

What Does It Mean to Believe

by Raymond Golsworthy

True faith in Christ requires repentance and surrender to His lordship, and is not just intellectual assent.

Scripture: Psalm 116:10, John 6:47, Acts 20:20, Romans 10:9-10, Ephesians 2:8, Titus 3:5, Hebrews 6:1, James 2:17

Topics: "Saving Faith", "Lordship Salvation"

Description

Raymond Golsworthy emphasizes the importance of true and genuine faith in Christ for our eternal welfare, highlighting that our salvation is solely through faith and not by works. He delves into the significance of repentance and faith going hand in hand, stressing that true faith issues from repentant hearts. Additionally, he underscores the necessity of surrendering to the lordship of Christ as an integral part of saving faith, not as an optional decision. Lastly, Golsworthy discusses the vital aspect of audibly confessing Jesus as Lord, as a genuine expression of saving faith.

Transcript

One of the greatest needs among professing Christians is to understand what it really means to believe on Christ. This is an issue of paramount importance, for according to the Bible, our whole eternal welfare depends upon our faith. It has been divinely revealed that our security in the sight of God is not at all bound up with any works of righteousness which we have done (Tit. 3:5), but rather with this single matter of a true and genuine faith in Christ. "For by grace are ye saved through faith," says Paul, "not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8). This is the essence of the Christian gospel and this glorious salvation has been made possible by the inestimable accomplishment of Christ upon the cross. There the Saviour made a full atonement for our sins, and now God's only requirement from us is that we believe. Jesus Himself declared that, "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). This is a gift beyond all measure and the very possibility of receiving it on such terms, fills our hearts with worship to the Lord.

This matter of believing, however, is in a sense not so simple as it sounds. Experience teaches us that we need to know the actual force and meaning of that word 'believe', viewing it in the full-orbed light of Holy Scripture. We must realise, for instance, that the same Bible which tells us we are saved by faith, tells us also that there is such a thing as dead faith (James 2:17, 20, 26). This is emphasized three times in one single chapter and this itself is a warning to us. And have you ever read in the gospel of John that, when many in Jerusalem did believe in His Name, having seen the miracles which He did, Jesus nevertheless, "Did not commit Himself unto them" (John 2:23 and 24)? The inference, of course, is that their faith was

not of the right kind. It lacked something, somewhere and that something was, evidently, very vital Jesus could do nothing for them!

In addition to the above we note the fact that, when Paul outlined the gospel of salvation in the epistle to the Romans and expounded the marvellous doctrine of justification by faith, he was very careful to point out that it is with the heart that man believeth unto righteousness (Rom. 10:10). In other words, the apostle would have us know that this believing is no mere intellectual, theological, or superficial matter; the believing that saves the soul, issues from far deeper depths; it is something from the heart!

So, as we said, this whole matter is not quite so easy and simple as it sounds. And yet, because our eternal salvation depends upon it, how great and how immediate is the need for us to come to a clear and reliable understanding of what the Bible actually means by this believing. And how essential for us all to make quite sure that the kind of faith in Christ which we profess is really and truly the faith that saves the soul.

To help us in this important matter we present three simple Bible-facts about this faith.

1. Faith that saves is faith that issues from repentant hearts.

Here is a supremely important aspect of the matter and it is something which every professing Christian should squarely face and earnestly consider. Let us notice what the Bible says in this connection. First we draw your attention to the words with which our Lord commenced His public ministry: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). These were carefully chosen words, and they formed the very foundation of the glorious ministry which was to follow. Notice, please, He did not simply say, "The time is fulfilled ... believe the gospel," but rather, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." Those two words were like the two great arms of invitation which the Son of God stretched out in His gracious and loving pleadings with the sons of men. And it is just the same today. On the one hand, He cries to us, "Repent" and on the other, "Believe the gospel." This has always been the call of God to sinners (and all of us are in that category) and this has always been His way to true salvation.

The same important truth is also seen in relation to the ministry of Paul. A number of instances could be quoted, but a single reference, relating to his ministry at Ephesus, will here suffice. Addressing the elders there and reviewing his ministry in that city, the apostle declared that he had kept back nothing that was profitable to them, "Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20 and 21). This is but one of a number of passages that could be quoted in this connection. Paul, for one, preached repentance mixed with faith and called for faith marked by repentance.

We would point out, too, that the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, likewise mentions repentance and faith as being linked together. In outlining what he calls the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, he speaks of, "The foundation of repentance from dead works and faith toward God" (Heb. 6:1). And, incidentally, we are here reminded of the word in Matthew: "What God hath joined, let no man put asunder."

It is surely very clear from all these scriptures, that for the true salvation of the soul, repentance and faith must go together. They are, in fact, intertwined with each other and in a sense inseparable from each other. We may say that if there has been no element of repentance in our faith, no genuine sorrow for our

sins and no determination, by God's grace, to live a different we have been living, we have not really believed on Christ at all; certainly not in the way in which God wants us to believe, unto righteousness. We may have intellectually embraced all the Biblical facts which the preacher has brought to us, concerning the Person and work of Christ and we may even have given some positive emotional responses to the picture set before us, but, for all that, if there has been no real repenting for our sins, we can only conclude that, after all, our faith is still of the quite inadequate and wholly ineffectual kind. It has not brought salvation to the soul whatever may be our delusions to the contrary, we are still estranged from God. This, of course, is a tremendously solemn and very searching matter and we do well, right now, to stop and seek the Lord about it. Satan, we must remember, is a great deceiver. (Rev. 12:9; 20:3; 20:10, etc.)

We do need to understand that the gracious ministry of the gospel always presupposes the faithful ministry of the law. In other words, the gospel as we know it, is actually God's message to those who have been proved guilty by the law; and remember, he who offends in one point is guilty of all. (See James 2:9 and 10.) The gospel, thank God, is explicitly designed to bring its gracious ministry of hope and comfort to those who know themselves to be in great personal danger, because of that righteousness of God which has been repeatedly offended. Such law-breakers (and we are all such,) are definitely in deep trouble and they desperately need an effectual and righteous way of escape. Thank God, it is just at that point that the gospel of God's grace in Christ comes in and it is there and then we learn to plead the precious answer of ... the blood. In all the darkness of our need, the good news reaches us. We see the Son of God made sin for us and in that hour of our awful shame we hear and heed that precious saving word of God: ..."Believe!" It is from such a background of conviction that we repent indeed and believe the gospel, as the Saviour said we should.

This is what we mean, when we submit that living faith always issues from repenting hearts. All will surely see that such a faith is altogether different from that merely intellectual believing, that takes little or no account of personal sin and of a broken law and which never really feels the danger of impending judgment.

Indeed, indeed; that precious word, believe, is actually God's gracious rescue-call to troubled penitents. It is for those who are conscious of their failure and their danger; who reach out now for a new and better future, by the help of God (see Luke 3:8-14). It must never be regarded, or quoted, as if it were some easy counsel to the unbent righteous of this world. May God forgive us, if till now we have been among the many who have used that word believe as if it were a kind of magic talisman to comfort and settle proud and superficial souls who seek some kind of easy guarantee of heavenly bliss.

We need to point out here that the word in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," was addressed to someone who was trembling with fear and stricken with conviction. Through personal contact with God's indomitable apostles, the Philippian jailor had, that very night, been brought face to face with the power and righteousness of God. He had seen the shining faces of God's servants, despite the many and grievous stripes that had been laid upon them and, perhaps, had heard their happy songs at midnight. But then had come the God-sent earthquake, shaking the mighty foundations of the prison and opening all the fast-closed doors to those Spirit-filled apostles. Then there was the jailor's attempted suicide and the saving cry of Paul, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here." Here is no disinterested student of religion, or superficial candidate for heaven, but rather a trembling (verse 29) sinner. Such is the man who throws himself at the feet of Paul and Silas and cries out to them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And to such a man, in such a case, is given the inspired and comforting assurance, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!"

We make bold to say that, if ever there were a precious word of Scripture which has been shamefully mishandled and woefully belittled by inappropriate usage and gross misapplication, it is this one. And who can measure the awful deception and eternal loss that have surely followed? If this true precious verse is carelessly echoed without discrimination, it may easily lead an unsuspecting person, or a million such, to mildly think that a merely intellectual faith in Christ is sufficient to guarantee the soul's salvation, and this without a single question of personal and grievous sinnership, and with no recognition, whatsoever, of the awful and urgent danger if we do not change our course! How convenient for us all, if we can just believe, as the scripture says (?); if we can, as it were, accept evangelical Christianity as our chosen creed and use the well-attested facts of the gospel for what we hope will be an unquestioned entrance into heaven! In this convenient way, our personal pride suffers no indignity; in fact it may be inwardly enhanced! We simply believe in Christ, as the preacher says, and go to heaven! This is one of the major deceptions of the devil and possibly it is his chief device for keeping respectable but unconverted sons of Adam on their way to hell!

We repeat again that the faith that God requires, issues from repentant hearts. By inward choice we turn from sin and self and gratefully receive the Saviour. That, we may be sure, is the only kind of faith that brings the sealing of the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 1:13). That other, lesser faith, so-called, leaves the sinner quite unquickened, whatever be his religious position, or opinion, or even his beliefs. And let us take it deeply to heart, that, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom.8:9).

2. Faith that saves includes a true surrender to the lordship of Christ.

This may be a new thought to many, but that it is fully Biblical is beyond all question professing Christians need to be taught. They need to realise that surrender to Christ as Lord, is not an optional decision that somewhere and sometimes follows faith; it is, itself, a part of faith! A certain genuine surrender is always present at the very moment when a soul believes on Christ to righteousness. That surrender can deepen and develop after conversion and there may be new crises on new issues, but at the moment of our trusting Christ, the inner reality of true surrender is always there. Sometimes it is rescinded and withdrawn at some time following conversion. Because of certain pressures on the life it may need to be restored and reaffirmed again, but as far as the actual moment of conversion is concerned, a genuine surrender to the Lord, as Lord, is always there. It is part of the faith that saves. Let us turn to the scriptures again regarding this great matter.

First we would point out that in the Epistle to the Romans, that great unrivalled classic on salvation and justification by faith, emphasis is clearly laid, first and last, on what the apostle calls the obedience of faith. Right at the beginning of the opening chapter, Paul declares that he has received his apostleship, "Unto obedience of faith among all nations" (Rom. 1:5). The Amplified Bible's rendering is that he has received his apostleship, "to promote obedience to the faith ... among all nations." That, in fact, becomes the keynote of the letter and the thought persists through all the coming chapters. (See Ch. 6:17; 10:16; etc.). In the closing chapter, in the final sentence, the apostle affirms again that the revelation of the gospel is made known to all nations, "To win them to obedience to the faith" (Rom 16:26, Ampl.).

This, surely, is very plain. It simply means that Paul and his associates were ever seeking to bring their hearers to the place where they would genuinely submit to the lordship of the Saviour Who was offered to them in the Gospel and earnestly set themselves to obey that Saviour in every personal and practical matter, as He Himself might henceforth graciously enable them. In that particular frame of mind and in that particular attitude of heart the recipients of the message would place their trust in Christ and thus obtain, in

personal experience, the gift of God's salvation.

That, we verily believe, is the kind of evangelism which is urgently needed in our own dark times. It stands in sharp contrast to that insipid 'easy-believism' which is so prevalent today. We should realise that the very phrase 'gospel of Christ' means literally 'gospel of the anointed King of glory'. In its basic character it is still the 'gospel of the kingdom' and, as such, it invariably requires the obedience of faith. (See Matt. 4:23; Matt. 9:35; Matt. 24:14; also Acts 28:31; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17.)

Let us settle it then, that when we come to Christ, we come to One Who is indeed, "The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). Because of what we are, we come with shame and deep repentance, as we said before, but, because of what He is, in all His risen glory, we come with genuine and true surrender. And yet we come, thank God, having in our hearts a deep, well-founded trust in Him, that He will graciously receive us and wash away our sins in His atoning blood (Rev. 1:5).

Putting it very simply, we can say that we are called upon to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and this, very obviously, envisages and requires a heart-acceptance of His lordship. When we cry out: "O Lord, save me!", we obviously must mean that appellation, "Lord", as well as the appended supplication, "Save me!". Can we expect God to take serious account of the superficial approaches of unyielding sinners who have no real desire or intention to live their lives under the direction of the One they claim to trust in? And yet there are thousands upon thousands who blandly and blindly say: "O yes, I am believing on Christ for my salvation, but I deem it wise to suspend (for a while at least) the awkward and complicating question of His lordship. I certainly expect Him to get me into heaven, but I do retain my right to choose my own convenient course until I get there!" These people may not actually use these words, but this in fact is what their attitude amounts to! They prefer to leave this matter of Christ's lordship to other, rather special Christians, who are not so occupied with the mundane things of life.

It is positively amazing and deeply humiliating that intelligent people can be so completely childish and so easily deceived on such a vital and solemn matter, but we say again that there are thousands upon thousands who are in that awful case. They do not realise that the kind of faith they have is not at all the faith that saves. God will surely draw no line between the love and lordship of His Son and those who seek to do so, for their own convenience, come under the rebuke of Luke 6:46. They need the adjoining warning of Luke 6:49. If only we would be more sensible in our approaches, how merciful and gracious we would find the Lord to be; and how powerful, too, in baptizing us into the reality of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

We believe that this explains why so many professing Christians are wholly dissatisfied with their so-called Christian experience. The fact of the matter is that, for all their religious routines and exercises and their strenuous efforts at Christian behaviour, they have not got the life. And, certainly, the Christian life must be received, before it can be lived (Rom. 6:23; John 1:12). These poor people have not truly met the King Who gives the life and they are, in fact, in a wholly false position. And this explains as well, why there is so little foundation of reality in the so-called local churches. To a large extent the individuals themselves have not faced the vital issue of the Saviour's headship; how then can it be a true and governing reality in the wider company? A mixed multitude, to say the least, has entered in (Ex. 12:38; Neh. 13:3) and in many cases the whole situation is completely false and artificial. All who have belief, whatever be the kind, are readily baptized ... and our wicked enemy contentedly looks on. And how he revels in the strifes and complications that invariably will follow!

We repeat that surrender to Christ is not an optional second blessing, reserved for a few enthusiasts; it is a necessary ingredient and hallmark of genuine, saving faith. As we said before, it may need to be ratified and deepened as we go along, but the basic reality is always there, in its initial form, whenever a human being believes on Christ to righteousness. The Bible says that Christ is the Author of eternal salvation to them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9) and it emphasises that those are the ones to whom God gives the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). And let us hear it again, those who have not the Spirit of Christ are none of His (Rom. 8:9).

It may be well to point out here the original wording of John 3:36, which is most significant and helpful. The verse actually reads, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on Him." This is the R.V. rendering and the clear and solemn inference is that believing is synonymous with obeying. The very construction and balance of the sentence shows that the two great words are interchangeable in this connection; "He that believeth" and "He that obeyeth". Let us not be deceived, then, in this great matter. Let us face the solemn fact that having faith always issues from surrendered hearts and it operates, exclusively, in the context of the Saviour's mighty lordship. That is the atmosphere when we believe on Christ; at the very moment when we truly trust Him as our Saviour, we inwardly crown Him as our Lord. No other approach is possible, or feasible, if we are coming to the Lord of glory and if He is, indeed, the risen Son of God. Those who try to circumvent His lordship, keep themselves outside the realm of blessing and unless they change their attitude, they will not even reach Him. More brokenness of heart and more submissiveness of will must first be shown, before such individuals can effectually rely on Christ for forgiveness and mercy and for the right to enter heaven. It is those who call on the Name of the Lord Who will he saved (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13).

It has been truly said that a right relationship with Christ requires a right relationship with His commandments. This should be beyond all question, but there are still very many who want the former without the latter; in fact they think they have it! They think they are trusting Christ, but they only want His promises and show no confidence in His commandments. And Christ, most certainly, cannot be divided. If His promises are good, His commandments are equally good and we cannot have the one without the other. To trust in Christ at all, is to trust a whole Christ, as He is. We embrace His promises of forgiveness as to our guilty past, and, simultaneously, we embrace His commandments and wishes (and promises) as to our coming future. That alone is genuine faith in Christ and that alone is the faith that saves.

How good when we can sing the whole hymn of Frances Ridley Havergal:

I am trusting Thee for pardon,

At Thy feet I bow;

For Thy grace and tender mercy,

Trusting now.

I am trusting Thee to guide me,

Thou alone shalt lead,

Ev'ry day and hour supplying

All my need.

I am trusting Thee, LORD JESUS,

Never let me fall,

I am trusting Thee forever,

And for all.

How good, indeed, to trust our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

Let no one think, however, from what we have written above, that we are suggesting that a man contributes anything to his salvation by any meritorious acts of obedience, or by any virtuous (?) attitudes of surrender. The Bible position is that we are saved by grace, through faith, plus nothing, and we know very well that all the virtue is in the One believed and all the merit in the One we trust. Salvation is a gift, thank God (Rom. 5:17; Rom. 6:17; etc.) and must never be regarded in any other light. But God insists, and rightly so, the sinner must receive that gift with due submissiveness before the royal Giver, with a genuine, deep intention to honour and obey Him. All of that is in the word believe and it certainly has nothing to do whatever with works of merit. It is simply a matter of relationship with Him on Whom our hearts depend for righteousness.

3. Faith that saves is faith that brings an audible confession from our mouths

The passage of scripture which we have in mind just here is Romans ten. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For, with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9 and 10).

Here, we believe, we have what can be used as a simple test as to whether the faith we claim is actually and truly saving faith, or whether, after all, it is only intellectual and, as far as salvation is concerned, quite profitless and unavailing. If it really is the type of faith that God is looking for, it will spontaneously express itself in a genuine and audible confession that Jesus is the Lord; that He is risen from the dead, and, in our life, He reigns. The words may vary, but, in actual essence, that will be the true confession of our lips.

This, we notice from our verses, is not just an audible statement, made by someone who holds beliefs concerning Christ; that is quite another matter. The reference here is to an actual confession, issuing from deep places in the heart. That confession clearly bespeaks a spiritual crisis and it openly commits the life to a becoming consistency with the facts declared. We may say, perhaps, that this confession with the mouth is the living 'birth-cry' and true evidence of the saving faith that is being born within us through the hearing of the word (Rom. 10:17). With our hearts we believe and with our mouths we confess.

This, we repeat, is something by which, right now, we may individually test ourselves. Has it been our sincere practice and holy habit to speak freely and gladly of the resurrection of Jesus; have we boldly confessed with our mouths that Christ is Lord? Let no man mistake it; there is a kind of mental believing which has no such voice and knows no such spontaneous and audible confession of Christ's lordship. In fact, if the truth were known, it really has no inward joy that He is risen from the dead! While the actual doctrine of the resurrection may be held as a more or less pleasing tenet of the faith we claim to follow, the resurrection itself, as an historical and spiritual reality, has never been the glorious theme of our new and

happy song! In other words, dead faith may have its flawless tenets and even its Biblical beliefs, but it gives no audible testimony concerning this mighty triumph of the Lord and it sings no songs of victory. In short, there is no appreciable confession from the heart and with the mouth, that we are subjects now of another King Whom God hath raised up from the dead.

Heart and mouth, then, are expected to be mutually active whenever there is saving faith. Those who have had opportunity to observe, will know that this merely intellectual or superficial faith is strangely and significantly silent on this matter of the Saviour's resurrection. Saving faith, on the other hand, is both held and heard. We may say, perhaps, that the faith that is high up in the brain seldom descends to animate reluctant lips, whilst faith that is deep down in the heart quickly rises from that heart and flows forth from the lips in grateful proclamation of the Saviour's triumph. "I believed," said the psalmist, "therefore have I spoken" (Psalm 116:10).

We conclude our meditation by asking you the solemn question: "Are you really in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5)? Is your belief, after all, only a dead belief, or is it living? Going back to that first matter of repentance, have you ever known the pangs of personal conviction, and have you ever seen yourself a lost and guilty sinner in the sight of God? And, looking on the Lamb of God Who died for you, have you turned from sin, and sins, with deep and true contrition? "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper:" says the word of God, "But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). That, surely, is the inward essence of repentance; and it goes with faith.

And what about this matter of surrender? Have you faced the fact that Jesus Christ is Lord (Acts 10:36) and have you made Him your Lord (Phil. 2:11)? Have you fallen down before Him as the King of glory, and from that lowly place claimed, by faith, the cleansing of His precious blood? That is what the Bible means by faith and that alone can save the soul.

Those who can answer a genuine 'Yes' to these few questions, are the real believers to whom God gives the Holy Spirit. And it is from the hearts and mouths of such believers that there comes, spontaneously, the confession that Christ is Lord and risen from the dead.

May God have dealings with us, here and now, if up till now we have only been respectable adherents of the Christian creed. May these few lines help us to realise the horror of this deep and devilish deception, and may they point the way to something altogether new. May they show the way, in fact, to Christ Himself, that all who read may know a true salvation from their sins and a divine and glorious renewing of the life, by deep and genuine trust in Him, the sinner's Friend.

Jesus, the sinner's Friend,

I hide myself in Thee;

God looks upon the sprinkled blood,

It is my only plea.

Thou hast fulfilled the law,

And I am justified,

Mine is the blessing, Thine the curse;

I live, for Thou hast died.
Jesus, the sinner's Friend,
I cannot speak Thy praise,
No mortal voice can sing the song
That ransomed hearts would raise.
(Mrs. Pennefather)

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