

Believe and Be Saved

by Horatius Bonar

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in making us believing men.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Faith", "Salvation"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes that it is solely the Holy Spirit that draws individuals to Christ, highlighting the necessity of faith as the only link between sinners and the Savior. He explains that faith is not a work or merit but a simple acceptance of God's truth regarding Christ's sacrifice. Bonar stresses the importance of understanding Scripture to grasp the nature of faith and salvation, asserting that true belief is rooted in God's testimony rather than personal efforts. He warns against self-righteousness and the misconception that faith must be earned, urging believers to trust in the completed work of Christ for salvation.

Transcript

It is the Holy Spirit alone that can draw us to the cross and fasten us to the Saviour. He who thinks he can do without the Spirit, has yet to learn his own sinfulness and helplessness. The gospel would be no good news to the dead in sin, if it did not tell of the love and power of the divine Spirit, as explicitly as it announces the love and power of the divine Substitute.

But, while keeping this in mind, we may try to learn from Scripture what is written concerning the bond which connects us individually with the cross of Christ; making us thereby partakers of the pardon and the life which that cross reveals.

Thus then it is written, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

Faith then is the link, the one link, between the sinner and the Sin-bearer. It is not faith, as a work or exercise of our minds, which must be properly performed in order to qualify or fit us for pardon. It is not faith, as a religious duty, which must be gone through according to certain rules, in order to induce Christ to give us the benefits of his work. It is faith, simply as a receiver of the divine record concerning the Son of God. It is not faith considered as the source of holiness, as containing in itself the seed of all spiritual excellence and good works; it is faith alone, recognizing simply the completeness of the great sacrifice for sin, and the trueness of the Father's testimony to that completeness; as Paul writes to the Thessalonians,

"our testimony among you was believed." It is not faith as a piece of money or a thing of merit; but faith taking God at his word, and giving him credit for speaking the honest truth, when he declares that "Christ died for the ungodly," and that the life which that death contains for sinners, is to be had without money, and without price."

But let us learn the things concerning this faith, from the lips of God himself. I lay great stress on this in dealing with inquirers. For the more that we can fix the sinner's eye and conscience upon God's own words, the more likely shall we be to lead him aright, and to secure the quickening presence of that Almighty Spirit who alone can give sight to the blind. One great difficulty which the inquirer finds in such cases, is that of unlearning much of his past experience and teaching. Hence the importance of studying the divine words themselves, by which the sinner is made wise unto salvation. For they both unteach the false and imperfect, and teach the true and the perfect.

Let us mark how frequently and strongly God has spoken respecting faith and believing. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." "Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." "The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood...to declare his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

"He that believeth shall be saved." "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life; 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. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life." "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life." "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." "He that believeth on me shall never thirst." "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life." "He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name." "By him all that believeth are justified from all things." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "To him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." "It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." "This is his commandment, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God."

"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." "He that believeth not shall be

damned."

These are some of the many texts which teach us what the link is between the sinner and the great salvation. They show that it is our belief of God's testimony, concerning his own free love, and the work of his Son, that makes us partakers of the blessings which that testimony reveals. They do not indeed ascribe any meritorious or saving virtue to our act of faith. They show us that it is the object of faith, - the person, or thing, or truth of which faith lays hold, - that is the soul's peace and consolation. But still they announce most solemnly the necessity of believing, and the greatness of the sin of unbelief. In them God demands the immediate faith of all who hear his testimony. Yet he gives no countenance to the self-righteousness of those who are trying to perform the act of faith, in order to qualify themselves for the favor of God; whose religion consists in performing acts of a certain kind; whose comfort arises from thinking of these well-performed acts; and whose assurance comes from the summing up of these at certain seasons, and dwelling upon the superior quality of many of them.

In some places the word trust occurs where perhaps we might have expected faith. But the reason of this is plain; the testimony which faith receives, is testimony to a person and his good will, in which case, belief of the testimony and confidence in the person are things inseparable. Our reception of God's testimony is confidence in God himself, and in Jesus Christ his Son. Hence it is that the Scripture speaks of trust or confidence as that which saves us, as if it would say to the sinner, "Such is the gracious character of God, that you have only to put your case into his hands, however bad it be, and entrust your soul to his keeping, and you shall be saved."

In some places we are said to be saved by the knowledge of God or of Christ; that is simply knowing God as he has made himself known to us in Jesus Christ. (Isa. liii.11; 1 Tim. ii.4; 2 Pet. ii.20). Thus Jesus spoke, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." And as if to make simplicity more simple, the Apostle, in speaking of the facts of Christ's death, and burial, and resurrection, says, "By which ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you." [23]

The God connects salvation with believing, trusting, knowing, remembering. Yet the salvation is not in our act of believing, trusting, knowing, or remembering; it is in the thing or person believed on, trusted, known, remembered. Nor is salvation given as a reward for believing and knowing. The things believed and known are our salvation. Nor are we saved or comforted by thinking about our act of believing and ascertaining that it possesses all the proper ingredients and qualities which would induce God to approve of it, and of us because of it. This would be making faith a meritorious, or, at least, a qualifying work; and then grace would be no more grace. It would really be making our faith a part of Christ's work, - the finishing stroke put to the great understanding of the Son of God, which, otherwise, would have been incomplete, or, at least, unsuitable for the sinner, as a sinner. To the man that makes his faith and his trust his rest, and tries to pacify his conscience by getting up evidence of their solidity and excellence, we say, miserable comforters are they all! I get light by using my eyes; not by thinking about my use of them, nor by a scientific analysis of their component parts. So I get peace by, and in believing; not by thinking about my faith, or trying to prove to myself how well I have performed the believing act. We might as well extract water from the desert sands as peace from our own act of faith. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ will do everything for us; believing in our own faith, or trusting in our own trust, will do nothing.

Thus faith is the bond between us and the Son of God; and it is so, not because of anything in itself, but because it is only through the medium of truth, as known and believed, that the soul can get hold of things

or persons. Faith is nothing, save as it lays hold of Christ; and it does so by laying hold of the truth or testimony concerning him. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," says the apostle. "Ye shall know the truth," says the Lord, "and the truth shall make you free," and again, "because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not...And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" We have also such expressions as these: "Those that know the truth;" "those that obey not the truth;" "The truth as it is in Jesus;" "belief of the truth;" "acknowledging of the truth;" "the way of truth;" "we are of the truth;" "destitute of the truth;" "sanctify them through thy truth;" "I speak forth the words of truth;" "the Spirit of truth will guide you into all truth." Most memorable in connection with this subject, are the Lord's warnings in the parable of the sower, specially the following: - "The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are they that hear: then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." The words, too, of the beloved disciple are no less so: - "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe;" and, again, "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

This truth regarding Christ and his sacrificial work, the natural man hates, because he hates Christ himself. "They hated me," says the Lord; nay, more, they hated me without a cause." It is not error that man hates, but truth; and hence the necessity for the Holy Spirit's work to remove that hatred, - to make the sinner even so much as willing to know the truth or the True One. Yet there is no backwardness on the part of God to give that Spirit; - and the first dawnings of inquiry and anxiety show that something beyond flesh and blood is at work in the soul.

But though it needs the power of the divine Spirit to make us believing men, this is not because faith is a mysterious thing, a great exercise or effort of soul, which must be very accurately gone through in order to make it acceptable, but because of our dislike to the truth believed, and our enmity to the Being in whom we are asked to confide. Believing is the simplest of all mental processes; yet not the less is the power of God needed. Let not the inquirer mystify or magnify faith in order to give it merit or importance in itself, so that by its superior texture or quality it may justify him; yet never, on the other hand, let him try to simplify it for the purpose of making the Spirit's work unnecessary. The more simple that he sees it to be, the more will he see his own guilt, in so deliberately refusing to believe, and his need of the divine Helper to overcome the fearful opposition of the natural heart to the simple reception of the truth.

The difficulty of believing has its real root in pure self-righteousness; and the struggles to believe, the endeavors to trust, of which men speak, are the indications of this self-righteousness. So far are these spiritual exercises from being tokens for good, they are often mere expressions of spiritual pride, - evidences of the desperate strength of self-righteousness. It is worse than vain, then, to try to comfort an anxious soul by pointing to these exercises or efforts as proofs of existing faith. They are proofs either of ignorance or of unbelief, - proofs of the sinner's determination to do anything rather than believe that all is done. Doubts are not the best evidences of faith; and attempts at performing this great thing called faith are mere proofs of blindness to the finished propitiation of the Son of God.

To do some great thing called faith, in order to win God's favour, the sinner has no objection; nay, it is just what he wants, for it gives him the opportunity of working for his salvation. But he rejects the idea of taking his stand upon a work already done, and so ceasing to exercise his soul in order to effect a reconciliation, for which all that is needed was accomplished eighteen hundred years ago, upon the cross of Him who "was made sin for us, though he knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

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