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A1306 – February 10, 2013 – 1 Corinthians 15:1-5
The Gospel-Part 2

Last week we started taking a peek at 1 Cor 15, the greatest chapter on resurrection in the entire Bible and the *locus classicus* for the gospel. And we are taking our time here because the gospel is of first importance, it is essential to the salvation of men and Satan doesn't want men to be saved and so it is always under siege. And so there are many false gospels. Some of them are easy to detect, some not so easy but as Paul said to the Galatians, if anyone comes to you with any other gospel than the one I delivered to you, which you can read right in Acts 13, let him be anathema to you, that is, he is off limits, under the ban, don't have anything to do with that person. You may correct them, I don't mean you can't do that, the Scriptures command us to correct error so as to grant an opportunity for repentance but other than that they are under the ban until they repent.

I tried to impress upon you how serious it is to preach a false gospel. And the basic reason is because people can't be saved by a false gospel. I know people have said the Holy Spirit can use a false gospel but I'm just saying I never read that in Scripture. What I read was that the Holy Spirit works with Scripture, that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God and a false gospel is not the word of God. So I don't see how a false gospel can save or why the Holy Spirit would ever use something false. And granting even that He could use a false gospel I ask this - is that a valid excuse for us being sloppy in our gospel presentation? I don't think so. We have a duty and a responsibility to deliver the one true gospel by which men are saved.

So let's review that gospel quickly in 1 Cor 15:1-5. In verse 1 he says, **Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel** and in verse 3 he delivers that gospel, **For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,**

4and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. And in the Greek the gospel content specific is verse 3 the death and verse 4 the resurrection. Those are both stated to have occurred **according to the Scriptures.** The historical evidence of the death is **that He was buried** and the historical evidence of the resurrection is **that He appeared.** It is important that Jesus Christ actually died in history and actually arose in history. The Christian faith is grounded in true history. This isn't like some moral religion where history is irrelevant and we're just building a system of ethics. If the events described in Scripture are not history then Christianity is not true. And so if Christ didn't die and rise again then your faith is worthless, there is no salvation, you are still in your sins.

Now the human requirement in order to be saved I said is faith and that's why you see in verse 1 they received it, in verse 2 they believed it, verse 11 they believed it. Believe or receive are equivalent ways of setting for the only human requirement in order to be saved. Over 150 times the NT states that the only thing a man must do is believe. Now Acts 11:18 uses repentance as a synonym of believing and so I'd say that repentance is always involved in believing when it comes to the gospel as long as you understand that repentance means "a change of mind." And when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ there is always a change of mind about Him. So repentance is tied up in faith as an inseparable act. As L.S. Chafer would put it, faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. It's not faith and repentance, it's a faith that involves repentance. So if you hear someone dividing them into two separate acts or if you hear someone saying you have to repent in the sense of turning from sin, that's not proper, that's a false gospel. It's not faith plus turning from your sin that saves you, it's God alone who saves you through faith. Faith is just an instrument or channel through which God saves and that necessarily involves a change of mind about Christ. But that's all there is to it.

Now last time I mentioned one of the more slippery corruptions of the gospel in our day that we must be aware of, Lordship Salvation, sometimes called Mastery Salvation or Discipleship Salvation. While the teaching is old, beginning in the times of the counter reformation of the 1550's, the controversy erupted anew in the 1980's. John MacArthur has been the most vocal proponent. If you listen to his testimony you'll hear him talk about

several close friends that he ministered with in some capacity in his early years that then went off the deep end. Some of them left their wives, some of them got involved in sexual sin, others claimed to be atheists. MacArthur wondered what had gone wrong. His answer was that they were never saved to begin with because they didn't have the right kind of faith. Arguing from a few misinterpreted texts he re-defined the nature of faith by adding to it a sinner's submission to the sovereignty of God, surrender of life, repentance from sin and a supernatural longing to obey. This kind of faith was supernaturally given by God and so it could never fail to produce good works. And by seeing good works it gave assurance of salvation. So it was actually a kind of faith that persevered, that lasted until the end, it could never fail because it was given by God and God never fails. So actually what MacArthur and other Lordship people are saying is that if you believed the gospel, say when you were six years old and then when you were twenty six you stopped believing the gospel then you never believed it to begin with because the belief that God gives never fails, it continues until the end of your life. So he rejected that it's a one time belief in the gospel and argued that it's a continual belief in the gospel that saves.ⁱ If this is the case, of course assurance is put off until the end of life because how can anyone know they will continually believe the gospel until they have reached the end of their life? So I see a lot of problems here. First of all, how can that be the gospel? If gospel means good news how is it good news to continually ponder whether or not you are really saved or not? Second, how many sins can you commit and really be saved? How serious a sin can you commit and really be saved? These kinds of questions are mentally taxing and put the emphasis on performance. Even though they will say it is God's performance in you, then you still have the third problem of why you still sin if God is the one doing all this and you no longer have a sin nature. There are many, many problems with Lordship Salvation and I think MacArthur would have been a lot better off if he'd faced the original problem with his friends flaking out by simply reminding them that Christ died for our sin so we should no longer live in it. Grace is not a license to sin. And just preach to them the gospel again. Not write them off and re-define faith and get into all this baloney. So Lordship Salvation is a false gospel and it's being propagated by many popular speakers and authors the world over; it's most vocal proponents are John MacArthur, John Piper, John Gerstner, J. I. Packer, James Montgomery Boice and R. C. Sproul although there are many, many others. Have nothing to do with them, people cannot get saved by that false gospel, they are under

the ban, they will corrupt your spiritual life. Are they saved? Well, if they believed the pure gospel before they adopted all this heresy, yes, but the gospel they are preaching now is not a saving gospel.

Now they say that faith in the gospel must be a continual faith or else you were never saved to begin with. But it sounds to me that's the exact situation Paul is addressing, some genuine believers who are now turning around and rejecting the resurrection. So they didn't continually believe and yet Paul assumes they are believers. So again, I don't see how Lordship Salvation adds up.

The second false gospel that has now invaded evangelicalism is called the Crossless Gospel. That's not a name given to it by the proponents but a name given to it by the opponents. The opponents read what the proponents had to say and recognized that the proponents say you don't have to preach the cross of Christ to an unbeliever, so they called it the Crossless Gospel. Here the issue is the content a person has to believe. They don't have a problem with faith, faith is just that - faith, no problem there, but what must a person have faith in? What's the content? That's the problem on this false gospel. So the opponents called it the Crossless Gospel because they say an unbeliever doesn't have to believe Christ died on the cross. They themselves believe He did but that's just not necessary for an unbeliever to believe in order to be saved. But it could just as easily be called the Resurrectionless Gospel or the Deityless Gospel because they say unbelievers don't have to believe in the resurrection of Christ or the deity of Christ either. They say all an unbeliever has to believe is "in Jesus for eternal life." That's it and I say that's not enough, you haven't told me anything about Jesus. Now if you doubt they are saying this you can hear it yourself from one of the proponents of the Crossless Gospel, Jeremy Myers, "If we want to know what a person must believe to receive everlasting life, we should not ask the question, "What is the gospel?" but rather "What is the message of life?" When asked that way, the answer becomes crystal clear...You do not have to believe the gospel to receive everlasting life, you only have to believe in Jesus for everlasting life." Now that may come across really strange to you. Why would he distinguish between the gospel and the message of life? That's the key to their position. They've distinguished between these arbitrarily such that they say that the gospel of 1 Cor 15:1-5 is for believers only and not for unbelievers. However,

I'm going to show you that the gospel of 1 Cor 15:1-5 is the gospel for believers and unbelievers.

Now, how do they distinguish between the gospel which is for believers only and the message of life which is for unbelievers? They commit a fallacy in the way they do word studies. They take the words for "gospel" which are *euaggelion* and *euaggelizomai* and they find that there are many different "good news" in the NT. For example, the angel Gabriel announces "good news" to Elizabeth concerning her son John the Baptist. Jesus preaches the "good news of the kingdom." Timothy reports back to Paul "good news" concerning the believers at Philippi. An angel is said to preach the "everlasting good news" in the Tribulation period. Paul preached the "good news" of the death, burial, resurrection and appearances of Jesus Christ. The Crossless Gospel people say that if you add up all the good news announcements in the NT there are something like 50 things in the gospel and surely, they say, an unbeliever does not have to believe all 50 things to go to heaven, otherwise the gospel has probably never even been preached! Therefore they grandly conclude that an unbeliever does not have to believe the gospel to receive everlasting life, they only have to believe the message of life, which is Jesus, to receive everlasting life.

Now the problem with this is that's not how you do a word study. That would be like taking the term church in the NT, *ekklesia* and going to each context where it is used and building a broad definition of the church. And if you did that you'd find in Acts 7 the Church includes OT Israel when they were wandering in the wilderness and you'd find in Acts 19 that the Church includes the rioting pagans of Ephesus and you'd find in 1 Cor 12:13 that the Church includes all believers in Christ. So now the Church is OT Israel, pagans and believers? Obviously that's not right!

And in the same way you don't roll together all the uses of the words for gospel into a big definition including the announcement of Jesus' birth, John's birth, Timothy's report, etc....and then contrive a distinction between the gospel and the message of life! That's not how you do word studies. To do a word study you go to individual contexts and discover how it's being used. And when you do that you find there are many gospels, the gospel of Jesus' birth, the gospel of John's birth, the gospel of the Philippians changed lives, etc...etc...those are not the gospel of salvation. Obviously an unbeliever

doesn't have to believe the birth announcement of John the Baptist in order to go to heaven! But the Crossless people have created this broad definition of the gospel that includes all these things and then said, hmm, since it's unreasonable to think that an unbeliever has to believe all 50 of those things we therefore conclude that an unbeliever doesn't have to believe the gospel at all. Okay, well what does he have to believe then? Just the message of life, Jesus, for eternal life. Well, I'm sorry, but that's not enough content. I need to know who Jesus is and what Jesus did. Why would I put my faith in a Jesus I know nothing about? It's baloney. The Crossless, Resurrectionless, Deityless gospel is a false gospel.

Paul says an unbeliever must believe the same thing, they must believe in Jesus who is the Christ, which means He is the Messiah, the anointed One, and the anointed One was predicted in the OT to be of the seed of David and so He was a genuine man. He is also said to be the Son of God and as the Son of God He is the son related to God and since a Son has the same nature as His Father then the Son of God is God. And His work is that He died and rose again. If someone says, well, that's too much doctrine for an unbeliever to learn in order to become a believer then take it up with John 6:45, "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me." It is taught to them, the Father teaches it to them so they can believe.

Now we come to the text of 1 Cor 15 and there are a lot of keys in the Greek tenses and voices so that it is essential to refer to it a lot more than I usually do but first I want to read the first two verses and deal quickly with the central concern people have as they read it. **Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.** The trouble spot for many Christians is the word **if** in verse 2. They see that and they immediately think one of two things. Either I can lose my salvation if I don't keep believing the gospel or I never was really saved to begin with. Most people think the first one, if I don't keep believing the gospel I'll lose my salvation. And they are right in a sense, there is a salvation that can be lost, it's just that that's not the whole discussion because there is also a salvation that can never be lost. Both are true. You can lose your salvation and you cannot lose your salvation. Now I'm not trying to confuse you but this is why so many people are confused on salvation. In some passages it

sounds like it's saying you can lose your salvation and in others it sounds like you can't. So which is it? I'm saying it's both. You can and cannot lose your salvation but the solution to the contradiction is that there is more than one salvation and you can lose one and you can't lose the other. Actually there are three salvations. And we know this because there are three tenses of salvation; past, present and future. The first one is past tense, you have been saved from the penalty of sin, that's justification, the legal declaration of righteous made in heaven at the moment of faith and that can never be lost; phase two is present tense, you are being saved from the power of sin as you live by faith, that's sanctification, being set free experientially from the dominating power of sin and it's consequences, but you only enjoy it if you live by faith. If you don't live by faith then you will experience the consequences of sin, i.e. you will lose your salvation, your being saved from the power of sin; and phase three is future tense, you shall be saved from the presence of sin, that's glorification, when you get your resurrection body and it should be obvious at that time there is no more sin to deal with.

So which phase is Paul talking about here? I said some people say verse 2 sounds like you can lose your salvation. So which phase of salvation? Past, present or future? The verb **saved** in verse 2 is the present tense so he's talking about phase two of salvation, the believer's present salvation from the power of sin and how is Paul saying we are saved from the power of sin? By holding **fast the word which I preached to you**, namely, the gospel message he is about to proclaim in verses 3-4. So a believer should continue to hold to the gospel message so that he is continually saved from the power of sin. And if a believer stops holding to the gospel message then he will lose his salvation in the sense that he will be turned over to the power of sin and make a wreck of his Christian life. It does not mean he loses phase one of his salvation, you can never lose that.

And to prove that notice that Paul never questions whether they have phase one salvation, which is justification, he assumes they are genuine believers as you can see from several evidences. First, in verse 1 he calls them **brethren** which means fellow believers. Second, also in verse 1 he says they **received** the gospel he preached to them. The Greek tense of the verb **received** is the aorist which means at an undefined past time when Paul preached the gospel to them. Third, in verse 11 he says **and so you believed**, again using the aorist tense to refer to that past time. So it is quite clear that they are

genuine believers and yet Paul is about to preach the gospel to genuine believers. Now that may sound strange to you, preaching the gospel to believers, but it's necessary for phase two salvation, which is sanctification, salvation from the power of sin in your life as you live by faith. Continuing to believe the gospel is essential to your overcoming the power of sin in your life.

Now implied in all of this is the exact reverse of what Lordship Salvation teaches. They say you have to continually believe or you were never saved to begin with. But Paul assumes they have believed and afterward rejected part of the gospel message. This rejection will not exclude them from heaven but what it will do is put them under the power of sin so that they make a wreck out of their Christian life. Now let's be honest here, I know a lot of people who say they are Christians and they are living in spiritual poverty, their lives are a wreck, they are depressed. A genuine believer can ruin his life. I'm of the opinion that most of the people in psych wards today are believers living in sin, they've rejected the grace mechanics of living by faith and they keep turning to gimmicks. Are they really saved? Of course, but they're dying in there under the power of sin because they have put their faith in a gimmick. They can't live by faith and they won't live by faith. What's the cure? Hearing the word of God. It's the only solution. Jesus didn't give prozac, Jesus didn't say go get a professional counselor, Jesus said, repent! And until these believers do they'll remain under the power of sin.

Now these believers at Corinth, some of them, rejected the resurrection, they used to believe it but now they didn't. What Paul is saying is that's going to have negative results on your spiritual life! Instead they need to go back to believing all the essentials of the gospel because it is necessary to being saved from the power of sin.

Now that's the main teaching, let's go back now and look at the details of the Greek text starting in verse 1. **Now I make known to you.** The Greek verb **known** is *gnorizo* and refers to "revealing" or "making known" some information. But because the context indicates he's talking to believers then he's not revealing this to them for the first time but as a reminder and to point out how important it is for our present salvation to continue to believe that gospel that we first believed.

He addresses them as **brethren** because they had indeed believed the gospel message when he was with them before, they are clearly fellow believers. And now he makes clear that what he is revealing to these believers is the same gospel he preached when he was with them, **the gospel which I preached to you**. There's nothing here like the Crossless Gospel people say when they say unbelievers don't need to believe the gospel just the message of life. Well what is this then? It says the gospel which Paul preached to them. The verb **I preached** is an aorist tense and refers to an undefined past time when Paul preached. It doesn't tell you when he preached or for how long he preached. It simply tells you that he had preached it to them and we know that was when he went to Corinth.

And he says **which you received**. The verb **received** is also an aorist tense just like the verb **preached**, it refers to an undefined past time when they **received** the gospel. And so we can only conclude that when Paul **preached** the gospel they **received** it and it was at that moment that they were justified in the high court of heaven, phase one of salvation which can never be lost.

He continues with phase one by saying, **in which you stand**. The verb **stand** is in the perfect tense referring to a past completed action with ongoing results. The time in which they began to stand in the gospel was when they received it and that standing remains. Once you believe the gospel you are phase one saved forever, you are saved from the penalty of sin which is eternal separation from God in the lake of fire, having been justified you have a new standing which can never change. So the perfect tense here is powerful evidence that phase one salvation can never be lost. It is a standing you receive at the moment you believe and it continues forever. Paul never doubts once in this passage whether they really believed or any of that nonsense kind of talk.

However, he says in verse 2, **through which also you are saved**. And the verb **you are saved** is in the present passive. The passive voice means you are being acted upon from the outside; you are not saving yourself but someone else, and in a salvation context it's God. God is saving you and the present tense means it should be translated "you are being saved." This shifts our attention to phase two of salvation which is sanctification, the believer is being saved from the power of sin and you'll see this is a conditional

salvation, maybe you will, maybe you won't be, depending on whether or not you hold fast to the gospel Paul preached or not. As Paul says, **if you hold fast the word which I preached to you.** It's a 1st class condition so he assumes they are but some of them may not be. Now the word which Paul preached to them is also an aorist and refers back to the gospel Paul originally preached to them at Corinth. But the **holding fast** to is in the present tense referring to the present moment. So Paul says if you are holding fast presently to that gospel which I originally preached to you when I first came then you are now being saved from the power of sin. Otherwise of course they are not being saved from the power of sin because they have now adopted a false gospel and they're Christian lives are going to be a wreck. Others we know rejected the resurrection and suffered shipwreck regarding their faith, namely Hymenaeus and Alexander who Paul mentions in 2 Tim 2:16-18.

Unless of course, the verse closes, **unless you believed in vain.** The verb **believed** is the aorist again and refers to when Paul originally preached the gospel. The Greek word translated **vain** means "to no purpose," and it seems Paul's point is you believed in a gospel without resurrection. So if you believed that Christ died but you did not believe He rose then you would be believing to no purpose since resurrection is necessary to have purpose in the next life. As he says in verse 19, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" because there is no resurrection unto a next life. So to believe in vain in verse 2 is to have believed in everything in the gospel except the resurrection. This of course is not the gospel and cannot result in phase two salvation because you were never even saved in phase one, you are an unbeliever. So essentially someone who believes in vain is an unbeliever, they did not believe the gospel message which Paul originally preached.

Now in verse 3 he preaches that original gospel once more that is so important for believers to continue to believe in order to enjoy phase two salvation, salvation from the power of sin. **For I delivered to you,** again aorist tense, looking at his original visit and preaching, **I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.** Paul, aorist tense, **also received** the gospel message, which means he believed it. When did Paul believe it? Acts 9, the Damascus Road. Paul was on his way to persecute Christians but the Lord appeared to him on the road and he became a

Christian. And so Paul was delivering to the Corinthians the same thing that Christ delivered to him.

Namely, that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**. Now the statement according to the Scriptures is a reference to a prophecy from the OT Scriptures. Isa 53:4 was a prophecy that the suffering servant of God, the Messiah, would suffer and die for our sins. Isaiah says, “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. 7He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. 8By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? 9His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. 10But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. 11As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. 12Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.”

On the cross He was dying for our sins because He had no sin to die for. It was therefore a substitutionary death. As Isaiah 53 predicted so He did. He **died for our sins**. The verb died is in the active voice showing that Christ died of His own initiative. He was not killed for our sins; He gave up His own life for our sins. He was a willing sacrifice. As He Himself said in the Gospels, No one takes My life from Me but I lay it down of My own accord. Christ died voluntarily for our sins and this is a necessary component of the gospel to be believed.

Then Paul states the historical evidence of His death, namely in verse 4, **that He was buried**, this refers to the tomb where his body was placed when it was removed from the cross. Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man who was a member of the Sanhedrin and a secret believer in Jesus asked Pilate to remove the body and bury it in a tomb. This request was granted and he and Nicodemus, another secret believer, buried Jesus' body in Joseph of Arimathea's own tomb. This tomb was carved out of rock and sealed by a large rolling stone and guarded by Roman soldiers. And while the burial is technically not a part of the gospel one must believe it is the historical evidence of His death which is essential to believe.

Verse 4 continues, **and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures**. Again the statement **according to the Scriptures** is a reference to a prophecy from the OT Scriptures. The resurrection of the Messiah was prophesied in Ps 16:8-11. And while some see this as a reference to David it is actually a prophecy that looks beyond David to a greater than David. **David** in the Psalm says, "I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 9Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely. 10For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." From the failure to decay it shows that He would not remain long in the grave. The NT authors quote this passage unanimously as a reference ultimately to the Messiah's resurrection. The only difficulty in Paul's statement is that it was prophesied that **He was raised on the third day**. Where is this prophesied? According to Jesus in Matt 12 it was either prophesied by Jonah or by Himself making an application of Jonah. "for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." This of course does not refer to a full 72 hours because the Jews thought that any part of a day constituted a whole day. Jesus was crucified on Friday as the sacrificial lamb of God for the sins of the whole world. He was placed in the tomb on that day with only a few hours remaining, Friday is the first day, He remained in the tomb for the entire second day, Saturday is the second day, He was raised on the third day after a portion of the day had passed, Sunday is the third day. As Paul says, **He was raised on the third day**. So Psalm 16 prophesied His resurrection and Jonah 1 and Matt 12 prophesied it would occur on the third day.

Finally in 1 Cor 15:5 Paul states the historical evidence of his resurrection, **and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.** The point of Paul's mention of **Cephas** and the **twelve** is not to list every appearance of Christ or even who He first appeared to which was not Cephas, but merely to state the historic evidence of His resurrection, namely, this one who died and was buried, now appeared alive **to Cephas**, who is Peter and was well-known to the Corinthians and **then to the twelve.** He did appear to **Cephas** before **the twelve.** Of course, **the twelve** here does not include Judas who He did not appear to because he had already hung himself, but the expression **the twelve** had become a standard way of referring to his closest disciples in the same way that the twelve tribes became a standard way of referring to the tribes of Israel.

In this way then Paul has preached the gospel to these believers once more, to highlight the fact that a believer must continue to believe in the essential components of the gospel if he is to enjoy salvation from the power of sin. If a believer departs from believing any one of these essential components of the gospel then he will lose his salvation in the sense that he will come under the power of sin and will make a wreck of his or her Christian life. So then, this gospel is for both unbelievers and believers. For unbelievers it results in phase one salvation, justification, being freed from the penalty of sin; for believers it results in phase two salvation, sanctification, being freed from the power of sin.

¹ Even Dan Wallace in his Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics commits this error on his treatment of John 3:16, the concept that believing in John is a continual, persevering faith.

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