

# The Sum of Saving Knowledge - the Use of Saving Knowledge

by David Dickson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding Christian doctrine, specifically the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, in order to be convinced of sin, righteousness, and judgment.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 55:3, John 16:8, Romans 8:1, Romans 10:8, 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 2 Peter 1:10

**Topics:** "Covenant Theology", "Eternal Judgment"

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## Description

David Dickson preaches on the practical use of saving knowledge contained in Scripture, emphasizing the chief general use of Christian doctrine to convince individuals of sin, righteousness, and judgment through the law or covenant of works and the gospel or covenant of grace. The sermon delves into the importance of understanding the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, highlighting the impossibility of finding righteousness through one's own works and the necessity of fleeing to Jesus Christ for eternal life. It also explores the concept of judgment, both for believers who embrace the covenant of grace and for those who reject it, emphasizing the consequences of not believing in Christ.

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## Transcript

The Practical Use of Saving Knowledge

Contained in Scripture, and holden forth briefly in the foresaid Confession of Faith and Catechisms

The chief general use of Christian doctrine is, to convince a man of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment, John xvi. 8. partly by the law or covenant of works, that he may be humbled and become penitent; and partly by the gospel or covenant of grace, that he may become an unfeigned believer in Jesus Christ, and be strengthened in his faith upon solid grounds and warrants, and give evidence of the truth of his faith by good fruits, and so be saved.

The sum of the covenant of works, or of the law, is this: "If thou do all that is commanded, and not fail in any point, thou shalt be saved: but if thou fail, thou shalt die." Rom.x. 5. Gal.iii. 10, 12.

The sum of the gospel, or covenant of grace and reconciliation, is this: If thou flee from deserved wrath to the true Redeemer Jesus Christ, (who is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him,) thou shalt not perish, but have eternal life. Rom.x. 8, 9, 11.

For convincing a man of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment by the law, or covenant of works, let these scriptures, among many more, be made use of.

I. For convincing a man of sin by the law, consider Jer. xvii. 9, 10.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

Here the Lord teacheth these two things.

1. That the fountain of all our miscarriage, and actual sinning against God, is in the heart, which comprehendeth the mind, will, affections, and all the powers of the soul, as they are corrupted and defiled with original sin; the mind being not only ignorant and incapable of saving truth, but also full of error and enmity against God; and the will and affections being obstinately disobedient unto all God's directions, and bent toward that only which is evil: The heart (saith he) is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; yea, and unsearchably wicked, so that no man can know it; and Gen. vi. 5. Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually, saith the Lord, whose testimony we must trust in this and all other matters ; and experience also may teach us, that, till God make us deny ourselves, we never look to God in any thing, but fleshly self-interest alone doth rule us, and move all the wheels of our actions.

2. That the Lord bringeth our original sin, or wicked inclination, with all the actual fruits thereof, unto reckoning before his judgment-seat; For he searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doing.

Hence let every man reason thus :

"What God and my guilty conscience beareth witness of, I am convinced that it is true:

But God and my guilty conscience beareth witness, that my heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; and that all the imaginations of my heart, by nature, are only evil continually:

Therefore I am convinced that this is true."

Thus a man may be convinced of sin by the law.

II. For convincing a man of righteousness by the law, consider Gal. iii. 10.

As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Here the apostle teacheth us three things:

1. That, by reason of our natural sinfulness, the impossibility of any man a being justified by the works of the law is so certain, that whosoever do seek justification by the works of the law, are liable to the curse of God for breaking of the law: For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, saith he.

2. That, unto the perfect fulfilling of the law, the keeping of one or two of the precepts, or doing of some, or of all duties (if it were possible) for a time, is not sufficient; for the law requireth, that a man continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

3. That, because no man can come up to this perfection, every man by nature is under the curse; for the law saith, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Now, to be under the curse, comprehendeth all the displeasure of God, with the danger of the breaking forth more and more of his wrath upon soul and body, both in this life, and after death perpetually, if grace do not prevent the full execution thereof.

Hence let every man reason thus:

"Whosoever, according to the covenant of works, is liable to the curse of God for breaking the law, times and ways out of number, cannot be justified, or find righteousness by the works of the law.

"But I, (may every man say,) according to the covenant of works, am liable to the curse of God, for breaking the law times and ways out of number:

"Therefore I cannot be justified, or have righteousness by the works of the law.

Thus may a man be convinced of righteousness, that it is not to be had by his own works, or by the law.

III. For convincing a man of judgment by the law, consider 2 Thess. i. 7.

The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, Ver. 8 In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Ver. 9. Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; Ver. 10. When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.

Wherein we are taught, that our Lord Jesus, who now offers to be Mediator for them who believe in him, shall, at the last day, come armed with flaming fire, to judge, condemn, and destroy all them who have not believed God, have not received the offer of grace made in the gospel, nor obeyed the doctrine thereof; but remain in their natural state, under the law or covenant of works.

Hence let every man reason thus:

"What the righteous Judge hath forewarned me shall be done at the last day, I am sure is just judgment:

"But the righteous Judge hath forewarned me, that if I do not believe God in time, and obey not the doctrine of the gospel, I shall be secluded from his presence and his glory at the last day, and be tormented in soul and body for ever:

"Therefore I am convinced that this is a just judgment:

"And I have reason to thank God heartily, who hath forewarned me to flee from the wrath which is to come."

Thus every man may be, by the law or covenant of works, convinced of judgment, if he shall continue under the covenant of works, or shall not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

IV. For convincing a man of sin, righteousness, and judgment, by the gospel.

As for convincing a man of sin, and righteousness, and judgment, by the gospel, or covenant of grace, he must understand three things: 1. That not believing in Jesus Christ, or refusing of the covenant of grace offered in him, is a greater and more dangerous sin than all other sins against the law; because the hearers of the gospel, not believing in Christ, do reject God's mercy in Christ, the only way of freedom from sin and wrath, and will not yield to be reconciled to God. 2.

Next, he must understand, that perfect remission of sin, and true righteousness, is to be had only by faith in Jesus; because God requireth no other conditions but faith; and testifies from heaven, that he is well pleased to justify sinners upon this condition. 3. He must understand, that upon righteousness received by faith, judgment shall follow, on the one hand, to the destroying of the works of the devil in the believer, and to the perfecting of the work of sanctification in him, with power: and that, upon refusing to take righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ, judgment shall follow, on the other hand, to the condemnation of the misbeliever, and destroying of him with Satan and his servants for ever.

For this end, let these passages of scripture, among many others, serve to make the greatness of the sin of not believing in Christ appear; or, to make the greatness of the sin of refusing of the covenant of grace offered to us, in the offering of Christ unto us appear, let the fair offer of grace be looked upon as it is made, Isa. lv. 3. Incline your ear, and come unto me, (saith the Lord:) hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

That is, If ye will believe me, and be reconciled to me, I will, by covenant, give unto you Christ, and all saving graces in him: repeated Acts xiii. 34. Again, consider, that this general offer in substance is equivalent to a special offer made to every one in particular; as appeareth by the apostle's making use of it, Acts xvi. 31. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. The reason of which offer is given, John iii. 16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Seeing then this great salvation is offered in the Lord Jesus, whosoever believeth not in him, but looks for happiness some other way, what doth he else but observe lying vanities, and forsake his own mercy, which he might have had in Christ? Jonah ii. 8, 9. What doth he else but blaspheme God in his heart? as it is said, I John v. 10, 11. He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son.

And that no sin against the law is like unto this sin, Christ testifies, John xv. 22. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin. This may convince a man of the greatness of this sin of not believing in Christ.

For convincing a man of righteousness to be had only by faith in Jesus Christ, consider how, Rom. x. 3, 4.

It is said, that the Jews, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God, (and so they perished.) For Christ is the end of the law for righteous that believeth. And Acts xiii. 39. By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. And I John i. 7. The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

For convincing a man of judgment, if a man embrace this righteousness, consider I John iii. 8. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. And Heb. ix. 14.

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to same the living God?

But if a man embrace not this righteousness, his doom is pronounced, John iii. 18, 19. He that believeth not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.

Hence let the penitent, desiring to believe, reason thus:

"What doth suffice to convince all the elect in the world of the greatness of the sin of not believing in Christ, or refusing to flee to him for relief from sins done against the law, and from wrath due thereto; and what sufficeth to convince them that righteousness and eternal life is to be had by faith in Jesus Christ, or by consenting to the covenant of grace in him; and what sufficeth to convince them of judgment to be exercised by Christ, for destroying the works of the devil in a man, and sanctifying and saving all that believe in him, may suffice to convince me also:

"But what the Spirit hath said, in these or other like scriptures, sufficeth to convince the elect world of the foresaid sin, and righteousness, and judgment:

"Therefore what the Spirit hath said, in these and other like scriptures, serveth to convince me thereof also.

Whereupon let the penitent desiring to believe, take with him words, and say heartily to the Lord, Seeing thou sayest, Seek ye my face; my soul answereth unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. I have hearkened unto the offer of an everlasting covenant of all saving mercies to be had in Christ, and I do heartily embrace thy offer. Lord, let it be a bargain; Lord, I believe; help my unbelief: Behold, I give myself to thee, to serve thee in all things for ever; and I hope thy right hand shall save me: the Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the works of thine own hands.

Thus may a man be made an unfeigned believer in Christ.

For strengthening the man's faith who hath agreed unto the covenant of grace.

Because many true believers are weak, and do much doubt if ever they shall be sure of the soundness of their own faith and effectual calling, or made certain of their justification and salvation, when they see that many, who profess faith, are found to deceive themselves; let us see how every believer may be made strong in the faith, and sure of his own election and salvation upon solid grounds, by sure warrants, and true evidences of faith. To this end, among many other scriptures, take these following.

1. For laying solid grounds of Faith, consider 2 Peter i. 10. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never fall.

In which words, the apostle teacheth us these four things, for help and direction how to be made strong in the faith.

1. That such as believe in Christ Jesus, and are fled to him for relief from sin and wrath, albeit they be weak in the faith, yet they are indeed children of the same Father with the apostles; for so he accounteth of them, while he calleth them brethren.

2. That albeit we be not sure, for the time, of our effectual calling and election, yet we may be made sure of both, if we use diligence; for this he presupposeth, saying, Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.

3. That we must not be discouraged, when we see many seeming believers prove rotten branches, and make defection; but we must the rather take the better heed to ourselves: Wherefore the rather, brethren, saith he, give all diligence.

4. That the way to be sure both of our effectual calling and election, is to make sure work of our faith, by laying the grounds of it solidly, and bringing forth the fruits of our faith in new obedience constantly: For if ye do these things, saith he, ye shall never fall; understanding by these things, what he had said of sound faith, Verses 1, 2, 3, 4, and what he had said of the bringing out of the fruits of faith, Verses 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

To this same purpose, consider Rom. viii. 1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Verse 2. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. Verse 3. For what as law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; Verse 4. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

Wherein the apostle teacheth us these four things, for laying of the ground of faith solidly. 1. That every one is a true believer, who, in the sense of his sin, and fear of God's wrath, doth flee for full relief from both unto Jesus Christ alone, as the only Mediator and all-sufficient Redeemer of men; and, being fled to Christ, doth strive against his own flesh, or corrupt inclination of nature, and studieth to follow the rule of God's Spirit, set down in his word: for the man, whom the apostle doth here bless as a true believer, is a man in Christ Jesus, who doth not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 2.

That all such persons as are fled to Christ, and do strive against sin, howsoever they may be possibly exercised under the sense of wrath, and fear of condemnation, yet they are in no danger; for there is no condemnation (saith he) to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 3. That albeit the apostle himself, (brought in here for example's cause,) and all other true believers in Christ, be by nature under the law of sin and death, or under the covenant of works, (called the law of sin and death, because it bindeth sin and death upon us, till Christ set us free;) yet the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, or the covenant of grace, (so called, because it doth enable and quicken a man to a spiritual life through Christ,) doth set the apostle, and all true believers, free from the covenant of works, or the law of sin and death: so that every man may say with him, The law of the Spirit of life, or the covenant of grace, hath made me free from the law of sin and death, or covenant of works. 4.

That the fountain and first ground, from whence our freedom from the curse of the law doth flow, is the covenant of redemption, passed betwixt God and God the Son as incarnate, wherein Christ takes the curse of the law upon him for sin, that the believer, who could not otherwise be delivered from the covenant of works, may be delivered from it. And this doctrine the apostle holdeth forth in these four branches: (1.) That it was utterly impossible for the law, or the covenant of works, to bring righteousness and life to a sinner, because it was weak. (2.)

That this weakness and inability of the law, or covenant of works, is not the fault of the law, but the fault of sinful flesh, which is neither able to pay the penalty of sin, nor to give perfect obedience to the law, (presuppose bygone sins were forgiven:) The law was weak (saith he) through the flesh. (3.) That the

righteousness and salvation of sinners, which was impossible to be brought about by the law, is brought to pass by sending God's own Son, Jesus Christ, in the flesh, in whose flesh sin is condemned and punished, for making satisfaction in the behalf of the elect, that they might be set free. (4.)

That by his means, the law loseth nothing, because the righteousness of the law is best fulfilled this way; first, by Christ's giving perfect active obedience in our name unto it in all things; next, by his paying in our name the penalty (due to our sins) in his death: and, lastly, by his working of sanctification in us, who are true believers, who strive to give new obedience unto the law, and walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

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