



FUNDAMENTAL CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES: FAITH

"1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

- Hebrews 12:1-3

Fundamental Christian Attitudes: Faith

The church is designed by God in the Scripture to work together like a body, and to relate to its head, who is Jesus Christ, as a body relates to the human brain. We are the body of Christ. And we've taken that metaphor of the body of Christ, which is a part of New Testament teaching, and expanded it a little bit, so that we can look a little more deeply at some of the implications that that metaphor has.

As we've already discussed in other education pieces, the church, like any body, must have a skeleton, it must have a framework. And we shared with you that the framework is what gives it its form, its ability to stand up. The framework is what everything hangs on, as in a human body all the organs, all the muscles, all the tissues, are attached at some point to the skeleton, the skeleton providing the framework. And we talked about that framework being rigid and unbending, and that's what bone is—bone doesn't bend, it's rigid. It has joints and hinges, but in itself, it provides rigidity for the body's structure, and that's precisely what the church must have. And we said that the skeleton of the church involves five great non-negotiables: honoring God, exalting Christ, pursuing holiness, proclaiming truth, and submitting to spiritual authority.

And we went through all of those things, and showed that those things bring heaven down. Remember that sort of picture? They bring heaven down. But like any living body, the church cannot exist only in skeletal form; that's not all there is, obviously. A skeleton provides framework, but a skeleton is not necessarily alive. A body must have internal organs. It must have fluids pumping through. It must have organs that are filtering oxygen and sending all of the nutrition to every part of the body. It must have, secondly, internal systems. So you start with the skeleton, and then you go, secondly, to the internal systems. And the internal systems provide life—they provide life. And that is also true in the church.

You can have the honor of God, and the service can lift up God and honor Him, and the exaltation of Christ, and you can have the pursuit of holiness, the leadership can be committed to that, and the proclamation of the truth, and the calling people to submit to spiritual authority, but it has to also have along with it a people who are genuinely alive. There must be internal systems. And what do I mean by that? Well, spiritual attitudes—let's

just say that's what it is—spiritual attitudes. The life of the church comes from spiritual attitudes. That is to say, what's inside people—what's inside people.

Outwardly, we can sing the hymns, and we can pray the prayers, and we can go through the worship, and we can sit and listen to the Word, and we can outwardly submit to those who lead us, but the real life of the church comes from inside the church. That's why the goal of everything we do is transformed lives. As Paul said, in Galatians 4, his passion, his prayer, his travail, his pain, was that Christ would be fully formed inside them. That is the same idea when Paul, in Colossians, says that he wants the Word of Christ to dwell in them richly. In other words, it's the inside that God wants to work on. So, the goal of pastors and the goal of leaders is that all of those skeletal features, all of those emphases, would generate proper spiritual attitudes in the hearts of the people. And to say it in its metaphoric sense, that we would be able to hang organs on that framework.

It is not external threats that should motivate the church to worship, or to listen to the truth, or to submit to leadership, or to behave itself. It is not external threats that should do that. It is not emotional manipulation that should do that. It is not some material prestige, or material reward, or earthly prestige, or popularity, or prominence, or respect that should motivate that. That should be motivated by internal attitudes. It should be motivated from the inside out.

I suppose we could see it summed up. Turn in your Bible to Galatians 5, and in Galatians 5, it says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

The Spirit of God wants to produce those inner attitudes, internal attitudes—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. This is absolutely crucial. And that's really what pastoral ministry is all about, that's what the church endeavors to do. What we want to do with you is not to get you to conform outwardly, but to see you transformed inwardly, right? Not to try to manipulate you with every preaching technique possible, or musical technique possible, or every intimidating threat. Not to be overbearing, and domineering, and dictatorial, and not to motivate you by the thought of earthly prestige, or earthly respect, but to motivate you on the inside; to create in your heart devotion to Christ, and to the Spirit of God's work, to the degree that the Spirit produces these internal attitudes.

You know, I look at the church today, and there's so many people who want to fix the church. I mean, a lot of people realize that the church is not everything it should be, and some people think they have an idea of what it ought to be, and so they approach the transformation of a church by reorganization. This is going on all over the place. Churches have decided what we need is a new style, what we need is a new format. One of the things that deeply concerns me along that line is that there is a depreciation of preaching, and the new format downplays preaching and substitutes all kinds of other things that people find more interesting or more entertaining, in spite of the fact that 1 Thessalonians 5 says, "Despise not prophēteia."

What does that mean? Despise not preaching. The verb to despise means to belittle, to depreciate, to diminish, to make light of, to think little of. Don't diminish preaching. That's a command in 1 Thessalonians 5:20, but that's exactly what people are doing. And the idea today is that if you really want to get your church on track you've got to reorganize it, you've got to come up with a new style, a new methodology. And what you end up with is the same people, at the same level of spiritual commitment, whatever that might be, in a different structure, and you haven't gotten yet to the real issue. Commitment to a different structure doesn't necessarily do anything to change the heart.

And what we're really after is spiritual attitudes. And I can tell you this: In all the years that we've been here, we have spent very little time on structure, very little time on programs, very little time on inventing styles that we think somehow are going to make a difference, and almost all our time working on heart attitudes, because then the church really becomes a church, from the inside out. And frankly, if there's anything you learn in doing this—and by the way, this is the long haul, that's why you've got to stay around twenty-five or so years — but if we've learned anything, it is that if spiritual attitudes are right, structure, form, and style become far less important.

The ideal situation is to have you engaged and present in Bible teachings because you would then be engaged and present by the prompting of your heart. There is nothing about our teachings or training that is flashy. I don't want to have any dancing bears. I mean it's not real creative, no multi-media. I was in a service one time where they had a guy dressed like John Wesley ride a horse down the middle aisle. We don't have any horses, because you care about the truth, and you care about being what God wants you to be. You're here from the

inside prompting, not because we force you to do that. Spirit-filled people do Spirit-led things, and they conform to the biblical pattern for the life of the church because it's in their heart to do that.

And that's the hard approach, that's the long approach. I mean you have to work at that, but you work at that by the consistent teaching and preaching of the Word of God, and holding people to a biblical standard, and watching them grow spiritually. So, if a church really wants to do what is right, it works on attitudes, not externals. You can use fear to motivate people, you can use fear, some churches do. There are churches if you don't show up on a Sunday night the elders come to your house. If you don't tithe every week, they come to your house. If you miss the prayer meeting, they're over there to see you, and they want to know what the sins are. You can be motivated by pride. You can be motivated by legalism, the idea that if I go there, somehow God will like me better.

But all of that stuff is counterproductive, because it allows people to derive satisfaction from a wrong motive. You don't ever want to make people do something, because then when they get the satisfaction of doing it, they're satisfied with doing something for the wrong reason. If you're going to be changing a church, if you want to be moving a church to what it needs to be, work on the heart. And what works on the heart? The truth and the Spirit, right? So we start with attitudes.

Let's talk about some of those attitudes. Number one attitude—and these are not necessarily, as we flow through them, in any particular order, although I think the first few sort of belong at the beginning.

The first issue of the heart, the first heart attitude that we want to see in the life of God's people is faith—faith, trust in God. I mean if that's not there, it's going to be very difficult to get you to believe anything that God says, or to rely on His promises. I mean it's clear that the Bible says that if you obey the Lord, your life will be blessed. If you listen to His Word, you'll be happy and fulfilled. If you obey His Word, you'll prosper spiritually, and you'll have good success, Joshua 1:8. God has made a myriad of promises. You stay in the circle of obedience you'll experience the fullness of His love. You'll enjoy His protection. You'll enjoy the assurance of your salvation. You'll have peace, and joy, and love, and all of those

things. And the Lord will meet every need of your life, and He'll take away all your anxiety and bear it for you, and all of those promises of Scripture.

But they mean nothing if you don't believe Him, right? So the first attitude is an attitude of faith. Now, how do you engender in people an attitude of trust in God? Well, there's only really one way to do it. You trust someone you know, right? You have to know Him well enough to trust Him. And we're right back to where we were in the first few messages, that when you come to church, or when you come to hear a message, or a Bible study, or a lesson, or read a book, or do your devotions, or prepare a Sunday school lesson, whatever you do, you should be constantly being exposed to the character of God revealed in Scripture. And as you come to know your God, with that knowledge comes trust.

Let me show you an illustration of this. Let's go back to the little minor prophet Habakkuk. Happiness is sitting next to somebody who knows where Habakkuk is. Habakkuk—Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk—Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi—fifth from the last in the Old Testament, Habakkuk. Now, Habakkuk has a problem—a big problem. Judah, the people of God, the Southern Kingdom, Judah, the people of God, are unfaithful to God. They're not just unfaithful, they're downright sinful, they're hypocritical, they're wicked. And the prophet Habakkuk does not understand why God doesn't intervene.

And so in verse 2, his oracle, or his sermon, or his burden is, "How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You about this violence and You don't save. Why do You make me see this iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises. The law is being ignored"—and he means by that the divine law—"justice is never upheld. The wicked surround the righteous"—and that means for evil purposes—"and justice comes out perverted." Now, that's his basic burden here. He's saying, "Look, this is Judah, this is the southern kingdom"—made up originally, of course, of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

"These are Your people, and they're defecting, and they're wicked, and they're iniquitous, and I keep telling You this, and I keep crying out to You, and You don't do anything." It might have been that Habakkuk's first request was that God would come down and bring a spiritual revival, and they'd all repent. But he also must have included in his petition that

God ought to step in and judge, because people shouldn't be getting away with this. And he's got a real dilemma, because God isn't doing either. He's not coming down with a great move of salvation and restoration, and He's not coming in judgment, and he doesn't understand how God can just look at this and not act.

And here comes the answer in verse 5. "Look among the nations, Habakkuk! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days— and you wouldn't believe it if you were told." In other words, He's saying to him, "I can't tell you about it because you wouldn't believe it; I have to wait till you see it—but I'm doing something, I am doing something." What is He doing? Verse 6: "Behold, I'm raising up the Chaldeans, That fierce and impetuous people" —and they were a vile, and wretched, and wicked people. "And I'm raising them up, those people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs." They were plunderers, they were murderers, they were wicked, they were marauders. They slaughtered people.

In verse 7: "They are dreaded and they are feared." The only justice and authority they have is that which they invent; it originates with themselves. They were vicious and efficient warriors. "Their horses are swifter than leopards and keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, their horsemen come from afar; They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour." Very graphic terms, descriptive of the fierce and formidable work of devastation wrought by these Chaldeans. "All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. They mock at kings And rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress and heap up rubble to capture it."

You know what that means—when they had a fortress with all the stone walls, the way you took the fortress was to pile up rubble and make a ramp out of it, and just march right up, and that's what they did. And at the end of verse 11, he says—well, verse 11 says, "They'll sweep through like the wind and pass on. They will be held guilty, They whose strength is their god." They worship nothing but their military might. They are a wicked, vile, vicious people. Well, that's not the answer he wanted, I don't think. I really don't think that's what he wanted. I think he wanted a revival, and if he couldn't get a revival, he wanted God to sort of step in supernaturally and do some judging that would cause the people to repent, but not the Chaldeans.

Then now, he's got even another question. First question: God why don't You act? Second question: God, You're going to do that? He didn't understand why God didn't act, and when God said, "I'm going to act," he couldn't understand why God would use the Chaldeans.

Why? Because the Chaldeans were far worse than the Judeans. How could God use a far worse people, not a covenant people, to come in and to slaughter the covenant people? That didn't make sense in terms of how he understood the covenant people's relationship to God, which he thought was a saving, delivering relationship. And it certainly didn't make any sense that God would make the judge a worse people. He's got a major dilemma.

To put it in simple terms, he didn't understand why God was doing what He was doing. Ever wondered about that? Didn't make sense. Why are You doing this? Why aren't You doing this, why are You doing this? I suppose you could ask the same question in our environment. You could say, "The church in America, America itself, is in iniquity and wickedness, and it escalates, and it escalates, and it escalates. And now You're lifting up into authority people who are at the heart of the problem, rather than solutions. Why?" This is the problem of history that he has. He doesn't understand why it's all unraveling, particularly with regard, uniquely so, to the covenant people.

Well, how is he going to solve his dilemma?

He's going to solve his dilemma by his theology. Verse 12, he starts musing, he starts talking to himself, really, in actually what is a prayer to God, but it's his own thoughts. "Art Thou not from everlasting?" First thing he does—he is on quicksand right now; he is sinking into the quicksand of his dilemma. He can't solve his problem. He doesn't understand it, and he starts sinking. He's looking for a rock, and he finds that rock in what he knows to be true about God. First thing he says: "Art Thou not from everlasting?" Oh yes. "God, You're eternal. You were here before this problem started. You're going to be here after this problem is over. You are bigger than this problem.

"This is a small little deal, this is a little period of time in the middle of history, and You are the eternal God, from eternity past to eternity future, who always existed and always will. You are far greater than this little moment in history."

See, what he's doing is reaffirming what he knows to be true about God, and that becomes the rock on which he can find his footing. "You're bigger than this problem. You obviously understand how it fits into the eternal plan." And then he says, "O Lord, my God," and he uses the term here for sovereign one. "Not only are You transcendent and eternal, and this fits within the full eternal scheme, and it's a little tiny moment in the midst of eternity.

"You are far greater than this, and You also are omnipotent, You are in charge of this, nothing is beyond Your control." And then he says, "My holy One." What does he mean by that? "You don't make mistakes. Whatever You're doing fits Your perfection." And then he says, "We will not die." What does he mean by that? God is faithful. "You will not destroy Judah, because You have a covenant to fulfill with them." God had made a covenant with Abraham that must be fulfilled with God's people. "You have made promises to them of a kingdom, and a future, and salvation." And so what is Habakkuk doing? He's reaffirming that God is eternal, God is sovereign, God is perfect, and God keeps all His promises.

And on the rock of his knowledge of God, he finds secure footing, and he says, "I see—You have just appointed them to judge, and Thou, O rock"—see, he's on the rock—"You establish them to correct. I understand. Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can't look on wickedness with favor, and so You are going to use them to judge. I see it."

And the real sum of it all comes at the end of verse 4, in chapter 2—the end of verse 4, in chapter 2. I wish we had time to go through all of it. Look what he says: "The righteous, or the just, will live by"—what—"his faith." The just will live by faith. That is such an important statement, you ought to underline it, put a little asterisk by it, or a check, or something, because that becomes a key statement in the New Testament, doesn't it?

Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38, repeated in the New Testament, the just shall live by faith, the just shall live by faith. And that's where he was; he was anchored by his faith in God. He knew God was eternal, far beyond any event in time. He knew God was sovereign, in charge of everything. He knew God was holy and never made a mistake, and he knew God was faithful and wouldn't violate His promise. God was doing what had to be done. Now, you know, Habakkuk feels a lot better now, and his circumstances haven't changed. And I love the way he wraps it up. Go to the end of the book, verse 17, chapter

3—verse 17, chapter 3. Now, this is language that would mean so much to people then, and doesn't mean as much to us today until we understand the background.

“Though the fig tree should not blossom” —guess what? Fig trees always blossom. “And there be no fruit on the vines” —and there was always fruit on the vines. “And though the yield of the olive should fail” —and I'll tell you one thing about an olive tree, they last. When you go to the Garden of Gethsemane now, they will point to some trees they believe were saplings when Jesus lived, and they're still producing olives. “And the fields produce no food” —and the fields did produce food. “And though the flocks should be cut off from the fold” —in other words, animals stop calving, and there aren't any more. “And there's no cattle in the stalls” —in other words, if everything that is common, ordinary, everyday, dependable, kind of natural happening, all of a sudden stops.

In other words, if everything goes upside-down, and everything you can always count on stops happening. If the whole world goes nuts, upside-down, inside-out, and backwards—verse 18: “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord” —that's what exult means—“I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.” In other words, he's saying this: when I don't understand the circumstances, I do understand my God. You understand that? And then verse 19, the sum of it all: “The Lord God is my” —what—“strength. I know my God. He's my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet.” Hinds are mountain goats. Ever see a mountain goat? Flying around in Alaska, right close to those mountains and those rugged rocky cliffs, you see these white kind of—call them sheep, but they're really more like a goat—and they're standing right on the edge of a ledge, with absolute safety and security.

And he's saying “God is my strength, and I might be on the precipice in my ignorance, and I might be in an unsolvable dilemma, and I might be in a circumstance from which it looks like there's no escape, but the Lord makes my feet like the feet of a mountain goat, and He makes me walk all over the high places with safety, security and confidence.” You could walk on any precipice that you ever face in life if you have enough confidence in your God, right? And how do you get that confidence? By getting to know your God, and learning that He is eternal, He is sovereign, He is holy, never makes a mistake, and He always keeps His promises. That's faith. That's faith. And that's the inner heart attitude that God's people must have. That's crucial to the internal systems of the church. Give me a people that believe their God.

That's one of the reasons that we don't have lots of people in our church falling apart. As somebody once said years ago, "In fact, a Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't." When you know your God, you can ride out the storms; you can walk on the high places in complete safety.

In Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" —I love this —"and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me." Oh, this is so rich. On the one hand, I live by faith in God, and on the other hand, I live by faith in Jesus Christ. And what is Paul saying here? I live trusting the Son of God.

Now, why would you trust the Son of God? Why would you trust Jesus? Why would you trust Him totally, with everything? His answer: "Because He loved me enough to do" —what—"to die for me." And as Paul said in Romans, "If while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, how much more, now that we belong to Him, shall we be saved by His living intervention." I live by faith in my great God, I live by faith in my great Savior, who is personally devoted to me as the one for whom He died. I know my God, and I know my Lord. And I know my Lord has promised that He will sustain me, that He will protect me, that He will guard me. He is the shepherd, isn't He? He is the one who protects His own sheep.

My God sticks closer than a brother. My God will never leave me or forsake me, and neither will His Son, who has taken up residence in my heart. And the Lord Jesus Christ seeks every good thing for me. "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by" —whom—"Christ Jesus." In other words, Christ Jesus is the means, the indwelling, powerful, ever-present, Christ is the means by which God fulfills that promise. The means by which God meets all our needs is through the ever-present, indwelling Christ. I have faith in God, don't you? I have faith in the greatness and the power of my God, the faithfulness of my God, and the perfection of my God, and the holiness of my God.

And I have confidence and faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and I have faith to believe that what He began, He will finish. I have faith that when Jesus said that all that the Father gives to Him will come to Him, and whoever comes, He will receive, and whoever He

receives, He keeps, and whoever He keeps, He raises. I have faith that Jesus will bring me to glory, don't you? I have faith that He'll supply my needs. I have faith that He'll never let anything come into my life that I cannot bear, but always will make a way of escape. I have faith that He'll pour out blessing upon my obedience. I have faith that He will use me. I have faith that He'll overcome every trial in my life victoriously if I am obedient to Him. I have faith in Him, I trust in Him, I believe in Him.

That's the beginning attitude. It starts at salvation, because salvation occurs when you trust in God, doesn't it? You trust Him to forgive your sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That's the beginning of faith; it's not the end, that's just the start. And then the just shall live by faith. That's the first great attitude. So what does the preacher, what does the leader want to produce in your heart? The confidence of the apostle Paul, who, in 2 Corinthians 5:7, said this: "We walk by faith, not by sight." We don't evaluate life by what we see, and feel, and smell, and touch. We evaluate life through the eyes of faith, and faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

But it's not wishful thinking; it's built on the rock of the character of our God, and the character and work of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And when you have that faith, you can face anything in life. When you know that God works all things together for good to them that love Him, then you can accept anything. When you know that nothing shall ever separate you from the love of Christ, absolutely nothing—not life or death, or things present or things to come, or height or depth or any other creature, not anything—when you know that, and believe that, you can trust Him in every situation. And that's the initial, that's the beginning attitude. Faith becomes the shield, Ephesians 6:16; you quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one with faith.

When Satan tempts you to do something, it's quenched by your trust. I told you this a few months ago. Sin is what you do when you're not satisfied with God. And if you're not satisfied with God, it's because you don't know Him. So what shields you from temptation is faith. James 1 says, "Ask in faith and you'll receive." Hebrews 10:22 says, "Draw near in faith." Hebrews 12 says, "Run by faith." Romans 4 says, "Be strong in faith, like Abraham." So the first attitude is to trust in our sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, wise, loving, gracious, and just God, and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has

promised to save you eternally. And that attitude is the attitude upon which you build your life.