

Chapter 7

Believing Through Grace

And that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.

—EPHESIANS 2:8

We are saved by grace and through faith. Another way than that of faith in Jesus Christ, the Christ of the Scriptures, who was delivered for our transgressions and raised for our justification, there is not.

This is the clear testimony of Scripture throughout.

For “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:14–16). “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). And again: “He that believeth on the Son has everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). When the Jews inquire of the Savior what work they must do in order to obtain the bread that never perishes, the Lord answers: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29). And to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, the Lord addresses the marvelous words: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he

live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25, 26). Hence, when the kingdom of God is at hand, the summons goes forth: "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). And the apostles go out into all the world with the message, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Paul is "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). And "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" (Rom. 10:9). The sole way of salvation, according to the Scriptures, is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and raised from the dead.

It is an important question, therefore: what is this faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and what does it mean to believe in him?

Is it a natural power, something which every man possesses and which he may either use or refuse to employ? There is, indeed, a certain natural faith, which is not unto salvation. It is a mere, intellectual assent to the truth. Every man, even the most pronounced and profane atheist, believes in his deepest heart that God is: the devils believe, too, and they tremble. And so one may believe the facts of the gospel, without ever being concerned about them. I may believe that the Son of God came into the flesh without knowing him as the light of the world and of my soul. I may assent to the truth of his crucifixion without fleeing to that cross for my personal redemption and washing my garments in his blood. And thus, one may believe that the facts of revelation are true without having any spiritual part in them. Such faith is no power. It is a faith of the head, not of the heart. Or rather, it is a faith of the natural man, not of the regenerated child of God. It is barren, it bears no fruit. Such natural faith does not reveal itself in true sorrow after God and repentance, and it is not the power of a new life.

But true faith, through which we are saved, is different.

It is, let us notice first of all, faith in Jesus Christ. That means that it is faith in God through Christ, or faith in God as he revealed himself in our Lord Jesus Christ as the God of our salvation. Christ is the revelation of God. In him God makes himself known to us as JEHOVAH-SALVATION. The center of this revelation, the focal point of this glorious light of salvation that shines from the face of God, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Notice that the apostle writes in Romans 10:9 that he who "believeth in his heart that God raised him from the dead, shall be saved." In creation God reveals himself as the Lord Omnipotent, who calls the things that are not as if they were; in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, he makes himself known as Jehovah-Salvation, who quickeneth the dead. Hence, in the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, the apostle emphasizes that if Christ were not raised, our faith would be vain, and we would still be in our sins. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the precious cornerstone of our salvation.

Of course, this resurrection must not be conceived as an isolated fact, but as an inseparable element of the whole revelation of God in Christ. He who believes that God raised Jesus from the dead also believes that Christ is the only begotten Son of God, sent by the Father into the world, God with us, Immanuel. To believe that he was raised from the dead by the Father implies the faith that God laid our iniquities upon him, and that he bore them as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, so that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." It implies that the death of Christ on the accursed tree was vicarious, substitutional, that He died instead of and in behalf of all whom the Father had given him; and that this death was atoning, fully satisfying for all our sins, so that the guilt of our sins is blotted out, and we are clothed with an eternal righteousness before God in Christ. For never would God have raised him from the dead, who bore all our iniquities, if he had not fully satisfied for them. And this Christ, who was delivered for our transgressions, and raised for our

justification, is exalted in the highest heavens, and sitteth at the right hand of God, clothed with power and majesty. To him was given the promise of the Holy Spirit, that by his power all for whom he died might be drawn unto him and obtain righteousness and life forever. This Jesus Christ, the Son of God in the flesh, crucified and raised, exalted at the right hand of God as the Lord of glory, is the revelation of the God of our salvation. And faith that saves is faith in God through him. He that believeth that *God raised Jesus from the dead* shall be saved!

Second, we must observe that this saving faith is faith *in* or *into* Jesus Christ as the revelation of the God of our salvation. This is often emphasized in Scripture. We do read sometimes of believing *on* Jesus, and then the idea of faith as confidence appears to have the emphasis. But the true character of saving faith is expressed in the phrase: faith *in* Christ. He who has the true faith believes *into* Christ.

What does this signify?

It means that faith is that altogether mysterious and wonderful spiritual power whereby the soul strikes its roots into Christ, to cling to him, appropriate him, and draw out of him all the glorious blessings of salvation which are in him—the forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and life. The difference between a believer and an unbeliever is not unlike that between a living young tree and a dead fence post. You can plant that fence post deep into the ground, but you do not expect that it will show signs of life and develop branches and fruit. On the contrary, it will rot in the soil in which it is planted. But plant a young sapling in the same soil, and it will strike its roots into the ground, draw nourishment from it, grow and bear fruit. The same is true of a living, saving faith in relation to Christ. Bring the unbelieving, dead sinner into contact with Christ as he is revealed in the holy Scriptures, and there will be no saving reaction. On the contrary, there is a reaction of unbelief unto damnation. But if the believer is led to Christ through the preaching of the word, he will take hold of him, cling to him, strike

the roots of his entire soul into him, and draw out of him all the spiritual nourishment necessary unto eternal life. What the roots are for the young tree, saving faith is for the believer in Christ: by faith the believer is rooted in him. And since Christ is revealed to us in the Scriptures, true faith always turns to them, has its delight in the word of God, is called into activity through the word preached, and constantly grows according as it increases in the knowledge and understanding of all that God has revealed to us in his word.

The activity of a true and conscious faith, therefore, engages the entire soul, with mind and will and all our desires and inclinations. Through faith the whole soul fastens itself upon Christ.

Hence, faith is first of all a true spiritual knowledge of Christ as the revelation of the God of our salvation. This knowledge of faith must not be confused with a mere natural knowledge about Christ such as anyone may acquire by studying the Bible or by applying himself to dogmatics. This knowledge *about* Christ is indispensable, but itself is not the knowledge of a saving faith. The latter is spiritual, experiential. A scientist, whose stomach is full of cancer, may be able to tell you all about the ingredients and their food value of a gorgeous dinner you prepared before him; but the food is nauseating to him, and he cannot partake of it. The uneducated laborer, returning from his day's work, may know nothing about calories and vitamins; but he sits down at the table and takes delight in the food you prepare. So the unbeliever may know all about Christ. He may even be a scientific theologian, able to instruct others in the knowledge of salvation. But his knowledge is purely intellectual, natural, theoretical. He does not know Christ spiritually. He does not have his delight in him, partake of him, eat and drink him. But the true believer, even though he may be far less equipped with theological knowledge, knows Christ spiritually. He does not merely know that he himself is a sinner; but he has a spiritual knowledge of his sin, is filled with true sorrow after God, repents and cries out, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" He knows the Lord Jesus Christ, not

merely in the sense that he knows all about him, but as the fulness of his own emptiness, as the righteousness of his own unrighteousness, as the light of his own darkness, as the life of his own death, as the bread of life for which he hungers, as the water of life for which he thirsts, as the way, the truth, and the life, by which he longs to come to the Father. He recognizes him as his own Savior and Redeemer, longs for him, eats and drinks him unto righteousness and life. The believer knows Christ with the knowledge of love and delight!

And so, true faith is also a sure and hearty confidence, a believing *on* Christ, a relying on him in life and in death, for time and for eternity. If I confide, trust, in someone completely, I surrender myself entirely and unconditionally to him, assured of his love and good will toward me, and of his ability and wisdom to seek my good. If I must travel through a strange, mountainous country, where I do not know the way, and the danger of hidden ravines lurks on every side, and I employ a guide, I surrender myself entirely to him, trusting in his good will and ability to lead me through safely. But if I suspect his good intentions toward me, or doubt his knowledge of the right way, I will not confide in him and follow where he leads. Thus, saving faith is a hearty confidence. Its basis is the assurance that God is filled with an eternal and unchangeable love to me, a sinner, and that he is able to save to the uttermost. I am assured of this because he revealed his love in the cross of Jesus Christ, my Lord, as a love that is willing to go into the deepest woe of death and hell for me, while I was still an enemy of God. And he gloriously manifested his power to save in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. In that God of my salvation I trust. On God through Christ I rely, in life and in death, now and in the day of judgment, fully assured that all my sins are forgiven me, and that he gives me eternal righteousness and life for Christ his Son's sake. This spiritual knowledge of love and delight, this wholehearted and unconditional surrender to and reliance upon, the God of our salvation in Christ is the activity of saving faith.

From all that we have said about the nature and activity of saving faith it also should have become evident what is the relation between faith and salvation. He that believeth shall be saved, have everlasting life. But why? What is the relation between salvation and faith?

The impression is often left by preachers who present the matter of faith as something that depends on the sinner's own will and choice, as if faith were a *condition* unto salvation. God is willing to save us *on condition* that we believe. But there are no conditions to salvation. We are not saved on condition of faith, or on the ground of, or because of our faith. The only ground of our salvation is Jesus, crucified and raised. Nor are we saved through faith because faith is regarded as a good work, or because through faith we are able to do good works and obtain righteousness before God. For we are saved by grace; and if it is of works, it is no more of grace. It cannot even be said that faith is the hand whereby we take hold of the salvation that is offered us. Salvation is not an offer, but a wonder work of God; and the sinner has no hand to accept it. But faith is the means, and that, too, *God's* means, whereby we are implanted into Christ. It is the spiritual power whereby we cling to the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord, our righteousness and perfect redemption forever! By grace are ye saved, not on condition of, nor because of, but *through* faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Yes, faith is by grace. It is the gift of God! This, too, should be perfectly evident from all that has been said about its nature and activity; but it is not superfluous to accentuate this truth. How often this truth is distorted in our day! How many there are who, even though they do not literally preach that faith is the work of man, leave the impression by their way of preaching, their pleading and begging, that it is in the power of any sinner to believe in Christ whenever he pleases, and to reject Him as he pleases! O, the matter is so simple and easy, say they. Just say that you accept Jesus as your personal Savior, and the thing is settled! And so they change the wonderwork of God into an arbitrary whim of the sinner's will. But

it is not so. It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy (Rom. 9:16). Only when the Holy Spirit accomplishes the wonderwork of faith in the heart can the sinner accept Christ. And he in whom the Spirit has wrought the marvelous work of faith neither can nor will ever reject him. And through that faith he is surely saved. Saved he is now: for he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. And saved he shall be in the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ: for he shall then be made like him in resurrection glory.

By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God!