

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

B. Faith

I. The Importance of the Doctrine

Faith is fundamental in Christian creed and conduct. It was the one thing which above all others Christ recognized as the paramount virtue. The Syrophoenician woman (Matt. 15) had perseverance; the centurion (Matt. 8), humility; the blind man (Mark 10), earnestness. But what Christ saw and rewarded in each of these cases was faith. Faith is the foundation of Peter's spiritual temple (2 Pet. 1:5–7); and first in Paul's trinity of graces (1 Cor. 13:13). In faith all the other graces find their source.

II. The Definition of Faith

Faith is used in the Scriptures in a general and in a particular sense.

1. Its General Meaning

(a) Knowledge

Psa. 9:10—"And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee." Rom. 10:17—"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Faith is not believing a thing without evidence; on the contrary faith rests upon the best of evidence, namely, the Word of God. An act of faith denotes a manifestation of the intelligence: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" Faith is no blind act of the soul; it is not a leap in the dark. Such a thing as believing with the heart without the head is out of the question. A man may believe with his head without believing with his heart; but he cannot believe with his heart without believing with his head too. The heart, in the Scriptures, means the whole man—intellect, sensibilities, and will. "As a man *thinketh* in his heart." "Why *reason* ye these things in your hearts?"

(b) Assent

Mark 12:32—"And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth." So was it with the faith which Christ demanded in His miracles: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" "Yea, Lord." There must not only be the knowledge that Jesus is able to save, and that He is the Saviour of the world; there must be also an assent of the heart to all these claims. Those who, *receiving* Christ to be all that He claimed to be, *believed* in Him, became thereby sons of God (John 1:12).

(c) Appropriation

John 1:12; 2:24. There must be an appropriation of the things which we know and assent to concerning the Christ and His work. Intelligent perception is not faith. A man may know Christ as divine, and yet aside from that reject him as Saviour. Knowledge affirms the reality of these things but neither accepts nor rejects them. Nor is assent faith. There is an assent of the mind which does not convey a surrender of the heart and affections.

Faith is the consent of the will to the assent of the understanding. Faith always has in it the idea of action—movement towards its object. It is the soul leaping forth to embrace and appropriate the Christ in whom it believes. It first says: “My Lord and my God,” and then falls down and worships.

A distinction between believing about Christ and on Christ is made in John 8:30, 31, R. V.—“Many believed *on* him ... Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed *him*.”

2. The Meaning of Faith in Particular

(a) When Used in Connection with the Name of God

Heb. 11:6—“But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Also Acts 27:22–25; Rom. 4:19–21 with Gen. 15:4–6. There can be no dealings with the invisible God unless there is absolute faith in His existence. We must believe in His reality, even though He is unseen. But we must believe even more than the fact of His existence; namely, that He is a rewarder, that He will assuredly honor with definite blessing those who approach unto Him in prayer. Importunity will, of course, be needed (Luke 11:5–10).

There must be confidence in the Word of God also. Faith believes all that God says as being absolutely true, even though circumstances seem to be against its fulfillment.

(b) When Used in Connection with the Person and Work of Christ

Recall the three elements in faith, and apply them here.

First, there must be a *knowledge* of the claims of Christ as to His person and mission in the world: As to His person—that He is Deity, John 9:35–38; 10:30; Phil. 2:6–11. As to His work—Matt. 20:28; 26:26–28; Luke 24:27, 44.

Second, there must be an *assent* to all these claims, John 16:30; 20:28; Matt. 16:16; John 6:68, 69.

Third, there must be a personal *appropriation* of Christ as being all that He claims to be, John 1:12; 8:21, 24; 5:24. There must be surrender to a person, and not mere faith in a creed. Faith in a doctrine must lead to faith in a person, and that person Jesus Christ, if salvation is to be the

result of such belief. So Martha was led to substitute faith in a doctrine for faith in a person (John 11:25).

It is such faith—consisting of knowledge, assent, and appropriation—that saves. This is believing with the heart (Rom. 10:9, 10).

(c) When Used in Connection with Prayer

Three passages may be used to set forth this relationship: 1 John 5:14, 15; James 1:5–7, Mark 11:24. There must be no hesitation which balances between belief and unbelief, and inclines toward the latter—tossed one moment upon the shore of faith and hope, the next tossed back again into the abyss of unbelief. To “doubt” means to reason whether or not the thing concerning which you are making request can be done (Acts 10:20; Rom. 4:20). Such a man only conjectures; he does not really believe. Real faith thanks God for the thing asked for, if that thing is in accord with the will of God, even before it receives it (Mark 11:24). Note the slight: “that man.”

We must recognize the fact that knowledge, assent, and appropriation exist here also. We must understand the promises on which we base our prayer; we must believe that they are worth their full face value; and then step out upon them, thereby giving substance to that which, at the moment may be unseen, and, perchance, nonexistent, so far as our knowledge and vision are concerned, but which to faith is a splendid reality.

(d) When Used in Connection with the Word and Promise of God

First, we should know whether the particular promise in question is intended for us in particular. There is a difference in a promise being written for us and to us. There are dispensational aspects to many of the promises in the Bible, therefore we must rightly divide, apportion, and appropriate the Word of God (cf. 1 Cor. 10:32).

Second, when once we are persuaded that a promise is for us, we must believe that God means all He says in that promise; we must assent to all its truth; we must not diminish nor discount it. God will not, cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

Third, we must appropriate and act upon the promises. Herein lies the difference between belief and faith. Belief is mental; faith adds the volitional; we may have belief without the will, but not faith. Belief is a realm of thought; faith is a sphere of action. Belief lives in the study; faith comes out into the market—places and the streets. Faith substantiates belief—gives substance, life, reality, activity to it (Heb. 11:1). Faith puts belief into active service, and connects possibilities with actualities. Faith is acting upon what you believe; it is appropriation.

Faith counts every promise valid, and guilt—edged (Heb. 11:11); no trial can shake it (11:35); it is so absolute that it survives the loss of anything (11:17). For illustration, see 1 Kings 18:41–43.

3. The Relation of Faith to Works

There is no merit in faith alone. It is not mere faith that saves, but faith in Christ. Faith in any other saviour but Christ will not save. Faith in any other gospel than that of the New Testament will not save (Gal. 1:8, 9).

There is no contradiction between Paul and James touching the matter of faith and works (cf. James 2:14–26; Rom. 4:1–12). Paul is looking at the matter from the Godward side, and asserts that we are justified, in the sight of God, *meritoriously*, without absolutely any works on our part. James considers the matter from the man—ward side, and asserts that we are justified, in the sight of man, *evidentially*, by works, and not by faith alone (2:24). In James it is not the *ground* of justification, as in Paul, but the *demonstration*. See under Justification, The Method of Justification.

III. The Source of Faith

There are two sides to this phase of the subject—a divine and a human side.

1. It is the Work of the Triune God.

God the Father: Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 12. This is true of faith both in its beginning (Phil. 1:29) and its development (1 Cor. 12). Faith, then, is a gift of His grace.

God the Son: Heb. 12:2—“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.” (Illustration, Matt. 14:30, 31—Peter taking his eyes off Christ.) 1 Cor. 12; Luke 17:5.

God the Spirit: Gal. 5:22; 1 Cor. 12:9. The Holy Spirit is the executive of the Godhead.

Why then, if faith is the work of the Godhead, are we responsible for not having it? God wills to work faith in all His creatures, and will do so if they do not resist His Holy Spirit. We are responsible, therefore, not so much for the lack of faith, but for resisting the Spirit who will create faith in our hearts if we will permit Him to do so.

2. There is Also a Human Side to Faith.

Rom. 10:17—“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (cf. the context, vv. 9–21.) Acts 4:4—“Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed.” In this instance the *spoken* word, the Gospel, is referred to; in other cases the written Word, the Scriptures, is referred to as being instrumental in producing faith. See also Gal. 3:2–5. It was a looking unto the promises of God that brought such faith into the heart of Abraham (Rom. 4:19).

Prayer also is an instrument in the development of faith. Luke is called the *human* Gospel because it makes so much of prayer, especially in connection with faith: 22:32—“But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.” 17:5—“And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.” See also Mark 9:24; Matt. 17:19–21.

Our faith grows by the use of the faith we already have. Luke 17:5, 6; Matt. 25:29.

IV. *Some Results of Faith*

1. We are Saved by Faith.

We, of course, recall that the saving power of faith resides not in itself, but in the Almighty Saviour on whom it rests; so that, properly speaking, it is not so much faith, as it is faith in Christ that saves.

The whole of our salvation—past, present, and future, is dependent upon faith. Our acceptance of Christ (John 1:12); our justification (Rom. 5:1); our adoption (Gal. 3:26); our sanctification (Acts 26:18); our keeping (1 Pet. 1:5), indeed our whole salvation from start to finish is dependent upon faith.

2. Rest, Peace, Assurance, Joy

Isa. 26:3; Phil. 4:6; Rom. 5:1; Heb. 4:1–3; John 14:1; 1 Pet. 1:8. Fact, faith, feeling—this is God’s order. Satan would reverse this order and put feeling before faith, and thus confuse the child of God. We should march in accord with God’s order: Fact leads, Faith with its eye on Fact, following, and Feeling with the eye on Faith bringing up the rear. All goes well as long as this order is observed. But the moment Faith turns his back on Fact, and looks at Feeling, the procession wobbles. Steam is of main importance, not for sounding the whistle, but for moving the wheels, and if there is a lack of steam we shall not remedy it by attempting by our own effort to move the piston or blow the whistle, but by more water in the boiler, and more fire under it. Feed Faith with Facts, not with Feeling.—*A. T. Pierson.*

3. Do Exploits Through Faith

Heb. 11:32–34; Matt. 21:21; John 14:12. Note the wonderful things done by the men of faith as recorded in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Read vv. 32–40. Jesus attributes a kind of omnipotence to faith. The disciple, by faith, will be able to do greater things than his Master. Here is a mighty Niagara of power for the believer. The great question for the Christian to answer is not “What can I do?” but “How much can I believe?” for “all things are possible to him that believeth.”