

Studies on Saving Faith

Part 2 - CHAPTER 5

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Part 2

CHAPTER 5 – ITS EVIDENCES

The great majority of those who read this article will, doubtless, be they who profess to be in possession of a saving faith. To all such we would put the question, *Where is your proof? What effects has it produced in you?* A tree is known by its fruits, and a fountain by the waters which issue from it; so the nature of your faith may be ascertained by a careful examination of what it is bringing forth. We say, "a careful examination, for all fruit is not fit for eating nor all water for drinking; so all works are not the effects of a faith which saves. Reformation is not regeneration, and a changed life does not always indicate a changed heart. Have you been saved from a dislike of God's commandments and a disrelish of His holiness? Have you been saved from pride, covetousness, murmuring? Have you been delivered from the love of this world, from the fear of man, from the reigning power of every sin?"

The heart of fallen man is thoroughly depraved: its thoughts and imaginations being only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). It is full of corrupt desires and affections, which exert themselves and influence man in all he does. Now the Gospel comes into direct opposition with these selfish lusts and corrupt affections, both in the root and in the fruit of them (Titus 2:11,12). There is no greater duty that the Gospel urges upon our souls than the mortifying and destroying of them, and this indispensably, if we intend to be made partakers of its promises (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5-8). Hence, the first real work of faith is to cleanse the soul from these pollutions, and therefore we read,

"They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24).

Mark well it is not that they "ought to" do so, but that they have actually, in some measure or degree.

It is one thing to really think we believe a thing, it is quite another to actually do so. So fickle is the human heart that, even in natural things men know not their own minds. In temporal affairs what a man really believes is best ascertained by his practice. Suppose I meet a traveler in a narrow gorge and tell him that just ahead is an impassable river, and that the bridge across it is rotten: if he declines to turn back, am I not warranted in concluding that he does not believe me? Or, if a physician tells me a certain disease holds me in its grip, and that in a short time it will prove fatal if I do not use a prescribed remedy which is sure to heal; would he not be justified in inferring that I did not trust his judgment, were he to see me not only ignoring his directions, but following a contrary course? Likewise, to believe there is a Hell, and yet run unto it; to believe that sin continued in will damn, and yet live in it—to what purpose is it to boast of such a faith?

Now from what was before us in the last article, it should be plain beyond all room for doubt, that when God imparts saving faith to a soul, radical and real effects will follow. One cannot be raised from the dead without there being a consequent walking in newness of life. One cannot be the subject of a miracle of grace being wrought in the heart without a noticeable change being apparent to all who know him. Where a supernatural root has been implanted, supernatural fruit must issue therefrom. Not that sinless perfection is attained in this life, nor that the evil principle, the flesh, is eradicated from our beings, or even purified. Nevertheless, there is now a yearning after perfection, there is a spirit resisting the flesh, there is a striving against sin. And more, there is a growing in grace, and a pressing forward along the "narrow way" which leadeth to Heaven.

One serious error so widely propagated today in "orthodox" circles, which is responsible for so many souls being deceived, is the seemingly Christ-honoring doctrine that it is "His blood which alone saves any sinner." Ah, Satan is very clever: he knows exactly which bait to use for every place in which he fishes. Many a company would indignantly resent a preacher's telling them that, getting baptized and eating the Lord's supper were God's appointed means for saving the soul; yet most of these same people will readily accept the lie that it is only by the blood of Christ that we can be saved. That is true Godwards, but it is not true manwards. The work of the Spirit in us is equally essential as the work of Christ for us. Let the reader carefully ponder the whole of Titus 3:5.

Salvation is twofold: it is both legal and experimental, and it consists of justification and sanctification. Moreover, I owe my salvation not only to the Son, but to all three persons of the Godhead. Alas, how little is this realized today, and how little it is preached. First and primarily, I owe my salvation to God the Father, who ordained and planned it, and who chose me unto salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13). In Titus 2:10 it is the Father who is denominated "God our Savior." Secondly and meritoriously, I owe my salvation to the obedience and sacrifice of God the Son incarnate, who performed as my Sponsor everything which the law required, and satisfied all its demands upon me. Thirdly and efficaciously, I owe my salvation to the regenerating, sanctifying and preserving operations of the Spirit: note that His work is made just as prominent in Luke 15:8-10 as is the Shepherd's in Luke 15:4-7! As Titus 3:5 so plainly affirms, God "saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"; and it is the presence of His "fruit" in my heart and life which furnishes the immediate evidence of my salvation.

"With the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10).

Thus it is the heart which we must first examine in order to discover evidences of the presence of a saving faith. And first, God's Word speaks of "purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). Of old the Lord said, "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved" (Jeremiah 4:14). A heart that is

being purified by faith (cf. 1 Peter 1:22), is one that has turned from all impure idols, and is fixed upon a pure Object. It drinks from a pure Fountain, delights in a pure law (Romans 7:22), and looks forward to spending eternity with a pure Savior (1 John 3:3). It loathes all that is foul and filthy—spiritually as well as morally—yea, hates the very garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 1:23). Contrariwise, it loves all that is holy, lovely and Christlike.

"The pure in heart shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Heart purity is absolutely essential to fit us for dwelling in that place into which there shall in nowise enter anything "that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination" (Revelation 21:27).

Perhaps a little fuller definition is called for. Purifying the heart by faith consists of, first the purifying of the understanding, by the shining in of Divine light, so as to cleanse it from error. Second, in the purifying the conscience, so as to cleanse it from guilt. Third, the purifying of the will, so as to cleanse it from self-will and self-seeking. Fourth, the purifying of the affections, so as to cleanse them from the love of all that is evil. In Scripture the "heart" includes all these four faculties. A deliberate purpose to continue in any one sin cannot consist with a pure heart.

Again; saving faith is always evidenced by an humble heart. Faith lays the soul low, for it discovers its own vileness, emptiness, impotency. It realizes its former sinfulness, and present unworthiness. It is conscious of its weaknesses and wants, its carnality and corruptions. Nothing more exalts Christ than faith, and nothing more debases a man. In order to magnify the riches of His grace, God has selected faith as the fittest instrument, and this, because it is that which causes us to go entirely out from ourselves unto Him. Faith, realizing we have nothing but sin and wretchedness, comes unto Christ as an empty-handed beggar, to receive all from Him. Faith empties a man of self-conceit, self-confidence, and self-righteousness, and makes him seem nothing, that Christ may be all in all. The strongest faith is always accompanied by the greatest humility, accounting self the greatest of sinners and unworthy of the least favor: see Matthew 8:8- 10.

Again, saving faith is always found in a tender heart.

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

An unregenerate heart is as hard as a stone, full of pride and presumption. It is quite unmoved by the sufferings of Christ, in the sense that they act as no deterrent against self-will and self-pleasing. But the real Christian is moved by the love of Christ, and says, How can I sin against His dying love for me? When overtaken by a fault, there is passionate relenting and bitter mourning. O my reader, do you know what it is to be melted before God, for you to be

heartbroken with anguish over sinning against and grieving such a Savior? Ah, it is not the absence of sin, but the grieving over it which distinguishes the child of God from empty professors.

Another characteristic of saving faith is that it "worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). It is not inactive, but energetic. That faith which is "of the operation of God" (Colossians 2:12), is a mighty principle of power, diffusing spiritual energy to all the faculties of the soul and enlisting them in the service of God. Faith is a principle of life by which the Christian lives unto God; a principle of motion, by which he walks to Heaven, along the highway of holiness; a principle of strength, by which he opposes the flesh, the world, and the Devil.

"Faith in the heart of a Christian is like the salt that was thrown into the corrupt fountain, that made the naughty waters good and the barren land fruitful. Hence it is that there followeth an alteration of life and conversation, and so bringeth forth fruit accordingly: 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good fruit'; which treasure is faith" (John Bunyan in Christian Behavior).

Where a saving faith is rooted in the heart it grows up and spreads itself in all the branches of obedience, and is filled with the fruits of righteousness. It makes its possessor act for God, and thereby evidences that it is a living thing and not merely a lifeless theory. Even a newborn infant, though it cannot walk and work as a grown man, yet it breathes and cries, moves and sucks, and thereby shows it is alive. So with the one who has been born again: there is a breathing unto God, a crying after Him, a moving toward Him, a clinging to Him. But the infant does not long remain a babe; there is growth, increasing strength, enlarged activities. Nor does the Christian remain stationary: he goes "from strength to strength" (Psalm 84:7).

But observe carefully, faith not only "worketh," but it "worketh by love." It is at this point that the "works" of the Christian differ from those of the mere religionist.

"The papist works that he may merit Heaven. The Pharisee works that he may be applauded, that he may be seen of men, that he may have a good esteem with them. The slave works lest he should be beaten, lest he should be damned. The formalist works that he may stop the mouth of conscience, that will be accusing him, if he do nothing. The ordinary professor works because it is a shame to do nothing where so much is professed. But the true believer works because he loves. This is the principal, if not the only motive, that sets him a-work. If there were no other motive within or without him, yet would he be working for God, acting for Christ, because he loves Him; it is like fire in his bones" (David Clarkson).

Saving Faith is ever accompanied by an obedient walk.

"Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, 'I know him,' and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3,4). Make no mistake on this point: infinite as are the merits of Christ's sacrifice, mighty as is the potency of His priestly intercession, yet they avail not for any who continue in the path of disobedience. He acknowledges none to be His disciples save them who do homage to Him as their Lord. 'Too many professors pacify themselves with the idea that they possess imputed righteousness, while they are indifferent to the sanctifying work of the Spirit. They refuse to put on the garment of obedience, they reject the white linen which is the righteousness of saints. They thus reveal their self-will, their enmity to God, and their non-submission to His Son. Such men may talk what they will about justification by faith, and salvation by grace, but they are rebels at heart; they have not on the wedding-dress any more than the self-righteous, whom they so eagerly condemn. The fact is, if we wish for the blessings of grace, we must in our hearts submit to the rules of grace without picking and choosing" (C.H. Spurgeon on "The Wedding Garment").

Once more: saving faith is precious, for, like gold, it will endure trial (1 Peter 1:7). A genuine Christian fears no test: he is willing, yea, wishes to be tried by God Himself. He cries, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart" (Psalm 26:2).

Therefore is he willing for his faith to be tried by others, for he shuns not the touchstone of Holy Writ. He frequently tries himself, for where so much is at stake, he must be sure. He is anxious to know the worst as well as the best. The preaching pleases him best which is most searching and discriminating. He is loath to be deluded with vain hopes. He would not be flattered into a high conceit of his spiritual state without grounds. When challenged, he complies with the apostle's advice in 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Herein does the real Christian differ from the formalist. The presumptuous professor is filled with pride, and having a high opinion of himself, is quite sure that he has been saved by Christ. He disdains any searching tests, and considers self-examination to be highly injurious and destructive of faith. That preaching pleases him best which keeps at a respectable distance, which comes not near his conscience, which makes no scrutiny of his heart. To preach to him of the finished work of Christ and the eternal security of all who believe in Him, strengthens his false peace and feeds his carnal confidence. Should a real servant of God seek to convince him that his hope is a delusion, and his confidence presumptuous, he would regard him as an enemy, as Satan seeking to fill him with doubts. There is more hope of a murderer being saved than of his being disillusioned.

Another characteristic of saving faith is that it gives the heart victory over all the vanities and vexations of things below.

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

Observe that this is not an ideal after which the Christian strives, but an actuality of present experience. In this the saint is conformed to his Head:

"Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Christ overcame it for His people, and now He overcomes it in them. He opens their eyes to see the hollowness and worthlessness of the best which this world has to offer, and weans their hearts from it by satisfying them with spiritual things. So little does the world attract the genuine child of God, that he longs for the time to come when God shall take him out of it. Alas, that so very few of those now bearing the name of Christ have any real experimental acquaintance with these things. Alas, that so many are deceived by a faith which is not a saving one.

"He only is a Christian who lives for Christ. Many persons think they can be Christians on easier terms than these. They think it is enough to trust in Christ while they do not live for Him. But the Bible teaches us that if we are partakers of Christ's death, we are also partakers of His life. If we have any such appreciation of His love in dying for us as to lead us to confide in the merits of His death, we shall be constrained to consecrate our lives to His service. And this is the only evidence of the genuineness of our faith" (Charles Hodge on 2 Corinthians 5:15).

Reader, are the things mentioned above actualized in your own experience? If they are not, how worthless and wicked is your profession!

"It is therefore exceedingly absurd for any to pretend that they have a good heart while they live a wicked life, or do not bring forth the fruit of universal holiness in their practice. Men that live in ways of sin, and yet flatter themselves that they shall go to Heaven, expecting to be received hereafter as holy persons, without a holy practice, act as though they expected to make a fool of their Judge. Which is implied in what the apostle says (speaking of men's doing good works and living a holy life, thereby exhibiting evidence of their title to everlasting life), 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap' (Galatians 6:7). As much as to say, Do not deceive yourselves with an expectation of reaping life everlasting hereafter, if you do not sow to the Spirit here; it is in vain to think that God will be made a fool of by you" (Jon. Edwards in Religious Affections).

That which Christ requires from His disciples is that they should magnify and glorify Him in this world, and that, by living holily to Him and suffering patiently for Him. Nothing is so honoring to Christ as that those who bear His name should, by their holy obedience, make manifest the power of His love over their hearts and lives. Contrariwise nothing is so great a reproach to Him, nothing more

dishonors Him, than for those who are living to please self and who are conformed to this world, should cloak their wickedness under His holy name. A Christian is one who has taken Christ for his example in all things: then how great the insult which is done Him by those claiming to be Christians whose daily lives show they have no respect for His godly example. They are a stench in His nostrils; they are a cause of grievous sorrow to His real disciples; they are the greatest hindrance of all to the progress of His cause on earth; and they shall yet find that the hottest places in Hell have been reserved for them. O that they would either abandon their course of self-pleasing, or drop the profession of that Name which is above every name.

Should the Lord be pleased to use this article in shattering the false confidence of some deluded souls, and should they earnestly inquire, Then how am I to obtain a genuine and saving faith? We answer, use the means which God has prescribed. When faith be His gift, He gives it in His own way; and if we desire to receive it, then we must put ourselves in that way wherein He is wont to communicate it. Faith is the work of God, but He works it not immediately, but through the channels of His appointed means. The means prescribed cannot effect faith of themselves. They are no further effectual than as instruments in the hands of Him who is the principle cause. Though He has not tied Himself to them, yet He has confined us. Though He be free, yet the means are necessary to us.

The first means is prayer.

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you" (Ezekiel 36:26).

Here is a gracious promise, but in what way will He accomplish it, and similar ones? Listen, "Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Ezekiel 36:37).

Cry earnestly to God for a new heart, for His regenerating Spirit, for the gift of saving faith. Prayer is a universal duty. Though an unbeliever sin in praying (as in everything else), yet it is not a sin for him to pray.

The second means is the written Word, heard (John 17:20, 1 Corinthians 3:5), or read (2 Timothy 3:15). Said David, "I will never forget Thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me" (Psalm 119:93).

The Scriptures are the Word of God; through them He speaks. Then read them: asking Him to speak life, power, deliverance, peace, to your heart. May the Lord deign to add His blessing.

PART 3

COMING TO CHRIST

By way of introduction let us bring before the readers the following Scriptures.

- (1) "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" John 5:40.
- (2) "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28.
- (3) "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" John 6:44.
- (4) "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.
- (5) "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" Luke 14:26,27.
- (6) "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious" 1 Peter 2:4.
- (7) "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" Hebrews 7:25.

The first of these passages applies to every unregenerate man and woman on this earth. While he is in a state of nature, no man can come to Christ. Though all excellencies, both Divine and human, are found in the Lord Jesus, though He is "altogether lovely" (Song of Solomon 5:16), yet the fallen sons of Adam see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. They may be well instructed in "the doctrine of Christ," they may believe unhesitatingly all that Scripture affirms concerning Him, they may frequently take His name upon their lips, profess to be resting on His finished work, sing His praises, yet their hearts are far from Him. The things of this world have the first place in their affections. The gratifying of self is their dominant concern. They surrender not their lives to Him. He is too holy to suit their love of sin; His claims are too exacting to suit their selfish hearts; His terms of discipleship are too severe to suit their fleshly ways. They will not yield to His Lordship—true alike with each one of us till God performs a miracle of grace upon our hearts,

The second of these passages contains a gracious invitation, made by the compassionate Savior to a particular class of sinners. The "all" is at once

qualified, clearly and definitely, by the words which immediately follow it. The character of those to whom this loving word belongs is clearly defined: it is those who "labor" and are "heavy laden." Most clearly then it applies not to the vast majority of our light-headed, gay-hearted, pleasure-seeking fellows, who have no regard for God's glory and no concern about their eternal welfare. No, the word for such poor creatures is rather, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

But to those who have "labored" hard to keep the law and please God, who are "heavy laden" with a felt sense of their utter inability to meet His requirements, and who long to be delivered from the power and pollution of sin, Christ says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

The third passage quoted above at once tells us that "coming to Christ" is not the easy matter so many imagine it, nor so simple a thing as most preachers represent it to be. Instead of its so being, the incarnate Son of God positively declares that such an act is utterly impossible to a fallen and depraved creature unless and until Divine power is brought to bear upon him. A most pride-humbling, flesh-withering, man-abasing word is this. "Coming to Christ" is a far, far different thing from raising your hand to be prayed for by some Protestant "priest," coming forward and taking some cheap-jack evangelist's hand, signing some "decision" card, uniting with some "church," or any other of the "many inventions" (Ecclesiastes 7:29) of man. Before any one can or will "come to Christ" the understanding must be supernaturally enlightened, the heart must be supernaturally changed, the stubborn will must be supernaturally broken.

The fourth passage is also one that is unpalatable to the carnal mind, yet is it a precious portion unto the Spirit-taught children of God. It sets forth the blessed truth of unconditional election, or the discriminating grace of God. It speaks of a favored people whom the Father giveth to His Son. It declares that every one of that blessed company shall come to Christ: neither the effects of their fall in Adam, the power of indwelling sin, the hatred and untiring efforts of Satan, nor the deceptive delusions of blind preachers, will be able to finally hinder them—when God's appointed hour arrives, each of His elect is delivered from the power of darkness and is translated into the kingdom of his dear Son. It announces that each such one who comes to Christ, no matter how unworthy and vile he be in himself no matter how black and long the awful catalogue of his sins, He will by no means despise or fail to welcome him, and under no circumstances will He ever cast him off.

The fifth passage is one that makes known the terms on which alone Christ is willing to receive sinners. Here the uncompromising claims of His holiness are set out. He must be crowned Lord of all, or He will not be Lord at all. There must be the complete heart-renunciation of all that stands in competition with Him. He

will brook no rival. All that pertains to "the flesh," whether found in a loved one or in self, has to be hated. The "cross" is the badge of Christian discipleship: not a golden one worn on the body, but the principle of self-denial and self-sacrifice ruling the heart. How evident is it, then, that a mighty, supernatural work of divine grace must be wrought in the human heart, if any man will even desire to meet such terms!

The sixth passage tells us that the Christian is to continue as he began. We are to "come to Christ" not once and for all, but frequently, daily. He is the only One who can minister to our needs, and to Him we must constantly turn for the supply of them. In our felt emptiness, we must draw from His "fullness" (John 1:16). In our weakness, we must turn to Him for strength. In our ignorance we must seek afresh His cleansing. All that we need for time and eternity is stored up in Him: refreshment when we are weary (Isaiah 40:3 1), healing of body when we are sick (Exodus 15:26), comfort when we are sad (1 Peter 5:7), deliverance when we are tempted (Hebrews 2:18). If we have wandered away from Him, left our first love, then the remedy is to "repent and do the first works" (Revelation 2:5), that is, cast ourselves upon Him anew, come just as we did the first time we came to Him—as unworthy, self-confessed sinners, seeking His mercy and forgiveness.

The seventh passage assures us of the eternal security of those who do come. Christ saves "unto the uttermost" or "for evermore" those who come unto God by Him. He is not of one mind to day and of another tomorrow. No, He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

"Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1), and blessedly does He give proof of this, for "He ever liveth to make intercession for them." inasmuch as His prayers are effectual, for He declares that the Father hearest Him "always" (John 11:42), none whose name is indelibly stamped on the heart of our great High Priest can ever perish. Hallelujah!

Having sought to thus introduce some of the leading aspects of the subject which is to engage our attention, we now propose to enter into some detail as the Spirit of Truth is pleased to grant us His much-needed assistance. Let us consider some of the obstacles in coming to Christ.

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