

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON SEVEN)

“THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST” (PART 2)

GALATIANS 1:6-7

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel—

7 not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ.

The Bible clearly states that in order for a person to be saved, he or she must exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. By that, we are not saying that faith is the **basis** of our salvation. Rather, we are saying that faith is the **instrument** that God uses to bring persons into a saving relationship with Himself. As the American theologian **B.B. Warfield** remarked, “The saving power of faith resides...not in itself, but in the Almighty Savior on whom it rests...It is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but that Christ saves through faith.”

Faith comes to the believer as a gift from God. It is not something that persons are capable of summoning up on their own. In **Ephesians 2:8-9**, Paul wrote,

8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God;

9 it is not from works, so that no one can boast.

(New English Translation)

If saving faith was something that human beings were able to summon up, they would be in a position to take some of the credit for their salvation. But such a concept is foreign to the writers of Scripture.

Faith comes as a result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a person who, according to **Ephesians 2:1** is, “*dead in trespasses and sins.*” The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit makes the spiritually dead person alive spiritually and produces faith in his or her heart to believe the Gospel. Our Lord speaks of this to Nicodemus in **John 3:3**: “*I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (**New English Translation**).

Apart from the new birth, there can be no true faith. Therefore, faith, though it manifests itself in action, comes as a result of God’s work in us. It is God who grants us faith and that faith is evidenced by our believing Christ for our salvation.

The Bible says that if a person exercises faith in Jesus Christ, he or she will be saved. However, the Bible does not present faith as simply “mental assent to the facts of the gospel.” True saving faith involves repentance from one’s sin and a complete trust in the work of Christ to save from sin and make one righteous. The Reformers spoke of three aspects of faith:

1 A recognition of the truth claims of the Gospel;

2 An acknowledgment of their truthfulness as it relates to one’s spiritual need;

3 A personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ who, by virtue of His death, provides the only sufficient sacrifice for a person’s sin.

Any one of these three aspects of faith, taken by themselves, is insufficient to meet the biblical definition of saving faith. However, the presence of all three components together results in saving faith. In other words, saving faith consists of mental, emotional, and volitional

elements. Saving faith involves both the mind and the will. Saving faith is faith that not only knows and comprehends the facts about the gospel of Jesus Christ but also trusts in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

In **Ephesians 1:13** Paul writes, “*And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation)—when you believed in Christ—you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit*” (**New English Translation**).

The **King James Version** translates the verse as follows: “*In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also **after** that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.*”

This rendering suggests that the reception of the Holy Spirit occurs sometime after one believes. This is misleading however because there is no Greek word for “*after*” in this verse! As a result of the **King James Version** translation, some persons have argued that a person can be a believer in Christ for many years, and yet not be saved because they have not spoken in tongues as the “initial evidence” that they have received the Holy Spirit. Such a claim cannot be substantiated by Scripture.

When a person is regenerated or born from above, and as a consequence, places his or her faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, not only is he or she placed into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit’s baptism (**1 Corinthians 12:13**), but the Holy Spirit is placed into him or her. So now every believer, without exception, possesses the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The word “*believed*” is a translation of the Greek word **πίστευό**: (**pist-yoo’-o**) which refers to belief that is not merely intellectual, or “head” belief, but belief that also transforms the heart. It does not result in perfection but it does result in a change of direction. Faith is a person’s response to God’s elective purpose and gracious provision. God’s choice

of persons is election; their choice of God is faith. In election God gives His promises, and by faith persons receive them. The sealing of the Holy Spirit is the result of believing, and believing is the result of hearing the Gospel.

The object of faith is the Person of Jesus Christ. It is Faith **in Him** that saves, not merely accepting some facts about Him. Saving faith has to be more than a mere accepting of facts, for even demons have that kind of faith according to **James 2:19**: “*You believe that God is one; well and good. Even the demons believe that—and tremble with fear*” (**New English Translation**).

Believing in Jesus means receiving Him for all that He is. It means both confessing Him as Savior and yielding to Him as Lord.

Commenting on saving faith, **John Piper** made the following remarks:

“If I believe that Jesus is the Son of God the same way that I believe that **Vladimir Putin** is the leader of Russia, have I fulfilled the conditions needed to be saved? Or is there more to belief than that?”

We know that it doesn't fulfill the conditions, because the devil believes it. And we know that the devil believes it because when Jesus came into the world and began to confront the demonic powers of the devil, they said out loud, ‘*We know who you are. You are the holy one of God. You are the Son of God.*’ So the devil is absolutely orthodox in his belief in the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. To believe in orthodox Christology is not to be saved. The devil is very orthodox when it comes to his understanding of Christ.

So what is missing is not believing in the fact that Jesus is the Son of God but **delighting** in that fact, **embracing** that fact, and making Christ the **treasure** and the Lord of your life by surrendering to him.

In other words, 'belief' is seeing him for who he really is, seeing him as infinitely valuable as the Son of God. It's not just acknowledging the fact that he is the Son but also seeing him as infinitely precious and valuable. Satan, on the other hand, does not view God as precious and valuable. He hates Christ and Christ is a threat to his own value.

But when the Holy Spirit begins to work in our lives we're not deceived like that anymore. We recognize that our value is nothing compared to Jesus' value. Instead, we just want to know him, be with him, enjoy him, follow him, and celebrate him. That transition—that change of heart, so that we are now looking away from ourselves to Christ and embracing all that God is for us in him—that is what faith is. That is what belief is. That is what saves."

We will now look at several verses of Scripture which highlight the importance of belief as it relates to personal salvation. All the verses reflect the rendering of the **New English Translation**.

Matthew 18:4-6

4 Whoever then humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 And whoever welcomes a child like this in my name welcomes me.

*6 "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who **believe** in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a huge millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the open sea.*

Mark 16:16-18

*16 The one who **believes** and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not **believe** will be condemned.*

*17 These signs will accompany those who **believe**: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new languages;*

18 they will pick up snakes with their hands, and whatever poison they drink will not harm them; they will place their hands on the sick and they will be well.”

A superficial reading of verse **16** would suggest that sinners must be baptized in order to be saved, but this is cleared up when we note that the emphasis is on **believing**. If a person does not believe, he or she is condemned, even if he or she has been baptized. It was expected in the early church that believers would be baptized as the evidence that they had believed. The renowned New Testament scholar **A.T. Robertson**, who incidentally, was a Baptist, noted that the omission of the word “baptized” with “*does not believe*” would seem to show that Jesus does not make baptism essential to salvation. Condemnation rests on disbelief, not on baptism. So salvation rests on belief. Baptism is merely the picture of the new life, not the means of securing it.

John 3:14-18

14 Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

*15 so that everyone who **believes** in him may have eternal life.”*

*16 For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who **believes** in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

*18 The one who **believes** in him is not condemned. The one who does not **believe** has been condemned already, because he has not **believed** in the name of the one and only Son of God.*

John 3:36

*“The one who **believes** in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God’s wrath remains on him.”*

John 5:24

*“I tell you the solemn truth, the one who hears my message and **believes** the one who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, but has crossed over from death to life.”*

John 6:27-29

27 Do not work for the food that disappears, but for the food that remains to eternal life—the food which the Son of Man will give to you. For God the Father has put his seal of approval on him.”

28 So then they said to him, “What must we do to accomplish the deeds God requires?”

*29 Jesus replied, “This is the deed God requires—to **believe** in the one whom he sent.”*

John 6:47

*“I tell you the solemn truth, the one who **believes** has eternal life.”*

John 9:35-38

*35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, so he found the man and said to him, “Do you **believe** in the Son of Man?”*

*36 The man replied, “And who is he, sir, that I may **believe** in him?”*

*37 Jesus told him, “You have seen him; he is the one speaking with you.” [He said, “Lord, I **believe**,” and he worshiped him.*

39 Jesus said,] “For judgment I have come into this world, so that those who do not see may gain their sight, and the ones who see may become blind.”

John 12:37-40

37 Although Jesus had performed so many miraculous signs before them, they still refused to **believe** in him,

38 so that the word of the prophet Isaiah would be fulfilled. He said, “Lord, who has **believed** our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

39 For this reason they could not **believe**, because again Isaiah said,

40 “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn to me, and I would heal them.”

Acts 10:43

“About him all the prophets testify, that everyone who **believes** in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Acts 13:38-39

38 Therefore let it be known to you, brothers, that through this one forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,

39 and by this one everyone who **believes** is justified from everything from which the law of Moses could not justify you.

Acts 16:1-6

29 Calling for lights, the jailer rushed in and fell down trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas.

30 Then he brought them outside and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

31 They replied, “**Believe** in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.”

32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him, along with all those who were in his house.

33 At that hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and all his family were baptized right away.

34 The jailer brought them into his house and set food before them, and he rejoiced greatly that he had come to **believe** in God, together with his entire household.

Acts 19:1-6

1 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul went through the inland regions and came to Ephesus. He found some disciples there

2 and said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you **believed**?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

3 So Paul said, “Into what then were you baptized?” “Into John’s baptism,” they replied.

4 Paul said, “John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to **believe** in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.”

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus,

6 and when Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy.

It is important for us to understand that in the early days of the church there were probably several cases like this, where a clear distinction could not be drawn between the disciples of John and the disciples of Jesus. These disciples were Jews who had responded positively to John the Baptist's ministry but who had not yet received a complete understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul's questioning of the disciples revealed that at no point had they advanced beyond John the Baptist's initial preaching of repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah.

It is apparent that they knew little or nothing about the gift of the Holy Spirit, about His baptism and indwelling, or about His sealing ministry or the fact that He is the earnest of our inheritance. They had not been made partakers of the sovereign acts of God that are all part of a genuine Christian experience. They may have believed in Jesus as the Messiah, but they did not understand the significance of His death and resurrection or the role of the Holy Spirit in the birth and life of the church. Since becoming a Christian involves turning from sin and turning to Christ in faith, their belief was incomplete. They were not yet converted.

We are not told why Paul asked them whether they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, but probably he sensed that something did not quite seem right. Maybe, as he reasoned with them, he realized that they did not understand spiritual truth. But Paul sensed something that led him to ask a diagnostic question to determine where these men were spiritually.

The way that Paul framed his question is significant. *“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”* It implies that the Holy Spirit is received at a definite point in time and that that time is the moment of initial belief. The construction of the question in the Greek supports such a position. (the aorist participle, **Pisteuó: (pist-yoo’-o)**, *“believed,”* being construed here as coincidental with the verb, **lambanó**, *“receive”*). No space of time is envisaged between the two events; nor is

the possibility entertained of believing without also receiving the “seal of the Spirit.”

I am of the opinion that this manifestation of speaking in tongues confirms Paul’s statement in **1 Corinthians 14:22**: “*Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers*” (**New English Translation**). The purpose of tongues was to overcome unbelief. It should also be noted that the reception of the Holy Spirit in Acts does not follow any set pattern. He came into believers before baptism (**Acts 10:44**), after baptism (**Acts 8:12-16; 19:6**), and in some instances, by the laying on of apostolic hands (**Acts 8:17; 19:6**). It seems clear that the Book of Acts is a transitional one and therefore should not to be used as a doctrinal source on how to receive the Holy Spirit.

What we have in this passage is God validating the ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, in the same way that He did for Peter, the apostle to the Jews. The scenario described in this passage occurred during the transitional period of the church when God was moving from Israel to the Gentiles. It must therefore be understood by us as being descriptive and not prescriptive. **Acts 19:1-7** was never meant to be a pattern for us to follow. We must be careful not to commit the error of failing to consider the transitional nature of **Acts**, which means that the experiences described in **Acts** may not all be normative for today.

Romans 1:16-17

*16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who **believes**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

17 For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, “The righteous by faith will live.”

Romans 3:20-23

20 For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (although it is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed—

*22 namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who **believe**. For there is no distinction,*

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

24 But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:21

*“For since in the wisdom of God the world by its wisdom did not know God, God was pleased to save those who **believe** by the foolishness of preaching.”*

Galatians 3:22

*“But the scripture imprisoned everything under sin so that the promise could be given—because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ—to those who **believe**.”*

1 Timothy 1:15-16

15 This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them!

*16 But here is why I was treated with mercy: so that in me as the worst, Christ Jesus could demonstrate his utmost patience, as an example for those who are going to **believe** in him for eternal life.*

The **Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)** explains that the "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts; and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word...the principal acts of saving faith are, accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace" (**Chapter 14**).

In other words, saving faith does not save because of what it does but rather because of whose work it rests in, namely, the work of Jesus Christ. The Bible knows of no other means of salvation other than trusting in Christ and resting in His finished work. Old Testament saints looked forward to Christ and New Testament saints look backward to Christ, but all lay hold of Christ's work through saving faith.