

Faith - Concluded

by Harmon A. Baldwin

Sanctifying faith is a three-step process of apprehension, reception, and acknowledgement, which involves a deep reliance on the blood of Christ and a recognition of one's utter helplessness.

Scripture: Mark 9:24, Romans 10:10, Ephesians 2:8, Hebrews 11:6, James 2:17

Topics: "Saving Faith", "Sanctification"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin delves into the essence of saving or sanctifying faith, emphasizing the three aspects: historical faith, expectant faith, and appropriating faith. Historical faith involves believing in the facts about Christ, God's attributes, and the Bible. Expectant faith requires believing in God's reward for diligent seekers and actively expecting His deliverance. Appropriating faith, also known as saving faith, is a full reliance on Christ's work, a trust in His atonement, and a confidence in the forgiveness of sins. Baldwin highlights the importance of acknowledging, receiving, and fully trusting in the cleansing power of Christ through faith, leading to sanctification and salvation.

Transcript

We proceed to note, --

II. What saving or sanctifying faith is.

There are always three aspects to the faith that saves, the historical, the expectant, and the appropriating features.

1. Historical faith is that act of the intellect by which we give credence to the facts regarding Christ's person and mission, and to the sufficiency of his work to redeem the soul from sin; also it is belief in the Being and attributes of God, and confidence in the Bible as the revealed will of God. Fletcher says it is the gift of the God of grace in the same sense as the senses of sight and hearing are the gift of the God of nature. He gives us our eyes and ears, but will not use them for us; and we may destroy them and thus destroy our power of seeing and hearing if we choose. This kind of faith is good as far as It goes, for without it none will ever seek God, and if they do not seek, they will not be saved. It is written, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is." This is historical faith.

2. The next aspect of faith is that of expectancy. When the inspired penman said, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is," he also added, "and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." To be

saved or sanctified a person must not only believe the recorded facts about the person and works of Christ, but must also believe that, if he is diligently sought, he will be found. And this conviction must be put into practice. If it is, it will set the soul to mourning over its unclean condition, and expecting the deliverance God has promised. But many a person stands in this place for weeks, and even months, mourning his lack, and expecting the work to be done some time, but not now. But there must come a time when the soul momentarily expects the coming of the Lord into his temple, or the work will never be done. This makes way for that final, bold and effectual act of appropriation which evangelical Christians have been pleased to call "saving faith."

3. Regarding this aspect of evangelical faith Fletcher says:

Justifying or saving faith is believing the saving truth with the heart unto internal, and (as we have opportunity) unto external righteousness, according to our light and dispensation."

Wesley thus defines it:

Christian faith is, not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ; a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us. It is a sure confidence that a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favor of God; and in consequence hereof, a closing with him, as our 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,' or, in one word, our salvation.

There are three steps in saving faith which are clearly shown in the following chorus by Phoebe Palmer, which has been an inspiration to perhaps hundreds of holiness seekers.

"The cleansing stream I see, I see;

I plunge, and oh, it cleanseth me."

The three steps might be named as follows, -- 1. The faith of apprehension, -- "The cleansing stream, I see, I see." 2. The faith of reception or appropriation, -- "I plunge." 3. The faith of acknowledgement, -- "And oh, it cleanseth me." The act of faith is not completed till the soul acknowledges the cleansing to be done; there are some traces of unbelief where this acknowledgement is lacking. It is the spontaneous "My Lord and my God" of the soul that completes or seals the act of faith; so Paul says, "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

The heart peering timidly through the mist sees Christ and the flowing blood, and when it gets a glimpse of the object for which it has been searching so long its timidity takes flight, and the next natural step is to make a desperate plunge into the crimson flow, and the instant it strikes the fountain all through its ransomed depths it shouts and sings, " 'Tis done, it cleanseth me."

The first step is God's revelation of himself to the longing gaze. And he reveals himself only when the seeker reaches the limits of God's requirements as to self-abandonment, and in his helplessness cries for divine assistance. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." So right at the limit of man's ability, and when he fully acknowledges his inability, God discovers himself to the inner eye of his soul. We may talk and reason about this, and say that if he had believed a week before he would have had the experience; and we may try to argue people into believing as much as we please, but in spite of it all the fact remains that saving faith is impossible till the soul has reached the end of self and realizes its utter need of divine help.

This may be sooner or later. Some may quickly and with comparative ease appropriate the blood to their needs, while others may struggle for days or weeks: One may be as honest as the other, but for some reason fails to comprehend or apprehend the truth aright. It is the same with natural life. Some have but little vitality, and easily give way to death! while others in much greater afflictions cling tenaciously to life, and only yield after a prolonged battle. Physical conditions in the same person may vary at different times, and one may fight successfully through a long siege that would have ended a less resolute person, and later succumb to some trifling ailment.

So with the carnal nature. If we may so express it, the carnal mind exhibits a great amount of vitality, a determined clinging to life, a refusal to die that hinders the Spirit; but when the moment comes that the seeker arises and, with all his ransomed power and in the strength of God, decrees that now the enemy of his soul shall die, the efficacy of the blood will very quickly appear to faith's interior eye. Seeker, you can make that moment for you arrive sooner or later as you choose. If you will receive the full import of that scripture, "Now is the accepted time," and apply it as God desires you should, to your own case, you need not linger long outside of Canaan. Constantly turn your eyes toward heaven with the expectation that you will see the Christ of your desires coming to your assistance. Be in constant readiness to receive him. Keep the arms of your faith thrown wide, and fly to his breast. You will not be disappointed, for he will kindle in your soul the sacred fire of his presence, till, with the once doubting Thomas, you will cry, "My Lord and my God." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, It shall be done!" Obedient faith that waits on thee,
Thou never wilt reprove;
But thou wilt form thy Son in me,
And perfect me in love."

The common error in the teaching of to-day concerning faith is not so much that of wrong analysis as that of misapplication. The divine order is, (1) apprehension, (2) reception, (3) acknowledgement. But in these days we too often have just the opposite order; (1) acknowledgement, (2) reception, (3) apprehension; which amounts to this, first, since you have done all you can, acknowledge that you are sanctified. for the altar sanctifies the gift; then, as a consequence of your acknowledgement, you will receive the cleansing blood on your heart, and finally will apprehend Christ's cleansing power.

There is a sense in which apprehension follows reception, but it is not in the sense of faith. The apprehension of faith sees Christ separate from itself, standing as its atonement, ready to cleanse, while the apprehension that follows faith sees him as the indwelling Christ revealing his nature and purity to the inmost soul -- not to faith, but through faith to the consciousness of the soul.

The proper foundation of faith is the Person of Christ. Spurious faith begins by saying or acknowledging that the work of grace is done, and professes thus to obtain the experience sought. But this cannot be. To say that the work of sanctification is done before it is really accomplished is to make an untruth the

foundation of its reception. "He has done it," and, "He is doing it," are two different statements. In the former the person says the work is accomplished or finished now, which is untrue; but in the latter he states that the work is being accomplished now, which, at this stage, is true, for God always comes to the rescue as soon as the seeking soul gets on such grounds. The latter is faith, the former is presumption. This does not make the reception or the experience a gradual process, for the moment that the soul thus believes, the work is accomplished.

Bishop R. S. Foster, In "Christian Purity," says,

You cannot rightly believe the work is accomplished before the evidence is produced in your soul.

John Fletcher says,

Nobody can truly believe according to this dispensation, without being immediately conscious both of the forgiveness of sins and of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." And again: "What is faith? It is believing heartily. What is saving faith? I dare not say that it is 'believing heartily,' my sins are forgiven me for Christ's sake;' for If I live in sin, that belief is a destructive conceit, and not saving faith.

Dr. Philip Schaff, in "The Person of Christ, says:

True faith is an act of God wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, who reveals Christ to us in his true character, as Christ has revealed the father.

While we cannot agree that faith is an "act of God," yet it is given of God, and if God gives it he will surely allow no other foundation but himself; while man's so-called faith is wrought up, and makes man its foundation. It is a common saying that if we would exercise the faith we naturally have we would be saved. There is no doubt that there is a great amount of faith that might be called natural, which is saving in the sense that it is necessary in order to properly seek God, but it is not that exercise of the soul that is commonly called "saving faith;" and as gospel light decreases natural faith degenerates into credulity, and causes a person to believe the mythologies and absurdities of heathenism. All the true natural faith a man possesses is brought into exercise when one starts to seek God, but saving faith can not be exercised until man's part is done. All men have not saving faith, and no one can have it till he meets God's requirements.

The following from Fletcher is clear on this subject:

As, on the one hand, it never came into my mind that an impenitent murderer can have even the saving faith of a heathen: so, on the other hand, it never entered my thoughts, that a penitent can believe with the faith of full assurance when he will: for this faith depends not only upon our general belief of the truth revealed to us, but also upon a peculiar operation of God, or revelation of his powerful arm. It is always attended with a manifestation of 'the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God.' And such a manifestation God in general grants to none but them that groan deeply under 'the spirit of bondage unto fear,' as Paul did while he remained blind at Damascus ; -- or them that are peculiarly faithful to the grace of their inferior dispensation (justification), and pray as earnestly for 'power from on high' as the apostles did after our Lord's ascension.

The Bible supports this excellent quotation. Paul says, "All men have not faith" (2 Thess. 3: 2); clearly meaning that the "unreasonable and wicked men" of whom he spake were excluded from the class of persons who have faith, and that faith which one does not possess he surely cannot exercise, at least until

he meets the requirements laid down in the word of God. And on the same grounds those who have in their hearts carnal tendencies unconfessed and uncrucified have not sanctifying faith, and cannot have it until so far as meeting conditions is concerned, their part is done.

Charles Wesley represents the seeker of holiness as praying,

"Open my faith's interior eye,
Display thy power from above,
And all I am shall sink and die,
Lost in astonishment and love."

Here he calls on God to open the interior eye of faith and give the soul power to discern, thus acknowledging that he cannot do it himself; and when the eye of faith is thus opened God displays his saving power before it, which when the soul sees, "all it is sinks and dies" at Jesus' feet, "lost in astonishment and love."

Wesley, in his sermon on "The Scripture Way of Salvation," defines faith thus,

Faith in general is defined by the apostle, an evidence, a divine evidence and conviction (the word means both) of things not seen; not visible, not perceivable by sight, or by any other of the external senses. It implies both a supernatural evidence of God, and of the things of God, a kind of spiritual light exhibited to the soul, and a supernatural sight or perception thereof. Accordingly the Scripture speaks of God giving sometimes light, sometimes a power of discerning it. So St. Paul, 'God who commanded light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' And elsewhere the same apostle speaks of 'the eyes of our understanding being opened.' By this twofold operation of the Holy Spirit, having the eyes of our soul both opened and enlightened, we see the things which the natural 'eye hath not seen, neither the ear heard.' We have a prospect of the invisible things of God; we see the spiritual world which is all round about us, and yet no more discerned by our natural faculties, than if it had no being; and we see the eternal world; piercing through the veil that hangs between time and eternity. Clouds and darkness then rest upon it no more, but we already see the glory which shall be revealed. * * * * It is certain, this faith necessarily implies an assurance (which is here only another word for evidence, it being hard to tell the difference between them) that Christ loved me, and gave himself for me. For 'he that believeth' with the true, living faith, 'hath the witness in himself.' * * * * But let it be observed that, in the very nature of the thing, the assurance goes before the confidence. For man cannot have a childlike confidence in God till he knows he is a child of God. Therefore, confidence, trust, reliance, adherence, or whatever else it may be called, is not the first, as some have supposed, but the second act or branch of faith.

Much has been said of conviction and confession as necessary, and some would naturally ask, "If these things are done in seeking holiness, do you not attach at least some merit to their performance" In reply let us quote the words of Wesley:

Though it be allowed, that both this repentance and its fruits are necessary to full salvation; yet they are not necessary either in the same sense with faith, or in the same degree: not in the same degree; -- for these fruits are necessary conditionally, if there be time and opportunity for them; otherwise a man may be sanctified without them. But he cannot be sanctified without faith. Likewise, let a man have ever so much

of this repentance, or ever so many good works, yet all this does not at all avail: he is not sanctified till he believes: but the moment he believes, with or without those fruits, yea, with more or less of this repentance, he is sanctified. Not in the same sense; -- for this repentance and these fruits are only remotely necessary, necessary in order to the continuance of faith, as well as the increase of it; whereas faith is immediately and directly necessary to sanctification. It remains, that faith is the only condition. which is immediately and proximately necessary to sanctification.

Yes, if a man will believe with more or less of these things the experience will immediately be given. But the natural heart is so constituted that it will not acknowledge its own helplessness until it is forced to it, and as faith grasps that which is beyond man's natural power, it will not be exercised till he sees his weakness; and in order that, the seeker may see this and sink at Jesus' feet, God is obliged to reveal to his inner eye his utter sinfulness, natural rebellion and hardness of heart, then when the merits of the blood are displayed before his longing vision he is ready to accept' it, for it is now his only plea.

Faith will never have anything of which to boast, for all former righteousnesses and efforts are as "filthy rags" in its sight, and the soul will instinctively recoil from every suggestion of self-glory. All his best efforts of the past are seen to be not only tainted with sin but impotent and insufficient to bring deliverance. As never before he realizes that man cannot make himself holy, and as never before he sees that "the blood is the life" of the soul.

Then as you approach God for heart cleansing, if you have had a definite view of your sinful heart and confessed it to God, if you feel that in the volition of your will you are completely abandoned to all the will of God, -- endeavor to pierce through the darkness of unbelief and see God, for at this moment he may be standing ready to reveal himself to your waiting heart. Do not be content till he does thus reveal himself. Do not be content with a cold, dry assent to certain promises, but tarry till your whole soul is filled with his love. You will not see him in bodily form standing before you, as the disciples saw him on the storm-tossed sea, but your spirit's eye will see him as a Redeemer from all sin, and the vision will be as clear and assuring as that of any material object can ever be.

Jesus said, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." It is not the "way of life," but "the way that leadeth unto life," that is strait and narrow. The way of life is out in the broad fields of infinite love. When you touch infinity you are not hampered by walls nor bound by fetters, but you are brought forth into a large place, a place of broad rivers and streams, a place of green pastures, where you can eat bread without scarceness, and lie down without fear.

But there is only one way into this broad place, the way of faith; and God shuts you up to this by shutting out everything else and hedging you up on every side. Before sanctifying faith is exercised your soul must stand stripped and helpless. You have had much help in living for God, but you now see your holiest actions polluted with self and all uncleanness, until you turn away with loathing. You are tired of the manna of the wilderness, and long for the corn and wine of Canaan. Your manna has been tainted with the corrupting breath of inward sin. You have poured out your troubles to God until your heart is sick, and in utter abhorrence you turn away from the treacherous foe. You fear your own heart. You tremble at the possible consequences if you fail.

You have almost unconsciously entertained good opinions of yourself, your abilities, your attainments, your spirituality, but now they all lie as refuse at your feet; and, instead of being puffed up with fancied worth, you see yourself filled with a loathsome disease. You have had friends whom you loved most

dearly, but now they are snatched away. You stand helpless and alone. And if you dare entertain a hope that there is help outside of God, your clamoring passions fling the lie at you. Darkness and burden seem to be your only lot.

When Jesus hung on the cross, deserted by his friends, bleeding in every wound, sinking under the load of sin, and the sun refusing to behold the scene; humanity for whom he groaned mocking him to scorn; hell's minions surrounding and oppressing his spirit; angels forbidden to minister to his needs; and finally, and worst of all, the Father's face withdrawn and he left alone to bear the curse for sinful men, it is no wonder that he cried in awful agony, and with breaking heart, "My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

So you, in your finite sphere, if you would be "crucified with Christ," will feel yourself deserted; and, seeing that divine justice burns against the inherent depravity of your heart, you, too, will feel like crying out, "My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet, faint not, thou favored one, God is only preparing you for the great things he has provided for you. Cry unto him "out of the depths." Search for the door of faith. Look for the blood. There is a refuge for you at his cross.

An old adage says, "It is always darkest just before day." While this is not always true in experience, yet it is so apt to be true that when you see yourself beset on every side, and your Jerusalem is beset with armies, then flee to the mountains, to Jesus Christ; he is ever very near. Abraham prepared his sacrifice and set himself to drive away the birds, until a horror of great darkness settled around him and a deep sleep overcame him; then God came. Jacob wrestled all night till the break of day, and at last the angel unjointed his thigh; but he kept praying and did not let the angel go till he received the divine blessing. A great many of the mighty victories of the Bible followed the passing of the straits. So to all great attainments in God there is ever a narrow passage, in which the soul, divested of all other considerations, and shut up to "this one thing," falls prostrate and crawls through the "needle's eye" of faith into the Jerusalem of its desires.

Let the following quotations from Wesley help you in fixing your eyes on the sin-destroying Lamb of God:

Now, faith is 'the demonstrative evidence of things unseen,' the supernatural evidence of things invisible, not perceivable by eyes of the flesh, or by any of our natural senses or faculties. Faith is that divine evidence whereby the spiritual man discerneth God, and the things of God. It is with regard to the spiritual world what sense is with regard to the natural. It is the spiritual sensation of every soul that is born of God.

* * * *

If you ask, 'Why then have not all men this faith? all, at least, who conceive it to be so happy a thing? Why do they not believe immediately?' We answer (on the Scriptural hypothesis), 'It is the gift of God.' No man is able to work it in himself. It is a work of omnipotence. It requires no less power thus to quicken a dead soul than to raise a body that lies in the grave. It is a new creation, and none can create a soul anew but he who at first created the heavens and the earth.

May not your own experience teach you this? Can you give yourself this faith? Is it now in your power to see, or hear, or taste, or feel God? Have you already, or can you raise in yourself, any perception of God, or of an invisible world? * * * *

Now, is there any power in your soul whereby you discern either these or him that created them? Or, can all your wisdom and strength open an intercourse between yourself and the world of spirits? Is it in your

power to burst the veil that is on your heart, and let in the light of eternity? You know it is not. You not only do not, but cannot, by your own strength, thus believe. The more you labor so to do, the more you will be convinced 'It is the gift of God.'

Again:

But what is that faith whereby we are sanctified, saved from sin, and perfected in love? It is a divine evidence and conviction, first that God hath promised it in the Scripture. Till we are thoroughly satisfied of this, there is no moving one step farther.

It is a divine evidence and conviction, secondly, that what God hath promised he is able to perform. Admitting, therefore, that 'with men it is impossible' to 'bring a clean thing out of an unclean,' to purify the heart from all sin, and to fill it with all holiness; yet this creates no difficulty In the case, seeing 'with God all things are possible.' And surely no one ever imagined it was possible to any power less than that of the Almighty! But if God speaks it shall be done.

It is, thirdly, a divine evidence and conviction that he is able and willing to do it now. And why not? Is not a moment to him the same as a thousand years? He cannot want more time to accomplish whatever he will. And he cannot want to stay for any more worthiness or fitness in the persons he is pleased to honor. We may therefore boldly say, at any point of time, 'Now is the day of salvation.'

To this confidence, that God is both able and willing to sanctify us now, there needs to be added one thing more, a divine evidence and conviction, that he doeth it. In that hour it is done: God says to the inmost soul, "According to thy faith be it unto thee.'

* * * * Thou therefore look for it every moment! Look for it in the way above described: in all those good works whereunto thou art 'created anew in Christ Jesus.' There is then no danger; you can be no worse, if you are no better for that expectation. For were you to be disappointed for your hope: it will come, and will not tarry. Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment! Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith. And by this token you may certainly know whether you seek it by faith or by works. If by works, you want something to be done first before you are sanctified. You think, I must first be or do thus or thus. Then you are seeking it by works unto this day. If you seek it by faith, you may expect it as you are; and if as you are then expect it now. It is of importance to observe, that there is an inseparable connection between these three points. Expect it by faith, Expect it as you are, and Expect it now! To deny one of them is to deny them all. To allow one, is to allow them all. Do you believe you are sanctified by faith? Be true then to your principle; and look for this blessing just as you are, neither better nor worse; as a poor sinner that still has nothing to plead, but Christ died. And if you look for it as you are, then expect it now. Stay for nothing: why should you? Christ is ready; and he is all you want. He is waiting for you: he is at the door! Let your inmost soul cry out,

'Come in, come in, thou heavenly guest!

Nor hence again remove;

But sup with me, and let the feast

Be everlasting love.'

The following, from Fletcher's "Christian Perfection," is also to the point:

If a momentary display of Christ's bodily glory could, in an instant, turn Saul, the blaspheming, bloody persecutor, into Paul, the praying, gentle apostle; if a sudden sight of Christ's hands could, in a moment, root up from Thomas' heart that detestable resolution, 'I will not believe;' and produce that deep confession of faith, 'My Lord and my God'.' what cannot the display of Christ's spiritual glory operate in a believing soul, to which he manifests himself, 'according to that power whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself'?

And again:

From the preceding observations, it appears that believers generally go to Christian Perfection as the disciples went to the other side of the sea of Galilee. They toiled some time very hard, and with little success, but after they had 'rowed about twenty-five or thirty furlongs, they saw Jesus walking on the sea. He said to them, "It is I, be not afraid." Then they willingly received him into the ship; and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.' Just so we toil till our faith discovers Christ in the promise, and welcomes him to our hearts; and such is the effect of his presence, that immediately we arrive at the land of perfection.

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