

## *“How to Avoid Apostasy”*

### **Fixing Our Eyes On Jesus, Our High Priest**

Hebrews 6:13-20

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**Jeff:** Okay. Good to be back with you, men. And I'd have an announcement I'd like to share with you. It's an opportunity. It's called the Paideia Center. And the Paideia Center really begins with RTS, the Reformed Theological Seminary, and I think it's Orlando. There are a number of different sites, but Michael Allen is in Orlando, and he's heading this up.

And what it is, it's an effort to advance lay education. And so what his hope and his vision is is basically to enable, to help lay folks read some texts that would otherwise be inaccessible to them. And so what we're going to read together is five orations by Gregory of Nazianzus. It's going to be a text-based discussion.

Now I realize that may sound a little bit daunting. Just the name of the man may be a bit daunting. But it's really not. These are five sermons that the man wrote. And for writing them he receives the title “The Theologian.”

And the other thing about this is that Nazianzus is one of the Cappadocian Fathers. And if you know anything about church history, you know that the Cappadocian Fathers were instrumental in helping the church to formulate an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. And really that's what the Five Orations are about. They're about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

So over the course of three months, one meeting a month, we're going to be reading these Five Orations. And I think there are two letters in the back of the book that we're going to be reading.

If you want to sign up, you can go to

<http://paideiacenter.com>

and sign up for the Pittsburgh site. They cap it off at 20, so the discussion group is small. It's going to be intimate. It is going to be a discussion. So you'll want to read and you'll want to sign up.

**Transcriber's Note:** The transcriptionist asks for the spelling of *paideia*.

**Participant:** And what does *paideia* mean? (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** *Paideia* means *education*. It's the Greek word for education. And the dates are September 6, October 4, and November 1 here in the Pittsburgh area. This is happening in seven different cities all over the country. And so don't go to another city. Come here to us, okay? (*Laughter*) Don, why don't you lead us into prayer? (*Music*)

Our Father in heaven, we are thankful for the day that You've provided. We know that each one is a gift from Your hand. And we are so thankful for the day upon which the Lord Jesus Christ was down to the horns of the altar at Calvary's cross. We're thankful for that day because it was the day on which You accomplished our redemption. It's a day upon which all of the Old Testament sacrifices and promises and foreshadows came to

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climax and fruition. Father, it's the day upon which we can have freedom in Jesus Christ, and so we're thankful for that day. And we're thankful for life in Christ. We pray, Father, that You will bless us as we study Your word. We pray that You will open this Word to us, that we might understand it and so that we might learn more about our freedom in Him.

And Father, we pray that You will bless not only our gathering here, but we pray for those who are on our hearts and minds. Father, we continue to pray for Don's wife, and ask that Your hand would be upon her. And Father, we pray that You will bless Corky's son. Father, we ask that Your hand would be upon Mary. We pray that Your strength would abound in her. Father, we also pray that Your hand would be upon Jim as he continues to translate and work to bring Your word into the range of hearing for those who have never heard. And Father, we pray that Your hand would be upon us for good, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** I want you to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 6. We'll read verses 13-20 this morning. And one thing that I will mention that I forgot to mention is that I'm going to be leading that Paideia Center here in Pittsburgh. So if you sign up, we'll be meeting there again.

Hebrews chapter 6. I'm picking up where we left off. So hopefully, you'll remember. *(Laughter)* Hebrews chapter 6 starting with verse 13. I'll read through the end of the chapter. And this is the word of God. Give your ear to the reading of it.

*“For when God made a promise to Abraham, since He had no one greater by whom to swear; He swore by Himself, saying, ‘Surely I will bless You and multiply You.’ And thus Abraham having patiently waited obtained the promise.*

*“For people swear by something greater than themselves. And in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of His promise, He guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the Inner Place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*

**Participant:** This is the word of the Lord.

**Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** All right. I had totally forgotten that. *(Laughter)* So today we're going to look at these headings. We're going to talk a little bit about some introductory matters. And we're going to ask the question. *What are we to emulate?* Then we're going to look at the question. *From where do these traits emerge?* And you'll understand what I mean by *traits* in just a minute. And then we're going to look at *the practical nature of the promise of God.* So with those kinds of things we're going to begin.

But I want to begin setting the stage if you will, for what it is that we're going to talk about next. And the reason I want to do this is because I think it's fairly important when we think about a passage like this one, especially a topic like the one I've proposed to talk about as it comes from the Scriptures, that is, how to avoid apostasy.

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You know what *apostasy* means by now. Apostasy is walking away from the faith. It’s turning, it’s going in the other direction. And you know and I know that there are people who do that. And I am talking to you this morning out of the book of Hebrews, saying that this is how you avoid apostasy. This is how the writer of Hebrews tells us how to avoid it. So I’m not making this up; this comes out of the text.

But when you propose a topic like that, that brings along with it a certain amount of baggage. Now I am under no presumption that I’m going to clear up the baggage. I know Bill’s here. I saw him earlier. *(Laughter)* Yes, Bill’s here. That means I’m going to run into trouble, but I’m trying to pre-empt it. Don’t tell him that. *(Laughter)*

**Participant:** I’m here for you, Jeff.

**Jeff:** Thank you, Don. *(Laughter)* All right. *(Laughter)* I’ve just found a pre-empt here. *(Laughter)*

All right. I want you to think. I want to give you some Scripture texts. I want to put some things into context for you.

I want you to think about John 17 for a minute. You don’t have to go there. If you want to go there, you can. I’m just going to work through a couple texts here.

In John 17 Jesus says, “*All that the Father has given Me will come to me.*” That’s part of chapter 6. “*And I will lose none of all that He has given Me.*” It’s a paraphrase. God has allocated some to be saved. “He’s given them to Me. They will come to Me, and I’ll lose none of them.”

Now when you think about those particular statements, that particular doctrine encompassed in those statements, you think about *the perseverance of the saints*. But before any saint can persevere, something else needs to happen. And it’s in what we just mentioned. And it’s this. *God needs to preserve the saints who persevere*, because if God doesn’t preserve the saints, than no one is going to persevere. It’s that simple; it’s that clear.

Now having said that, there are those passages like 1 John, where John is talking about those who departed. And he says something like this. He says, “They went out from us because they were never of us.”

Now that means that there is an *invisible church*, an invisible church of whom God knows who belongs. But there is the *visible church*. And the visible church is made up of wheat and tares. And people come in and out. And some people who come in are the elect, and some people who come in are not the elect. And so John says that they went out from us because they were never of us.

Now obviously there may be repentance on their part and they may come back into the fold and so on, and all that stuff. I’m not denying any of that. But what John is saying is true if they remain outside of the church. They left because they were never really a part, okay? So we have to factor that in.

Now having those two texts in mind, we need to factor in a third. We need to think about 2 Peter and what 2 Peter says. “*Make your calling and election sure.*” “*Be diligent to make your calling and election sure,*” because God doesn’t know it. *(Laughter)* Okay. Thanks, Don. *(Laughter)* I really appreciate that. *(Laughter)* Come on, guys. Get awake

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here. *(Laughter)* Yeah, God knows, right? So to whom am I to make this calling and election sure?

**Participant:** To yourself.

**Jeff:** Myself, right? I am to make my calling and election sure to me, okay? So when we think about our text this morning—how to avoid apostasy—we are in the perimeter or the textual location of 2 Peter, making my calling and election sure to me, how to avoid apostasy. This is a message for me so that I don’t end up on the outside of the church looking in. Okay, so that just sets the theological framework and hopefully gives you a little bit of a leg up when you’re thinking about how to place what we’re going to do today. So I fully, heartily believe in the preservation of God and the perseverance of the saints. And yet I also believe that there can be those in the visible church who exit, who were never of us. And therefore it behooves us to make our calling and election sure. Okay, Bill. Any disagreements? No, just kidding. *(Laughter)* Ted?

**Ted:** I think it’s important. I like what you said a couple times already in the last several minutes. “They went out from us because they were not of us.”

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Ted:** It does not say, “They went out from us because they quit believing in Jesus.”

**Jeff:** They may have been put out, right?

**Ted:** Right. But the point is that I think that we think of being in or out based on my personal faith. It’s whether I’m in the church or not. And you’ve said that several times. They’ve gone out from the church. It’s not that they didn’t believe in Jesus. Now maybe they went out from the church because they didn’t believe in Jesus.

**Jeff:** Right.

**Ted:** We think so individually today in the Protestant faith that we forget that we need to remain in the fellowship of the church. It’s not enough just to have your own personal faith.

**Jeff:** Yes. And that’s a great comment. There’s so much to that. But I’m going to resist.

**Ted:** That’s no problem.

**Jeff:** That’s a great comment. I mean, there’s a lot of good that we could unpack obviously, as you know.

Well, let’s go on. We’re going to walk through the Valley of *Paranesis*. Now what is the Valley of *Paranesis*?

I like John Bunyan. Is John, the one who put that up on the website, here? No? I can’t call on a guy who’s not here. Sorry about that, John. Anyway,--

**Participant:** Our Greek brother John?

**Jeff:** Yes, yes. John Bunyan would have named this section “The Valley of *Paranesis*.” What is *paranesis*? You know what it is. You may not know the word, but you certainly know what it is. It’s strong admonition. It’s an urging. You’ve heard me refer to it in the past as a *hortatory section*, a section of encouragement. And this whole letter could be described as a letter of encouragement, because it is.

But one of the things that we’re going to look at as we look at today’s text is that we have to realize that we’re going down into one side of the valley, the Valley of *Paranesis*.

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And we see that in Hebrews 5:1-10. We just heard the author to the Hebrews talk about Christ, the Melchizedekian Priest, who is the fulfillment of the Levitical priests. And yet He is of a different priesthood, and so on. We just heard about that.

But when he gets to verse 11, he says something interesting. He says, “You know what? The problem is that this is all hard to explain to you. And it’s hard to explain not because the theology is so hard, but it’s hard to explain to you. Why? It’s hard to explain because you’ve become dull of hearing,” he says. “You’ve become sluggish in hearing.” In other words, the problem is not with the theology, that it’s so hard. “The problem is with you,” he says.

Now you can automatically see where this is one side of the valley that we’re going down into, right? We’re going down into the Valley of Exhortation. We started high with the Christ who is the fulfillment of the Melchizedekian priesthood. Now we’re going down, and he’s going to give us some hard things. He’s going to say some difficult things to us.

But the question that we have to ask ourselves as you think about this particular text, at being dull and being sluggish and being non-responsive, maybe, is how do we avoid apostasy? How do we avoid walking away from the faith altogether?

Now let me ask you a question, and I want you to answer it to yourself. If you were giving a talk on this particular text or any other,—and let’s think about another text. If you were giving a talk on how to avoid walking away from the faith—apostasy—what might you encourage people to do? I think you would encourage them to do any number of things. I think you might say, “Well, you know, to avoid apostasy you need to read the Scriptures. You need to pray.”

What else might you encourage them to do? You might say that journaling is helpful. Meditating upon the Word is a fruitful activity. You might say any number of things. And to go back to Ted’s point, a lot of the things that we would tell people to do are very individualistic in nature, as if we’re saying to them, “It all depends on you. Hang in there and hold on. And these are some of the life preserves that you can hold onto as you think about how to avoid walking away from the faith.”

But you will avoid apostasy, at least according to this text, in some interesting ways. You avoid it by being imitators of the faithful who are in the church. I mean, that’s what it says in verse 12.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Hebrews 6:11-12, NKJV. *“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”*

**Jeff:** I mean, that’s what it says in verse 12. In verse 12 we are to avoid walking away from the faith, to avoid apostasy, by being a part of the church of Jesus Christ. I think that’s something that we probably don’t always think about these days. And I also think that it’s one thing that we’ve been thinking about, whether you’re conscious of it or not, or whether you remember these references or not. But do you remember what he says? He says, “you with an unbelieving heart.” He says, “be encouraged. You who are considering forsaking the assembly, don’t do it.” And then in chapter 11, verses 1 and following, he gives a list of faithful people—we call that the “hall of faith”—in order to

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look to people that they don't live with now, people that are in the past, that they can look to and say that these people were a part of the invisible church. I'm a part of the visible church. I can look to people who I see and know.

I want you to think about this for a minute. Think about this. You're in a church, and I'll give you my own example of this.

I was in what Condolisa Rice called in 2005 “The Elastic Fellowship of Europe.” And I was in that particular church worshipping with a congregation whose pastor had been arrested by the KGB for preaching the gospel. And I was sitting there on that particular Sunday morning listening to this pastor preach the Word. And I could not help but well up with admiration for not only him, but for my brothers and sisters who sat around me.

I mean, think about it. I want you to know something. One of the things they said to me was, “We never know when the KGB is going to come and raid the church.”

**Participant:** Wow!

**Jeff:** And so they have to change the times they meet and the locations, and so on. In fact,--well, I'll tell you the story. But the point is that I couldn't help but think to myself, *these people love the Lord Jesus Christ and they love one another*. They're not hiding away, reading the Scriptures on their own and saying, “This is the safest way to do it.” They're gathering together and worshipping. And this man is up there proclaiming the gospel because it's the means of salvation for people who need it.

So how do you avoid apostasy? Well the answer, at least in our text, is *the church*, okay? It's the church.

So let's think about *what we are to emulate* when we think about life in the church, when we think about avoiding apostasy. What are we to emulate?

Well, when you look at the word that's here—*imitate*—it's the word from which we get our word *mimic*.

Now I don't know if you know how this goes or not. You probably do. We're all humans. We all function in some way or other by the worst parts of human nature. And do you ever watch your kid, and he starts hanging around with somebody that you don't really like, who you don't really care for? And the first thing that he does is imitate that other kid's laugh. And you're a little irritated by that, because you know what you're saying to yourself. Is this kid of mine a follower, or is he a leader? You know, that sort of thing. (*Laughter*) Do you know what I'm saying?

But my point is, what do we do? When we really like somebody, we imitate them. And we usually, typically, imitate the worst parts of them first. Or we imitate the most superficial parts first. And that's difficult not to do.

Do you ever find yourself doing that? All of a sudden you say, “Oh, I've heard that before.” You know what I mean? And you're saying, “Where did I get that?” And you know where you got it—that sort of thing. That's the idea.

Well, there are things that we want to emulate about the church. And what we want to avoid doing is imitating the most superficial things about those in the church.

Do you know what I'm saying to you? The worst thing that you can do is to have somebody that you really admire and imitate, for instance, the way they walk, and think that that's really spiritual maturity—a certain master, the way he walks. (*Laughter*) You

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know, that sort of thing? Do you ever watch that? I’ve got too many stories. We’re going to avoid all these things. But you know what I’m talking about.

You know, a guy comes into the church, and he starts picking up on this or that or the other thing that he sees mature Christians doing, and he’s really picking up on the most superficial thing about them. And that’s what we need to avoid doing.

I mean, whether you do that or not in one sense is not a big deal. But one of the things that you need to pick up on is that you need to pick up on the most important thing about your brothers who are in the church.

Conversion and family likeness are crucial. In other words, there will be things that you will do that you will see other believers doing, and you won’t be able to help it. It’s sort of like walking along with your dad. And you realize that there is more about your dad that is in you than you at first realized. And that doesn’t just mean biology.

You know, how often is it when you walk up to somebody or somebody walks up to you, if you have an adopted child, and they say to you, “You know, so-and-so looks just like you.”? Or “they act just like you.” What I’m saying is that when you’re part of a family, there are some deep-seated substructures that get laid into your life. And that’s the way it is with the Christian church.

B. B. Warfield tells a story, and it’s a great story. He doesn’t identify where this is, but he says that there are two men. He claims that this is true. There are two men and they’re walking toward one another in a city in Europe that happens to be in disarray. I don’t know if it was during war time or during a riot, or what. But they’re walking toward one another. And as they walk toward one another, their eyes lock. And their eyes lock because there is a relative peace that has come over both of them.

So as they look, they pass each other, looking at each other. And as they pass one another, they both turn around to discover that they’re looking at each other. And the one guy walks up to the other guy and puts his finger right in his chest and says to him, “What is the chief end of man?” (*Laughter*)

And the other guy says, “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” (*Laughter*)

**Participant:** Amen.

**Jeff:** And the other guy says, “I knew you were a Shorter Catechism boy.” (*Laughter*) Right? Because look, he’s not just saying, “You know, I knew you had that look about you that you memorize stuff.” No, no, no. He’s saying, “I know what it’s like to have the peace of God come over me.” I know what it’s like to live and to walk in that peace. And he recognizes it in this other man.

See, that’s what we’re talking about. And that’s not a matter of studying somebody’s walk. I’ll tell you what it is. That is a matter of studying someone’s Christ.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Okay? Now that leads to talking about *Abraham*. And we need to think about this, because what we often say is this. Let’s study Abraham’s faith.

Well look, I want to tell you something. We are going to look at Abraham’s faith. I want to look at Abraham’s faith because it’s important for us to do that. But we need to understand what it is that we’re saying before we look at Abraham’s faith. When we look at Abraham’s faith, we are really looking at *Abraham’s Christ*.

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**Participant:** Amen.

**Jeff:** How many times does somebody walk up to you and say to you, “Boy, I really wish I had your faith.”

And we want to say to them, “No, you don’t, because my faith is weak and strong at any given moment. What you want is my Christ.”

**Participant:** Yes.

**Jeff:** Because whether I’m weak or strong, He is always my Rock in whom I hide. And so the idea then is that yes, faith is the instrument through or whereby I am saved. But it is Christ who saves me. And so the idea then is that when we talk about looking at someone’s faith, we really always want to be saying that I’m really looking at their Christ and what it is that’s produced in them as a result of having them saved by Christ. And what is produced in them is obviously faith.

Faith is one of those things that we recognize in somebody else. It’s like the two walking toward one another in the midst of the rebellion. I recognize something in you, right? It’s the faith that we’re recognizing, okay? So that’s the idea that we want to think about when we think about Abraham’s faith. It’s the response that’s engendered in him as a result of Christ having saved him.

So what is faith? Well, in simplest terms, *faith is our response to the gospel*. That’s exactly what it is.

Now you can flesh that out further, and we will flesh that out for just a minute. But I think that in its most fundamental form it is our response to the gospel. That’s what faith is.

Now when you think about faith, you think about faith in terms of *kat* spelled with a k. It’s *knowledge* or *notitia*. It’s knowledge of the gospel, even if it’s a slight or a small knowledge. It’s a—*assensus* or *assent*. It’s assent to the knowledge that I have.

And if you have that much, then you have as much as the demons, because the demons believe. They agree with what they believe. But they’re not saved.

So what is saving faith? Saving faith is the t.

You’ve heard people use this before. And as I’ve come to study, I think this is not a good way to do this.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Jeff pulls up a chair.

**Jeff:** You’ve heard people say, “This is a chair.” You’ve heard me say this. This is a chair. “Do you believe that’s a chair?”

“Yes, I believe that’s a chair. It looks like a chair—not every chair I’ve seen, but it looks like a chair.”

“Do you agree that’s it’s a chair?”

“I agree that it’s a chair.”

“Well then, sit down in it.”

And what are we saying at that point? We’re saying that *trust is my obedient response*.

Now I have come to believe in the last year, maybe six months, that that’s not a good way to do that analogy. Why? Because what I’m doing is that I’m importing my work—sitting in the chair—into my definition of faith.

**Participant:** Right.

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**Second Participant:** It’s your decision.

**Jeff:** So what’s the better way to describe the t? Well, the better way to describe *trust* or *fiducia* is to describe it as my *inflamed affections for God*. In other words, my head knows the right knowledge. My will agrees with that knowledge. But the problem is the deadness of my affections, the deadness of my desire toward God.

And so when I am regenerated, my desire is now for God. And so the trust has to do with our affections, not with our obedient response. Sanctification is our obedient response. Faith has to do with what we know, what we desire, and so what we will, what we agree with savingly.

So when I talk to you about what faith is, that’s what I’m talking about. I’m talking about a mind that knows. I’m talking about a heart that longs, and a will that chooses that one thing, the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes?

**Participant:** Jeff, why did you come to this change of thought? I mean, what manufactured this?

**Jeff:** Yes. Well, I’ve always been a little bit uncomfortable Here’s the thing I would say. You need to distinguish or differentiate the forensic without separating the sanctifying benefits. And so how is it that we are justified before God? It is by faith. And that faith is what I know and what I agree with and what I desire. Having that which amounts to saving faith, I also possess the accompanying benefits, because it’s impossible for me not to possess the sanctifying benefits along with the forensic. So I agree with you totally. Yes?

**Participant:** I was just thinking that it’s probably not very good to tell people to decide for Christ, because the decision is primarily God having moved upon us, but rather to hear the gospel and then to respond.

with that analogy because of the work that is entailed in it. But I’ve been doing some reading as of late, and that’s driven me to that conclusion, mainly Jonathan Edwards, mainly thinking a little bit more about the unified dispositional complex that we are, thinking about the head and the heart and the affections and the will, and thinking about how those things are really what is encompassed in the definition of faith.

So I’ve talked to you guys about the *unified dispositional complex* and the *fragmented dispositional complex*. These young men will someday experience the closest thing to a unified dispositional complex that we’ve already experienced. A unified dispositional complex is when your mind knows what you want and thinks the one thing. And your heart wants that one thing, and you will to choose that one thing.

And the closest you get to that in this life, apart from conversion, is the woman you marry, right? You’ll know that you love her. You’ll love her. And you’ll choose to love her. And so thinking about those kinds of things in this definition of faith has really driven me to that.

**Participant:** And you will not be able not to love her.

**Jeff:** That’s right.

**Participant:** I mean, when I first started dating Diana,. I didn’t have to sit around and say, “Let me see. I need to make a decision here. I’m going to see here. I’m trying to date her.” I wanted to. There was no question in my mind. When I ran track, I knew all the

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workouts were going to be hard. Well, should I go or shouldn't I? I couldn't help but show up for the workouts because that's what I wanted.

**Jeff:** And see, I'm a converted tracker, because I say, "Do I want to? No, I don't; I've got a car." (*Laughter*) I'm teasing you guys. Go ahead, Tom.

**Tom:** What is God's role in this, versus what we do?

**Participant:** Election.

**Jeff:** Yes. God is the One who elects. The Son is the One who accomplishes my salvation. And the Spirit is the One who draws me. He's the One who applies salvation to me.

**Tom:** So when I'm using my faith, is it me or is it the Holy Spirit's life in me?

**Jeff:** Well Tom, depending on whether you ask me or Bill,-- (*laughter*),-- You know what, Bill? I really feel bad. It's all pent up. (*Laughter*)

**Participant:** Don't let up. (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** So I'm going to say that salvation is a monergistic work. God is the only worker in resurrecting me from the dead state that I'm in. But once I'm alive by the working of God, then I exercise faith and I repent. And so a synergism begins out of the monergistic work of God.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Second Participant:** And you bring up the baggage. (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** I should have known better than to say that. He had a microphone in his hand. (*Laughter*)

**Participant:** I was going to say that you can't remove works or obedience.

**Jeff:** That's right.

**Participant:** It's part of the formula. You know, Ted used the analogy of wanting to be with his wife. And if we love our wives, there are times that we do things that we don't necessarily feel like or want to do. I wash the dishes because I know it's a particularly stressful time, or something like that. James says that "*faith without works is dead.*" You go to Hebrews 11, the Hall of Faith. The faithful are identified there not because they necessarily had a real passion, but they are identified by what they did. You know, this guy did this. And their works were evidence of their faith. Ephesians 2:8-10 is one of my favorite passages, because "we are saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest we should boast." But we are also saved "unto good works which He prepared in advance for us to walk in. We are His workmanship, created in Christ." So works are important. You shouldn't try to separate the professions from the works. And they may sometimes be obedience, and obedience is born of love. And Jesus Christ was obedient to the point of death. He did that because He had such an affection for us. So I think the two always have to fit together.

**Jeff:** You're absolutely right. When you think about what Calvin called "*the twofold grace of God that we receive upon salvation,*" one of the things that he said was that the twofold grace of God is *forensic*, and that it has *renovative* or sanctifying benefits. And he said that you can't just possess the forensic benefits, nor can you just possess the sanctifying benefits. And the sanctifying benefits flow logically from the justifying benefits.

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Here’s the thing I would say. You need to distinguish or differentiate the forensic without separating from the sanctifying benefits. And so how is it that we are justified before God? It is by faith. And that faith is what I know, what I agree with and what I desire. Having that which amounts to saving faith, I also possess the accompanying benefits, because it’s possible for me not to possess the sanctifying benefits along with the forensic. So I agree with you totally. Yes?

**Participant:** I was just thinking that it’s probably not very good or very helpful to tell people to decide for Christ, because the decision is primarily God’s, having moved among us, but rather to hear the gospel and then respond.

**Jeff:** Yes. Okay. Well, let me press on. *What does faith do? Faith inherits the promises.* Now I’m going to put up two statements that we’re going to see. *Faith obtains the promises.* And then *faith inherits the promises.*

*Faith inherits the promises* is a present participle, which means that it has a continuing effect. In other words, I am an heir. I continue to be an heir as long as I am alive and continue to wait for my inheritance. And yet faith obtains. The idea is an aorist, which means that I’ve already come into possession of that which I long for.

Now one of the things that is really interesting, one of the things that commentators say, is this. They don’t look forward to Abraham’s death and say that it was upon his death that he obtained the inheritance. They talk about him as if he obtained the inheritance as he continued to believe the promises of God. So for instance in Genesis 22, when he receives back his son as if his son were resurrected, he obtains the promises. So there’s a sense in which we have to live out being heirs while living in possession of what was promised by God. And that’s going to become a little bit more clear in just a minute.

But faith then gives us a place to stand and a path to walk—a place to stand in that we inherit those promises, and a path to walk in the sense that we continually walk as heirs.

There’s a second thing that we want to emulate, and that’s *Abraham’s patience*. Now the word in our text is made up of two words, and it’s kind of an interesting word. The first word has to do with *distance and space*, putting space between us and something else. And the second word has to do with *boiling up*.

And when you think about patience and you put these two words together, you put them together and you think about it like this. The idea is that I am to put distance or space between that which would boil up within me. That’s the idea of patience.

How would I think about that? I would think about fretting about tomorrow and how anxiety wells up within me. And I’ve got to put distance between me and that anxiety. And that’s the idea of the word.

So Abraham’s patience was that he put distance between himself and the world. Let me talk to you about it like this. When you think about the difference between anxiety that we experience as fallen creatures and the distress in the garden that Jesus experienced to the extent that he sweat drops of blood, what’s the difference? What’s the difference between the two?

The difference between the two is this. Distress is not sinful because distress doesn’t worry about tomorrow. Anxiety can be sinful because anxiety worries about tomorrow.

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Now there’s a lot more to it than that. But that’s the way we ought to think about the difference between Jesus’ response in the Garden of Gethsemane as distress and my anxiety.

So when we think about Abraham’s patience, I think that one of the ways in which we ought to think about it is distress. He could have been distressed. I can’t think of a father who wouldn’t have been distressed as they were cutting wood to be used to burn his son, okay? But we seem to have a man who exercised patience, and wasn’t anxious about it. And so faith and patience are mutual in their outworking. And I’m not going to say much about that.

But I want to say this: what patience is not. It’s not dullness, because we can misinterpret that, can’t we? Patience can look like dullness or sluggishness, and it’s not. We could say a lot more about that, but I’m not going to. I’m also going to indicate that what made Abraham’s progress is not perfection, but growth.

And we need to go on to *faith’s foundation*. I’m going to have to hurry through some of this. So *from where do these traits emerge?* Well, we’ve talked about parentage. So yes, they can come from biology. But we also talked about how they can emerge from an adopted child. You can have these kinds of traits fitted into the person who has been adopted. And so love has a tendency to motivate as a change factor.

John Owen said that *“if the love of a father will not make the child delight in him, what will?”* That’s a great quote.

Part of this biology, or in the family of God this love that motivates, brings about conviction. Now we saw this when the two men were approaching one another. *Conviction* means *to conquer*, and put with the commas as we have it, it is *the intensive*. It’s to conquer with conviction and intensity in terms of the conviction. In other words, what I believe is insurmountable because it rests on something other than me.

So, in other words, my faith rests on certain convictions. My patience is built upon convictions. Now the question that we have to ask ourselves is, what are these convictions?

Well, one is *the Father’s promise*. And we know that a promise is not better than the man who makes it, right? I mean, you know, how many times have you met the father who says, “I’ve got to make sure that I go home today, because I promised my son that I would build the train with him last week and I just wasn’t able to do it, right? You know, there may be a good man that we know who has had that experience, but he’s not a perfect man, right? And even his promise is not as solid as he would like it to be.

And so the Father’s promise is what is in view here. And the promise is based on the character of the Father. And what does he say? He says that the Father’s character does not change. And that’s what he says in verse 17. The promise is an immutable promise based upon the immutable God! That’s the idea. And so when we think about the Father who promises, we need to think about His character first of all. Being immutable, it doesn’t change. He loves and He will not stop loving us because He has covenanted to do so. And His promise then, flowing out of His character, is an immutable promise. It doesn’t change.

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So we have convictions about the Father because of who the Father is. And we then have convictions about what the Father says.

It's sort of like this Bible. I don't believe this Bible because it says that it's God's word. I believe this Bible is God's word because God says that it's His word. The Bible is based upon the character of God who speaks it.

Next, we'll talk about *inheriting the promise*. And then he says this, as if to shore things up for us. He says, look. *“It is impossible for God to lie.”*

**Participant:** Amen. Right.

**Jeff:** Now you wouldn't think he would need to say that. He's just got done saying that the Father's characters immutable, and so too is His promise. Well, I'm just going to put this on for good measure. The Father doesn't lie. And we say, “That's quite redundant, but we'll take it.”

We'll take it because we need it. And I'll tell you why we need it. We need it because we have failures in us. We don't always live according to our convictions.

You know, I want to tell you something. One thing I've recently said to my son. You know, he's getting ready to go off to college. And one thing I said to him was that I said, “you need to be faithful. And part of being faithful is this. You need to live out your convictions. No one else is going to live out your convictions. You need to know what you believe and you need to believe what you believe, and you need to live according to those beliefs.” That's what conviction is. If you are a man who is always pulled this way and that way, you're not a man of conviction. “Well but, you know, I'm pulled this way because this is going to put me in a bad situation. I would have been in a tense situation with this person or that person.” Who cares? You live according to your convictions.

And then this. This is a help to we who have fled. It is a strong encouragement to us to hold fast.

Now the reason that I want you to notice this is this. We've been told that it's impossible for God to lie. We've been told that God is immutable, an unchangeable character. But it says this. It says that I need to hold fast. I need to be strongly encouraged to hold fast because Hebrews chapter 2 says that I may drift. Hebrews chapter 5 says that I may get dull. Hebrews chapter 6 says that I may grow sluggish.

Let's jump to *the practical nature*. And I'm just going to finish with this because we're at 7:31. Let's go back to John Bunyan.

John Bunyan has this wonderful story in *Pilgrim's Progress*. If you haven't read it, I don't know if you're going to heaven. *(Laughter)* But listen to me. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a wonderful read. It's not an infallible read, but it's a wonderful read. He's talking about the experience of the Christian life.

Christian and the character Hopeful are on their way to the Celestial City, and the path is a little bit difficult. So Christian sees a meadow, and it's called the Bypath Meadow. A wonderful but ominous description, right? *(Laughter)*

And so he says, “Let's just go on the other side of the fence, because look! It parallels the path. And the path is really difficult, but we'll just walk in the meadow.”

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Well, they walk in the meadow. But the meadow leads them away from the path and through all kinds of dangers and snares. The end of it is that they end up being taken captive by Giant Despair and locked in Doubting Castle.

And they're there, and Hopeful is such a good companion, because Hopeful has to talk to Christian. Christian has talked about suicide three times while he's in Doubting Castle. And Hopeful talks to him, encourages him. Do you see the importance of the church?

And then this. Hopeful can't have faith for Christian. Hopeful can't have conviction for Christian. But Hopeful can remind Christian, pray with Christian, encourage Christian.

And what happens? On the third day, Bunyan says that Christian remembered that around his neck hung a key. And the key could unlock any room in Doubting Castle, but not easily. Remember what Bunyan says? *“Damnable locks!”*

But that's the practical nature of the promise of God. Don't?

**Don:** Yes. It's just amazing to me, the condescension of God, how He swears by Himself. When He says something, if He says it only once we should believe it, right? But He swears with an oath. And that's not the only place he does it. There are other places in Scripture. And over and over and over again He has these great promises. And then we wonder, well, does God really love me? *(Laughter)* The grace of God.

**Jeff:** That's right. Well with that comment, why don't we wrap up and let's pray together, okay? Our heavenly Father, we are thankful for this day, for the time You've given us. We're thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ and the promises that are in Him. Lord, let us be encouraged to lay hold, to take hold of these promises daily, moment by moment. Father, help us, for we need it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*