



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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Faith

by Thomas Watson

From the *Body of Divinity*, edited by George Rogers

Question 65. What does God require of us, that we may escape the wrath and curse due to our sin?

Answer. Faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means, whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption.

I begin with “Faith in Jesus Christ.” “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.” Rom. 3:25. The great privilege in the text is to have Christ for a propitiation; which is not only to free us from God’s wrath, but to ingratiate us into his love and favour. The means of having Christ to be our propitiation is, “Faith in his blood.” There is a twofold faith, *Fides quae creditur*, which is “the doctrine of faith” and *Fides qua creditur*, which is “the grace of faith.” The act of justifying faith lies in recumbency; we rest on Christ alone for salvation. As a man that is ready to drown catches hold on the bough of a tree, so a poor trembling sinner, seeing himself ready to perish, catches hold by faith on Christ the tree of life, and is saved. The work of faith is by the Holy Spirit; therefore faith is called the “fruit of the Spirit,” Gal. 5:22. Faith does not grow in nature, it is an outlandish plant, a fruit of the Spirit. This grace of faith is *sanctissimum humani pectoris bonum* [the most holy good of the human breast]; of all others, the most precious rich faith, and most holy faith, and faith of God’s elect: hence it is called “precious faith.” 2 Pet. 1:1. As gold is most precious among metals, so is faith among the graces. Faith is the queen of the graces; it is the condition of the gospel. “Thy faith hath saved thee,” not thy tears, Luke 7:50. Faith is the “vital artery of the soul” that animates it. “The just shall live by faith.” Hab. 2:4. Though unbelievers breathe, they lack life. Faith, as Clemens Alexandrinus calls it, is a mother grace; it excites and invigorates all the

graces; not a grace stirs till faith sets it to work. Faith sets repentance to work; it is like fire to the still; it sets hope to work. First we believe the promise, then we hope for it. If faith did not feed the lamp of hope with oil, it would soon die. It sets love to work. "Faith which worketh by love." Gal. 5:6. Who can believe in the infinite merits of Christ, and his heart not ascend in a fiery chariot of love? It is a catholicon, or remedy against all troubles; a sheet anchor cast into the sea of God's mercy to keep us from sinking in despair. Other graces have done worthily; thou, O faith, excellest them all. In heaven love will be the chief grace; but while we are here love must give place to faith. Love takes possession of glory, but faith gives a title to it. Love is the crowning grace in heaven, but faith is the conquering grace upon earth. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4. Faith carries away the garland from all the other graces. Other graces help to sanctify us, but faith only has the honour to justify us. "Being justified by faith." Rom. 5:1.

Q. How comes faith to be so precious?

A. Not that it is a more holy quality, or has more worthiness than other graces, but *respectu objecti* [in respect of its object], "as it lays hold on Christ the blessed object," and fetches in his fulness, John 9:16. Faith in itself considered, is but *manus mendica*, "the beggar's hand;" but as this hand receives the rich alms of Christ's merits, so it is precious, and challenges a superiority over the rest of the graces.

Use 1. Of all sins beware of the rock of unbelief. "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." Heb. 3: 12. Men think, as long as they are not drunkards or swearers, it is no great matter to be unbelievers. This is the gospel sin, it dyes your other sins in grain.

1. Unbelief is a Christ-reproaching sin. It disparages Christ's infinite merit as if it could not save; it makes the wound of sin to be broader than the plaster of Christ's blood. This is a high contempt offered to Christ, and is a deeper spear than that which the Jews thrust into his side.

2. Unbelief is an ungrateful sin. *Ingratus vitandus est ut dirum scelus, tellus ipsa foedius nihil creat.* [A life of ingratitude is a fearful evil, a horror the earth itself would never bring forth.] Ingratitude is a prodigy of wickedness; and unbelief is being ungrateful for the richest mercy. Suppose a king, to redeem a captive, should part with his crown of gold, and when he had done this should say to the redeemed man, "All I desire of thee in lieu of my kindness, is to believe that

I love thee.” If he should say “No, I do not believe any such thing, or that thou carest at all for me;” I appeal to you whether this would not be odious ingratitude? So is the case here. God has sent his Son to shed his blood; he requires us only to believe in him, that he is able and willing to save us. No, says unbelief, his blood was not shed for me, I cannot persuade myself that Christ has any purpose of love to me. Is not this horrid ingratitude? This enhances a sin, and makes it of a crimson colour.

3. Unbelief is a leading sin. It is the breeder of sin. *Qualitas malae vitae initium sumit ab infidelitate* [The fruits of an evil life originally grow out of unbelief.]. Unbelief is a root sin, and the devil labours to water this root, that the branches may be fruitful. (1.) It breeds hardness of heart; therefore they are put together. Mark 16:14. Christ upbraids them with their unbelief and hardness of heart. Unbelief breeds the stone of the heart. He who believes not in Christ, is not affected with his sufferings, he melts not in tears of love. Unbelief freezes the heart; first it defiles and then hardens. (2.) Unbelief breeds profaneness. An unbeliever will hesitate at no sin; neither at false weights, nor false oaths. He will swallow down treason. Judas was first an unbeliever, and then a traitor. John 6:64. He who has no faith in his heart, will have no fear of God before his eyes.

4. Unbelief is a wrath-procuring sin. It is *inimica salutis*, [an enemy of salvation] Bernard, John 3:18. *Jam condemnatus est* [he is now condemned], dying so, he is as sure to be condemned as if he were so already. “He that believeth not on the Son of God, the wrath of God abideth on him.” John 3:36. He who believes not in the blood of the Lamb must feel the wrath of the Lamb. The Gentiles that believe not in Christ will be damned as well as the Jews who blaspheme him. And if unbelief be so fearful and damnable a sin, shall we not be afraid to live in it?

Use 2. Above all graces set faith to work on Christ. “That whosoever believeth on him should not perish.” John 3:16. “Above all, taking the shield of faith.” Eph. 6:16. Say as queen Esther, “I will go in unto the king: and if I perish, I perish.” She had nothing to encourage her; she ventured against law, yet the golden sceptre was held forth to her. We have promises to encourage our faith. “He that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out.” John 6:37. Let us then advance faith by a holy recumbency on Christ’s merits. Christ’s blood will not justify without believing; they are both put together in the text, “Faith in his blood.” The blood of God, without faith in Christ, will not save. Christ’s sufferings are the plaster to heal a sin-sick soul, but this plaster must be applied by

faith. It is not money in a rich man's hand, though offered to us, that will enrich us, unless we receive it. So Christ's virtues or benefits will do us no good unless we receive them by the hand of faith. Above all graces set faith at work. It is a faith most acceptable to God upon many accounts.

1. Because it is a God-exalting grace. It glorifies God. "Abraham being strong in faith, gave glory to God." Rom. 4:20. To believe that there is more mercy in God and merit in Christ than sin in us, and that Christ has answered all the demands of the law, and that his blood has fully satisfied for us, is in a high degree to honour God. Faith in the Mediator brings more glory to God than martyrdom, or the most heroic act of obedience.

2. Faith in Christ is acceptable to God because it is a self-denying grace; it makes a man go out of himself, renounce all self-righteousness, and wholly rely on Christ for justification, It is very humble, it confesses its own indigence, and lives wholly upon Christ. As the bee sucks sweetness from the flower, so faith sucks all its strength and comfort from Christ.

3. Faith is a grace acceptable to God, because by faith we present a righteousness to him which best pleases him; we bring the righteousness of Christ into court, which is called the righteousness of God. I Cor. 5:21. To bring Christ's righteousness, is to bring Benjamin with us. A believer may say, Lord, it is not the righteousness of Adam, or of the angels, but of Christ who is God-man, that I bring before thee. The Lord cannot but smell a sweet savour in Christ's righteousness.

Use 3. Let us try our faith. There is something that looks like faith, and is not. Pliny says there is a Cyprian stone which is in colour like a diamond, but it is not of the right kind; so there is a spurious faith in the world. Some plants have the same leaf with others, but the herbalist can distinguish them by the root and taste; so something may look like true faith, but it may be distinguished several ways:—

1. True faith is grounded upon knowledge. Knowledge carries the torch before faith. There is a knowledge of Christ's radiant excellencies, Phil. 3:7. He is made up of all love and beauty. True faith is a judicious intelligent grace, it knows whom it believes, and why it believes. Faith is seated as well in the understanding as in the will. It has an eye to see Christ, as well as a wing to fly to him. Such therefore as are veiled in ignorance, or have only an implicit faith to believe as the church believes, have no true and genuine faith.

2. Faith lives in a broken heart. “He cried out with tears, Lord, I believe.” True faith is always in a heart bruised for sin. They, therefore, whose hearts were never touched for sin, have no faith. If a physician should tell us there was a herb that would help us against all infections, but it always grows in a watery place; if we should see a herb like it in colour, leaf, smell, blossom, but growing upon a rock, we should conclude that it was the wrong herb. So saving faith always grows in a heart humbled for sin, in a weeping eye and a tearful conscience. If, therefore, there be a show of faith, but it grows upon the rock of a hard impenitent heart, it is not the true faith.

3. True faith is at first nothing but an embryo, it is minute and small; it is full of doubts, temptations, fears; it begins in weakness. It is like the smoking flax, Matt. 12:20. It smokes with desires, but does not flame with comfort; it is at first so small, that it is scarce discernible. They who, at the first dash have a strong persuasion that Christ is theirs, who leap out of sin into assurance, have a false and spurious faith. The faith which comes to its full stature on its birth-day is a monster. The seed that sprung up suddenly withered, Matt. 13:5.

4. Faith is a refining grace, it consecrates and purifies. Moral virtue may wash the outside, but faith washes the inside. “Having purified their hearts by faith.” Acts 15:9. Faith makes the heart a temple with this inscription, “Holiness to the Lord.” They whose hearts have legions of lust in them, were never acquainted with the true faith. For one to say he has faith, and yet lives in sin, is as if one should say he was in health when his vitals are perished. Faith is a virgin grace, it is joined with sanctity. “Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience.” 1 Tim. 3:9. The jewel of faith is always put in the cabinet of a pure conscience. The woman that touched Christ by faith fetched a healing and cleansing virtue from him.

5. True faith is obedient. “The obedience of faith.” Rom. 16:26. Faith melts our will into the will of God. If God commands duty, though unwelcome to flesh and blood, faith obeys. “By faith Abraham obeyed.” Heb. 11:8. It not only believes the promise, but obeys the command. It is not having a speculative knowledge that will evidence you to be believers. The devil has knowledge; but that which makes him a devil is that he has no obedience.

6. True faith is increasing, “from faith to faith,” i.e. from one degree of faith to another, Rom. 1:17. Faith does not lie in the heart, as a stone in the earth; but as seed that grows. Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Christ, but was afraid to confess him; afterwards he went boldly to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. John 19:36. A Christian’s increase in faith is known two ways:—

(1.) By steadfastness. He is a pillar in the temple of God, “Rooted and built up in him; and established in the faith.” Col. 2:7. Unbelievers are sceptics in religion; they are unsettled; they question every truth; but when faith is on the increasing hand, it operates *stabilire animum* [to establish the soul], it corroborates a Christian. He is able to prove his principles; he holds no more than he will die for; as that martyr woman said, “I cannot dispute for Christ, but I can burn for him.” An increasing faith is not like a ship in the midst of the sea, that fluctuates, and is tossed upon the waves; but like a ship at anchor, which is firm and steadfast.

(2.) A Christian’s increase in faith is known by his strength. He can do that now which he could not do before. When one is man-grown, he can do that which he was not able to do when he was a child; he can carry a heavier burden: so a growing Christian can bear crosses with more patience.

Objection. *But I fear I have no faith, it is so weak.*

Ans. If you have faith, though but in its infancy, be not discouraged. For, 1. A little faith is faith, as a spark of fire is fire. 2. A weak faith may lay hold on a strong Christ; as a weak hand can tie the knot in marriage as well as a strong one. She, in the gospel, who but touched Christ, fetched virtue from him. 3. The promises are not made to strong faith, but to true. The promise does not say, he who has a giant faith, who can believe God’s love through a frown, who can rejoice in affliction, who can work wonders, remove mountains, stop the mouth of lions, shall be saved, but whosoever believes, be his faith ever so small. A reed is but weak, especially when it is bruised; yet a promise is made to it. “A bruised reed will he not break.” Matt. 12:20. 4. A weak faith may be fruitful. Weakest things multiply most. The vine is a weak plant, but it is fruitful. The thief on the cross, who was newly converted, was but weak in grace; but how many precious clusters grew upon that tender plant! He chided his fellow-thief. “Dost thou not fear God?” Luke 23:40. He judged himself, “We indeed suffer justly.” He believed in Christ, when he said, “Lord.” He made a heavenly prayer, “Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Weak Christians may have strong affections. How strong is the first love, which is after the first planting of faith! The weakest believer is a member of Christ as well as the strongest; and the weakest member of the body mystic shall not perish. Christ will cut off rotten members, but not weak members. Therefore, Christian, be not discouraged. God, who would have us receive them that are weak in faith, will not himself refuse them, Rom. 14:1.

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