

# Advice to the Inquiring Sinner

by W.G.T. Shedd

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*The first step in salvation is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and the order of the invitations is crucial to understanding the process of salvation.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 11:28, Matthew 16:24, John 6:37, Acts 16:29, Hebrews 12:2

**Topics:** "Faith Alone", "Salvation By Grace"

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## Description

W.G.T. Shedd emphasizes the importance of faith as the first and essential step towards salvation, contrary to urging actions like giving one's heart to God or submitting to Him. He explains that salvation is a gift from God received through faith in Christ's atoning work, not achieved through human efforts. Shedd warns against deviating from the scriptural method of salvation, which centers on believing in Jesus Christ as the initial act before any other works or submissions.

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## Transcript

"Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And 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." Acts16:29-31

It is not right or safe to depart from the method prescribed in the Scriptures for an anxious soul to take in order to salvation. Even a slight deviation, however well intended, works mischief. We have heard during seasons of religious awakening, the inquirer exhorted to "give his heart to God," to "submit to God," to "resolve to serve Christ." This is not the direction which Paul gave to the anxious jailer, and neither does it agree with the declarations of our Lord respecting the particular kind of act which man must perform in order to salvation. The Jews once came to the Redeemer asking what they must do to work the works of God, and his reply was, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." The first act for the soul in order to salvation is the act of faith. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," is the first and only direction, therefore, which should be given to an inquiring sinner. When this has been done, other things will follow naturally, and be done in their order and place; but until it has been done, not a step toward heaven can be taken.

There are objections to the other direction to which we have alluded, which we will specify: In the first place, when an inquiring person is bidden to give his heart to God, he is commanded to present something to God, instead of being invited to receive something from him. The gospel method is thus wholly reversed. The Scripture representation of the way of salvation indisputably makes it, from first to last, a

blessing which comes down from God to man. It does not go up from man to God. "Ask and ye shall receive." Christ is appointed "to give both faith and repentance," as well as the remission of sins. Even the very first exercises of sorrow for sin, and the very first and faintest exercise of faith, are wrought by God. When, therefore, a sinful man is bidden, as the first act upon his part, to give his heart to God, he is converted from a recipient of salvation to an agent and author of it. He is urged to do a "work" as the very first thing in the process. And it is a work which is the most difficult of performance, for a helpless and guilt-smitten sinner, that can be conceived of. In reality, the whole immense burden is thrown upon the poor despairing soul, in the very outset. He is told that if he will give his heart to God, if he will submit his will to Christ, his salvation is assured. But this is to put in the forefront of the religious experience something that does not belong there. No man can surrender and sweetly submit his heart to God, unless he believes that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.

We are not speaking, of course, of the succession in time. The two things may not be distinguishable in time measured by the clock, but in the order of nature the soul must first accept and receive Christ as its atonement before God, before it can become subject and submissive to his will. And, therefore, this act of faith must be urged upon the inquirer first of any, and before any other act is spoken of or enjoined.

In the second place, this direction conceals Christ and his sacrificial work from the guilt-smitten soul. While it is engaged in the attempt to overcome the love of self, and to give itself wholly to God, it cannot see the cross, because, if for no other reason, it is too much absorbed. It is looking within, instead of looking out and away to the Lamb of God. It is summoning its energies to overcome its own self-love, and subdue its obstinate aversion to holiness, instead of sending up an imploring and believing glance to the merciful Redeemer who "of God is made unto it wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification." The true answer to the sinner's inquiry, "What shall I do?" is, to say to him, "Do nothing only believe." But if the answer that is given be the one which we are criticizing; if he be told to give his heart to God; he is bidden to "do," and this will prevent his "believing." No one can do two things at once; and if the anxious inquirer be straining every muscle to its utmost tension in order to subdue his native depravity, how can he relax every muscle and in helpless impotence cast himself upon Christ? We cannot open and shut the hand in one and the same instant, and by one and the same volition. Our Lord affirms that his yoke is easy. It is so, because the act of faith is not a strenuous and vehement act, but a trusting and recipient one. It does not try to originate holiness by its own volition, but it longs to receive the holiness which is freely given it of God. The eye and not the hand is the member of the body which the Holy Spirit has chosen, by which to explain the act by which salvation is secured. Look unto me, and be ye saved. Behold the Lamb of God. We are not to raise the hand and lift at a burden; we are not to raise the foot and run a long and severe race; but we are simply to open the eye and gaze steadily upon the atoning Christ, dying a sacrifice for our guilt.

It is indeed true that after faith has come, after the soul has beheld the cross, after the eye has performed its function, the hand and the foot and all the members of the body come into requisition. Having accepted and received Christ by faith, and having thereby been delivered from condemnation, the soul is then to run a race, and fight a fight, and carry a burden. But the previous faith makes all this activity easy and successful. When the eye has seen the Lord, it is easy then to lift the hand for him. Faith works by love, and the love of Christ constraineth us. In giving advice, therefore, to inquiring souls, we should not direct their attention, first of all, to the results of faith in Christ, but to faith itself.

The surrender of the heart to God, entire submission to his will, a steady and strong determination to obey the commandments of Christ, renunciation of the world as the chief good, these fruits of belief on the Lord Jesus Christ ought to be kept in the background while the soul is urged, first of all, and as the one thing

needful, to cast itself humbly and penitently upon the atoning work of the Son of God. There is no danger of undervaluing the consequences of faith, by thus laying stress upon faith in the outset; for only from faith as the root can all these consequences spring. He who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ finds that in so doing he has given his heart to God as the natural result. But he who attempts to give his heart to God, before he has believed on the Son of God, is attempting an impossibility, and that too by a dead lift.

There are two invitations given by the Lord Jesus Christ, which cover the whole subject of a sinner's salvation. One is an invitation to come to him, and the other an, invitation to come after him. Examples of the first are: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt.11 :28. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. Examples of the second are: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." Matt.11:29. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Matt.16:24.

The first of these is an invitation to come to the Saviour, by trusting penitently in his atoning blood in order to pardon and reconciliation with God's holiness. The second is an invitation to come after the Saviour, by imitating his character and example. And they must be accepted in the order in which the Saviour has placed them. A reversal of the order is fatal. If the sinner attempts to come after the Saviour before he has come to him, to copy the Redeemer's life and conduct without seeking peace with God by trust in the Redeemer's offering for sin, it will be an utter failure. A pacified conscience and a sense of being forgiven, must go before all true obedience. If, again, the sinner separates these two invitations, the consequence is equally fatal. If he attempts to obey the first without obeying the second, to come to Christ without coming after him, he is James's antinomian and his faith is dead faith without works. And if he attempts to obey the second invitation without obeying the first, to come after Christ without coming to him, he is Paul's legalist, who has no true sense of sin, rejects Christ's expiation, and expects salvation by moral character and a moral life.

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