

HOW CAN I OBTAIN FAITH?

NO. 1031

A SERMON

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 21, 1872

BY C. H. SPURGEON

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Romans 10:17

IT is difficult to make men understand that the salvation of the Gospel is not by works but entirely by grace. That it is not presented to men as the reward of their own endeavors, but is given to them freely upon their accepting it by an act of simple faith or trust in Jesus Christ. However plainly we may preach this truth, there will always be some who will misunderstand us, and as many more who will raise objections against it, as if it were their part to give an opinion and not to do as they are bidden by the Lord.

But when men are brought under the teaching of the Word, to see that the pardon of their sins and the acceptance of their souls does not lie with any merit of their own, or any doings of their own, another difficulty generally presents itself. They say, “What is this faith of which you speak?” And when we assure them that it is a simple trust or confidence in the finished work of Christ, then straightway they say, “How can we get this faith? How can we obtain this confidence?”

To us, who have faith, this question is very easy to answer, for when we heard the gladsome news of a finished salvation for lost sinners, complete forgiveness for the guilty, and acceptance for the ungodly, simply upon believing in Jesus, we came to Jesus and we trusted in Him, and we continue still to trust and we have joy and peace through believing. We see far more reasons for belief than for doubt.

Yet, nevertheless, there are hundreds and thousands who are awakened, and seriously inquiring to whom this is a great difficulty—“How can I get the faith which gives me possession of Christ Jesus, and brings me salvation?” Our text is the ready answer, practically a complete answer, not doctrinally or theologically complete, but practically perfect. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” “But faith is the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul, is it not?” Certainly. “And it is given by the Spirit to God’s own chosen?” Assuredly, yet, nevertheless, it was not necessary for the apostle to mention those facts here.

Some persons are always for having a whole system of theology in every sermon, but it is not needful that they should be gratified. Paul is clear enough about the work of the Spirit in other places, and it is not necessary that he should introduce that subject into every line he writes. It was practically unnecessary for him to mention that subject in the present instance, and therefore, he did not do so.

It would sometimes puzzle rather than instruct an inquirer if we were to go into the full details of a matter. For instance, if I am thirsty, how shall I quench my thirst? By a drink of water. But in what way can I obtain water? It quite suffices, for practical purposes for you to tell me to go to the tap or the fountain. There is no need to explain to me before I drink that the water is supplied by a company, and forced to the fountain by sundry machines, having been first extracted from the great fountains beneath by artesian wells, or drawn from the river at Thames Ditton.

Nor would it be needful, in answer to my question, to trace the river to the clouds, and to treat upon the formation of vapor by the skill and wisdom of God. Practically, to the thirsty man, all you want to say is, “There’s the water, drink.”

I will add another illustration. A man is hungry and he asks you, “How can I get bread?” “Go to the baker’s,” you say. The answer is complete enough for him, it meets the case at once. If he wants a larger declaration of how bread is obtained, we can give it to him at another time when he is no longer hungry.

We will tell him how the corn is sown in the furrow of the earth, and how by mysterious processes of nature it germinates, grows, and ripens. We will trace it from the reaper to the thresher, and from the thresher to the mill, and we will also show that daily bread is as much a gift from heaven as the manna which dropped down upon the hungry people in the wilderness. But it is not needful for the feeding of the hungry that we should on every occasion go into all those details, although we hold very sound views upon them.

And when you are dealing with an anxious person, it will suffice to say to him, “Faith cometh by hearing;” further information can be supplied under happier circumstances. I mean to keep to our text this morning, and if any shall charge me with an omission of the work of the Spirit, or a failure to trace all saving faith to the electing grace of God, I shall bear the charge without murmuring, only saying that my soul rejoices as much as that of any man living in the work of the Spirit of God. And that the electing love of God and His determinate purposes are precious truths to me. If the text was sufficient for Paul, it will, I trust, be sufficient for you.

May the Spirit of God assist us while we meditate upon *the way by which faith cometh*. This shall be followed by a brief indication of *certain obstructions which often lie in that way*. And then we will conclude by dwelling upon *the importance that faith should come to us by that appointed road*.

I. First then, THE WAY BY WHICH FAITH COMES TO MEN. “Faith cometh by hearing.”

It may help to set the truth out more clearly, if we say, *negatively*, that it does not come by any other process than by hearing—not by any mysterious and strange method, but in the most simple and natural mode conceivable, namely, by the hearing of the word.

Some imagine that faith comes by *hereditary descent*, and they act upon the supposition. Hence, in certain churches, birthright membership is thought to be a proper practice, and the child of a Christian is thought to be a Christian. In some other churches, though the theory would not be stated in so many words, yet it is practically accepted, and children of pious parents are regarded as scarcely needing conversion. The text is forgotten which saith that the heirs of salvation are born, “Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.”

The typical covenant secured outward privileges to the children born after the flesh, but under the covenant of grace the blessing is secured to the spiritual and not to the natural seed. “He who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise” (Gal 4:23). That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and nothing more, the newborn nature is not transmissible from father to son like a natural temperament or a cast of countenance.

I know the answer will be that “The promise is to us and to our children,” but it will be well for the objector to reply to himself by completing the quotation—“even to as many as the LORD your God shall call.” The fact is that nothing spiritual is inherited by carnal generation. Our children, even if we are far advanced in grace, will still be “shaped in iniquity.” No matter how high the sainthood of the professing Christian, his child (when capable of understanding) must for himself become a personal believer in Jesus.

It appears to be thought possible to infuse grace by *sacraments*. There are persons yet alive who teach that a babe may be regenerated by certain water processes, and be thereby placed in “A state of salvation.” But is not faith a perpetual requirement of regeneration? and what is that regeneration worth which leaves a person an unbeliever, and consequently, “Condemned already, because he hath not believed on the Son of God?”

Rest assured, that as faith does not come by descent, and neither can it be produced by any rite which recognizes that descent, it comes in one way, and in one way only in every case, and that is by the hearing of the word. To every person, whoever he may be, though nursed in the bosom of the church, and introduced to that church by the most solemn ritual, we are bound to say, you must hear as well as others, and you must believe as the result of that hearing as well as others, or else you will remain short of saving grace.

Faith is not a mystery juggled into us by the postures, genuflections, and mumblings of priests. We have heard a great deal about sacramental efficacy, but I think a man must have extraordinary hardihood who would say that either baptism or the so-called Eucharist, are the sure creators of faith. Yet I see not what saving service these forms can render to unbelieving men if they leave them in an unbelieving condition, and consequently, in a state of condemnation.

Seeing that without faith it is impossible to please God, the grace supposed to be conveyed by the mere participation in sacraments is of small value, if it cannot give the cardinal requisite for acceptance before God. Faith cannot be washed into us by immersion, nor sprinkled upon us in christening, it is not to be poured into us from a chalice, nor generated in us by a consecrated piece of bread. There is no magic about it. It comes by hearing the Word of God, and by that way only.

These are superstitions, you tell me, and scarcely need to be mentioned here. Very well then, we will have done with them and treat of superstitions which linger in our own congregations. There are some who fancy that faith cometh by *feeling*. If they could feel emotions either of horror or of exquisite delight, they would then, they think, be the possessors of faith. But till they have felt what they have heard described in certain biographies of undoubtedly good men, they cannot believe, or even if they have a measure of faith, they cannot hope that it is true faith.

Faith does not come by feeling, but through faith arises much of Holy feeling, and the more a man lives in the walk of faith, as a rule, the more will he feel and enjoy the light of God's countenance. Faith has something firmer to stand upon than those ever-changing frames and feelings which, like the weather of our own sunless land, is fickle and frail, and changes speedily from brightness into gloom.

You may get feeling from faith, and the best of it, but you will be long before you will find any faith that is worth the having if you try to evoke it from frames and feelings.

***“My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame;
But wholly lean on Jesus' name;
On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.”***

Some also have supposed that true faith will come to men by *dreams and visions*. It is surprising how a belief in these things lingers still in what is called this age of light. The notion is still current that if you dream of seeing Jesus, or fancy you have seen Him while awake, or if a passage of Scripture strikes you, or if you hear or imagine that you hear a voice speaking to you, you are then a believer.

Now, faith in Christ is like faith in anyone else, it comes to us by the same kind of mental processes, and is based upon simple principles, and plain matters of fact and it needs no vision of the night. Though you should see all the angels in heaven, it would not prove that you would go to heaven, any more than my having seen the Pope's bodyguard would be a proof that I shall be made a Cardinal. Things which are seen of the eye save not, for the things which are seen are temporal, and cannot work eternal salvation.

Moreover, men saw Christ, and yet pierced Him and blasphemed Him. Visions have been seen by heathens like Nebuchadnezzar, and angels have appeared to bad men like Balaam who, though he sighed out, “Let me die the death of the righteous,” yet perished fighting against the God of Israel. True faith has a more solid basis for its fabric than the fleeting fancies of the mind.

I beg you to notice too, that it does not say in the text that faith comes through the *eloquence*, earnestness, or any other good quality of the preacher. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word, not of man, but of God. The Word of God is the substance of faith-creating preaching. It is by the hearing of God's Word, and not by any other hearing that saving faith comes to the soul.

I may hear a man descant upon the Gospel with all the eloquence that can be commanded by the most fluent tongue, yet if my faith comes to me because the man spoke pathetically, or poetically, or

argumentatively, or rhetorically, it is a poor miserable faith. Being of the power of the flesh, it will die, and so prove itself unlike the faith which springs from the incorruptible word of God, for that liveth and abideth forever.

On the other hand, I may hope for faith if I am listening to the true Gospel, the very Word of God, though the man who speaks it may be of stammering lips, and his voice may be disagreeable to my ear, and there may be much about his manner that does not commend itself to me. If he preaches truth it is by hearing not him, the man, but by hearing the Word of God, that I shall come to faith.

I do desire ever, as a preacher, to feel that it is not my word but God's Word that saves souls. We are to explain it and expound it, but we are not to add to it, take from or conceive that we can improve it. We must not go into the pulpit and say, "I have been working out a subject from my own mind, and I am going to give you the result of my thoughts." We had better keep our own thoughts for some other place, and give the people the revealed truth of God. The theory now-a-days is that all preachers worth hearing by this refined generation must be profound thinkers, and inventors of improved theologies.

Brethren, let man's thoughts perish forever, the thoughts of God and not the thoughts of man will save souls. The truth of God should be spoken simply, with as little as possible of the embellishments of metaphysics, and philosophy, and high culture and all that stuff. I say the Word of God delivered as we find it is that which, when heard, brings faith to the souls of men.

I counsel you, my occasional hearers, you who perhaps have come freshly to this city, or who reside where you have a choice of ministry, seek not that which tickles your ear, but that which your conscience approves as consistent with the Word of God. And though we or an angel from heaven should preach to you that which is not God's Word, do not listen to us, for it will be mischievous to you.

Hear you what God the Lord speaketh, and hear nothing else. What though He shall sound forth His word through a ram's horn, if it be God's Spirit that giveth forth a certain sound, it shall be more profitable to your soul than though the silver trumpet should be set to the mouth of falsehood, and the sweetest music should regale your ears. The matter of a discourse is far more important than the manner. Saving faith never comes from hearing falsehood, but from the Word of God alone.

I ought, perhaps, to add that the expression, "by hearing," though of course literally must be confined to the hearing of words vocally uttered is meant to include in its spirit the reading of the Word. For reading is a sort of hearing with the eyes and faith has often come and will often come to men while they are reading the Word of God for themselves. We must not kill the spirit of the text by excessive regard to the mere letter of it, and we would do so if we excluded reading, which is a quiet hearing of the still small voice of the printed page.

Faith comes by the Word of God reaching our minds, and our knowing and understanding it. The entrance of God's Word gives light. "Incline your ear and come unto me. hear and your soul shall live." Thus, we have spoken of it negatively.

Now, *positively*, "Faith cometh by hearing." Sometimes faith has come into men's minds by *hearing the simple statement* of the Gospel. They have longed to be saved, and they have been told that Jesus the Son of God condescended to come into this world, and to take upon Himself the form of man, and as man to be partaker of our infirmities, and to offer Himself as a sacrifice in the room, place, and stead of sinners. They have, moreover, been told that whosoever trusts in this substitutionary sacrifice shall be saved, and straightway they have believed.

All they have wanted has been merely to be informed of the way of salvation. God's Spirit has so prepared them that they have believed almost as soon as they have heard the saving truth. In many cases the only difficulty in the way of salvation has been a want of understanding the Word. I know in my own case I would have given all I had, if I might but have been informed what I must do to be saved.

Though I frequented places where the Gospel was preached, I did not catch the meaning of believing, it puzzled me much. I do not remember to have heard the simple declaration that to trust in Jesus Christ would save my soul, or possibly I did hear it with my outward ears, but I must have been

strangely infatuated, for I did not understand the sense. And I have often thought if I could have heard the way of faith simply stated, my soul would have leaped into liberty long before.

I will not so say, but I am persuaded that faith often comes by hearing the simple declaration that God accepts sinners, not for what they are in themselves but for what Christ is, and that when sinners believe in Jesus they are saved there and then, and are acceptable with God through Jesus Christ His dear Son. The mere statement of this has brought, by the operation of the Spirit of God, faith into the soul.

“How is this?” saith one. Well, it is because the Gospel commends itself to some hearts as true upon the very first blush of it, it strikes them as being undoubtedly the Gospel of God. It is the same in other matters, you sometimes hear a story about which you say, “Well, I do not know, it may be correct, but I shall have to look a little into that before I am certain.” But you often hear statements which you accept at once because they commend themselves to your understanding, and you feel that they must be true.

There are minds which God has so prepared that the moment they hear the Gospel they respond to it. I think I hear the seeker after truth exclaim when he heard the Gospel, “True? Why, how could it be otherwise? It is so divinely grand, so harmonious, so good, so gracious, so unexpected—nobody could have thought of it but God Himself—it must be the truth.”

Having long sought goodly pearls of truth, the illuminated eye catches the gleam of the Gospel and discerns it to be a priceless gem. Those are blessed indeed who are thus at once brought unto faith by the statement of the Gospel.

To some others the convincing point has been *the suitability of the Gospel to their case*, for while they have heard it preached as a Gospel for sinners, they have felt that they were certainly among that class. When the preacher has gone on to describe the misery of the fall, the utter ruin of human nature, its deceitfulness, feebleness, fickleness and folly, the hearer has said, “Is the Gospel sent to those who are thus lost, guilty, and impotent? Why, I am precisely in that condition.” And then, when its great command is stated, namely, simple trust in Jesus, the soul perceives the suitability of the way of grace.

We do not go to heaven to bring Christ down, or dive into the deeps to bring Him up from the dead. We can neither keep the law, nor find an atonement for our transgressions. But this simple trust, oh how suitable it is to undone sinners. Nothing to do—I can do nothing. Nothing to bring—I have nothing to bring, it suits my case.

Glory be to God for devising a plan so adapted to our wants. From the suitability of the Gospel to the sinner, many have been by God’s Spirit led to saving faith in Jesus, and so faith has come by hearing.

In many, I do not doubt, faith has come through hearing of *the condescending pity and the melting love of Jesus*. Oh, that we dwelt more on this, that He loved His enemies, that He died for the ungodly, that His heart yearns over the lost sheep, that He is willing to receive prodigal sons, for He is full of grace and truth.

*“His heart is made of tenderness,
His bowels melt with love.”*

When such texts as the following have been preached on—“This man receiveth sinners.” “Come unto me all you who labor.” “Ho, everyone that thirsteth,” etc. “All manner of sin and transgression shall be forgiven unto men.” “Whosoever will let him come and take the water of life freely.” “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out,” that melting strain has touched the heart, and led the most hardened to believe in a Savior so kind to the undeserving.

Men have found it impossible not to believe in a friend so self-sacrificing, a Redeemer so altogether lovely. The sweet love of Jesus has an omnipotence in it to win souls. They yield “by mighty love subdued,” unable to resist its charms, and as if they could hold out no longer, they throw themselves by an act of faith into the Savior’s arms.

I can well understand their singing, “I do believe, I *must* believe in such a friend as this.” Faith comes by hearing of the free forgiveness procured by the agony, the stripes, the wounds, the death of Jesus, the lover of our souls.

At other times, faith has come, not so much through hearing the statement of the Gospel as from hearing of *its authority*. I may believe a statement because it looks like truth. I may, on the other hand, accept it not at all because I have perceived the apparent truth of it, but because of the person who tells it to me. And this is a very right and acceptable kind of faith.

What has God said about my salvation? Before I hear it, I am prepared to believe it on the testimony of God. He says it, and that is enough for me. I believe this Bible to be His Book. I hear what it says, and whatever the Lord God hath said I must and will receive, whether it appears plain or not.

There are persons who when they have heard the Gospel preached have not at first believed it, but if it has pleased the Spirit of God to lead the minister to show that the Gospel is of divine appointment, that the way proclaimed is ordained by God Himself, and that God has set the sanction of His promise upon it—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”—and has also set upon it the second sanction of His threatening—“He that believeth not shall be damned”—then they have yielded and given over all further question. God bids them trust in Jesus, and they do so through His grace.

Without canvassing the statement itself they receive what God teaches, and since He hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation for sin they receive Him as such. Since He has said, “Look unto me and be saved,” they look because God bids them look, and they are saved.

To believe in Jesus is a command from God’s own mouth, and is, therefore, to be obeyed, and the more so, because “He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son; and this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”

In some cases, too, the coming of faith has been helped by hearing and perceiving *the veracity of the subordinate testifiers of the Gospel*—I mean the writers of the sacred Book, the prophets, and chiefly the apostles. These men are worthy of credit—they were honest, unsophisticated men, and they certainly gained nothing by testifying that Christ was the Messiah, and that He died and rose again from the dead.

One of them, the apostle Paul, lost his position, which was one of great eminence, and spent his whole life in toil, and suffering, and reproach, and ended with a bloody death because of what he preached, and thus he proved that he was a sincere, honest, upright man.

If Paul or any other of the apostles were in the witness box, nobody could demur to their evidence, whatever they said we should believe, because the men were truthful witnesses. Now, sometimes, persons have been led into faith in Christ by feeling that those whom He sent to be testifiers to His person, death, and resurrection, were evidently true to the core, and therefore, their word was worthy of all acceptance.

I believe, dear friends that faith has come by hearing in another way. Perhaps the preacher has not so much stated the Gospel, and brought forward its authority, as *explained it*, and so faith has come. If we spent our time in nothing else but just explaining the text, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” we might achieve a blessed life-work, and perhaps might see greater results than when our ministry takes a wider range.

When the preacher takes up one by one the soul difficulties which prevent man from seeing what faith is, and keep him away from looking to Christ, and when he tries to show, as he should, that all the hope of the sinner lies out of himself, none of it in himself, that all his help for salvation is laid upon one who is mighty, even Jesus Christ the Son of God, and that he must look away from his own feelings, and prayers, and doings, and even away from his own believings as any ground of confidence, and must rest simply and alone upon the one sacrifice of Jesus, it has often happened that faith has come through the hearing of such an explanatory word.

In some cases, too, faith has come when the word has possessed a peculiar *soul-revealing pointedness* in it to the hearer’s particular case. Remember the Samaritan woman? Our Lord Jesus Christ

explained to her the Gospel, but she does not appear to have been enlightened by His explanations. It was that home stroke of His—"Go, call thy husband and come hither," which won her to faith. Such revealings of the thoughts and intents of the heart will occur in any God-sent preaching of the Gospel, just because the Word pierces to the dividing of soul and spirit, and lays bare the secrets of the soul.

Then it is that hearers cry, "Come, see a man that told me all things that I ever did; is not this the Christ?" Thus, by the guidance of the Spirit, the Word finds the man, and faith cometh by hearing.

Faith also comes in to many by hearing when we detail *the experience* of those who have tasted and handled the good word of life. When the preacher or teacher tells how he trusted in Jesus, and found pardon, peace, and life eternal, when he is able to point to others who have felt the same, some of whom perhaps, were even greater offenders than the person addressed, then conviction and faith are wrought in the mind.

We bid you see what Jesus has done for us in the hope that you will trust and try Him for yourselves. Jesus prayed for those who shall believe on Him through our word, and we hope you will be among the number.

To set the whole matter clearly, we will suppose that you are laboring under a very serious disease, and a physician professes to heal you. You are quite willing to believe in him, but you cannot blindly follow any man, for there are thousands of quacks and impostors. You naturally want to know something about him.

Now, in what way would you go to work to get faith in him? How would faith be likely to come to you? It would come by hearing. You hear him speak, and you perceive that he understands your case, for he describes exactly all your symptoms, even those which none know but yourself and a skillful physician. You feel already some confidence in him.

He next describes to you as much of the method of cure as you can comprehend, and it seems to you to be very reasonable and withal suitable to the requirements of your case. His proposal commends itself to your best judgment, and you are already a step nearer submission to his mode of operation.

Then you inquire as to the man's character. You find that he is no mere pretender, but an authorized, skillful, long-established practitioner, well known for truthfulness, uprightness, and every good quality. Moreover, suppose in addition to this he charges you nothing whatever, but does everything gratis, having evidently no motive of gain, but being altogether disinterested, moved only by real pity for you, and a kind desire to remove your pain and save your life. Can you any longer refuse to believe and submit?

But if, in addition to all this, he allows you his case-book, and bids you read case after case similar to your own in which he has effected perfect cure, and if some of these are your own acquaintances, if they are persons whom you know and esteem, why, sir, you will not insult him by saying, "I wish I could believe you," but you will be unable to help trusting him unless you are unwilling to be cured.

Faith, in such a case, does not depend upon the will at all. You are convinced by hearing, and you become a believer. In the same way faith comes by hearing. You are unreasonable if you sit still and say, "I cannot make myself believe." Of course you cannot, but you hear, do you not, of how Christ heals sinners. You hear that He is backed by divine authority. You see that He really does save those that trust Him, and what more of evidence do you want?

O soul! it seems to me a harder thing not to believe in Jesus than to believe in Him, if you are indeed willing to be made whole. When one has heard these things, and understands them, surely the mind, if it be not willfully blinded, must receive the Savior.

May God forgive your long perverseness, and by His Spirit open your eyes to see the simplicity of that faith which comes by hearing the Word of God.

II. My time however, flies much too rapidly this morning, and I must be brief on the second very important head, namely, OBSTRUCTIONS WHICH OFTEN BLOCK UP THIS WAY.

One is *a want of intention*, by which I mean that many persons come to hear, but they have no wish to be led into faith. Like the butterflies which flit from flower to flower, they extract no honey because

they come not for such a purpose, while the bees dive into the cups and bells of the flowers, and come up loaded with their luscious food. Oh, if men came to hear, praying to be endowed with faith in Jesus, faith would surely come to them by hearing.

Many persons, in hearing a sermon, are like children looking at a cornfield—it is full of yellow garlic, or perhaps of scarlet poppies, and they cry, “What a lovely field.” But the farmer thinks not so, he is looking for the wheat.

Many a hearer watches for pretty speeches and flowery metaphors, and cries, “How well he puts it! What a well-turned sentence. How sweetly he quotes poetry!” and so on. Bah! Is that what you come to God’s house for? O fools and slow of heart, is this your end in hearing the life-giving Gospel of the bleeding Lamb? I assure you it is not this that we are aiming at in preaching to you.

If you came to look after the good corn, you would care little for the gaudy poppies of a flaunting eloquence so much regarded by the men of these days. Come with the intent to find faith in Jesus, cry to God to make His Word effectual to your salvation, and then hearing will be quite another business with you.

Alas! I fear you will perish, let us preach as we may, while we are regarded by you as mere orators to be criticized, and not as witnesses whose testimony is to be weighed.

Some do not hear aright for *want of attention*. Sleepy hearers are not likely to be led to faith. Eutychus may fall from the third loft and be taken up for dead, but he is not likely to become a believer by sleeping, even though Paul should be the preacher. We want attention in order to the real reception of the Word.

Oh how pleasant it is to preach to earnest hearers who lean forward to catch every syllable, anxious to know how they can be saved. Wandering hearts lose the benefit of the truth, and vain minds trifle away the privilege of a Gospel ministry. Take heed how ye hear, otherwise ye may remain hearers only, and so perish in unbelief.

With many, a *want of candor* is another reason why faith does not come by hearing. If a man hears with a prejudiced heart, making up his mind beforehand what he will believe, he is not likely to be convinced, he puts himself as far as he can out of the reach of benefit. When the heart rebels against the Word, when it says, “If this be true I am living a bad life, and I shall have to give up my pleasures, therefore I will not accept it.” Well then, faith does not come and cannot come by such hearing.

Faith comes by hearing when a man does, as it were, give himself up to the Word of God, like a person who is badly wounded and surrenders himself to the surgeon’s hand. Oh, if I had a gangrened limb and it must be taken off, I think I would pray for patience enough to say, “O sir, if you can but spare my life cut to the very bone.”

When it is the soul that is concerned, I would say to the preacher, “Sir, do not flatter me, do not tell me that which will please but delude me. I do not want your flattery, I do not want your fine words. Sir, tell me what I am, and where I am in the sight of God, and how I can be saved, for it will little satisfy me to wake up in hell and remember that I used to hear a fine orator. I want to be saved in deed and of a truth.”

“Ah,” says one, “but some preachers are not only bold, but rough in their expression.” Yes, but suppose you were nearly drowned, and a strong swimmer plunged into the stream and plucked you out just as you were sinking for the last time, if he dislocated your arm would you grumble? No, you would say, “The bone can be set at another time, but my life could not have been restored.”

And so with the preacher, though he be rough, if it be the truth which he speaks, only pray that it may save your soul, and be content to put up with the man’s infirmity, if by any means you may attain to salvation by Jesus Christ.

With some, however, hearing does not bring faith because they hear *without any after meditation*. There is a great trial going on, as you know, in the Tichborne case. Every juryman, I doubt not, wants to judge righteously. I am sure the sleepy one is not likely to do so, and I am pretty clear that the juryman who is most likely to get at the truth will be the man who, when he gets away from the court, having

heard attentively all the time, takes home the notes of the evidence, weighs it, and makes comparisons, and endeavors to sift out the truth.

So I would say to you when you hear us preach, sift the sermon afterwards, turn our sermons over, pick holes in them if you like, and find out our mistakes. But oh, do search into the truth, and be not content till you find it. If you want to find Christ, the wisdom of God, you should seek for Him as for silver. You are likely to believe the truth when your mind turns it over and over.

Here is a bag, and I am willing to make a man rich, and therefore, I drop into it pound after pound, but I find that the bag is just as empty as before. The reason is plain—there are holes in the bag, and the money drops through. Too many hearers are as a bag full of holes, and golden sermons will not bless them because they willfully forget all.

They will never come to faith because they do but look at their face in the glass of the Word, and go their way and forget what manner of men they are. Oh for hearers who only need to know the Gospel, and the evidence of it, and then consent thereto, saying, “It is the truth of God, I cannot quarrel with it. I joyfully receive it.” Such are saved souls.

III. But now, I am sorry to be so brief, but I must conclude by speaking of THE IMPORTANCE THAT FAITH SHOULD COME TO US BY HEARING.

I will let my words drop rapidly without any ornament, and remind you, dear friend, that if you have been a hearer and faith has not come to you, you are, this moment, in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. You believe not in Christ, and you make God a liar, because you have not believed in His only begotten Son. The wrath of God abideth on you. You are dead while you live. You are without God, without Christ, and strangers to the covenant of promise.

My soul pities you—will you not pity yourselves? Hearers only, faithless, graceless, Christless! Christ died, but you have no part in His death. His blood cleanses from sin, but your sin remains upon you. Christ has risen, and He pleads before the throne—you have no part in that intercession. He is preparing a place for His people, but that place is not for you.

Oh unhappy soul! oh wretched soul! You are out of favor with God, at enmity with eternal love, destitute of eternal life! Truly, if Jesus were here He would weep over you as He did over Jerusalem, and say, “How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.”

Ah, remember, though your present state is terrible, that is not all. You will soon die, and you will die without faith. Remember that Word of Christ, it is one of the most terrible I know of, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” To die in a ditch, to die in a prison, to die on the gallows, none of us would desire it, but to die in your sins! O God, it is hell, it is eternal damnation. May the great Lord save you!

But to perish forever will be your lot as surely as you live, except you believe in Jesus and that speedily, for soon you will be out of the reach of all hearing. No more sermons, no more invitations of grace. Oh, what would you give to have the Gospel once more when you are cast away from it! No more the preacher’s voice saying, “Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die!” No more the pitiful accents of one who loves your souls, and gladly would snatch you as firebrands from the flame. Around you all will be dark, and hard, and the only message for you will be this—“He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.”

*“There are no acts of pardon passed,
In that cold grave to which we haste;
But darkness, death, and long despair,
Reign in eternal silence there.”*

Ah! then it will be no assuagement of your miseries that you once heard the Gospel. It will rather increase your torment. Conscience will cry aloud—“I heard the Gospel of grace, and I heard the arguments which proved it true, but I rejected a Gospel which God Himself proclaimed, a Gospel which

was genuine on the face of it, a Gospel full of such love as ought to have melted a rock, a Gospel that was brought to me without money and without price, a Gospel that was pressed upon me from my infancy to my hoar hairs—I rejected it, I willfully rejected it, not because it was not true, but because I would believe a lie, and would not believe the living God.”

Eternal Father, Thou who art mighty to save, let not one among us go down into the pit with a lie in his right hand, refusing to accept the Gospel of Thy blessed Son! The Lord save you all, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 10

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.