

## CHAPTER II

### WHAT WE BELIEVE

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."—Titus iii. 4-7.

**A** PROLONGED correspondence in a daily newspaper some time ago on "Do We Believe?" was a significant and remarkable sign of the times. The widespread interest as shown by the thousands of letters received by the editor testified to the unrest of the age and its longing for certitude.

"Do we believe?" The answer is, "Yes, of course we do, for everyone does." It is simple truth to say that there is not a single person in the world who does not believe. Belief is fundamental and essential to human life. The child could not do other than believe its parents; the scholar cannot but believe what his schoolmaster tells him; business life would be impossible without belief, and international affairs are necessarily based on this element of trust. Everywhere, at all times, and by all faith is being exercised.

The real question is not, "Do we believe?" but

"What do you believe?" or still better, "Whom do we believe?" Everything depends upon the substance of our faith and the Object of our trust. It is when these questions are asked that differences of opinion and differences of faith emerge.

To this way of looking at the subject we must now turn our attention. What do we believe as Christians, as those who profess and confess the name of Jesus Christ? What is the substance of our faith? What is the meaning of that which we acknowledge as followers of Christ? The answers to these inquiries can be given in many forms. We will however take the above passage, and that a very noteworthy one, from the epistles of the great Apostle Paul in order to answer that question, "What do we believe?"

The keynote of this passage is evidently the idea of *Salvation*, for it is mentioned or implied at least four times, and to speak quite briefly it may be said that we Christians believe in *Salvation*. *Salvation*, properly understood, is the most glorious fact and reality in the world, and it is the characteristic feature of the Christian religion. It means, to put it in another way, *Safety*, and a *Safety* that concerns man's spiritual life from time to eternity. Let us look more carefully at some aspects of this wonderful revelation of *Safety* for mankind. Christians believe in

THE AUTHOR OF SALVATION

He is described in this passage as "God our Saviour," and we are told very distinctly of four aspects of His Divine character.

*His Divine Goodness* (ver. 4). This is the meaning of the term translated "kindness" in the English version, and it depicts for us God's character, that which He is in Himself. The very meaning of the word "God," according to some authorities, is "good," the One Who is perfectly good; faith rests on this as on a sure foundation. We trust in One Who is essential goodness, and herein our minds and hearts are at peace.

*His Divine Philanthropy* (ver. 4). The word "love" in this passage is quite literally "philanthropy," or the love of man as man. It is only found in this one passage as descriptive of God, and gives us a beautiful picture of the Divine heart in its attitude towards mankind. Philanthropy is generally associated with man's love to man, but here we find the source and spring of it in God's love to man simply because he is man.

*His Divine Mercy* (ver. 5). Mercy is pity to the needy, and here again we have a revelation of God's attitude to man. He knows our need, and in mercy pities us with a Divine compassion and stoops to our aid.

*His Divine Grace* (ver. 7). Grace is even more

than mercy. We may show pity to the needy who are needy through no fault of their own, but Divine grace means favour to the undeserving, to those who are brought into misery and wretchedness through their own sin and wickedness.

This fourfold picture of God as the Author of Salvation is the foundation of our faith and the assurance of our trust. Could anything be more solid and substantial, more real and satisfying than the Christian's trust in such a wonderful God?

But this is not all; we must go into particulars and notice our belief in

#### THE REALITY OF SALVATION

*Salvation is Entirely Unmerited.* "Not by works of righteousness which we have done" (ver. 5). All through the ages mankind has shown in various ways its need of and longing for salvation and its earnest desire to be right with God, and yet it is a curious and striking fact that side by side with these intense desires, man has ever sought to accomplish this end by his own unaided efforts. It was through a desire to be independent of God that man fell, and almost ever since that day man has evinced the same independence of God in trying to get back to the Divine presence. The result has been seen in the various religious systems

with their sacrifices, altars, cleansings, gifts, penances, and other human works, but all with no effect, for if man is to win salvation by his works those works must be perfect, and he must keep God's law wholly and absolutely in thought, word, and deed. The impossibility of this is evident when we remember what sin has done for man in affecting every part of his moral being, and preventing him from doing that which is right in the sight of God. If, then, man is to be saved, it must be entirely outside his own merits or deservings and quite apart from any works of his own. It is often pointed out that mankind is divided into two great classes in relation to religion. One class endeavoring to win God's favour by merit or work is really saying, "Something in my hand I bring." The other class, utterly distrustful of self and human merit, says in penitent trust,

"Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

*Salvation is Divinely Merciful.* "According to His mercy He saved us" (ver. 5). Salvation, if it is to be effectual, must of necessity be Divine. It must be the work of God and no one else. This is the burden of the Christian religion: "Salvation is of the Lord." "God our Saviour" is one of the most remarkable titles of the Divine Being,

and it is of His mercy alone that salvation has been brought to man. There was nothing in man to merit it or deserve it, but God of His own mercy came to our rescue and saved us in Christ with an everlasting salvation.

*Salvation is Absolutely Complete.* "He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (ver. 5). In these words we are told very plainly of the perfection of God's salvation. It starts with regeneration, the gift of God's new life which accompanies the washing and cleansing of forgiveness, and then this life issues in daily renovation and renewal. Thus from first to last there is perfect provision for every conceivable circumstance in the gift of Divine life with which our salvation commences, and in the constant, daily, even momentary renewal of that life by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost.

*Salvation is Gloriously Abundant.* "Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (ver. 6). God's gifts are always in profusion; as in nature so in grace, there is abundant and overflowing provision. In the Father's house there is "bread enough and to spare," and God's salvation is poured out upon us in wealth and abundance, meeting every conceivable need and all possible circumstances in every part of the world. There is salvation from the ignorance of sin through the Divine knowledge, salvation from the

guilt of sin through the Divine righteousness, salvation from the bondage of sin through the Divine redemption, salvation from the defilement of sin through the Divine holiness, salvation from the weakness of sin through the Divine power, salvation from the degradation of sin through the Divine glory, salvation from the enmity of sin through the Divine fellowship, and in the life to come salvation from the very presence of sin as the crown and culmination of God's marvellous provision. Thus we have in this passage the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the blessed and glorious Trinity, revealed as our Saviour, and offering to everyone the guarantee of a perfect salvation.

Even all this, however, is not sufficient. We have hitherto been considering the facts and glories of Divine revelation in the salvation of man, but it is possible for these facts to remain outside ourselves without coming into contact with our daily life. Hence the need of looking again at the passage of Scripture before us as we express our belief in

#### THE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION

How does this Divine salvation come into human life? What does it do for us in our personal experience?

*It gives us a New Position.* "Being justified by His grace" (ver. 7). Justification means the restoration of that position which man lost through sin. It is the reinstatement, and even more than the reinstatement, in what man possessed before the Fall. It implies the removal of the guilt of sin, the removal of the condemnation of sin, the removal of the separation caused by sin. It is the Divine righteousness covering the sinner, and Divine grace regarding that sinner as righteous in the eyes of God's holy law. Truly this is a new position, the gift of righteousness by grace through faith.

*It gives us a New Privilege.* "That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs" (ver. 7). In our phraseology an "heir" means one who will succeed to an estate after the present owner's death, but in the New Testament, in connection with spiritual realities, the terms "heir" and "inheritance" include a present experience in part of our glorious heritage. The Apostle Paul could not think of anything higher than this. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). What a glorious privilege is this, to be heirs already enjoying in part the wealth of God's grace and the heritage of His mercy and favour!

*It gives us a New Possession.* "Eternal life" (ver. 7). Eternal life in connection with the

Christian religion means the personal experience of God (John xvii. 3), and the present possession of His Divine life (John v. 24). Life is not measured by duration but by quality, and this eternal life is even now the possession of all the children of God.

*It gives us a New Prospect.* "Heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (ver. 7). Hope, in the New Testament, is always associated with the great future connected with the Lord's Coming. Again and again, indeed no less than three hundred times, is the "blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour," brought before us as the expectation of the Christian, and the crown of all his aspirations and endeavours. This, and this only is the prospect set out by the Christian religion. We look forward with joy and satisfaction to the time when we shall see Him as He is, and be made like unto Him in His eternal and glorious kingdom.

This, then, is what Christians believe, and, even more, this is the substance of our faith in Him whom we believe. There is a world of difference between believing facts and trusting a person. Facts are, of course, necessary, but it is possible to believe in facts about God without believing in God Himself. These facts of the Christian religion, the facts concerning salvation, only become vital and real as our faith is exercised in

the Person of God Himself, personal trust in a personal Saviour.

The question then for us is, Do we believe in Him as our God and Saviour? Is our trust centred in Him? Does our heart go out to Him in simple childlike trust and dependence? This is really the essence of belief and faith. Some years ago the great missionary, Dr. John G. Paton, told an audience in England of the great difficulty he had in the early days of his missionary work in the South Sea Islands in translating the New Testament into the vernacular of the people among whom he was labouring. He could not find in their language any equivalent for the Bible idea of faith; to those people "hearing" was equivalent to faith, and if anyone told another something which he believed, he would reply, "I hear," and if he did not credit the news would say, "I do not hear." Dr. Paton easily saw that this would not suffice for the New Testament meaning of faith, especially in such a passage as "Faith cometh by hearing," and for months he sought in vain to find an exact equivalent in the language of the people. At last, one day, when a very intelligent native came into his room, he thought he would make another attempt to obtain the word he needed. Dr. Paton was sitting on his chair, and as he sat there he said to the native, "What am I doing now?" to which he replied, "You are sitting down, Mas-

ter." Dr. Paton saw clearly that this would not suffice, and lifting up his feet on to the bar of the chair and leaning back, resting his full weight on the chair, he said to the man, "What am I doing now?" "You are leaning wholly on the chair." At once Dr. Paton felt that he had obtained what he desired, and from that time forward the version of the Scripture used in those Islands has described faith as "leaning wholly and only on God," and hundreds of those natives have all through these years been showing in their lives that they are leaning wholly and only on the Lord Jesus for salvation and everlasting glory. This is trust, leaning wholly, leaning only, and leaning always on God.

"Jesus, I will trust Thee, trust Thee with my soul;  
Guilty, lost, and helpless, Thou canst make me whole.  
There is none in heaven or on earth like Thee:  
Thou hast died for sinners—therefore, Lord, for me."