

What Saith the Scripture?

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presents

LIFE AND WORKS
OF REV. CHARLES H. SPURGEON

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continued BOOK II.
Sermons and Lectures by Rev. C. H. Spurgeon.

The Luther Sermon at Exeter-Hall.

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision;
but faith which worketh by love." --Galatians v. 6.

PAUL makes a clean sweep of that trust in the externals of religion which is the common temptation of all time. Circumcision was a great thing with the Jew, and oftentimes he trusted in it; but Paul declares that availeth nothing. There might be others who were glad that they were not Jews, but Paul declares that their uncircumcision availeth no more than its opposite. Certain matters connected with godliness are external, and yet they are useful in their places: especially is that the case with baptism and the Lord's supper, the assembling of ourselves together, the reading of the word, and public prayer and praise. These things are proper and profitable; but none of them must be made in any measure or degree the ground of our hope of salvation; for this text sweeps them all away, and plainly describes them as availing nothing if they are made to be the foundations of our trust.

In Luther's day superstitious confidence in external observances had overlaid faith in the gospel; ceremonies had multiplied excessively, and the plain and simple way of salvation was obscured. There was need of some sturdy soul who, seeing the truth himself, should show it to others. When God raised up Martin Luther, who was born four centuries ago, he bore emphatic testimony against salvation by outward forms and by the power of priestcraft, affirming, that salvation is by faith, and that the church of God is a company of priests, every believer being a priest unto God.

God's Clergy.

If Luther had not affirmed it, the doctrine would have been just as true, for the distinction between clergy and laity is no excuse in Scripture, which calls the saints, "God's *kleros*"-- God's clergy, or heritage. Again we read, "Ye are a royal priesthood." Every man that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is anointed to exercise the Christian priesthood, and therefore he need not put his trust in another, seeing the supposed priest is no more than any other man. Each man must be accountable for himself before God. Each one must read and search the Scriptures for himself, and must believe for himself, and when saved, he must offer up himself as a living sacrifice, unto God by Jesus Christ, who is the only High Priest of our profession. So much for the negative side of the text, which is full of warning to this Ritualistic age.

The chief testimony of our great reformer was to the justification of a sinner in the sight of God by faith in Jesus Christ, and by that alone. He could fitly have taken this for his motto, "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." He was in the Augustinian monastery at Wittenberg troubled and perturbed in mind; and he read there, in an old Latin Bible, this text,-- "The just shall live by faith." It was a new idea to him, and by its means spiritual light entered his soul in some degree; but such were the prejudices of his upbringing, and such the darkness of his surroundings, that he still hoped to find salvation by outward performances.

Long Fasting.

He therefore fasted long, till he was found swooning from hunger. He was exceedingly zealous for salvation by works. At last he made a pilgrimage to Rome, hoping to find there everything that was holy and helpful: he was disappointed in his search, but yet found more than he looked for. On the pretended staircase of Pilate, while in the act of climbing it upon his knees, the Wittenberg text again sounded in his ear like a thunderclap: "The just shall live by faith."

Up he started and descended those stairs, never to grovel upon them again. The chain was broken, the soul was free. Luther had found the light; and henceforth it became his life's business to flash that light upon the nations, crying evermore, "The just shall live by faith." The best commemoration which I can make of this man is to preach the doctrine which he held so dear, and you who are not saved can best assist me by believing the doctrine, and proving its truth in your own cases. May the Holy Ghost cause it to be so in hundreds of instances.

I. First, let us inquire WHAT IS THIS FAITH?

We are, always talking about it; but what is it? Whenever I try to explain it, I am afraid lest I should confuse rather than expound.

Story of Bunyan. There is a story told concerning John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." Good Thomas Scott, the Commentator, wrote notes to it; he thought the 'Pilgrim's Progress' a difficult book, and he would make it clear. A pious cottager in his parish had the book, and she was reading it when her minister called. He said to her, "Oh, I see, you are reading Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress.' Do you understand it?" She answered innocently enough, "Oh, yes, sir, I understand Mr. Bunyan very well, and I hope that one day I shall be able to understand your explanations." I am afraid lest you should

say when I have done, "I understand what faith is, as I find it in the Bible, and one day, perhaps, I may be able to understand the preacher's explanation of it." Warned by this, I will speak as plainly as I can.

And first, it is to be remembered that faith is not a mere creed-holding. It is very proper to say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," and so forth; but you may repeat all that and be no "believer" in the Scriptural sense of that term. Though the creed be true, it may not be true to you; it would have been the same to you if the opposite had been true, for you put the truth away like a paper in a pigeonhole, and it has no effect upon you. "A very proper doctrine," you say, "a very proper doctrine," and so you put it to sleep. It does not influence your heart, nor affect your life. Do not imagine that professing an orthodox creed is the same thing as faith in Christ. A truthful creed is desirable for many reasons; but if it be a dead, inoperative thing, it cannot bring salvation. Faith is belief of the truth; but it is more.

Important Distinction.

Again, faith is not the mere belief that there is a God, though that we must have, for we cannot come to God except we "believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." We are to believe in God-- that he is good, blessed, true, right, and therefore to be trusted, confided in, and praised. Whatever he may do, whatever he may say, God is not to be suspected, but believed in.

You know what it is to believe in a man, do you not? to believe in a man so that you follow him, and confide in him, and accept his advice? In that same way faith believes in God-- not only believes that he is, but finds rest in his character, his Son, his promise, his covenant, his word, and everything about him. Faith livingly and lovingly trusts in her God about everything. Especially must we believe in what God has revealed in Scripture-- that it is verily and indeed a sure and infallible testimony to be received without question. We accept the Father's witness concerning Jesus, and take heed thereto "as unto a light that shineth in a dark place."

Faith has specially to believe in him who is the sum and substance of all this revelation, even Jesus Christ, who became God in human flesh that he might redeem our fallen souls from all the evils of sin, and raise it to eternal felicity. We believe in Christ, on Christ, and upon Christ; accepting him because of the record which God has given to us concerning his Son, that he is the propitiation for our sins. We accept God's unspeakable gift, and receive Jesus as our all in all.

If I wanted to describe saving faith in one word, I should say that it is trust. It is so believing God and so believing in Christ that we trust ourselves and our eternal destinies in the hands of a reconciled God.

II. In the second place we will consider, WHY FAITH IS SELECTED AS THE WAY OF SALVATION?

I would remind YOU that if we could not answer this question it would not matter; for since the Lord has appointed believing as the way of grace it is not ours to challenge his choice. Beggars must not be choosers; let us trust, if so the Lord ordains.

No Help for Past Defects.

But we can answer this question in a measure. First, it is clear that no other way is possible. It is not possible for us to be saved by our own merits, for we have broken the law already, and future obedience, being already due, cannot make up for past defects.

"Could my tears for ever flow,
Could my zeal no respite know.
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and thou alone."

The road of good works is blocked up by our past sins, and it is sadly further blocked up by future sins; we ought therefore to rejoice that God has commended to us the open road of faith. God has chosen the way of faith that salvation be by grace. If we had to do anything in order to save ourselves, we should be sure to impute a measure of virtue to our own doings, or feelings, or prayers, or almsgivings, and we should thus detract from the pure grace of God. But salvation comes from God as a pure favor-- an act of undeserved generosity and benevolence, and the Lord will, therefore, only put it into the hand of faith since faith arrogates nothing to herself. Faith, in fact, disowns all idea of merit, and the Lord of grace therefore elects to place the treasure of his love in the hand of faith.

Pride Crucified.

Again, it is of faith that there may be no boasting; for if our salvation be of our doings or feelings, we are sure to boast; but, if it be of faith, we cannot glory in self. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith." Faith is humble, and ascribes all praise to God. Faith is truthful, and confesses her obligation to the sovereign grace of God.

I bless the Lord that he has chosen this way of faith, because it is so suitable for poor sinners. Some among us to-night would never have been saved if salvation had only been prepared for the good and righteous. Suppose that you were in the last article of death, what good works could you do? Yonder dying thief found it a happy thing that by faith he could trust the Crucified One, and before set of sun could be with him in Paradise. Faith is a way suitable for sinners, and especially for sinners who are soon to die; in some sense we are all in that condition and some of us peradventure are especially so; for what man among us knows that he will see to-morrow's dawn?

I bless God again that the way of salvation is by faith, because it is a way open to the most unlearned. What fine theology we get nowadays-- deep thinking they call it. The men go down so deep into their subjects, and so stir the mud at the bottom, that you cannot see them and they cannot see themselves. I apprehend that teachers of a certain school do not themselves know what they are talking about. Now, if salvation were only to be learned by reading through huge folios, what would become of multitudes of poor souls in Bow, and Bethnal Green, and Seven Dials? If the gospel had consisted of a mass of learning, how could the unlearned be saved? But now we can go to each one of them and say, "Jesus died."

"There is life in a look at the Crucified One;
There is life at this moment for thee."

Now, I am going to finish in a way suitable to this Luther memorial. You have heard a great deal about Luther's preaching salvation by faith alone.

**III. NOW LET US TURN TO LUTHER'S LIFE, and see what Luther himself meant by it.
What kind of faith did Luther himself exhibit by which he was justified?**

First, in Luther's case, faith led him to an open avowal of what he believed. Luther did not mean to go up to heaven by the back stairs, as many young men hope to do. You wish to be Christians on the sly, so as to escape the offence of the cross. Luther did not refuse to confess Christ and take up his cross and follow him. He knew that he who with his heart believeth, must also with his mouth make confession, and he did so right nobly. He began teaching and preaching the truth which had enlightened his own soul. One of his sermons displeased Duke George of Saxony; but as it saved a lady of high rank, Luther did not fret. He was not the man to conceal truth because it was dangerous to avow it. It cost him something to stand up boldly for a pure and simple gospel, but he believed the testimony he gave was worth much more than it cost.

"Without Money and Without Price."

The river of life is as free as any river that flows to the sea, and all the world may stoop down and drink. Luther wished the people to have free access to the Bible. He was not always excessively polite in his speech; he was too earnest for that. He spoke from the heart, he was all on fire, and his words were heated sevenfold, "without money and without price," and he did not conceal his convictions. He nailed his theses to the church door where all might read them. When astronomers require a new constellation in the heavens let it be "the hammer and nails." Oh you who make no profession, let this man's outspoken faith rebuke you!

His dauntless valor for truth caused him to be greatly hated in his own day with a ferocity which has not yet died out. It has always been so, and always will be so. Light has no fellowship with darkness; oil and water will not unite; there is no concord between Christ and Belial. Yet Luther would not sacrifice his convictions for the sake of the applause of men. Feeling that he was right he went ahead, and did not stop to count the consequences. Ridicule, malice, even the dark dungeon could not turn him aside, nor daunt his holy courage.

Appeal to Young Men.

Young men, I do not know what your ambition may be; but I hope you do not wish to be in this world mere chips in the porridge, giving forth no flavor whatever. My ambition does not run in that line. I know that if I have no intense haters, I can have no intense lovers; and I am prepared to have both. When right-hearted men see honest love of truth in a man, they cry, "He is our brother. Let him be our champion." When the wrong-hearted reply, "Down with him!" we thank them for the unconscious homage which they thus pay to decision of character. No child of God should court the world's

approbation. Certainly Luther did not. He pleased God, and that was enough for him.

His faith was of this kind also-- that it moved him to a hearty reverence for what he believed to be Holy Scripture. I am sorry that he was not always wise in his judgment of what the Bible contains; but yet to him Scripture was the last court of appeal. If any had convinced Luther of error out of that book, he would gladly have retracted; but that was not their plan, they simply said, "He is a heretic: condemn him or make him retract."

A Fool for a Client.

To this he never yielded for an instant. Alas, in this age numbers of men are setting up to be their own inspired writers. I have been told that every man who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client; and I am inclined to think that, when any man sets up to be his own Saviour and his own revelation, much the same thing occurs. That conceited idea is in the air at this present: every man is excogitating his own Bible. Not so Luther; He loved the sacred book! He fought by its help. It was his battle-axe and his weapon of war. A text of Scripture fired his soul; but the words of tradition he rejected. He would not yield to Melancthon, or Zwingle, or Calvin, or whoever it might be, however learned or pious; he took his own personal faith to the Scripture, and according to his light he followed the word of the Lord. May many a Luther be in this place.

The next thing I note was the intense activity of his faith. Luther did not believe in God doing the work he was to do, so as to be in idleness himself. Not a bit of it. Oliver Cromwell's Puritan precept was, "Trust in God, but keep your powder dry." Luther believed above most men in keeping his powder dry. How he worked! By pen, by mouth, by hand; he was energetic almost beyond belief.

Many Men in One.

He seemed a many-handed man. He did works which would have taxed the strength of hundreds of smaller men. He worked as if everything depended upon his own activity, and then he fell back in holy trust upon God as though he had done nothing. This is the kind of faith which saves a man both in this life and in that which is to come.

Again, Luther's faith abounded in prayer. What supplications they were! Those who heard them tell us of his tears, his wrestlings, his holy arguments. He would go into his closet heavy at heart, and remain there an hour or two, and then come forth singing, "I have conquered, I have conquered." "Ah," said he one day, "I have so much to do to-day that I cannot get through it with less than three hours' prayer." I thought he was going to say, "I cannot allow to give even a quarter of an hour to prayer; "but he increased his prayer as he increased his labor. This is the faith that saves-- a faith that lays hold on God and prevails with him in private supplication.

Dukes Could Not Stop Him.

His was a faith that delivered him entirely from the fear of man. Duke George is going to stop him. "Is

he?" said Luther. "If it were to rain Duke Georges I would go." He is exhorted not to go to Worms, for he will be in danger. If there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the housetops he would be there. And he was there, as you all know, playing the man for the gospel and for his God. He committed himself to no man, but kept his faith in God pure and unmingled. Dukes, emperors, doctors, electors were all as nothing to Luther when they stood against the Lord. Be it so with us also.

His was a faith that made him risk all for the truth. There seemed no hope of his ever coming back from Worms alive. He was pretty sure to be burned like John Huss; and the wonder is that he escaped. His very daring brought him safety from peril. He expressed his regret that the crown of martyrdom would, in all probability, be missed by him; but the faith which is prepared to die for Jesus was within him. He who in such a case saves his live shall lose it, but he that loses his life for Christ's sake shall find it unto life eternal.

Religion in a Glass Case.

This was the faith that made Luther a man among men, and saved him from priestly affectation. I do not know whether you admire what is thought to be very superior religion: as is a thing of beauty, but not of use; that it ought always to be kept in a glass case; it is made up for drawing-rooms and religious meetings, but would be out of place in a shop or on a farm. Now, Luther's religion was with him at home, at the table as well as in the pulpit. His religion was part and parcel of his common life, and that life was free, open, bold, and unrestrained. It is easy to find fault with him from the superfine standpoint, for he lived in an honest unguardedness. My admiration kindles as I know of the hearty openness of the man. I do not wonder that even ungodly Germans revere him, for he is all a German and all a man. When he speaks he does not take his words out of his mouth to look at them, and to ask Melancthon whether they will do; but he hits hard, and he has spoken a dozen sentences before he has thought whether they are polished or not. Indeed, he is utterly indifferent to criticism, and speaks what he thinks and feels. He is at his ease, for he feels at home: is he not everywhere in his great Father's house? Has he not a pure and simple intent to speak the truth and do the right?

Luther's Home Life.

I like Luther with a wife and children. I like to see him with his family and a Christmas-tree, making music with little Johnny Luther on his knee. I love to hear him sing a little hymn with the children, and tell his pretty boy about the horses in heaven with golden bridles and silver saddles. Faith had not taken away his manhood, but sanctified it to noblest uses. Luther did not live and move as if he were a mere cleric, but as a brother to our common humanity.

After all, brethren, you must know that the greatest divines have to eat bread and butter like other people. They shut their eyes before they sleep, and they open them in the morning, just like other folks. This is matter of fact, though some stilted gentlemen might like us to doubt it. They feel and think like other men. Why should they seem as if they did not? Is it not a good thing to eat and drink to the glory of God, and show people that common things can be sanctified by the word of God and prayer? What if we do not wear canonicals, and so on? The best canonicals in the world are thorough devotion to the Lord's work; and if a man lives aright, he makes every garment a vestment, every

meal a sacrament, and every house a temple. All our hours are canonical, all our days holy days, every breath is incense, every pulse music for the Most High.

Luther's Charity.

They tell us that Luther ignored good works. It is true he would not allow good works to be spoken of as the means of salvation; but of those who professed faith in Jesus he demanded holy lives. Luther abounded in prayer and charity. What an almsgiver Luther was! I fear he did not at all times duly regard the principles of the Charity Organization Society. As he goes along, if there are beggars he empties his pockets for them. Two hundred crowns have just come in, and, though he has a family about him, he cries, "Two hundred crowns! God is giving me my portion in this life." "Here," says he to a poor brother minister, "take half. And where are the poor? Fetch them in. I must be rid of this!"

I am afraid that his Catherine was forced at times to shake her head at him; for, in truth, he was not always the most economical husband that might be. In almsgiving he was second to none, and in all the duties of life he rose far beyond the level of his age. Like all other men he had his faults; but as his enemies harp on that string and go far beyond the truth, I need not dwell upon his failings. I wish that the detractors of Luther were half as good as he. All the glory of his grand career be unto the Lord alone.

Lastly, Luther's faith was a faith that helped him under struggles that are seldom spoken of. I suppose that never had man had greater soul-conflict than Luther. He was a man of heights and depths. Sometimes he went up to heaven and he sang his hallelujahs; and then he went down again into the abyss with his "misereres." I am afraid that, great, vigorous man that he was, he had a bad liver. he was grievously afflicted in body in ways which I need not mention; and he was sometimes laid aside for months together, being so racked and tortured that he longed to die. His pains were extreme, and we wonder how he endured them so well. But ever between the attacks of illness Luther was up again preaching the word of God. Those desperate struggles with the devil would have crushed him but for his faith. The devil seems to have been constantly assailing him, and he was constantly assailing the devil. In that tremendous duel he fell back upon his Lord, and, trusting in Omnipotence, he put Satan to rout.

Young men, I pray that a Luther may spring up from your ranks. How gladly would the faithful welcome him! I, who am more a follower of Calvin than of Luther, and much more a follower of Jesus than of either of them, would be charmed to see another Luther upon this earth.

God bless you, brethren, for Christ's sake. Amen.

[BOOK II. SERMONS AND LECTURES: The Best War-Cry.](#)