

- Located in heaven, not of this world

NOTES

SO DO YOU LIVE LIKE YOU'RE A
CITIZEN OF A NEW KINGDOM?

2. You're a **soldier** in a new army
"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." – 2 Timothy 2:3

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." – 2 Corinthians 10:4

- In need of basic training
- In need of equipment

DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU'RE FIGHTING
FOR?
DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE
FIGHTING FOR?

3. You're a **member** of a new body
For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
– 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

- With a new role to play
- Given gifts to use for the body's benefit

SO DO YOU KNOW WHAT ROLE YOU
ARE SUPPOSED TO BE PLAYING?

4. It means you're a **priest** in a new family
But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. – 1 Peter 2:9

- Praying and interceding
- Teaching

NEXT STEPS

WEEK 6

...keep your eye on what you're doing; accept the hard times along with the good;
keep the Message alive; do a thorough job as God's servant.

— 2 TIMOTHY 4:5 (MSG)

The journey continues. This week we are offering more potential NEXT STEPS for you to take. The topic for the few weeks is going to be on belief. Especially our beliefs about salvation. We're giving you books to read, DVDs to watch, and CDs to listen to. Take your pick and take a NEXT STEP in your spiritual journey.

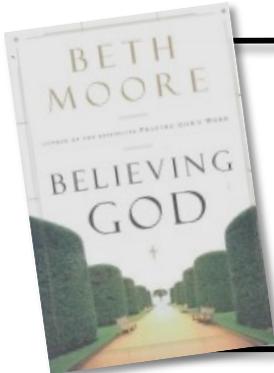
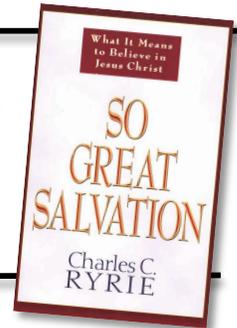


1. WATCH "BIBLE STUDY METHODS" BY DR. MARK BAILEY

Want to learn to study the Bible more effectively? Then learn from the president of Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. Mark Bailey. This is an actual online course offered to seminary students. Just use the link below and follow the directions.
<http://www.dts.edu/media/play/?MediaItemID=5a79cf9c-4ccc-4584-b504-321d074d71e8>

2. READ "SO GREAT A SALVATION" BY CHARLES C. RYRIE

Faith and works. Salvation and sanctification. What does it mean to be saved? Is there "proof" of salvation? Ryrie offers a concise, alternative look at the meaning and evidences of salvation and the greatness of God's grace. Available in the church bookstore.



3. READ "BELIEVING GOD" BY BETH MOORE

Yes, a book by a woman! A woman who has the guts to ask the question: "Is it working? Your belief system, that is. Is it really working? God's intention all along has been for the believer's life to work. From divine perspective toward terrestrial turf, God meant for his children to succeed ... Are our Christian lives successful? Are they achieving and experiencing what Scripture said they would?" Find out the truth in this easy-to-read book. Available in the church bookstore.

4. READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

Here are some more sermons and articles you can read at your leisure. Remember, this is NOT assigned reading. They are simply designed to spur you on your walk and to help you think biblically and spiritually.

- *What Does It Mean to Believe* by Oswald J. Smith (available this week as an audio CD)
- *Do You Really Believe In Jesus* by John Walvoord
- *The Great Cause Part 3 - God Saves* by Matt Chandler (Available on CD as well)
- *There Is No God* by Penn Tiller (An atheist's view on God and belief)

5. LISTEN TO ONE OF OUR TWO CDS

This week you can choose from a sermon give by Oswald J. Smith given in 1906 or a slightly more contemporary one given by Matt Chandler from the Village Church in Dallas. Both are talking about the topic of salvation. Listen to them both and compare.



What Does It Mean To Believe?

Oswald J. Smith

THERE was a time in my life when I did not know whether I was saved or whether I was lost. I remember working for the Massey-Harris Company in Toronto, and carrying messages from one department to another. As I walked along the underground corridors of that great firm I was not interested in the message I was carrying. I was asking myself just one question: "Am I saved or am I lost? If I am lost, Lord, let me know it in order that I may get saved, and if I am saved let me know it in order that I may rejoice in Thy Salvation." You see, I had come into contact with a group of people who taught salvation by feeling and experience instead of faith. Night after night I would go forward in their tent, kneel in the straw, where they would gather around me and all pray together, pleading with God to save me. So alarmed was I that I was afraid to go home and go to bed for fear I would fall asleep and wake up in perdition. My one cry day and night was, "Am I bound for Heaven or for Hell?" I was still only 16 years of age.

One night I decided to attend Chalmer's Presbyterian Church, and as I sat on the east side of the gallery I bowed my head and prayed that the minister would that night preach on saving faith and thus solve my problem. At last Dr. MacPherson stepped into the pulpit and the service commenced.

And that night he did preach on faith. I listened with both ears and watched with both eyes, but at the close of the service, with hundreds of others, I got up and went out into the darkness of the night, still not knowing whether I was saved or whether I was lost. Why? Was it because Dr. MacPherson had not preached the Gospel? Most assuredly not. He did preach the Gospel. Again and again he cried out: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved." What then was the matter? Let me tell you. Never once in the course of his address did he stop to tell us what he meant by the word "believe", and that was my trouble. I knew that I had to believe, but I had always believed. There never had been a time when I did not believe. From the days of my earliest childhood I believed as much as I believe today, and yet I did not know whether I was a Christian or not.

You see, there were no atheists in our community, no agnostics or skeptics. I had never heard of an infidel. Everybody believed. Some were drunkards, others swore and cursed; many were given to lying and stealing. They did not even profess to be Christians, but they all believed. I did not know one who even questioned the authenticity of the Word of God. Are there not millions in a similar situation? I have found them everywhere I have gone. In ancient Russia, let alone Spain, Italy and many other countries of Europe, as well as in America, there are literally millions who believe and yet who are not saved. And if millions who believe in Christ are not Christians then what does it mean to believe? Finally one day I came across that little booklet that was used so often by Queen Mary in her personal work, *Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment*, by Geo. Cutting, and as a result my doubts vanished. I was assured of my salvation, and from that day to this I have never had a doubt of any kind.

THREE STEPS

There are three steps in saving faith. They are like the three rungs of a ladder. The first two will not save, but the third will. However, you cannot take the third until you have taken the first two.

Hear

The first step I designate by the simple word "hear". "How shall they believe except they hear?" A knowledge of God's salvation is necessary before it is possible to believe. That is why we send missionaries to China, to India and to Africa. The heathen must first hear before they can believe. But I am sure that I need not dwell on this first step now. I am quite certain that everyone here present has again and again heard the message of God's salvation. Therefore you have already taken the first step. You have heard.

Believe

I designate the second step by using the simple word "believe". Now what is the meaning of "believe"? It simply means "giving intellectual assent to a truth". The Dictionary says, "to consent with the mind". When therefore you have given "intellectual assent to a truth" you have believed.

You have taken the second step. But you are not saved. When the King James translators were translating the Bible some three hundred and fifty years ago, they came across a certain Hebrew word in the Old Testament Scriptures, and they began searching for an English word with which to translate it. Finally they chose the word "trust", and that is why you have the word "trust" occurring so frequently in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is found a hundred and fifty-two times.

In due time they came to the New Testament, and presently they encountered the same word, but this time in the Greek, and again they searched for an English word with which to translate it. But for some unknown reason they decided to choose an entirely different word, for they chose the word "believe". Had they been consistent, had they used the Old Testament word for their translation, this message would not have been necessary. But they used, as I have stated, the word "believe", and that is why you have the word "believe" occurring so frequently in the New Testament Scriptures, especially in the Gospel of John and the epistles of Paul. That has caused all the confusion and misunderstanding.

You see, the word "believe" has to do with the head, the intellect. It is a mental process. But you can believe all you want to believe about Jesus Christ and still not be saved. You can believe everything that I believe about the Bible, and yet perish eternally. That is the faith of the demons. The Word of God declares that the demons also believe and tremble. They were among the first to acclaim Jesus as the Son of God, but they did not submit to Him. They believe as much or more than you do about Christ. They do not for a moment doubt His Deity, but their faith is purely intellectual. It does not change their lives, and their doom is certain, therefore they tremble.

I came across a certain denomination one day and I was anxious to discover, if I could, the basis upon which they received men and women as members of their churches. I learned that they asked them just one question, one question consisting of two parts, namely, "Do you believe God loves you and that Jesus Christ His Son died for you?" If they could answer that question in the affirmative they were accepted.

But who doesn't believe in the love of God? Everyone who believes the Bible does. And who doesn't believe that Jesus Christ died for mankind? The Bible says He did, and if you believe the Bible you believe He died for you. That doesn't make you a Christian. That doesn't change your life.

That is purely intellectual. Thousands believe in the love of God and the death of Christ who are not Christians. The second step will save no one and yet that is where multitudes stop. They take the second step but not the third. Hence they are not yet saved. What are the usual questions that are asked of one who wishes to join the Church? These: "Do you believe in the Virgin Birth, the Deity, Resurrection and Second Coming of Christ? Do you believe Christ died for your sins?" Such questions are doctrinal and can be answered intellectually by anyone. What are the questions I ask? These: "Have you been born again? Are you saved? Have you received Jesus Christ?" Such questions are experimental. If they can be answered in the affirmative I do not worry about the others.

Trust

The third step and the only step that saves I designate by the simple word "trust". And now I must turn to "The New English Bible". At long last the translation of the Authorized Version has been corrected. After 350 years the word "believe" has been eliminated. After preaching this sermon for 40 years I now have The New English Bible to back me.

When the Philippian jailer asked the question, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer in The New English Bible is, "Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31). Again and again instead of "believe" it is "Put your faith in" or "Put your trust in the

Lord Jesus." That has nothing whatever to do with the intellect; that has to do with the will, and it demands a decision. Multitudes there are who "believe" who have never "trusted".

In the O.T. the way of salvation is stated thus: "Put your trust in the Lord" (Psalm 4:5). In the N.T. it is "Believe on the Lord." The O.T. has the correct translation. When you "put your trust in the Lord" you are saved. Now what is the meaning of the word "trust"? Excludes Effort First, it excludes effort. Did you ever have anyone try to teach you to float? Do you remember how you stood beside your instructor in the water, and how he said to you, "The water can sustain your weight. All you have to do is to trust the water. Now throw yourself back and float." And do you remember how you threw yourself back on the water and how you floated—to the bottom?

Then do you recall how you stood again by your instructor and how he said to you, "Now why did you tighten your muscles? Why did you hold your breath? Couldn't you trust the water? Why, it carries whole navies. It can easily bear you up." And once again you threw yourself back on the water, but there was a slight catching of the breath, a tightening of the muscles and once again you floated—to the bottom. Then again you stood beside your instructor. Again he urged you to trust, and this time without any effort of your own, as you threw yourself back on the water, to your pleasure and delight, you found yourself floating. I wish someone would float tonight on God's great salvation. Put aside your effort. Stop struggling. Don't try to help yourself either by works or religion. Just float. Trust, I say, excludes effort. As long as you are putting forth effort you are not trusting.

Implies Committal

Second, trust implies committal. I think the best illustration is that of the marriage ceremony. Here is a young man who is keeping company with a young woman. For some considerable time they go together. At least they should. At last he asks the all-important question and she says, "Yes".

Now they are engaged.

Now this young man makes a great many promises and the young woman believes he means what he says. After a while her girl friends come along and they ask her some questions. "We understand," they say, "that this young man of yours has promised you a home." "Yes, he has," replies the young woman. "And he has promised you clothes and food. Now tell us, do you have the home?" "Oh no," she exclaims, "I do not. I am still living with my parents." "What about the food?" they continue. "Does he supply your food?" "Why no, of course not," she responds, "except when we go to the restaurant, and then sometimes I pay the bill." "What about clothes? Has he given you any clothes?" "No, he has not," the young woman answers; "my parents still buy my clothes." "And yet you believe the young man," they exclaim. "Yes, I do," she answers. "I believe every word. I have no doubt of any kind." You see, she had taken the second step; she had believed.

There comes a never-to-be-forgotten day when the young man stands at the front of the church facing the minister, first on one foot, then on the other. Never in his life has he stood so long before. It seems an age. At last to the strains of the wedding march the young woman on the arm of her father comes slowly, oh, so slowly, down the aisle. Every eye is fastened on her. There is plenty of time for everyone to admire her wedding gown. At last she reaches the front and stands beside the man of her choice. The minister asks one or two very important questions: "Wilt thou?" And she "wilts". And then something happens that has never happened before, and I want you to mark, if you will, very carefully, my phraseology. For the first time in her life she gives herself over, she hands herself to, she commits herself to, she trusts the young man. Taking his arm, she now leaves the church in his protection. Never again will she have to work. He is now responsible for her and it is up to him to look after her. Her worries are over. He must provide for her.

A little later her girl-friends approach her again. "Well," they ask, "has he given you a home?" "Oh yes," she exclaims, "we are now living together in our own home." "What about the food?" "Yes, he pays the grocery bills and the butcher bills. He provides the food." "And what about clothes?" "Yes, he is buying my clothes—not as many as I want, but all that I need. Indeed

he is looking after everything." But just when did she get everything? Was it when she took the second step, when she believed, or was it when she took the third step and trusted? It was not until she trusted. She had believed but she got nothing. When she trusted she got everything. So it is with salvation. You can believe as much as you want to believe and get nothing. But the very moment you give yourself up to Jesus Christ, the moment you hand yourself over to Him, the moment you commit yourself to Him, the moment you put your trust in Him, you are saved, but not until then.

Have you ever done it? You see, it implies committal. It is something you must do. Just as that young woman had to walk down the aisle and definitely give herself up to the young man of her choice for the rest of her life, so you must give yourself up to the Lord Jesus Christ for time and eternity, if you are to be saved. The second step will not save. The third is absolutely necessary. You must trust Jesus Christ. Will you then do what the young woman did? Will you too come down the aisle? Will you hand yourself over to the Heavenly Bridegroom as she did to the earthly? Will you own allegiance to Him? If you will, you will be His for evermore, and He will be responsible for you. Here is a struggling swimmer who is drowning. He goes down for the first time struggling furiously, while a man stands on the bank with folded arms, who never makes a motion to dive in and rescue the drowning man. Now he is going down for the second time. Still he struggles. But still the man makes no effort to save him. Now he is going down for the third and last time. But he does not struggle. His arms fall limp at his sides cries out "Help!" And in a moment the man on the bank unfolds his arms, dives in and easily rescues the drowning man.

Why didn't he do it before? Because the man thought he could save himself. He had to wait until the man was ready to give up. But the moment the man was willing to trust his rescuer he was saved. As the rescuer approached him all he had to do was to commit himself to the one who had come to save him, and the moment he gave himself up to his rescuer and trusted him, that moment he was saved. When you, my friend, are willing to give yourself up to your Rescuer, the resurrected, living Christ, you too will be saved. What you believe about Him will not save you; you must put your trust in Him. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Is that what I say when I am dealing with a lost soul? Of course not. If I were to say that I would have an argument on my hands at once. I would be asked the meaning of the word "believe". No, I do not use the King James Version. I use the Old Testament word, or The New English translation, and I say to the seeker: "Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

Requires Action

In the third place trust requires action. Let me show you what I mean. The date is June 30th, 1858. It is a glorious morning. The mighty cataract of Niagara thunders on the rocks at the foot of the Falls. An eleven hundred foot tightrope has been stretched from bank to bank, on which Charles Blondin, the world's greatest tightrope walker, is to cross. Special trains from Toronto and Buffalo have been run to bring the crowds.

Balancing his 40-pound pole he steps on the rope and starts across, while the voices of the throngs are hushed, until, as he triumphantly places his foot on the farther bank, a great cheer rises even above the noise of the cataract itself. Turning to the sea of faces, he now makes a thrilling proposal. He offers to recross the cataract with a man on his back. But who is to be the man? Excitedly the people talk among themselves. "Do you believe I am able to carry you across?" at length asks the ropewalker, turning to a likely looking individual.

"I certainly do," at once responds the one addressed.

"Will you let me?" inquires the waiting hero.

"Will I let you? Well, hardly. You don't think I am going to risk my life like that, do you?" And he turns away.

"And what about you?" he asks Henry Colcord, his manager. Do you believe I can carry you across?"

"I believe. In fact, I have no doubt about it at all," answers Colcord.

"Will you trust me?" "I will!"

Breathlessly the people watch. The 38-foot pole is balanced; they start; and the great rope tightens beneath their weight. Step after step, slow but sure, without hesitation, they move along. What confidence! The centre is reached. They are above the rushing, boiling, foam-covered water, the ugly rocks beneath, poised, as it were, in mid-air. Now they are nearing the Canadian side. A great hush falls on the excited crowds. The people hold their breath. The strain is terrific. Suddenly there is a pause. Some gambler had cut the guy line and the rope is swaying fearfully. Blondin tells Colcord to dismount, which he does, standing with one foot on the rope and his hands on Blondin's shoulders.

"Harry," says Blondin, "you are no longer Colcord; you are now Blondin. Be part of me. If I sway, sway with me. Do not try to balance or we will both be dead."

Colcord climbs back. The rope sways wildly and Blondin begins running. How he keeps his balance no one knows, but he does, and at last they are over; the final step is taken, and they stand once more on terra-firma, while the spectators go wild with excitement. The tension is broken; the nerve-racking experience ended.

Bridging the gulf between time and eternity is the great rope of salvation. Never yet has it broken. And Jesus Christ alone is able to cross it. You may have heard all about it, and, like the first man, you may even believe that Jesus can carry you across. But not until you take the final step and commit yourself to Him will you ever get over, must also trust.

Are you among the thousands who believe, But who have never trusted Christ the Lord? Who know about Him, and defend Him, too, And yet who do not take Him at His Word? Oh, friend, receive, receive this Savior true, Take Jesus now, oh make Him yours today; You may believe, but you must trust Him, too, For He Himself is God's appointed Way. Oh my friend, tell me, have you trusted? Or do you merely believe in your head, and have you failed to take the last important step?

If so, will you not by a definite act of your will "put your trust in the Lord Jesus?" If you will, "you will be saved." Will you do it? Do it and do it—NOW.

MY DECISION

Realizing that I am a sinner, and believing that Jesus Christ the Son of God died and rose for me, I now receive Him as my personal Savior, and turning from all else, I put my trust in Him alone.

Do You Really Believe in Jesus?

John F. Walvoord

Have you ever really believed in Jesus Christ? I was talking to my five-year old son. He replied quickly, "Of course, dad."

"But have you ever really been saved? How do you really know you are saved?"

He replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." He ripped off the words as fast as his little mouth could phrase them. It was a verse he had memorized, and he had heard it explained so many times.

Perhaps you would have answered just as he did. "Of course I am saved. Of course I believe in Jesus Christ."

Do you really believe?

It is not uncommon for children, as well as adults, who have taken the position that they believe in Christ, later to question it and to wonder whether they really believe. *How can you really know?*

The answer is found in a series of smaller questions, questions that are natural to our own thinking, and questions that are often raised in the Bible. Through the ages men have traveled on many roads, seeking some assurance that after this life they would have a blessed eternity. Really believing in Christ is the Christian answer to the way of entering a blessed eternity. *But what is involved?*

First of all, it means that you believe something about yourself. One of the plain facts that confront any reader of the Bible is that man is naturally sinful, and as a sinner, is far from God. This theme can be traced from Genesis to Revelation as the Bible records every known human sin. Man is revealed to be born a sinner by nature as confirmed by the fact that men universally have sinned. Obviously the problem of salvation is how to deal with sin.

There have been many answers. The most common answer, found in the non-Christian religions, is that the solution is to do better. An Orthodox Jew, if he follows his own theologians, believes that if his good works outweigh his bad works, he will have a blessed eternity. Heathen religions often prescribe the most torturous and painful ceremonies to make a person acceptable to God. In some religions, parents had to offer their infant children as a fiery human sacrifice to God. Salvation for many pagan religions is a painful, almost hopeless pursuit of some way by which they can appease the gods and find rest and peace in eternity. Most religions teach that salvation is difficult, not easily attained.

Is there a better way?

The Christian Gospel alone, among all the religions of the world, offers a different method. It is a method in which someone else — God Himself — supplies the salvation. Those who need salvation accept it as a gift from God. It is what the Bible calls salvation by grace. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).*

Salvation by grace recognizes that man is a sinner and that he cannot save himself. Accordingly, God does for man what man could never do for himself, that is, provide a perfect system of forgiveness in which man is forgiven of his sins. More than that, he is looked on by God as if he has always been righteous and has always done what is right. This is the famous doctrine of justification which Martin Luther rescued from oblivion in the great Protestant Reformation. God in His gift of salvation declares sinners righteous.

But it is obvious that not everyone is saved, at least if you accept what the Bible teaches. Christ said the way of salvation was narrow and the way to destruction was broad. Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Here we face the question again. How can I be saved?

The answer of the Bible is, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). This is what Paul told the Philippian jailer.

What does it mean to believe?

The Bible uses the word *believe* or the word *faith* hundreds of times to describe an act of trust. It is an act of the mind in that it involves comprehension of some truth, to at least a limited degree. The Bible indicates that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and enables us to understand what we should believe to be saved (John 16:7-11).

Belief is also an act of the will because it involves a decision on our part (John 7:17). Are we going to trust the facts about the person and the work of Christ? The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was the God-man — all that God is from eternity, and all that man is apart from sin. The Bible also repeatedly presents, in both testaments, the fact that God Himself provides Christ as the One who would die on the cross for our sins. He was the lamb of sacrifice (John 1:29). He died in our place. He “bore our sins in his body” (1 Pet. 2:24). He died “the righteous for the unrighteous” to bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18).

How could another person die for us?

This is a difficult question to answer, but the Bible presents it as a fact, not as a philosophy or as a tentative solution. This was the divine method. God, recognizing we could not do it ourselves, provided a Savior to die in our place.

But did He die for everyone? Theologians discuss this question, but the Bible seems to indicate clearly not only the universality of sin, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way”; but also the universality of God's provision that “the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). God's love extended to all the world, as stated in John 3:16-17, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Christ died for the same world to which He came, a world that was without hope and without God, but a world that desperately needed what He had to offer.

But the world as a whole did not receive Christ and did not enter in to what He had provided. This is stated in John 1:11, “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” But as the passage goes on to state, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

Believing is accepting as a fact and making a commitment of your own future to the promises of God to save you — simply by believing in Christ. This leads to the question ...

“Do you really believe?”

True faith involves believing something about yourself: that you are a sinner. It involves believing that Christ is the Son of God. It includes believing that He died for us on the cross and paid the penalty for our sins. It is an act of the mind. It is an act of the will. But it is also an act of the heart.

Sometimes the terms of the gospel are expressed in the phrase that to be saved we should receive Christ in our hearts. While many have come to Christ on this type of invitation, it is only a partial presentation of what the Bible teaches. Actually, it is included in believing. For the Scriptures say, “That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Rom. 10:9-10). Coming back to the question, “Do I really believe?” the only one who can answer that question is you yourself. We have to be honest with ourselves and with God. Have you really put your trust for your eternal salvation in the crucified hands of One who died in your place? Are you willing to accept the humiliating fact that you cannot save yourself by anything you do or anything that

you are in yourself? Are you willing to accept God's solution? Are you willing to accept Jesus Christ?

Fundamentally, while it is in part an act of your mind and in part an act of your emotions or your heart, it is an act of your will.

Years ago a high school lad was listening to his father preach. It was a large, prominent church. His father was an eminent preacher. His father was pleading for souls to come to Christ. When the service ended, the young lad went home and later to bed. But his father's words rang in his ears. "Have you ever believed in Christ?" Here he was, "the preacher's kid." Everybody thought he was a Christian. But was he really? How could he know? As he faced the awesome question, he slipped out of his bed, got down on his knees, and prayed this simple prayer. He said, "Lord, if I have never received you before, I receive you now." He climbed back into bed, and in a few moments was sound asleep. He had really believed in Jesus Christ; it was a clear act of his will.

Many years later, that high school lad was to return to serve as pastor in his father's church, where, in the years which followed, he led hundreds of others to receive Christ as Savior. When that lad, now a famous preacher in his own right, heard of the possibility of Dallas Seminary being founded as a school for training preachers, he said to Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, "This seminary must be in Dallas." The preacher was Dr. William Anderson. The year was 1923. Dallas Seminary became a reality in 1924 because a high school lad was honest and straightforward in facing the question, "Do I really believe?" Multiplied thousands have followed the same road. Have you?

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The Great Cause Pt. 3 – God Saves

Matt Chandler – April 26, 2009

Last week we talked about the bad news. Let's look at it. Ephesians 2, starting in verse 1, "*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath.*" Now what we said last week very curtly is that everyone's guilty. The problem in the universe, from the economy to disease to murder to strife, the problem is a sin issue. All of us are fractured and alienated from our Creator, and all of us are lawbreakers. Are there any liars in here? Dose anybody in here pursue other things as ultimate besides God? Does anyone rejoice when bad things happen to people we think bad things should happen to? Yes. Does anyone here get upset when good things happen to people we want bad things to happen to? Yes. On and on I could go. You are guilty. I'll say it this way. If the thoughts of your mind and the motives of your heart could be projected on the screen behind me, you would not want to be in this room. I don't care who you are, how much you give, how good you are, how fun you are. If the thoughts on your mind and the motives in your heart could be displayed publicly, you would be embarrassed and ashamed. Everyone's guilty. And I said that the reality is most of us aren't bothered by that. We're not really bothered by that because we believe that we are intrinsically good, because we compare ourselves to the rest of humanity and go, "Ah, we're good. God shouldn't be upset." But I told you last week that goodness is really subjective. The illustration I used was my son. My son is strong for a 3 year old. But let's say that in our house we went all UFC and built the octagon, and it's me vs. my three year old son Reid. That's over in two seconds. He flies eight feet, slams into the fence, falls to the ground...give me the belt. There's not going to be any grappling, I don't need to make him submit. I'll kick him in his face and it's over. But if we get another three year old and put him in the octagon with Reid and we're looking for knocked out or submission, we could be there for weeks. Why? Because against a three year old, he's strong; against me, he's not. Against everybody around you, you're good; against a holy, spotless God who you have attacked, belittled and mocked, the Bible would say "even your righteous acts are as filthy rags to Him." You're not good. Any goodness in you is completely subjective.

And then we said the other reason it doesn't bother us is we just think God should deal with it. We think it's a victimless crime. We think it's like going 35 in a 30. Why should anybody be upset by that? But if you want to grasp how God sees even the smallest of your sins, you need only to look at the sacrificial system in the Old Testament and to the crucifixion of Christ on the cross. Why do you think He had them grab the back of a goat, take a knife and jab it into its throat and rip its throat open and let the blood spill all over the altar? Have you ever smelled blood? It reeks. Do you know how

unpleasant that moment must have been? Do you know how that goat must have screamed? Do you know how disgusting that scene is? That's God teaching His people, "That's what your sin is to Me. This is what your lying, this is what your manipulating, this is what your indifference smells like to Me." Have you paid attention to the cross? They grab Him, slap Him, spit on Him, mock Him, rip the beard out of His face, smack Him with sticks, peel the skin off His back, strip Him naked, nail Him to the cross while even more wicked people come out and mock Him and hurl insults on Him even then, His lungs fill up with blood, they run a spear under His ribcage killing Him and they leave Him there to rot. Now what do you think that's all about? That's about you. And don't think "us," think "you." This is your sin. This is how God sees your sin. And the Bible says that in reaction to that God is filled with grief, He is filled with anger, He is filled with wrath and He will justly and rightly damn every one of us for it. I know that's very unpopular to say that. The popular thing is that God should be some impotent, weak fairy in the sky who lets you mock Him, belittle Him, slap Him, spit on Him, make a mockery of all that He is and just deal with it. If there is a God, I guarantee you that is not His personality trait. And if it is, he's not God. So this is what we said last week. I gave you the bad news and just prayed and dismissed us.

That was the bad news, now we're going to move into the good news. So we read Ephesians 2:1-3, now let's pick it up in verse 4. The first word in verse 4 makes us breath out a little bit. "*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ*" I love the way he words it because he says, "When did God show you mercy, and when did God lavish His love upon you? Not when you straightened yourself out, not when you started doing better, not when you stopped doing wrong but while you were dead in your trespasses. That's when He showed you mercy. That's when He loved you." It's the difference between morality driven religion and the gospel. Let's look at what comes next. There's going to be some very interesting things I need to point out. "*...even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved*" Unmerited favor is what grace means. Which means that you had nothing intrinsically good in you that God deemed savable for His cause. So He doesn't go, "Here's who I'm going to save. I'm going to find the most popular people, the most talented people, the wealthiest people." In fact, He actually goes the other way with it. Paul would tell us later that He's chosen the foolish things of the world to scorn the wise. So if you'll watch who He saves, most of the time He saves imbeciles, He uses murderers. He saves not what is pretty but what is ugly. So congratulations. Here we go. "*...by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*" When I went to church growing up with my parents, we would sing *Amazing Grace*. And we would get to the third stanza and it would go like this, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining like the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun." And I just remember thinking, "I am going to be bored out of my mind. If I get into this deal ten thousand years later and we've no less days, I'm going to be beating my head against the golden bricks of the road." What he's saying here is that the immeasurable riches of Christ are so deep and so vast that they would actually take ages,

millennium to even reveal to you how deep and wide they are. So you know how thrills here while we're alive go away pretty quickly. It doesn't matter what they are. Thrills have a tendency to lessen over time. What he's saying is that eternity freed up from this physical body, glorified because of the cross of Christ, it's ever increasing joy. It's a pretty profound verse.

Let's keep reading. Verse 8, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith.*" So what happens is we have faith in grace. By grace, through faith, we become believers in Jesus Christ. Now let's look at where the faith comes from. "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*" So even the faith to believe in the grace of God was given to you by God. So the grace is His, but so is the faith. Why? The fundamental problem in the universe is that we are idolaters. Which means we will make much of other things besides God, namely ourselves. And so God's solution to this problem is not to make faith ours so we can then boast our faith believed in His grace. But even the faith is His, so you have nothing to boast in when it comes to salvation. You didn't do it, He did. So that's 30,000ft up looking down on salvation. "Oh, it's all Him. Oh, I see."

So what does it look like on the ground? To do that, let's go over to Romans 8. And those of you who know what's there are saying right not, "Surely he's not going to." And yet I am. I love verse 28...unless someone quotes it to me when I'm struggling. Has anyone ever done that to you. When you're just struggling and struggling and they're like, "All things work together for good, brother." The sinful part of me, the part of me that's not sanctified yet wants to just punch him in the throat right at that moment and go, "I guess that was for your good. I guess you needed that for sanctification." I've never done it, but to this day it's my first thought. So let's look at it. Romans 8:28, "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*" All things, joys, sorrows, successes, failures, health, sickness, money, poverty, all things work together for good for those who love Him. That is an unreal passage. Now he's going to go into why that's true and unpack that for us exactly how salvation, conversion and belief happen. "*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*" So let's talk about what it means for God to foreknow. You've got to do something with this idea of foreknowledge and predestination because it's all over the Bible. So here's probably the most popular. The idea is that foreknowledge is God knowing who's going to choose Him in the future and predestining those He knows will choose Him in the future. Okay, that's mainstay. If you ask most Christians to decipher this verse for you and that's what they're going to say. "I think what's going on in this verse is that God sees who's going to choose Him and then He predestines those who are going to choose Him." Now, there are two fundamental problems with that interpretation. Problem number 1, it assumes that the faith to believe is ours and that we are the cause of that faith instead of the recipients of it. It assumes that the faith to believe was ours to begin with and God peers into the future to take that faith and give it to them. The problem with that is we just read that even the faith to believe is not ours, but it's given to us. The other thing it does is it puts God inside of time instead of outside of time. So what God has to do then is grab the book of life, get

inside the time machine, adjust the flux capacitor, jet into the future and go, “Okay, that guy chooses Me...that guy chooses Me...that girl chose Me...that woman did...he didn’t...she did...he is not in anymore...” Then He gets back in the time machine, adjusts the flux capacitor, heads back to before anything was and then go, “I predestine the ones who were going to choose Me.” But biblically, God is not inside of time; He’s outside of it. Which means that the future is not a place that He knows about; it’s a place that He is right now. Past, present, future, He just is. We can’t do anything with that with our small little brains. But I can tell you this. That interpretation of foreknowledge is silly, and it’s people trying to make God something that He has biblically shown Himself not to be.

Okay, so what do we do with this? What does it mean that He foreknew? To do that, here’s what I think you have to do. You have to look at how He uses the word “know.” How do the Scriptures use this word “know?” What does it mean when He talks about how He knew them or didn’t know them? What’s He talking about there? In Genesis 18:19, God says of Abraham, “*For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD.*” Now virtually every translation of the Bible translates that word in Genesis 18 as “chosen.” “I have known” and “I have chosen” are synonymous in that. Amos 3:2, “*You only have I known among all the families of the earth.*” Now what’s the problem with that? Well God knows every family of the earth. There’s not a place that He doesn’t know. So let’s just say that we just had a great idea and one of you came up to me and said, “Here’s the deal. This coming December 25th is Jesus’ 2412th birthday. Let’s throw Him a surprise party.” And we got the white board out and said, “Okay here’s what we’re going to do. Let’s get some gold, some frankincense and some myrrh. Let’s go old school with this.” So we planned out this huge party. Here was the plan. The plan was for us to all come in here and I was to pray and invite Him in (because I’m the pastor). I was just going to go, “Jesus, would You join us in here?” And when He got here, we were all going to yell, “Surprise!!!” That’s really stupid, isn’t it? You can’t surprise Him, you can’t jump out at Him, you can’t hide anything from Him. So He’s saying here to Israel, “*You alone have I known among all of the families of the earth.*” So there’s a type of knowing going on with Israel that is more than just being aware of. We’ll see that even more with these next couple of texts. In Matthew 7:23, speaking of the Pharisees, He said, “*I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*” So now we know that God not only knows the way of the righteous, but He also knows the way of the wicked. In fact, He’ll say that clearly in Psalm 1:6. “*The LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*” So He knows the way of the righteous, but He also knows the way of the wicked. But the word “know” for the righteous is a different way of knowing than He knows the wicked. Hosea 13:5, “*It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought*” So He took note of their plight, and He cared for them. In Genesis 4:1, He says this, “*Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.*” Now there’s knowing, and then there’s knowing. Knowing that conceives is a little bit different from knowing, right? Please do not make me put a chart behind me. So when God uses the word “know” in any of its forms, about His people, that word is synonymous for “love.” “I loved you.” He looks upon those He deems as righteous with a divine, sovereign foreknowledge love. So you can even interpret that text as “Those

whom He foreloved.” So those whom He foreloved, He predestined. There’s such conflict over this word. Those He foreloved, He predestined. Here’s what that means. Those whom He, in His foreknowledge, His foreloving, loved, cared for, deemed righteous, He’s decided what their future is, that they would be conformed to the image of His Son.

So foreknowledge, leading into predestination, that leads into those being conformed into the image of His Son, how does that work? How does that look? How does that play itself out? Well he doesn’t leave us hanging. He picks it up in verse 30, and he tells us exactly how it works. “*And those whom he predestined he also called,...*” Okay, how does He call? That’s all over the map. He engages some people through the intellect. The Bible tells us in Acts 15 that this woman named Lydia, this successful fashionista, she’s basically at this Beth Moore Bible study and Paul shows up and begins to engage her intellect and she becomes a believer. Or have you seen the *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*? That was originally written by a guy named C.S. Lewis. In 1925, C.S. Lewis became a teacher of medieval literature at Oxford. He would later move to Cambridge. He was just a brilliant mind. His mom died when he was 9, he fought in World War I, he was wounded, saw atrocities there and became a staunch, ferocious atheist. As he would teach medieval literature, here’s the thing that would infuriate him. All his favorite authors were Christians. It drove him crazy. He also had a dear friend, also a public intellect, named J.R.R. Tolkien. Have you heard of him? Tolkien and Lewis would go to the pub and drink pints and smoke pipes and argue for hours. Tolkien would just argue and argue and argue with Lewis because Lewis was tormented by the Bible. He hated the Bible. Here’s why. He wanted to take this book and go, “It’s just myth.” But his problem was he knew enough about medieval literature to know it’s not myth because of the details in the text and the historical assignments given. Like if you read *Beowulf*, there are no details in *Beowulf*. There’s no, “He was laying in his left side holding a cup in his right.” It’s more like, “Everybody was sleeping in a room, the monster came in, there was a big fight, everybody died.” There are no details. But in the text, in our Scripture, there are things like, “They threw the net off the left side of the boat early in the morning.” There are historical data given, leaders who were actually in power when the Bible says they were in power. So he knew it wasn’t myth, but he wanted it to be myth and it drove him crazy. So finally after a night of drinking and pubbing it up, they go on this long walk. They walk all night long and Tolkien just goes, “Here is your problem, Lewis. This is a myth that’s true.” And for whatever reason, that line just blew Lewis up. It just infuriated him. So a couple days later, he gets on his brother’s motorcycle and goes to the zoo. And according to him, when he got on that bike, he wasn’t a believer, but when he arrived at the zoo in London, he was the most reluctant convert in London. How did God come after him? Through his intellect.

But then there are other times that God doesn’t come through the intellect at all, like the apostle Paul. Saul is on his horse, headed to Damascus to kill Christians and Jesus Himself is like, “(Bam!) No, I’m done with this. You’re following Me.” He even stands over him for a second. “I’ll show you how much you must suffer for My name’s sake.” And then what happens? Paul serves Him faithfully. Jesus didn’t show up and go, “Paul,

open up your Torah. Let me discuss with you, both in regards to religion and philosophy, why My resurrection (which I'm obviously resurrected, check it) is the most logical course of events to make sense of the mess that you see around you in the world." He doesn't do that, does He? He just shows up. For some people, it's by example. They see an example of strong Christian living and it does something to them. They're drawn to it and want to know more about it. You see, those God foreloved, He predestined them. He calls, He woos. Can I tell you something that haunted me forever? Why did I care? When Jeff Fairclaw started sharing the gospel with me, why did I care? Do you know how many people don't care? Do you know how many people are just cut off from that? They have no interest whatsoever in hearing any of it. Why, upon hearing it, did I go, "I need to know what's here?" Why did I go to lame Christian thing after lame Christian thing and keep going back? The first time I went to church, teenagers spelled out the word "joy" with their bodies. That's dumb. You shouldn't spell out stuff with your body. There should be a law. So why did I keep coming back? God woos. Like some of you have said to me, "Man, when I first started going to the Village, I felt like you were talking just to me." I don't know you. This is not a plot. It's not like your friend e-mailed me going, "Hey bro, here's his background, and here's where we'll be sitting." And if you study Christian history, in the Revivalist era they would actually do that. There was this thing called the "guilt seat," and if you were bringing lost people with you, they would sit in the guilt seat to be pointed out later.

Now, He woos, He calls. Think about this. For those of you who aren't believers, why do you keep coming back? Last week I stood up here and told you that you were going to go to hell and that that was just and right, that you were intrinsically and by your essence wicked and worthy of the wrath of God. What in the world would make you leave that and go, "Hmm, I wonder what the good news is. We are going back next week." What would make you do that? Why would you not go, "Oh, that is old school hell fire damnation stupidity, and I am an enlightened man and want nothing to do with that. God would not be like that. God is what I make Him to be." Because that's what everybody else does. Why would you come back? Why are those who are hostile towards the Lord keep coming back? Can I tell you why? Because those whom He foreknew He predestined and those He predestined He is calling, and you won't outrun Him. And listen to peoples' testimonies. Very few people have the same exact testimony. Then there are these crazy things. People just driving in the middle of nowhere turn on the radio station and there's someone preaching the gospel, they pull their car over and weep and become believers. People are saved through tragedy, people are saved through joy. He just calls. We've even met people overseas who are just like, "I had a dream. Jesus came to me in a dream." It makes me go, "What? My story's lame. Don't worry about mine. A guy on the football team shared the gospel with me." Jesus Himself didn't come to me, another guy had to do it. And this is how it works. He calls. Those He foreloved He predestined, those He predestined He calls, those He calls He justifies. Which means, since this took place so long ago in the mind and heart of God, that God, knowing full well every sin, every idle thought, every wicked motivation, everything that's on that film that would be projected, God sees and justifies. Right standing before Him, all of my sin past, present and future poured out on Christ in the cross so that now as messy as I am, I am spotless and perfect in His sight. And it blows

my mind that that's true, because I'm still such a mess. That's why I'm always trying to quote to you 2 Corinthians 5, "*He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" Don't I try to say that every week? Why? Because in this foreloving, predetermined calling of God, He justifies you. He takes from you all that is wicked that He would need to put His wrath on, and He fills you, saves you to His mission, righteousness, holiness. "*Those whom he foreknew he also predestined,...and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*"

Here's how He glorifies. Here's how it looks. What happens in that process is that, as I'm called and justified and He opens up my heart and mind to Him, He becomes the treasure, He becomes the pursuit, He becomes what I want. We were in and out of church like I said earlier, but "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" was always being sung. It would go, "Turn you eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of this earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." This is glorification. This is "You're what I want." Augustine, who was just another brilliant historic theologian and statesman, said, "How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose! . . . You drove them from me, You who are the true, the sovereign joy . . . You who are sweeter than all pleasure." Do you see what happened? There's this fundamental shift. He valued these things, he loved these things. And then all of a sudden he loved this thing more, and it made him walk away from these things. That's sanctification and glorification. I'll say it this way. My money doesn't control me. It doesn't. I'm open-handed. I don't need to live in such a way that garners your approval. I don't care what you think about what I drive or where I live or how I dress. None of those external forces that enslave so many of us should enslave the believer in Christ. Glorified, I have one goal, one treasure. Because there's a lot of people who are cool right now who won't be soon. And there are a lot of wealthy people right now who will not be wealthy soon. So I drive an '01 Impala while I let my wife dress me. I don't know if it works; I don't care. Free, glorified, inward holiness, transformation, that I, despite my continued wickedness, have been empowered and enabled by the cross of Christ in grace and faith to love my wife like Jesus Christ loved the church, to pour the gospel into my children as primary, to live with my money open-handed to show that there is something of greater value than this life. And on and on and on I could go. It's glorification.

It's also why I'm constantly pleading with you who are nominal believers to address your heart and mind. Because if there is none of this in your life, you should fear and doubt. If there's nothing in you that says, "I need to pursue Him, I love Him, I want to grow in Him" and all there is is good people trying to do good things, you should be nervous and afraid. You might not be saved. I'm not saying you're not, but I'm saying you should be nervous. And every time I say something like that, a bunch of you get mad at me. But listen, what would you have me do? Would it not be more cruel of me to preach directly to you what the Scriptures say even though I know it's going to make some of you angry, would it not be cruel of me if your soul was really on the line, if eternity and you being judged either by the cross of Christ or by your wickedness, would it not be the most cruel, wicked act I could do to you as a pastor to not preach to you the full counsel of

God and only tickle your ears so we could take up a better offering? Those whom He calls He glorifies.

And then he moves onto this very, very famous part of the Scriptures. Starting in verse 31, *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* So all he’s saying right now in this moment is, “How secure are we in God? He did this. We didn’t do this. He did. He came and got me.” It’s why Paul was so aggressive and fearless. He’s like, “I was just riding my horse. He came and got me. He saved me. He began the good work in me, and He’ll be faithful to complete it because He is the Author and Perfecter of this thing. He started it, He did it, He maintains it, He grows it.” Let’s keep going. *“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God...”* All he’s saying right there is, “To any accusation that can be made against you, God simply goes, ‘That was paid for in the cross of Christ. Jesus Christ died for that.’” So it doesn’t matter what sin it is, if that accusation came before the throne room of God, if that film was shown before God, God would look at that and go, “Yeah, I poured out all that wrath on Jesus. Justified, paid in full, he doesn’t owe that.”

I think one of the reasons that worship and transformed lives are such rare things among Evangelicals is because there’s a fundamental misunderstanding about what’s happened here. What we want to do is take ownership over certain parts of salvation. We want to go, “I did this...I did this...I did this...” And when you do that, you become instrumental in what God’s done and you play this significant role in what God’s done. The problem with that is the Bible screams that that is a made-up version of salvation. God gave you faith, God gave you grace according to His foreloving, predetermined calling plan to justify you and glorify you into the image of His Son for the sake of His name. You see, when you know that you didn’t do anything, when you know that God just rescued you, when you know that you’re not any different from the most wicked pagan, horrible human soul on earth, but God saved you, He loves you, He foreloved you, it’s humbling, it can be overwhelming and it will incite the soul to worship. But when you boil this thing down to, “Quit doing this and start doing this,” you rob the essence change necessary for you to walk in the freedom of those commands.

And we haven’t even gotten to talk about that Jesus got all the disciples together and told them, “Go preach, go herald this good news to the entire earth. Because I’m going to save people all over the earth. I have foreloved, predestined and am going to call men from every tribe, tongue and nation all over the world.” Because right now, people get really goofy. Like hyper-Calvinists go, “Don’t tell anybody about the Lord. They’ll just sit around.” Arminians just go, “You won’t do missions if you believe in a sovereign God.” Which is ridiculous. You have to point to something far beyond reformed theology to kill missions. Jesus says, “Go, tell.” So here’s what happens. According to Acts 17, the times and places at which you dwell were set by God before history began. He says the times and habitations of your living were planned by God so men may find Him though He is not far from any of them. So here’s what happens. There are those in

your neighborhood that God, in His forelove, predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son by calling. So He moves you into the neighborhood and then comes to you and goes, "Um, I'm going to save. Do you want to play? You see, here's the thing. You've still got a lot of wicked things in your heart, and so I'm going to heal you and work in you and show you and chisel some things out in you as you are a part of what I'm doing. And what I'm doing is saving some folks in your neighborhood. So do you want to play?" Because the mission, the great cause, it exposes that we're ashamed. We don't want to be embarrassed. We don't want to be the weird Christian guy. And let me ask you, please don't be the weird Christian guy. Can I beg you for that? Have dinner with your neighbor, but don't bring anointing oil. Can you just not do that please? Now if the Holy Spirit tells you to audibly, then yes. But other than that, keep the oil that you bought on television from Jerusalem at the house. Please don't be the weird Christian guy. But we herald, we herald the gospel. Why? Because He's going to save. So we herald it. How do we know who? We don't. We never will. But I didn't read anything where we're responsible to call. We herald, God calls. So in our neighborhoods, we herald. And God's inviting you into what He's doing. That moment where you're at the bench press, you're at 225lbs on there, you know you can't do it. All of a sudden you look and there's that guy you've already talked to once and you know he's the guy who's done a bunch of flies and curls and has never done anything to his legs...we've all seen him. And if that's you, stop it. You look ridiculous. Do a squat. Anyhow, have you noticed that some people you're really drawn to? Like there's people you have genuine spiritual concern for? What do you think is going on there? You're a self-centered, wicked human being. What in the world in you would lay somebody heavy on your heart? Could it just maybe be the Holy Spirit saying, "Do you want to play?" I contend that the reason why so many of your faith is boring and retarded and goofy as can be is because you've been saved from but you haven't been saved to anything. It's on mission in the great cause that so much of what ails us is chiseled away, so much of what haunts us is chiseled away. And nothing makes the soul explode and worship like knowing who we are and having God use us in profound ways. But we'll start that talk next week. This is how salvation works. Praise His name that, for whatever reason, He has already called to some of us and He's calling to others even now.

Here was my hope coming in, because this sermon is just as much of a space maker as the last one. My hope coming in is for those of you who aren't believers but just keep coming back and you don't quite understand why that is, that maybe now you would understand why that's happening. The God of the universe is wooing you. Maybe today is that day you'll finally surrender to all of that. We prayed this week that it would be. And if you're nominal, maybe God would reveal His grace and mercy in such a way that finally your heart and mind are stirred up to Him in a way that would be called serious and not trite and weak. And then if you're a strong believer, maybe God would repair some really humanistic, man-centered theology that gets espoused all the time but in the end has very little biblical evidence to support it. And even the ones that people try to make support it don't make up for the massive amount of biblical evidence that this is how God saves.

So if the bad news is that we're all damned and we're all sinners, the good news is that

God saves. That's what this doctrine is, that God saves. And maybe we might have our hearts stirred up. Maybe we would feel gratitude for the first time. Maybe we never really felt gratitude towards the Lord because we can look at what we have and what we chose and what we did, and in all of that we've lost just how good and how gracious and mighty and beautiful God's been to you. This is our hope, this is our prayer and as I've already read, it's well out of our hands, well out of my hands. I herald, God calls.

Let's pray, "Father, for these men and women being drawn into this place by You and for You, I thank You. I know that some of this is heavy and some of this is confusing and it creates a lot of other questions. But for those of us who know You, I pray that we just rest today in Your foreloving, predestined call on our lives to be conformed to the image of Your Son. And then for those of us who are being called, I pray that You would make us genuinely aware of your intent and pursuit of us. Help us. We want hearts that worship You, minds that love You. We need that transformation. Help us. Thank You that You who began this good work will complete it and that our confidence that all things work for our good is based completely on the fact that this is Your authoring and Your perfecting going on. So we submit to You, we love You and we chase You. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

There Is No God

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I believe that there is no God. I'm beyond atheism. Atheism is not believing in God. Not believing in God is easy -- you can't prove a negative, so there's no work to do. You can't prove that there isn't an elephant inside the trunk of my car. You sure? How about now? Maybe he was just hiding before. Check again. Did I mention that my personal heartfelt definition of the word "elephant" includes mystery, order, goodness, love and a spare tire?

So, anyone with a love for truth outside of herself has to start with no belief in God and then look for evidence of God. She needs to search for some objective evidence of a supernatural power. All the people I write e-mails to often are still stuck at this searching stage. The atheism part is easy.

But, this "This I Believe" thing seems to demand something more personal, some leap of faith that helps one see life's big picture, some rules to live by. So, I'm saying, "This I believe: I believe there is no God."

Having taken that step, it informs every moment of my life. I'm not greedy. I have love, blue skies, rainbows and Hallmark cards, and that has to be enough. It has to be enough, but it's everything in the world and everything in the world is plenty for me. It seems just rude to beg the invisible for more. Just the love of my family that raised me and the family I'm raising now is enough that I don't need heaven. I won the huge genetic lottery and I get joy every day.

Believing there's no God means I can't really be forgiven except by kindness and faulty memories. That's good; it makes me want to be more thoughtful. I have to try to treat people right the first time around.

Believing there's no God stops me from being solipsistic. I can read ideas from all different people from all different cultures. Without God, we can agree on reality, and I can keep learning where I'm wrong. We can all keep adjusting, so we can really communicate. I don't travel in circles where people say, "I have faith, I believe this in my heart and nothing you can say or do can shake my faith." That's just a long-winded religious way to say, "shut up," or another two words that the FCC likes less. But all obscenity is less insulting than, "How I was brought up and my imaginary friend means more to me than anything you can ever say or do." So, believing there is no God lets me be proven wrong and that's always fun. It means I'm learning something.

Believing there is no God means the suffering I've seen in my family, and indeed all the suffering in the world, isn't caused by an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent force that isn't bothered to help or is just testing us, but rather something we all may be able to help others with in the future. No God means the possibility of less suffering in the future.

Believing there is no God gives me more room for belief in family, people, love, truth, beauty, sex, Jell-O and all the other things I can prove and that make this life the best life I will ever have.