

# Faith

by Harmon A. Baldwin

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*Saving faith is the procuring cause of salvation on man's side, and it involves the purification of the heart through the work of the Holy Spirit.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:21, Acts 15:8, Romans 10:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 11:1, James 2:19, 1 John 5:10

**Topics:** "True Faith", "Sanctification"

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## Description

Harmon A. Baldwin preaches about the importance of genuine faith in the process of salvation and sanctification, emphasizing the need to distinguish between true faith and its counterfeit forms. He highlights that faith is not merely mental assent or resting on promises, but a deep, transformative trust in God's power to cleanse and purify the heart. Baldwin warns against misconceptions such as believing without evidence or relying on easy-going feelings, stressing the necessity of a Spirit-filled life and true surrender to God's work of sanctification.

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## Transcript

"Deep repentance is good," says Fletcher; "gospel self denial is excellent; and a degree of patient resignation in trials is of unspeakable use to attain the perfection of love; but as faith immediately works by love, it is of far more immediate use to purify the soul."

When Peter stood up before the apostles and elders who were considering whether the Gentile converts should be circumcised, after mentioning how God had first chosen him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, he added: "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8, 9).

St. Paul is also in accord with this when he says, "By grace are ye saved through faith." The same sentiment is voiced all through the New Testament. Faith is the great procuring cause of salvation on man's side. By it he appropriates to himself the benefits flowing from the atonement of Christ.

But, as with everything else in the wonderful plan of salvation by grace, the devil and wicked men have succeeded in so counterfeiting faith that we need carefully to distinguish between the genuine article and its base imitation. Because of much erroneous use of the term faith some honest people are afraid to mention it to seekers of holiness lest they should take up with some one of the modern uses which are

neither reasonable nor scriptural. We need have little fear, however, if the conditions of salvation are properly laid down, the nature of saving faith carefully set forth, and the line of distinction between faith and presumption clearly drawn.

There is no difference in kind, or, of necessity, in degree, between the faith that justifies and that which sanctifies. Saving faith, in these two acts of experience, does not differ as to its nature, but only in the object or end for which it is exercised. In the one act it is exercised for the forgiveness of sins, and in the other for the cleansing of the heart. The arguments and illustrations that apply to the one exercise will apply nearly if not quite as well to the other. Hence, in the quotations we shall soon give from Wesley and Fletcher the fact that at times they were talking to penitent sinners and at other times to Christians need cause no confusion. Sometimes they addressed both classes at once, using the same words to describe the faith of a seeking sinner and that of one seeking heart purity.

I. Let us note what saving or sanctifying faith is not. It is not simply a mental assent to the general truths of redemption, that Jesus Christ lived, suffered, died for sinners, etc. Nearly everybody in Christianized countries believes these things, but how few comparatively believe them with any saving effect.

Faith is not simply acknowledging that Jesus died for me, and concluding that, as a consequence, I may be sanctified. We once knew a preacher to tell a man who believed that Jesus died for him, that because of this it might be that he had been saved at some time in the past -- when he did not know it. Seekers are often urged to take Christ as their sanctifier, simply because he died for them, without a word being spoken about conditions that must be met before this faith can be exercised. Confusion and deception result almost inevitably from accepting such teaching.

Faith is not believing without evidence. There is a method of argument sometimes used by some workers in order to persuade seekers that, because cleansing is promised, they should declare the work done, and that if they hesitate to do so, they thereby displease God. This reasoning may at first glance seem plausible and honoring to God and his promises, but it is certainly a very insecure ground on which to build one's hope of full salvation. A passage from God's word should keep us from error at this point: "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (1 John 5: 10). Not "will have the witness," but "hath" it now". We do not undervalue the promises, but would suggest that they never save; they are grounds of and helps to faith, but it takes the merit of the blood of Christ to save. "Believing without the evidence," as taught by some, is likely to be believing an untruth.

Faith is not merely resting on the promises, in the commonly accepted way of doing. Hungry souls are led to make a mental surrender of all, and then told to rest on the promises and wait for the witness, which they may expect to come at any time. Some seeking souls are led by their teachers to repeat this process from time to time, but the expected blessing never comes; and, finally, they give up in despair and are put down as backsliders; or it may be they become fighters of holiness.

Faith is not that easy-going, restful feeling sometimes miscalled "living by faith." People who accept this doctrine usually settle into a place where they can talk sweetly of Jesus, and can use honeyed phrases about the sweet place of rest they have found, while they woefully lack in devotion, and in that breaking up of their hearts before God, without which the true "rest of faith" can never be attained. There is a sameness about their lives and testimonies, never very high and never very low, which they mistake for holiness or sanctification. They never shed the fragrance, however, that comes from tarrying with the Lord, nor manifest the courage of those who have gained the victory over sin in a mortal conflict. The sweetness

of a holy life is lacking. Emptiness and hollowness rather than the fullness of the Spirit are ruling characteristics. Oh, for the Spirit-filled life!

Faith is not the laying of one's all on the altar, and there claiming the work done, feeling or no feeling. Those who teach this as the way like to sing,

"My all is on the altar,

And I'm waiting for the fire;

Waiting, waiting,

I'm waiting for the fire."

But the trouble is that the fire seldom if ever falls. Moreover, this theory, that "the altar sanctifies the gift," when applied to seeking holiness is unscriptural. This appears from the following considerations.

1. When Jesus used this expression he had no reference to religious experience, but simply to the sacrifices of the temple. It is wrong to wrest a passage from its connection to make it teach any doctrine, no matter though that doctrine be right in itself, and clearly taught in other places. But this doctrine is taught in no passage of the Bible, not even by inference. Those who teach this theory use our Lord's words literally. There might be some excuse if they were only used as an illustration, but even then the effect would not be changed. We are told that Christ is the altar, the seeker the gift, and, that as soon as the gift is placed on Christ the work of cleansing is done. But by a cold assent of the mind to say, "My all is on the altar," and then take the rest for granted, is going beyond the bounds of scripture and reason. We have no other way of knowing that the Lord completes his work but by the witness of the Spirit; and if God really saves one he will without fail witness to the fact. It is he that should do the witnessing, and not ourselves. In this work there is a part that man does and a part that God does. If our consciences bear us witness that we have done our best, well and good; but it is going too far to assume God's part, and, without his witness, to say the work is done. This leaves God entirely out of the matter so far as anything practical in the work of sanctification is concerned, and makes man's spirit the only witness.

But with many who teach that "the altar sanctifies the gift" it is not Christ who is the altar, but rather an indefinite something like a mourner's bench, or a kind of sacrificial altar, upon which they put their time, talents, money, reputation, all they know, and all they do not know, for time and for eternity (and sometimes they put on their tobacco, jewelry, stylish dress, worldliness, secret societies, and what not), and then proceed to climb thereon themselves and complacently sing,

"My all is on the altar,

And I'm waiting for the fire."

2. Again, sanctification has two meanings: first, to set apart, to consecrate; second, to purify or cleanse. The altar never cleansed the beast that was placed on it. That had to be done before the victim touched the altar, and when it touched the altar it became in a peculiar sense God's property, set apart for his worship, and was sanctified by the altar in that sense only.

Dr. Daniel Steele has written as follows on this important subject:

When a thing is laid on God's altar it is not purified, but only consecrated. When the phrase 'I lay myself on the altar,' is used by a seeker of entire sanctification he has a wrong formula, for impurity has no place on the holy altar of God. Its place is in the cleansing stream issuing from the pierced side of the Son of God. In the Wesleyan sense no person in the scriptures was ever sanctified by being laid on the altar of God, or by touching it. The altar theory of sanctification is not found in the writings of either Wesley or in the volumes of his great defender, John Fletcher, nor in any of the standard Methodist theologians, Watson, Raymond, Pope and Miley. In fact it originated in America about the year 1840, in the writings of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer, who regarded it as a great discovery. It was her short way to entire sanctification. Christ is the altar; the altar sanctifieth the gift; lay yourself on the altar and you are sanctified. The error is in confounding the two meanings of sanctify, or in substituting purification, the work of the Holy Spirit, for consecration, man's work. \* \* \* \*

The more thoughtful friends of the precious doctrine of full salvation adhered to Wesley's statement that 'NO ONE OUGHT TO BELIEVE THAT THE WORK IS DONE TILL THERE IS ADDED THE TESTIMONY OF THE SPIRIT WITNESSING HIS ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION AS CLEARLY AS HIS JUSTIFICATION.' That souls have experienced entire sanctification while asserting 'the altar sanctifieth,' we do not deny. They had real faith in Christ despite the erroneous formula. But many have made the same assertion and have found themselves in great perplexity. The altar theory has become a snare to them. Their faith was mere presumption, an unwarranted inference that God does his part because they have done their part, as they suppose. \* \* \* \* Many a person has, under erroneous instruction, thought that he laid himself on the altar and has been induced to say, 'The altar sanctifies the gift,' and has kept repeating this assertion for months and years, without realizing any inward change. Some continue thus till death, but many more in despair pass into a state of indifference and unbelief respecting the question of purity of heart in this life. Bishop William Taylor styles the altar theory 'the devil's switch just outside the depot of full salvation, by which he switches off seeking souls, and causes them to wander round and round, and to fail of entering in.' The so-called holiness evangelist is strongly tempted to adopt this theory, because it enables him in his brief term of labor in any church to count up as sanctified as many as he can persuade to say, 'I am on the altar, and the altar sanctifies the gift.'

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