

Spiritual growth 16 - Faith that Saves

1. Help thou mine unbelief.

The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall.

Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, and with faith we are freed from the flimsy enclosures of life that only fear allows to entrap us.

— John Emmons

Although faith is simple, some have described the preaching of simply believing in Jesus to pardon you for being a sinner when you pray and ask as *Easy Believism*. Sometimes people go to extremes with this position. Some soul winners have counted someone as saved if they merely say that they agree that Jesus is God, or if they read a printed sinner's prayer on a card. On the other hand, there is an alternate position called *Lordship Salvation*. People correctly point out when you get saved it is because you have made Jesus the Lord of your life. And there *should* be change in your life. There must be an acknowledgment that as a sinner you were in opposition to God and it is not just your sin and judgement that you are turning over to Christ, but your whole heart, also. However, some gone to extremes with *this* position. Some believe that if you still struggle with sin then you aren't obedient to Christ, which means that you have not made Him Lord of your life *enough*. This would suggest that unless you quit sinning entirely then you aren't saved. People can then put an improper emphasis on doing good works and end up thinking that your good works save you.

I hope I have conveyed in these few sentences the gist of the issue, but it is actually not so simple; plenty of books have been written and debates are still argued about this. We cannot dismiss the whole issue because we quickly get tired of examining something that should be so simple. Without an understanding of the basics of faith, we risk spiritually misreading people and assuming that they have a proper faith. Without discernment, we run the risk of having a wrong understanding which will leave people on a track for Hell. Consider the case of the man who brought his demon possessed son to Jesus.

Mark 9:23-24 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that

believeth.

24And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

The man knew he believed, and yet he knew there was something missing in his faith. Later, the disciples asked why they were unable to cast out the demon. Jesus revealed that faith is not so simple when He explained to them that, in this case, prayer and fasting was needed.

Although the moment of faith is ultimately simple, *getting* to that moment is the question. To say that one believes is not sufficient for salvation.

James 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

2. The components of faith.

When I give someone a presentation of the Gospel, I find that I have to bring out *their* understanding of faith. I have to ask what do *they* mean when *they* say *they* have faith.

There are no atheists in foxholes, but foxhole faith is not necessarily saving faith. It will produce some of the components of saving faith, but not necessarily *all* the components of saving faith. Facing mortality can bring someone's faith into sharper focus. When you get to a more critical moment and you have sufficient evidence and reason that might not persuade you under other circumstances, it becomes more reasonable to have faith when you have to choose and the consequences are more dire. Even still, some people hold out just to save face. They become stubborn and refuse to believe because it would mean having to admit they were wrong, which is really foolish. Whether someone is filled with pride or just careless in their thinking, it is foolish to hope you will get lucky when it comes to eternity. Hell is too big, too hot, and too long to take any chance with. I cannot imagine anyone to be sincere who insists that he is untouched by the prospect of an eternity in Hell.

For those who have a vision of achieving joy in this life by all their earthly goals and plans there is a melancholy specter hovering over them. The longer they live, the more aware they become that death is around the corner and they might not get to finally enjoy all they were saving up for.

Luke 12:16-21 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to

bestow my fruits?

18And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry.

20But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

The threat that they might not get to enjoy all they have planned drives them to live only for the moment. They turn inward, destroying even what *temporary* joy they might have in *this* life. What seems bright and promising and full of light becomes dark and foreboding, like a bright sunny day being filled with dark storm clouds. I say this to point out that the stakes are too high that after all is done and over and their whole life is spent, do you want to then take a chance that God will accept you as you are knowing that you are a sinner? We are *compelled* to seek God to know that He is real, just, loving, and forgiving.

Matt 13:45-46 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

46Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Matt 18:8-9 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast *them* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

9And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Mark 8:34-38 And when he had called the people *unto him* with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

35For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

36For what shall it profit a man,
if he shall gain the whole world,
and lose his own soul?

37Or what shall a man give in
exchange for his soul?

38Whosoever therefore shall be
ashamed of me and of my words
in this adulterous and sinful
generation; of him also shall the
Son of man be ashamed, when
he cometh in the glory of his
Father with the holy angels.

So what is saving faith? A faith that saves will have at least three major components: emotion, intellect, and volition.

The thief on the cross is a significant example because he exhibited faith in its purest form. We see that he had a strong emotion, a thoughtful consideration, and an exercise of the will.

Luke 23:39-43 And one of the
malefactors which were hanged
railed on him, saying, If thou be
Christ, save thyself and us.

40But the other answering
rebuked him, saying, Dost not
thou fear God, seeing thou art in
the same condemnation?

41And we indeed justly; for we
receive the due reward of our
deeds: but this man hath done
nothing amiss.

42And he said unto Jesus, Lord,
remember me when thou comest
into thy kingdom.

43And Jesus said unto him,
Verily I say unto thee, To day
shalt thou be with me in
paradise.

The thief was fearful of God, he was able to clearly define the problem intellectually, and he took a decisive step to turn to Christ.

Nicodemus case is not a good example of saving faith because it is somewhat vague (the Gospel presentation in his case was not vague, just his response). He *seemed* to have a desire, there is an intellectual consideration, but there is no choosing. He seems to have some concern later for Christ because he brought some things for His burial, but we can't really tell if he ever got saved. Without clear statements about his concerns and decision, there is a question that lingers over what ever happened to him.

In saving faith, the three components, emotion, intellect, and volition, all work in concert together in the heart of the sinner as he comes before God.

3. The Emotional Factor.

A very clear presentation of the emotional factor in faith can be seen in the case of the repentance of the

Corinthians. Whether that emotion accompanies repentance for salvation or repentance for sanctification, the significant idea is that we should not be flippant and dismissive of God's displeasure. I have chosen the Corinthians because of the very clear statement and testimony of the passion in their response to God.

2Cor 7:9-11 Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

10For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

11For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, *what* clearing of yourselves, yea, *what* indignation, yea, *what* fear, yea, *what* vehement desire, yea, *what* zeal, yea, *what* revenge! In all *things* ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

When I talk about the emotional component of faith, I do not mean that one has to be super-excited, or tearfully sobbing. There will be a sorrow for having offended a Holy God. We have to admit to ourselves that we actually *are* guilty instead of trying to justify self and avoid criticism. The Corinthians experienced sorrow over their sin. It was Godly sorrow, meaning that they were concerned about the fact that they had grieved God.

Eph 4:30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

They did not just have a self-centered, get God off my back attitude that characterizes a worldly sorrow. Their passion was pervasive in their response to God. They were careful, indignant over their sin, fearful, vehement in their desire, and zealous.

4. The Intellectual Component.

We have to be careful when we exercise faith that it not be based *solely* on emotion. People have committed themselves passionately to some of the most ungodly causes: Nazi rallies were passionate, the Communist Revolutions were passionate, the cults are passionate. When it comes to faith, we have to have a *right understanding* of the salvation we should passionately desire.

- The right name.

Acts 4:10-12 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

- The right understanding of salvation.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Heb 10:10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

Heb 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Heb 10:14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

5. The Volitional Component.

You can believe in all the parts of salvation and be bothered by your sin to the point of frustration, but you must come ultimately to the point to where you *decide* to get saved. You must exercise volition, or your will, and accept Christ.

Rom 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Pro 1:24-25 Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;

25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:

John 5:40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

Act 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do* ye.

Luke 10:27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

Acts 16:27-30 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

28But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

29Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

30And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

Acts 8:36-39 And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

39And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

Luke 18:10-14 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14I tell you, this man went down

to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

6. Strength of faith vs. purity and simplicity.

Luke 18:16-17 But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

Matt 18:2-4 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

A child's faith, not mixed with issues of sin that we feel like we have to justify. You can see a child's guilt written all over their face. We need the "Aha" moment, the moment of faith, simple and pure and no longer resisting where we call on Jesus, with understanding, and that will be salvation. It is not the strength of one's faith that is key, but the purity of it. We do not have to have a strong faith in God, but a faith in a strong God. Faith can grow, but it does so in simplicity, not in laboring over and belaboring points of doctrine unto doubtful disputations. When we talk to people about faith, and especially saving faith, their mental assent, their passion, and their decision must come together in the aha moment of salvation.

1. Help thou mine unbelief. Mark 9:23-24, James 2:19
2. The components of faith. Luke 12:16-21, Matt 13:45-46, 18:8-9 , Mark 8:34-38, Luke 23:39-43
3. The Emotional Factor. 2Cor 7:9-11, Eph 4:30
4. The Intellectual Component .Acts 4:10-12 , 1 Peter, Eph 2:8-9, Heb 10:10,25,14
5. The Volitional Component. Rom 10:13, Pro 1:24-25, John 5:40, Acts 7:51 , Luke 10:27, Acts 16:27-30,8:36-39, Luke 18:10-14
6. Strength of faith vs. purity and simplicity. Luke 18:16-17, Matt 18:2-4