

Ephesians 2:8, Part 3

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Have you looked away from self, realizing that approval by the Father will never come to me by myself? If you haven't, what awaits you are the fires of hell.

We're starting to see, I think the connection, right? There's this acceptance, approval and love of God that we so deeply, desperately need. And we know we need it. And faith is 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 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, quit 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 I 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 save, 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 in verse four, God desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of Him.

Zachariah two, Verse eight, for he who touches you, for he 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 nine de mis ojos." And literally, that means the pupil of my eye. That's what the 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 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 problems to be taken care of before He can do

that. So this faith is something that the Scripture says is absolutely foundational, right? But if we were to search the pages of the scriptures, in search of a definition for faith, you know that nowhere in the Scriptures do we find a definition of faith.

We might think of Hebrews 11, six, that kind of gets it the but not really. nowhere in Scripture, is there just a pure dictionary-type definition of faith. But instead, the Scriptures do something far better. The Scriptures give us vivid examples of what saving faith looks like; vivid word pictures of what saving faith looks like. And we can take all those and put them together and actually come up with—I think—a far more precise understanding of what saving faith looks like.

And so there's lots of these but I picked, I think five of the most common, I think, what probably are the most important images in Scripture that say to us: this is the picture, this is the biblical picture of what saving faith looks like. And so, the first one for us to see is biblical picture, the first biblical picture of saving faith is the picture of the fearful, dying person, looking and finding life in the look. The beleaguered the dying, the sick, the fearful, looking and finding life in the look. This comes to us from places like John three, where Jesus speaking there of the bronze serpent from numbers 21, remember we talked about that a few months back, and they looked upon the serpent and lived in Jesus says, that serpent is Me. All must look upon the Son of Man, the Son of Man must be looked upon, must be lifted up and looked upon, and that look, looking upon the Son of Man is what saves. So it's this image of the one who looks and sees the Deliverer, sees the Healer seals, sees the bronze serpent that brings healing. The look is what brings that salvation. There's many parallels to this that we can see in Scripture, Isaiah, 45, and 22. To turn to me, and be saved, for I am God and there is no other.

We see other, other parallels as well of looking. So this is a picture of looking to one looking to Him. Faith looks to Jesus and sees the One who takes away the deadly sin. Or think of John, behold the Lamb of God, it takes away the sin of the world. Another biblical picture of saving faith is, is the picture of the empty hand, receiving. The empty hand, receiving. John chapter one and verse 11, and 12, but to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. So there's this there's this image here, this picture of, of a hand, holding out this empty hand and just receiving. Or we see the same sort of picture Colossians two and verse six as you receive the Lord Jesus Christ, so also walk with Him.

The saving faith looks to Jesus and sees Jesus as the Giver of all things. Another biblical picture of saving faith is the picture of the hungry and thirsty person, eating and drinking, the starving person, the person thirsting to death, eating and drinking and being given life in the food and being given life in the water. Many places that we see this John six, verse 35, Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life, Whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, whoever believes in Me shall never thirst. John 60, John seven, I'm sorry, John six, verse 50, and 51, John seven, John eight, John 11. It's a popular picture in John's gospel. Also the manna, there's so many other places that we see that the picture of saving faith as this picture of the one who's hungry to death, thirsting to death, and receiving life by means of the flesh and the blood of Jesus. So saving faith looks to Jesus and sees Jesus as the Provider of all things the great Provider. Another biblical picture of saving faith we see as the is the picture of the hunted criminal or the endangered person, the endangered soul, who finds refuge and safety in Jesus. They find Jesus as the strong and willing Protector. Think of the Psalter as, as God is our our fortress, our

rock and our salvation. Or, or Martin Luther, a Mighty Fortress Is our God, a Bulwark, never failing. This picture that you run to Jesus you see in Jesus, your Fortress, your Safety, your Refuge. This comes from the cities of refuge from the Old Testament, remember the, the cities of refuge there, or think of Mark chapter four, that Mark Chapter Four is a picture of the opposite is the picture of those who had opportunity to have saving faith but didn't have it? At least not yet. Mark chapter four, Jesus speaks to the storm: "Peace be still." And he turns to his disciples and says,

Why don't you have faith? So that's a picture of faith that wasn't had. They didn't see Jesus as their Refuge. They didn't see Jesus as their Rescuer. Saving faith looks to Jesus and sees him as our Refuge, our Fortress, our Salvation. Lastly, the biblical picture of saving faith, sometimes is the picture of the weary and burdened person casting their heavy burden upon Him. Mark 11, "Come to me all ye who are weak and heavy laden," Cast your cares upon me first, Peter five, cast your anxieties on me for I care for you, so it's this picture: that Jesus is the One who says, Cast your burden upon Me, cast it upon Me, I want your burden. Give it to Me. So saving faith looks to Jesus and sees him as the great burden Bearer. So we begin to put all these together. And we got a number of pieces. And all this is working towards a goal. This isn't just sort of random thoughts, in case you thought it was. All this is working towards a focused goal. And the focused goal is this: to give us a vivid picture of saving faith. We don't want a vivid picture of unsaving faith.

We don't want to just be satisfied with mental agreement. We want to see what saving faith looks like. So what's the commonality? There's a couple of commonalities that we're seeing. First is the commonality of this: and all those biblical pictures, as well as what we talked about earlier about the heart that deeply needs the approval, the acceptance and the love of the Father, all this is shaping for us a picture number one, have a deep felt need of a perceived need of a perception, there's a realization, I'm missing something. There is some something that I don't have. And that something is not optional. That something is the deepest felt need of my life.

All of those biblical pictures have that in common. The one dying from hunger, the one who's dying from thirst, the accused convict who's running to the City of Refuge, the one with a heavy burden that he can't keep. Think of Pilgrim's Progress, if you've read Pilgrims Progress. That is, that's the most vivid illustration of this. Because the whole premise of the book is the main character 'Christian' who has this burden that he just can't bear, he's got to get this burden off. So there's this common theme that there's this felt need, there's this soul perception that there's something that I absolutely have to have, and I don't have it. And the second commonality is, this is the direction of the faith. The direction always turns away from self, and always towards Christ.

All those pictures are the same. All of them are turning the faith focus away from self and turning it toward Christ. So this has started to develop for us to starting to sort of flesh out this picture of what biblical saving genuine, true faith looks like. Is this real felt need. And that felt need looks to Jesus and looks away from self, think about the Philippian jailer. I mean, if there was a felt need, he had it. His need was so deep and so sharp, he was ready to end his life. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?," he begs. "Believe upon the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, and you're household." So there's this looking to Jesus, seeing my need, rightly seeing Jesus as the contact point through which the love acceptance and approval of the father comes to us. So, sort of in a nutshell, here we go with what I'm

offering is kind of a definition. "Saving faith is the sinner having been made alive to a right view of God and self..." So God has acted upon the heart so that we lose the misperceptions of God as this unloving, hateful God, we lose those and we gain the right perception that he's a loving, compassionate God. And we have a right view of self seeing in ourselves this deep need for his acceptance and approval. "The redeemed sinner perceives, joyfully surrenders, surrenders to and lives in the deeply needed acceptance and approval of the Father."

That is rightly deserved by Another" (capital A.) The acceptance the approval and the love is deserved by Jesus. Yet, it is perceived, joyfully surrender to and lived in, as it's freely given to the sinner. And this delves into next week but rightly understood, "Saving faith frees the center from thoughts of guilt and disappointment itself and binds the redeemed center to God with a bond that rejects all boasting itself and necessitates boasting in the Lord." That's part of next week right there.

So our question is, have you perceived within yourself, your need for the Father to approve of you and to accept you?

Have you looked at Jesus and seen the great Provider? The great Rescuer? Have you looked away from self? Realizing that approval by the Father will never come to me by myself? If you haven't, what awaits you are the fires of hell.

The last question for us to try to answer is this question that I think always comes up. As you describe those things, maybe some would say, Yeah, I kind of see that. But I'm not sure how deeply I understand that. That sort of resonates with me, but how much does it have to resonate with me? So let me finish with just a story that I'm gonna take from Robert Louis Dabney. Robert Lewis Dabney was a 19th century theologian. He actually fought in the Civil War, in the Stonewall Brigade, he was actually Stonewall Jackson's chaplain. But he writes the story, I'm going to take it from him, I'm going to kind of modify it a little bit. He tells this story of this small village in which some strange disease comes to this village, and everyone in the village becomes afflicted by this disease. And for some, the disease is severe unto death.

And for others, it's just mild, maybe a cough and a slight headache. But it affects everybody, people differently, but it affects everybody. And they don't know the cure for this. But then somehow, this mysterious stone comes to the village and it's a healing stone. And to be healed of the disease, all you need to do is believe, touch the stone believe that the stone is going to heal you and you'll be healed. And so people flocked to the stone, and they touch the stone, and they're healed as soon as they touch the stone. And among those who flocked to the stones, one of the first ones, there was a young man who was barely afflicted at all, just had a little bit of a headache look tired. But he comes in, he throws himself upon the stone doesn't touch it.

He lays across it in full faith and full belief and he said you meanwhile, there's an elderly man, sort of a grumpy old type. Who doesn't believe that the stone can heal. But he's afflicted seriously, he's afflicted under death. And he lies on his deathbed nearing death barely has any energy. And finally it dawns upon Him. Maybe, maybe the stone heals. I don't know. I'm not sure maybe it does. But by this point, he barely has the energy to just barely crawl down to the town square. And all he can do is just reach

up and just barely touch with one finger with a heart that believes but also doubts. What happens? He, too, is healed. Because it's not faith that saves, it's Jesus Christ that saves. And it's that simple point of contact, that's His means of saving. Doesn't Jesus talk about faith like a mustard seed? That it's not the faith, faith is not the Savior. So a lot of our struggles, do I believe enough? Do I believe fully enough? I still struggle with doubts. Jesus Christ saves and He saves by grace through faith.