

A Plain Answer to an Important Enquiry

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that the chief work pleasing to God is the act of faith—believing in Jesus Christ whom God has sent—as it encompasses all true holiness and establishes a right relationship with God.

Scripture: John 6:29, Hebrews 11, 1 John 5:1

Topics: "Faith", "Salvation"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explains that faith—believing in Jesus Christ—is the fundamental work that pleases God above all else. He teaches that faith is not only a gift from God but also the active response of man, encompassing all virtues and establishing a right relationship with God. Spurgeon challenges listeners to understand that without faith, all works are ultimately futile and that true Christian living begins with trusting in Christ alone.

Transcript

"Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent." John 6:29.

NOTICE the connection or you will miss the meaning of the words, for, at first sight it looks as if our Savior taught us that it is the work of God for us to believe on Him. Now, that would be quite true and it is very plainly taught in other parts of Scripture that faith is the work of God, but that is not the teaching in this particular instance, as will be very plain if you look at the context. First, our Savior said to the people, "See how you labor after the bread of your bodies. You have been running all round the coast to find Me in order that I might feed you again with loaves and fishes. Now," He says, "let your labor run after something better. Labor not for the meat that perishes, but for that which endures to life eternal."

He gently rebukes them, "Do not spend all your strength in seeking after temporal good, but think about your immortal natures. Satisfy the hunger of your spirits, the better part of you." They immediately answered, "You tell us to labor after the bread that does not perish. What shall we do that we might work the work of God and so obtain it?" Our translation fails to let us see that they used precisely the same words as the Savior had done. He said, "labor," and they said, "What shall we do that we may labor this labor of God? What is it?" They took Him at His word and they put a question in accordance. When men begin to be awakened about spiritual things, they naturally cry, "What must we do to be saved? What must we do that we may work the work of God?"

It is a faulty question—it is a question very much shaped by their ignorance and error. They suppose that there are works to be done, and merit to be earned by doing and obeying a law. And so they put it in that shape—"What shall we do? What shall we work that we may work the work of God?" The Savior did not chide them for the shape of the question. It was not the time to expect accuracy, but He gave them such Truth as they could understand and He replied, "You want to know what work you must do that shall be 'the work of God,' or a work pleasing to God? This, then, is 'the work of God,' the work most pleasing to God of all the works that can be done by men, that you believe on Him whom He has sent."

The teaching here is not that faith is worked in us by God, which I have already said is a great Truth of God, but it is this—that if men desire to work, the first and chief of all work is that they believe on Jesus Christ whom God has sent! Does any man object to faith being called the work of man? If he does, I ask him why he objects. It is true that faith is the gift of God, but this does not change, for a moment, the other Truth of God that faith is the work of man—for it is and must be the act of man. No one in his senses can deny that! Will you venture to say that man does not believe? Then I venture to tell you that he who does not personally believe in Jesus is a lost man! And if there is such a thing as a faith which is not a man's own act and deed it will not save him.

The man must, himself, believe or perish! This is the plain doctrine of Scripture. Repentance is worked in us by the Holy Spirit, but we must, ourselves, repent or we shall never be saved. Faith is worked in us by the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit does not believe, or repent—these are a man's own acts! With our hearts we believe unto righteousness. If we do not believe, then we are not partakers of the promise which is given to those who do believe! Faith is, therefore, the work of man and it is the chief of works, the work most pleasing to God, the most godlike work, or, as the text puts it, "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent."

To open up this one thought I pray for help from on high—it is just this—that faith is the most pleasing of all the works that man can do. It is here called, "the work," but not strictly and properly, for it can never be ranged with the works of the Law, from which it essentially differs. But the Savior took up the word which they used and spoke to their ignorance that He might instruct them.

I. Regarding it as a work, faith is most pleasing to God, for, first, IT IS THE COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY OF ALL TRUE WORK. There lies within the loins of faith every possible form of holiness. As a forest may lie asleep within an acorn, so within the bounds of faith, little though it is, every virtue lies hidden. It may be microscopic in form, but it is certainly there and only needs development. Repentance dwells in faith, for he that believes in Jesus Christ unto salvation knows that he is a sinner and he must have some hatred of sin, or else he would not have taken Christ to deliver him from his sin.

Love to God is there, for, most assuredly, when I trust a man—completely trust him—it would be impossible for me to do so unless I felt some leaning of my spirit towards him. The complete trusting of the soul to Christ, which is faith, has had in it no small measure of love to Christ. If I had before me a list of all the Graces of the Spirit of God and I were to take them up one by one and then analyze faith, I should find some measure of all these good works of the Spirit hidden away in the simple act of believing in Jesus Christ. I know what some of you have said—"Is that all that I am to do in order to be saved? Am I simply and only to believe in Christ, that is, trust myself with Him?"

Yes, that is all and it is so small an act that the most uneducated heart can perform it! But yet, within it there are inconceivable mysteries of goodness! Just as sometimes inside a walnut shell I have seen

packed away with careful art all sorts of gems and jewels, "with my lady's gloves to wear," so within this little walnut shell of, "believe and live," there will be found by any careful eye all the Graces of the Spirit of God. What is more, all the Graces come out of faith in due time, for faith sums up the whole of a Christian's life!

Now, my Brothers and Sisters, I challenge you to read the 11th chapter of Hebrews and see if you can think of anything noble, brave, glorious which has not its counterpart in that chapter. But remember, it is a description of the heroism—not of this virtue or of that, but of faith. In the long list, beginning with Abel and going down to the last, faith worked all. From faith comes the power that stops the mouths of lions, quenches the violence of flames! Out of weakness men become strong. It is faith that tramples on temptation. It is faith that overcomes the world. It is faith that attains to holiness. Within the compass of that little babe whom you hold in your hand, a slender weight that you can scarcely feel, there are all the elements of yonder man of six feet who leads the van in the royal host and so the true Christian man in the perfection of the stature of Christ is all within the babe in Grace who cries, "Lord, I believe. Help You my unbelief."

I can well understand why our Savior should say, "If you wish to work the work of God, you must believe in Jesus Christ whom He has sent," for in that act lies all the virtues and out of that act will grow all the virtues in due time.

II. But now, secondly, this simple matter of trusting Jesus Christ which is called FAITH, IS, IN ITSELF, MOST PLEASING TO GOD. First, it is the creature acknowledging its God. While a man says, "I do not care about my soul," he lives in atheism, disowning God, living as if there were no God. When a man says, "I need no saving," that is contradicting God's testimony wherein He declares that we are all gone out of the way and have altogether become abominable. When a man says, "I may be wrong, but I can get right by myself. My own good deeds will save me," he is setting himself up in independence of his God. In fact, he is making himself his own god and so, practically, setting up another god.

But when the man cries, "I have sinned," there is an acknowledgment that the Law is good and holy and just! When he then adds, "I have so sinned that I deserve punishment and I submit myself to it," there is a recognition of the court of Heaven and an admission of the righteousness of its sentences! The rebellious heart submits itself to the authority of God! When he further says, "But I have heard, great God, that You have given Your Son to bleed and die for sinners and that He is able to save to the uttermost them that trust Him and I do trust Him," the submission of the man to God is complete. Before, he said, "I do not believe it. It does not stand to reason"—that is proud Reason still a rebel. Or he said, "It may or may not be so, but I do not see the peculiar beauty of an atoning Sacrifice." There, again, is the proud heart kicking against God.

But the man comes into his right place when he believes. When he believes in Jesus Christ and accepts mercy through the great Sacrifice, God is well-pleased because His poor erring creature has come into its right place and God sees in the act of faith the restitution of rectitude. Again, God is pleased with faith because it accepts God's way of reconciliation. God has given Christ that He might reconcile us to Himself by Him. When a man says, "I take Christ to be my Savior," he accepts God's way of reconciliation and then God must be reconciled, for He has promised to be so. As He longs to be reconciled and wills not that any should perish, but that they should come to repentance, so does He rejoice when they are willing to make peace with Him in His own appointed way. It shows a submission to His wisdom, a confidence in His

love, a yielding to His Divine will and that is what He seeks after. All this, I say, is included in faith and makes it well pleasing to God.

Perhaps the most acceptable element in faith to the eyes of God is the fact that it puts honor upon Jesus Christ, for He dearly loves His Son. We cannot tell how deep is the love of the Father towards His only begotten Son. That which dishonors Jesus must be very obnoxious to the Father and your self-confidence, my Friend, is a dishonor to the merit and salvation of Christ and God abhors it! But when you fling that all away and have no hope but in the great Atonement which He has made, then, I say, because your faith honors Jesus, therefore God delights in it and He will honor your faith. It is not possible that He should cast a soul away that clings to the great High Priest. Oh, if you look to Jesus, you shall never lose your sight! If your heart clings to Jesus, that heart of yours shall never lose its life! If your soul joys in Jesus, that soul of yours shall never lose its joy!

The fact is, that faith puts us into a right relationship with God, for what is the right relationship of a creature to his God but that of dependence? Is it not most suitable that since God made us and He has all power and all strength, we should depend upon Him for our being, as well as for our well-being? See how He hangs the world upon nothing! This round globe never starts nor falters, but is steadily upheld in its mighty march by the unseen hand of God! Yonder stars, mighty worlds though they are, have no power to keep themselves in their places but the power of God which established them. All things hang upon Him and the only position for a created being is that of entire dependence—what is that but

faith?

I believe that there is faith in Heaven. Do not tell me there is no faith there. I believe it to be the essence of Heaven that the glorified exercise unquestioning faith and never feel a doubt. It will be the joy of every spirit before the Throne of God to depend every moment for its immortality and bliss upon God and to be quite confident that He will never fail it. Some sorts of faith will be turned to sight—but if faith is confidence in God, I bless God I shall have a great deal more of it in Heaven than I can have here! A perfect child must have a perfect faith in a perfect Father. Because faith brings the creature back to conscious dependence, God is well-pleased with it.

Faith restores us by putting us into a place of childlike rest. If a son has fallen into the hands of a malicious individual who has whispered into his ear that his father hates him—that he is doing all he possibly can to ruin him—at first the youth will not believe the accusation, but perhaps, after a while, he begins to think it is true. From that time forward every action that his father makes will be interpreted the wrong way—and if there is anything in the father's life which is more kind than usual, it is highly probable that this poor misled boy will see a deeper subtlety of malice in it than in his father's ordinary actions! The lad will break his father's commands and vex and anger him. What is the first thing to be done to set that youth right?

You may make him dread his father and then he will behave properly in his outward actions, but he will only be waiting his time to break loose. Suppose it to be possible to make him believe in his father and to be assured that his father loved him and had, all along, been the kindest man on earth? Why he would run into his father's arms! He will be willing enough to obey a parent whom he trusts—it will be his delight to do so! You have won his confidence and everything is right now. This is what faith does to us. The devil and our own corrupt nature say, "God is unkind, for He has made an awful Hell," and so on. Faith interposes and cries, "He has put away His wrath. He has made full atonement for sin. He is willing to receive us."

Then faith says, "Trust Him. Trust Him implicitly." And when the soul has done that, then faith testifies, "He has loved you with an everlasting love. Jesus died for you and He has provided a Heaven for you." Let this be known and felt and what a change takes place! Oh, then you hate your sin! Oh, then you are ready to say, "How could I play the fool against One so kind, so good, so right?" Under this impulse you will serve Him and live for Him! That simple matter of believing Him has done it all! It is the hinge on which character turns. Hard thoughts of God lead to acts of rebellion, but a childlike confidence in Infinite Love softens the heart and sanctifies it and makes the man a true child towards the great Father.

Do you wonder, then, that there is much in faith, in itself, which is pleasing to God? And if you ask what great works you are to do to please God, we shall not tell you to build a row of almshouses, or endow an orphanage, or give your body to be burned—believe in Jesus Christ and you have done more than all these things put together!

III. And now a third reason why faith is so great a thing is this—FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST IS THE TEST OF WORKING FOR GOD, for all the works that ever were, without faith in Jesus Christ, are not works for God at all. Let me explain and prove my point. Suppose that a person should say, "But I mean to live for the great God and work for Him." Without faith the spirit of work is wrong. My Friend, suppose you said to me, "I will live for you and spend my life in your service, but I am not going to believe what you say"? There would be a point of disagreement between us which would render it impossible for you to be of any service to me, or for anything that you did to be of any value to me. You call me a liar to begin with and then say you serve me?

Many of you that have heard the Gospel may, perhaps, think that you are serving God, though you have never believed in Christ. But, I tell you, your best actions are nothing but whitewashed sins! All that you do must be destitute of real excellence because you begin by making God a liar! It is a hard word, you say. I cannot help it—it is the word of John, the most gentle spirit among all Biblical characters. John says, "He that believes not has made God a liar because he has not believed on the Son of God." If you begin by calling God a liar, I do not care much what you do after that. I would a great deal rather you should be moral than immoral and sober than drunk, but, after all, you will be lost in either case if you persevere in calling God a liar!

All your holiness will be a sham if you will not believe in Jesus. The test of true work for God is this—"That you believe on Jesus Christ whom He has sent." Without faith the motive of work fails. "But," cries another person, "I believe I have deserved well of God! I have kept myself pretty right and I have performed many good deeds." What have you done them for? "I have been working for my salvation," says one. In other words, you have been working for yourself. Pay yourself, then! Self is first and last—your works are selfishness from top to bottom! You have been trying to be good to get to Heaven by it. It is a mean, beggarly life that begins and ends with self! Your Maker, whom you were bound to love with all your heart, you have not loved at all except that you have meanly pretended to love Him in order to save yourself!

You had a kind of cupboard love to Him, such as an ass or an ox might have to a corn bin, or a stall, but no real affection. How can you perform a virtuous act while self is your tyrant lord? When you have once believed in Jesus Christ then you are saved and from that day on you live to glorify the name of the Lord—you live to work out that which He has worked in you—to will and to do of His own good pleasure. But until you are saved by faith, self is necessarily your first thought. No man is capable of virtue as long as self is his objective and every man must make self his objective till he is saved! When he is saved, he rises into a nobler atmosphere altogether and then his works are acceptable to God. Do you not see that

you have to get out of self-righteousness and to be saved by believing in Christ before you can begin to do anything that will be really working for God? Up to that point it will be all working for yourself and that is a poor, poor thing which cannot please the most high God.

Beloved Friends, living by faith in Jesus Christ is the evidence of your sincerity in any work that you do for God, for can there be any real working for God while your own pride is uppermost? God tells you that your best works are imperfect and will not save you and He hangs His own dear Son upon the Cross to save you because you are a sinner. You turn your back to the Cross—you say, "My own merits are good enough," and then you talk about serving God after that? Can He accept anything at your hands after you have rejected His Son and insulted Him? You have touched the Lord in the most tender point when you have taken your own detestable righteousness which is just a heap of infected rags—a mass of abominable filth in the sight of God—and have preferred it to the blood and righteousness of His only Son!

After such an atrocious crime as this, how dare you talk about doing service to God! It is impossible, Sir! There is a lie in the bottom of your heart. Get rid of it! How can you serve the Lord while your pride thus angers Him? He tells you that you must bow before His Son and trust in Him and you reply, "No, I must feel something or do something." That is as much as saying, "I will be saved in my own way." You talk about serving God after that evil, "I will," of yours has been defying Him? Suppose that one of your family will not do what you tell him? He defies you to your face. He says he will have his own way and then he goes into the garden and he plucks you a flower—and he expects that the gift will please you.

What? Brought in a rebellious hand? While he is in a willful state and boiling over with bad temper? Does he think to please you by such a trifle? You say, "No, my child, that cannot be. You must first bow before your father and acknowledge that you have done wrong." He may pout his lips and say he will never obey you and then ask to kiss you.

Will he have his kiss? Assuredly not till first of all he will submit! That is just the condition of many a seeker after God. He has a wicked pride in his heart and a rebellious will and if he will believe in Jesus it will be a proof that his pride and rebellion are given up. But if he will not yield and trust, neither can he expect that God will save him!

IV. I would say, in the fourth place, that faith in God is a most blessed and acceptable thing because IT IS THE SEAL OF ALL OTHER BLESSINGS. Notice that faith in God is the seal—first, of our election. Read the 37th verse, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me." Now, if you come to Christ, dear Friend, you are one that His Father gave Him! You are one of His elect! Oh, what a blessing this is. The doctrine of Election is full of rich comfort to all who are interested in it and election, itself, is the greatest of all favors. "But how am I to know that I am one of God's elect?" By this testimony, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me." Every elect soul that reaches adult age is brought to believe in Jesus Christ and as sure as ever you are brought to believe in Jesus Christ, you may be absolutely certain that you are predestinated to eternal life!

In the next place, faith seals our effectual calling. If you look a little farther down you will see, "No man can come unto Me except the Father which has sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." These are the express words of Christ and they show that every man that comes to Christ must have been drawn by the Father. That is to say, that effectual calling has exerted its Divine power upon him. No man need say, "Am I drawn of the Father?" after he is once sure that he has faith in Jesus Christ, for you never could have believed in Jesus Christ unless this had been given you from Heaven. The 44th verse is as

plain as possible, "No man can come to Me except the Father which has sent Me draws him." You have come to him and, therefore, the Father must have drawn you.

The next thing that faith assures us of is final perseverance. Read the 47th verse—"He that believes on Me has everlasting life." You need not raise the question, "Have I received everlasting life?" Raise this question, first, "Have I believed in Jesus Christ?" If so, you have everlasting life. Not a life, mark you, that will last you up to the end of the quarter when you take a new ticket—nor a life that will preserve you to old age and then leave you to temptation and death. No, "He that believes on Him has everlasting life" And it is not everlasting life if it does not last forever. Herein he that believes has the guarantee of final perseverance.

Did not Jesus say, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hands"? Are we not told of him that believes in Christ that there shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life? Or, as Christ puts it in this very chapter, "He shall never hunger and he shall never thirst." He has drunk a draught of eternal life in Christ Jesus and he shall never thirst again! This is a great deal for faith to bring to us, but it is not all, for two or three times over we are told here that whoever believes in Christ shall be raised up again at the last day—so that faith secures resurrection! Read the 39th verse and then the 49th verse—"This is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which sees the Son and believes on Him may have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last

day."

How do I know that I shall have a blessed resurrection? How can I be certain that though the worms devour this body, yet when Christ shall stand in the latter day upon the earth, in my flesh I shall see God? I may be quite sure of it because I believe in Jesus Christ whom He has sent! Beloved, faith is the seal at the bottom of the title deed which secures all things for time and eternity to the man that has it! If you are a Believer, all the wheels of Providence revolve for you! If you are a Believer, every angel spreads his wings for you! If you are a Believer, life is yours and the death which seems to close it is only the appointed janitor to open the door of another and a brighter chamber! If you believe, God Himself is yours and Christ, His Son, is yours! If you believe, Heaven, with its eternity and infinity of joy which your eye has not seen, nor your heart conceived of, is yours!

Nothing shall be kept back from the man that believes his God and trusts his Redeemer! Oh that the Lord would give faith to you all! "Alas," you say, "I do not feel right." Never mind your feelings, trust in Christ! "Oh, but I am such a sinner." Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. "Alas, but I have tried before." Away with all your trying before! Have done with trying and accept the finished work! Trust Jesus now! "Do you mean that if I now trust myself with Christ, I shall be saved while sitting in the pew?" I mean even so! Be you whoever you may be, this night look to Jesus and be saved! If you will have done with yourself and will trust your soul in the hands of Jesus who has sworn to save those that rest themselves upon Him, you are saved!

Oh, that those who have heard this Gospel many times would now, for the first time, really understand it and say, "Is this, after all, the greatest of all works—that I believe in Jesus Christ whom He has sent? Lord, I believe—help You my unbelief and save me now." O God, help many to breathe the prayer of faith at this moment, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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