

FOUNDATIONS: What Christians Should Believe

18 July 2012

SALVATION: How God Makes Rebels His Children

Part 9

Context: In our ongoing study through our church's confession of faith,¹ we are currently discussing the doctrine of salvation.² Thus far we have learned what it means to be saved, how salvation is wholly of grace, how salvation is only and always mediated through Jesus Christ, and some of the key terms the Bible uses to describe our salvation. In tonight's lesson we will discuss what saving faith is and how faith alone unites us to Jesus and His benefits.

Salvation: *We believe that the salvation of sinners is divinely initiated and wholly of grace through the mediatorial offices of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who, by appointment of the Father, voluntarily took upon Himself our nature, yet without sin, and honored the divine law by His obedience, thus qualifying Himself to be our Savior; that by the shedding of His blood in His death He fully satisfied the just demands of a holy and righteous God regarding sin; that His sacrifice consisted not in setting us an example by his death as a martyr, but was a voluntary substitution of Himself in the sinner's place, the Just dying for the unjust, Christ bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; that having risen from the dead He is now enthroned in Heaven; He is in every way qualified to be a suitable, compassionate and all-sufficient Savior. We believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition of salvation. Repentance is a change of mind and purpose toward God prompted by the Holy Spirit and is an integral part of saving faith.*

Bible Reading: Romans 10:9-17

Discussion:

- I. What is the most significant truth about our salvation that has stood out to you from this series so far?
- II. Select one of the following salvation words and define it: atonement, redemption, propitiation, reconciliation.
- III. Imagine the following situation: Satan has succeeded in completely redefining what saving faith is in the minds of all people. All the other truths of the Gospel (e.g., Jesus' birth, sinless life, atoning death, resurrection, etc.) are left untouched, but humanity seriously misunderstands what it means to repent and believe in Jesus. If Satan were able to do this, what would he accomplish?

Study:

- I. Contemporary culture uses the words "believe" and "faith" in a wide variety of ways. How are these terms used in the following examples?
 - A. "If my memory serves me correctly, I believe the Renaissance took place in the late 15th century."
 - B. "I have faith that Mr. So-and-so will be our next president and solve all our country's problems."
 - C. "I believe in myself."
 - D. "Faith means believin' somethin' you know ain't true."³
 - E. "I believe strongly in the right of every American to carry and bear arms."

¹ For a complete copy of our church's confession of faith, visit our website (www.trinitybaptistmuncie.org) and look under the "We Believe" category. We will attempt to put all the previous notes from this series on the church website in the not too distant future.

² If you would like to go deeper in the study of the doctrine of salvation, we recommend the following resources: For an introductory study, see *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); for a more intermediate consideration, consider *The Truth of the Cross* by RC Sproul (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2007); for a challenging yet rewarding study, check out *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* by John Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

³ If memory serves correctly, I believe this was said by Tom Sawyer in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

- F. "If we believe, it's possible to achieve anything."
- G. "Faith means believing when common sense tells you not to."⁴
- II. As shocking as it may sound, it appears as if Satan has been successful in stirring up much confusion regarding what it means to believe. This should not be surprise us, since Satan is the "father of lies" and will do whatever he can to confuse and damn sinners. Since this is the context we live and minister in, it is essential that we *understand* and *communicate* a biblical definition of saving faith.
- III. What saving faith is not:
- A. Saving faith is not simple affirmation of historical facts.
1. The Pharisees, Sadducees, Roman officials, etc. believed that there was a person named "Jesus" who had a large number of followers and was crucified on a cross and buried in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the chief priests and the soldiers who guarded Jesus tomb even believed that this Jesus had risen from the dead (Matthew 28:11-15). Yet this kind of simple affirmation of historical facts did not reconcile them to God.
 2. Satan and the demons understand and affirm all the historical facts of the Gospel, yet none of them are saved:

James 2:19 – You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!⁵
 3. Today most Americans believe there was a person named Jesus who died on a cross nearly 2,000 years ago. It is nearly impossible to deny the historical authenticity of this event, something even honest atheists admit. Yet this is not the kind of faith that the Bible is speaking of when it says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).
- B. Saving faith is not wishful thinking contrary to reality. Rather, saving faith is based on historical events that actually happened in real time and space.
1. 1 Corinthians 15:12-17 – Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.
 2. 1 Corinthians 15:19 – If in this life only we have hoped⁶ in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.
- C. Saving faith is not a meritorious act by which we earn salvation.
1. Romans 4:1-5 – What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.
 2. Romans 11:6 – If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

⁴ This somewhat famous line comes from the 1947 Christmas movie "Miracle on 34th Street."

⁵ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁶ Note the way "hope" is used here as a synonym for "faith." This gives us a bit of insight into the biblical definition of saving faith.

3. Ephesians 2:8-9 – For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
4. Note the way that according to the Bible faith and works are entirely different currencies. If you are working for salvation, you are not exercising saving faith and *vice versa* (and thus, we are saved by faith *alone*). Faith and works cannot be blended together but are entirely different tracks we walk. Therefore, churches or individuals who proclaim a gospel of faith plus works do not rightly understand the biblical nature of faith. Works are an attempt to climb the ladder to heaven; faith is letting go of the ladder and falling back into the arms of Jesus.

IV. What saving faith is:

A. A few theological definitions of saving faith:

1. "Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God...saving faith is not just a belief in facts, but in personal trust in Jesus to save me."⁷
2. "Faith is knowledge passing into conviction, and it is conviction passing into confidence. Faith cannot stop short of self-commitment to Christ, a transference of reliance upon ourselves and all human resources to reliance upon Christ alone for salvation. It is a receiving and a resting upon him."⁸
3. "Saving faith has as its object the person of Christ, the Atoner, not just certain facts about the atonement...The whole person is to respond to the whole Christ. The essence of real faith is trust—pictured as drinking, eating, submitting, identifying with a person."⁹
4. What do these definitions have in common? Are there any words or phrases they share?

B. Defined biblically, saving faith is dependence upon, or reliance upon, or trust in, or hope in, or confidence in what Christ has done to save me. Saving faith is *personal* and *passive*.¹⁰

C. Biblical support for defining saving faith as "personal reliance":

1. The Biblical words for faith communicate the idea of trust or dependence:
 - a. The Hebrew word (Old Testament) for faith means "to sustain, to uphold."¹¹
 - b. The Greek word (New Testament) for faith means "to trust, to be persuaded that a person or thing is trustworthy."¹²
2. Many biblical passages on salvation clearly communicate the idea that saving faith is personal trust or reliance. In the following passages, try to identify some synonyms for "faith" or "believe".
 - a. John 1:12 – But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.
 - b. John 3:16 – For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
 - i. Literally, this passage reads "whoever believes *into* him."

⁷ Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 1994), 710.

⁸ Murray, John. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 111.

⁹ Metzger, Will. *Tell the Truth* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 2002), 77.

¹⁰ By passive we do not mean weak or sluggish but reliant on someone else. When someone is converted, they are indeed actively believing on Jesus, but their confidence or trust is no longer in their own resources, but in the sufficiency and work of Another.

¹¹ See *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, volume 1, 427ff.

¹² See *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, volume 1, 593ff.

- ii. This implies the idea of casting one's hopes upon Christ or resting in the person of Jesus. The Christian "bets all the blue chips" on Jesus' death and resurrection.
 - c. John 6:37 – All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.
 - d. Matthew 11:28-30 – Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
 - e. Hebrews 11:1 – Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
- D. While faith alone saves, true saving faith is living and will eventually evidence itself in good works. Just like a living tree will eventually bear leaves, so also living faith will eventually be seen in a changed life. It is important for us to divorce faith and works in our minds and in our explanations of the Gospel, but not in our experience.
1. Luke 6:43-46 – No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?
 2. James 2:14-18 – What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.
 3. 1 John 2:3 – And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
 4. Someone describe the right relationship between saving faith and good works. Do good works produce faith? Do good works precede saving faith or follow it? Does the Holy Spirit come to indwell someone in response to good works, or to produce good works? Are we simply playing word games if we contend that one order is right and the other is wrong?
 5. Compare the following equations:

Faith in Jesus + works = salvation

Faith in Jesus = salvation + works

What is the difference in these two equations? How significant is the difference? Which one is biblical?

Conclusion:

- I. Why is it important to rightly define saving faith? What might happen if we wrongly define saving faith?
- II. What are some synonyms for saving faith? List as many as possible.
- III. Which wrong definition of faith is most common in our culture today?
- IV. What one point from this lesson most stood out to you and why?