

DO YOU BELIEVE?

A QUESTION FOR 1861.

BY THE

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"It is a great thing to be able to say from the heart, 'I BELIEVE.'"—OLD DIVINE.

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DO YOU BELIEVE?

“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 iii. 16.

Reader,

Look at the well-known text which heads this page. Its words are probably familiar to your ears. You have very likely heard them, or read them, or quoted them, a hundred times. But have you ever considered what a vast amount of divinity this text contains? No wonder that Luther called it “the Bible in miniature!” And have you ever considered what an immensely solemn question arises out of this text? The Lord Jesus says, “Whosoever believeth shall not perish.” Now, reader, DO YOU BELIEVE?

Questions about religion are seldom popular. They frighten people. They oblige them to look within and to think. The insolvent tradesman does not like his books to be searched. The faithless steward does not like his accounts to be examined. And the unconverted Christian does not like to be asked home-questions about his soul.

But questions about religion are very useful. The Lord Jesus Christ asked many questions during His ministry on earth. The servant of Christ ought not to be ashamed to do likewise. Questions about things necessary to salvation,—questions which probe the conscience, and bring men face to face with God,—such questions often bring life and health to souls. I know few questions more important than the one before you today. DO YOU BELIEVE?

Reader, the question before you is no easy one to answer. Think not to thrust it aside by the off-hand answer, “Of course I believe.” I tell you this day that true belief is no such “matter of course” as you suppose. I tell you that myriads of Protestants and Roman Catholics are constantly saying on Sundays, “I believe,” who know nothing whatever of believing. They cannot explain what they mean. They neither know what, nor in whom, they believe. They can give no account of their faith. Reader, a belief of this kind is utterly useless. It can neither satisfy, nor sanctify, nor save.

I invite you to begin a New Year by seriously considering the question which heads this tract. I ask you to give me your attention while I try to place it before you in its full proportions. In order to see clearly the importance of believing, you should ponder well the words of Christ to which I have already referred. It is by the unfolding of these words, that I shall hope to make you feel the weight of the question, “Do you believe? “

There are four things which I wish to show you, and to impress upon your mind.

I. God's mind towards the world,—*He "loved" it.*

II. God's gift to the world,—*"He gave his only begotten Son."*

III. The only way to obtain the benefit of God's gift,—*"Whosoever believeth on him shall not perish."*

IV. The marks by which true belief may be known.

Reader, I invite you in all affection to follow me step by step through the four points I have just stated. Do not throw down this tract in anger or impatience, but read it to the end. One thing I desire in writing it, and that is your salvation.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, *God's mind towards the world,—He "loved" it.*

The extent of the Father's love towards the world, is a subject on which there is some difference of opinion. It is a subject on which I have long taken my side, and never hesitate to speak my mind. I believe that the Bible teaches us that God's love extends to all mankind. "His tender mercies are over all his works." (Psalm cxlv. 9.) He did not love the Jews only, but the Gentiles also. He does not love His own elect only. He loves all the world.

But what kind of love is this with which the Father regards all mankind? It cannot be a love of complacency, or else He would cease to be a perfect God. He is one who cannot bear that which is evil. Oh! no! The world-wide love of which Jesus speaks, is a love of pity and compassion. Fallen as man is, and provoking as man's ways are, the heart of God is full of mercy towards him. While as a righteous Judge He hates sin, He is yet able in a certain sense to love sinners. The length and breadth of His compassion are not to be measured by our feeble measures. We are not to suppose that He is such a one as ourselves. Righteous and holy and pure as God is, it is yet possible for God to love all mankind.

Think, reader, for a moment, how wonderful is this extent of God's love. Look at the state of mankind in every part of the earth, and mark the amazing quantity of wickedness and ungodliness by which earth is defiled. Look at the millions of heathen worshipping stocks and stones, and living in a spiritual darkness "that may be felt." Look at the millions of Roman Catholics, burying the truth under man-made traditions, and giving the honour due to Christ to the church, the saints, and the priest. Look at the millions of Protestants who are content with a mere formal Christianity,

and know nothing of Christian believing or Christian living except the name. Look at the land in which we live at this very day, and mark the sins which abound even in a privileged nation like our own. Think how drunkenness, and Sabbath-breaking, and uncleanness, and lying, and swearing, and pride, and covetousness, and infidelity, are crying aloud to God from one end of Great Britain to the other. And then remember that God loves this world! No wonder that we find it written that He is “merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth.” (Exod. xxxiv. 6.) His compassions fail not. He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”—He “would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”—He “has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.” (2 Peter iii. 9: 1 Tim. ii. 4: Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) There lives not the man or woman on earth whom God regards with absolute hatred or complete indifference. His mercy is like all His other attributes. It passes knowledge. God loves the world.

Reader, there are divers and strange doctrines abroad in the present day about the love of God. It is a precious truth which Satan labours hard to obscure by misrepresentation and perversion. Grasp it firmly, and stand on your guard.

Beware of the common idea that God the Father is only an angry Being, whom sinful man can only regard with fear, and from whom he must flee to Christ for safety. Cast it aside as a baseless and unscriptural notion. Contend earnestly for all the attributes of God,—for His holiness and His justice, as well as for His love. But never allow for one moment that there is any want of love towards sinners in any Person in the Blessed Trinity. Oh! no! Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father loves, and the Son loves, and the Holy Ghost loves. The cross is the effect of the Father’s love, and not the cause. Redemption is the result of the compassion of all three Persons in the Trinity. To place the Father and the Son in opposition one to another, is weak and crude theology. Christ died, not because God the Father hated, but because He loved the world.

Beware, again, of the common doctrine that God’s love is limited and confined to His own elect, and that all the rest of mankind are passed by, neglected, and let alone. This also is a notion that will not bear examination by the light of Scripture. The father of a prodigal son can surely love and pity him, even when he is walking after his own lusts, and refusing to return home. The Maker of all things may surely love the work of His own hands with a love of compassion, even when rebellious against Him. Let us resist to the death the unscriptural doctrine of universal salvation. It is not true that all mankind will be finally saved. But let us not fly into the extreme of denying God’s universal compassion. It is true that God “loves the world.”—Let us maintain jealously the privilege of God’s elect. It is true

that they are loved with a special love, and will be loved to all eternity. But let us not exclude any man or woman from the pale of God's kindness and compassion. We have no right to pare down the meaning of words when Jesus says, "God loved the world." The heart of God is far wider than that of man. There is a sense in which the Father loves all mankind.*

Reader, if you never took up the service of Christ in real earnest, and have the least desire to begin, take comfort in the truth now before you. Take comfort in the thought that God the Father is a God of infinite love and compassion. Do not hang back and hesitate, under the idea that God is an angry Being, who is unwilling to receive sinners, and slow to pardon. Remember this day that love is the Father's darling attribute. In Him there is perfect justice, perfect purity, perfect wisdom, perfect knowledge, infinite power. But, above all, never forget there is in the Father a perfect love and compassion. Draw near to Him with boldness, because Jesus has made a way for you. But draw nigh to Him also with boldness, because it is written that "He loved the world."

Reader, if you have taken up the service of God already, never be ashamed of imitating Him whom you serve. Be full of love and kindness to all men, and full of special love to them that believe. Let there be nothing narrow, limited, contracted, stingy, or sectarian in your love. Do not only love your family and your friends;—love all mankind. Love your neighbours and your fellow-countrymen. Love strangers and foreigners. Love heathen and Mahometans. Love the worst of men with a love of pity. Love all the world. Lay aside all envy and malice, —all selfishness and unkindness. To keep up such a spirit is to be no better than an infidel. Let all your things be done with charity. Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and be not weary of doing them good to your life's end. The world may sneer at such conduct, and call it mean and low-spirited. But this is the mind of Christ. This is the way to be like God. **GOD LOVED THE WORLD.**

II. The next thing I want you to consider is *God's gift to the world*. "*He gave his only begotten Son*"

* If any reader is stumbled by the statements I have made about God's love, I venture to request his attention to the notes on John i. 29, and John iii. 16, in my "Expository Thoughts on St. John's Gospel." I hold firmly the doctrine of election, as set forth in the Seventeenth Article of the Church of England. I glory in that Article, as one of the sheet anchors of my Church. I delight in the blessed truth that God has loved his own elect with an everlasting love, before the foundation of the world. But all this is beside the question before us. That question is, "how does God regard all mankind?" I reply unhesitatingly, that God loves them. God loves all the world with a love of compassion.

The manner in which the truth before us is stated by our Lord Jesus Christ, demands special attention. It would be well for many who talk big swelling words about “the love of God” in the present day, if they would mark the way in which the Lord Jesus sets it before us.

The love of God towards the world is not a vague, abstract idea of mercy, which we are obliged to take on trust without any proof that it is true. It is a love which has been manifested by a mighty gift. It is a love which has been put before us in a plain, unmistakeable, tangible form. God the Father was not content to sit in heaven, idly pitying and loving His fallen creatures on earth. He has given the mightiest evidence of His love towards us by a gift of unspeakable value. He has “not spared His own Son but delivered Him up for us all.” (Rom. viii. 32.) He has so loved us that He has given us Christ. A higher proof of the Father’s love could not have been given.

Again, it is not written that God so loved the world that He resolved to save it, but that He so loved it that He gave Christ. His love is not displayed at the expense of His holiness and justice. It flows down from heaven to earth through one particular channel. It is set before men in one special way. It is only through Christ, by Christ, on account of Christ, and in inseparable connection with the work of Christ. Let us glory in God’s love by all means. Let us proclaim to all the world that God is love. But let us carefully remember that we know little or nothing of God’s love which can give us comfort, excepting in Jesus Christ. It is not written that God so loved the world that He will take all the world to heaven, but that He so loved it, that He has given His only begotten Son. He that ventures on God’s love without reference to Christ, is building on a foundation of sand.

Who can estimate the value of God’s gift, when He gave to the world His only begotten Son? It is something unspeakable, incomprehensible. It passes man’s understanding. Two things there are which man has no arithmetic to reckon, and no line to measure. One of these things is the extent of that man’s loss who loses his own soul. The other is the extent of God’s gift when He gave Christ to sinners. He gave no created thing for our redemption, though all the treasures of earth, and all the stars of heaven were at His disposal. He gave no created being to be our Redeemer, though angels, principalities and powers in heavenly places, were ready to do His will. Oh! no! He gave us One who was nothing less than his own fellow, very God of very God, His only begotten Son. He that thinks lightly of man’s need and man’s sin, would do well to consider man’s Saviour. Sin must indeed be exceeding sinful, when the Father must needs give His only Son to be the sinner’s friend.

Reader, have you ever considered *to what* the Father gave His only begotten Son? Was it to be received with gratitude and thankfulness by a lost and bankrupt world? Was it to reign in royal majesty on a restored earth,

and put down every enemy under His feet? Was it to enter the world as a king, and to give laws to a willing and obedient people? No! The Father gave His Son to be despised and rejected of men, to be born of a poor woman, and live a life of poverty,—to be hated, persecuted, slandered, and blasphemed,—to be counted a malefactor, condemned as a transgressor, and die the death of a felon. Never was there such love as this! Never such condescension! The man among ourselves who cannot stoop much and suffer much in order to do good, knows nothing of the mind of Christ.

For what end and purpose did the Father give His only begotten Son? Was it only to supply an example of self-denial and self-sacrifice? No! It was for a far higher end and purpose than this. He gave Him to be a sacrifice for man's sin, and an atonement for man's transgression. He gave him to be delivered for our offences, and to die for the ungodly. He gave him to bear our iniquities, and to suffer for our sins, the just for the unjust. He gave Him to be made a curse for us, that we might be redeemed from the curse of the law. He gave Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He gave Him to be a propitiation for our sin, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. He gave Him to be a ransom for all, and to make satisfaction for our heavy debt to God by His own precious blood. He gave Him to be the Almighty Friend of all sinners of mankind,—to be their Surety and Substitute,—to do for them what they never could have done for themselves,—suffer what they could never have suffered,—and pay what they could never have payed. All that Jesus did and suffered on earth was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. The chief end for which He lived and died was to provide eternal redemption for mankind.

Reader, beware of ever losing sight of the great purpose for which Christ was given by God the Father. Let not the false teaching of modern divinity, however plausible it may sound, tempt you to forsake the old paths. Hold fast the faith once delivered to the saints, that the special object for which Christ was given was to die for sinners, and to make atonement for them by His sacrifice on the cross. Once give up this great doctrine, and there is little worth contending for in Christianity. If Christ did not really bear our sins on the tree as our substitute, there is an end of all solid peace.

Beware, again, of holding narrow and confined views of the extent of Christ's redemption. Regard Him as given by God the Father to be the common Saviour for all the world. See in Him the fountain for all sin and uncleanness, to which every sinner may come boldly, drink and live. See in Him the brazen serpent set up in the midst of the camp, to which every sin-bitten soul may look and be healed. See in Him a medicine of matchless value, sufficient for the wants of all the world, and offered freely to all mankind. The way to heaven is narrow enough already, by reason of man's

pride, hardness, sloth, listlessness, and unbelief. But take heed that you do not make that way more narrow than it really is.

I confess, boldly, that I hold the doctrine of particular redemption, in a certain sense, as strongly as any one. I believe that none are effectually redeemed but God's elect. They and they only are set free from the guilt, and power, and consequences of sin. But I hold no less strongly, that Christ's work of atonement is sufficient for all mankind. There is a sense in which He has tasted death for every man, and has taken upon Him the sin of the world. I dare not pare down, and fine away, what appear to me the plain statements of Scripture. I dare not shut a door which God seems, to my eyes, to have left open. I dare not tell any man on earth that Christ has done nothing for him, and that he has no warrant to apply boldly to Christ for salvation. I must abide by the statements of the Bible. Christ is God's gift to the whole world.

Reader, I ask you to observe what a *giving* religion true Christianity is. Gift, love, and free grace are the grand characteristics of the pure gospel. The Father loves the world and gives His only begotten Son. The Son loves us and gives Himself for us. The Father and the Son together give the Holy Spirit to all that ask. All Three Persons in the Blessed Trinity give grace upon grace to them that believe. Never be ashamed of being a giving Christian, if you profess to have any hope in Christ. Give freely, liberally, and self-denyingly, according as you have power and opportunity. Let not your love consist in nothing more than vague expressions of kindness and compassion. Make proof of it by actions. Help forward the cause of Christ on earth, by money, influence, pains, and prayer. If God so loved you as to give His Son for your soul, you should count it a privilege, and not a burden, to give what you can to do good to men.

Reader, if God has given you His only begotten Son, beware of doubting His kindness and love in any painful providence of your daily life. Never allow yourself to think hard thoughts of God. Never suppose that He can give you anything that is not really for your good. Remember the words of St. Paul: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things." (Rom. viii. 32.) See in every sorrow and trouble of your earthly pilgrimage, the hand of Him who gave Christ to die for your sins. That hand can never smite you except in love. He who gave you His only begotten Son, will never withhold anything from you that is really for your good. Lean back on this thought and be content. Say to yourself in the darkest hour of trial, "This also is ordered by Him who gave Christ to die for my sins. It cannot be wrong. It is done in love. It must be well."

III. The third thing I propose to consider, is *the way in which man obtains the benefit of God's love and Christ's salvation*. It is written that "whosoever believeth shall not perish."

Reader, the point before you is of the deepest importance. To bring it out clearly before your eyes is one great object of the tract you are now reading. God has loved the world. God has given His Son "to be the Saviour of the world." (1 John iv. 14.) And yet we learn from Scripture that many persons in the world never reach heaven. Here at any rate is limitation. Here the gate is strait and the way narrow. Some and some only out of mankind obtain eternal benefit from Christ. Who then, and what are they?

Christ and His benefits are only available to those who *believe*. This is a doctrine repeatedly laid down in Scripture, in plain and unmistakeable language. Those who will not believe in Him have no part in Him. Without believing there is no salvation. It is vain to suppose that any will be saved, merely because Christ was incarnate, or because Christ is in heaven, or because they belong to Christ's church, or because they are baptised, or because they have received the Lord's supper. All this is entirely useless to any man except he believes. Without faith on his part all these things together will not save his soul. We must have personal faith in Christ, personal dealings with Christ, personal transactions with Christ, or we are lost for evermore. It is utterly false and unscriptural to say that Christ is in every man. Christ no doubt is *for* every one, but Christ is not *in* every one. He dwells only in those hearts which have faith, and all, unhappily, have not faith. He that believeth not in the Son of God is yet in his sins, the wrath of God abideth on him. "He that believeth not," says our Lord Jesus Christ in words of fearful distinctness,—“he that believeth not shall be damned.”* (Mark xvi. 16; John iii. 36.)

But Christ and all His benefits are the property of any one of mankind that believes. Every one that believes on the Son of God is at once pardoned, forgiven, justified, counted righteous, reckoned innocent and freed from all liability to condemnation. His sins, however many, are at once cleansed away by Christ's precious blood. His soul, however guilty, is at once clothed with Christ's perfect righteousness. It matters not what he may have been in time past. His sins may be of the worst kind. His former character may be of the blackest description. But does He believe on the Son of God? This is the one question. If he does believe, he is justified from all things in the sight of God.—It matters nothing that he can bring to Christ nothing to recommend him, no good works, no long-proved amend-

* It is perhaps almost needless to say, that I am not speaking of idiots or those who die in infancy, in this paragraph.

ments, no unmistakable repentance and change of life. But does he this day believe in Jesus Christ? This is the grand question. If he does he is at once accepted. He is accounted righteous for Christ's sake.

But what is this believing, which is of such matchless importance. What is the nature of this faith which gives a man such amazing privileges? This is an important question. I ask your attention to the answer. Here is a rock on which many make shipwreck. And yet there is nothing really mysterious and hard to understand about saving belief. The whole difficulty arises from man's pride and self-righteousness. It is the very simplicity of justifying faith, at which thousands stumble. They cannot understand it because they will not stoop.

Believing on Christ is no mere intellectual assent, or belief of the head. This is no more than the faith of devils. We may believe that there was a divine Person called Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again, eighteen hundred years ago, and yet never believe so as to be saved. Doubtless there must be some knowledge before we can believe. There is no true religion in ignorance. But knowledge alone is not saving faith.

Believing on Christ, again, is not mere feeling something about Christ. This is often no more than temporary excitement, which, like the early dew, soon passes away. We may be pricked in conscience, and feel drawings toward the Gospel like Herod and Felix. We may even tremble and weep, and show much affection for the truth and those that profess it. And yet all this time our hearts and wills may remain utterly unchanged and secretly chained down to the world. Doubtless there is no saving faith where there is no feeling. But feeling alone is not faith.

True belief in Christ is the unreserved trust of a heart convinced of sin, in Christ, as an all-sufficient Saviour. It is the combined act of the whole man's head, conscience, heart, and will. It is often so weak and feeble at first, that he who has it cannot be persuaded that he has it. And yet, like life in the new born infant, his belief may be real, genuine, saving, and true. The moment that the conscience is convinced of sin, and the head sees Christ to be the only One who can save, and the heart and will lay hold on the hand that Christ holds out, that moment there is saving faith.

True belief in Christ is so immensely important, that the Holy Ghost has graciously used many figures in the Bible in describing it. The Lord God knows the slowness of man to comprehend spiritual things. He has therefore multiplied forms of expression, in order to set faith fully before us. The man who cannot understand believing in one form of words, will perhaps understand it in another.

1. Believing is the soul's *coming* to Christ. The Lord Jesus says, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger." "Come unto me, all ye that labour

and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (John vi. 35; Matt. xi. 28.) Christ is that Almighty Friend, Advocate, and Physician, to whom all sinners, needing help, are commanded to apply. The believer comes to Him by faith, and is relieved.

2. Believing is the soul’s *receiving* Christ. St. Paul says, “Ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord.” (Col. ii. 6.) Christ offers to come into man’s heart with pardon, mercy, and grace, and to dwell there as its Peace-maker and King. He says, “I stand at the door and knock.” (Rev. iii. 20.) The believer hears His voice, opens the door, and admits Christ, as his Master, Priest, and King.

3. Believing is the soul’s *building* on Christ. St. Paul says, ye are “built up in Him. Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” (Eph. ii. 20. Col. ii. 7.) Christ is that sure cornerstone, that strong foundation, which alone can bear the weight of a sinful soul. The believer places his hopes for eternity on Him, and is safe. The earth may be shaken and dissolved, but he is built upon a rock, and will never be confounded.

4. Believing is the soul’s *putting on* Christ. “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.” (Gal. iii. 27.) Christ is that pure white robe, which God has provided for all sinners who would enter heaven. The believer puts on this robe by faith and is at once perfect, and free from any spot in God’s sight.

5. Believing is the soul’s *laying hold on* Christ. St. Paul says, “We have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.” (Heb. vi. 18.) Christ is that true city of refuge, to which the man fleeing from the avenger of blood runs, and in which he is safe. Christ is that altar which provided a sanctuary to him who laid hold on its horns. Christ is that almighty hand of mercy, which God holds out from heaven to lost and drowning sinners. The believer lays hold on this hand by faith, and is delivered from the pit of hell.

6. Believing is the soul’s *eating* Christ. The Lord Jesus says, “My flesh is meat indeed. He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.” (John vi. 55, 58.) Christ is that divine food which God has provided for starving sinners. He is that divine bread which is at the same time life, nourishment, and medicine. The believer feeds on this bread of life by faith. His hunger is relieved. His soul is delivered from death.

7. Believing is the soul's *drinking* Christ. The Lord Jesus says, "My blood is drink indeed." (John vi. 55.) Christ is that fountain of living water which God has opened for the use of all thirsty and sin-defiled sinners, proclaiming, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev. xxii. 17.) The believer drinks of this living water, and his thirst is quenched.

8. Believing is the soul's *committal* of itself to Christ. St. Paul says, "He is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." (2 Tim. i. 12.) Christ is the appointed keeper and guardian of souls. It is his office to preserve from sin, death, hell, and the devil, anything committed to his charge. The believer places his soul in the hands of the Almighty treasure-keeper, and is insured against loss to all eternity. He trusts himself to Him and is safe.

9. Last, but not least, believing is the soul's *look* to Christ. St. Paul describes the saints as "looking to Jesus." (Heb. xii. 2.) The invitation of the Gospel is, "look unto me and be ye saved." (Isai. xlv. 22.) Christ is that brazen serpent which God has set up in the world, for the healing of all sin-bitten souls who desire to be cured. The believer looks to Him by faith, and has life, health, and spiritual strength.

One common remark applies to all the nine expressions which I have just gone through. They all give us the simplest idea of faith or believing that man can desire. Not one of them implies the notion of anything mysterious, great, or meritorious in the act of belief. All represent it as something within reach of the weakest and feeblest sinner, and within the comprehension of the most ignorant and unlearned. Grant for a moment that a man says he cannot understand what faith in Christ is. Let him look at the nine expressions under which faith is described in Scripture, and tell me, if he can, that he cannot understand them. Surely he must allow that coming to Christ, looking to Christ, committing our souls to Christ, laying hold on Christ, are simple ideas. Then let him remember that coming, looking, and committing our souls to Christ, are, in other words, believing.

And now, reader, if you love peace of conscience in your religion, I intreat you to grasp firmly the great doctrine which I have tried to set before you, and never let it go. Hold fast the grand truth, that saving faith is nothing but simple trust in Christ, that faith alone justifies, and that the one thing needful in order to obtain an interest in Christ is to *believe*. No doubt repentance, holiness, and charity are excellent things. They will always accompany true faith. But in the matter of justification, they have nothing to do. In that matter, the one thing needful is to believe. No doubt belief is not the only grace to be found in the heart of a true Christian. But only belief

gives him an interest in Christ. Prize that doctrine as the peculiar treasure of Christianity. Once let it go, or add anything to it, and there is an end of inward peace.*

Prize the doctrine for its suitableness to the wants of fallen man. It places salvation within reach of the lowest and vilest sinner, if he has but heart and will to receive it. It asks him not for works, righteousness, merit, goodness, worthiness. It requires nothing of him. It strips him of all excuses. It deprives him of all pretext for despair. His sins may have been as scarlet. But will he believe? Then there is hope.

Prize the doctrine for its glorious simplicity. It brings eternal life near to the poor, and ignorant, and unlearned. It does not ask a man for a long confession of doctrinal orthodoxy. It does not require a store of head-knowledge, and an acquaintance with articles and creeds. Does the man, with all his ignorance, come to Christ as a sinner, and commit himself entirely to Him for salvation? Will he believe? If he will, there is hope.

Above all, prize the doctrine for the glorious breadth and fulness of its terms. It does not say “the elect” who believe, or “the rich” who believe, or “the moral” people who believe, or the Churchman who believes, or the Dissenter who believes,—these, and these only shall be saved. Oh! no, it uses a word of far wider signification:—It says, “*Whosoever* believeth, shall not perish.” Whosoever,—whatever his past life, conduct, or character,—whatever his name, rank, people, or country,—whatever his denomination, and whatever place of worship he may have attended; whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish.

Reader, this is the Gospel. I marvel not that St. Paul wrote those words, “If we or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed.” (Gal. i. 8.)

IV. The fourth and last thing which I propose to consider, is a point of great practical importance. I wish to show you *the marks by which true belief in Christ may be discerned and known.*

The faith or believing of which I have spoken, is a grace of such importance, that we may naturally expect to hear of many counterfeits of it. There is a dead faith as well as a living one,—a faith of devils as well as a faith of God’s elect,—a faith which is vain and useless, as well as a faith that justifies and saves. How shall a man know whether he has true faith? How shall he find out whether he believes to the saving of his soul? The thing may be found out. The Ethiopian may be known by his skin, and the

* If any reader is startled and stumbled by what I here say about faith, I recommend him to read attentively the Church of England Homily about Salvation. My doctrine at any rate is that of the Church of England.

leopard by his spots. True faith may always be known by certain marks. These marks are laid down unmistakeably in Scripture. Reader, let me endeavour to set these marks plainly before you. Look at them carefully, and try your own soul by what I am going to say.

1. He that believeth in Christ has inward *peace and hope*. It is written, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “We which have believed do enter into rest?” (Rom. v. 1: Heb. iv. 3.) The believer’s sins are pardoned, and his iniquities taken away. His conscience is no longer burdened with the load of unpardoned transgressions. He is reconciled to God, and is one of His friends. He can look forward to death, judgment, and eternity without fear. The sting of death is taken away. When the great assize of the last day is held, and the books are opened, there will be nothing laid to his charge. When eternity begins, he is provided for. He has a hope laid up in heaven, and a city which cannot be moved. He may not be fully sensible of all these privileges. His sense and view of them may vary greatly at different times, and be often obscured by doubts and fears. Like a child who is yet under age, though heir to a great fortune, he may not be fully aware of the value of his possessions. But with all his doubts and fears, he has a real, solid, true hope which will bear examination, and at his best moments, he will be able to say, “I feel a hope which makes me not ashamed.”

2. He that believes in Christ *has a new heart*. It is written, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold all things are become new.” “To as many as received Christ, he gave power to become sons of God, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” (2 Cor. v. 17: John i. 12, 13: 1 John v, 1.) A believer has no longer the same nature with which he was born. He is changed, renewed, and transformed after the image of his Lord and Saviour. He that minds first the things of the flesh, has no saving faith. True faith, and spiritual regeneration, are inseparable companions. An unconverted person is not a believer.

3. He that believes in Christ is *a holy person in heart and life*. It is written that God “purifies the heart by faith,” and that Christians are “sanctified by faith.” “Whoso hath this hope in him, purifieth himself.” (Acts xv. 9; xxvi. 18: 1 John iii. 3.) A believer loves what God loves, and hates what God hates. His heart’s desire is to walk in the way of God’s commandments, and to abstain from all manner of evil. His wish is to follow after the things which are just, and honest, and lovely, and of good report, and to

cleanse himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. He falls far short of his aim in many things. He finds his daily life a constant fight with indwelling corruption. But he fights on, and resolutely refuses to serve sin. Where there is no holiness, we may be sure there is no saving faith. An unholy man is not a believer.

4. He that believes on Christ *works godly works*. It is written, that “faith worketh by love.” (Gal. v. 6.) True belief will never make a man idle, or allow him to sit still, contented with his own religion. It will stir him to do acts of love, kindness, and charity, according as he sees opportunity. It will constrain him to walk in the steps of his master, who “went about doing good.” In one way or another, it will make him work. The works that he does may attract no notice from the world. They may seem trifling and insignificant to many persons. But they are not forgotten by Him who notices a cup of cold water given for His sake. Where there is no working love, there is no faith. A lazy, selfish Christian, has no right to regard himself as a believer.

5. He that believes on Christ *overcomes the world*. It is written, that “whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” (1 John v. 4.) A true believer is not ruled by the world’s standard of right or wrong, of truth or error. He is independent of the world’s opinion. He cares little for the world’s praise. He is not moved by the world’s blame. He does not seek for the world’s pleasures. He is not ambitious of the world’s rewards. He looks at things unseen. He sees an invisible Saviour, a coming judgment, a crown of glory that fadeth not away. The sight of these objects makes him think comparatively little of this world. Where the world reigns in the heart, there is no faith. A man that is habitually conformed to the world, has no title to the name of a believer.

6. He that believes on Christ, has an *inward testimony* of his belief. It is written, that “he that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself.” (1 John v. 10.) The remark before us requires very delicate handling. The witness of the Spirit is unquestionably a very difficult subject. But I cannot shrink from declaring my own firm persuasion, that a true believer always has inward feelings peculiar to himself,—feelings which are inseparably connected with his faith, and flow from it,—feelings of which unbelievers know nothing at all. He has the Spirit of adoption, by which he regards God as a reconciled Father, and looks up to Him without fear. He has the testimony of his conscience, sprinkled with Christ’s blood, that weak as he is, he rests on Christ. He has hopes, joys, fears, sorrows, consolations,

expectations, of which he knew nothing before he believed. He has pocket evidences which the world cannot understand, but which are better to him than all the books of evidence in existence. Feelings are, no doubt, very deceitful. But where there are no inward religious feelings there is no faith. A man who knows nothing of an inward, spiritual, experimental religion, is not yet a believer.

7. Last, but not least, he that believes on Christ, has *a special regard in all his religion to the person of Christ Himself*. It is written, "Unto you that believe Christ is precious." (1 Pet. ii. 7.) That text deserves especial notice. It does not say "Christianity" is precious, or the "Gospel" is precious, or "salvation" is precious, but Christ Himself. A believer's religion does not consist in mere intellectual assent to a certain set of propositions and doctrines. It is not a mere cold belief of a certain set of truths and facts concerning Christ. It consists in union, communion, and fellowship with an actual living Person, even Jesus the Son of God. It is a life of faith in Jesus, confidence in Jesus, leaning on Jesus, drawing out of the fulness of Jesus, speaking to Jesus, working for Jesus, loving Jesus, and looking for Jesus to come again. Such life may sound like enthusiasm to many. But where there is true faith, Christ will always be known and realized, as an actual living personal Friend. He that knows nothing of Christ as his own Priest, Physician, and Redeemer, knows nothing yet of believing.

Reader, I place these seven marks of believing before you, and I ask you to consider them well. I do not say, that all believers have them equally. I do not say, that no one will be saved, who cannot discover all these marks in himself. I concede, freely, that many believers are so weak in faith, that they go doubting all their days, and make others doubt about them too. I simply say, that these are the marks to which a man should first direct his attention, if he would answer the mighty question, Do you believe?

Where the seven marks, of which I have just been speaking, are utterly wanting, I dare not tell a man that he is a true believer. He may be called a Christian, and attend on Christian ordinances. He may have been baptized with Christian baptism, and be a member of a Christian church. But if he knows nothing of peace with God, conversion of heart, newness of life, victory over the world, I dare not pronounce him a believer. He is yet dead in trespasses and sins. Except he awakes to newness of life, he will perish everlastingly.

Show me a man who has about him the seven marks which I have described, and I feel a strong confidence about the state of his soul. He may be poor and needy in this world, but he is rich in the sight of God. He may

be despised and sneered at by man, but he is honourable in the sight of the King of kings. He is travelling towards heaven. He has a mansion ready for him in the Father's house. He is cared for by Christ, while on earth. He will be owned by Christ before assembled worlds, in the life which is to come.

1. And now, reader, in drawing this tract to a conclusion, I return to *the question* with which I began. I press that question on your conscience. I ask you, in my Master's name, whether you yet know anything of the subject of it? I ask you, at the beginning of a new year, to look my inquiry in the face. I ask you, Do you believe?

DO YOU BELIEVE? I think it impossible to overrate the immense importance of the question before you. Life or death, heaven or hell, blessing or cursing, all hinge and turn upon it. He that believeth on Christ is not condemned. He that believeth not shall be damned. If you believe you are pardoned, justified, accepted in God's sight, and have a title to everlasting life. If you do not believe, you are perishing daily. Your sins are all upon your head, sinking you down to perdition. Every hour you are so much nearer to hell.

DO YOU BELIEVE? It matters nothing what others are doing. The question concerns yourself. The folly of other men is no excuse for yours. The loss of heaven will not be less bitter, because you lose it in company. Look at home. Think of your own soul.

DO YOU BELIEVE? It is no answer to say, that you sometimes hope Christ died for you. The Scriptures never tell us to spend our time in doubts and hesitation on that point. We never read of a single case of one who stood still on that ground. Salvation is never made to turn on the question, whether Christ died for a man or not. The turning point is always set before us as believing.

DO YOU BELIEVE? This is the point to which all must come at last, if they would be saved. It will signify little, when we hang on the brink of the grave, what we have professed, and to what denomination we have belonged. All this will sink into nothing, in comparison with the question of this tract. All will be useless, if we have not believed.

DO YOU BELIEVE? This is the common mark of all saved souls. Episcopalians or Presbyterians, Baptists or Independents, Methodists or Plymouth brethren, Churchmen or Dissenters, all meet on this common ground, if they are true men. On other matters, they are often hopelessly disagreed. But in living by faith on Jesus Christ, they are all one.

DO YOU BELIEVE? What reason can you give for unbelief, that will bear examination? Life is short and uncertain. Death is sure. Judgment is inevitable. Sin is exceeding sinful. Hell is an awful reality. Christ alone can save you. There is no other name given under heaven, whereby you can be

saved. If not saved, the blame will be on your own head. You will not believe. You will not come to Christ, that He may give you life.

Reader, take warning this day. You must either believe on Christ, or perish everlastingly. Rest not till you can give a satisfactory answer to the question before you. Never be satisfied, till you can say, By the grace of God I do believe.

2. I pass on from questions to *counsel*. I offer it to all who are convinced of sin, and dissatisfied with their own spiritual condition. I entreat you to come to Christ by faith without delay. I invite you this day to believe on Christ to the saving of your soul.

I will not let you put me off by the common objection, “We cannot believe,—we must wait till God gives us faith.” I grant most fully that saving faith, like true repentance, is the gift of God. I grant that we have no natural power of our own to believe on Christ, receive Christ, come to Christ, lay hold on Christ, and commit our souls to Christ. But I see faith and repentance laid down clearly in Scripture as *duties* which God requires at any man's hands. He “commandeth all men to repent.” “This is His commandment, that we should believe.” (Acts xvii. 30: 1 John iii. 23.) And I see it laid down with no less clearness, that unbelief and impenitence are sins for which man will be held accountable, and that he who does not repent and believe destroys his own soul. (Mark xvi. 16: Luke xiii. 3.)

Will any one tell me that it is right for any one to sit still in sin? Will any one say that a sinner on the road to hell ought to wait idly for some power to take him up and put him in the way to heaven? Will any one say that it is right for a man to continue quietly serving the devil, in open rebellion against God, and that he is to make no effort, no struggle, no attempt to turn towards Christ?

Let others say these things, if they will. I cannot say them. I can find no warrant for them in Scripture. I will not waste time in trying to explain what cannot be explained, and unravel what cannot be unravelled. I will not attempt to show metaphysically in what way an unconverted man *can* look to Christ, or repent, or believe. But this I know, that it is my plain duty to bid every unbeliever to repent and believe. And this I know, that the man who will not take the invitation, will find that he has ruined his own soul.

Reader, trust Christ, look to Christ, cry to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you never yet believed, about your soul. If you have not the right feelings yet, ask Him to give you right feelings. If you dare not think that you have true faith yet, ask Him to give you faith. But in any case do not sit still and idle. Do not live on in senseless inactivity,—waiting for you know not what,—expecting what you cannot explain,—increasing your guilt every day,—offending God by continuing in lazy unbelief,—and hourly digging a grave

for your own soul. Arise and call upon Christ! Awake and cry to Jesus about your soul! Whatever difficulties there may be about believing, one thing at least is abundantly dear,—no man ever perished and went to hell from the foot of the cross.

3. I finish all by a word of *exhortation* to all believers into whose hands this tract may fall. I address them as fellow-pilgrims and companions in tribulation. I exhort them, if they love life, and have found any peace in believing, to pray daily for an increase of faith. Let your prayer be continually, “Lord, increase my faith.”

True faith admits of many degrees. The weakest faith is enough to join the soul to Christ, and to secure salvation. A trembling hand may receive a healing medicine. The feeblest infant may be heir to the richest possessions. The least faith gives a sinner a title to heaven as surely as the strongest. But little faith can never give so much sensible comfort as strong faith. According to the degree of our faith will be the degree of our peace, our hope, our strength for duty, and our patience in trial. Surely we should pray continually, “Increase our faith.”

Believing reader, would you have more faith this year? Do you find believing so pleasant that you would like to believe more? Then take heed that you are diligent in the use of every means of grace, —diligent in your private communion with God,—diligent in your daily watchfulness over time, temper, and tongue,—diligent in your private Bible-reading,—diligent in your own private prayers. It is vain to expect spiritual prosperity, when we are careless about these things. Let those who will call it over-precise and legal to be particular about these things. I only reply, that there never was an eminent saint who neglected them.

Reader, would you have more faith this year? Then seek to become more acquainted with Jesus Christ. Study your blessed Saviour more and more, and strive to know more of the length and breadth and height of His love. Study Him in all his offices, as the Priest, the Physician, the Redeemer, the Advocate, the Friend, the Teacher, the Shepherd of His believing people. Study Him as one who not only died for you, but is also living for you at the right hand of God,—as one who not only shed His blood for you, but daily intercedes for you at the right hand of God,—as one who is soon coming again for you, and will stand once more on this earth. The miner who is fully persuaded that the rope which draws him up from the pit will not break, is drawn up without anxiety and alarm. The believer who is thoroughly acquainted with the fulness of Jesus Christ, is the believer who travels from grace to glory with the greatest comfort and peace.

Reader, I commend these things to your attention. Use them, and remember him who writes them. I ask to be remembered in your prayers in 1861.

I remain
Your affectionate Friend.

J. C. RYLE.

Helmingham, December, 1860.

W. Hunt, Steam Press, Tavern Street, Ipswich.