

A True and a False Faith

by Catherine Booth

Catherine Booth's sermon emphasizes the critical distinction between true saving faith and mere intellectual belief, urging a heartfelt commitment to God that manifests in righteous living.

Scripture: Luke 16:11, Romans 3:31, Galatians 5:6, Hebrews 11:6, James 2:20

Topics: "Saving Faith", "True Obedience"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches about the difference between true and false faith, emphasizing the necessity of a faith that is not just intellectual perception or emotional feeling, but a voluntary committal of the heart to God. She highlights that saving faith is a powerful, transforming principle that leads to obedience and righteousness, not just a belief in facts. Catherine Booth urges the congregation to give themselves over to God completely, risking their all on His truthfulness and goodness, and living contrary to the world as if all that God has said is true.

Transcript

GALATIANS V. 6.-- 'For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.'

JAMES ii. 20.-- 'But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?'

ROMANS iii. 31.-- 'Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law.'

You are aware my subject this afternoon is to be the difference between a true and a false faith, and Oh! lift up your hearts to God for the light and power of the Holy Spirit. I feel intensely the importance of the subject; for I cannot help fearing that there is comparatively little of the real life of faith notwithstanding that there is so much talk and writing and preaching about faith. I am afraid that faith is awfully misunderstood, and I know that it is vilely misrepresented. These convictions have been forced upon me by actual contact with the people. I believe that multitudes upon multitudes are deceived on this vital point; and, God knows, I do not say this without realizing the terrible import of my words. Pamphlets and tracts are often sent to me which I look through for the sake of the senders, but frequently they make my blood run cold, and I cry, 'Lord, it is time for Thee to work; for not only are the righteous perishing but righteousness itself seems to be perishing, and these blind guides seem to be making haste to extinguish the last faint barriers between right and wrong, and to set open the floodgates of Antinomianism and iniquity.' 'Whom the gods intend to destroy, they first deceive'; and certainly Satan seems to have succeeded in deceiving many who pass for

the elect, that through them he may drown the people in deception and perdition.

Well, I have prayed for ten years especially that God would raise up a people who would unfurl once more the standard of practical Holiness, and show what GOD'S RELIGION REALLY is. Everybody in these days is setting up to be a theologian. We get the most weak and contemptible contradictions and interpretations of Scripture possible to imagine.

I have often felt almost in despair as I have seen how the enemy has got over to his side the very strongholds of the Church, and turned the weapons of God's warfare to serve his own purposes. How I have seen him dispensing the untempered mortar, until its slime is everywhere! You cannot take up a book or a periodical but the grossest Antinomianism meets you clothed in a new dress. It is time somebody spoke out, and, thank God, seeing that His professing people will not, He is raising up a people from the slums to come out and tell the world that God is not dead, and that justice and judgment are still the habitation of His throne; that He still can save His people FROM THEIR SINS.

It was meeting with numbers of deceived people that first led me to consider saving faith as a separate subject. On one occasion, when I was walking down a large music-hall, after a service, a respectable woman grasped my hand and said. `Oh! Mrs. Booth, tell me where I am wrong. I believe all that you have been saying. I have believed it for years, and I pray, and strive, and believe, and yet I am not saved. I am just as big a SLAVE TO MY SINS AS ANYBODY ELSE.' I shall never forget the light that seemed to strike from Heaven as that woman spoke. I said, `O Lord! here is a specimen of thousands. Show me where is the missing link. Give me Thy message of truth on this point, and I will give it to them.' And I believe God did give it to me, and has helped me to show to thousands since then what is true saving faith. We will now try to show it to you; and if there is a thought in our minds not of His conception, may He blot it out! and what is of His conception, Oh, may He give you light, and willingness, and confidence, and humility to receive, and thus may we all be blessed together!

I am going to speak of faith this afternoon in the evangelical or SAVING SENSE--not faith as used sometimes to denote the whole of Christianity, or to represent a system of truth, but faith when it is used to set forth that act of the soul which translates it out of the kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of God--that living, powerful, transforming principle in the soul of the believer which enables him to live in obedience to God--the faith that SAVES.

Now, WHAT IS THE FAITH? God help us, because on this hinges our Salvation or damnation; for He who was the embodiment of truth has said, `He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.' They are not my words, therefore I dare not mince them.

Then, what is this faith?

First. We will note one or two things which it is not. And here you will see some of the great delusions of the Church in the present day.

(1) It is not a mere mental perception of, or conviction of, the truth. There may be this and not one atom of saving faith. Saving faith is not an intellectual perception of the truth. `Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?' and t circumcision availeth nothing, nor uncircumcision; but faith that worketh by love.' `Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law.'

Now there are tens of thousands of merely intellectual believers in this country--just as your son has been trained in the belief, that is, the reception into his mind of certain facts in astronomy. He has been taught that the earth moves round the sun, and there that fact is, so to speak laid away on the shelf of his intellect, but he goes to his office 365 days in the year and perhaps never once thinks of it. It has no practical effect upon his life. Again, he has been taught that there was such a person as William the Conqueror; he has read all about his life in history, and has received the facts into his mind; and if anybody were to set up an opposite theory, he would be valiant for the truth of history, and yet he has perhaps never thought of William the Conqueror for a whole year. Neither his life nor death has any practical effect on the young man's life. Again, there are hundreds of drunkards who believe thoroughly in sobriety. I have known many who have protested that they hated drink, and believed that abstinence was the finest thing in the world; nevertheless, you found them drunk every Saturday night just the same. Their faith in sobriety had no practical effect on their lives!

These are illustrations of a DEAD FAITH, of a mere intellectual perception and approval of a truth, without any corresponding effect upon the heart. Now there are tens of thousands of people in this country who are just thus, and in no other way, believers in Christianity and in Jesus Christ. And, alas! They have been taught that because they have received the facts about Jesus Christ into their minds they are Christians; and, Oh! what everlasting confusion, condemnation, and shame this theory has brought about. The world is full of liars, and cheats, and rogues, who believe these facts quite as much as I do! Oh, yes! and they would be valiant for the truth if attacked; but they are unbelievers still, in the Bible sense, and in danger of Hell fire. The devils believe and tremble! 'Oh,' say the deceived guides, 'Salvation is not by works; it is by faith--"only believe," and you are saved,' without adding the qualifying passages, and the explanations of correlative texts, which the inspired writers never lost sight of for a moment. So it has come to pass that we have lying believers, cheating believers, deceiving believers, and unclean believers, and all manner of sinful believers. Of course they are head-believers, but they are deceived, and it is time that somebody sounded the trumpet of alarm, as John did. 'Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the Devil,' John and James lived to see the creeping up of this deadly heresy through the 'wresting' of 'Scriptures' from their explanatory connexions (especially in the writings of Paul), which heresy would have been quite as horrible to the soul of this Apostle as it is to our souls--making him teach unrighteousness, instead of righteousness. Hence James' warning: 'For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.' And you know what comes after death?--corruption. Like the body when the spirit is gone, it stinketh in the nostrils of God. If a mere intellectual perception of the truth were saving faith, the Devil would have been saved long ago, for he is one of the profoundest intellectual believers in the universe! You remember in the days of Christ's flesh, when the Pharisees were 'if-ing' and 'but-ing' as to His origin, the Devil had none of these difficulties; he comes boldly out, and says, 'I KNOW THEE WHO THOU ART, THE HOLY ONE OF GOD!' But that faith did not change his character--he remains a devil still. Well might the Apostles James and Paul urge us to examine ourselves whether we be in THE FAITH, for there is a faith that damns, as well as a faith that saves. My friend, WHICH HAVE YOU GOT?

Further, saving faith is not mere FEELING on the subject of religion. People go and hear finely wrought sermons about the sufferings of Christ, and the triumph of Christianity; and because they weep, or are wrought up to gladness at the extension of Christ's kingdom, they reason, 'I should not feel thus if I were not a Christian. If I am not a Christian, I am pretty near being one. I am not far wrong, or I should not feel like this.' A most delusive test. Suppose a man reading a romance; he has feelings excited in his soul in accordance with the sentiment that passes through his mind, but he lays down the book and goes his way,

and is the same as before. And so the Apostle says as to hearing and not doing: 'He is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' The truth has no practical effect upon him. He lives the next day just the same. Can that be the faith which Hebrews xi. sets forth as the very power of God in the souls of men and women, leading them to be the prey of lions, to be sawn asunder, separated from all they loved, suffering a martyrdom in life and a martyrdom in death, for the kingdom and glory of God? Can it? Oh, no! you say a thousand times no!

Then, if it is neither intellectual perception nor conviction of the truth, nor mere feeling about the truth, WHAT IS IT? May God the Holy Ghost help us to find out!

I like to let one Scripture explain another, so I want to remark that the word translated faith, or belief, as used in the saving sense, is, in several other places in the New Testament, translated commit, or committal, the giving one's self over to another. Luke xvi. 11: 'If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?' Now that is the same word as in this place is translated faith or belief.

Now, you see the Apostolic idea of faith. It is the committal, the giving over of the soul and of the whole being to God. It means such a giving himself up to God as constitutes him henceforth God's man or woman.

Again, the same word occurs in John ii. 24: 'But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men.' He did not give Himself over into their power or keeping, because He could see into their wicked hearts, and knew what they would do with Him if He did. Here is the same word as is translated faith, or belief, when used in the saving sense. These will suffice.

THEN WHAT IS FAITH? It is giving myself up to God, 'risking' myself (if we may use such a term, when there is no risk about it), risking my all, for this life and for the next, on the truthfulness and the goodness of God, and daring to live and act contrary to everybody around me, as if all that God HAS SAID WERE TRUE! Now, mark, there is no getting away from the fact that this is the Scriptural idea of faith; and I hope you will go and compare the Scriptures and examine for yourselves, because faith is, all through the Scriptures, represented as a VOLUNTARY thing. Here is encouragement for intellectual doubters. I think I have met with some sincere and honest souls in my life who have been tormented almost out of their minds by intellectual doubts, yet whose hearts have been honestly inquiring after God's truth. I have a great deal more sympathy with such people than with those who profess all and do nothing. God believes, as we do, in a man's honesty and sincerity of heart; and if you have a sincere heart, and want to know God, and obey Him, don't be afraid that He will leave you because the Devil is always shooting his hellish darts through your intellect.

FAITH IS A VOLUNTARY THING. It is a thing you can do or leave undone, or God must have been unjust to have made a man's everlasting Salvation or damnation to depend on what he has no power to do. You have not absolute power over your intellect, but you have POWER OVER YOUR WILL. You can say, 'Here, Lord, I am, troubled on this subject and on that; but I am not going to wait till I can clear up all these difficulties; I will take my stand on Thy declaration, and I will pledge myself to follow Thee, and work Thy righteousness, and do Thy will, as Thou shalt reveal it unto me.' You do that, and see if God won't send you light. I know He will. He will bring you into a large place and flood your soul with His light, and those doubts, like birds of prey, will take their flight for ever, and you will know to a demonstration that 'God is

light, and in Him is no darkness at all?' But it must be a voluntary committal of your heart to Him.

God wants your HEART. Then He will enlighten your intellect. He wants you to come and take your stand alongside His throne and the cross of His Son, and commit yourself once and for ever into His hands. He wants you to say, 'Now, Lord. I am a poor, guilty, helpless sinner. All the guilt of my past life is open to You, but You have promised to receive and to save me. You say, that if I come, the blood of Your Son shall atone for me, and cleanse me from all sin; that if I come, putting away my idols and forsaking my sins, that You will receive and forgive me; and that if I will come and put my neck under Your yoke, You will take me to be Your own. Here I come, weary and heavy-laden enough, but with all the choice of my heart, with all the power of my will, with all the purpose of my soul--all I have and am--I come and put myself at the foot of the cross, TO BE YOURS WHOLLY AND FOR EVER!' I never knew a soul come to that in my life--and I have known some terrible cases of conflict--who did not soon get flooded with light. You see, He only wants you as you want one another. When a young man woos a young woman--and I use the illustration because I can't find a better--what does he want? He wants HER. He does not want to hear her say, 'I believe all you say about yourself, about your father and mother, your position and prospects--Oh! yes, I quite believe all that.' She may say all that, but that is not enough. What does he want? He wants her HEART. He wants her to say, 'Yes, I am willing to accept you as my bride-groom, my love, my husband.' That is what he wants, and that is what God wants--your heart; and you may bring Him your gifts, and your head-faith, and your Church creeds, and your dead formal services, or whatever else you like, but He will not accept them, and in the day of judgment He will say, 'YOU NEVER GAVE ME YOUR HEART!'

Faith is the thing of the heart, hence the philosophy of the Scripture, which says, that 'with the HEART man believeth unto righteousness.' The HEAD CAN BELIEVE FACTS, WHILE THE HEART ABIDES IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, in hypocritical professions and outside performances; but it is only with the heart that we believe unto RIGHTEOUSNESS. Bring your heart then, and the Holy Spirit will help you to commit it to God, and then you shall know what this means: 'Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ.' Come and commit yourself. Trust Him. What can harm you? What can happen to you? God has you in His hand as it is. Trust Him for your body. If you are in a land that you must go out of, as Abraham did, GO OUT of it, and He will find you another land flowing with milk and honey, and another father's house, with brothers and sisters and friends far more dear and precious than those you leave; for He will enable you to look round on His own, and say, 'Whosoever doeth the will of My Father, the same is My mother, and sister, and brother.' Come out. He will take care of you, and your Isaacs and Jacobs shall inherit the promise with you, if you will come out and seek the country that hath foundation. You shall have a seed to serve Him when your heads are laid in the grave. He will be your friend all the way through life, and, glory to His name! He will be with you when you are dying! You shall not go trembling and shrinking out of time into eternity like a thief and a robber; but like a victorious warrior you shall go sweeping through the gates!

Oh! He loves you, but He cannot save you if you will not commit yourself to Him--He cannot in the nature of the case save you in any other way than this. Paul was saved in this way; hear him saying, 'For I know Whom (not in what) I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have COMMITTED unto Him against that day.' Sin and the Devil ave severed you from God; now He wants you back, and He has done all He can to winn you by the death of His Beloved and by the enlightening of His Spirit: but it is for you to come and give yourself to Him. Won't you do it?

Won't you trust such a Father? Won't you pledge yourself to love and serve Him! Will you not stand up on His side in preference to a poor, rotten, godless world? Dare you not pledge yourself to His throne and link yourself on to His almightiness? Come along. He waits still for your choice. He knocks still at the door of your heart. He asks your confidence, He woos your love. `Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

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