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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 7.4.4 – The Doctrine of the Way of Salvation (Soteriology)

Faith as Knowledge, Enlightenment, Wisdom, and Obedience

Sometimes the Bible uses the term “knowledge” as a synonym of “faith,” and “know” as a synonym of “believe”. When the prophet Jeremiah describes the arrival of the new covenant through the Messiah, he says: **“No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more”** (Jeremiah 31:34). The ones who “know” the Lord are those who trust in Him, those who are forgiven through faith in Him.

The priest Zacharias prophesied that his son John the Baptist would **“give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins”** (Luke 1:77). Through John’s work the people would come to know their Savior and trust in Him for the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus prayed to His Father on the night before His death: **“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”** (John 17:3). This is not just knowledge that there is a God, but it includes trust and confidence in Him, knowing Him as the Savior and the Giver of eternal life. The apostle Paul also spoke of **“the knowledge of the Son of God”** (Ephesians 4:13) and **“the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”** (Philippians 3:8), certainly meaning more than an intellectual awareness of the existence of Christ. To know Christ is to trust in Him and rely on Him for salvation. So also the apostle Peter wrote: **“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** (2 Peter 3:18). Surely he meant more than that we should learn more facts about Jesus and His life; he meant that we should grow in our trust in Him, that is, we should come to know Him more and more by experiencing His love and coming to understand the richness of His grace.

Sometimes the words “enlighten” and “enlightenment” are used with reference to saving faith in Jesus Christ. The priest Zacharias said that the mission of his son John the Baptist was **“to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death”** (Luke 1:79). People are in the light, rather than in the darkness, when they are brought to faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul explains it like this: **“It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”** (2 Corinthians 4:6). When the light shines in our hearts, then we know who Jesus is and what He has done for us, and we trust in Him. Then we can consider ourselves God’s own special people whom He has called **“out of darkness into His marvelous light”** (1 Peter 2:9).

Sometimes the word “wisdom” is used to refer to those who know Jesus Christ by faith in Him. Believers in Christ possess wisdom of God, not the wisdom of the world. Paul wrote to Timothy: **“From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”** (2 Timothy 3:15). Those whom God has brought to faith in Jesus have wisdom for salvation; they know that the true and only way to eternal life is Jesus Christ, and they trust in Him. For this reason, the apostle Paul prayed for his converts in Ephesus, **“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling”** (Ephesians 1:17-18). Likewise, he wrote to the Christians in Colossae: We **“do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”** (Colossians 1:9).

The word “obedience” is sometimes associated with faith. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: **“Through Him (Christ) we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name”** (Romans 1:5). Obedience to the faith is equivalent to believing the Gospel of Christ. The same concept is expressed in Romans 6:17, where Paul says: **“God be thanked that though we were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.”** The “form of doctrine” refers to the Gospel of Christ. When the Gospel was brought to them, they obeyed it from the heart; that is, they believed it and trusted in it with all their hearts. Paul wrote about making the Gentiles “obedient” in Romans 15:18. This means that Paul preached the Gospel to them with the aim of bringing them to faith in Christ. Luke tells us in the book of Acts that even **“a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith”** (Acts 6:7).

It is also true that the believer in Jesus who has obeyed the Gospel begins to live an obedient life in the sense of trying to please God in his thoughts, words, and deeds. This obedience is always imperfect because of the continuing presence of the sinful flesh in every believer. Paul encourages the Christians in Rome with these words: **“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God”** (Romans 6:12-13). Instead of obeying sin, which leads to death, we should obey our Lord God who has brought us to faith in our loving Savior. The Holy Spirit, who has created faith in Christ in our hearts through the Gospel, also works in our hearts to produce the fruits of the Spirit, which can also be called the fruits of faith: **“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”** (Galatians 5:22-23).

The apostle Paul joins faith with hope and love in 1 Corinthians 13:13: **“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”** Love is listed as the first fruit of faith. As soon as a person is brought to faith in Christ, he begins to have love in his heart for his Savior, and then love for those around him as well. Also, as soon as a person is brought to faith in Christ, he has hope in his heart with reference to his future salvation. Hope always has to do with a future that cannot yet be seen. Believers in Christ have the sure hope of heaven. Paul writes: **“Hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance”** (Romans 8:24-25). **“Having been justified by faith, we...rejoice in hope of the glory of God”** (Romans 5:1-2).

The apostle Peter calls this **“a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”** (1 Peter 1:3-5). Now we believe God’s promise of forgiveness in Jesus, and at the same time we hope for the full salvation that will be revealed to us at the end of time.

The apostle John emphasizes the relationship of faith with love. **“Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God”** (1 John 4:7). We are born with a second birth when God brings us to faith in Christ. That is when we begin to know God, and when we begin to know God, then we begin to love Him and our neighbor. **“We have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him... We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”** (1 John 4:16-20).

Thus faith, hope, and love are joined together. But faith comes first. First we are brought to faith in Christ through the Gospel, and then we begin to have a sure hope for eternal life in heaven, and then, because God has loved us and brought us to faith in Christ, we begin to love Him and our neighbor as well. It seems love is called **“the greatest”** (1 Corinthians 13:13) because it endures after there is no more need for faith in God’s promises and no more need for hope in a future salvation.

The Roman Catholic Church officially contradicts the Bible's teaching about faith when it declares: "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that this confidence alone is that by which we are justified, let him be anathema (cursed)" (*Council of Trent, Session 6, Canon 12*). This directly contradicts Paul's statement in Romans 3:28: **"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."** It is by faith alone in Christ that we are declared righteous in God's sight. But the Roman Catholic Church teaches that faith in Christ is not enough. "Faith, unless hope and love are added to it, neither unites perfectly with Christ nor makes one a living member of His body... Faith cannot bestow eternal life without hope and love" (*Council of Trent, Session 6, Chapter 7*).

Notice how this teaching changes the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel says that Christ finished the work of redemption on the cross, and that we are saved alone by faith in Him and what He has done for us. We have all the blessings of God by faith in Christ. We are 100% righteous in His sight through faith in Christ. But the Roman Catholic position is that faith in Christ is not enough. They say that we are saved by faith, hope, and love. This makes our own actions and feelings necessary for our own salvation. We are not saved alone by faith in Christ, but partly by faith in Christ, and partly by our own response to what Christ has done for us. This robs us of any certainty of salvation, for if our salvation depends partly on our own actions, it will never happen, for the fruits of faith are always imperfect.

Questions

1. List some words that the Bible sometimes uses to refer to saving faith.
2. What does it mean to know Christ?
3. How has God enlightened us?
4. What is the difference between wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world?
5. How did the child Timothy gain wisdom?
6. What does it mean to be obedient to the faith?
7. How do we obey the Gospel of Christ?
8. What is true of the life of every believer in Christ?
9. Why is it wrong to say that we are saved by faith, hope, and love?
10. What is meant when we say that love is a fruit of faith?
11. How does the Roman Catholic teaching make a person uncertain concerning his salvation?