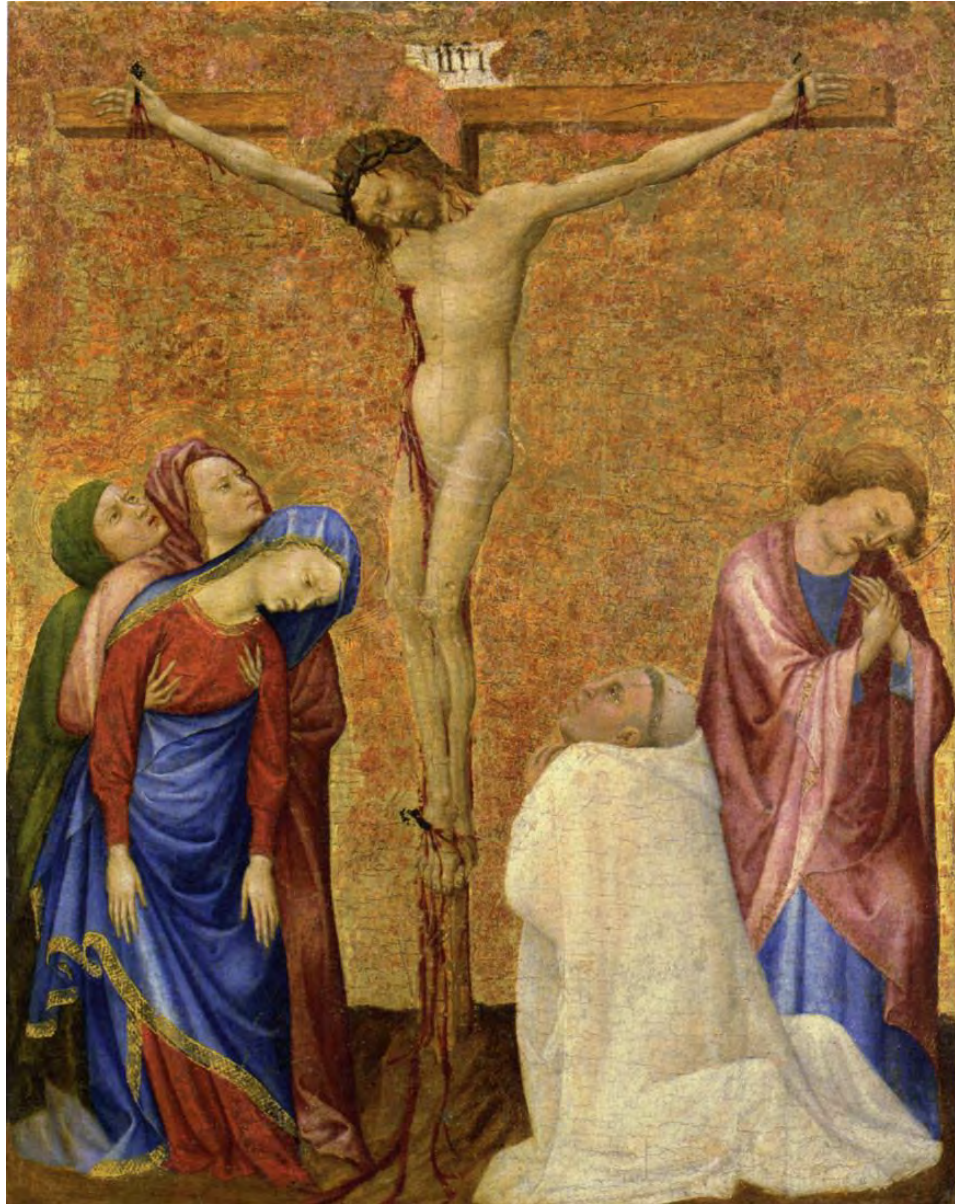


THEOLOGY FROM SCRATCH— WEEK 6



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The cover picture is Crucifixion, by Jean de Beaufort (1335–1396),
on display at the Louvre, Paris.*

Week six finishes up with the details of the crucifixion of Jesus and moves on into what faith in Christ really is—particularly how everything hinges on His resurrection

After that, we start on how a proper confession of faith is made and then practiced.

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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T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

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Theology From Scratch — Week 5

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Dialogue 26 — Blood and Water

John 19:33–34 (NKJV)

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

Time out, athletes pass out from dehydration all the time. It's not unheard of for a doctor to stick an IV into an athlete on the sidelines.

Right. They stick an IV in because it's a medical emergency, but Jesus didn't get an IV; He got a spear in his side. That finished Him off for sure—and the swoon theory along with Him. John 19:34 says,

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. (NKJV)

Wait. You bleed when you're stabbed. What's up with the water?

In pages 137–143 of Zugibe's book, he explains that the "water" is actually pleural effusion from the pleura sac surrounding one of Jesus's lungs. Not being modern doctors, Jesus's followers couldn't possibly have known this unless they saw it.

Couldn't the emission of blood and water have been common knowledge because popping the corpse in the side with a spear was normal.

That doesn't make sense. There's absolutely no historical evidence to support it either.

It doesn't fit with what we know about the Roman practice of crucifixion. Rome wasn't in a hurry to get people down off the cross. Remember, the purpose of crucifixion was deterrence.

Why not just leave them up there for a while? An empty cross doesn't have the visual impact of one with a person on it, even a lifeless one.

Thus, leaving them up increases the deterrent effect, especially after a few days. Like Martha said to Jesus about her brother Lazarus after he'd been dead for a few days (John 11:39, King James translation),

He stinketh.

I've heard that's the worst smell on earth. It's why cops can bring cigars to some scenes—to cover up the smell.

Any Roman soldier given the task of removing a corpse from a cross wouldn't want to turn it into a wet slimy one by poking holes in it.

This made Joseph of Arimathea's job that much worse. It was gross enough without that, and this was just as depression was setting in among Jesus's followers. They did not yet understand the plan. To them, it looked like the whole enterprise had just unraveled.

Yeah. I get that they were depressed. Who wouldn't be?

But what about the mistaken identity theory—that the Romans crucified the wrong guy.

That doesn't fit what happened next in countless ways, most obviously this incident.

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" — John 20:24–28 (NKJV)

So?

The point is that without the holes in Jesus's body, his appearance wouldn't have had the shock value needed to overcome everyone's depression. Jesus claimed to be God, and God can't die. They didn't understand incarnation yet—how He could die.

So, when Jesus died, the whole movement pretty much died with him. Everyone was just sitting around stone-faced wondering how they could have been so wrong.

Only a "holey Jesus" (pun intended) could reverse this. Only that could move them to a level of commitment that prepared them for martyrdom.

There's just no way that the Romans crucified somebody else. Then Jesus wouldn't have had the holes to show to His followers.

That's all well and good, but it still doesn't compare with the absurdity of someone being raised from the dead.

You're right. As long as your mind isn't open to that possibility, nothing I say can change that.

Still, let's keep going.

See you tomorrow.

Dialogue 27 — Proper Confession

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.

So, you started off presenting the case for Christ with that outrageous Monty Python skit. Are you finished? Was your argument for the resurrection your version of the gospel?

It's only a piece. The evidence for the resurrection is the evidence that Christianity is true. I haven't even begun to say what Christianity is, or how to join.

But I want to start by explaining what Christianity isn't, because the Christianity you've been exposed to all your life is quite possibly a weakened version of the real thing. Your skepticism may be quite justified.

Look up the word "Christian" in the dictionary, and you'll find something weird. Skip past the definitions of Christian as a noun to the definitions as an adjective. There you'll find something like, "Commendably decent or charitable."

Yeah. I sometimes like to say that you Christians aren't being very Christian.

Exactly. The dictionary implies that Christians are the good guys.

How did that happen?

That definition wasn't just handed to us; it was earned. Through great 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. Something's wrong. We're not as serious as Christians were back then.

Wow. We actually agree on something.

But here comes the complicated part. Our Christianity is weak because our faith is weak. 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.*

Many, if not most, American Christians are not solidly Romans 10:9 Christians. Many never even confessed Christ as their Lord in the first place; they only confessed him as their "personal savior." That kind of confession appears nowhere in scripture.

That's like accepting a job offer by announcing that you "accept" the retirement benefits. What about the job?

Many Christians are weak on the other half of Romans 10:9 too, That’s why I spent so much time on the resurrection. Doubt about that is catastrophic. You have to *believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead*. That’s not a “gee, I think so” faith.

And these two parts are inseparable. If Jesus is raised, then He is Lord. If not, then He isn’t Lord—He isn’t anything. Faith is either rock solid, or it’s Jell-O.

And you think modern Christians doubt the resurrection?

I think they’re just not thinking about it. They “choose” to believe, but they’re unprepared to make much of a defense if challenged.

But the bigger problem is with the first part. The New Testament consistently describes confessing Christ as a declaration of His lordship.

And here’s where that gets deep; does this mean “Jesus is **the** Lord,” or, “Jesus is **my** Lord”?

Why does that matter?

Because saying Jesus is **the** Lord is just assenting to a fact. It doesn’t imply loyalty. It’s not joining the team. Even demons know that Jesus is **the** Lord.

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

So, you’re saying that it’s more precise to confess Christ by saying, “Jesus is my Lord.”

I suppose. It’s okay 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. It needs to be a pledge of fealty.

But another thing that should be clear is what you mean by Lord. Lord means absolute king-boss 24/7. Lord means more than just 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)

A proper confession of faith is a pledge of fealty to Jesus as Lord over your whole being.

Well, at least that’s self-consistent; I’ll grant you that much. Let’s keep going tomorrow.

Dialogue 28 — Damned Surprised

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!’”

You said that saying Jesus is Lord is the key, but in Matthew 7:21, Jesus says, *“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.”* Doesn’t that contradict what you said yesterday?

Perfect question. What does a pledge of fealty mean if there isn’t any fealty? This is another example of what Christianity isn’t. Here we see a shocking description of some people who think they’re not just Christians, but big-shot Christians—and they’re neither.

The rest of the passage is just brutal. In Matthew 7:22–23, Jesus goes on to say,

“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!’” (NIV)

I don’t get it. Their service to God seems impressive. What did they do wrong?

It’s what they didn’t do, and didn’t say, that’s the problem. They never said, “We tried to follow the will of the Father.” All these fancy tricks were their idea. No mention of praying or any other way of seeking the Lord’s will.

It’s a complete lack of understanding of what the word “Lord” means.

This is Jesus’s 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 I like to call this the scariest verse in the Bible.

And notice how they respond to Jesus’s criticism. They don’t have a clue.

Okay, but He says, “I never knew you.” What does that even mean? He knows everyone.

Of course, He “knows” everyone in one sense.

But Jesus is speaking of a relationship. Picture this:

Boss: Did you finish the Benson report?

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

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

You see how the boss could say that he doesn't "know" this guy? Their relationship has a "nobody's home" feel to it.

Yeah. So, some Christians aren't the real thing. Is that your point?

Not exactly. My point is that people can sincerely think they're Christians, but not really get it. Remember that I said that I don't want your theology to be a bunch of scrambled ideas. My goal here is correct theology.

The "super-Christians" in this passage could be viewed as victims of poor teaching. They weren't taught this lesson correctly, and so their vision of following God's will was to do their best according to their own calculations. They did what they felt like doing, but it's really more like a bunch of showing off.

The point is that Jesus wasn't really their Lord. Those were just empty words. They were their own lords.

So, what's the fix? How does one not miss the point?

By 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 many Christian prayers sound like could begin with the words, "Dear Santa Claus."

Anyone with a relationship like that with the Lord, is missing something.

And that justifies the words, "I never knew you."?

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." Your relationship with God should not be a one-way street.

Wait. Didn't Jesus say, In — John 15:7, "*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*" (NIV)

Absolutely. 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.

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

You can ask for favors but only, as the cereal commercial used to say, "as a part of a complete breakfast."

You know that line was used in ads to market junk-sugary cereal, right?

Yeah, but it's the perfect segue to tomorrow's lesson. See you then.

Dialogue 29 — Seeking Prayers

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.”

Here’s another passage describing how to pray—Luke 11:9–10. Make sense out of that one.

Actually, that’s a pretty good example of what I’m talking about. We tend to think of these verses in terms of requests for favors.

But when Jesus said, *“seek, and you will find,”* how could this not include 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 often refers 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 praying for suddenly became 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.

That’s how you became a Christian?

Yes, but let’s not do that now. My point is that 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 solid 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 not seeking His will with something specific like, “Should I accept this job offer?” You just want to connect.

Just connect? Like how?

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 a chance for 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?

So, you might not even have a list of questions. You'd just want to hear whatever he has to say. 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.

So, it sounds like you're just saying to treat God like He's God.

Pretty much. There are two more rules (hints, actually) for seeking God's will in prayer. First off, it's not good to make it a forced binary sign—where the answer has to be yes or no based on something that happens next. You must leave room for a non-answer. Sometimes you're supposed to make your own decision and learn from it. Not every prayer is answered, and interpreting a non-answer as a sign borders on superstition.

That makes a lot of sense. I see Christians do some pretty extreme things.

Well, sometimes they're right when they do things that look extreme from a distance, but not always. Don't expect to understand everything.

Let me move on to the other "hint"—exceptional signs. There's one case where a binary choice is okay, if a non-answer is the default. The prayer might be something like, "Lord if you want me to do this extraordinary thing, please give me an extraordinary sign. Otherwise, it's just too over the top."

Is anything like this actually in the Bible?

Yes. The classic example is Judges 6:36–40. Gideon asks for an almost impossible combination of events to confirm something.

Then Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said." And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. Then Gideon said to God, "Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew." And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew. (ESV)

Because of this reference, asking for an extraordinary sign like this is called "fleecing."

But do not miss Gideon's nervousness about asking for such a clear sign. He knows this is a bold, even presumptuous, prayer request. It's a very rare kind of prayer.

Makes sense. See you tomorrow.

Dialogue 30 — Simple Faith

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.**”*

I looked something up, and I don't understand it. Luke 23:39–54 describes the thief on the cross saying some nice things to Jesus, but it's nowhere near what you say is needed to confess faith as per Romans 10:9. Yet Jesus says to him, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” Why does this guy get in? He doesn't confess Jesus as Lord—he only asks to be remembered—and he sure as heck doesn't believe in the resurrection.

Great question. You're right; we know, beyond any doubt, that he was saved. Our understanding of saving faith has to include him.

So, what was his faith? What did he believe? How does his faith meet your standards?

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 free all three of them.
- 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.

I suppose that numbers 3–6 take 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. The mechanism by which Jesus would come into his kingdom isn't the issue; it's that He will—or, for later believers, that He did.

After the resurrection, anyone who knows who Jesus is has to believe in His resurrection. His Lordship and His resurrection go hand-in-hand. As I said before, if Jesus was raised, He is Lord. If He wasn't raised, He isn't Lord (He isn't anything).

But before that event, the faith couldn't be in specifics that they didn't know about. That's why we say that the Old Testament believers had the same saving faith. They didn't know certain details, but they pledged (and practiced) fealty to the Lord.

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 should be careful not to overvalue them. Simple faith is saving faith, and the first century 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.

Okay, but there's one bit I don't understand. Where is the paradise that Jesus says He will be with him be in?

I talked about heaven a bit earlier, but there's one thing I need to nail down—heaven is created. This is made crystal clear by Revelation 21:1.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (ESV)

The creator's fundamental self-existence is not in a place. God created the concepts of "in" and "place" when He created space and time. Scripture consistently describes the heavens as created. For example, see Genesis 1:1.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (ESV)

So, paradise is the same as heaven?

Yes. We see that in 2 Corinthians 12:2–3, which equates them.

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows (ESV)

So, Christians believe in life after death and they will get to see things they can't see now, right?

Right. I've already used the King James version of 1 Corinthians 13:12, but it's sublime.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. — 1 Corinthians 13:12 (KJV)

What does that even mean?

Yeah, this is another one of those topics which we must admit we're not going to fully comprehend. Heaven is massively different, and our eyes will be opened—somehow.

But, the idea that we'll be completely outside of any creation is too insanely abstract to even be pondered—and it's absolutely not supported by scripture.

I suppose. See you tomorrow.