

FAITH IN WHAT? — WEEK 1

JESUS IS LORD



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Faith in What, Week 1 — Jesus is Lord

This series, titled “Faith in What?” explores the basics of Christianity, based on Romans 10:9. This week we study the references to His lordship in a confession of faith. What makes a confession valid?

Knowing Jesus as your Lord and seeking His will.

We’re pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

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1 Romans 10:9 (ESV)

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Look up the word “Christian” in the dictionary, and you’ll discover something wonderful. Skip past the definitions of Christian as a noun to the definitions of it as an adjective. There you’ll find one like, “Commendably decent or charitable.”

Wow. That definition is one of the most precious, glorious things in the whole universe. The dictionary says Christians are the good guys. What a treasure.

And this treasure wasn’t just given to us; it was earned. Through incredible sacrifice, the first Christians established themselves as people who were commendably decent or charitable. The dictionary doesn’t invent definitions—it reports them—and decency and charity are what people thought of when they thought of a Christian.

But nowadays many Christians aren’t living up to the standards of our forebears. People often say, “Christians aren’t very Christian.” Something’s wrong. We’ve become a nation of “pew potatoes.”

Our Christianity is weak because our faith is weak. Many, if not most, American Christians do not conform to Romans 10:9. Many never even confessed Christ as their Lord in the first place; they only confessed him as savior. That’s like accepting a job offer by announcing that you “accept” the retirement benefits. What about the job?

We’re weak on the other half of Romans 10:9 too, and this part is trickier—at least conceptually. The first Christians knew, absolutely knew, that Jesus rose from the dead because they either saw it, or talked to someone who did, or talked to someone who talked to someone who did. They weren’t that many degrees of separation away from an eyewitness.

But now it’s a hundred generations later, and the evidence isn’t that fresh. It’s not easy to gain a first-century level of confidence in the truth of the resurrection.

But it is possible.

For the next few weeks, we’re going to be walking through the basics of the Christian faith, based on Romans 10:9.

This DEEP series, titled “*Faith in What?*” will lay a solid foundation for belief. That involves establishing a correct view of Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, along with a thorough understanding of crucifixion, how it kills people, and how we can be certain that the resurrection really happened.

Faith built on a solid foundation leads to a full life in Christ—the kind of life that gets glorious definitions into the dictionary.

2 1 Corinthians 12:3b (ESV)

No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament consistently describes confessing Christ as the declaration of His lordship. Unfortunately, the Greek words translated as “Jesus is Lord” leave some questions unanswered.

The Greek in 1 Corinthians 12:3b doesn’t exactly match the Greek in Romans 10:9, though virtually all English translations render both as “Jesus is Lord.”

But do they mean “Jesus is the Lord,” or, “Jesus is my Lord”?

The Greek has the sense of “Jesus is my Lord,” especially in Romans 10:9. Any other interpretation wouldn’t make sense anyway, given what’s in the rest of the New Testament. For example, even demons know that Jesus is the Lord.

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. — Mark 1:23–26 (ESV)

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! — James 2:19 (ESV)

So, it’s more precise to confess Christ by saying, “Jesus is my Lord,” though feel free to say it any way you like. There’s no need to split hairs, as long as it’s clear in your mind what you mean.

Another question is, “What do you mean by Lord?”

Lord means absolute king-boss 24/7. Lord means more than boss because He rules over more than just your work week. Lord means more than king because His rule is in every nook and cranny of your world. No moment is excluded from his rule. No place is out from under Him.

But it’s even more than that. Jesus’s lordship is more than any earthly relationship because it’s over every aspect of your life—the invisible as well as the visible. Jesus is Lord even over your thoughts.

“But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” — Matthew 5:28 (ESV)

Pledging fealty to Jesus is a huge commitment, one that grows over your whole life. It’s not that you get more serious about the pledge (though you might); it’s that you get better at it. It can be hard to know what Christ wants us to do. That puts a dent in how vigorously we pursue things.

But even when His will is obvious, we don’t always do what Christ wants us to do. That’s scary.

If your boss tells you to do something and you don’t do it, is he really your boss?

3 Matthew 7:21–23 (NIV)

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

This is a portrait of people who are shocked at being rejected—the damned surprised, so to speak. The problem is that they look like Christians. They look like super-Christians. That’s why people call this the scariest verse in the Bible.

“I never knew you?? What does that mean? He knows everyone. I was taught many things about Christ, but no one said that the key was simply knowing Him. Why didn’t anyone teach me about that?”

Fair enough. So, what is it that these “super-Christians” did wrong? What is it they didn’t say?

Well, picture this:

Boss: Did you finish the Benson report?

Me: No, but I performed many wonders in your name.

Boss: Okay, but I need that Benson report ASAP.

The super-Christians didn’t say, “We did what you asked us to do.” They’re not *the one who does the will of my Father*. They did what they wanted to do, and frankly it sounds like a bunch of showing off.

So, are we that bad? We don’t do those fancy super-Christian parlor tricks.

Possibly. It depends on whether we’re seeking His will. Many Christians spend their whole lives in prayer and never say a single prayer that’s a question. There are other ways to seek His will for our lives, but sometimes prayers sound like could begin with the words, “Dear Santa Claus.” Anyone with a relationship like that with the Lord, is missing out.

Jesus saying, “I never knew you,” is like your boss saying, “You never came into my office. All I got from you was emails asking for favors.”

Don’t get me wrong. It’s okay to ask for favors, even seemingly selfish ones. In fact, we’re commanded to lay our requests before Him. He even promised to grant them.

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”
— John 15:7 (NIV)

It’s just that supplication isn’t the only kind of prayer. Other kinds include adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and seeking His will. Not all prayers must have all five kinds, but some should.

You can ask for favors but, as the commercials used to say, “as a part of a complete breakfast.”

4 Luke 11:9–10 (NKJV)

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

We tend to think of these verses in terms of requests for favors. No doubt, it does apply to those prayers, but not only them.

When Jesus said, *“seek, and you will find,”* how could this not refer to seeking His will? When He said, *“knock, and it will be opened to you,”* what kind of door is He talking about?

The concept of doors opening also can refer to prayers that seek His will. God often answers prayers for direction by opening or closing doors.

Some of my clearest answers to prayer were “doors” closing clearly and painfully. God has said, “No,” to my heart’s desire more than once this way. What I had been hoping for had suddenly become impossible.

But the pain of disappointment was overwhelmed by the profound sense of His presence. The first time this happened, I was an agnostic—but not for long.

Not knocking on His door fits the “I never knew you” theme perfectly. You wouldn’t come into your boss’s office without knocking on the door first. So, what kind of prayer could be called “knocking on His door”?

Prayer isn’t supposed to be a one-way communication. Few people have heard God give an audible reply, but replies are anything but rare. Any conversational prayer counts, even a lamentation. If you’re screaming, “Why God, why?” and are looking for an answer, you’re knocking on the door.

So, maybe that’s a sixth kind of prayer—door-knocking. It’s different from seeking His will with something like, “Should I accept this job offer?” You just want to connect.

Imagine you had a chance to chat with the wisest, most powerful person in the world—say Solomon in ancient Israel. You’re just an ancient Israeli peasant, but through some happy circumstance, you get serious facetime with the king himself. What would you talk about? (Assume you have plenty of time to prepare and think of good topics.)

Would you pepper him with requests for favors? Let’s hope not. Remember, he doesn’t just have money; he has supernatural wisdom. Who knows what you might learn?

It’s the same, and more, with God. Just peppering Him with requests isn’t the best use of the time. Getting to talk to Him is an awesome blessing. It’s incredible that He’s interested in hearing anything I might have to say. I must be boring.

But I try not to be **that** boring.

5 Luke 23:39–43 (ESV)

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

If Romans 10:9 says, “because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved,” then how is it that this guy’s saved? He doesn’t confess Him as Lord—he only asks to be remembered—and he doesn’t seem to know anything about resurrection.

Yet we know, beyond any doubt, that this “thief on the cross” was saved. Our understanding of saving faith has to include him. So, what was his faith? What did he believe?

We know a number of things about the thief’s faith from this passage:

- 1) He knew that Jesus was innocent.
- 2) He knew of Jesus’s reputation, including the power to get all three of them out of their predicament.
- 3) He knew that Jesus was a king.
- 4) He knew that crucifixion wouldn’t prevent Jesus from coming into His kingdom.
- 5) He knew that after he died, Jesus “remembering” him would be significant.
- 6) He “preached” these things to the other thief.

Number 6 takes care of the confession part of Romans 10:9, but how could he have believed that Jesus would be raised from the dead?

He didn’t. That detail doesn’t apply to this guy. It doesn’t apply to John the Baptist either. How Jesus would come into his kingdom isn’t the issue; it’s that He will—or that He did in our case.

After the resurrection, anyone who knows who Jesus is has to believe in His resurrection. His Lordship and His resurrection go hand-in-hand. If Jesus was raised, He is Lord. If He wasn’t raised, He isn’t Lord (He isn’t anything). That’s why we say that the Old Testament believers had the same saving faith.

They didn’t know the details, but they foresaw Him and what He would accomplish.

The simplicity of the thief on the cross’s faith is a thing of wonder. I love to study (and write about) complex doctrines, but I need to be careful not to overvalue them. Simple faith is saving faith, and the first Christians had simple faith.

Those simple Christians are the ones Jesus chose to spread His gospel to the ends of the Earth.

We could use a few more like them.

