

Ephesians 2:8, Part 2

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You have a deep life-shaping need for the approval, the acceptance and the love of your father.

Now, the Bible speaks to us frequently about a type of belief or a type of faith that does not save. We know what James has to say about the demons and how they believe. We also know places like, well—Jesus's parable, the soils, where Jesus is going to talk about, for example, the rocky soil. And he says that the seed that spread on the rock, those are those who they hear the word, they receive it with joy, but these have no root, they believe for a while. And in time of testing, they fall away.

So Jesus speaks plainly there of a type of belief, that is not a saving belief. Or we can look at Acts chapter eight, for example, the story of Simon the magician. We're told plainly in that story, that Simon, the magician, hears the gospel and believes and becomes a disciple, and begins following the disciples and he's even baptized. It's not until later that it's realized well, that his faith wasn't a true saving faith.

Or we could turn to the Gospel of John. And John actually makes quite a theme out of this idea of two types of belief. There's a type of belief that saves and there's a type of belief that doesn't save. And we see it brought up time and again, in the in the Gospel of John. Just one occasion, it comes up we see in chapter eight.

“And he says, who sent me is with me, He has not left me alone, I always do the things that are pleasing to Him. And He was saying these things. And as he was saying, these things, many believed in him (the very next sentence), so Jesus said to the Jews, who had believed in him, (and then there's going to come this discourse), If you abide in me and my word abides in you abide in my word, you're truly my disciple, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. (But then it begins), well, they answered him, we're all the offspring of Abraham, we've never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say to you, that you say that we will be free? Jesus answered them truly I say to you...”

...and from that point on is this contentious argument between Jesus and unbelieving people, the same people that John just described as the Jews who believed in him.

And there's other places we could see the same sort of thing. But we see here that the scriptures say to us plainly, that there is a faith that saved and there's a faith that does not save.

And since faith is so fundamental and so foundational, it would certainly behoove us to spend some time understanding the difference between faith that saves and faith that does not save.

The Scriptures say to us that the crown jewel of sin, that damns us the hell is failure to believe. The crown jewel—you could, theoretically, you could commit no other sin, other than hearing the gospel, and not believing it, and that is enough to dam you to eternal fire. Simply the sin of hearing the gospel, and failing to believe it.

Likewise, the scriptures also tell us that saving faith is the watermark of every saint. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, whosoever believes in Him, shall not perish.” John six, verse 29. “This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” John 7:38, “whoever believes in me, the Scripture says out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” Acts 10, verse 43, “To him, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

And we could go on and on and on, because you are well aware, I'm certainly sure of the scriptures testimony, that belief is the watermark of the true saint. We talked about this just back in chapter one, verses 15 and 16. When Paul says, When I heard about your faith, your faith and Lord Jesus Christ, that's, that's when I knew I'm writing to true believers here.

So when we come to this topic of faith, it is something that we should spend our energy and our time to understand well.

So here's how we want to do this. I want to just kind of set the scriptures aside for just a few minutes. And I want to set the stage or sort of build some, some foundational blocks here just by talking about human nature, human nature. Something that's true about human nature. That is true for everyone in the room, that plays a very, very central role in the saving work of faith. And it's this this is the truth are you ready?

Everyone in the room shares the same thing in common and that's this: You have a deep, sharp, penetrating need for the approval, the acceptance and the love of your father.

That is true for everyone alive today, that is true for everyone who's ever lived: you have a deep, life-shaping need for the approval, the acceptance and the love of your father.

This manifests itself most plainly in our need for the approval, the acceptance and the love of our earthly father. That's where it shows up first. And we all know this dynamic and how this dynamic works. You, yourself may be a person, or you may know someone who has a broken relationship with their father, and those things can be overcome. But they always are a struggle. And they always leave a mark.

Because you were created in the image of God, and part of being in the image of God means that God made you with a deep, deep need to have the approval, the acceptance, and the love of your father.

So let's just put political correctness aside for a few minutes—It's not the same for mother. The role of the mother is, is—we can't overestimate the importance of the role of the mother. Children need mothers and fathers, right? But it's true that early in the life the child needs the mother more than they need the father, later in the life is when that dynamic really comes to bear. That if a person feels as though they don't have the love, acceptance, and the approval of their father, that is life shaping.

But on a spiritual level, it's far, far more life-shaping. Because that need for an earthly parent, or an earthly father's approval is intended to teach you about your need for your Heavenly Father's approval, and for his acceptance, and for his love.

That i—hear this, hear this clearly: that is the biggest need in all of humanity—the acceptance and the love and the approval of our Heavenly Father.

And that need is absolutely life-shaping. If you study humanity, and you study yourself, you will see how life—not just of you—but of all people around you, is shaped by this need.

Here's what I mean: To try to meet this need outside of Christ, and we'll talk in just a minute about how, what the role of faith plays in this and how this solves this greatest problems for us. But apart from Christ, to have this deep need for the approval of your heavenly Father expresses itself in a number of ways. I think probably the most common way it expresses itself is in a deep ambition or a drive to succeed, to accomplish, to achieve, to gain, to accumulate, to accumulate a career, an accomplishment accumulate wealth, to achieve this or achieve that or, or have a reputation or fame or whatever it may be. A deep drive to succeed. Because we've got deep within us this need for the approval of our father. And we instinctively know that apart from Christ, we don't have the approval of our father. And so we seek other ways to get that. And probably the most common way is through a drive to achieve and to accomplish.

A lot of people will do that, others will try to meet this need through a vigorous pursuit of religion, whether it be false religion, or true religion. I have known many people in my life, many people in my life, who are trying to meet the need in their soul for their father's approval and acceptance. And they're doing it through a vigorous pursuit of the true religion. And they can oftentimes be the biggest volunteers in the church, and do the most, and be the most energetic. But deep in their soul, they're trying to meet a need by showing their Father that they're worthy of his approval and his acceptance.

For others, this expresses itself in a lifelong struggle with depression and anxiety. Because of the weight of the knowledge that you don't have your Father's approval can be too much for people to bear. And so for many people, this will express itself in this lifelong anxiety or this cynicism towards life.

For others, this can express itself in a hatred toward the people that you think do have the approval of your Father. That's where the hatred of Christians comes from. That's exactly, precisely where the hatred of Christians comes from—from people who know instinctively deep in their soul, that they don't have the approval of their Father and they see you as someone that they think does. And...that's where anti-Semitism comes from. That explains the Holocaust, that explains the anti-semitism that still exists today, that defies any other explanation.

The world has a deep need for the approval of their Heavenly Father. And they instinctively, their soul knows they don't have it, and they see the ethnic people of God as the ones that have it and they hate them.

So it can express itself in a number of ways, but it's always there. It's like the old wound that healed over but didn't quite heal over completely. And there's still a little bit of sensitivity, there, or maybe a limp or something like that. That's what this is, we can learn to deal with it, we can learn to put it down, we can learn to put it out of our mind. But we can never make it go away. Because God created us in such a way that it cannot be put away. Because the deepest and most important need of our life is to have the approval and the acceptance and the love of our Heavenly Father.

We can deny it, some people try to deal with this by denying that there is a heavenly Father that they need to have the approval of. Other people will deny it by saying that the approval of the Heavenly Father is easier than you think, I can get it by just simply being a person who does more good things than bad things. And that's how I am getting the approval of my heavenly Father.

Or they can seek it, they can they can express this need for it in a host of other ways. But if you become a student of humanity, you will see that all people have this need. And the need is, of course, we know only met in Christ. And so therefore all who are apart from Christ, have this old wound, this thorn that was stuck deep into the bottom of their foot years ago, and they never got it out. And it's still there, and their foot just sort of grew over, but it's still there. And that shapes, and that defines all of their life, people deal with it differently. It looks different on the outside. But if you peel away every layer, that's what you end up with.

And so this need for our Father's approval, sometimes here's a, here's a real clue. That helps us to see it in ourselves and in others. This need for our Father's approval oftentimes shows up in disappointment in yourself.

When you are disappointed in yourself, that is sometimes a clue that you are still looking for the approval and acceptance of your Father through means other than Christ. And you failed in some moral way, or you failed in some other way. And you feel like that, that sets you back in the approval of your Father.

Now, let's be clear, you can take that too far. Because as believers, we don't just have this nonchalant attitude about moral failures, you know, doesn't matter. But if a moral failure in your life or another type of failure in your life, causes depression, causes a spiritual depression, causes you to feel as though that approval has been jeopardized. That is a clear sign for you that you are not (Colossians two verse six), living by the faith by which you came to know, the heavenly Father, okay.

So with that groundwork being laid, let's turn to some scriptures that show us how this faith comes to be, and how this is actually the active agent that connects us to the approval, and to the acceptance, and the love of the Father that we so desperately need.

The Scriptures speak of faith, particularly the New Testament speaks of faith, not in this simplistic sort of belief—what the Bible believes and that's kind, kind of thing The Scriptures speak of faith as a bonding agent, that binds together two. It's like a spiritual glue.

And so the one who has faith is bonded to the One that the faith is placed in—there's this connection, there's this binding there. And part of that binding together includes the very, very important truth, that the one who has faith is taught that the acceptance and the approval and the love of the Father is given to them by means of this faith from the One who has the acceptance and the love and the approval of the Father. Who's the one who has the acceptance of the Father? Jesus, right?

That's why the baptism of Jesus was so important. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." God said that about nobody else.

God is pleased with Jesus. God approves completely of Jesus. Jesus has the Father's complete and total love. And so the one who is bonded together with God by faith is the one whose heart is being taught that the approval, the acceptance, the love, that Jesus enjoys of the Father is given to us—by means of that bonding together.

There's many places we could see this, I think the best place to see this is Galatians chapter two, verse 20, and verse 21. I got those two verses in your scriptures. But let me...I'm going to open my Bible to it. And I'm going to set a little bit more context. And I want to just show us briefly here how the flow of Paul's thought is this flow of thought that: acceptance of the Father doesn't come the old way. Acceptance of, the from the Father comes by dying to self and living in Christ.

Okay, so from chapter two, verse 11, verse 11, starts out with this opposition to Peter or Cephas. And you know, the story there in Antioch. And here's Peter, and Peter is there with the Gentile Christians and his eating with them. He's sharing table fellowship with Him. But then when other Jews come to Antioch, then Peter withdraws and doesn't eat with the Jews.

Paul sees this, and he lets Peter have it. Peter, that's, you're being a hypocrite. You can't eat with them, when the Jews aren't here. And then when they come, then now of a sudden, you're not eating with them. So he lets Peter have it. Why? Because Peter is not living by faith. Peter is starting to see his acceptance, his approval of God, or God's approval of him rather, as based on once again in the old way of keeping the law.

And so Paul just loses it. Peter is not committing some small offense here. He's not just offending the Gentile Christians a little bit. Peter is rejecting the faith that has saved it. And Paul is right to come along and say, Whoa, hang on, brother. Think about what you're doing. You are now reverting back to thinking of your Father approving of you, because you do so well at keeping the law.

Then we come down to verse 13, or 15. And I'll pick up right here, "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ." In other words, our approval, our love, our acceptance, doesn't come by works of the law, doesn't come by success or achievement, even religious achievement, it comes by the approval of Another, the acceptance of Another, the love of Another. Another had the love of God, and that now comes to us by way of the connection point.

“So we have also believed in Jesus in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ Jesus and not by works with the law (once again), because by works of the law, no one will be justified (there again, verse 17), but if in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ in a servant of sin?”

So what Paul is saying here is that if our approval by the Father, if he doesn't approve of us by the works of our life, are we found to be outside of his approval? No. Because our approval wasn't in works of the law, our approval wasn't in some external means of pursuing the right thing vigorously, or keeping the law vigorously. That's not how God ever approved of us.

He approved of us by means of the approval of Another. “For if I rebuild what I tore down, I proved myself to be a transgressor.”

In other words, if now but after being approved by God and accepted by God, and loved by God by means of faith in Another, if I now revert to thinking of myself as being approved by God, because I'm such a good Christian, then I'm tearing down the faith that I began.

“For if I rebuild what I tore down, I proved myself to be a transgressor.” I prove myself to be a transgressor because I'm living for the approval of God, by my own means by my own strength. Verse 19, “For through the law, I died to the law, so that I might live to God.” The law taught me that there was no ultimate approval and acceptance of God to be found in myself. That's what the law taught me.

“So through the law, I died to keeping the law in order to please God. But now I live by faith in Christ,” he says.

So now verse 20, here it comes, “I have been crucified with Christ is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.” I have been crucified with Christ the ‘I’ there is Paul's way of saying: the Paul that strove for God's acceptance because I was a good person, that ‘I’ had been crucified with Christ. It's not that ‘I’ who lives anymore. The ‘I’ that now lives is the ‘I’—the Paul—that lives by faith, by this connection point that communicates to me the acceptance approval in the love of God by means of Another who has his acceptance, His love and His approval.

“It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me in the life I now live by in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” In other words, as I go about my life, I strive to continue seeing my approval by God as coming by faith, not by Paul doing such good works, or Paul being such a good law keeper, or Paul, sacrificing himself on his missionary journey so much, etc., etc.

And then it continues, “I do not nullify the grace of God for a justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose,” and he reiterates himself there. So you see there, we're starting to see, I think the connection, okay. There's this acceptance, approval in love of God that we so deeply, desperately need. And we know we need it. And faith, as the contact point between the God who seeks to redeem and the sinner in need of redemption, that contact point is what then transfers to us by faith, the love, the acceptance, and the approval that we so desperately need.

So, this only works, if we have this right understanding of God. This only works if we see God as one who desires to give us his approval, as one who wants to give us his acceptance, who wants to give us his love. None of this works. If in your heart, you think of God as not wanting to give you his approval.

If you think of God as one who is not quick to be gracious, quick, to be merciful, quick to be loving. If that's how you think of God, then all the grace in the world won't bring you to the place that you see your approval in the approval of Another. You must see God rightly in your heart, as one who desires to give you his full approval, his full acceptance, his full love, he needs—the righteousness of Jesus that comes through faith—he needs that to give it to you so that he can give you His love his acceptance and his approval.

Which is why being made alive to God was necessary. Because when we were dead to God, we didn't see him rightly. We didn't see him as compassionate and loving. We saw him as vindictive and judgmental only. And not until we saw him as this kind, gracious, merciful, loving God, who desires deeply to give his approval to us, and his love to us. It's not until then that his approval and his love can come to us by means of Another.

There's so many places that are thought of where can I illustrate this from the scriptures? Where can I illustrate this right view of God that sees God as a God who deeply desires to give his approval to lost sinners?

Well, I thought of Zephaniah three, verse 17, “The Lord your God is in your midst a mighty one who will say, he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will quiet you by His love, He will exalt over you with loud singing.”

First Timothy, chapter two and verse four, “God desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of Him.”

Zachariah to Verse eight, for he who touches you for who touches you touches the apple of my eye. What is the apple of your eye? You got an apple? I don't have an apple in my eye. What's the apple of your eye?

That same phrase in Spanish is “La niña de mis ojos.” And literally that means the pupil of my eye. That's what is this old English phrase that literally means the pupil of my eye. Now, what does it mean that God says when someone touches you they touch the pupil of my eye? What if I were to come up to you right now and poke you in the pupil? Would you know that I did that? Would you have an immediate reaction? Would you react right away? Would you not let that happen again?

That's what God means. When you touch my children, you touch the pupil of my eye. And you better believe that you're not gonna touch the pupil of my eye and I just looked the other way. So many other places we can illustrate this. This is the right view of God that the heart must have. It must be made alive to God. So that we see him rightly as compassionate, merciful, loving and desiring to give us his approval, and his acceptance and his love. But he needs our sin problem to be taken care of. Before we can do that.