

The Gospel of John (119)

All people begin their physical life in spiritual death, and many of them live and die in that condition, and afterward enter a Christless eternity. But there are those, thankfully so, whom God brings out of spiritual death to experience spiritual life. To them God imparts eternal life. Today, in concluding our study of John 20, we will read that God brings people to experience and enjoy everlasting life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Last Lord's Day we were addressing John's account of Jesus appearing to His eleven disciples on the second Sunday evening after His resurrection from the dead. Thomas was not present on the first occasion Jesus had appeared to them on that first Lord's Day. But Thomas was present on the second occasion, the evening of the second Lord's Day. The disciples had told him that they had seen and spoken with Jesus who had risen from the dead. But Thomas did not believe their witness. He had declared to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." But shortly after the Lord appeared to His disciples on the second occasion, Jesus immediately addressed unbelieving Thomas, convincing him that He had indeed risen from the dead. Thomas then confessed his faith that Jesus was his Lord and his God. Let us read of this again, beginning with verse 26 in John 20 and continue through the end of the chapter.

²⁶And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" ²⁷Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

²⁸And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)

The outline that we have employed of John 20:19 through 26 has 3 major divisions:

- I. Jesus appeared to ten of His apostles (vs. 19-23)
- II. Jesus appeared again to His apostles, including Thomas (vs. 24-31)
- III. John gave a pronouncement regarding the signs of Jesus and the limited record he had provided of them in his Gospel (vs. 30-31).

We have already addressed the following:

- II. Jesus appeared again to His apostles, including Thomas (vs. 24-31)
 - A. The absence of Thomas from their first meeting (vs. 24, 25)
 - B. Jesus again appeared to them and again pronounced to them the peace of God (v. 26)

Let us now consider that...

C. Jesus addressed Thomas directly and he responded to Jesus in faith (vs. 27-28)

²⁷Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

²⁸And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Thomas had missed the first occasion when Jesus had appeared to the disciples. Even though he had refused to believe the witness of his friends that Jesus had risen from the dead, it would seem that that he did not want to miss the next occasion that they probably expected Him to appear to them. The disciples had again gathered on the evening of the first day of the week—the Lord’s Day--and Jesus indeed appeared to them again. It was as the earlier event, even though the door to their room was locked, Jesus suddenly stood in the middle of them.

We read in **verse 26**, “*Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’*” This is the third time in which Jesus assured them of “peace” (vs. 19, 21, and here, v. 26). He assured them that all was well between God and them--His disciples. He could pronounce peace to them, for He had secured peace for them. He obtained peace with God on their behalf through His death which atoned for their sin. And so it is that you, too, are at peace with God and He is at peace with you through faith in Jesus Christ if you are His disciple. Romans 5:1 and 2 state this reality:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, ***we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Here Jesus was, still on earth in His resurrected body. Heaven would have readily received Him and myriads of saints and angels would have sung praises upon His entrance into heaven and upon Him formally receiving His authority as King from His Father. His full glorification would occur not many days after His post-resurrection appearances to His disciples. Daniel 7:13 and 14 had prophesied of this event; Revelation 5 recorded this event. The same John that wrote this fourth Gospel later “saw” and described this event. When John had been taken into heaven, he beheld this scene:

Now when He (Jesus Christ) had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
¹⁰And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth.”

¹¹Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, ¹²saying with a loud voice:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

¹³And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

¹⁴Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever. (Rev. 5:8-14)

This is what awaited the Lord Jesus when He would soon ascend to His Father to receive the regal authority to reign over His kingdom. But before us in John 20, we read of Jesus, soon to be glorified, standing in the midst of His eleven apostles, about to convince one of them that it was indeed He, Jesus, who had risen from the dead. Jesus would forestall His glorification in the heavenly throne room, so that He could be with His disciples, while they still cowering together in a locked room. He desired to assure them of their state of peace with God. But this is true of our Lord in all of His dealings with His people. Jesus Christ was always concerned most and delighted most not in bringing glory to Himself, but in bringing blessing to others, blessing to them for whom He had lived and died, and on whose behalf He would soon reign.

But upon His appearing to His disciples, Jesus almost immediately turned to Thomas and addressed him. Here was one of them who had not yet believed. Jesus would correct this, bringing Thomas to full faith as He had His other disciples.

By our Lord's words He revealed that He knew full well what had transpired between Thomas and the other disciples, when he had refused to believe their testimony. Jesus repeated Thomas' very words of unbelief that he had spoken to the others the week before. Jesus confronted Thomas to bring forth faith from him. But in encouraging Thomas there is an implied rebuke as well. Thomas was probably shamed in a measure, and probably humbled as well. Personal humility often accompanies divine blessing.

And so it is, as the Lord knew of Thomas' failings, so our Lord knows all of our deficiencies, defections, and our expressions of unbelief, and of our little and weak faith in Him. Jesus has heard every word of your unbelief spoken. He has "read" every evil and wretched thought of your mind and the illicit affections of your heart. And He has His ways of revealing you to you, your weakness and failings. But again, Jesus was wonderfully condescending to Thomas. He did not rebuke him overtly, but He dealt with him tenderly with the purpose to lead him to full faith in Him as his resurrected Lord and God. And Jesus so deals with you and me, tenderly restoring us after we falter and stumble, that is, if we are true believers, true committed disciples of Him.

Jesus said to Thomas in **verse 27**, "*Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.*" So the Lord would affirm Himself to you, even if you are doubting, even as He did here for doubting Thomas, bringing him to place his full faith in Him as Savior. Jesus Christ is a gracious and merciful Savior of sinners. It is prophesied of Him in Isaiah 42 and stated of Him in Matthew 12,

He will not quarrel nor cry out,
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.
A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench.¹

And it is manifested here before us. He is gracious and forgiving, even as He corrects us and restores us. And we are to do the same. We "have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak" (Rom. 15:1). But if and when we do so, we only do what the Lord Jesus always does for you and me, and did here for Thomas.

Jesus gave Thomas permission to touch His nail-pierced hands, to thrust his hand into His side where the Roman spear had pierced Him. And apparently even while Thomas was about to do so, Jesus said, "Be not faithless but believing." John actually does not tell us if Thomas did so. Whether he did or not we do not know. But I suspect that at this point Thomas did not see the need. We read in **verse 28**, "*And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and My God.'*" And with that confession...

¹ Cf. Isa. 42:1-4 and Matt. 12:18-21

D. Jesus pronounced those as “blessed”, who believe apart from seeing (v. 29)

We read in verse 29, “*Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’*” You and I have not seen Jesus, except with the eye of faith. Jesus declared that we who believe are more blessed than Thomas, for his “faith” was based on sight, what his physical eyes beheld. Faith is the instrument through which God brings sinners to experience the forgiveness of their sins and assures them of their future inheritance of eternal life. But where Thomas had refused to believe the witness of his fellow apostles, we have and continue to believe their witness, which is recorded for us in the New Testament. Jesus pronounced you to be “blessed”, which is a word that describes a right and secure saving relationship with God through Him. Therefore the peace that Jesus pronounced to them on these two occasions in John 20, is assured to you and me as His disciples. Again, Romans 5:1 and 2 read,

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

We now move on to verses 30 and 31 of John 20, in which...

III. John gave a pronouncement regarding the signs of Jesus and the limited record he had provided of them in his Gospel (vs. 30-31).

We read in these verses John’s declaration of his purpose for writing this fourth Gospel and why he chose what he recorded toward accomplishing his purpose. John wrote,

³⁰And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)

A. A word about the word, “sign”

John wrote, “*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples*” (v. 30a). We have seen this word, “sign”, in a number of places in this Gospel. The words, “sign” and “signs”, which are references to the miracles performed by Jesus, occur 16 times in this Gospel. There are 6 specific signs that John identifies. They include the following:

1. Jesus turned water into wine (2:1-11).
2. Jesus healed a nobleman’s son (4:43-54).
3. Jesus healed a lame man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-11).
4. Jesus fed the 5,000 (6:1-15)
5. Jesus gave sight to a man born blind (9:1-41)
6. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (11:1-57)

It is generally accepted that John recorded a total of 7 signs, which would be the number signifying fullness or completion that is so common in the Scriptures. But there is difference of opinion among Johannean scholars as to what should be regarded the seventh sign. Actually, it seems to be quite clear as to the identification of the seventh sign. In John 2:18ff we have this interchange between Jesus and unbelieving Jewish leaders:

¹⁸So the Jews answered and said to Him, “*What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?*”

¹⁹Jesus answered and said to them, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*”

²⁰Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

²¹But He was speaking of the temple of His body. ²²Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said. (John 2:18-22)

The Jews asked for a sign. Jesus told them of the sign that would be shown them. It is clear that *the seventh sign was the Lord’s crucifixion and resurrection from the dead.*

But John declared here in verse 30a that Jesus had done “many other signs in the presence of His disciples.” They were convinced by all these signs, with this seventh sign as the culmination of confirming proof. Thomas seemed to be the one hold out, until now. But with his confession they all had come to believe Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. This leads us to consider specifically...

B. A word about the purpose for the signs that John had chosen to set before his readers.

Again, John wrote, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; *but these are written that you may believe...*” John chose these signs specifically, which he, or rather the Holy Spirit, determined were sufficient to lead people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Through the record of these signs they could come to acknowledge and believe in the identity and the authority of Jesus Christ, to which these signs testified.

Faith is at the heart of a relationship with God. It is the instrument that God uses to bring His people to know Him and to receive the benefits of His promises in Jesus Christ. Through faith comes forgiveness of sins. Through faith we come into a state of adoption as His children (cf. Gal. 3:26). Through faith we experience deliverance from the power of sin in our lives. Through faith we receive God’s power to enable us to fulfil His will in our lives. True Christians are ones who have true faith, have come to Jesus Christ in faith, who live by their faith in Him and continue in faith until they die. Biblically prescribed and defined faith is the only way that anyone can become pleasing to God. Hebrews 11:3 declares, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

But what is true faith and how can it be distinguished from phony faith that does not save the sinner from damnation? Here is a good description of what the Bible sets forth as true faith:

Faith cannot be defined in subjective terms, as a feeling or optimistic decision. Neither is it a passive orthodoxy. Faith is a response, directed toward an object and defined by what is believed. Christian faith is trust in the eternal God and His promises secured by Jesus Christ. It is called forth by the gospel as the gospel is made understandable through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. Christian faith is a personal act, involving the mind, heart, and will, just as it is directed to a personal God, and not an idol or an idea.²

It is through faith alone that we come into the state of justification by and before God. The unbeliever is guilty before God for his sin, both his propensity to sin and all of his individual acts of sin. But upon (true) faith in Jesus Christ he immediately comes into a state of peace with God, his sins having been pardoned—past, present, and future sins. The believer is declared and regarded to be as righteous as the Son of God Himself, for the gift of Christ’s righteousness has been accounted (reckoned) to be his. He is forever secure in Christ, for he is now alive and his faith in Christ that moves him to follow Christ, substantiates the reality of his present spiritual life.

Everything about our knowledge of God and of our relationship with God is wrapped up in this matter of faith. Through this means, God takes away any credit (glory) from the creature, and shows forth His will and in all of His dealings with His people. Paul wrote of this with respect to our justification before God through faith that it removes any ground of boasting on our part. **Romans 3:27** and **28** read,

² R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 1,962.

²⁷Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. (Rom. 3:27f)

Here Paul asserted some implications drawn from the truth of God's free justification of sinners by grace through faith. Paul stated that as a result of being freely justified through faith alone, the believer is to be humble, not assuming any personal credit, or have any thoughts of any privilege based on what he has done, for what he has of God was received wholly due to the grace of God. Verse 27 reads, "Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith." If we were saved through our own works, then we would have reason to think more highly of ourselves than of those who did not work for their salvation. We would think that we earned God's favor, in that we had indebted God to be gracious to us. But faith in something that someone else has done for us removes any basis of self-exaltation. The very essence of the gospel as taught in the Holy Scriptures promotes humility before God and others, and gratefulness to God alone. The law or principle of faith is the means God uses to save His people so as to prevent their taking credit for anything they receive from God. As Paul wrote elsewhere, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8f). He wrote to Christians,

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 glories, let him glory in the LORD." (1 Cor. 1:30f)

Let us return to our passage in John's Gospel

C. What is it that John desired His readers to believe?

We again read verses 30 and 31:

³⁰And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe *that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)

First, we read that John selected the signs that he had recounted in his Gospel in order to lead his readers to believe...

1. That Jesus is "the Christ"

Jesus is the Christ, that is, the Anointed One, which is the meaning of the word "Christ" in Greek and "Messiah" in Hebrew. In the Old Testament, when a person (or thing) was anointed with oil, it indicated that person belonged to God and would be an instrument in God's hand to work on His behalf. Priests were anointed because they ministered before the Lord. Prophets were anointed because they spoke on behalf of God. Judges and Kings were anointed because they administered justice on behalf of God. In the Old Testament we see frequently the expressions "the Lord's anointed" and "My anointed" to refer to God's servants. That Jesus is "the Christ" means that God His Father had called and equipped Him to secure the redemption of His people. Jesus of Nazareth was called, commissioned, and sent into the world to accomplish God's work of salvation in you, if you come to Him. This is indeed a cause of great joy. You have no power to make yourself acceptable before God, nor does anyone other than this Man have this ability. Jesus is the Christ, the One appointed by the Father and equipped by the Spirit to this very thing.

The word, "Christ", or "anointed", is actually an adjective. It could be translated as "Jesus, the anointed One." That Jesus was the Christ was saying that He was the promised anointed one of God to accomplish God's will to save His people. In time the word came to precede the name of Jesus, and so, He is

often called “Christ Jesus.” But as the first century unfolded the word “Christ” became more formalized, becoming a part of His name: “Jesus Christ.” All of these varied uses of the word, “Christ”, are found in the New Testament.

Now more specifically, the term “Christ” speaks of our Lord being anointed to His three-fold office, and each office is necessary for our salvation. First, we were in need of Christ as a **Prophet** to reveal God to us and our sinful and condemned standing before Him. Second, we were in need of a **Priest** to intercede with God on our behalf and make sacrifice for our sin. And third, we were in need of a **King** to subdue sin within us, to lead us, and preserve us to His heavenly Kingdom. And our Lord Jesus was anointed by the Father to perform this three-fold function on our behalf. In Him alone were all of these duties entrusted and He alone was equipped to execute them.

In the Old Testament there were examples of men endowed with two of these three offices. We read of kings who were also prophets, such as David. The Old Testament records of a king who was also a priest—Melchizedec. There was also a priestly prophet—Samuel. But only our Lord Jesus was anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows to assume this three-fold office to execute on our behalf. Thus He is to us a **Priest**, having sacrificed Himself on our behalf and He lives to apply the benefits of His sacrifice to us. He is to us a **Prophet**, who declares and reveals the will of God to us--He is our Teacher. And He is our **King**, who delivers us, leads us, protects us, and provides for us.

And so He *is* all that we need. A little children’s catechism (that I love to cite), which is a series of questions and answers taught to children to instruct them in the Christian faith, stated it this way:

Question: Why do you need Christ as a prophet? Answer: Because I am ignorant.

Question: Why do you need Christ as a Priest? Answer: Because I am guilty.

Question: Why do you need Christ as a King? Answer: Because I am weak and helpless.

But here in John’s Gospel, particularly in John 20:31, believing Jesus to be “the Christ” is to be understood chiefly to know and believe that Jesus is the promised Son of David, who God declared through the Old Testament prophets would rise to inaugurate the promised kingdom of David, which is the same as the Kingdom of God.³ He is the promised Messiah, the king of Israel. And so, when John declared that he had chosen these “signs” to lead people to faith in Jesus, it was to first show them that Jesus Christ—in His human nature—is the promised son of David, who has inaugurated the promised Messianic kingdom.

But *secondly*, we read that John selected the signs that he had recounted in his Gospel in order to lead his readers to believe...

2. That Jesus is “the Son of God”

Where Jesus as “the Christ” speaks of the human nature of Jesus Christ, in John’s Gospel “the Son of God” speaks of His divine nature. This is not in every case the phrase is used, but it is commonly so. Jesus Christ is truly a man and He is also truly God. We have addressed this rather recently, but it is a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith so it warrants rehearsal and repetition. God has led His “Church” through the centuries to assert that unless these two natures of Jesus Christ are not both believed, you cannot be a true Christian according to the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is truly Man and He is truly God, two natures in His one person.

John wrote in his short epistles that those who believed in the deity of Jesus Christ but who denied His human nature, are not Christians, but rather they are “antichrists.” There are actually four references in his epistles that touch on this matter. These are the following:

³ The common progressive dispensational teaching is wrong that claims that Jesus is presently king over the kingdom of God but that He will not become the promised king as the Son of David ruling over a future 1,000 year messianic kingdom. We are living in the promised messianic kingdom, the restored Davidic kingdom over which reigns the Son of David—Jesus Christ. This is what Peter declared in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost.

1 John 2:18. “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.”

1 John 2:22. “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.”

1 John 4:2f. “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.”

2 John 1:7. “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.”

We addressed this matter of our Lord’s divine nature not many weeks ago⁴ We will not give great detail here and now, other than affirming the historic understanding of our Lord Jesus in His essence being the eternally begotten Son of God. Here are the words of **Robert Reymond** (1932-2013) in which he identified five different ways in which the deity of Christ is set forth in the Holy Scriptures:

The biblical evidence for the deity of the Son includes (1) the Old Testament adumbrations (foreshadows) and predictions of a divine Messiah, (2) Jesus’ self-testimony in both words and deeds, (3) His resurrection, (4) The New Testament writers’ united witness, and (5) specifically, the nine New Testament passages in which “God” is used for a title for Christ.⁵

Reymond then extrapolated these five ways in which the deity of Jesus is set forth in the Scriptures over the next 105 pages of his systematic theology. The biblical evidence for the deity of Jesus Christ is beyond doubt and defies all attempts of those who teach otherwise.

D. To what end did John desire their belief?

John made this quite clear in the last clause of these verses. Once again, we read,

³⁰And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and *that believing you may have life in His name.* (John 20:19-31)

John desired that his readers would become “believers.” Here he used a present participle, “believing” to show the continuous faith, the life of faith of the true believer. I viewed a 60 second commercial last evening of Franklin Graham making an appeal for people to “accept Christ”, and if they did they were invited to call their toll free number. The gospel in 60 seconds? It was a truncated word and offer. John was not writing so that his readers would “make a one-time decision for Christ”, whatever that means. Nor was he striving for his readers “to accept Christ.” He chose and recorded these signs of Jesus because he desired his readers to be “believing”, that is, to become continual believers. And of course what constitutes “believing” should be understood according to the Holy Scriptures.

The error of promoting a method of evangelism through making “a decision for Christ” is one of the major reasons that there are so many spurious “conversions” that fill so-called “Bible-believing churches” with unconverted people. It is a message that promises forgiveness of sins to any “believer”, but what they mean by becoming a believer is through making a one-time decision for Christ, to “accept” Christ. The real question that one should ask himself is not, “Have I truly accepted Christ?” but rather, “Has Christ truly

⁴ See sermon #1046, November 8, 2020.

⁵ Robert L. Reymond, **A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), p. 211.

accepted me?” This will lead to questions and concerns that are not commonly addressed, but should of every would-be convert.

The reason that the error of decisionism exists may be traced in this way:

(1) The Bible teaches that God justifies a sinner through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, that it is a one-time declaration of God that the believer’s sins are forgiven and that he is thereafter regarded as righteous for Christ’s sake. This is, of course, is correct biblical teaching, which is foundational and essential to the gospel.

(2) However, it was then wrongly assumed and taught that because justification is a one-time declaration of God of the pardon of the sinner that it only takes a one-time decision for Christ that secures this blessing. This is error. But this resulted in the invention and practice of decisionism in the 19th century through personal and crusade evangelism. These “evangelists” sought to lead people “to come to Christ in faith.” This was seen to be the one-time decision of an awakened sinner at the end of an evangelistic message, at which time that one was pronounced “saved” because of his “faith alone.”

(3) This is coupled with the errant reduction of the meaning of salvation to that of the forgiveness of sins only, and since “saving faith” is apart from works, the prospective converts are not examined for evidence of God’s saving, transforming grace in their lives, but only assessed as to whether or not they “believe” Jesus to be their Savior. These converts are never pressed about the essential need for repentance, turning from sin and submitting to Jesus as Lord. They are told all they have to do is “accept Jesus” and this may be done “simply by praying this sinner’s prayer.”

No, John was writing in order that his readers would become *believers*. He was not desiring one-time decisions, but life-long “believing”, which is expressed by the present participle translated “believing.” John commonly described saving faith in this same manner. In John 3:16 we read, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever *believes* in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” “Believes” is a present participle emphasizing continuous believing. And in John 3:36 we read, “He who *believes* in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Again, here “believes” is a present active participle that emphasizes continuous believing.

And in order to underscore what we are saying, consider the result or the manifestation of this believing “that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.” Again, John wrote, “

³⁰And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing *you may have life in His name*.

And so,...

2. Let us consider the word, “life.”

“Life” is an important word for John in that he used it 47 times in 39 verses. Jesus Christ not only brings eternal life to His people, but He Himself is that “life.” We have addressed this quite thoroughly earlier in our study of this Gospel. We could go back to John 14:6 in which He declared, “I am the way, the truth, and *the life*. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Jesus said these words to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who *believes* in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25). **Leon Morris** (1914-2006) had written, “The only life worthy of the name is that which Jesus brings, for He is life itself.”⁶ And as we asserted on an earlier occasion:

⁶ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 641.

Jesus is the source of life. Jesus is the meaning of life. Jesus is the origin of life. Jesus is the purpose of life. Jesus is the blessing of life. Having Jesus is the possession of life. Jesus is the power of life. Jesus is the certainty of life. Jesus is the beauty of life. Jesus is the proof of life. Jesus is the assurance of life. Jesus is God's gift of life. Jesus is God's giver of life. Jesus is the Author and Sustainer of life. Christ is our life! He the source of our life! He is to be the focus of our life! He is the Lord of our life! He is the love of our life! The point is this: we need Jesus Christ and Him more abundantly, and then we will enjoy the abundant life that He has come to bring to us. If we are rejoicing in Jesus Christ and enjoying the fullness of life that comes with Him, then, we are connected to the life that God the Father gives to His people.

For John, he related these seven signs so that his readers would believe on Jesus Christ and thereby possess and enjoy life in Him. Salvation is much more than simply having one's sins forgiven. Biblical salvation is a whole new and different way of living.

Edward Klink wrote these words on our Lord's statement, "I am the life":

Jesus is "the life" in that He is the *source* through which Christian existence and participation in God are founded and given their origin. Jesus fulfils this by being the supplier of life and existence, the Creator of all living things—without whom "not one thing came into existence that has been made" (1:3). Jesus is the beginning and was "with God" in the beginning and is God, the second person of the Trinity. Jesus is life itself (1:4), is the One who has life in Himself (5:26), is the One who defines life even over death, for Jesus is "the resurrection and the life (11:25). Since Jesus is "the life", all the dichotomies are broken that have been created between life and death, this life and the life to come, the seen and the unseen.⁷

And then,...

3. Let us consider briefly the phrase, "in His name."

John wrote, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life *in His name*" (John 20:19-31). "His name" means His person. Life is not in *believing*, but it is *in Jesus Christ Himself*. If your believing has not brought you to experience and enjoy the life that is Christ, you have very good reason to question the soundness of your "faith", of your "belief."

Let us conclude with this thought: the failure to believe, and certainly the refusal to believe, is great sin. Unbelief is everywhere rebuked and condemned in the Holy Scriptures. Here are the words of **Charles Spurgeon** (1834-1892):

I am taught in the Scriptures that, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men love darkness rather than light." and when I read, "he that believes not is condemned already, because he believes not on the Son of God." I affirm and the Word declares it, *unbelief is a sin*. Surely with rational and unprejudiced persons, it cannot require any reasoning to prove it. Is it not a sin for a creature to doubt the word of its Maker? Is it not a crime and an insult to the Divinity, for me, an atom, a particle of dust, to dare to deny His words? Is it not the very summit of arrogance and extremity of pride for a son of Adam to say, even in his heart, "God I doubt Your grace. God I doubt Your love. God I doubt Your power"? Oh, Sirs believe me, could you roll all sins into one mass—could you take murder, blasphemy, lust, adultery and fornication and everything that is vile and unite—them all into one vast globe of black corruption, they would not equal, even then—the sin of unbelief. This is the monarch sin,

⁷ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 619.

the quintessence of guilt, the mixture of the venom of all crimes. The dregs of the wine of Gomorrah. It is the A1 sin, the masterpiece of Satan, the chief work of the devil.

And then after setting forth the nature and extent of the sin of unbelief, Spurgeon concluded with these words:

And now to close this point—for I have been already too long—let me remark that you will observe the heinous nature of unbelief in this—that it is the dammed sin. There is one sin for which Christ never died. It is the sin against the Holy Spirit. There is one other sin for which Christ never made atonement. Mention every crime in the calendar of evil and I will show you persons who have found forgiveness for it. But ask me whether the man who died in unbelief can be saved and I reply there is no atonement for that man. There is an atonement made for the unbelief of a Christian, because it is temporary, but the *final* unbelief—the unbelief with which men die—never was atoned for.

You may turn over this whole Book and you will find that there is no atonement for the man who died in unbelief. There is no mercy for him. Had he been guilty of every other sin but had believed, he would have been pardoned. But this is the damning exception—he had no faith... He is faithless and unbelieving and such are the tenants for whom Hell was built. It is *their* portion, *their* prison—they are the chief prisoners, the fetters are marked with their names. Forever shall they know that, “He that believes not shall be damned.”

May every one of us depart from this place “believing” “in Christ, the Son of God.” And may this faith in Him be shown forth in the life we live. May the Lord grant us grace to do so.

And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ
and love one another, just as He has commanded us. (1 John 3:23)

Faith and Works

[This theological “note” is from **The Reformation Study Bible**, published by Thomas Nelson Publishers. We recommend this study Bible for its sound and thorough notes and comments on the verses and passages of God’s Word.]

Faith is the means or instrument by which a person is saved. Christians are justified before God by faith (Rom. 3:26; 4:1-5; Gal. 2:16), and by faith they live their lives (2 Cor. 5:7) and sustain their hope (Heb. 10:35-12:3).

Faith cannot be defined in subjective terms, as a feeling or optimistic decision. Neither is it a passive orthodoxy. Faith is a response, directed toward an object and defined by what is believed. Christian faith is trust in the eternal God and His promises secured by Jesus Christ. It is called forth by the gospel as the gospel is made understandable through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. Christian faith is a personal act, involving the mind, heart, and will, just as it is directed to a personal God, and not an idol or an idea.

It is usual to analyze faith as involving three steps: knowledge, agreement, and trust. First is knowledge, or acquaintance with the content of the gospel; second is agreement, or recognition that the gospel is true; and third is trust, the essential step of committing self to God. These steps go together in the sense that there can be Christian faith only when the gospel is known and its truth accepted (Rom. 10:14). Calvin defined faith as “a firm and sure knowledge of divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds and sealed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.7).

Through faith we receive Christ, who satisfied the law on our behalf. In this way we are justified through faith alone, without doing the works of the law. But since faith unites us with Christ, it cannot be lifeless. Directed toward God and resting in Him, It is active, “working through love” (Gal. 5:6), seeking to do all the “good works, which God prepared beforehand” for us (Eph. 2:10). Justification is by faith alone, but justifying faith can never be alone.

When James says that faith without works is dead, he is describing a faith that knows the gospel and even agrees with it, but has fallen short of trust in God. Failure to grow, develop, and bear the fruits of righteousness shows that the free gift of God in Christ has never been received. The answer for those with such a faith is not to save themselves by establishing a righteousness of their own, as if they could create faith by their own efforts, but to call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13). God alone can save those for whom it is otherwise impossible (Mark 10:27). Paul shows that good works cannot break this impossibility; James shows that the faith required is faith that rests in the living God.

Even when we have believed, the good works we do are never perfect. They are acceptable to God only because of the mercy of Christ (Rom. 7:13-20; Gal. 5:17). We express our love for God through doing what pleases Him, and He in His kindness promises to reward us for what we do (Phil. 3:12-14; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8). In this we are not making God our debtor, any more than we first believed in Him. As Augustine noted, God in rewarding us is graciously crowning His own gracious gifts.
