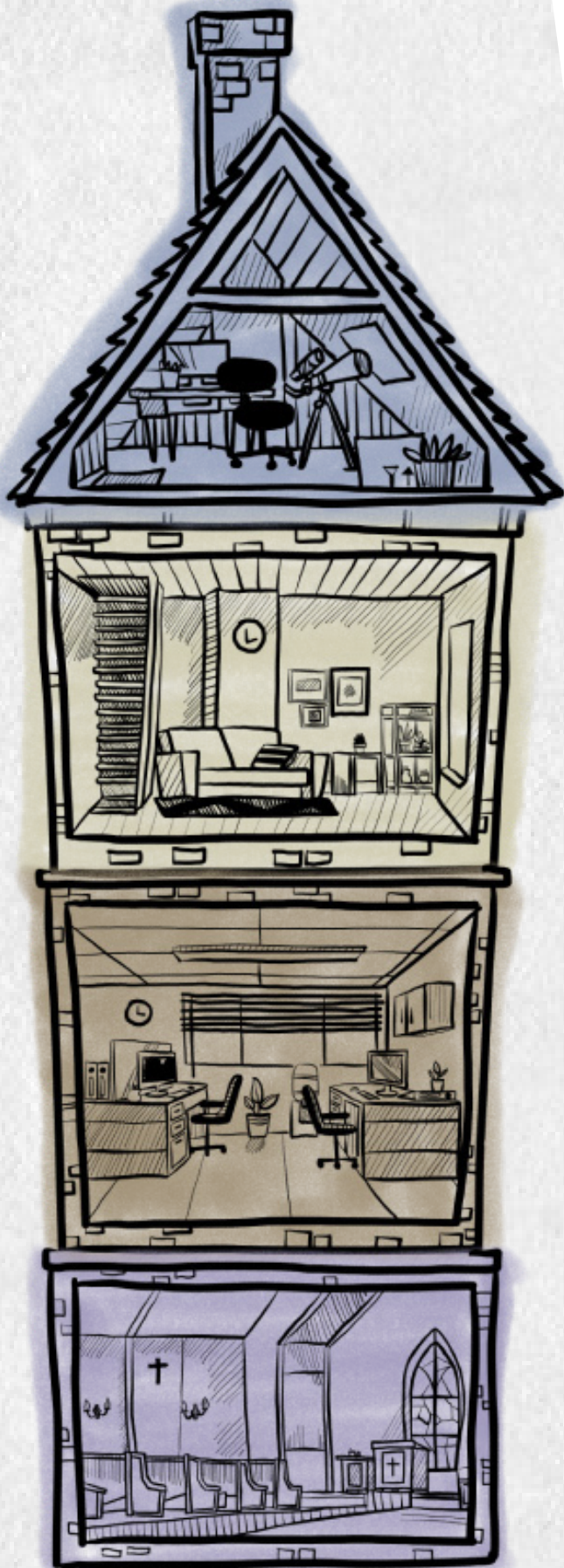
FOLLOW ME

Let's look at Luke 9:23.

LUKE 9:23

 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

What does this verse say about anyone who wants to follow Jesus?



When Jesus said “take up your cross” to them, his disciples understood that those who wish to come after him must die to themselves. They must no longer run their own lives.

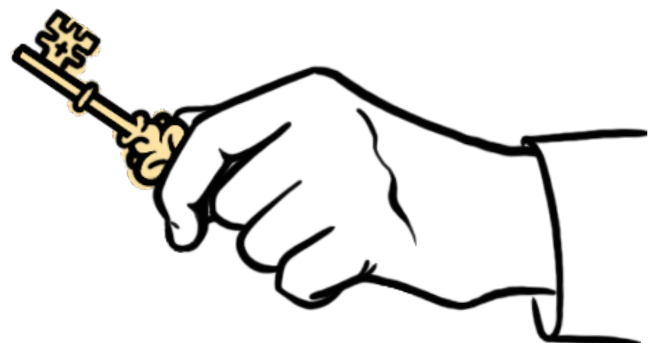
John Stott elaborates on what it means to follow Jesus:

Now there can be no following without a previous forsaking. *To follow Christ is to renounce all lesser loyalties [...]* There must be a renunciation of self. In order to follow Christ we must not only forsake isolated sins, but renounce the very principle of self-will which lies at the root of every act of sin. **To follow Christ is to surrender to Him the rights over our own lives. It is to abdicate the throne of our heart and to pay homage to Him as our King [...]** So in order to follow Christ we have to deny ourselves, to crucify ourselves, to lose ourselves. The full, inexorable demand of Jesus Christ is now laid bare. He does not call us to a sloppy half-heartedness, but to a vigorous, absolute commitment. He calls us to make Him our Lord.⁷

JOHN STOTT, BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Another way to put this is that to be saved, you must **be willing to turn over the control of your life to Jesus Christ.**

Again, this is to reverse the Fall, in which Adam and Eve rejected God’s rule. We do this only when we dethrone ourselves from the center and enthrone Jesus as King and Lord over our lives. Our sinful nature will balk at this, because it demands that we remain the lord over our lives. But the gospel is clear: Jesus needs to be Lord, the ultimate authority, and we need to follow him. That means his preferences take priority over our preferences, his morality over ours, and what he values in life will need to become what we value.





Some people's notion of following Jesus is that they try to "balance" following him, allowing him to be Lord temporarily in certain areas while fundamentally still serving the self. C.S. Lewis addresses such a person:

Christ says "Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want YOU. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours." ⁸

C.S. LEWIS, MERE CHRISTIANITY

Once we submit to the Lordship of Jesus, we enter into a relationship with him, uproot ourselves from this self-driven life and become planted in Christ. Then, and only then, will our lives begin to genuinely flourish as we return to the original design God had intended for mankind.

OUR CHOICE

Repentance, Faith and Lordship – they really all refer to the same thing. When we realize that our self-directed rebellion is sinning against God and leading us to eternal separation from Him, we must acknowledge our wrong [Repent], turn to the Lord in trust [Faith], and follow Jesus [Lordship]. They are three different expressions of the one reality.

Perhaps you have now come to understand what is meant by "salvation." Perhaps you've had some serious misconceptions cleared up about what it means to be a Christian. The question that you face now is the question that Pilate asked: "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:22).

Each person has to decide for himself what his response to Jesus Christ will be. You can receive Him as Savior and Lord or you can reject Him. God will not force you to love Him. The choice has always been left to each individual.

So what are some choices that can possibly be made today?

If you have never decided to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, you can decide to do so.

If you grew up in a Christian environment but never made a personal decision to follow Jesus, you can do so and actually make this most important decision your own. If you had a wrong understanding of salvation and want to clarify your identity, rather than try to sort out what happened in the past, the best approach would be to settle it by making a clear personal commitment today.

Perhaps you're not ready to make a decision to become a Christian, but you've come to realize that Christianity is worth seeking. If that's the case, you can decide to seek God seriously.

What decision do you need to make?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:2.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:2

For he says,

“In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is
the day of salvation.

Why is there a sense of urgency in this passage? It is because although we may feel that we have plenty of time left in our lives, unfortunately, life does not afford us many opportunities to think clearly. We know from experience that moments of clarity about life are few and far between. So the Bible implores us to seize the precious times of clarity that we do have.

However, that is not to say that we should make a hasty decision. Before you rush such a decision, consider all that we have discussed. Even Jesus warned his would-be followers to think carefully and count the cost before they chose to follow Him.

COUNT THE COST**LUKE 14:28-31**

²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?



John Stott explains:

If then, you suffer from moral anemia, take my advice and steer clear of Christianity. If you want to live a life of easy-going self-indulgence, whatever you do, do not become a Christian. But if you want a life of self-discovery, deeply satisfying to the nature God has given you; if you want a life of adventure in which you have the privilege of serving him and your fellow men; if you want a life in which to express something of the overwhelming gratitude you are beginning to feel for him who died for you, then I would urge you to yield your life, without reserve and without delay, to your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.⁹

JOHN STOTT, BASIC CHRISTIANITY

While the Christian life is certainly not a bed of roses, it is the most meaningful and full life there is. Jesus described it as “abundant life.” It is a life of being in profound peace amidst tribulation. It is finally arriving home; it is achieving for the first time your original design. It is liberation, healing, freedom and joy. It is having an eternal purpose so much larger than your life that it calls forth from you your very best and highest.

Yet, we often have trouble conceiving of a relationship with God, or thinking of eternal life along with all its implications. We find ourselves in the predicament of a small girl for whom the loftier tastes are foreign, who,

upon being told of a great banquet can only ask, "Is there chocolate there?" Or, like a caterpillar who can only conceive of the life of a butterfly chiefly in negatives: the absence of crawling, the absence of chewing on leaves, etc. We, too, being impoverished by sin and trapped in our egos, often conceive of the abundant life in Christ only in terms of its absences.

If the poor girl's palate is ever going to be initiated into the delights of the banquet, she'll have to trust the testimony of her parents who say it really is better to feast at the table than to clutch onto her sweets. She will have to trust that whatever joy she gets from her chocolates is a cheap imitation to the robust flavors of the banquet table. And trusting, she'll have to let go of the chocolates.

The astonishing paradox of Christ's teaching and of Christian experience is this: if we lose ourselves in following Christ, we actually find ourselves. True self-denial is true self- discovery. To live for ourselves is insanity and suicide; to live for God and for man is wisdom and life indeed. We do not begin to find ourselves until we have become willing to lose ourselves in the service of Christ and of our fellows.¹⁰

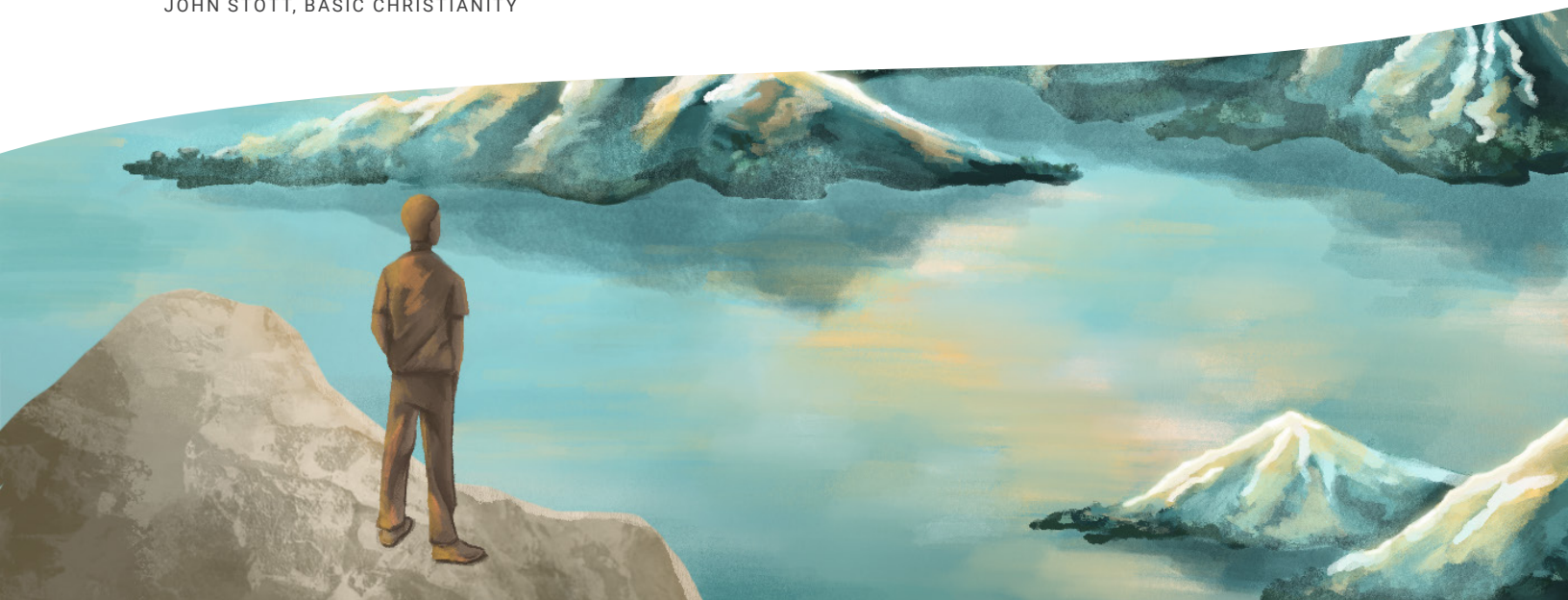
JOHN STOTT, BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Jesus draws a stark contrast between the two kinds of lives: life lived for the self and life lived for Jesus. To refrain from choosing one would be the same as choosing the other.

We cannot remain neutral. Nor can we drift into Christianity. Nor can anybody else settle the matter for us. We must decide for ourselves.¹¹

JOHN STOTT, BASIC CHRISTIANITY

What is your personal response to this week's material?

This image shows a full page of blank handwriting practice paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal blue lines across the entire page, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The lines are consistent in color and thickness throughout.

Endnotes

- 1 Greear, J.D. Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group.
- 2 Moody, D.L. The Way to God. Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2010.
- 3 Greear, J.D. Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group.
- 4 McDowell, Josh. Practical Christianity. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986.
- 5 Stott, John. Basic Christianity. Downers Grover, IL: IVP Books, 2008.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Lewis, C.S. Mere Christianity. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2001.
- 9 Stott, John. Basic Christianity. Downers Grover, IL: IVP Books, 2008.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.

