

"Believe it or Not"

--An Open Letter to the World--

Dear Friends,

"What must I do to be saved?" What an immensely important question! It is the very question a jailer asked the imprisoned Paul and Silas in Acts 16:30. Paul and Silas replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved..." (16:31).

You may ask, "Don't our good works save us?" NO! "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10, ESV). We do good works to fulfill our purpose in life and out of gratitude to God for our salvation, not to earn our salvation. We must not flatter ourselves so as to think that we earn salvation by works. A person must do good works because he or she is saved, not to become saved. Jesus said in John 6:29, "this is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

What, then, does it mean to believe in Jesus? It is much more than mere head knowledge. Even demons so "believe" (James 2:19). We must, as Pastor Richard Cecil said in 1798, "believe savingly."

To believe in Jesus means...

- ✓ To be convinced of His death, burial, and resurrection to pay for your sins (1 Corinthians 15:1ff),
- ✓ To trust in Jesus Christ alone for eternal salvation (John 3:16),
- ✓ To obey the commands of Scripture (Romans 1:5; 16:26; 11 Thess. 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17) as we follow after Jesus daily.

Carefully consider what you have just read. By the above standard and definition, set by God, do you truly believe? That is, do you "believe savingly"? Many think they are saved, but they are not. From Matthew 7:21-23 it is clear that many on the last day who expected to be in heaven eternally will be in hell. Their expectation will perish (Proverbs 10:28). Why?

- ✓ Because they had what Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown called a "fatal confidence" in their spiritual condition.
- ✓ Because they had a form of godliness (11 Timothy 3:5) but did not have God.
- ✓ Because they knew about Jesus but didn't know Jesus.
- ✓ Because they grieved the Holy Spirit by their sins but were not themselves grieved by their sins.

They may have gone to church quite a lot, but they also went out getting drunk, lying, and stealing. They would not repent of their unbelief. They would not turn away from their adultery or of taking God's name in vain. They didn't honor their father and mother. They were gossips and liars.... The list is long. The kind of "faith" that allows a person to claim to be a follower of Jesus but also to live such a life is emphatically not saving faith.

Jesus said in John 15:10 and 14, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love.... You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." In First John 5:12 we are told by God, "He who has the Son has the life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have the life." Carefully pondering all you have just read, ask yourself and then honestly answer the question:

DO I HAVE THE SON OF GOD?!

Note that the question is not, "Have I been confirmed?" nor "Am I a good person?" but rather, "Do I have the Son of God?" If the answer is "yes! I have the Son of God," then you will prove it by keeping the faith, day and night meditating on Scripture (Psalm 1). You will pray in a manner that is steadfast, watchful, and thankful (Colossians 4:2). You will tell others of the wonders of the Lord and of His beloved Son (1 Peter 2:9). You will confess and repent of your sins (1 John 1:9; Acts 20:21). And you will do this out of sheer gratitude to God for your salvation, not to earn your salvation.

On the other hand, if the honest answer is "No, I do not have the Son of God," then be warned. You must repent of (turn from) your sins today and look to Jesus to be reconciled to God (11 Corinthians 5:17). Believe in the manner described above. "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion" (Hebrews 3:15; 4:7, quoting Psalm 95:7, 8). The Bible says that "God our Savior...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all..." (1 Timothy 2:3-6).

One God? One mediator? One way? Some may say, "That's so narrow and intolerant!" But consider the equation $2 + 2 = 4$. There is only one right answer to this equation. But what about $2 + 2 = 5$? Or $2 + 2 = 3$? No, none of those answers is correct. Rather, $2 + 2 = 4$. Period. There are no two ways about it. Is that being narrow? I guess it is. If it is "narrow" to be right, then I guess it is right to be narrow! When it comes to $2 + 2 = 7$, I am intolerant of the wrong answer. At any rate, I would rather be right in God's eyes than tolerant in the eyes of God's enemies. So, narrow is not bad in the present case. In fact, Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13-14, ESV).

So, believe it or not, Jesus is your one and only hope of being forgiven of your sins, escaping God's wrath, and entering heaven instead of hell. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). There are not many gods, all of whom are equal. There are not many paths to God. There is just one: Jesus Christ. If any so-called god does not have a son named Jesus, it is no god at all, but rather a demon (Deuteronomy 32:17).

But, you may say, "I am a good person. Surely my good deeds will outweigh my bad deeds." Okay, brace yourself! Here is the hard truth: you are not a "good person." And neither am I. Pastor Ray Comfort helps us think through this: If you have ever lied, you are a liar. If you have ever stolen (ever a small item twenty years ago), you are a thief. If you have ever committed adultery (even looking, Jesus said), you are an adulterer. If you have done these things then you, by your own admission, are a lying, thieving adulterer, and we have only looked at 3 of the 10 Commandments! Still think you are a good person? How will you do on judgment day?

Consider these verses...

"There is none righteous, no, not even one...there is not one who goes good, no, not one" (Romans 3:10, 12).

"We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (Isaiah 64:6, ESV).

Besides, God does not operate in a "Do-Sam's-good-deeds-outweigh-the-bad-ones?" manner. Rather, the Father requires perfection to enter heaven. We are not perfect and thus cannot enter heaven. But alas, all is not lost! If we repent and believe in the Perfect One, Jesus Christ, then the Father credits the perfection of His Son to our account, we are justified and seen as perfect by the merits of Christ, and thus able to enter heaven! Hallelujah! Wow! Such mercy!

I love what the character Christian said in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*: "Unless I could obtain the righteousness of one who had never sinned, I should be utterly cast away." And that's putting it mildly! His wife Christiana said some wonderful stuff too: To the Lord she said, "I have heard that You are a merciful God and that You delight to multiply the pardon of our offenses." Indeed!

And by the way, this is not about being Lutheran or Catholic or Presbyterian or Methodist or Baptist or any other flavor. God does not recognize these distinctions and is generally not pleased with them. That is clear in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.

Now, if you are married, then at some time in the past there was a day when you *became* married. There had to be a certain day, an exciting day, when you promised your vows, took some pictures, and received your spouse to be yours. Similarly, if you are saved, there had to come a day when you became saved. Most people remember their wedding anniversary date. (Or they *better* remember it!) But many people do not remember the date of their conversion to Christ, the day they became saved (or "**born again**"/"**born from above**" as it is worded in John chapter 3). It is not so important that you remember the exact day but that there indeed was a day when you were saved. Has there been a day when you received Christ (John 1:12) and were saved? The question is not, "Do you go to church?" nor "When were you confirmed?" but rather, "Has there been a day when you repented of your sins, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and began a life of following Him?"

Consider the words of the hymn "Love Lifted Me," by James Rowe:

*I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore
Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more.
But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry,
From the waters lifted me, now safe am I!*

*All my heart to Him I give, ever to Him I'll cling,
In His blessed presence live, ever His praises sing.
Love so mighty and so true merits my soul's best songs,
Faithful, loving service too, to Him belongs.*

*Souls in danger, look above! Jesus completely saves!
He will lift you by His love out of the angry waves.
He's the Master of the sea, billows His will obey,
He your Savior wants to be—be saved today!*

Sincerely Yours,

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P.S. If you are new to reading the Bible, start in the Gospel of John, chapter 1. Godspeed!