

The Road to Giant Despair's Castle

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”
(1 John 5:13)

If you have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ to be your Savior, the Devil will try to get you to doubt that you are saved. When a Christian doubts his salvation, he cannot enjoy the Christian life and he cannot serve God effectively. Not confessing sin keeps me from having fellowship with God, but not knowing that I am saved makes me feel like I don't even have a relationship with God! It is like being bound in a dungeon. In the front of my Bible I have a quote written: “The road that leads to Giant Despair's castle is doubt.”⁵ Doubt will ruin your Christian life.

I doubted my salvation for years. God has given me assurance, but it didn't come instantly. It came over time. When I was younger, it got to the point that I was asking Jesus to save me every day, several times a day. I just couldn't be sure that I really trusted Him as my Savior.

Lost people do not doubt their salvation. They don't have any salvation to doubt. Only a saved person can doubt his salvation. The Holy Spirit does not cause you to doubt your salvation. The Devil does that. If you are not saved, the Holy Spirit will show you clearly, from the Word of God, that you are lost. If you have received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, the Holy Spirit will show you, from the Bible, that you are saved.

I pray that God will use the following verses to lead you to a

5. This quote (probably from Charles Spurgeon) refers to the book The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan, (1628-1688). Bunyan wrote the book while imprisoned for preaching the Bible without government approval. Pilgrim's Progress is an allegory about salvation and the Christian life.

place of assurance.

John The Baptist And A Bogus Idea

First of all, there is the false idea among some people that a saved person cannot doubt his salvation. It is easy for a preacher to get lots of people “saved” when he teaches this, because many Christians doubt their salvation. John the Baptist was definitely saved, but he doubted his salvation. Luke 7:19 says, “*And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?*” When John the Baptist was put in prison, he began to struggle with doubt. “Is Jesus really the Son of God? Is He really the Christ, or do we need to look for another?” Most of us, when we doubt our salvation, we doubt ourselves. We doubt that we are really trusting in Christ, that we have truly done what is necessary to be born again. John the Baptist went far beyond that. He doubted Christ. He doubted who Jesus was. The Bible tells us what Jesus told the people after John’s disciples had departed.

And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously appavelled, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. (Luke 7:24-28)

Jesus told the people that John the Baptist was the messenger whom the Old Testament prophet, Malachi, said would come. John was the man whom God had chosen to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said that there had never been a greater prophet of God than John the Baptist. Only a fool would doubt that John was a

saved man; yet John, a saved man, doubted his Savior. If John could doubt the Savior then any saved person can doubt that he or she is truly saved.

Put Your Helmet On

In Ephesians chapter six, the Bible uses a soldier's armor as an illustration of the weapons that God gives us to fight against the Devil and his demons.

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:11-13)

The next to last piece of armor is the helmet of salvation. “*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*” (Ephesians 6:17) The helmet protects the soldier's head, and the Christian's “helmet of salvation” works to protect the Christian's mind. The Devil tries to assault our minds, to cause us to doubt our salvation. I believe that the “helmet of salvation” is a good understanding of the doctrine of salvation. If you understand what you must do to be saved, and you know that you have done that, then it is extremely difficult for the Devil to trick you into thinking that you are not saved.

The better we understand salvation as a doctrine, the more our mind is protected. For instance, if I think that sin will cause me to lose my salvation, then the moment I tell a lie, or drive over the speed limit, or do anything that is against God's Word, then I will think that I'm lost. If I understand what the Bible teaches about eternal life and being born again, then I will know that I am still saved, even though I have sinned.

The Most Important Word In Understanding Salvation

Let's examine the word "believe." This is the most important word in understanding salvation. The Bible tells us over and over again that the way to be saved is to believe in Jesus Christ.

For example:

John 3:15, *"That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."*

John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

John 3:18, *"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."*

John 3:36, *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."*

John 6:40, *"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."*

John 11:25, *"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"*

Acts 10:43, *"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."*

Acts 13:39, *"And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."*

Acts 16:31, *"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."*

The word “believe” in the Bible means just what it says. “To believe,” means *to believe*, or *to put faith in* or *to trust*. The Word of God teaches that I will be saved if I “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul and a man that he was working with named Silas had been put in jail. In Acts chapter sixteen, and verse thirty, the jailer came to them and asked the question, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Now, if you ask the average person that question today, he will give you fifty-dozen things that you have to do to be saved. I have heard a preacher say that you had to walk down a church aisle to be saved. There are people who say that you have to confess every sin in order to be saved. We are not concerned here with what people say. What does the Bible teach? I could say that in order to be saved, you had to stand on your head and count to a thousand and then run around town screaming at the top of your lungs for four hours. It wouldn’t make any difference. The Bible says,

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...”

When I read this Scripture and say that the way to be saved is by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, people begin to object. I am a Baptist and I mean that I have seen Baptists object to this. I quoted some verses that taught that salvation was by believing in Jesus Christ to a Jehovah’s Witness one time, and he kept on saying “No, No, No.” I quoted *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”* to a man who believed that people had to be baptized to be saved, and he objected because I kept on quoting the same verse over and over, as if God didn’t really mean what he said in that verse. It doesn’t surprise me when cult members object to salvation by faith alone, but when supposed “Bible-believing” Christians object to it, it is a little unnerving to say the least. Why would you object when the Lord Jesus Christ presented the way of salvation as believing? Why would you object when the apostle Paul presented the way of salvation as believing? Perhaps Jesus Christ and Paul were not as skilled as we are at presenting the Gospel. Maybe we could teach them a thing or two.

Believing in Jesus is More than Just Believing that He Exists

The word “believe” has the idea of *faith*, *confidence*, *trust*. I could say, “I believe in Santa Claus.” Or, “I believe in the Tooth

Fairy.” In other words, I am saying that I believe that they exist. That’s not what the Bible is talking about here. People are not saved because they believe that Jesus exists. They are saved because they trust in Him for their soul’s salvation. A father has a son who plays little league ball. His son is up to bat and the father says, “Son, I believe in you!” Now, everyone knows that he doesn’t mean, “I believe you exist.” He means, “I have faith in you; I have confidence in you. I believe that you can do it.” That is what the Bible means when it says, “...*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...*” (Acts 16:31) It is the idea of putting your faith in Him, of placing your trust in Him. It is the idea of having confidence in Him that He will save you and keep you saved. Second Timothy 1:12 explains this idea very clearly. “...*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*” Here, the words “believe” and “commit” are interchangeable. To believe in Jesus is to commit the matter of my salvation into His hands. It is to trust in Him to save me from Hell and to get me to Heaven.

Repentance And Faith: A Relationship That Cannot Be Broken

I want to talk about repentance for a moment, because sometimes the Bible presents the requirement for salvation as repentance, and sometimes as repentance and belief although, most of the time, only the word “believe” is used. Repentance and faith are often separated into two requirements for salvation by well-meaning preachers. It is better, though, to look at repentance and faith in the same way we would look at two sides of a coin. Remove the side of the penny that has Lincoln’s face on it and you no longer have a complete penny. Remove the side with the Lincoln Memorial on it, and you have only half a coin. Remove repentance from faith, and you no longer have real faith. Remove faith from repentance and you cannot have the genuine article. You see, it is sometimes said that if I believe and do not repent that I am not really saved. If we closely examine the Bible’s teaching on saving faith and what it actually is, then we will see that it is impossible to believe without repenting.

Repentance is not reformation, nor is it remorse. The word

usually translated “repent” in our English New Testament is made up of two Greek words. When these words are put together, they mean “an afterthought.” To put that in plain, everyday English, the word repent means “to think differently” or “to have a change of mind.”⁶ Here are some verses that demonstrate that repentance is a change of mind.

John the Baptist preached...

“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” (Matthew 3:8-9) The Jews were trusting in their lineage to get them to Heaven. They were descendants of Abraham. John the Baptist said that they needed to change their minds. Notice in this sentence how the words “*think not*” are used along with the word “*repent*” to explain what their change of mind was to be about.

The Lord Jesus Christ preached...

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. (Luke 13:1-5)

Here, in a similar manner as the verses in Matthew, the words, “*Suppose ye*” and “*Think ye*” are used along with the word “*repent*”

6. There are several different Greek words translated in the English New Testament as “repent, repentance,” etc. While these words have different shades of meaning, the primary idea of repentance is “to have a change of mind.”

to explain what the change of mind is to be about.
The Apostle Paul preached...

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:” (Acts 17:29-30)

The Greeks believed that God was a god (or for that matter, many gods) made by men's hands. They were idolaters, and they worshiped all kinds of humanistic, false deities. Again, the words, *“we ought not to think”* are used to explain what the repentance, or change of mind, is to be about. They were to change their minds and acknowledge the true and living God. They were to turn from their trust in idols.

Repentance from trust in idols was a big theme in the preaching of the early church to the people who were part of the ancient Roman Empire. Those who are not *Jews* are called *Gentiles* in the Bible. The Gentiles worshiped many gods. They trusted in these gods for their salvation, both on earth and in the afterlife. Paul commended the Christian converts in the church at Thessalonica. He wrote, *“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10)* These Gentiles *“...turned to God from idols...”* Their idols could not save them. They changed their minds in repentance and realized that only Jesus Christ could give them eternal life. They realized that He alone was the Son of God and they turned to Him from their idols.

Repentance Inside Out

Now let me say here that repentance is something that is internal. It should manifest itself on the outside in actions, but it is a work that God does in the heart of man.

“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 2:4-5)

Notice that these unbeliever’s hearts were impenitent. They would not repent in their hearts. Belief is also something that happens in the heart, but manifests itself on the outside.

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:10)

A man can reform all day long on the outside and never repent. Repentance is a change that happens primarily on the inside of man. In fact, in the book of Jonah, the Word of God actually says that the outward, physical, turning from sin that the people did was a work.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. (Jonah 3:5-10)

“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way...” Now we know that salvation is not by works, but that we are

to do works after we are saved. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* (Ephesians 2:8-10) Jonah, chapter three and verse five says, *“...The People of Nineveh believed God....”* First they believed, then the works came. First there was a change on the inside, in the heart; then in the life, and on the outside.

Turning From Dead Works Toward God

The Bible tells us in the Book of Hebrews about the foundation of the Christian faith. *“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God”* (Hebrews 6:1)

Saving repentance is *“repentance from dead works.”* This is the first block in the foundation of Christianity. The Jews were trusting in the works of the law to get them to Heaven. The Gentiles were trusting in the works of their hands, their idols. Both Jews and Gentiles were to repent and place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Also, the Bible talks about saving repentance as being repentance toward God.

In Acts 20:21 Paul says that he went about, *“Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

The Jews thought that God was a God who would accept their good works and lineage and would save them because of these things. They needed to change their minds. The Greeks believed that God wasn't the true and living God but that there were many gods made by men. They needed to change their minds.

Sinners today need a change of mind toward God as well. When we see God high and lifted up, then we will see ourselves as wicked, lost, helpless sinners. Our problem is that we preach a kind of

a self-exalting repentance that says, “Reform. Clean up your life and God will save you.” If we understand that God is holy, just and perfect, it will cause us to realize how lost we really are, and we will not be foolish enough to think that we can do anything to change our own lives. Repentance is not a half-hearted change of mind. It is a radical change of mind that says, “I am a lost sinner and I can do nothing to save myself. Only Jesus Christ can save me.” As long as men see themselves as only partially sinful, then they will see Jesus Christ as only a partial Savior. That is why genuine repentance is necessary to have genuine faith in Jesus Christ.

Lystra

Now the fact that you cannot have true, saving faith without repentance is clearly seen in Paul and Barnabas’ preaching in the city of Lystra.

And there they preached the gospel. And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: (Acts 14:7-15)

Paul and Barnabas were preaching the gospel, which the Bible defines as the good news of Jesus Christ who died for our sins, was buried and arose from the dead. (Cf. 1Corinthians 15:1-4) God's Word tells us that this good news is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes.

Romans 1:16 says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

The people in Lystra thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods because a man who was listening to Paul preach was healed. The people wanted to worship them, but Barnabas and Paul ran through the crowd crying, "...ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein." Here is saving faith clarified for the idol-worshipping audience. Faith in Jesus Christ is faith in Him alone. It is not inclusive faith. You cannot trust in Jesus Christ and your idols for salvation. No. It is exclusive faith. It must be faith that looks to Jesus Christ alone. True belief in Jesus Christ includes a genuine and radical change of mind. That is why the word "repent" is never used in the Gospel of John. It is not because repentance isn't important. It is because when a man truly puts his faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, he has repented.

A Question of Faith

Here's a question to think about. How can someone believe in Jesus if they don't believe His words? I was talking to a man in prison one time who professed to be a Baptist. I asked him what he thought a person had to do to go to Heaven, and he said something to the effect of, "Love your neighbor." It amazes me how people who are in prison would think that they could be saved by good works, but self-righteousness is everywhere! I took him to John 3:16 and showed him what Jesus said about getting to Heaven. Jesus did not say that we have eternal life by "loving our neighbors." He said that we have eternal life by believing in Him as Savior. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16) He saw the words of Jesus, yet he would not change his mind and reject his

false idea about salvation. He said that I had given him something to think about, but he refused to believe the simple words of Jesus Christ at that moment. How can a person really believe in Jesus and be a Christian if they don't even believe John 3:16? Believing in Jesus means that I trust what He has promised. I know that I have eternal life and that I will go to Heaven simply because I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior. That is what Jesus said, and I believe His words.

Synonyms For "Believe"

Several different words are used in the Bible interchangeably with "believe." Often times, preachers have taught that these words express different requirements for salvation. For instance, in John chapter one, verse twelve, the Bible says, "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*" Some well-meaning preachers teach that it is not enough to believe in Jesus as Savior. You must also receive Him. God makes it clear with the expression, "*even to them that believe on his name,*" that receiving Jesus as Savior means to believe on Him. The words are synonymous. Also, to "call upon the name of the Lord" in Romans 10:13 is just a way of expressing faith. Read verses thirteen and fourteen together to get the full meaning. "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed...?*" (Romans 10:13-14) We cannot call unless we believe, or trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. We put far too much emphasis on getting people to pray a prayer when they are saved. When I was young and wanted to be saved, I thought that there was a certain prayer that I had to pray. I wanted to know what that prayer was. But a prayer will not save anyone. The moment we trust in Jesus Christ for our soul's salvation, He saves us. Prayer is an outward expression of inward faith. Putting our faith into words is good; but faith alone in Jesus Christ saves.