

How Faith Prepares the Soul for Christ

By Thomas Goodwin

“Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace” —*Romans 4:16*

IF thou hast not faith in Jesus Christ, all that wisdom in the Scriptures will not save thee, nor have power to save thee. If they save thee, it is through faith on Christ revealed in them. “Search the Scriptures” (says Christ, John 5:39), “for ye think therein ye have salvation”; but search them, for they speak of me more than of anything else, and ye ought to know me, or ye shall die in your sins. But you will say: May not a man have love to God the Father upon the thoughts of his free grace alone; and may he not then repent for sin? I say, no; you cannot repent unless you believe on his Son Christ (Rom 1:5). Love to God, and turning to God, will not save you, if you swerve from the means of grace and the way of faith. What says Christ? John 5:42,48: “But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.” I know that you have not the love of God in you; why? Because you lack faith in me. Love to God springs from faith in Christ; and therefore never talk of love to God, if you have not treated concerning salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

What saith Christ himself from heaven when he gave Paul his commission in Acts 26:17-19? “I send thee,” saith he, “to open the eyes of the Gentiles, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified.” Will not all this do? Will not turning unto God from self-love, and loving God, and being sanctified, serve to save us under the gospel? No; read the next words: it must all be, says Christ, “through faith that is in me.” Christ saith it from heaven, this is his commission, and he declares, that under the gospel, remission of sins and turning to God, forgiveness of sin and sanctification, were all *through faith in him*. Be convinced then, that if ever you be saved, there is a necessity that God teach you to come to the Son.

You think it is an easy thing to come to Christ, and to look to him and to his name for pardon, and to go to him for forgiveness and sanctification: but let this be preached to you, and inculcated to you, to go to Christ: let it all be urged upon you, yet you will not come to Christ that you may have life, and you will die in your sins, unless God the Father draws you to him. Our Lord Jesus Christ gives a great instance of this: John 6:63,64, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.” He doth give the greatest instance in the world: let men live under the highest preaching of the gospel, and the most powerful ministry that ever spake, even the preaching of Christ himself, yet a man will not come to Christ. Whom doth Christ pitch upon for an instance but upon Judas, that had been with him from the beginning, and had heard him preach all his sermons, and heard his parables? And yet he is a devil for all this. “For he knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. Therefore I said,” says he, “that no man can come to me, except it were given unto him of the Father” (v65). Therefore there must be a teaching from God, and none but those that are taught by a secret work, beyond what any powerful minister in the world can make, will believe. A man otherwise will never do it, he will never give up himself to God and Christ, but there will be “a heart departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12), that is, from Christ, as the coherence of the words shew. So that it is a plain case, that those who live in gospel-times, must all of them be taught of God, if they ever come to Christ. They that live under never so powerful means, if God doth not touch their hearts, they will never come. Oh bless the Lord, that hath taught you to know his free grace, and to believe on his Son, which is the great work of God, as Christ calls it, John 6:29.

(1.) It is faith that prepares the soul for Christ. A man’s conscience may be first set a work in the sight of sin, set upon by all, and they may humble him, and bring him down very low; but that which strikes the great stroke in preparing you for Christ is the taking you off for ever from all abilities, and from whatsoever is in yourselves, and out of that emptiness to go to Jesus Christ. Now it is faith only that doeth this; that only is the emptying grace which is the filling grace of Christ. Though the Spirit begins upon a man’s conscience

first, yet it is faith that perfects that work of making you nothing, and then it comes and raiseth you up to all things in Christ. Now as it is a rule, both in the law of nature and of commonwealths, that it is the same power that must make void a law that makes a law, the same power that creates must annihilate and bring to nothing, so it is the same faith that brings the soul to nothing, and empties it of itself, and of all things else, and that brings it unto Jesus Christ, and fills it with the fulness that is in him. It is all but faith digging downward, and working upward.

In John 16:8, it is said, "The Spirit shall convince the world of sin, and of righteousness." The thing I quote it for is this, the word there that is translated "convince," is the same that is used in the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:2. Faith there is called "the *evidence* of things not seen"; the word used by the apostle is *conviction*, the same that Christ useth here when he saith, "The Spirit shall *convince* the world of sin"; that is, he shall work faith in them to see their lost condition ultimately. The same spirit of faith and conviction that convinceth me of righteousness, convinceth me of my lost condition; and therefore he adds, if you mark it, "Because ye believe not on me"; for that is the ultimate conviction that prepares a man for Christ. To take a man off of his own bottom, to make him see that he hath no ability to believe in Christ of himself, this is what faith doeth; and having done thus, convinces a man of his lost condition ultimately.

What is the reason the first promise is made to poverty of spirit by Christ (Matt 5:3)? Certainly in poverty of spirit there he includes faith, and Christ would not have pronounced a blessedness but upon forgiveness of sins, and that is upon believing; yet it is eminently denominated poverty, because it is a work of faith, as making the soul poor. It is faith only that makes a man fling away his own righteousness, and to count it dross and dung (Phil 3), and to lay hold upon the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. It is faith that ultimately strikes that great stroke in preparation so much spoken of; and truly other preparation will not drive a man to Christ.

(2.) And then when the soul is thus ultimately emptied by faith, and is lost, it is faith that first spies out Christ, as that all-sufficient satisfaction received by God the Father. When the soul is in a storm, and is even cast away in his own apprehension, when it hath thrown overboard all his own goods, all his own righteousness, all his own hopes, all his own abilities, or whatever it be, and if God should leave the soul in that condition, the wrath of God, like mighty waves, would break in upon it, and swallow it up. What doth faith now? It climbs up to the top of the mast. Oh there is Christ, I have spied out the Lord Jesus, and it makes out to him instantly, gets aboard of him presently. Therefore now the entrance into the state of grace is attributed unto faith, in Romans 5:1, "We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand."

(3.) Then again, though there is a radical union that we have with Jesus Christ, without all preparation, for he takes us before we take him, yet notwithstanding, all the communion we have with Christ is transacted by faith. The union, on our part, is mainly and primarily by faith: it is that which, on our part, ties the marriage knot; it is not love, but consent, that makes man and wife. It is the heart's coming off to be Christ's, and going unto Christ to be his, and to be righteousness for him, and to be a head and a Saviour to him; this is what makes a union, and this is done by faith.

There are but two things that do marry us unto Christ, as Hosea 2:19 clearly holds forth: "I will betroth thee unto me in faithfulness and in loving-kindness"; that is now on God's part. But what is on our part? It follows: "and thou shalt know the Lord." There are but these two things that make the match. Here is the faithfulness and loving-kindness of God on his part; and then here is on our part, "You shall know the Lord." I opened that before out of Jeremiah 9. I need not stand to repeat it, for in the Old Testament you shall find that faith is expressed, as there, by our knowing of God, who exerciseth loving-kindness in the earth. Now though that love doth unite too, for the soul is united to what it loves by love, yet it is faith that brings Jesus Christ into the heart, and reveals him to the soul in all his excellencies and his glory. We apprehend his love first, or his excellencies first, how lovely he is, even before love unites the soul to him. So that faith is first, and though that love may unite us to him, as for the excellencies in his person, yet take him as he is a mystical head, and as a husband, and a husband given, so it is faith that goes out to him as such, and goes out to him with an instinct after mystical union with him.