



May 8, 2022

*“An Amazing Love”*

*SS at 9:30. Service at 10:30 with King’s Kids.*

## Happy Mother’s Day

**Thanks** to those serving Christ at the church yesterday – **VBS** Jun 13-17 – Church **Camp** Aug 22-24

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We get our very best example of God’s \_\_\_\_\_ from the love of mothers for their children. Happy Mother’s Day to every \_\_\_\_\_ whom someone calls \_\_\_\_\_.

When Nikodemus \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus as “Rabbi” there is a tinge of insincerity. The tension builds from there until we get to verse 9, where Nicodemus incredulously asks, “How can these things be?” There is a note of \_\_\_\_\_ in that question.

That assessment is confirmed by Jesus’ derisive retort, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?” Remember Nick had called Jesus a teacher.

What happened? \_\_\_\_\_. Nick had questions for Jesus, but just like everyone who has ever questioned Jesus they end up being objections rather than questions.

### JOHN 3:11-15 ~

Nikodemus started with, “We know.” Here Jesus is \_\_\_\_\_. His words, “We speak of what we know.” That’s a bit of \_\_\_\_\_. “You all think you know? Here’s what the Trinity \_\_\_\_\_.

*Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.*

*God Bless You!*

When Jesus makes a statement, the proper response is \_\_\_\_\_, even if you don't know what it means. The "earthly things" is being "Begotten from above." It is the \_\_\_\_\_ that the Holy Spirit actually indwells people and \_\_\_\_\_ them towards Christlikeness in our present reality - earthly.

The word, "except" in verse 13 has to do with the ability to testify, not that Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ into Heaven. To confirm that, Jesus then uses the title "Son of Man." God who dwelt in Heaven came to the \_\_\_\_\_ as a "Son of Man," and so He is the only one qualified to talk about Heavenly things.

Whenever Jesus makes a comparison people take it too \_\_\_\_\_. The point of comparison between Jesus and the bronze serpent on a stick is the "Lifted up" part.

The purpose of Jesus' coming was not to argue or judge, but to be lifted up upon a \_\_\_\_\_ of defeat and shame in order that anyone looking to Him – to His sacrifice on their behalf – would be forgiven of the arrogance and insolence, of their ingratitude and unbelief. That in trusting in God's plan through His chosen \_\_\_\_\_ they would be Saved.

Christianity is the most inclusive...

Christianity is the most exclusive...

The Eternal Life only exists in the \_\_\_\_\_ of Eternal Life. Since this Eternal Life is in Him, it is not merely living forever – it is fundamentally Life in unison with Him and all others in Him – it is \_\_\_\_\_ Life that never diminishes, decays, or dies.

### **JOHN 3:16 ~**

Love, and specifically Agapê Love, is the word that describes perfect relational harmony. That's the love we get a glimpse of by watching moms.

"Believe" is the Greek participle πιστεύων (pēs-tū-ōn). Your faith must be... 1) INDIVIDUAL  
2) ACTIVE... 3) CONTINUOUS... 4) OBJECTIVE... 5) INTENSE... 6) INTELLECTUAL...

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Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_



# Lêtheia

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP



I want to remind you that the Image of God is

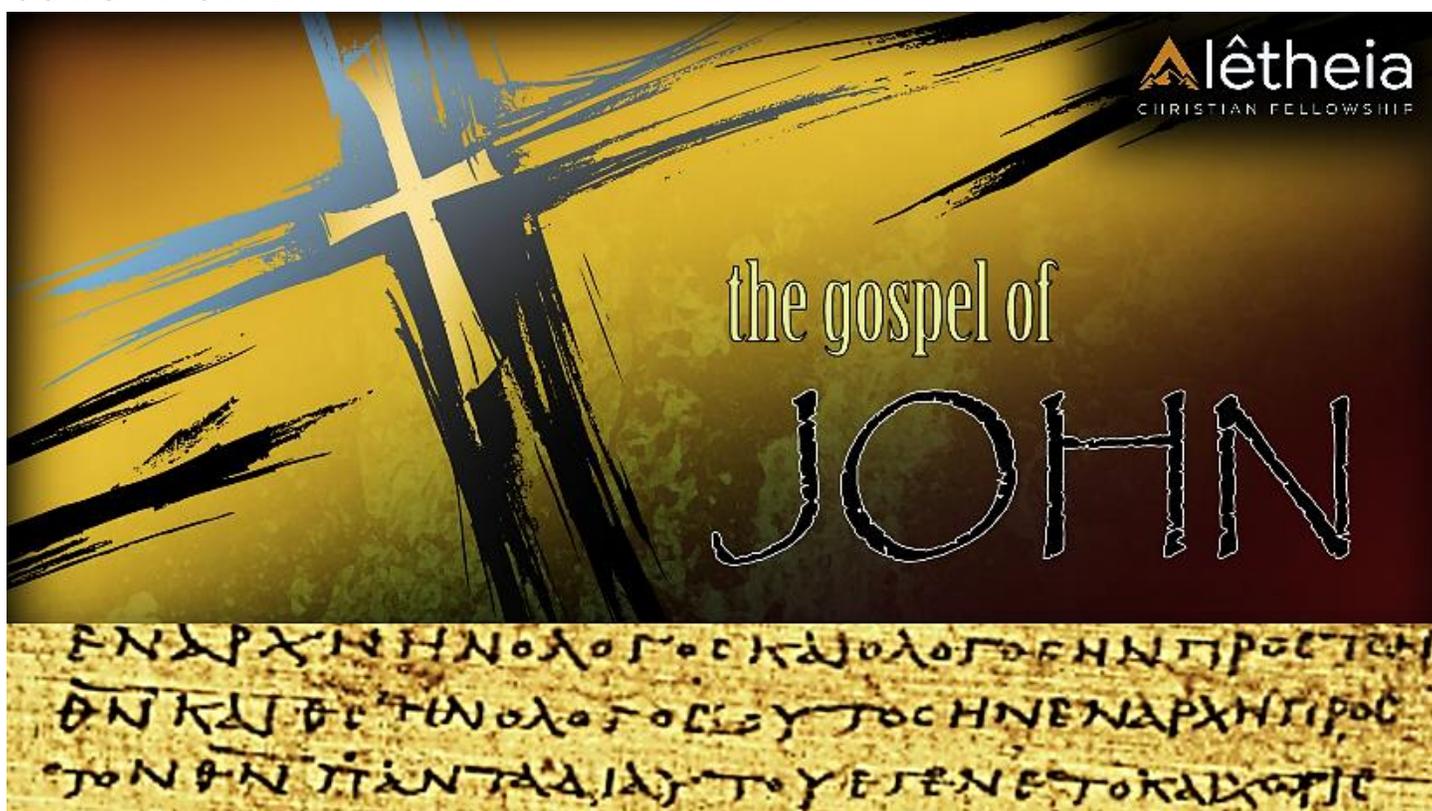
specifically seen in the idealized character of both male and female as they are joined together as one flesh in the sight of Almighty God with the original, natural, expectation of bearing children whom they would raise together as father and mother.

Sin entered and the result we have a distortion of that image. Perfect marital oneness has been replaced by near-constant friction as a male husband and a female wife try to live in harmony. Assured reproduction has been replaced by physical infertility for many men and women. The guaranteed success of pregnancy, birth, and beyond has been replaced with abortion, miscarriage, still birth and SIDS. I could go on and on about how sin has corrupted the Image of God here on planet earth, but suffice it to say, it is a very tarnished Image.

Nonetheless, it is our very best Image available. People sometimes give us a glimpse of God, a flash of some characteristic of God's nature, and never more so, than the view of God's unconditional love we see on display through moms caring for their miniature charges. Sure, there's dysfunction. Sure, there's imperfection, but if we look for it, if we focus, we can

see past the deficiencies and get a picture of God's love in action.

We get our very best example of God's Agapê – His unconditional, altruistic, selfless, and self-sacrificing, love for us from the love of mothers for their children. Happy Mother's Day to every woman whom someone calls mom.



Last week we looked at the encounter Jesus had with the Jewish Ruler Nicodemus. I painted Nick favorably, but in the dialogue recorded in the Bible, you could probably tell that there was actually a fair bit of tension in their exchange.

Some scholars see it as purely argumentative and combative from the jump. Some others see Nick as a nascent, or budding Believer simply searching for clearer understanding. Most scholars see a bit of both, and I agree. When we look carefully at the entire incident as a whole, it becomes obvious that it even starts out on slightly confrontational note.

When Nikodemus addressed Jesus as “Rabbi” there is a tinge of insincerity. I don’t think it was an outright challenge, nor do I think it was initially hostile; I’m not even sure that it was intentional.

I believe that Nick was both impressed with, and curious about, Jesus. I think that he genuinely wanted answers. That is evident by his seeking out Jesus at night. He came under the cover of darkness because he knew that any legitimate investigation of Jesus would be met with ridicule from his fellow leaders – the Chief Priests, noblemen, and the other great Jewish council Teachers of the Law.

Nikodemus was a formally educated and officially ordained professional Rabbi among Rabbis. He was

also a recognized scholar and ruling official of the Jewish people. His use of the title “Rabbi” for Jesus, a seemingly self-taught, self-appointed country bumpkin preacher, was tinged with some insincerity.



An airline pilot may address a private pilot as a fellow pilot, but trust me, the airline pilot doesn't really believe that they are equals. While Nick's address seems magnanimous given the circumstances, it is in his mind less than the truth. What's ironic is the exact opposite is true. Jesus is the only true Rabbi. In addition, Nick calls Him "Teacher," which would again have been overstating things from Nick's perspective, when in fact, Jesus is the only true teacher as well.



The tension builds from there until we get to verse 9, where Nicodemus incredulously asks, “How can these things be?” There is a note of rejection in that question. He didn’t say “Please elaborate, I’m not sure that I really understand.” Instead, it means “What You are saying is crazy – how is it even conceivable?” – pun intended.

Nick was basically saying “I am a true expert in relations between God and mankind. I have always known and always taught that it is obedience to the Law and the meticulous observance of customs, sacrifices, rituals, and traditions that enable a person to

enter into the Kingdom of God. Now you're telling me it requires some nebulous birth from above?"

That assessment is confirmed by Jesus' derisive retort, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?" That of course harkens back to earlier in the exchange when Nick called Jesus a teacher. It is a rhetorical question meaning that there is no question here at all. It is a blunt statement formatted as a question to better drive home the point. Jesus was saying, "You are the so-called official, school-trained, Pharisee-approved, Sanhedrin-sitting teacher of the Children of God, and you don't understand the first thing about what the Scripture says about entering Heaven."

What happened? How did it go from cordial to confrontational? In a word, pride. Nick had questions for Jesus, but just like everyone who has ever questioned Jesus, they end up being objections rather than questions.

The homosexual person comes to Jesus and asks, "can I live a lifestyle in keeping with my desires and be Your disciple?" Within what seems like a question is the

objection. It is implicit within the seemingly honest question. Jesus would say to that person, “My friend, just like every other human being you must fight against your fleshly urges that constitute sin.”

It isn't to say that the Christian with homosexual tendencies will not be tempted, or that the Christian with homosexual tendencies will not fail, but just as with any sinful inclination, it is to say that peace with the tendency is unacceptable. Sin, in whatever way it manifests, must be confessed, renounced, and turned away from. Then the person must accept the forgiveness given and move forward with a renewed spirit... That's the boat we are all in, all the time. Avoid sin. When you fail, feel badly, and then do something about it. Once you have, put it in the past as you press forward again with Christ. All in the power of the Holy Spirit.



John 3:11-15, 11“Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. 12“If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13“No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. 14“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

A lot of people mess up the meaning of the details of this entire passage because of the plurals and the symbolism. It's actually fairly straightforward in context.

Back in the opening Nikodemus approached Jesus and said, "We know." Here Jesus is picking up on that by repeating His words, "We speak of what we know." That's a bit of sarcasm aimed at Nick and his peers. It's sort of like, "You all think you know? Well, guess what I know a thing or two as well." In addition, it is an authoritative way to say that I do not speak, or know, or testify on My own. That's what Nick did. Instead of saying that "He knew," he said, "We know," giving his assessment more gravitas as a person in close connection with the rulers of the Jews. Jesus follows suit and says "We" instead of "I." Now, the "We" isn't Jesus and His disciples, or Jesus and the angels, or Jesus using a royal "We," it is quite literally Jesus and His Father in Heaven through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Trinity. That is the "We," communicating to Nick and his "We."



Yet, Jesus said, “You don’t accept our testimony.” This is quite profound. What Jesus was saying here is that it is of minor consequence that you don’t understand my words; what is critical is that you have failed to believe my words – that’s the problem.

When Jesus makes a statement, the proper response is trust, faith, and belief in that statement even if you don’t have a clue what it means. If you recognize Jesus as Lord, it is always “Yes, Lord.” Instant obedience to Christ even when you don’t understand is the proof of Trust. Human parents are nowhere near as infallible as God, but it is still perfectly acceptable for you moms to

say to your kid, when he or she questions your command, “Because I said so!”

Trust means accepting what a person says even when you don't understand. Now, of course, there is a time to ask and answer questions to increase understanding – that's fine. But Jesus' main point in verse 11, was you should simply believe what I say because you believe Me. Once you fully believe, then we can work out the details of comprehension if that's appropriate.



Verse 12 has people all over the map with their interpretations and again it's very simple when you get the grammar and context. The “earthly things” is specifically being “Begotten from above.” That's what they are talking about. People don't get that because that seems like a heavenly thing, not an earthly thing.

It is actually the most earthly of things because it is the evidence that the Heavenly exists. It is the evidence

that the Holy Spirit actually indwells people and changes them towards Christlikeness.

The biggest challenge to my Christian faith is a lack of that earthly physical evidence... Of observing Christians being "Begotten from above." When I see Christian people act no differently than godless heathens, it hurts my faith. Conversely, the biggest boost to my Christian faith is when I see tangible, physical, earthly evidence that a person is truly "Begotten from above." When I see transformation.

That's selfish, self-focused, self-serving human beings walking around on planet earth conformed to Christ at least enough to be measurable and recognized. If Nick and his fellow Jewish leaders cannot grasp that simple concept, well then, how in the world can Jesus talk to them about what actually goes on in Heaven?

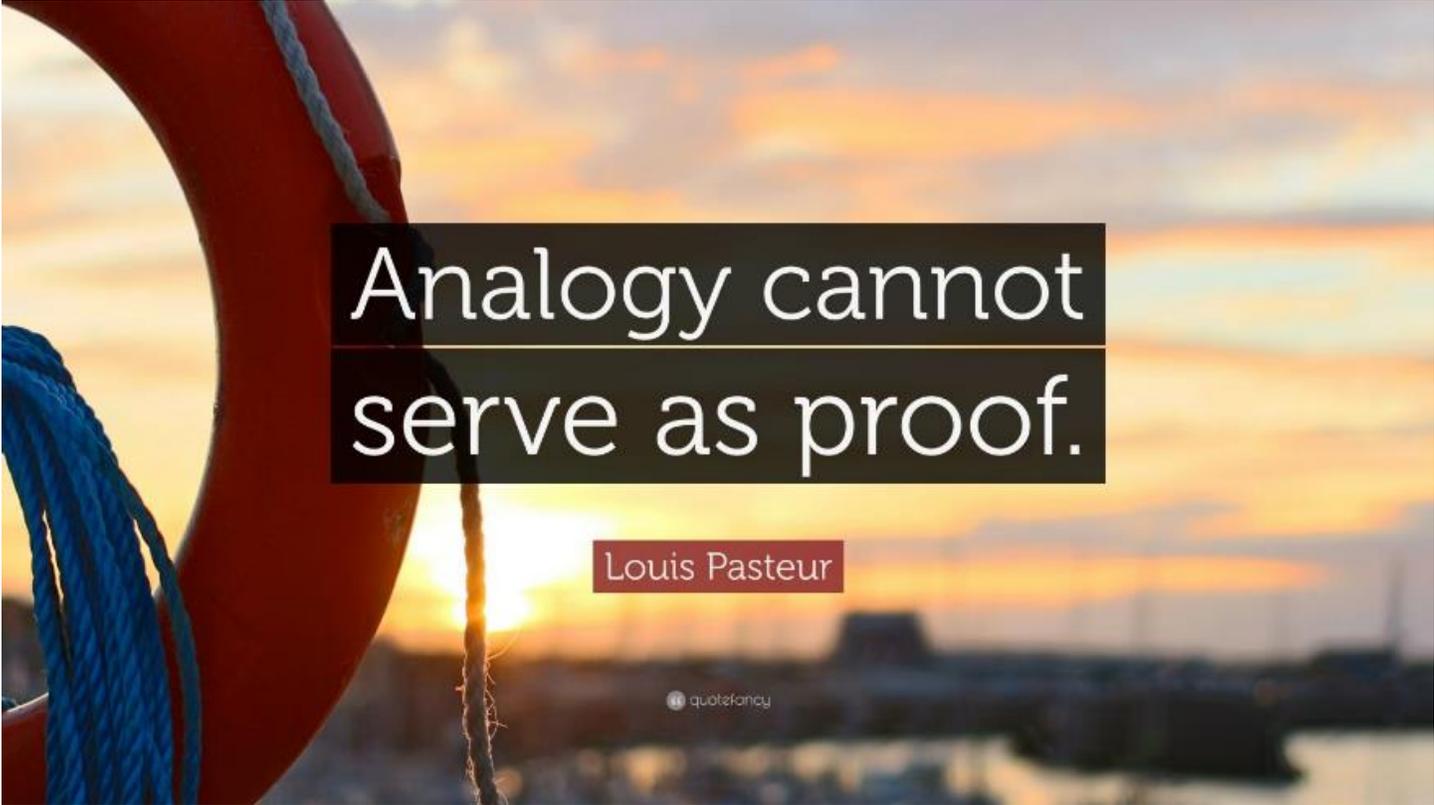


Verse 13 is another verse often misunderstood and even a bit mistranslated. The NIV as an example, has “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.” That makes it seem as though Jesus said that He had “Gone into Heaven.” Well, as the Son of Man, He hadn’t done that yet. The word “Except” applies to Jesus’ ability to testify as coming from Heaven, not that He was the exception to the going into Heaven idea.

In other words, Jesus had not already ascended back into Heaven, nor had He gone home for a visit to do His laundry while sojourning on earth. The

mistranslation creates words that Jesus would not have spoken at that time. What He was saying instead was, “No one has ever gone up into Heaven and taken a look around – so no one can speak about Heavenly things... Except, except, except, the One Who came from Heaven. Of course, He can speak with authority about heavenly things, because that’s where He came from originally, existing now on earth.”

Again, the “Except” has to do with the ability to testify, not that Jesus ascended into Heaven – He didn’t in this sense, until after His Crucifixion. To confirm that interpretation Jesus then uses the title “Son of Man.” God who dwelt in Heaven came to the earth as a “Son of Man,” and so He is the only one qualified to talk about Heavenly things. He can’t talk about Heavenly things though, because Nick and his people won’t even accept what He has to say concerning earthly things that are clearly taught in the Jewish Scriptures. Which leads us directly into the Jewish Scriptures in the next two verses.



Analogy cannot  
serve as proof.

Louis Pasteur

quote fancy

Verse 14. Whenever Jesus makes a comparison, uses an analogy, speaks metaphorically, or tells a parable, people take it too far. The point of comparison between Jesus and the bronze serpent on a stick is the “Lifted up” part. Specifically, that’s what Jesus clearly said.

Biblically the only part we’re supposed to apply as the Holy Word of God is that bit. Now we can dig and find all sorts of other connections and while they may be nice, they are not Scripture. What is Scripture in this case? Back in Numbers chapter 21, it says that the people spoke against God and Moses. What that means is that the people spoke against Moses’

leadership and since Moses was appointed by God, for the role that he played, it was identical to speaking against God Himself – that’s how that works. That’s precisely why we are not supposed to speak or act against God’s anointed while in the performance of their duties. Anyway, the people grumbled and complained, and they questioned and objected. We might say, “Good grief, what’s the big deal? We Americans have made an artform out of that.” Well, it all points to a lack of trust and to an attitude of ungrateful disrespect, which itself speaks of a certain level of arrogance. You cannot disrespect a person without feeling superior to them... Yes, we do that to God!



None of that works for God, so He sent in among the people “Fiery serpents.” Dragons, I guess. It’s a fiery flying serpent and it is the same word as Seraphim – those six-winged Heavenly Beings of Isaiah chapter 6. Whatever the specifics, God sent them in amongst the grumbly people and they bit them, killing a bunch of those whiners. The curse of death was upon all the people for their sin. Then God told Moses to hold up a bronze image of the Dragon-like snake and all the people trusting in God’s saving grace through that mediating redeemer would be Saved.



That's the point of comparison – Like the incident in the desert, so it would be similar in that fashion to Jesus' Mediation. Then the analogous comparison is made explicit with "Whoever believes in (the lifted-up Son of Man) will in Him have eternal life."

The purpose of Jesus coming was not to argue, not to judge, but explicitly to be lifted up upon a Cross of entire defeat and shame in order that anyone looking to Him – to His sacrifice on their behalf – would be forgiven of the arrogance and insolence, of their ingratitude and unbelief. In trusting in God's plan

through His chosen Mediator they would be redeemed – they would be Saved.

Whoever is literally anyone and everyone who chooses. Christianity is the most inclusive thing imaginable – no one is hindered from Belief. Christianity is simultaneously the most exclusive thing imaginable – no one will ever be accepted apart from believing in Him.

The Eternal Life only exists in the Source of Eternal Life. Jesus is the Life Giving and Sustaining Force – there can be no life at all apart from His active agency. Since this Eternal Life is in Him, it is not merely living forever – it is fundamentally Life in unison with Him and all others likewise in Him – it is Relational Life that never diminishes, decays, or dies.

What would we call that kind of Life? There's only one word for it and we'll see it in the next verse. So, let's read what the Holy Spirit through the Apostle John clarifies next...



John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Love, and specifically Agapê, is the word that describes perfect relational harmony. John the Apostle called the Beloved Disciple and the Apostle of Love as well as a Son of Thunder, here narrating after the fact, explains to us Jesus’ statement to Nikodemus. This is so important, so essential to the Christian Faith that the Holy Spirit does not want anyone missing the point.

God – the totality of God to include the Word and the Breath as well as the Will of God – Agapêd, which is to say, chose to selflessly, and self-sacrificingly, love the human children they created. It's truly the only logical reason to create the universe in the first place – A desire to share perfect love with others. God loved so incredibly much that He handed over His own eternal Word to be made flesh and blood and dwell as a mortal man on planet earth.

Technically, the Word condescended. Wow, what an understatement! God allowed a part of Himself to become an entirely helpless unborn baby, followed by years as a child, and then as an adolescent human, and finally as a man. Nothing special at all. Nothing to draw anyone's attention, but of humble circumstances, without notoriety, or wealth, or prestige, or power, or privilege. Enduring every human degradation and suffering every human temptation and yet perfectly obedient to God in Heaven.

He earned His spot back in Heaven and instead of taking what was His, He allowed God in Heaven to collect up every sin, past, present, and future and charge them to Jesus' account as though they were His

own personal sins – that’s what “Taking away the sin (singular) of the world” means. All sin imputed to Him.

“Only begotten Son,” means one and only unique Son. The eternal Word of God as Jesus in His earthly incarnation became the Son of God in that sense as He was now the Son of Man. Honestly, He was more dear and more precious to God than any child to any mother has ever been... Eternally bound in perfect unity and now handing over Jesus to be brutally lifted up for all to see, that some might actually look at Him with eyes of faith.

Well, everyone who does will be Saved. All who believe in the sacrificial accomplishment of Jesus – believe in Him for their entire acceptance by God will not perish into the Lake that burns with fire and brimstone, but instead will Live in relational harmony forever and ever, amen.

All one must do is believe in Jesus. Is it really so simple? Yes, truly, it is, “Believing in Him” is all, but to believe in Jesus might be a little different than a lot of people think.

Now we transition from the love, care, and comfort of the feminine to the pragmatism of the masculine. I won't go down a long list of what "Believing" is not – like believing in Jesus is not about snagging a get-out-of-hell-free card. As an example. In addition, I won't go through all the passages in the Bible dealing with the topic either. For today, I'll simply cut to the chase by telling you what the word "Believe" is the Greek. It is the participle πιστεύων (pēs-tü-ōn), meaning that your faith, trust, and belief must be...

1) Individual – no one can do it for you; Mormon baptism for the dead, is merely going to get a living person wet for no good reason. It's God's work and individual faith in His completed work that is required.

2) Active – action that is based upon faith is conviction. I can believe, lift equals the coefficient of lift times one half rho, "V" squared times "S," is theoretically correct, but when I strap my little pink body to two after-burning jet engines producing 56,000 pounds of thrust, my belief is real – it is active – it is proven. I can believe that a chair will hold my weight, but salvific belief is when I sit!

3) Continuous – or habitual, so it is who you really are not just who you think you are, who you wish you were, or who you're trying to be. It is who you actually are as demonstrated by what you actually do. If I believe church is important, I am going to attend regularly, habitually, continuously, and if I don't, I'm just a liar.

4) Objective – it is belief directed toward a specific object. There is a specific thing encompassing the activity of belief. It is not that I believe in some ambiguous, indefinite, and mysterious idea of metaphysical Christianity; it is that I believe in the person of Jesus Christ.

5) Intense – it is vitally important – there is a sense of great urgency. For them to use a participle is like us using an exclamation point.

6) Intellectual – not emotional! Emotion along with all kinds of other things may bring us to the precipice, but genuine salvific faith is an intellectual choice – I have seen the evidence, I have carefully considered the ramifications and I choose to believe, I choose to place my trust in God.

We do what we are, not the other way around. If you have Biblical belief, it will be obvious to the most casual observer.

Just as James says, truly without works, evidence or “Fruit,” faith is dead. Without a change of perspective, attitude, and ultimately behavior, there is not a sufficient faith. Without transformation there is no yielding to the God and so, there is no true salvation, there is no infilling of the Holy Spirit because there is again, no “Fruit of the Spirit.” First among the elements is love. Without love there is only legalistic religious fervor.

That’s what it is to Biblically believe and what must we believe? In every place it is worded a bit differently, but it all boils down to Trusting completely in the One True God and the Savior that He provided in the way that He provided Him.