

The Faith That Saves

by Catherine Booth

True faith is not just intellectual assent, but a surrender of the will to God, which requires repentance and a desire to turn away from sin.

Scripture: Acts 8:27, Acts 9:3, Acts 10:1, Acts 16:30

Topics: "Repentance And Faith", "Salvation Through Christ"

Description

Catherine Booth emphasizes the importance of genuine repentance and renouncing sin before believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. She highlights the need for individuals to be awakened to the seriousness of their sin, to hate sin, and to be willing to turn away from it. Catherine Booth stresses that true faith involves surrendering to Jesus Christ, trusting in His power to save, and committing one's life fully to Him. She uses examples from the conversions of the Philippian gaoler, Saul of Tarsus, the eunuch, and Cornelius to illustrate the process of conviction, repentance, and genuine faith in Christ.

Transcript

ONE of the most abused texts in the Bible, and one which perhaps has been made to do as much work for the devil as for God, is that which occurs in the story of the conversion of the Philippian gaoler:

"Then he . . . brought them out, and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.'"

Let us inquire first, Who are to believe? then, When are they to believe? and again, How are they to believe?

To whom does the Holy Spirit say, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved?' I answer, not to all sinners indiscriminately. Here is a grand mistake in a great deal of the teaching of this age. These words are wrested from their explanatory connection and held up independently of all the conditions which must ever, and did ever, in the mind and practice of the apostles, accompany them. Only within the last sixty or seventy years has there sprung into existence this new gospel preaching indiscriminately to unawakened, unconverted, unrepentant sinners, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.'

Great injury has been done to the cause of Christ by thus wrongly dividing the word of truth, to say nothing of the unphilosophical character of such a course; for how can an unawakened, unconverted, unrepentant sinner believe? As soon might Satan believe. On the top of an omnibus a man who was the worse for

liquor and using very improper language was being shown the danger of his evil course. 'Oh!' said the man, 'it is not by works, it is by faith, and I believe as much as you do. I believe in Jesus Christ, and of course I shall be saved.'

That man is a sample of thousands. They believe there was such a man as Jesus, and that He died for sinners, and for them, but as to the exercise of saving faith they know no more about it than Agrippa or Felix, as is manifest when they come to die, for then these very people are wringing their hands and sending for Christians to come and pray with them. If they had believed, why all this alarm and concern at the approach of death? They were believers only of the head and not of the heart; that is, they were but theoretical believers in the facts recorded in the Bible, not believers in the scriptural sense, or their faith would have saved them.

We maintain that it is useless, and as unphilosophical as it is unscriptural, to preach 'only believe' to such persons. Christians have not done their duty, and have not discharged their responsibility when they have told them that Jesus died for them, and that they are to believe in Him!

They have a much harder work to do, and that is to 'open their eyes' to a sense of their danger, and make them, by the power of the Spirit, realize the dreadful truth that they are sinners.

The eyes of the soul must be opened to such a realization of sin, and such an apprehension of the consequences of sin, as shall lead to an earnest desire to be saved from sin.

There is not one instance in the New Testament in which the apostles urged men to believe, or in which a person is narrated as believing, in which we have not good grounds to suppose that these preparatory steps of conviction and repentance had been taken. The only apparent exception was Simon the sorcerer. He, like numbers of people in great religious movements, was carried away by the influence of the meeting and the example of those around him, and professed to believe. Doubtless he did credit the fact that Jesus died on the Cross. He received the facts of Christianity into his mind, and in that sense he became a believer and was baptized. But when the testing point came as to whose interests were paramount with him, his own or God's, then he manifested his true state, and the Apostle said, 'Thy heart is not right in the sight of God.' Nobody is converted whose heart is not right with God. That is the test. If Simon had been converted he would not have supposed that the Holy Ghost could have been bought for money. And Peter added, 'I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.' What further did he say to him? 'Therefore at once believe?' No, he did not. He said, 'Repent . . . and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.' Repent first, and then believe and get this wickedness forgiven. So we get a double lesson in the same passage. This Simon is the only person we have any record of as believing where there is not in the passage itself, taken with its context, reasonable and rational evidence that the preparatory steps of conviction and repentance were taken before the exercise and confession of faith. Simon had this faith of the head, but not of the heart, and therefore it ended in defeat and despair.

Some have written me that you had believed. You had been persuaded into a profession of faith, but no fruits followed. It was not the faith of the heart: it was the faith of the head-like that of Simon's--and it left you worse than it found you, and you have been groping and grovelling ever since. But do not think that was real faith, and that therefore real faith has failed, but be encouraged to begin again, and repent. Try the real thing, for Satan always gets up a counterfeit. Do not go down in despair because the wrong kind of faith did not succeed. God forbid that that should make the real faith of God of none effect.

Look at the three thousand who were converted in a day at Pentecost. What was the first work that Peter did? He drove the knife of God's convincing truth into their hearts and made them cry out. He awoke them to the truth of their almost lost and damned condition, till they longed to know what they must do to be saved. They were so pricked in their hearts, their eyes were so opened to the terrible consequences of their sin, that they cried aloud before the vast multitude, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' He convinced them of sin, and thus followed the order of God.

The eunuch who was converted under Philip on the road to Gaza is often quoted as an illustration of faith; but what state of mind was he in? Was he a careless unconvicted sinner? He was an Ethiopian, a heathen. But where had he been? To Jerusalem to worship the true and living God in the best way he knew and as far as he understood. And what was he doing when Philip found him? He was not content with the mere worship of the Temple; he was searching the Scriptures. He was honestly seeking after God.

The Holy Ghost always knows where such souls are, and He said unto Philip, 'Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.' There was a man seeking God, whose heart was honestly set on finding Him. Philip was to preach Christ, and tell him to believe. That man would have sacrificed or done or lost anything for salvation, and as soon as Philip expounded the way of faith he received it as, of course, all such individuals will.

Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus is another instance. Jesus Christ was the preacher there, and surely He could not be mistaken. Where did He begin? He saw there an honest-hearted man. Saul was sincere, so far as he understood, and if, in any case there needed to be the immediate reception of Christ by faith, it was in his. But the Lord Jesus Christ did not say one word about faith. 'Saul, Saul,' He said, 'why persecutest thou Me?'--tearing the bandages of deception off his eyes, and letting him see the wickedness of his conduct.

When Saul said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' the Lord repeated the accusation and did not come in with the oil of comfort. He said, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.' He ran the knife in again and opened Saul's wounds wider, and sent him with a bleeding heart on to Damascus, where he was three days before he got any healing. God had to send for a poor human instrument, and Saul had to hear and obey before the pardon of his sins was pronounced, and the Holy Ghost came into his soul.

I wonder what Saul was doing those three days. He neither ate nor drank, and he was in the dark. What was he doing? No doubt he was praying. No doubt he was seeking after this Christ who had spoken to him in the way. No doubt he was looking with horror upon his past life and abjuring for ever his accursed antagonism to Jesus Christ and his gospel. Of course, he was bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, according to the divine order. Then came Ananias and preached Christ unto him. He believed unto salvation, the scales fell from his eyes and his heart, and his mouth was filled with praise and thanksgiving.

Cornelius is another instance. But what was the state of his mind and heart? We know that he feared God and wrought righteousness, as far as he was able. He gave alms to the people, and prayed day and night. That is more than some ever did who have lived in gospel times. Yes, Cornelius was seeking God. He honestly wanted to know Him. He was willing at all costs to do His will. Consequently, the Lord sent him the glorious message of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Look what state of mind the Philippian gaoler was in. We see from the whole narrative how his eyes had been opened. The earthquake had done that. Some people need an earthquake before they get their eyes opened, and it has to be a loud one, too. The gaoler's eyes were opened, and he made the best use of his time. He was lashing the backs of the two apostles a little while before.

Here was a change! 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' When a man comes to that state of mind he has nothing more to do but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The gaoler came in trembling and went down on his knees and washed their stripes. When any man gets to that state of mind he will soon be saved, having nothing more to do but to believe.

When is a sinner to believe? When he repents. A gentleman writes to me and says, 'I am afraid I do not realize my sin sufficiently. I have no particular agony on account of sin, but I do see my whole life to have been one huge error and sin.' There is nothing more common than for people to delude themselves on the point of feeling. That gentleman confounds feeling with conviction. He thinks because he has not this extreme agony which some have, therefore he is not sufficiently convinced. Yet such a perception of his true character is given him that he sees his whole life to have been sin. Surely he is convinced, for none but the Holy Ghost could have shown that. Now, the truly repentant soul first sees sin; secondly, he hates sin; thirdly, he renounces sin.

An entirely unawakened soul does not see sin; that is, in its heinousness, in its consequences. He admits that all people are sinners, but he does not see the deadly, damning character of sin. The Holy Ghost alone can open a man's eyes to see this. Without Him, all preaching, even the preaching of angels, might go on to all eternity and it would never convince of sin. If you see sin it is the Holy Ghost who has opened your eyes. If God has thus opened your eyes, does it not augur well that He desires also to save you? He has opened your eyes in order that He may cause you to see light in His light.

As I have said, the true penitent hates sin; that is, his feelings toward sin are quite different from what they were in the past, he could commit sin almost without concern. People do not realize the great change that takes place in them in this matter. It occurs gradually. The very things that now cause them distress were practiced by them every day and gave no concern. There was no hatred of, no dread of sin. Still, hating sin is not being saved from it.

Sin, I say, must be renounced. Here is a man who is daily addicted to drink, and who becomes convinced of sin. The Spirit of God says, 'Will you give up the cup?' Then commences the struggle. Are you to tell that man that he may go on drinking, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved? Or are you to tell him, 'You must put away your sin, and renounce that drink for ever in your heart, in your purpose, in your will, because until you do you cannot exercise faith in the Lord Jesus?'

A servant, we will say, systematically robs his master. He goes to a religious meeting and is convinced. The Spirit of God says: 'You must cut off that dishonesty. You cannot pretend to want to be saved while you go on robbing your master. You must give up that pilfering, and resolve that you will make restitution.' To any who may be addicted to an evil habit I would say, Jesus Christ wants you to forswear that habit in your will, determination and purpose. You have not the power to deliver yourself from it, yet you know that if you had the power to extinguish the force of that evil habit you would do it. You say, 'Would to God I had the power!' That is genuine repentance.

Having become truly penitent, having shown that you hate sin and are willing to renounce it, trust and obey, and expect that it is going to be with you according to His word. The faith of many people is like that

of a person afflicted with some grievous malady. A friend tells him of a wonderful physician who has cured hundreds of such cases, and gives him abundant evidence that this doctor is able and willing to cure him, if only he will commit himself to his treatment. The sick man may thoroughly believe in the testimony of his friend about this physician, and yet for some secret reason he may refuse to put himself into his hands.

There are numbers like that with Jesus Christ. They believe He could cure the malady of sin on certain conditions. They believe He 'is no respecter of persons.' They believe He has done it for hundreds as bad as they, and yet there is some reason why they do not trust Him. They hold back.

Now, what you want is to give your case into His hands and say: 'Lord Jesus, I come as Thou hast bid me, confessing and forsaking sin. If I could, I would jump out of it now and for ever. Thou knowest I come renouncing it, but have not power to save myself from it. I put my sins upon the glorious sacrifice of Thy Son, and trust Thee.' That is faith, and I have never known a soul who came to this and did not become saved.

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