

Covenant Membership

Session 4 | Our Faith: How We Know and Love the Lord

Introduction

- A. This morning we gather to consider Our Faith: How We Know and Love the Lord. Before we dive in, I want to give you a sense of how things will be **structured**:
1. First, I simply want to **reintroduce** our Value of Faith to us.
 2. Then I want to discuss two particular Passions that flow from this Value.
 3. Then we will discuss our Core Confession and Doctrinal Distinctives.

Key Text

"[F]or us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:6).

From Him, for Him, and through Him

- A. You might recall from **last time**, I chose the text we just read, 1 Corinthians 8:6, as the **key verse** for our Value Faith.
1. Commenting on this verse, **Leon Morris** writes: *"We came **from** him and we live **for** him; he is our **origin and goal**" (TNTC 7, p. 125).*
- B. Human beings were **created** and designed to participate in transcendent reality—a reality that extends **far above** us, a reality that **invigorates** and **infuses** the **material, tangible** world in which we live.
1. We are not supposed to look up at the **stars**, see the **endless expanse**, and merely **confine** our reflections to the realms of our **science** or **art**.
 - a. We are to move in our reflections **beyond** the **stars** to the **God** who **created** them and us—"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psa 19:1). It's as if **God is crying out for relationship with us from all corners of His creation**.
 - i. That's why Paul would say: *"²⁷ He is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for 'In Him we live and move and have our being'" (Acts 17:27–28).* He is all around us. He is our atmosphere. He is our reason for being.
- C. This is what makes the secular humanistic worldview of our culture so thoroughly **dissatisfying**—"Life is all about **man**; we don't need **God**!" They **suck** the **soul** right out of the universe. And everything just falls to the floor like a **corpse**.
1. There's no **transcendent** anymore. There's no **meaning** anymore. There's no **God**.

- D. We mistakenly think getting rid of God will be our **freedom**, but it truly becomes our **slavery**. We mistakenly think getting rid of God will make us more like **gods**—we get to call the shots, rule our lives, do what we want—but it truly makes us more like the **animals**—we are ruled by our **instincts**, in bondage to our **lusts**, destructive in our **habits**.
- E. The **second part** of **1 Corinthians 8:6** points us in the direction of God's great **redemption** and **rescue**. He has not left **Himself** without a **witness** in creation. And He has not left **us** without a **Savior** in Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Jesus Christ, the One through whom He **created** all things, is also now the One **redeeming** all things. He is the One *"through whom we exist"*. He is the One who *"suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18)*.
 - a. He puts the **soul** back in the **universe**, He gives the **stars** back their **singing voice**, He brings **man** back to **God**! And now we can again **know** and **love** Him, just as we were **created** to do!
- F. This is what we mean when we say we value **Faith** in this church. We are **pressing upwards** into this relationship.

Our Passions

(1) The Divine Word

- A. But **how** do we know that any of what I just said is actually **true**? How do we know that this is what God is **like**—that this is what God has **done** and is **doing**? How do we come to **know** and **love** this God?
 - 1. Answer: He has **spoken** to us—*"¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1–2)*.
 - a. From the **beginning**, our God speaks. He **knows** and **loves** us and wants to be **known** and **loved** by us. He doesn't leave us to our **vain imaginations**. He speaks through the fog and **reveals** Himself truly to us.
- B. That's why we speak of this Value as **Faith**: *"[F]aith comes from hearing, and hearing through the **word** of Christ" (Rom 10:17)*.
 - 1. We come to **know** and **love** God by **trusting** what He has **spoken** and **revealed** to us of Himself.
- C. This leads us to what I would identify as a Passion of Mercy Hill Church: namely, we are passionate about **The Divine Word**. In other words, we are passionate about the **Bible**, for the Bible is God's word to us: *"All Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Tim 3:16)*.

1. In the Scriptures, it's as if God **pulls up a chair** next to us, and begins to speak.
- D. As a church, there are **two ways** we can relate to this Divine Word that I want to quickly reflect on: (1) We **Sit Under** It; and (2) We **Stand Upon** It.

(1) We Sit Under It

- A. The Word of God, as it has been recorded for us in Scripture, is to be **set over** us, and we are to situate ourselves **under** it. We do not place ourselves **above Him**, but take our place **under Him**, at His feet. May it always be that God gets the **first word** in this church!

1. In fact, it's **2 Timothy 3:16** that **fuels** the **charge** Paul gives to Timothy in **4:1-2**—
"[P]reach the word." *"Set this word over your people Timothy...and preach it!"*
- B. I remember hearing **Mark Dever** speak about the symbol of the **pulpit** in our churches. So many in this **postmodern** era have been ready to do away with the pulpit and the preaching that animates it. *"Isn't preaching an **outdated** way of communicating? Isn't such a method **detestable** to the postmodern man?"*
 1. Have you ever heard someone say, or perhaps you've even said yourself: **"Don't preach at me!"** What is meant by this? Is it not that we are saying: *"Don't **talk down** to me, as if you know and I don't. How could you be so **arrogant**?"*
 - a. Preaching in our day has come to be **synonymous** with **pride** and **pushiness**.
- C. But we've got it all **wrong**! Preaching—what I am doing right now—must not be interpreted as: *"Nick thinks he is **better** than everyone else in this room."* (Certainly men have used the pulpit for this kind of vainglory, and this perhaps is why so many now have a great disdain for it.)
 1. But the **pulpit** and **preaching** serve a much more **sublime** reality. They remind us not that Nick is above us, but that **God is above** us—that God gets the **first word**; that we have been **created** because God spoke over the **formless void** and life came forth; that we have been **redeemed** because God spoke over our **dead bones** and life came forth, once more.
- D. That is why we are passionate about the **pulpit** in this church! Not so that Nick can push his **agenda** on everyone, but so that God can bring the **dead to life** and, once alive, can continue **guiding, nourishing, cherishing,** and **preserving** His bride!

(2) We Stand Upon It

- A. And this leads to the second way we relate as a church to this Divine Word: **We Stand Upon It.**
- B. We are a church that sets over us the Word of God. **Preaching** is just **one way** we do this. It's **symbolic** of the whole of our lives, **lived under** the authority of His Word.

1. But, although God's word is over us, it doesn't **oppress** us. God is not a **tyrant**. He's a **Servant**. So as we set His Word over us, we find that it actually starts to lay a stable foundation underneath us. That which we **sit under**, we find that we **stand upon**!
 - a. God speaks, even **hard words**, not to **tear** us **down**, but to **build** us **up**!
- C. Hear now the full context of **2 Timothy 3:16** into verse **17**: "¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God and **profitable** for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *that the man of God may be **complete, equipped** for every good work.*"
 1. God is **profiting** you, **completing** you, **equipping** you as He speaks! The Divine Word which we **sit under** is also that which we **stand upon**!

(2) Mysterious Orthodoxy

- A. There's a second Passion I want to highlight at this point. We are passionate about what I call "**Mysterious Orthodoxy**".
 1. Here's what I mean. Is God **one** or is He **three**? Is Jesus **God** or is He **man**? Is God **sovereign** or is man **responsible**?
 - a. The answer to all of these questions is simply: **yes**. But when we are asked how this is so, the answer is simply: **I don't know**. God says it. I believe it.
 - i. Now, perhaps, you see how the **first passion** flows into the **second**. We take God at His word, even when it leads us **headlong** into **mystery**.
 - B. So much of what is now considered **biblical orthodoxy** has been forged along the lines of **mystery**. The church has learned over the years to **articulate clearly** even what she doesn't **understand fully** (the doctrines of the **trinity** and of **Christ** being perfect examples).
 1. On the other hand, so much of what is now understood to be **heresy**, veered off into such error precisely because men felt they must **strip** God of the mystery. "*It must **fit into our minds** or it cannot be so.*"
 - a. Jesus could not have been both **fully God** and **fully man**. Therefore, maybe He wasn't **fully God** (the heresy of **Arianism**). Or maybe He wasn't **fully man** (the heresy of **Docetism**).
 - i. Mysterious Orthodoxy says, "*I don't know how, but He's **both**.*"
 - C. Allow me to read you something from my **notes** at this point: "*If a man is to become a Christian, he must finally reach a place where he is willing to say: "Jesus, I want you not just as my Savior, but as my Lord." By this I mean that he must fully surrender to Christ's*

authority: “What You say goes.” Until then, I am quite certain that a person cannot even be saved. You either have Him as Savior and Lord, or you do not have Him at all.

And when Jesus is Lord, if we come to things in His Word that we don’t understand, we don’t raise our objections and our fists. We might struggle. We might question. This is okay. But at last, we have learned the secret of Psalm 131: “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me” (v. 1). We let Him be God. We receive His interpretation of reality, even if we can’t figure out how it all fits together.

Somewhere along the way we started thinking the we must have all our questions answered before we can believe. But this is really quite foolish when once we step back and consider it. How can we, a finite, time-bound creature possibly wrap our little minds around the infinite, eternal Creator? It is unthinkable (pun intended). Far better would it be for us if we would stop trying to steal the seat of honor around the table and just put ourselves in the seat of a child (they have more of the fun anyways). God is on the throne. Ours is to trust Him and relax.

Now I am not saying we are not to think deeply about the revelation He has given us in the Scriptures. I am giving my life over to such deep thinking! But I do mean to say that, when at last we have studied and prayed and inquired, and still we don’t know how God can be both one and three, or how Jesus can be both God and man, or how God is absolutely sovereign and yet man is still responsible—we don’t throw it all out, but accept it on faith. Not blind faith, but a faith that sees clearly: He is God, and we are not. We embrace the mystery, because He is Savior, because He is Lord, and we trust Him.”

- D. This mystery will ultimately lead us to one of two places: **grumbling** or **glorying**. It either fuels our **resentment** of God or our **worship** of Him.
1. We want to come out where Paul comes out in **Romans 11** after dealing with the deep **mysteries** of God’s **sovereign grace** and **election**: “³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* ³⁴ *‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’* ³⁵ *‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’* ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen*” (**vv. 33–36**).
 - a. As a church, when we come to things we can’t piece together in His word, this is where I want us to go! Not to **grumbling** and **resentment**, but to **glorying** and **worship**!

Our Core Confession

- A. All of this was to **set us up** to talk about **Our Faith in particular**—what we believe in this church; our **Core Confession** and our **Doctrinal Distinctives**. But really I’m going to have to **punt** to your Covenant Membership Notebooks at this point. There is much I wrote there that I can’t say here. Please **read** it.
- B. Regarding our **Core Confession** (see **Appendix 3**), let me at least say this: it provides an **index** of core biblical teaching all of which you would need to hold to in order to be a

Covenant Member here. Many of the articles we would consider necessary for *salvation*. All of the articles we would consider necessary for *spiritual health*.

- C. I would also point out that, as you read it, you may notice that we tried to be intentionally ambiguous on matters of **secondary importance**. We don't take a stand in this confession on how **God's sovereignty** relates to salvation, or whether **baptism** can be for infants or only believers, etc.
 - 1. Let me be clear: the goal was not to **water down** our church's positions on these secondary matters (as we'll see in our Doctrinal Distinctives), but to **widen our church's doors** so as to welcome into the membership of this **local church** more of those who seem to be genuine members of Christ's **universal church**.
 - a. I don't want to shut the door on my **Arminian** or **Presbyterian** brother. I want to worship around the cross with them. I want to **leave space** in our community for people to **wrestle** with these secondary matters and **grow** in their faith.

Our Doctrinal Distinctives

- A. That being said, we are not afraid to come down with **conviction** on these secondary matters. Indeed, we believe that if we are to faithfully declare the **whole counsel of God** in this church, we must often make **interpretive decisions** regarding these things.
 - 1. And so we have **Doctrinal Distinctives**—positions that **distinguish** us from other churches and other Christians.
 - a. Complete agreement here is not required for the sake of **membership**, but will be required for the sake of **Eldership**. So it should be known that we will **preach, teach** and **counsel** in accordance with these convictions.
- B. So what are Mercy Hill's Doctrinal Distinctives? Beginning with the most fundamental and moving out from there, we are: (1) **Evangelical**; (2) **Reformed**; (3) **Continuationist**; (4) **Complementarian**; and (5) **Baptistic** in our theology.
 - 1. All I am going to look at with you this morning is that second one: **Reformed**. I just want to **settle in** deep here. The others I would encourage you to **read** through on your own time.

(2) Reformed

- A. By "**Reformed**" I mean that we hold to a view of **God**, in general, and **salvation**, in particular, that was regained and clarified in the Reformation of the 16th century, especially by John Calvin.
- B. This Reformed view of salvation is **best crystallized** in what has come to be known as the five points of Calvinism, **memorably contained** within the acronym **T-U-L-I-P**.

- T — Total Depravity
- U — Unconditional Election
- L — Limited Atonement
- I — Irresistible Grace
- P — Perseverance of the Saints

C. Let's look at these briefly one by one.

(1) Total Depravity

A. By Total Depravity we mean that man is **dead** in his sin, **wholly opposed** to God by nature: *"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Cor 2:14).

1. Did you catch that? We are so corrupt in our sin, that we **need the Spirit** before we could ever receive the **things of the Spirit**.

a. This is why Jesus would say to **Nicodemus**: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [by the Spirit (v. 5)] he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John 3:3).

B. Or consider Paul's devastating estimation of humanity in **Ephesians 2:1-5**—*"¹ And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us **alive** together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."*

1. The Scriptures depict men not as **drowning** in the **sea** of their sin, but **dead** at the **bottom** it.

a. Salvation, therefore, is not God in Christ casting out a **lifesaver** for drowning people to grab a hold of if they so will.

b. No! Salvation is God in Christ **diving down** to the ocean floor and grabbing a hold of us—ice-cold sinners—and dragging us up to the surface, and bringing us back to life!

i. We are not merely **drowning**, we are **drowned**. We are **born dead**. And in Him, we are **born again**!

(2) Unconditional Election

A. By Unconditional Election we mean that God chose you not on the basis of any **condition** in you, but with regard to His **mercy alone**: *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy"* (Rom 9:15).

B. With **Total Depravity** as our **presupposition**, it is clear, we **cannot choose** God. Therefore, if we are to be saved, **God must choose** us.

1. Which is why Jesus would turn to His disciples and say *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you"* ([John 15:16](#)).
2. And it's why Luke would record that when **Paul** and **Barnabas** were preaching in **Antioch**: *"as many as were **appointed to eternal life** believed"* ([Acts 13:48](#)).

C. And He **chooses** us, **appoints** us, **elects** us **unconditionally**: *"[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, **not because of our works** but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began"* ([2 Tim 1:9](#)).

(3) Limited Atonement

A. Now this one gets a little **controversial**, even among the Reformed. Even I am not all that happy with the language. It's a question of the **perspective** from which you view the **atonement**.

1. In **one sense**, Christ's atonement, His death on the cross, is not limited but **universal**. It is **sufficient** to pay for the debt of all mankind. Jesus is *"the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"* ([John 1:29](#)). It is not as if He needed **6 quarts** of blood to purchase all of humanity but he only had **5**—*"Whoops, I guess I'll settle for **limited atonement**."*
2. No! That's not it. His blood is sufficient for **any** who would come. But, shifting perspectives, while it is universal in one sense, it is **limited**, or **definite**, or **particular** in **another sense**.
 - a. He paid for a **specific people**—those whom *"God chose . . . in Him before the foundation of the world"* ([Eph 1:4](#)). He offered up His life as the **bride price**, as it were. He died not **hoping** that His bride would come, but **so that** His bride would come!

(4) Irresistible Grace

A. By Irresistible Grace we mean that when God **purposes** to save a person, there is **no stopping Him**.

1. So many go to the story of **Lazarus** as an illustration of this. Lazarus is **dead**, but Jesus is the **King**. And from outside the tomb He ushers the **royal summons**: *"Lazarus, come out"* ([John 11:43](#)). And the dead man came out. He **couldn't resist** this grace.

B. That's how you and I **got saved**! Read [Ezekiel 37](#) if you don't believe me.

(5) Perseverance of the Saints

- A. By Perseverance of the Saints we mean that, if you're in Christ, you're going to make it to the end.
1. Hear me, O **sin-sick, storm-tossed Christian**. You're not even sure your **faith** will last through the **day**, let alone through to **glory**. Perseverance of the Saints says, "*I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*" (Phil 1:6).
 - a. *"He . . . began."* Because He began, He will bring it to completion. Do you really think God won't **finish** what He's **started**?! *"[T]hose whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom 8:30).*
- B. Everybody wants this fifth point. Sometimes they try to get it without the others: *"I don't like all this election stuff, but I'll take perseverance and assurance."*
1. But this assurance of salvation only **blossoms** on the **rich stem** and **deep roots** of the preceding **four points**! Because **you couldn't** do this thing and **God** has taken it upon Himself to do it, you can be assured He's going to get you to **the harbor**!
- C. And lest you think that this is some kind of **NT idiosyncrasy**, let me assure you: it's not! These five points are wonderfully illustrated for us in God's dealings with Israel back in the OT.
1. For they were in **bondage** in **Egypt** and couldn't break free. (Total Depravity)
 2. They were **elected** of God not because they were the **largest** of nations—for they were the **smallest**—but because God had mercy upon them. (Unconditional Election)
 3. And He puts the **blood** of the lamb over the doorposts of Israel, not of Egypt. And the **Angel of Death** passes over them. (Limited Atonement)
 4. And then God **summons** His people. The divine voice, like the **roar** of a lion, shakes at the **foundations** of Egypt: *"Let My people go!" (Exo 5:1)*. And out His people come. (Irresistible Grace)
 5. And YHWH carries His people to the **promised land** so that Joshua could stand on the other side of the Jordan and say: *"[N]ot one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass" (Josh 23:14)*!
- D. So this is not some New Testament **idiosyncrasy**. This is how God has **always saved** His people. This is how God saved you!
1. Hello and welcome to Mercy Hill Church. We are **Reformed**.