

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BELIEVE?

by Oswald J. Smith

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There was a time in my life when I did not know whether I was saved or whether I was lost. I remember working for the Massey-Harris Company in Toronto, and carrying messages from one department to another. As I walked along the underground corridors of that great firm I was not interested in the message I was carrying. I was asking myself just one question: "Am I saved or am I lost? If I am lost, Lord, let me know it in order that I may get saved, and if I am saved let me know it in order that I may rejoice in Your Salvation."

You see, I had come into contact with a group of people who taught salvation by feeling and experience instead of faith. Night after night I would go forward in their tent, kneel in the straw, where they would gather around me and all pray together, pleading with God to save me. So alarmed was I that I was afraid to go home and go to bed for fear I would fall asleep and wake up in perdition. My one cry day and night was, "Am I bound for Heaven or for Hell?" I was still only 16 years of age.

One night I decided to attend Chalmer's Presbyterian Church, and as I sat on the east side of the gallery I bowed my head and prayed that the minister would that night preach on saving faith and thus solve my problem. At last Dr. MacPherson stepped into the pulpit

and the service commenced. And that night he did preach on faith. I listened with both ears and watched with both eyes, but at the close of the service, with hundreds of others, I got up and went out into the darkness of the night, still not knowing whether I was saved or whether I was lost.

Why? Was it because Dr. MacPherson had not preached the Gospel? Most assuredly not. He did preach the Gospel. Again and again he cried out: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved." What then was the matter? Let me tell you. Never once in the course of his address did he stop to tell us what he meant by the word "believe," and that was my trouble. I knew that I had to believe, but I had always believed. There never had been a time when I did not believe. From the days of my earliest childhood I believed as much as I believe today, and yet I did not know whether I was a Christian or not.

You see, there were no atheists in our community, no agnostics or skeptics. I had never heard of an infidel. Everybody believed. Some were drunkards, others swore and cursed; many were given to lying and stealing. They did not even profess to be Christians, but they all believed. I did not know one who even questioned the authenticity of the Word of God.

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Are there not millions in a similar situation? I have found them everywhere I have gone. In ancient Russia, let alone Spain, Italy and many other countries of Europe, as well as in America, there are literally millions who believe and yet who are not saved. And if millions who believe in Christ are not Christians then what does it mean to believe? Finally one day I came across that little booklet that was used so often by Queen Mary in her personal work, "Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment," by Geo Cutting, and as a result my doubts vanished. I was assured of my salvation, and from that day to this I have never had a doubt of any kind.

THREE STEPS

There are three steps in saving faith. They are like the three rungs of a ladder. The first two will not save, but the third will. However, you cannot take the third until you have taken the first two.

Hear

The first step I designate by the simple word "hear." "How shall they believe except they hear?" A knowledge of God's salvation is necessary before it is possible to believe. That is why we send missionaries to China, to India, and to Africa. The heathen must first hear before they can believe. But I am sure that I need not dwell on this first step now. I am quite certain that everyone here present has again and again heard the message of God's salvation. Therefore you have already taken the first step. You have heard.

Believe

I designate the second step by using the simple word "believe." Now what is the meaning of "believe?" It simply means "giving intellectual assent to a truth." The Dictionary says, "to consent with the mind." When therefore you have given "intellectual assent to a truth" you have believed. You have taken the second step. But you are not saved.

When the King James translators were translating the Bible some three hundred and fifty years ago, they came across a certain Hebrew word in the Old Testament Scriptures, and they began searching for an English word with which to translate it. Finally they

chose the word "trust," and that is why you have the word "trust" occurring so frequently in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is found a hundred and fifty-two times.

In due time they came to the New Testament, and presently they encountered the same word, but this time in the Greek, and again they searched for an English word with which to translate it. But for some unknown reason they decided to choose an entirely different word, for they chose the word "believe." Had they been consistent, had they used the Old Testament word for their translation, this message would not have been necessary. But they used, as I have stated, the word "believe," and that is why you have the word "believe" occurring so frequently in the New Testament Scriptures, especially in the Gospel of John and the epistles of Paul. That has caused all the confusion and misunderstanding.

You see, the word "believe" has to do with the head, the intellect. It is a mental process. But you can believe all you want to believe about Jesus Christ and still not be saved. You can believe everything that I believe about the Bible, and yet perish eternally. That is the faith of the demons. The Word of God declares that the demons also believe and tremble. They were among the first to acclaim Jesus as the Son of God, but they did not submit to Him. They believe as much or more than you do about Christ. They do not for a moment doubt His Deity, but their faith is purely intellectual. It does not change their lives, and their doom is certain, therefore they tremble.

I came across a certain denomination one day and I was anxious to discover, if I could, the basis upon which they received men and women as members of their churches. I learned that they asked them just one question, one question consisting of two parts, namely, "Do you believe God loves you and that Jesus Christ His Son died for you?" If they could answer that question in the affirmative they were accepted.

But who doesn't believe in the love of God? Everyone who believes the Bible does. And who doesn't believe that Jesus Christ died for mankind? The Bible says He did, and if you believe the Bible you believe He died for you. That doesn't make you a Christian. That doesn't

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change your life. That is purely intellectual. Thousands believe in the love of God and the death of Christ who are not Christians. The second step will save no one and yet that is where multitudes stop. They take the second step but not the third. Hence they are not yet saved.

What are the usual questions that are asked of one who wishes to join the Church? These: "Do you believe in the Virgin Birth, the Deity, Resurrection and Second Coming of Christ? Do you believe Christ died for your sins?" Such questions are doctrinal and can be answered intellectually by anyone. What are the questions I ask? These: "Have you been born again? Are you saved? Have you received Jesus Christ?" Such questions are experimental. If they can be answered in the affirmative I do not worry about the others.

Trust

The third step and the only step that saves I designate by the simple word "trust." And now I must turn to "The New English Bible." At long last the translation of the Authorized Version has been corrected. After 350 years the word "believe" has been eliminated. After preaching this sermon for 40 years I now have The New English Bible to back me.

When the Philippian jailer asked the question, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer in The New English Bible is, "Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31). Again and again instead of "believe" it is "Put your faith in" or "Put your trust in the Lord Jesus." That has nothing whatever to do with the intellect; that has to do with the will, and it demands a decision. Multitudes there are who "believe" who have never "trusted."

In the O.T. the way of salvation is stated thus: "Put your trust in the Lord" (Psalm 4:5). In the N.T. it is "Believe on the Lord." The O.T. has the correct translation. When you "put your trust in the Lord" you are saved. Now what is the meaning of the word "trust?"

Excludes Effort

First, it excludes effort. Did you ever have anyone try to teach you to float? Do you remember how you stood beside your instructor in the water, and how he said to

you, "The water can sustain your weight. All you have to do is to trust the water. Now throw yourself back and float." And do you remember how you threw yourself back on the water and how you floated—to the bottom?

Then do you recall how you stood again by your instructor and how he said to you, "Now why did you tighten your muscles? Why did you hold your breath? Couldn't you trust the water? Why, it carries whole navies. It can easily bear you up." And once again you threw yourself back on the water, but there was a slight catching of the breath, a tightening of the muscles and once again you floated—to the bottom.

Then again you stood beside your instructor. Again he urged you to trust, and this time without any effort of your own, as you threw yourself back on the water, to your pleasure and delight, you found yourself floating. I wish someone would float tonight on God's great salvation. Put aside your effort. Stop struggling. Don't try to help yourself either by works or religion. Just float. Trust, I say, excludes effort. As long as you are putting forth effort you are not trusting.

Implies Committal

Second, trust implies committal. I think the best illustration is that of the marriage ceremony. Here is a young man who is keeping company with a young woman. For some considerable time they go together. At least they should. At last he asks the all-important question and she says, "Yes." Now they are engaged.

Now this young man makes a great many promises and the young woman believes he means what he says. After a while her girl friends come along and they ask her some questions. "We understand," they say, "that this young man of yours has promised you a home." "Yes, he has," replies the young woman. "And he has promised you clothes and food. Now tell us, do you have the home?" "Oh no," she exclaims, "I do not. I am still living with my parents." "What about the food?" they continue. "Does he supply your food?" "Why no, of course not," she responds, "except when we go to the restaurant, and then sometimes I pay the bill." "What about clothes? Has he given you any clothes?" "No, he has not," the young woman answers; "my parents still

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buy my clothes." "And yet you believe the young man," they exclaim. "Yes, I do," she answers. "I believe every word. I have no doubt of any kind." You see, she had taken the second step; she had believed.

There comes a never-to-be-forgotten day when the young man stands at the front of the church facing the minister, first on one foot, then on the other. Never in his life has he stood so long before. It seems an age. At last to the strains of the wedding march the young woman on the arm of her father comes slowly, oh, so slowly, down the aisle. Every eye is fastened on her. There is plenty of time for everyone to admire her wedding gown.

At last she reaches the front and stands beside the man of her choice. The minister asks one or two very important questions: "Wilt thou?" And she "wilts". And then something happens that has never happened before, and I want you to mark, if you will, very carefully, my phraseology. For the first time in her life she gives herself over, she hands herself to, she commits herself to, she trusts the young man. Taking his arm, she now leaves the church in his protection. Never again will she have to work. He is now responsible for her and it is up to him to look after her. Her worries are over. He must provide for her.

A little later her girl-friends approach her again. "Well," they ask, "has he given you a home?" "Oh yes," she exclaims, "we are now living together in our own home." "What about the food?" "Yes, he pays the grocery bills and the butcher bills. He provides the food." "And what about clothes?" "Yes, he is buying my clothes—not as many as I want, but all that I need. Indeed he is looking after everything." But just when did she get everything? Was it when she took the second step, when she believed, or was it when she took the third step and trusted? It was not until she trusted. She had believed but she got nothing. When she trusted she got everything. So it is with salvation. You can believe as much as you want to believe and get nothing. But the very moment you give yourself up to Jesus Christ, the moment you hand yourself over to Him, the moment you commit yourself to Him, the moment you put your trust in Him, you are saved, but not until then.

Have you ever done it? You see, it implies committal. It is something you must do. Just as that young woman had to walk down the aisle and definitely give herself up to the young man of her choice for the rest of her life, so you must give yourself up to the Lord Jesus Christ for time and eternity, if you are to be saved. The second step will not save. The third is absolutely necessary. You must trust Jesus Christ.

Will you then do what the young woman did? Will you too come down the aisle? Will you hand yourself over to the Heavenly Bridegroom as she did to the earthly? Will you own allegiance to Him? If you will, you will be His for evermore, and He will be responsible for you.

Here is a struggling swimmer who is drowning. He goes down for the first time struggling furiously, while a man stands on the bank with folded arms, who never makes a motion to dive in and rescue the drowning man. Now he is going down for the second time. Still he struggles. But still the man makes no effort to save him. Now he is going down for the third and last time. But he does not struggle. His arms fall limp at his sides cries out "Help!" And in a moment the man on the bank unfolds his arms, dives in and easily rescues the drowning man.

Why didn't he do it before? Because the man thought he could save himself. He had to wait until the man was ready to give up. But the moment the man was willing to trust his rescuer he was saved. As the rescuer approached him all he had to do was to commit himself to the one who had come to save him, and the moment he gave himself up to his rescuer and trusted him, that moment he was saved.

When you, my friend, are willing to give yourself up to your Rescuer, the resurrected, living Christ, you too will be saved. What you believe about Him will not save you; you must put your trust in Him. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Is that what I say when I am dealing with a lost soul? Of course not. If I were to say that I would have an argument on my hands at once. I would be asked the meaning of the word "believe." No, I do not use the King James Version. I use the Old Testament word, or The New English translation, and I say to the seeker: "Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

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Requires Action

In the third place trust requires action. Let me show you what I mean. The date is June 30th, 1858. It is a glorious morning. The mighty cataract of Niagara thunders on the rocks at the foot of the Falls. An eleven hundred foot tightrope has been stretched from bank to bank, on which Charles Blondin, the world's greatest tightrope walker, is to cross. Special trains from Toronto and Buffalo have been run to bring the crowds.

Balancing his 40-pound pole he steps on the rope and starts across, while the voices of the throngs are hushed, until, as he triumphantly places his foot on the farther bank, a great cheer rises even above the noise of the cataract itself.

Turning to the sea of faces, he now makes a thrilling proposal. He offers to recross the cataract with a man on his back. But who is to be the man? Excitedly the people talk among themselves.

"Do you believe I am able to carry you across?" at length asks the ropewalker, turning to a likely looking individual.

"I certainly do," at once responds the one addressed.

"Will you let me?" inquires the waiting hero.

"Will I let you? Well, hardly. You don't think I am going to risk my life like that, do you?" And he turns away.

"And what about you?" he asks Henry Colcord, his manager. Do you believe I can carry you across?"

"I believe. In fact, I have no doubt about it at all," answers Colcord.

"Will you trust me?"

"I will!"

Breathlessly the people watch. The 38-foot pole is balanced; they start; and the great rope tightens beneath their weight. Step after step, slow but sure, without hesitation, they move along. What confidence! The centre is reached. They are above the rushing,

boiling, foam-covered water, the ugly rocks beneath, poised, as it were, in mid-air. Now they are nearing the Canadian side. A great hush falls on the excited crowds. The people hold their breath. The strain is terrific.

Suddenly there is a pause. Some gambler had cut the guy line and the rope is swaying fearfully. Blondin tells Colcord to dismount, which he does, standing with one foot on the rope and his hands on Blondin's shoulders. "Harry," says Blondin, "you are no longer Colcord; you are now Blondin. Be part of me. If I sway, sway with me. Do not try to balance or we will both be dead."

Colcord climbs back. The rope sways wildly and Blondin begins running. How he keeps his balance no one knows, but he does, and at last they are over. The final step is taken, and they stand once more on terra-firma, while the spectators go wild with excitement. The tension is broken; the nerve-racking experience ended.

Bridging the gulf between time and eternity is the great rope of salvation. Never yet has it broken. And Jesus Christ alone is able to cross it. You may have heard all about it, and, like the first man, you may even believe that Jesus can carry you across. But not until you take the final step and commit yourself to Him will you ever get over. You must also trust.

Are you among the thousands who believe, but who have never trusted Christ the Lord? Who know about Him, and defend Him, too, and yet who do not take Him at His Word? Oh, friend, receive, receive this Savior true. Take Jesus now, oh make Him yours today; you may believe, but you must trust Him, too. For He Himself is God's appointed Way. Oh my friend, tell me, have you trusted? Or do you merely believe in your head, and have you failed to take the last important step? If so, will you not by a definite act of your will "put your trust in the Lord Jesus?" If you will, "you will be saved." Will you do it? Do it and do it—NOW.

MY DECISION

Realizing that I am a sinner, and believing that Jesus Christ the Son of God died and rose for me, I now receive Him as my personal Savior, and turning from all else, I put my trust in Him alone.