

## Studies on Saving Faith

### Part 2 - CHAPTER 3

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Part 1 - Signs of the Times

Part 2 - Saving Faith

- 1 - Its Counterfeits
- 2 - Its Nature
- 3 - Its Difficulty
- 4 - Its Communication
- 5 - Its Evidences

Part 3 - Coming to Christ

- 6 - Obstacles in Coming to Christ  
Wherein Lies the Total Inability Of the Natural Man?
- 7 - coming to Christ With Our Understanding
- 8 - Coming to Christ With Our Affections
- 9 - Coming to Christ With Our the Will
- 10 - Tests

Part 4 - Assurance

- 11 - Introduction
- 12 - Its Nature
- 13 - Its Basis
- 14 - Its Attainment
- 15 - Its Subjects
- 16 - Its Hindrances
- 17 - Its Maintenance
- 18 - Its Fruits
- 19 - Dialogue 1
- 20 - Dialogue 2
- 21 - Dialogue 3
- 22 - Dialogue 4

### Part 2

### CHAPTER 3 – ITS DIFFICULTY

Some of our readers will probably be surprised to hear about the difficulty of saving faith. On almost every side today is being taught, even by men styled orthodox and "fundamentalists," that getting saved is an exceedingly simple affair. So long as a person believes John 3:16 and "rests on it," or "accepts Christ as his personal Savior," that is all that is needed. It is often said that there is nothing left for the sinner to do but direct his faith toward the right object: just as a man trusts his bank or a wife her husband, let him exercise the same faculty of faith and trust in Christ. So widely has this idea been received, that for any one now to condemn it, is to court being branded as a heretic. Notwithstanding, the writer here unhesitatingly denounces it as a most God-insulting lie of the Devil. A natural faith is sufficient for trusting a human object; but a supernatural faith is required to savingly trust in a Divine object.

While observing the methods employed by present-day "evangelists" and "personal workers," we are made to wonder what place the Holy Spirit has in their thoughts: certainly they entertain the most degrading conception of that miracle of grace which He performs, when He moves a human heart to truly surrender unto the Lord Jesus. Alas, in these degenerate times, few have any idea that saving faith is a miraculous thing. Instead, it is now almost universally supposed that saving faith is nothing more than an act of the human will, which any man is capable of performing: all that is needed is to bring before a sinner a few verses of Scripture which describe his lost condition, one or two which contain the word "believe," and then a little persuasion for him to "accept Christ," and the thing is done. And the awful thing is that so very, very few see anything wrong with this—blind to the fact that such a process is only the Devil's drug to lull thousands into a false peace.

So many have been argued into a believing that they are saved. In reality, their "faith" sprang from nothing better than a superficial process of logic. Some "personal worker" addresses a man who has no concern whatever for the glory of God and no realization of his terrible hostility against Him. Anxious to "win another soul to Christ," he pulls out the N.T. and reads to him in 1 Timothy 1:15. The worker says, You are a sinner, and his man assenting, he is at once informed, then that verse includes you. Next John 3:16 is read, and the question is asked, Who does the word "whosoever" include? The question is repeated until the poor victim answers, "You, me, and everybody." Then he is asked, Will you believe it? believe that God loves you, that Christ died for you? If the answer is Yes, he is at once assured that he is now saved. Ah, my reader, if this is how you were "saved," then it was with "enticing words of man's wisdom" and your "faith" stands only "in the wisdom of men" (1 Corinthians 2:4,5), and not in the power of God!

Multitudes seem to think that it is about as easy for a sinner to purify his heart (James 4:8), as it is to wash his hands; to admit the searching and flesh-withering light of Divine truth into the soul, as the morning sun into his room by pulling up the blinds; to turn from idols to God, from the world to Christ, from sin

to holiness, as it is to turn a ship right round by the help of her helm. O my reader, be not deceived on this vital matter: to mortify the lusts of the flesh, to be crucified unto the world, to overcome the Devil, to die daily unto sin, and live unto righteousness, to be meek and lowly in heart, trustful and obedient, pious and patient, faithful and uncompromising, loving and gentle; in a word, to be a Christian, to be Christlike, is a task far, far beyond the poor resources of fallen human nature.

It is because a generation has arisen which is ignorant of the real nature of saving faith, that they deem it such a simple thing. It is because so very few have any scriptural conception of the character of God's great salvation that the delusions referred to above are so widely received. It is because so very few realize what they need saving from, that the popular "evangel" (?) of the hour is so eagerly accepted. Once it is seen that saving faith consists of very much more than believing that "Christ died for me," that it involves and entails the complete surrender of my heart and life to His government, fewer will imagine that they possess it. Once it is seen that God's salvation is not only a legal, but also an experimental thing, that it not only justifies, but regenerates and sanctifies, fewer will suppose they are its participants. Once it is seen that Christ came here to save His people not only from hell, but from sin, from self-will and self-pleasing, then fewer will desire His salvation.

The Lord Jesus did not teach that saving faith was a simple matter. Far from it. Instead of declaring that the saving of the soul was an easy thing, which many would participate in, He said:

"Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14).

The only path which leads to Heaven is a hard and laborious one:

"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22):

an entrance into that path calls for the utmost endeavors of the soul

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24).

After the young ruler had departed from Christ, sorrowing, the Lord turned to His disciples and said,

"How hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:24,25).

What place is given to such a passage as this in the theology (if "theology" it is fit to be called) which is being taught in the "Bible Institutes" of those seeking to

qualify for evangelistic and personal work? None at all. According to their views it is just as easy for a millionaire to be saved as it is for a pauper, since all that either has to do is "rest on the finished work of Christ." But those who are wallowing in wealth think not of God:

"According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten Me" (Hosea 13:6)!

When the disciples heard these words of Christ's "they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, 'Who then can be saved?'" Had our moderns heard them, they had soon set their fears at rest, and assured them that anybody and everybody could be saved if they believed on the Lord Jesus. But not so did Christ reassure them. Instead, He immediately added, "With men it is impossible, but not with God" (Mark 10:27). Of himself the fallen sinner can no more repent evangelically, than he can create a world. "With men it is impossible" rules out of court all special pleading for the power of man's will. Nothing but a miracle of grace can lead to the saving of any sinner.

And why is it "impossible" for the natural man to exercise saving faith? Let the answer be drawn from the case of the young ruler. He departed from Christ sorrowing, "for he had great possessions (Mark 10:22). He was wrapped up in them. They were his idols. His heart was chained to the things of earth. The demands of Christ were too exacting: to part with all and follow Him, was more than flesh and blood could endure. Reader, what are your idols? To him the Lord said, "One thing thou lackest." What was it? A yielding to the imperative requirements of Christ; a heart surrendered to God. When the soul is stuffed with the dregs of earth, there is no room for the impressions of Heaven. When a man is satisfied with carnal riches, he has no desire for spiritual riches.

The sad truth is brought out again in Christ's parable of the "great supper." The feast of Divine grace is spread, and through the Gospel a general call is given for men to come and partake of it. And what is the response? This:

"they all with one consent began to make excuse" (Luke 14:18).

And why should they? Because they were more interested in other things. Their hearts were set upon land (v. 18), oxen (v. 19), domestic comforts (v. 20). People are willing to "accept Christ" on their own terms, but not on His. What His terms are, is made known in the same chapter: giving Him the supreme place in our affections (v. 26), the crucifixion of self (v. 27), the abandonment of every idol (v. 33). Therefore did He ask,

"which of you, intending to build a tower (figure of a hard task, of setting the affections on things above), sitteth not down first and counteth the cost" (Luke 14:28).

"How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44).

Do these words picture the exercise of saving faith as the simple matter which so many deem it? The word "honor" here signifies approbation or praise. While those Jews were making it their chief aim to win and hold the good opinion of each other, and were indifferent to the approval of God, it was impossible that they should come to Christ. It is the same now: "whosoever therefore will be (desires and is determined to be) a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). To come to Christ effectually, to believe on Him savingly, involves the turning our backs upon the world, alienating ourselves from the esteem of our godless (or religious) fellows, and identifying ourselves with the despised and rejected One. It involves bowing to His yoke, surrendering to His Lordship, and living henceforth for His glory. And that is no small task.

"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you" (John 6:27).

Does this language imply that the obtaining of eternal life is a simple matter? It does not; far from it. It denotes that a man must be in deadly earnest, subordinating all other interests in his quest for it, and be prepared to put forth strenuous endeavors and overcome formidable difficulties. Then does this verse teach salvation by works, by self-efforts? No, and Yes. No, in the sense that anything we do can merit salvation—eternal life is a "gift." But, Yes, in the sense that whole-hearted seeking after salvation, and a diligent use of the prescribed means of grace are demanded of us. Nowhere in Scripture is there any promise to the dilatory. Compare Hebrews 4:11.

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44).

Plainly does this language give the lie to the popular theory of the day, that it lies within the power of man's will to be saved any time he chooses to be. Flatly does this verse contradict the flesh-pleasing and creature-honoring idea that any one can receive Christ as his Savior the moment he decides to do so. The reason why the natural man cannot come to Christ till the Father "draw" him, is because he is the bondsman of sin (John 8:34), serving divers lusts (Titus 3:3), the captive of the Devil (2 Timothy 2:26); Almighty power must break his chains and open the prison-doors (Luke 4:18) ere he can come to Christ. Can one who loves darkness and hates the Light reverse the process? No, no more than a man who has a diseased foot or poisoned hand can heal it by an effort of will. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? No more than they who are accustomed to do evil, do good (Jeremiah 13:23).

"And if the righteous with difficulty is saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18, Bag. Int.)

Matthew Henry said,

"It is as much as the best can do to secure the salvation of their souls; there are so many sufferings, temptations, and difficulties to be overcome; so many sins to be mortified; the gate is so strait, and the way so narrow, that it is as much as the righteous can do to be saved. Let the absolute necessity of salvation balance the difficulty of it. Consider your difficulties are greatest at first; God offers His grace and help; the contest will not last long. Be but faithful to the death and God will give you the crown of life: Revelation 2:10."

So also John Lillie,

"After all that God has done by sending His Son, and the Son by sending the Holy Spirit, it is only with difficulty, exceeding difficulty, that the work of saving the righteous advances to its consummation. The entrance into the kingdom lies through much tribulation—through fightings without and fears within—through the world's seductions, and its frowns—through the utter weakness and continual failures of the flesh, and the many fiery darts of Satan."

Here then are the reasons why saving faith is so difficult to put forth.

1. By nature men are entirely ignorant of its real character, and therefore are easily deceived by Satan's plausible substitutes for it. But even when they are scripturally informed thereon, either they sorrowfully turn their backs on Christ, as did the rich young ruler when he learned His terms of discipleship; or they hypocritically profess what they do not possess.
2. The power of self-love reigns supreme within, and to deny self is too great a demand upon the unregenerate.
3. The love of the world and the approbation of their friends stands in the way of a complete surrender to Christ.
4. The demands of God that He should be loved with all the heart and that we should be "holy in all manner of conversation (behavior)" (1 Peter 1:15) repels the carnal.
5. Bearing the reproach of Christ, being hated by the religious world (John 15:18), suffering persecution for righteousness' sake, is something which mere flesh and blood shrinks from.
6. The humbling of ourselves before God, penitently confessing all our self-will, is something which an unbroken heart revolts against.

7. To fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12) and overcome the Devil (1 John 2:13), is too arduous an undertaking for those who love their own ease.

Multitudes desire to be saved from Hell (the natural instinct of self-preservation) who are quite unwilling to be saved from sin. Yea, there are tens of thousands who have been deluded into thinking that they have "accepted Christ as their Savior," whose lives show plainly that they reject Him as their Lord. For a sinner to obtain the pardon of God, he must "forsake his way" (Isaiah 55:7). No man can turn to God until he turns from idols (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Thus insisted the Lord Jesus,

"Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

The terrible thing is that so many preachers today, under the pretense of magnifying the grace of God, have represented Christ as the Minister of sin, as One who has, through His atoning sacrifice, procured an indulgence for men to continue gratifying their fleshly and worldly lusts. Providing a man professes to believe in the virgin birth and vicarious death of Christ, and claims to be resting upon Him alone for salvation, he may pass for a real Christian almost anywhere today, even though his daily life may be no different from that of the moral worldling who makes no profession at all. The Devil is chloroforming thousands into Hell by this very delusion. The Lord Jesus asks,

"Why call ye me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46);

and insists

"Not everyone that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

The hardest task before most of us is not to learn, but to unlearn. Many of God's own children have drunk so deeply of the sweetened poison of Satan, that it is by no means easy to get it out of their systems; and while it remains in them, it stupefies their understanding. So much is this the case that, the first time one of them reads an article like this, it is apt to strike them as an open attack upon the sufficiency of Christ's finished work, as though we were here teaching that the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb needed to be increased by something from the creature. Not so. Nothing but the merits of Immanuel can ever give any sinner title to stand before the ineffably holy God. But what we are now contending for is, when does God impute to any sinner the righteousness of Christ? Certainly not while he is opposed to Him.

Moreover, we do not honor the work of Christ until we correctly define what that work was designed to effect. The Lord of glory did not come here and die to

procure the pardon of our sins and the taking us to Heaven while our hearts still remain cleaving to the earth. No, He came here to prepare a way to Heaven (John 10:4; 14:4; Hebrews 10:20-22; 1 Peter 2:21), to call men into that way, that by His precepts and promises, His example and spirit, He might form and fashion their souls to that glorious state, and make them willing to abandon all things for it. He lived and died so that His Spirit should come and quicken dead sinners into newness of life, make them new creatures in Himself, and cause them to sojourn in this world as those who are not of it, as those whose hearts have already departed from it. Christ did not come here to render a change of heart, repentance, faith, personal holiness, the loving of God supremely and obeying Him unreservedly, as unnecessary, or salvation as possible without them. How passing strange that any suppose He did!

Ah, my reader, it becomes a searching test for each of our hearts to honestly face the question, Is this what I really long for? As Bunyan asked (in his *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*), "What are thy desires. Wouldest thou be saved? Wouldest thou be saved from guilt, and from filth, too? Wouldest thou be the servant of thy Savior? Art thou indeed weary of the service of thy old master, the Devil, sin, and the world? And have these desires put thy soul to flight? Dost thou fly to him that is a Savior from the wrath to come, for life? If these be thy desires, and if they be unfeigned, fear not."

"Many people think that when we preach salvation, we mean salvation from going to Hell. We do mean that, but we mean a great deal more: we preach salvation from sin; we say that Christ is able to save a man; and we mean by that He is able to save him from sin, and to make him holy; to make him a new man. No person has any right to say, 'I am saved,' while he continues in sin as he did before. How can you be saved from sin while you are living in it? A man that is drowning cannot say he is saved from the water while he is sinking in it; a man that is frost-bitten cannot say, with any truth, that he is saved from the cold while he is stiffened by the wintry blast. No, man, Christ did not come to save thee in thy sins, but to save thee from thy sins; not to make the disease so that it should not kill thee, but to let it remain in itself mortal, and nevertheless, to remove it from thee, and thee from it. Christ Jesus came then to heal us from the plague of sin, to touch us with His hand and say, 'I will, be thou clean'" (C.H. Spurgeon on Matthew 9:12).

They who do not yearn after holiness of heart and righteousness of life, are only deceiving themselves when they suppose they desire to be saved by Christ. The plain fact is, all that is wanted by many today is merely a soothing position for their conscience, which will enable them to go on comfortably in a course of self-pleasing, which will permit them to continue their worldly ways without the fear of eternal punishment. Human nature is the same the world over: that wretched instinct which causes multitudes to believe that the paying a papist priest a few dollars procures forgiveness of all their past sins, and an "indulgence" for future ones, moves other multitudes to greedily devour the lie that, with an unbroken



and impenitent heart, by a mere act of the will, they may "believe in Christ," and thereby obtain not only God's pardon for past sins but an "eternal security," no matter what they do or do not do in the future.

O my reader, be not deceived; God frees none from condemnation but those "which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1), and

"if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are (not "ought to be") passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Saving faith makes a sinner come to Christ with a real soul-thirst, that he may drink of the living water, even of His sanctifying Spirit (John 7:38, 39). To love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to pray for them that spitefully use us, is very far from being easy; yet this is only one part of the task which Christ assigns unto those who would be His disciples. He acted thus, and He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. And His "salvation," in its present application, consists of a revealing to our hearts the imperative need for our measuring up to His high and holy standard, with a realization of our own utter powerlessness to do so; and a creating within us an intense hunger and thirst after such personal righteousness, and a daily turning unto Him in humble and trustful supplication for needed grace and strength.

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