

# A STUDY OF THE Protestant Reformation

1517 - 2017

# The 500th Anniversary





# Introduction: Part 7

On October 31, 1517, on the eve of All Saints' Day, Martin Luther, as we have noted, nailed the *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. "Barely two weeks after being posted," writes Lutheran scholar Heiko Oberman, "the theses had circulated all over Germany," just as Luther had reported. Against his wishes, the theses were translated from the Latin into German, printed in Nuremberg, and distributed from hand to hand. Before Easter of 1518, Luther added a third Reformational principle to *sola gratia* and *sola scriptura*: *sola fides* (by faith alone). God demands and wants faith alone. There is no specific level of contrition necessary to obtain the forgiveness of sins. Trust in the divine Word: "Your sins are forgiven."



# Introduction

Over the past 500 years, millions of people around the world still ask the question, “Are my sins truly forgiven?” Certainly as one approaches death, the question intensifies: “Where will I spend eternity? Purgatory? Hell? Heaven?” As philosopher Peter Kreeft asks, “How can I *know* God loves me? I believe it, or I want to believe it. But how can I know it for sure? How can I get assurance of the most important thing in the world?”

Is what we call *assurance of salvation* possible? Can we be certain that when we die we will go to heaven and be with the Lord forever? What kind of guarantee or pledge have I been given that this would, indeed, be the case? These are the questions we will explore today.



# The Objective and the Subjective

- As our starting point, I believe we should listen carefully to theologian Dr. John Frame when he writes: “One’s life should be based on something objective, rather than on something subjective. On this view, our life is built on what Christ has done *for* us, objectively in history, not on anything arising from our own subjectivity or inwardness. On this view, the gospel is a recitation of what God has done for us, not a command to provoke our subjective response.”
- **Subjective**, *adj. and noun*, “relating to the thinking subject proceeding from or taking place within the individual consciousness or perception; having its source in the mind” (OED).



# The Objective and the Subjective

“In Scripture, though justification is based on the work of Christ external to us, it is embraced by faith, which is subjective. And faith, in turn, is the result of the Spirit’s subjective work of regeneration (John 3:3). So nobody is justified who has not been subjectively changed by God’s grace.”

- John M. Frame

# What Is Assurance of Salvation?



**Wayne Grudem, PhD**

Research Professor, Theology & Biblical Studies  
Phoenix Seminary

**Assurance of Salvation:** “The internal sense we may have based upon certain evidences in our lives that we are truly ‘born again’ and will persevere as Christians until the end of our lives.”



# Where God's Truth is Not Grounded

- In the limitations of human reason
- In the prerogative of human knowing
- In human ingenuity
- In human initiation
- In human experience
- In human understanding
- In philosophical speculation

# The Nature of Faith

“Almost everyone seems ready to concede or consent that religious assertion is peculiarly a matter of faith. But what relationship if any does such religious faith bear to knowledge? Is faith essentially emotive, volitional, moral or intellectual? Do religious assertions rest on authority, intuition, experience, speculation, or personal preference and prejudice?”



**Carl F.H. Henry**  
ThD; PhD, Boston University  
1913-2003



# God's Divine Revelation

“There is a way of knowing that is objective and universal. By this route I can indeed know that God loves me in the same way that you and anyone else can: God said so. There are objective facts. There is data. Christianity is a religion of facts, not just values. It appeals to a public, objective divine revelation, not subjective and private mystical experiences and subtle insights.”



**Dr. Peter Kreeft**

1937 -

Professor of Philosophy, Boston College

# The Foundation of True Faith



**Chuck Colson**  
1931-2012

“True faith depends not upon mysterious signs, celestial fireworks, or grandiose dispensations from a God who is seen as a rich, benevolent uncle; true faith, as Job understood, rests on the assurance that *God is who He is*. Indeed, on that we must be willing to stake our very lives.”

“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it....There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn. 1:4-5,9-13).

# Two Calls to Personal Examination



- **By Peter:** “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you” (II Peter 1:10).
- **By Paul:** “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test?” (II Cor. 13:5).



# Four Possible Positions

	Saved	Unsaved
Know	People who are saved and know they are saved	People who are unsaved and know they are unsaved
Don't Know	People who are saved and do not know they are saved	People who are unsaved and do not know they are unsaved

# Reasons for False Assurance

- Universalist view of salvation (everyone is saved)
- Living a good life (saved by good works)
- Believing in sound doctrine (I believe in God)
- Keeping the law (saved by obedience to God's law)
- Self-righteousness (I am already righteous)
- Claim to goodness (I've never hurt anyone)
- Flattery of self-love (Of course, God would receive me)
- Desire for happiness (God wants me to be happy)
- Spiritual pride (I've never done anything that bad).





# Three Elements to Saving Faith

- ***Notitia***, knowledge. “One may have a knowledge that the Bible teaches that man is a sinner who cannot save himself, without assenting to the truth of this statement” (James Kennedy).
- ***Assensus***, intellectual assent. “One can know about, and assent to, many historical facts without trusting them. We know about Alexander the Great and assent to the historical record concerning his conquests....However, I hope no one is trusting Alexander to do anything for him!” (Kennedy).
- ***Fiducia***, trust or personal commitment. Transferring our trust for eternal life from ourselves to Jesus Christ alone.

# Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation (WCF)

**Section I:** Although hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God and estate of salvation; which hope of theirs shall perish; yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God; which hope shall never make them ashamed.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

**Section II:** This certainly is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidences of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God: which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

**Section III:** This infallible assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it: yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. And therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure; that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance: so far is it from inclining men to looseness.

# Westminster Confession of Faith

**Section IV:** True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers (different) ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it; by falling into some special sin, which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation; by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness, and to have no light; yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.



# The First Foundation of Assurance

- The first foundation: ***the promises of God.***
- “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:13).
- The Greek word translated by our English word *know* in this passage means “to have realized, perceived” = to know. It is used 320 times in the New Testament.
- This kind of knowledge is not abstract. Jesus expresses His knowledge of the Father using this word: “I **know** Him; because I am from Him, and He sent Me” (Jn. 7:29). “And you have **not come to know Him**, but I **know Him**; and if I say that I do not know Him, I shall be a liar like you, but I **do know Him**, and keep His word” (Jn. 8:55).



# The First Foundation of Assurance

- “But you have an anointing from the Holy One and you all **know**” (1 Jn. 2:20). This is not acquired knowledge; it is innate knowledge.
- “And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us” (1 Jn. 3:24). “The Holy Spirit not only witnesses to us that we are God’s children, but also witnesses that God abides in us and that we are abiding in him. Once again more than our intellect is involved: the Spirit works to give us assurance at the subjective level of spiritual and emotional perception as well” (Wayne Grudem).
- “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (Jn. 1:12).

# The First Foundation of Assurance

- “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:14-16).
- “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:36).
- “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” (Jn. 6:47).

# The First Foundation of Assurance

- “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (Jn. 5:24).
- “For this is the will of My Father, that every one who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (Jn. 6:40).
- “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies; and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’” (Jn. 11:25-26).

# The Most Certain Kind of Knowledge



Dr. Peter Kreeft

“I know that God loves me by faith. Faith is more than opinion and more than belief. It is not even in the same league. It is not even playing the same game. Opinion is the weakest kind of knowledge, knowledge with the least certainty attached to it. But faith, in the Christian sense of accepting God’s Word and his promise, is the *most* certain kind of knowledge, for it is guaranteed by the One who can neither deceive nor be deceived.”



# The Editors of *Christianity Today*, 1980

“The ancient quarrel over ‘faith alone’ should never have risen. The biblical teaching is clear. We are saved on the condition of personal faith in Christ, and this is the only condition (‘by faith apart from the works of the law’; Rom. 3:28 and Eph. 2:8). In the strictest biblical sense, we are not even saved by faith. We are saved by Christ. It is the work of God. God does not save us because we have been so good as to believe. Our faith is not the ground of our salvation. Rather, the ground of our salvation is the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf offered freely to all who will accept it.”

# The Second Foundation of Assurance

- The second foundation: *the inward graces unto which these promises are made.*
- “For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (II Pet. 1:4).
- “For our proud confidence is this, the **testimony of our conscience** that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you” (II Cor. 1:12).



# D. James Kennedy's Chair Illustration



- You see this chair? Yes.
- You believe that chair exists? Yes.
- Do you believe that it would hold you up? Yes.
- But, you see, it's not holding you up for a very simple reason: you're not sitting on it. That is the way it was with Christ. I believed Jesus existed. I believed he was divine. I trusted him for finances and for health, as you have done too. But, you see, saving faith is trusting in Christ for my salvation.



# The Third Foundation of Assurance

- The third foundation: ***the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit.***
- “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:15-16).
- “It is to us the witness is given and it is ‘to our spirit,’ but there are many respects in which this witness is borne. Particularly is it made manifest in sealing to the hearts of believers the promises which are theirs as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ and the generating in them of the assurance of the great love the Father has bestowed upon them that they should be called children of God” (John Murray).

# The Fourth Foundation of Assurance

- The fourth foundation: ***a changed life, or the fruit of our faith.***
- “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone one who **practices righteousness** is born of Him” (1 Jn. 2:29).
- “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we **love the brethren**. He who does not love abides in death. Every one who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn. 3:14-15).
- “We know that **no one who is born of God sins**; but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him” (1 Jn. 5:18).
- “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end” (Heb. 3:14).

# The Fourth Foundation of Assurance



“But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and **the sheep follow him; because they know his voice**” (Jn. 10:2-4).

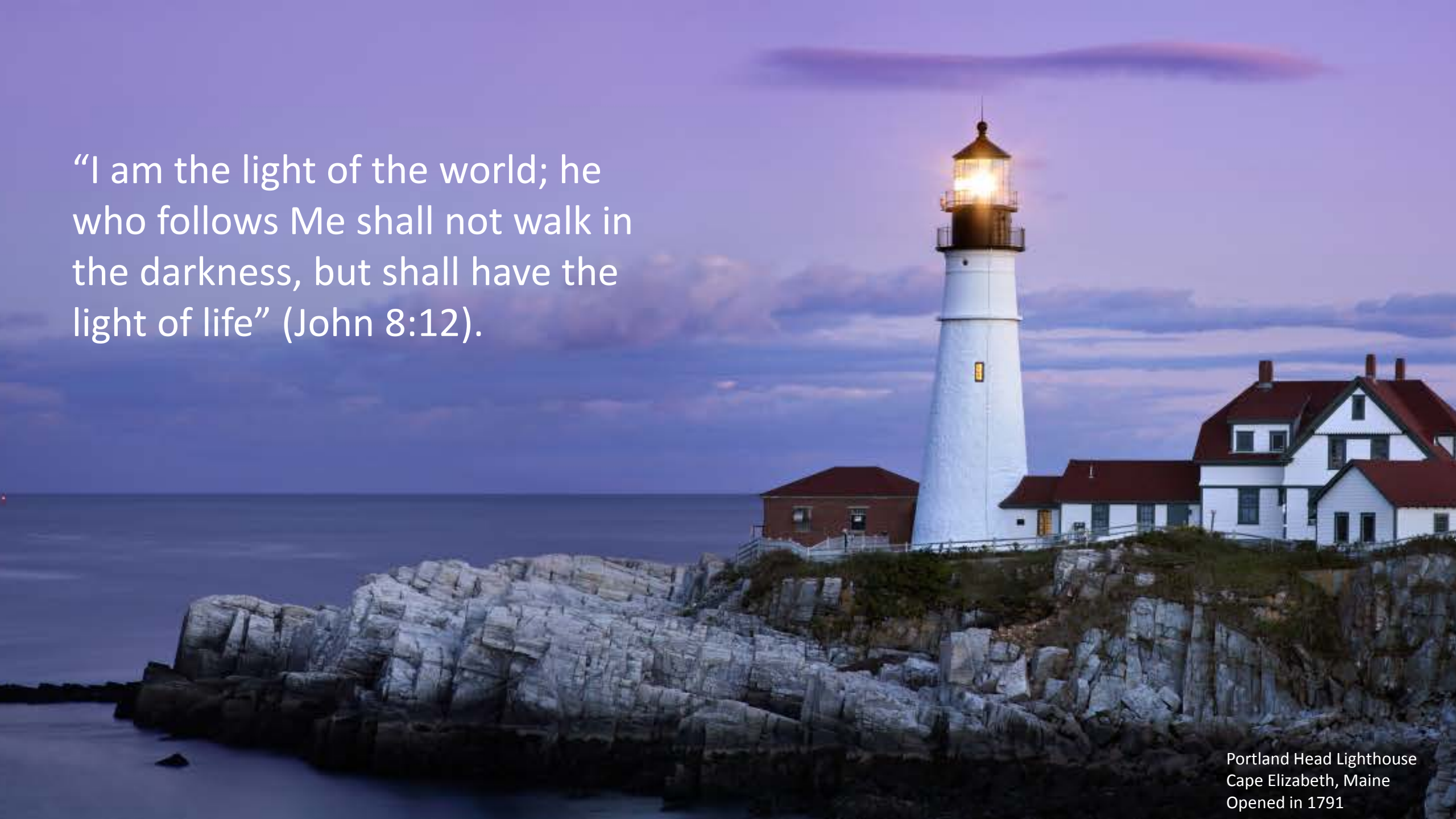


# Justification by Faith

“Justification by faith or, as it is often put today, salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone, is the true fundamental of biblical Christianity. That is not all to which the church is commanded to bear witness, but without this all else is lost.”

- Editors, *Christianity Today*, 1980

“I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).



Portland Head Lighthouse  
Cape Elizabeth, Maine  
Opened in 1791