

The Great Common Faith

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December 9, 1956

The first chapter of the book of Titus, Titus, the first chapter, Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began, that hath in due times, manifested His Word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God, our Savior. To Titus, mine own son after the common faith. Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.

Now, there are four phrases here; according to the faith of God's elect; and the acknowledging of the truth; and manifested His Word through preaching; and after the common faith. Now they all mean about the same thing, the faith of God's elect, the common faith, the truth that is preached, and the truth that is acknowledged.

Now, every so often, it's necessary that a minister should restate what is the common faith, the faith by which we live. I want you to notice that the word "faith" has two meanings. It means a body of truth. That is it's one meaning. It means the response of the heart in belief to that body of faith. That's its second meaning. And we're never sure except by the context which is meant in the Scriptures. And when Paul talks about the faith and we sing about the faith of our fathers, we're not talking about their heart's faith. We're talking about the body of doctrine they held.

Now often in our teaching and preaching we take for granted too much. We assume that our hearers know things that they simply do not know. Many of them do, but some of them don't, because a new generation comes up into its middle teens and are ready to be taught mature truth. New people come in and others go and great turnover occurs in congregations like this one particularly. So today, I want to sketch over what is it that we acknowledge? What is it that we preach as a church? What is the faith of God's elect? What is the common faith, the faith shared by all Christians?

Well, it's a pleasant job and not a difficult one at all. And I want to point out I suppose we'll run to about 10 to 12. But I want to point out and sketch briefly the things we stand for.

Now these things do not constitute Alliance truth. You've never heard me use the phrase except to declare I didn't believe it, Alliance truth. There is no such thing as Alliance truth. There is no such thing as Baptist truth nor Presbyterian truth nor protestant truth. Truth is truth. Jesus Christ said, I am the Truth. And out of His mouth came the Truth as out of a fountain. And that truth is so

divine and so universal, that it will not allow itself to be joined by a hyphen to any man-made organization. So there's no such thing as Alliance truth and there's no such thing as fundamentalist truth. There's no such thing as Moody truth and Nyack truth and Taylor truth and Catholic truth. Truth is simply truth without modification and without any qualifiers.

Now what is this truth that we Christians agree on? We disagree on a lot of things. We disagree on modes of baptism. And we disagree on certain eschatological truths, those that have to do with the future events in the coming back of Christ and the end of the age. We disagree on organizational truths. But if we'll only look, we'll find that the things we agree on are the fundamental things and the things we disagree on are only secondary. And that the things we agree on are very many more than the things we disagree on.

For instance, we agree and teach as the faith of our fathers and as part of the declaration of truth for which we stand, that the great reality is God. Now I spoke about that yesterday on the radio briefly, and for you who heard, I do not want to repeat too monotonously, so I'll merely sketch this. It is the part and parcel of all the Christian teaching, that God is. This is the greatest fact.

But you say, don't we all know that. Must it be brought up again? And the answer is that it's astonishing how many people don't know it, or know it only vaguely. But it is the foundation of all sane thinking nevertheless, that God is and that God is real. That is, that God is objectively real like a mountain hidden in the clouds. You can't see the mountain but the mountain is there. And you only have to take the clouds away to reveal it. So the greatest fact the Bible teaches, the Christian teaches, and it is the foundation fact upon which all the temple of Christian truth rests, that the great reality is God. That God is, God created, God spake, God made God is, that's the great reality. We begin there.

And then the second great truth that we hold, and it's held by all Christians, that we're made by and for God. Now, suppose a child asked the question, and they all do, Mama, where did I come from? If the mother answers the question, God made you, she is more profoundly simple and more scientifically sound in her statement than all the explanations that we might be able to give, the biological or physiological explanations. God made you. That's what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that this God, who is a reality and who is objectively real, isn't created, but He is. Whether there's any creation or not, that this God made us and not ourselves. As it says in the Psalms, the Lord has made us and not we ourselves. So, God made you is a perfectly sound and right answer. And incidentally, it goes beneath all the physiological answers possible to give.

And then a second question the child might ask would be, what did God make me for? Now, the child who hasn't intelligence enough to begin to probe around and ask who made me? Where did I come from and why am I here? That child won't amount to very much when he grows older. He'll be a taxpayer and he'll vote you know. You know, you don't have to know anything to pay taxes

and vote. You just have to be able to breathe. And this child will grow up and pay taxes and propagate his kind. But if he amounts to much, he's likely to ask this question, what did God make me for? And what's it all about? Why am I here?

Now, he may not hold that serious attitude of mind very long, because he'll see a cat walk across in front of him or a dog run down the alley, or somebody will come out and play ball and then he disappears in the cloud of joyful dust. But when he is or she is for a moment asking the question, what did God make me for, you don't need to quote Plato and go into any profound explanations. You only have to say, He made you for Himself. For that is Christian teaching that's foundational. That's a part of it, and yet it's the part that's overlooked. God is. God made us. And God made us for Himself, to honor Him, and to enjoy him forever. To live in fellowship with Him while the ages roll on and millenniums roll on. That is what God made us for.

Now, just there you have two great truths, just there. Up to now they're not saving truths, but they're there, God is, and God made me and God made me for Himself. Those are great truths. And they're woven through all the fabric of New Testament Christianity. They're woven through all the sermons preached by the saints of God, from the teachings of Jesus and John the Baptist, and Jesus on down to the latest evangelical preacher that rises to preach in any simple church anywhere in the world. That's what God did. He made us and made us for Himself.

And the third is, that our relationship to Him is all that really matters. Now, you may hear all kinds of approaches made to this subject, but after all, that's what we're all trying to say. And that's what's all the preachers are trying to say and what all the writers and editors and book publishers are trying to say, that is, Christian. That our relationship to God is all that matters. It's of first importance, and that it should be the first responsibility of our lives. But that we broke that fellowship by sin. This is a part of Christian truth, and right here, we diverge sharply from ordinary pagan religion that is so broad, widespread everywhere in the world, particularly in the United States. We broke that fellowship. Our relation to God is all that mattered and we violated that relationship and broke that relation by sin in what we call the fall of man.

Now, there we have it. These things, they are the faith of our fathers. These things are what men lived and died for and died by; that God is the great reality, that God made us, that God made us for Himself. That our relationship to God is all that matters, and yet that we've broken that relationship through sin.

And then we go on and somebody says, well, what is the next answer? What's the next? What can you tell me next then? The child asked the question, who is Jesus? I hear the preachers talk about Jesus and we sing sometimes about, Jesus loves me this I know. Who's Jesus? Well, the answer is Jesus is God come to us. Now that's the best answer in the wide world. And incidentally, that's all the early church knew. Long before we knew about persons and substance and had invented

words to try to set forth philosophically the doctrines of the faith. Long before that, whole generations of fire-baptized Christians had gone everywhere, almost, throughout the civilized world and had preached the gospel and they didn't know any more than this about Jesus. Jesus is God come to us. That's all. His name is Emmanuel. He is God come to us.

How He could be both God and man in one individual. They thought about that later, but they didn't think about that in the early days. Paul didn't even try to explain it. Peter didn't try to explain it. The early apostolic fathers scarcely tried to explain it. It was only when they began bringing human reason to bear upon these doctrines that explanations began. We got the word "person," the word "essence," the word "substance," and oh, the very many, the word "trinity" and trinitarian. Those words came later as an effort to explain that which can be summed up in these words, Jesus is God come to us. That's all you have to tell your child at first. And that's all we have to tell the heathen, Jesus is God come to us.

I don't know. I've never been on the mission field, but I would risk that the Christian missionaries don't try to tell the heathen at first all about the Trinity and about the indivisible substance and not confounding the persons and all of that; and the pre-incarnate glory of Christ and the fusion of the two natures in one personality. No, I don't think they talk about that. They simplify it and say Jesus is God come to us. And when we talk about Jesus, we're talking about God. That is the Christian faith. That is what the man of God meant when he said, the faith of God's elect and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness. And through preaching the Word, the common faith, by which you've been converted Titus. That's what he had in mind.

Jesus is God coming to us, to win us and to restore us and to redeem us. This is one of the impregnable rocks upon which we build. And it isn't very hard to grasp, is it? You don't have to take a course anywhere nor learn Greek to know it. Greek is all right. But that's where we got our New Testament, that we have good faithful translators that have given us English. So, you don't have to know, you don't have to be a theologian, thank God. You only have to be a believer that Jesus is God come to win us, come to restore us. I said that part of our faith is also that we broke away from God by sin in the tragedy of the fall, but that Jesus is God come to restore us and to redeem us.

And now somebody may ask the question. I imagine some child asking, now, if Jesus is God come to us, then why did they kill him? Why did Jesus die? What's it about? Why did He die? Well, He died to undo our sins. We don't know exactly why that had to be, but we only know that it had to be. And we don't know why it had to be.

The temptation of the human mind is to bore in and bore in and try to find reasons under the profundities of God's dealings. Sometimes we can find those reasons, but more often we can't. I don't know why Jesus had to die. But because we had broken fellowship and because our

relationship to God is all that matters, seeing that He made us and made us for Himself. Then that fellowship was broken and that purpose of God was frustrated. Then God came to us in order that He might undo this, in order that He might undo our sins and destroy our old record. Justice demands that the soul that sinneth, it shall die. That's why when we sinned, we died. But Jesus came to destroy that old record.

And there's one thing absolutely sure, there are no mugshots anywhere of a Christian. Sometimes a man is pardoned. I heard a John Callahan tell about being pardoned after he was converted in prison. He was in on a hold up that resulted in death, though he didn't kill the man, he was sent to prison for murder. He was converted in prison, and then he got out and was, rose so fast in his work, that he got popular and got to eating with governors and great men. And finally, a governor asked him what he could do for him. And he said, there's just one thing. I've been pardoned and forgiven for my crime against society. But my mug shots, my face, two pictures of me are still somewhere in your records, and I want them back and the governor said, I'll see what I can do. So, the governor sent them back. And not only was he forgiven and every record wiped clean, but even his picture was taken out of the picture gallery of crime that they keep in the state institutions.

Now nowhere in the wide world, not in heaven or earth or sea or in the depths of the hell, will you find any mug shots of a child of God. You will not find any rogue's gallery where God keeps the old pictures of what you used to be. Jesus came to destroy our record. That's what He came for. And He came to reconcile us to God. He came to reconcile us to God that we might be reconciled. Be ye reconciled to Him, because He has been propitiated and we're now reconciled. That's the message of the gospel. To God I am reconciled. His pardoning voice I hear. He owns me for His child, I need no longer fear. In confidence I now draw nigh and Father, Abba Father cry. That's simplifying it and saying it beautifully and musically, and that's what the Bible teaches.

So, answer the child, why did Jesus die if He was a good man and He was God come to us? Why did He die? And the answer was, He died that this friendly God can now befriend us. That this wounded God that we have wounded by our sins, can now befriend us and be our friend.

Well, then someone says, now I've heard about the gospel all of my life. What is the gospel? Well, the gospel is God's official proclamation that now, because God has come to us and has died for us and risen, died to undo our sins and destroy our record, and reconcile us to God; therefore, we now can believe and we can get the benefit of all this by believing in Jesus Christ. And of course, it always carries an invitation. There are those who would strip the gospel down to a mere statement of fact: Christ died and rose again for our sins. No, the gospel is more than that. The gospel is an invitation. Let me illustrate.

Suppose that you quarreled bitterly with some lifetime friend of yours. I hope such a thing wouldn't happen. But if you had a bitter quarrel, your families quarreled and there was litigation and stern looks and angry talk and refusal to speak and the two families were alienated from each other. And then the time came when they forgave and the wronged party said, now, I want you to know, I forgive. It's all over. As God forgave me, I forgive you. And I will hold it no more against you.

You know, one more thing he'd have to do before you'd feel real good about it, he'd have to invite you over. Come over for dinner. And when he said, come over for dinner and bring the family and we'll have a reunion, then you'd know, okay, he means it. It's all right. Before he proclaimed a fact, I had been forgiven. But now he invites me to come. The gospel contains not only an official announcement that the kind God is now able to be kind, the merciful God is now able to be merciful because He came to us in Christ and died for our sins to sweep away all the hindrances.

But along with that proclamation also, there's an invitation. Come on, come on, come to my house, come to see me coming, that is, eat together. I stand at the door and knock, and if any man open the door, I'll come in. It's an invitation and a proclamation. That's the gospel.

And then, how can I receive this? If it's true, why doesn't it work without my doing anything? What response must I make? And the answer is, you must believe what you're told about this, because God told it. You must believe it, and cast in your lot with Him. Then it becomes effective in your life. Turn away from your sin and cast in your lot with Him. The sins that He died to deliver you from, turn your back on them and cast in your lot with Jesus who is God come to us. And it becomes effective in your life at once.

And there are 1000s of people, almost I might say millions of them if you were to count them all, even now, in this tragic, terrible age in which we live, this age of immorality and degeneracy. There are still perhaps a million or more who can say with shining face, I know you're telling the truth. I heard the proclamation. I heard it that God made me, made me for Himself, but that I sinned and broke, broke, all forfeited, all rights to His fellowship, but that He sent His Son, and that Jesus came. God came to us, that He died and rose and lives and I've heard that and I believe it. And the change in my life has been wonderful. That's what the gospel is. That's what the gospel is, and all we have to do is receive that gospel with a firm determination that from here on we're not going to live the old life anymore.

I have had some unkind and unpleasant things to say and I don't apologize at all about those who teach that all we have to do is believe and are ready to bring people in in this easy believe fashion. No, no. There must be a determination to turn away from sin and cast your lot in with Jesus and carry His cross along with Him. And then after that, all you have to do is believe for that's all you can do is believe.

When I was a young man studying hard in the great doctrines of the faith, I remember I went to God and I said, God, why is it that you've got to believe to be saved? And why is it that faith does save. Why is it that you didn't make some other condition? Why didn't you lay down some other conditions instead of faith? And I went to bed thinking about that.

Now, psychologists say that if you get a question in your mind, go to bed, your mind will work by unconscious cogitation and you may have the answer in the morning. I don't think this was a miracle. And I don't say that God woke me in a dream, but only say that the next morning as I stepped out of bed onto the floor after a night's sleep, I stood straight up on the floor and had the answer. It came to my heart like this, because that's the only thing you could do. I saw that and I've never had reason to change my mind since.

The Bible confirms it that God said you are to believe in His Son because that's the only thing left. You can't do anything else. You can't fix yourself up any, even repenting. You've got to repent and turn away from sin. That's what that means. But even that wouldn't save you. Judas repented, but he perished. You've got to believe in Jesus, because that's all that's left that anybody can do. Just as the dying Jews back in the Old Testament, in their great pain and when they were being poisoned as the deadly virus went through their veins. All they had to do was look at a serpent on a pole and believing in that serpent they were instantly healed. Why did God make it so easy? That was all they could do? What else could they do? And so, that's all we can do, granted that we have turned away from sin.

And now another point is, and this is part of the faith which we teach, that we can experience God, that God can be known. But somebody says, can I really know God as I know my grandfather or as I know my friend across the street? Can I really know God, speak to Him and have Him talk to me and talk to Him? And the answer of the Bible is all the way down the line, yes. That's part of the faith by which we live, that I can know God. That God knows me. And that by meditation on the sacred writings, with a quiet heart, I can hear God speak to me. And then by prayer, I can speak to God. And so, I can know God and yet, I can know God in an inwardness that is beyond speech, either written speech or spoken words. I can know God inwardly when I pray. There is a conscious awareness of God deep within the heart. He that believeth on the Son of God hath what?, the witness were?, in Himself. And so, we can know God in our deep hearts.

Now, there is another thing yet. All these are on the positive side, that you and I are called to believe this, this faith by which men are saved. This faith of God's elect, this acknowledging of the Truth, this common faith, which saved Titus, and Paul and all saints and saved men today. Yet, we have a responsibility above this. There's a generation to serve. David served his generation and fell on sleep. And you and I have a generation to serve. The Bible though it teaches that salvation is by faith, it still does not teach that we must stop and sit down there, but that there's are two jobs to

do. One is to do good in every practical way to everybody we can. And the other is witness to this truth, this faith of our fathers to all nations, starting next door, and ending up wherever the last heathen may be found in the far reaches of the world.

Now that's a generation to serve, and this is a part of the Christian faith too. For God does not save us and then put us in what my grandmother used to call a bandbox. I've always been curious to know what a bandbox was until after all yours I never saw one. But she said why she thinks she got married to live in a bandbox. That was my grandmother's sarcastic way of cutting down some lady who was putting on airs.

Now, what a bandbox is I do not know. But it evidently is a very fluffy place that you can get put in. And God does not save us to put us in a bandbox. He saves us in order that He might put overalls on us, and that He might put boots on us and tools in our hands and send us out rightly dividing the Word of Truth. Working like a carpenter, fighting like a soldier, planting and reaping like a farmer, hunting like a fisherman for the fish. So, we've got a job to do.

I don't know what you think about all this. But brethren, I think it's simply wonderful. And after all these years, I still believe that this is the greatest thing in all the wide world, that the great reality is God, that God is and God is real, that God made us for Himself. And that our relationship to God is all that matters. That we broke it in sin. But God came in Christ to restore us again, and that He restores us by believing the very things that we've stated. That God came in Christ and died and rose that He might restore us. And that we receive it by believing the Gospel and that it brings us into conscious experience of God. And that that conscious experience of God then eventuates in service, hard work.

One of the charges they bring against some of us is we're mystical. But I have noticed and I'm prepared to make a case for it if I ever am forced to do it. But the mystics were the hardest working people that ever lived. The mystics, those who believed in the fullness of the Holy Ghost and the life in union with God, believe that men could experience God. They were nevertheless men, who wrought and labored and worked beyond all measure.

Finney was an evangelical mystic and one of the hardest workers that ever lived. Moody was in some measure what you might call an extroverted mystic, but he was a great laborer. And so were some of the great missionaries and the great reformers, and so were they down the years. They were men who believed that you can experience God. But they didn't sit down and twiddle their thumbs. They got up and went to work to let this generation know that these things are true.

Now, those are the positive things briefly, there are two more and they're the negative ones. They are, that all this glory can be missed by rejecting or denying or despising, by loving sin or refusing to believe or letting our egotistic pride prevent us. We can miss all this. As a poor farmer, living in

a tarpaper shack and eating what little he could get. He may, only a few feet under his house and within easy reach of a pick and shovel, there may be uranium that will make him fabulously wealthy and buy him a yacht and a home in Florida. But instead of that he grubs it out, wears his overalls, has no decent suit, gets on the best he can. He hasn't a dime to rub against another; fabulously wealthy if he only knew it. But he can miss the whole thing and die and be buried by the county.

And so we, says the Bible, in effect, can miss all this glory. We can live within reach of it and miss it all by refusing to believe it's there by refusing to humble ourselves. And then at our death, the friendly invitation is withdrawn. The proclamation of the gospel is heard no more. The status of the soul is fixed for good. And we are lost without hope of reclamation. Now, that's what we believe.

Is that worth giving for? Is that worth supporting? Is that worth uniting yourself with groups that believe that kind of thing? Is that worth anything? Ah, God gazes down like the sun. I thought this morning this and I'll close. I thought how the gaze of God never fails. God never closes his eyelids, but like the sun that has no lids to close, shines down always, always, always upon the people. Always His friendly gaze is upon all mankind. But we don't see Him because the clouds and mist and smog had shrouded it between us and Him and have shrouded the glory of His countenance.

And I thought, by way of kind of illustration, would you believe that this was the same city as yesterday. Do you remember yesterday morning this time? Do you remember the smog and the fog and the mist and the clouds and the gloom and everybody was shrugging and smiling and saying, this is a day isn't it. Street car motorman, this is a day, was a day, a gloomy day. And it looked as if the sun had gotten lost somewhere in the immensity. But it was the same sun. And he's in the same position, as it was this hour yesterday. The difference is the clouds have been swept away. I don't know what happened to them. Whoever got them, I don't pity, I mean, I don't envy him. I do pity them. Whoever got this mess or whatever hit Chicago yesterday, but you and I have the sun shining down in brilliant glory.

Now the face of God shines upon all men. And the voice of God calls all men home. You and I can shroud ourselves in the cloud banks of iniquity and never see it during a lifetime, that smiling countenance and never hear that Voice. And if we do, says the Christian testimony, we shall certainly perish without end.

There we have it. That's what to tell children. That's what to tell the Jew down the street. That's what to tell the Catholic or the Christian Scientist over here. That's what to tell the paperboy. That's what to tell the heathen over there. All so simple. It's the faith by which men live. It's the faith of our fathers. There's infinitely more of course. But these are the great beliefs and if you

believe them and teach them and live by them, blessed art thou and well shall it be with you. For the God of our fathers will be your God and will be to you what a father should be to his family.