Giving Faith Something to See: For the Good Fight

Faith When Confident (Class 3)

Dan Cruver

**This is a lightly edited transcript*.

So, give me some leeway here at the start of this particular lesson because I speak here as a fool, right? I'm speaking as a fool. Here's what I want you to imagine: I want you to imagine God the Father, thinking about you right now, the you with all your sins, all your failures, all your shortcomings, right? Now, while he's thinking about you, what is bubbling up inside his heart about you? So, I speak as a fool, right? Is he feeling disappointment? So, he is thinking of you. His mind's eye is upon you. He sees your face. He sees the entirety of your life. He sees everything that you've ever done externally and every thought, every feeling or emotion, every passion that you've had internally; he's seeing all of that. None of that is hidden from him. All of that is as conscious to him at one moment as he thinks about you. What does he feel about you? What's bubbling up in his heart? Is it disappointment, or if he begins talking about you, to all those who are within his presence in the heavenly places, the Father, all these people surrounding, worshiping, both angels and saints who have already died, they're in his audience, and the Father begins speaking to them about you? Is the Father measured and restrained in his description of how he feels about you?

So let's say an angel comes up to the Father and the angel says, "How do you feel about—" and the angel gives your name. Would the Father have to pause before he answers, pause and consider? "I need to say my words very carefully." Have you ever been in a situation like that where you're asked a question and you know you could just answer it? But, given the context and who's asking you in the situation of who might overhear it, you have to be very circumspect in the words you use to answer the question because if you're not, it could cause some problems, some awkwardness. How would the Father talk about you to all the hosts of heaven when asked, "What do you think about so-and-so?"

Now, how we answer that question depends upon where we're looking. So if I am looking at myself when I consider that, and when I look at myself, I can't help but also think of all my failures and sins. That's something that always comes to my mind when I'm thinking about God. The knee-jerk reaction when I'm thinking about God Himself is my sins, my failures. So if that's my knee-jerk, that's where my mind immediately goes, and I'm thinking about that particular question. My answer is going to be, "He's disappointed." So, where we're looking actually makes a big difference in how we consider that particular scenario. If we're looking at Christ crucified, the answer is different. That's what Paul's getting at here in our base camp book, the book of Galatians.

Now, I want to make this a little more tangible to you. So, we've talked about this make-believe scenario. Now, I want to get a little more tangible so we can feel maybe the tension that exists here in how we think about God thinking about us. So, Proverbs 3:11 and 12, this is actually a text that the writer of Hebrews used to help us get at how we think about the Father's discipline of us. So in Hebrews 12, the writer's talking about the Father's discipline and how we should think about it and not think about it. This is the text that the writer of Hebrews actually uses: Look at verse 11, "My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline, or be weary of his reproof." So, the Lord here is referring to the Father in the way that the writer of Hebrews uses it. So, the Father does discipline us, and he does reprove us.

So, the way the Father relates to us is as one who, as our Father, disciplines and reproves us. Notice what he says in the next verse, verse 12, for here's why the Lord disciplines and

reproves and how we should think about it: "For the Lord reproves him who loves." What's the word? Loves. Then, Solomon, who actually wrote this particular proverb, continues with the next clause. He explains what he means when he uses the word "loves." The Lord does this, the Father does this, because he loves us. What does Solomon mean? And how does he intend for us to understand what he means by the word "loves" that the Father loves us? Look what he says as a father. So he's providing a very tangible illustration here: as a father loves the son in whom he delights.

So, the ideal earthly father is one who, when he disciplines his son, is disciplining the one who five minutes ago he delighted in, but right now he does not delight in, right? No, that's not what it says. What does it say? He's disciplining the son in whom, right now, he is delighting.

Now, I've been a parent for a long time and there have been plenty of opportunities, more times than I would like, where I'm disciplining one of my children and I can guarantee, given the temperature internally when I was disciplining them, you know what? They did not feel like my dad shared the delights in me. So then this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you. There have been too many times where my own children, as I discipline them, probably felt like, "Dad's against me."

Notice what it says here. Here's how you should understand the Father's discipline and reproof. It's not that five minutes ago, before you blew it, he delighted in you. And now, alright, now I've got to deal with you. You. And there's no delight in it. Our children, when we discipline them, should sense in that moment, even though the discipline is hard, even though the discipline is uncomfortable, whatever form of discipline it is, ideally, what the child should feel is that this discipline is coming from a place of current, ongoing, deep, rich, profound delight. And when there were times that I was able to do that, how does the child then respond to that kind of discipline? Makes a difference, doesn't it? It really does make a difference.

So, with God the Father, there is no gap between his discipline and his reproof of us and his delight in us. They are concurrent, and they are so concurrent, and more than concurrent, that the more we understand who the Father is for us in Christ, the more we experience that discipline as an outworking of the Father's delight in us. Just so we're not overlooking this, the Father does figure quite centrally in Galatians. So, look at the two texts that I have there for you. Galatians 1:1-5, Paul begins the epistle not happy with the Galatians and the decisions they're making as it relates to who Jesus is and how they should respond to who Jesus is. He's not pleased. He's reproving them. This letter is a disciplinary move toward the Galatians. And notice how he introduces the letter: "Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who," so now he's talking about God the Father who raised Christ from the dead, "and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: grace to you and peace from God."

He doesn't say "your Father." What does he say? "Our Father, grace and peace." That's what I want for you—grace and peace. And this grace and peace that I want for you is from God, our Father. So, Paul places himself right alongside them as those who are the very children, sons of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for us, for our sins, to deliver us from this present evil age. And the Son, giving himself in life and death, delivers us from this evil age. Paul then says it's according to the will of our God and Father, to whom, referring to the Father, be glory forever and ever. Amen. So in this letter where Paul is reproving them, he begins it with a focus, a stress upon both his and their relationship to the Father as their Father and what he's done for them through Jesus Christ. And he ends that opening paragraph with worship: "To him be glory forever and ever." So, he's inviting the Galatians, as he writes this letter of reproof, to join him in expressing glory to the Father and all that He's done for them in and through Christ.

So then you get to Galatians 4:4-6, and Paul says, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son," referring to the Father there, "born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God, the Father has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father.'" So that word, "Abba," we preachers have not always handled that particular reference very well. It's the Aramaic word "Abba." And it has two parts, two components: "ab," which means "father," and "ba," which means "my." So when you put those two together, it's saying "My Father." If you were a Jewish kid and you were referring to someone else's father, you know what you would say? You would say "ab." You would not say "Abba"; you only refer to your father as "Abba" because it was your way of saying, "That is my father," but every other father of my friends is "ab."

So what Paul is doing here is talking about how collectively the Galatians and he are the very sons of God. So much so that, though they are collectively the children of God, individually, we are also saying "My Father." And the only time in scripture where "Abba" actually appeared on the lips of a man was where? In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus himself said in Mark's gospel, "Abba, Father," is "My Father." So, he's giving us terminology, a word for us to identify ourselves with the very way that Jesus himself expressed his relationship with the Father, one which he had for all of eternity, but now that he's man and now that he's identified himself with us and he's stepped into our shoes and walked our path and carried upon his shoulders all of our sins, all of our failures, all of our shortcomings, we now, with Jesus, individually and corporately refer to the Father as "My Father," which takes us back to the question I asked at the very beginning. How does the Father think about you?

Well, here's how he thinks about you. He wants you to look at him and say, "You are my Father" with as much confidence as Jesus himself when, in the Garden of Gethsemane, while doing the very will of the Father, in distress, sweating great drops of blood, says to the Father, "My Father." That's how the Father thinks about you. So our Richard Sibbes quotation that we read in week one, let me read it again: "This is the wisdom of a Christian, to have sights of faith, that is, to present several things that faith may work upon to strengthen itself as for faith to have a sight of God in Christ, a gracious Father." So all that Paul says about Christ in this particular letter is to deepen our experience of God as our Father, to deepen our intimacy in how we relate to the God to whom we say "My Father," with all our sins, with all our failures, with all our shortcomings.

So I want to think of two headings here: capricious gods and then confident faith. So look at Galatians 3:1.

Capricious gods

So here he is, reproving them. "Oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. The word "bewitched," Paul uses it very intentionally. Archaeologists have discovered what they call magical papyri, and they found these documents with all kinds of strings of invocations. In Galatia, what was prominent among the Galatians—think about this before they came to Christ, before they heard the gospel from Paul, before they repented of their sins and believed in Christ—was that they lived according to writing out these invocations that would somehow get the gods to be favorable to them. So, the entirety of their lives, up until they became Christians, was about whether the gods would be favorable to my business. "Am I going to do well in my trade today, this week, or this month in order to hope that the gods look favorably upon me?"

Here's this invocation that I'm calling upon the gods to have mercy upon me and to be gracious to me. And when they were, life was good, I was right in the world; when they weren't,

and most of the time they were not, the invocation did not work, all was wrong with the world. And so their habit was every day when they awoke in the morning to think, "How can I get the gods to be favorable to me?" Because I never know how they're going to respond to me, what they're going to do to my family, or allow my family to experience, whether through my job I will make money or lose money. So the entirety of their lives was to live a transactional religion.

"I give the gods something and hopefully, they'll wake up on the right side of the bed and they'll give me what I desire and feel like I need." So when the Judaizers came in, they were not calling the Galatians back to paganism. They were saying, "Okay, yes, Paul has preached to you about Jesus, by all means believe in Jesus, but we're Jews and we're coming from Jerusalem. You've heard about Jerusalem; we're from Jerusalem. So yes, believe in this Jesus, take the words of Paul and say, 'Yes, I'm placing my faith in Jesus,' but you also need to obey the law of circumcision." So the temptation for the Galatians was not to abandon Christianity. They thought the temptation was to return to a transactional way of relating to God.

And this is really easy to do. Let me give you one example. For my job, I often fly to Minneapolis, and there was a decade where I was just terrified of flying. But now I have a job where I fly all the time. I was there last week, and next week I'll be back in Minneapolis. So I'm flying all the time and emailing my coworkers who are in Minneapolis. Over the last two weeks, because I'm going to be there a couple of times, I was getting ready to be there and I said, "See you Tuesday." I was writing that email, "See you Tuesday," and I was about ready to sign my name when I went, "Oh, you know what I should do? Lord willing." What was going on in my mind? The first time I did that, I knew I was being very transactional with God and I still did it, "Lord willing," and sent it off. And I was like, "What am I doing? Why am I thinking this way?" I'm going to email someone else and I'm not going to put "Lord willing," and I didn't, and I made it there and back.

So, this transactional way of relating to God is not something we might be tempted to do if everything aligns, and we have reasons to fear this transactional way of relating to God. It's a legal faith. Remember last week, this legal faith is very easy for us to slip into, thinking, "I better put 'Lord willing' because you never know what the Lord will do if I don't." But remember, the law figured centrally in how Jesus related to the Father in order to redeem us from this present evil age, in order to redeem us from the curse of the law. Jesus had to obey the law perfectly. However, in our relationship to the Father, our acceptance by Him is not at all dependent on our performance of the law of God. It's dependent upon someone's performance, someone's obedience, but not ours. It's dependent upon the one who lived a perfect legal faith before the Father—Jesus. So, Jesus's success depended upon his obedience. Our success depends upon his obedience, not ours at all.

Now let me show you what Paul's doing here. Look at Galatians 4:8-11. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those who by nature are not gods. So he's talking about the Galatians again. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to a pagan, transactional religion. But now you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God. How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? That previous life was miserable; it was slavery. You never knew what you were going to get from the gods. You always wondered, "Today, how are the gods going to act toward me? Will they be favorable or unfavorable?" They were slaves. That is a horrible way to live. And so, Paul asks, why do you want to turn back? He uses the phrase "the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world." Scholars have spilled a lot of ink trying to figure out what "elementary principles" means. It can refer to celestial bodies, or to worlds.

It can refer to demons, it can refer to the actual elements of the earth: earth, fire, wind, and water. I wanted to say "Earth, Wind, and Fire." Nothing wrong with saying that, but that's where

my mind wanted to go. What he's saying here, and this is remarkable, is that if you add to Jesus any obedience to have security in your relationship with the Father, you're returning to paganism.

How is that? Why is that, Paul? How can you say, "Yes, we believe in Jesus. We're just adding a little bit to the quality of my faith." How can you say we're returning to paganism? Because you're doing a transactional relationship, and that is slavery. That's the same kind of slavery that you endured before you were known by God the Father. That's the kind of slavery that you were under the yoke of before you believed in Christ, and it was just utter miserable slavery, not knowing what you're going to get with God or the gods any day you got up in the morning. We might be tempted to think. So, if you look at verse 10, he says, "You observe days and months and seasons and years." He's referring to the Jewish calendar there. So, not just circumcision. Now he's saying you find yourself, you're Gentiles, and you're wanting to observe the Jewish calendar and all the festivals. You're wanting to put those into practice and he's upset about that. Notice what he says in verse 11, "And I'm afraid I have labored over you in vain."

So, we might say to Paul, "Alright Paul, not all sins are equal. This is just the Jewish calendar. They want to follow what the Jews did for thousands of years. What's the big deal about that?" It seems to me, Paul, that the Corinthian church did a whole lot worse things than they're doing just by wanting to follow the Jewish calendar. I mean, there's man in the Corinthians church sleeping with his stepmother, and all we're wanting to do is practice the Jewish calendar. What's the big deal about that? Well, Paul's upset because it's a way of trying to relate to God as if God is like the pagan gods. That's what they're doing. You're returning to paganism. If you add anything to Jesus to know that things between you and God are okay, that's paganism. So, my "Lord willing," yikes, that was functional paganism. Are you going to let a pagan teach your class next week? If you add anything to faith in Christ, just to know that God will be favorable to you, bless you that day, you've actually exchanged Jesus for a capricious God. You just never know what you're going to get. There are two traps here. Trap one is "Jesus plus my quality of faith." So, I talked about this at the beginning. Shouldn't we be concerned about the quality of our faith? Of course, right? Yes, I do care about the quality of my faith, absolutely. But where I don't care about the quality of my faith is as it relates to God's disposition toward me. Does God's disposition toward you alter, shift, change at all, even the slightest, for thinking, minutiae, even the very slightest switch or change or alteration in his disposition toward you based on the quality of your faith?

That doesn't happen. It just doesn't happen. With respect to what God's disposition is towards me, whether he is delighting in me now or not delighting in me now has no bearing on the quality of my faith whatsoever. If the quality of my faith does matter in determining what God's disposition is towards me, then what is the cutoff point between an adequately quality faith and a deficient faith? At what point do we say, "Yes, that's quality" and "No, that's deficient"? There has to be a line, right? There must be a line where if you cross it, you go from a quality faith to a deficient faith. Where is that line? And depending on how you're doing that day, this line is shifting. I don't care if you have bifocals; that line is still moving. So, Jesus plus the quality of your faith—that's slavery.

What about Jesus plus your desire for Him? Do I really desire God, or do I just desire His good gifts? Here's why that's a trap: Sometimes, I genuinely desire God—wake up in the morning thirsting, hungering for God and His presence. Other times, I'm more in love with what He does for me. When I'm finding my delight in God, my spiritual world is right; I'm content. When I'm not delighting in God, my sense of security is lost. In order to feel secure with God, if you add to your faith in Christ a requirement for a desire for God, then I have to continually offer the sacrifice of my desire for God—not just lip service, but what's truly inside. What's going on in here? The entirety of my inner being has to be filled with a desire for God. So, where's the line

between a quality desire for God and a deficient desire for God? It's so easy for us to functionally fall back into slavery as if we are pagans with a transactional religion. That's the capricious gods trap. Let's look at confident faith in Galatians 3:1.

Confident Faith

What does Paul say right after asking, "Who has bewitched you?" He says, "It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified," which is fascinating. You know why that's fascinating? None of the Galatians were in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified. Not one of them. And what does Paul mean by "It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified"? Obviously, he's not referring to their physical eyes. He's speaking about something that happened through the 'ear gate.' When Paul came to Galatia and began to preach the gospel, he didn't just talk about the events of the crucifixion.

Back when I was a youth pastor in the early 2000s, I taught through Galatians, and it was when Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of Christ," came out. I used that as an illustration because what's wrong with that movie is it gives us the events of the crucifixion, what happened to Jesus. But what does it not do? It does not give you the meaning of those events. It doesn't infuse those events with the theological significance of what was transpiring beyond what was visible to man—that there were things happening in the spiritual realm between God and man, between the God-man, the high priest, the sacrifice, the lamb, and what was happening in heaven that was unknown to anyone observing it. And so, for the gospel—the proclamation of what Jesus did for us—to have any saving impact upon us and to deliver us from this present evil age into the kingdom of God is the meaning of those events. That's why Paul is able to say, "Who has bewitched you?" I preached the gospel to you, when Jesus lived, and when Jesus died, and when this happened, and when that happened, this is what transpired.

So, we have Isaiah 53:4, "He has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." But he was pierced for our transgressions. This isn't just about the event. We are being given the substance of the event. What was happening that man could not see was the invisible reality, the mysterious reality that was transpiring while Jesus was bleeding on the cross, when his side was pierced. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was laid the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds, we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way. Here's the meaning: the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. The only transactional relationship that you need is the one that happened on that cross. That's all the transactions needed for the Father's disposition toward you to be one of delight, yesterday, today, and forever.

Did your faith hang on that tree? Did your desire for God hang on that tree? If it did, we've got nothing. Your faith, my faith—evaporated. It was less than a breath, less than a vapor. Your desire for God, my desire for God, if there was any, and there wasn't, evaporated; it was a vapor, less than a vapor on a cold morning. When Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified, you saw everything you needed to see. There's nothing else to see. Do you hear me? When you heard the meaning of the cross, when the meaning of the cross was declared to you, you heard everything you needed to hear.

What does the Father think about you? An angel comes up to him. And let's say it's because I like archangels—Michael comes up to the Father and he says, "Hey, tell me what you think about Dan Kruger." No pause, no measured words. "I delighted in them." And when I discipline him, it comes from all my delight. Not some of it, not a fraction of it, but all of it.

And when Michael, or I think for you all it would be Gabriel, says, "Tell me what you think about so-and-so," and he says your name, the Father says the same thing. You know why? Because you have the same right as Jesus to call out to him, "My Father," and He says, "Yes, I am." Yes, I am. I am not ashamed to call you brother. From that, I can also say, when you say "You're my father," He says, "Yes, I am." I'm not ashamed to call you my child, and you just blew it. But I'm reproofing you because, oh, do I delight in you! Oh, do I delight in you! Faith, when confident, has nothing to do with the quality or measure of our faith; it has everything to do with Christ crucified and all that that means. That's good news.

Let's pray. Father, we call You our Father, and I call You my Father, and we give you thanks for your delight in us. It's the very delight that You have in your Son because of all that He has done in our place. And so we give you thanks and ask that You would indeed give us confident faith this week as we live each day and as we relate to You as our Father. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Alright, have a great week, and we'll see you, Lord willing—no, not going to say that. We'll see you next Sunday.