

JOHN THREE: SIXTEEN

By

R. L. Moyer, D. D.

THE FAMILY ALTAR BOOK SHOP Minneapolis, Minn.

CHAPTER SEVEN -

Believeth

MEN are the same the world over - all guilty, all sinners, all lost. They may be rich and affluent and of great reputation, but they are nevertheless by nature the children of wrath. Every man needs to be saved, and, if not saved, that man will be eternally lost.

"**What must I do to be saved?**" is an old, old question. In the final analysis there are just two doctrines regarding salvation: one is that GOD saves a man; the other is that man saves himself; that is, that man is saved because of what he is, because of what he does, because of what he knows, or because of what he feels.

We believe that GOD alone can save a man and that man's only part in salvation is in the emphasized word of the text - "**believeth.**" This word in its different forms is found over five hundred times in the New Testament. Faith attends every step of the Christian's life from first to last.

"Believeth" Denies Salvation by Character

That is, man is not saved because of what he is. Men forget that our Lord said, "**That which was born of the flesh is flesh,**" and that the mind of the flesh is always enmity against GOD. Frequently a man says, "I have been a Christian ever since I was born," but this is never a truth. A man never becomes a Christian until he is "**born again.**" Many seem to think that a child of Christian parents is a Christian, but a man is not a Christian because he is born into a pious family. He is a Christian because he is "**born again**" into GOD's family.

We read of a cultured man who said, "Why, I do not need anyone to die for me. I do not want any one's blood shed for me." This is only self-righteousness. Such a one is like the Pharisee of Luke 18:9-14 who was so well pleased with himself that he congratulated himself upon himself and commended himself to GOD. "**I thank thee, that I am not as other men are**" was his boast, yet GOD declared that the poor publican went down to his house justified rather than the other.

Every man who refuses salvation by faith denies sin and delights in the exaltation of the flesh. GOD declares, "**There is none righteous, no, not one**" (Romans 3:10). Man's self-righteousness is only "**filthy rags**" in GOD's sight, and utterly futile.

The only righteousness that GOD will ever accept is absolute righteousness, and no human being in himself can meet that demand. The only righteousness that will ever satisfy GOD is the righteousness which He alone bestows; that is, the "**righteousness of God.**" This is not man's righteousness.

What use to demand righteousness from man when there is none righteous? Man is bankrupt as to righteousness. This righteousness is bestowed by GOD upon men and not demanded by GOD from men. It is the "**righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe**" (Romans 3:22). This perfect righteousness of GOD is put upon a man the very moment he believes, but until that moment he is absolutely without righteousness. Nothing in the natural man will ever please GOD.

"Believeth" Refutes Salvation by Works

That is, a man is not saved because of what he does. "**Not of works**" is GOD's testimony over and over again (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:9). "**To him that worketh not**" (Romans 4:5).

In a little tract entitled "*The Newspaper Plan of Salvation*" there appears the following from Walt Mason:

"I do not know just what may hap, when I go tumbling off the map, into the outer void; I hope to draw a pair of wings, and crown and robe, and kindred things, and harp of celluloid. But little do I walk the floor, or lose a chance to sleep and snore by worrying my head about the things that may befall when I step off this whirling ball, and line up with the dead. I think I've all a man should need, in this, the simple little creed, that's pasted in my lid: 'With all your fellow-men be square; be kind and just to all; nor care a cent what others did.' If one is square and just and kind, I don't believe he'll be behind, when they distribute crowns; he'll be a credit to this globe, and he will swap for snowy robe, his work worn hand-me-downs. Religion's tangled, teased, and vext with dogma and conflicting text, by sages splitting hairs; and all that fellows really need is just that simple little creed, to climb the golden stairs."

Ask ten unsaved men what they think of this "simple little creed" and in all probability all ten will heartily approve of this plan of salvation. We fear that if you asked ten Christians what they thought of this creed they would also approve of it. Yet there is not one word of truth in it. No matter how square and just and kind a man may be, he is lost without CHRIST.

"Yes, sir," said the merchant, "this book is my book of life. It is my consolation, my support, my hope. When my last hour comes I will meet it calmly, resting upon the certainty that I have made a good use of the talents which GOD entrusted to me. Yes, in this book rest all my hopes, both for this world and the next!"

The words were spoken confidently, and almost triumphantly. At least, so it seemed to the Christian visitor, who was sitting in the merchant's office, and listening with surprise and grief. What book was it, think you, to which the speaker referred, and which he called his "book of life"? The Bible? To what other book could he possibly refer in such terms? No, it was not the Bible. We will let the merchant himself answer our question.

"If you were to read this book," he said, "you would find some names in it that would surprise you. But I have never shown it to any one, for it contains the secrets of others. This book is a record of all the services which I have ever rendered to anyone. It is secured from every eye except my own, for I keep it in this box, of which I alone have the key. Look at the inscription."

The visitor glanced at the writing on the cover, and read these words: "To be placed in my coffin without being opened."

Some comment was evidently expected from him, and quietly seeking GOD's help and guidance, he said: "I would like to ask you if in those moments which come to us all (for we are all sinners), when conscience rises up to accuse us, and we feel we are guilty in GOD's sight, do you then find anything in this book that can give you peace? Does it lead you to believe yourself pardoned, and justified before GOD?"

The merchant leaned over and laid his hand upon that of his visitor. "Sir," he said, "if this book had not power to give me peace, I would burn it, and never give another halfpenny to the poor. Yes, I know that I commit sins; I have my faults, like everyone else. But this book reassures me. When I look over it, I feel that my account stands well, and that there is sufficient recorded in its pages to make all my faults and sins to be forgotten."

Some years passed since the visit paid by the Christian to the office of the merchant, and now the latter was laid upon his dying bed. His sufferings were great, but his mind was clear. He sent a message to his Christian friend, begging him to come to his bedside, which he gladly did. As the visitor entered the sick-room, what, should he see, lying beside the dying man, but the register of his good works.

"It will be a relief to me to confide in you," he said. "It was hard to give up a delusion which I had treasured for thirty years. But the veil was torn away, and there was revealed to me the utter worthlessness of the book I had so prized."

His face beamed with gratitude and joy. "Imagine," he continued, "what would have been my state if I had ended with this thought: I have labored for myself, and have received my reward. But I saw that, far from having atoned for my sins by my good works, those very works were in themselves full of sin; and that I was a lost sinner, in danger of eternal death, and with no power to save myself. And then, for the first time in my life, I felt my need of a SAVIOUR, and I thought of Him Who, **'though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.'** And now I treasure in my heart those words which once were so distasteful to me: **'By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast'** (Ephesians 2:8-9)."

The next day he passed peacefully away.

This was Cain's mistake. He was a tiller of the ground and brought the fruit of the ground unto JEHOVAH. That fruit was not of spontaneous growth, but represented the work of his hands and the sweat of his face, but GOD rejected that offering. A man's works may take the form of reformation, but man is not saved by the process of sin-elimination. Sam Jones used to preach a sermon on "*Quit Your Meanness*." Undoubtedly there are a great many Christians who need to

quit their meanness, but no man becomes a Christian by quitting his meanness.

We read of a saloon-keeper in Detroit who heard one of Billy Sunday's sermons on "booze," and who walked the trail declaring, "If I am as mean as he says I am, I am going to quit the business." But that did not make him a Christian. A man is not a Christian because he does not drink or sell drink.

Some men think they can be saved by "turning over a new page." Suppose a man owes a large bill for groceries and the grocer tells him he can have no more merchandise until the bill is paid. The next day the man goes into the store, orders a large supply of groceries, turns to a new page in his charge book and asks the grocer to charge the order. The grocer asks about the unpaid bill, and the man answers, "Oh, that is all right. I have turned over a new page." Turning over a new page does not pay the obligation on the turned-down pages. Every man has enough sin on the past pages of his book to damn him forever.

A man's work may take the sacramental form; that is, he may believe that because he is baptized and unites with the church and partakes of the Lord's Supper he is saved. We have had too many testimonies to believe that every church member is saved. It is not form but faith that makes one to be the child of GOD.

Salvation by works is pure paganism. We read of a Buddhist who arose every morning, ate no food until the noon hour, and spent the entire morning performing the rites and requirements of his religion, but at the age of seventy-six, that Buddhist was superstitious, unrighteous, idolatrous, unsaved.

"Believeth" Contradicts Salvation by Culture

That is, man is not saved because of what he knows. In some circles today sin is labeled as ignorance, therefore a man can be saved only by education. We quote the statement of one: "Give every one an education, elevate standards, raise ideas, change environments, and a better life will eventuate." According to that, a man is damned because he is ignorant or illiterate.

Nicodemus came to the Lord with this, "**We know**," and undoubtedly Nicodemus knew a great many things for he was the teacher in Israel, and yet he was an unsaved man to whom the Lord said, "**Ye must be born again**."

Paul was a man of great culture. He spoke at least three languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. He was versed in Greek literature and Hebrew theology. He had a keen mind and great reasoning powers, yet schooling did not save him. A man may graduate from a university and yet not be saved. No school can hand you salvation wrapped up in a diploma. The natural man, no matter how well trained, cannot receive the things of GOD. Indeed, it is the wisdom of the natural man that keeps him away from GOD.

A friend of ours who was a preacher before he was saved said that when he was in that state and was asked what a man should do to become a Christian he always replied, "Read good books." Think of that! "Read good books" without any reference to the Book. This writer, before he was saved, read good books, even those which go to make up the "world's best literature"; indeed,

had a library of many hundreds of such volumes. Yet none of these, nor all of them, ever made him a Christian. Man is saved because he believeth with the heart - not because he knoweth with the head.

"Believeth" Disproves Salvation by Feeling

That is, a man is not saved because of what he feels. Faith must never be confounded with nor measured by feelings.

If we say we cannot believe unless we feel, we are guilty of rank unbelief. That is just as though we said, "Lord, I will not believe you unless I have some evidence, some proof that what you have said is true." Try that on an earthly friend and you will give offense. You cannot imagine a greater insult than that.

Feeling is a natural consequence of faith, but too many times we forget faith and set our eyes on feelings. That is a fatal mistake. We are not saved because we "feel good." We ought to "feel good" because we are saved. Feeling follows faith. Our feelings are not the basis of what we believe. They are rather the result of what we believe.

As an illustration of this I give you the experience of a friend of mine, Elmer Johnson, a member of the First Baptist Church of Minneapolis. A year or so ago he received a telegram from Willmar stating, "Mother passed away. Funeral Wednesday." This telegram was signed "Bill." Bill is the name of a brother still living at home. Elmer, his sisters and brother, all who live here in Minneapolis were terribly shocked by the message. They immediately assembled themselves and started for home. As they described that ride later, it was truly a "ride of death," sad as a funeral itself. They were torn between grief and astonishment.

What had been the cause of this awful blow? The last time they had seen their mother she was very well. Why had they not spent a little more time with her when she was living? They tried to telephone to get the answers to some of the questions in their sad and perplexed minds, but there was no answer. At last they arrived at home - to be greeted at the door by their mother!

They tried to hide from her the real cause of their visit, but the shock was too great to be so hid. Upon inquiring, they found that a friend's mother had died. This friend had telegraphed to Elmer and had signed only his first name - Bill. You can readily see that the misunderstanding was a natural one.

Elmer and his dear ones all believed that the telegram had reference to their own mother. Their feelings were based upon their belief.

Spurgeon said the following concerning feeling: "*Faith doth not come by feeling, but through faith arises much of holy feeling, and the more a man lives in the walk of faith, as a rule, the more will he feel and enjoy the light of GOD's countenance. Faith hath something firmer to stand upon than those ever-changing frames and feelings which like the weather of our sunless land, is fickle and frail, and changeth speedily from brightness into gloom. You may get feeling from faith, and the best of it, but you will be long before you will find any faith that is worth the having if you try to evoke it from frames and feelings.*"

"Believeth" Declares Salvation by Trust

Spurgeon also bears this testimony: "I would have given all I had if I might but have been informed what I must do to be saved. Though I frequented places where the gospel was preached, I did not catch the meaning of believing. It puzzled me much. I do not remember to have heard the simple declaration that to trust in JESUS CHRIST would save my soul . . . I have often thought that if I had heard the way of faith simply stated, my soul would have leaped into liberty long before."

In Romans 10:17 we are told that "**faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**"

An old definition of faith is that it "**sets its seal that God is true.**" In I John 5:10 we read, "**He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.**"

"**Faith cometh by hearing**" is a true statement, for no man can believe what he does not hear. "**How shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard?**" I must be informed of a fact before I can possibly believe it. The record that GOD has given of His Son constitutes the Gospel. That record must be believed.

The hearing is that of the Word of GOD - not hearing just anything. Not hearing the word of man. One has truly said: "I may hear a man descant upon the Gospel with all the eloquence that can be commanded by the most fluent tongue, yet if my faith comes to me because that man has spoken pathetically, or poetically, or argumentatively, it is a poor miserable faith; being born of the power of the flesh, it will die; and so prove itself unlike the faith which springs from the incorruptible Word of GOD, for that liveth and abideth forever."

"On the other hand, I may hope for faith if I am listening to the true Gospel, though the man who speaks it may be of stammering lips, and his voice may be disagreeable to my ear, and there may be much about his manner that does not commend itself to me. If he preaches the truth it is by hearing not him, the man, but by hearing the Word of GOD that I shall come to faith." Saving faith always has respect to what GOD says.

It sounds a little strange to have some one ask, "How can I believe?" Do you mean, "How can I believe GOD?" The next time your wife tells you something, say to her, "How can I believe you?" You will probably leave the house with the dishwater down your neck.

It sounds just as strange to have a man say, "Well, I am trying to believe." The next time your business associate or friend tells you something, say, "Well, I'll try to believe you." What will the result be?

Our trouble is that we receive man's word, deceptive as it is, and that word forms the foundation of all business life, of all social life, of all judicial life, of all national life, and of nearly all our educational life. We believe the word of man even when that word does not have to do with facts, but rather with hopes. We believe the word of man whether it comes to us orally, or written

with pen and ink, or printed on paper.

We receive the word of man as true. Just so we receive the testimony of GOD which is far more reliable than that of any man.

- GOD's Word tells us that we are sinful and lost. We know that.
- GOD's Word tells us that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked. We know that.
- GOD's Word tells us that we are so helpless that we need a SAVIOUR. We believe that.
- GOD's Word tells us that judgment abideth upon the unbeliever.
- GOD's Word tells us that He so loved every individual in the world that He delivered His own Son into the hands of justice to bear the penalty that was justly our due.

This is the record of GOD which we must believe for salvation.

The first time faith is found in Scripture is in Genesis 15:6 where we are told that Abraham was counted righteous because he believed the Lord. In the last part of Romans 4 we are told that this was not written for his sake alone, but for us also who **"believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead."** The bodies of Abraham and Sarah were as good as dead, and yet Abraham believed GOD's promise concerning a son who was to be given. We believe GOD's testimony concerning the Son Whom He has given.

Sometimes we hear things we do not believe. Recently some one told me something concerning a mutual friend, and I answered bluntly, "I do not believe it."

Faith means that the word affirmed by one is confirmed by us, as when the disciples said, **"Master, Thou hast well said."**

"Believeth" means more than all this - it means trust

There must be not only the reception of the Word and confidence in it, but dependence upon it. The Greek word translated **"believe"** means *"to trust," "to confide in," "to rely on."* How carelessly we use that word. You have all read the old story of the incident at Niagara Falls when a tight wire walker announced that he would run a wheelbarrow over the falls on the wire, and that he would gladly carry a man in it.

Two men, in talking over this, were divided as to the possibility of the performance. One insisted that he believed it could be done. Then finally the one who did not believe it possible said to the believing one, "I'll give you fifty dollars if you will get into the wheelbarrow." This the believing one refused to do! He insisted that he believed and yet he would not trust. We fear that that is the trouble with a great many professed believers today. They insist that they believe in the Lord JESUS CHRIST, and yet when the matter is pressed home you will find that they are trusting in their own merit or good works rather than in Him.

We insist that it is the Lord JESUS CHRIST, and the Lord JESUS CHRIST alone Who is the SAVIOUR of men. It is not the Lord JESUS CHRIST plus us. The preacher who declared, "You do your part and CHRIST will do His," is wide of the mark. You are not saved by what you do or by what you don't do. You are saved because you trust in Him.

"Could my tears forever flow
Could my zeal no languor know,
These for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone.
In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

Saving faith is trusting in some one else to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

The following illustrates what we mean. A man was cast on to a little island which was being submerged by the rising tide. A boat had also been cast there. He recognized the fact that it was a boat, and then, as the water continued to rise he came to see that it was a good boat for a time of need. He believed in the boat although he was not ready to use it. But soon after, when he saw that the rising water would soon drown him if he did not escape, and that there was no other hope, he finally got into the boat and trusted himself to it as his only means of safety. A man does not trust himself to CHRIST until he sees in CHRIST the only means of safety.

A minister cared for the funeral of a baby whose mother was not saved. Immediately after the funeral she left the city and did not return for several months. Upon her return he called upon her and found her eager to be saved.

"But," she exclaimed at length with deep feeling, "All my efforts to become a Christian are unavailing."

The minister said, "Perhaps your efforts have not been sincere. What have you been doing in order to become a Christian?"

The answer was, "I have been praying and reading my Bible. I have attended church regularly. I have been very watchful over my thoughts and words. I have tried if possible to keep from sinning, and I can truly say I have tried my best."

"And you have not succeeded?"

"No," she answered sorrowfully, "I have not."

"Don't try any more," he quietly said.

She opened her eyes wide in astonishment and exclaimed, "Don't try any more! Surely you can't mean that. You certainly do not tell me to give over my efforts when my very salvation depends on my success!"

He said, "Certainly no good can come out of further efforts. You have honestly and earnestly tried to be a Christian since your baby went away to be with the Lord. How long do you expect to try before you have the promise of forgiveness and eternal life?"

A look of sorrow and despair came into her face and she, replied, "Why, I don't know."

"Then," said he, "let me say again, don't try anymore. Trust One Who is willing and able to save you just now, without any goodness of your own, without any effort on your part, without moving from your chair."

He went on to tell her of the finished work of CHRIST, showed her that "**God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.**" Quoted to her the lines of a familiar hymn:

"Nothing, either great or small,
Nothing, sinner, no;
JESUS did it, did it all,
Long, long ago.

Till to Jesus' Cross you cling
By a simple faith,
Doing is a deadly thing,
Doing ends in death.

Cast your deadly doing down,
Down at Jesus' feet;
Trust in Him, in Him alone,
Stand glorious and complete."

Tears of gratitude filled her eyes with joy at the truth that after all her useless trying she could have pardon and peace without trying.

When the minister departed, he said, "Don't try any more to be saved, but try with all your might to serve and please Him Who has saved you by His grace."

~ end of chapter 7 ~
