

ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

BIBLE STUDY, 21/01/2009

STUDY 1

SAVING FAITH

Mark 16:16

"He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). These are the words of Christ, the risen Christ, and are the last that He uttered before He left this earth. The words call for our most diligent attention. They are of the greatest possible consequence, for in them are set forth the terms of eternal happiness or misery: life and death, and the conditions of both. Faith is the principal saving grace, and unbelief the chief damning sin. The condition of life as made known by Christ in Mark 16:16, is double: the principal one, faith; the accessory one, baptism; it is termed accessory because it is not absolutely necessary to life, as faith is, for it is *not* "he that is not baptized shall be damned," but "he that believeth not." Faith is so indispensable that, though one be baptised, yet *believeth not*, he shall be damned. Continuance in unbelief makes hell as certain as though sinners were already in it. While sinners remain in unbelief, they have no hope and are "*without God in the world*" (Ephesians 2:12). Now if believing be so necessary, and unbelief so dangerous and fatal, it deeply concerns us to *know* what it is to believe. It becomes each of us to make the most diligent and thorough enquiry as to the nature of saving faith. The more so because all faith in Christ does not save; yea, all faith in Christ does not save. Multitudes are deceived upon this vital matter.

1. The defectiveness of non-saving faith

Mark 16:16; Isaiah 48:2, 4; Exodus 14:31; Hebrews 3:17, 18; II Chronicles 13:5, 12, 17, 18; I Kings 15:3; Matthew 7:22, 23

There are those who have a faith which is so like to that which is saving that they themselves may take it to be the very same. Simon Magus is a case in point. Of him it is written, "Then Simon himself *believed* also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip" (Acts 8:13). Such a faith had he, and so expressed it, that Philip took him to be a Christian, and admitted him to those privileges which are peculiar to them. Yet, a little later, the apostle Peter said to him, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God . . . I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:21, 23).

This non-saving faith is defective and comes short of a faith which does save. Many are willing for Christ to save them from hell, but are not willing for Him to save them from *self*. They want to be delivered from the wrath to come, but they wish to retain their self-will and self-pleasing. But He will not be dictated unto: we must be saved on *His* terms, or not at all. When Christ *saves*, He saves from *sin* from its power and pollution, and therefore from its guilt. And the very essence of sin is the determination to have our *own* way (Isaiah 53:6). Where Christ saves, He subdues this spirit of self-will, and implants a genuine, a powerful, a lasting, desire and determination to please *Him*. Many are never saved because they wish to divide Christ; they want to take Him as Saviour, but are unwilling to subject themselves unto Him as their Lord. Of all such Christ will yet say, "But these Mine enemies, *which would not* that I should *reign over them*, bring hither, and slay them before Me" (Luke 19:27). To deny self utterly, and take up their cross daily, is a task from which they shrink.

2. The nature of saving faith

Mark 16:16; Matthew 11:28; John 6:37; Colossians 2:6; John 15:14; Romans 16:26

Saving faith is the opposite of damning belief. Both issue from the heart that is alienated from God, which is in a state of rebellion against Him; saving faith from a heart which is reconciled to Him and so has ceased to fight against Him. Thus an essential element or ingredient in saving faith is a yielding to the authority of God, a submitting of oneself to His rule. To be received by Christ one

must not only come to Him renouncing all his own righteousness (Romans 10:3), as an empty-handed beggar (Matthew 19:21), but he must also forsake his self-will and rebellion against Him (Psalm 12:11, 12; Proverbs 28:13). Should an insurrectionist and seditious come to an earthly king seeking his sovereign favour and pardon, then, obviously, the very law of his coming to him for forgiveness requires that he should come on his knees, laying aside his hostility. So it is with a sinner who really comes savingly to Christ for pardon. John Bunyan wrote: "Coming to Christ is attended with an honest and sincere forsaking all for Him [Luke 14:26, 27]".

Saving faith consists of the complete surrender of our whole being and life to the claims of God upon us: "But first gave their own selves to the Lord" (II Corinthians 8:5). Until the ungodly are sensible of the exceeding sinfulness of their vile course of self-will and self-pleasing, until they are genuinely broken down and penitent over it before God, until they are willing to forsake the world for Christ, until they have resolved to come under His government, for such to depend upon Him for pardon and life is not faith, but blatant presumption, it is but to add insult to injury. And for any such to take His holy name upon their polluted lips and profess to be His followers is the most terribly blasphemy, and comes perilously nigh to committing that sin for which there is no forgiveness. Saving faith is to the soul what health is to the body: it is a mighty principle of operation, full of life, ever working, bringing forth fruit after its own kind.

3. The communication of saving faith

Saving faith is a spiritual grace communicated from on high. "It is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). It is "of the operation of God" (Colossians 2:12). It is by "the power of God" (I Corinthians 2:5). A most remarkable passage on this subject is found in Ephesians 1:16-20. There we find the apostle Paul praying that the saints should have the eyes of their understanding enlightened, that they might know "what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." Not the strong power of God, or the greatness of it, but the "exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward." Note too the standard of comparison: we "believe according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead."

When spiritual life has been communicated to the soul, that individual is now able to see things in their true colours. In God's light he sees light (Psalm 36:9). He is now given to perceive (by the Holy Spirit) what a lifelong rebel he has been against his Creator and Benefactor: that instead of making God's will his rule he has gone his own way; that instead of having before him God's glory he has sought only to please and gratify self. Even though he may have been preserved from all the grosser outward forms of wickedness, he now recognises that he is a spiritual leper, a vile and polluted creature, utterly unfit to draw near, still less to dwell with, Him who is ineffably holy; and such an apprehension makes him feel that his case is hopeless. Only thus is any soul prepared truly to appreciate Christ. They that are whole need not a physician. The one who has been savingly convicted is made to realise that none but the Lord Jesus can heal one so desperately diseased by sin; that He alone can impart that spiritual health (holiness).

4. The evidences of saving faith

The heart of fallen man is thoroughly depraved, its thoughts and imaginations being only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). It is full of corrupt desires and affections, which exert themselves and influence man in all he does. Hence the first real work of faith is to cleanse the soul from these pollutions, and therefore we read, "*They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*" (Galatians 5:24). A heart that is being purified by faith (Acts 15:9; I Peter 1:22), is one fixed upon a pure Object. It drinks from a pure Fountain, delights in a pure Law (Romans 7:22), and looks forward to spending eternity with a pure Saviour (I John 3:3). It loathes all that is filthy—spiritually as well as morally—yea, hates the very garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 23). Contrariwise, it loves all that is holy, lovely and Christlike.

Saving faith is always evidenced by a *humble* heart. Faith lays the soul low, for it discovers its own vileness, emptiness, impotency. It realises its former sinfulness and present unworthiness. It is conscious of its weaknesses and wants, its carnality and corruptions. Nothing more exalts Christ than faith, and nothing more debases a man. Faith empties a man of self-conceit, self-confidence, and self-righteousness, and makes him seem nothing, that Christ may be all in all. The strongest faith is always accompanied by the greatest humility, accounting self the greatest of sinners and unworthy of the least favour (Matthew 8:8-10).

Saving faith is always found in a *tender* heart (Ezekiel 36:26) whereas an unregenerate heart is hard as stone, full of pride and presumption. Saving faith "worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). That faith which is "of the operation of God" (Colossians 2:12) is a mighty principle of power, diffusing spiritual energy to all the faculties of the soul and enlisting them in the service of God. Saving faith is ever accompanied by *an obedient walk* (I John 2:3 ó 4). Saving faith gives the heart victory over all the vanities and vexations of things below. "For whatsoever is born of God *overcometh the world*: and this is the victory that *overcometh the world*, even our faith" (I John 5:4). Where a saving faith is rooted in the heart it grows up and spreads itself in all the branches of obedience, and is filled with the fruits of righteousness.