



## Chasing Jesus (Not His Shadow)

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21, Colossians 2:6-18 & 13-19  
Young Adults Pastor Adam McIntire

1. Read Ephesians 3:14-21. This is the passage that Adam prays over his daughter, influenced by his knowledge of the power of Jesus in his own life. What about you?
  - a. What passage do you pray over your children (if you have them) or family members or friends?
  - b. What about your own life?
  - c. What Scripture are you asking God to reign over you and transform the way you respond to the world?
2. Read Matthew 7:21-23, John 8:31-47, and James 2:14-26. What is the difference between a mere “head knowledge faith” and true faith? How have you seen your faith grow from head knowledge to faith in action? Was it an experience? Did it grow over time? What became different?
3. Read Matthew 11:28-30. Would you say that your Christianity is a joy or a burden? What does Jesus say is the answer? Is this the Jesus you know?
4. Read Colossians 2:13-15 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. What does Paul say in these verses is of first importance?
  - a. Prior to Sunday’s message how would you have described the core of what it means to be a Christian?
  - b. Did Sunday’s message challenge how you might have answered that question, and if yes, how so?
  - c. How would you answer that question now, after having heard Adam’s message?

**Challenge:** Read Acts 2:42-47. What do you see in this picture of the early church in the passage? What does the last part of v. 47 say was the result? How are you and/or your group showing the love of Christ to those around you? How can you grow in this area?

**Prayer:** Pray this verse over each other. Take turns, paraphrase, use your own words, however you feel led to pray.

*14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and*

*established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

## STUDY DEEPER

### **Love Is the Main Thing in Saving Faith by John Piper**

Love is the main thing in saving faith. Those are the words of Jonathan Edwards, and if they are true, life and ministry are changed forever.

By “love,” he means love to God. And by “main thing,” he means “the life and power of [saving faith], by which it produces its great effects” (Writings on the Trinity, 448).

I’ll come back in a moment to show you where Edwards gets that idea. But first, I’ll try to show why I agree.

One legitimate worry about such a statement is that it could contaminate “faith” and turn it into a performance, or a deed, or a work. But does it? Must it?

It is right to jealously guard saving faith as fundamentally receiving, not giving. To be sure, faith is powerful in producing the fruit of deeds, but is not those deeds. Confusing a good tree with its good fruit makes Jesus’s words meaningless. “Every healthy tree bears good fruit” (Matthew 7:17). So I want to be vigilant to guard faith as essentially receiving, not performing or giving.

We see the nature of faith as receiving in John 1:11–12,

[Jesus] came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

John puts “believing in his name” in apposition with “receiving him.” They are essentially the same.

### No Greater Treasure

So for me, the question is this: Receive him as what? It is possible that you see Jesus wrongly and receive him as what you see, and thus receive a Jesus who does not exist. For example, you may receive a Jesus who is not the divine Son of God. Or you may receive a Jesus who did not do miracles. Or a Jesus who did not rise from the dead, but is only a spirit and influence in the world. Or you may receive a Jesus who teaches that your reception of him is not his gift to you but yours to him.

So the great question is this: Faith means receiving Jesus as what?

The common evangelical answer – and it is gloriously true – is “receive him as your personal Savior and Lord.” No half-Christ! Not half a Christ – Savior. Not half a Christ – Lord. But Christ, as he is, the full Christ!

But did the Scripture ever mean that saving faith receives Christ as anything less than supreme Treasure? Did the Bible ever mean: Receive him as Lord, but not treasured Lord? Did the Bible ever mean: Receive him as Savior but not as treasured Savior?

No. Receiving Christ as he is means receiving him as the supreme Treasure that he is. Isn't Jesus's parable about the treasure meant to describe the true nature of coming into contact with the King?

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” (Matthew 13:44)

The point of that parable is not that the kingdom can be bought, but that there is no greater treasure than being in the kingdom – where the King is.

So saving faith receives Jesus as what he truly is. He is the supreme Treasure of all who receive him.

What Is Love?

Now think about it. What is the nature of this receiving-as-supreme-Treasure? What is this experience? My suggestion is that it is the same as love. It is what love is – love to Christ. To receive him as supreme Treasure is to love him that way. To value him. Treasure him. Be satisfied with him.

So Jesus says,

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 10:37)

This does not mean we are “worth” having Jesus, but that he is worth being had as our supreme Treasure. To be “worthy” of Jesus, is to receive him in a way that is “suitable” – that shows his worth. This is what saving faith is. And if we don't have it, we don't have Jesus.

Here is the way Paul put it:

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. (2 Thessalonians 2:9–10)

Literally, it says, “They did not welcome the love of the truth in order to be saved.” The issue is not just welcoming the truth, but being willing to have the love of the truth in our hearts. Many people presume to have truth and speak truth. But it is all mental, intellectual – notional, Edwards would say. They do not love the truth of the gospel. They say things about Jesus, but they don't love what they say – that is, they don't love the one they speak of. They don't treasure what they say. And Paul says this is why they are not

saved. Which means, they don't have saving faith. Because saving faith has in it the love of what is believed – the One believed.

Saving faith receives the truth of Christ not merely as a fact, but as treasured fact. Not just as the description of a person and his deeds, but as a treasured person whose deeds are treasured for how valuable they really are. That is, saving faith includes loving Christ – treasuring him for who he is.

Do You Want Jesus to Return?

Paul has other ways of saying the same thing. For example, in 1 Corinthians 16:22 he says, "If anyone does not love (philei) the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!" In view of what we have seen, the most natural way to take this is to say that love to Christ – treasuring Christ more than the dearest family members (philei) – is an essential part of what saving faith is.

Having connected love to Jesus and the second coming in 1 Corinthians 16:22, Paul does it again in 2 Timothy 4:7-8,

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved (egapekosin) his appearing.

To love him is to love his appearing. That is, to really want him to come back. To treasure his return more than you treasure finishing your career, or getting married, or having a family. That is what it means to love him.

And the effect of such love is "the crown of righteousness." That is not a reference to a special class of Christians in heaven. That is the crown that is put on every Christian head. By faith we are identified with the righteous one (Isaiah 53:11). And we will be crowned with him. This is the outcome of our faith. Which means that loving his appearing – that is loving him – is what faith includes.

Believe. Receive. Love.

Several texts in the writings of John show us that loving Christ is part of trusting Christ – that is, receiving him as our supreme Treasure – our treasured Savior and our treasured Lord – is what faith is. For example, Jesus said,

I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (John 5:41–44)

Ponder the connections among "believe," "receive," and "love." You do not receive me, Jesus says. Why do they not receive him? Because they can't believe on him. Why can't they believe? Because they seek glory from one another, not the glory of God. Why do they do that? Because they "do not have the love of God" in them. They don't love God. Not loving God excludes believing and receiving Jesus. Why? Because

believing and receiving Jesus means receiving him for who he is – the loved and treasured Son of God. Believing Jesus includes loving God.

Or again, John says,

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. (John 3:18–19)

Why don't they believe on Jesus? Why don't they receive him as supremely treasured? Because they "love the darkness." Until the love of darkness has been broken, and replaced with love for the Light, coming to the Light as supremely valuable – supremely loved – will be impossible.

Edwards's Six Steps to Faith

Now back to Jonathan Edwards. He said, "Love is the main thing in saving faith, the life and power of it, by which it produces its great effects."

He got this from 1 John 5:3–5

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Here are the steps in his thinking.

Loving God means that his commandments are not burdensome to us (1 John 5:3). Love lifts the burden and turns obedience into delight – as when Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" (John 4:34). Obedience is not depleting, it is nourishing. I don't mainly give out when I obey; I receive when I obey. It is not a burden. It is a burden lifter. Like food strengthens, obedience gives joy. That's what love for God does to the soul.

The source of this love for God is the new birth (1 John 5:4).

For the new birth is the origin of faith. This is implied in verse 4 and made explicit in verse 1: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God" (1 John 5:1). The sure evidence of being born of God is that we believe on Jesus. Not the other way around. New birth causes faith, not the reverse.

Overcoming the world in verse 4 refers to the overcoming of the forces that make the commandments of God burdensome. This is plain from the relationship between verses 3 and 4: His commandments are not burdensome because new-born people overcome the world. Hence, overcoming the world refers to overcoming the burdensomeness of the commandments.

“This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith” (5:4). So on the one hand what overcomes the world (that is, lifts the burdensomeness of the commandments) is loving God. And on the other hand what overcomes the world is our faith.

Therefore, Edwards concludes,

Our love to God enables us to overcome the difficulties that attend keeping God’s commands; which shows that love is the main thing in saving faith, the life and power of it, by which it produces its great effects. If you are a parent or a pastor or a small group leader, or a Christian who cares about helping anyone trust Christ and live by faith, what all this means is that your desire to help the people you serve will include a desire to help them love Christ. This does not mean do things for him. It feels things for him. It means treasure him above all else. Be satisfied in all that God is for us in him.

When this sinks in, all of parenting, all of ministry, all of life becomes the great quest of awakening affections for God in Christ. More than this, to be sure. But nothing less – never less.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/love-is-the-main-thing-in-saving-faith>