

The One Condition of Salvation

by Lewis S. Chafer (1871-1952)

[Bible Believers Resources Note: The author of this paper uses the Revised Version (RV) in three places, two times for Mark 16:16, and one time for 2 Corinthians 15:14, 19. The KJV is used for all other Scripture references. It is recommended that when reading this resource, you use the KJV for the two occurrences which reference the RV.]



Notwithstanding all that has been divinely accomplished for the unsaved, they are not saved by it alone. Salvation is an immediate display of the power of God within the lifetime and experience of the individual, and is easily distinguished from those potential accomplishments finished nearly two thousand years ago in the cross. As has been stated, salvation is a work of God for man, rather than a work of man for God. No aspect of salvation, according to the Bible, is made to depend, even in the slightest degree, on human merit or works. Great stress is laid on the value of good works which grow out of a saved life, but they do not precede salvation or form any part of a basis for it. It, therefore, is revealed that the first issue between God and an unsaved person in this age is that of receiving Christ, rather than that of improving the manner of life, however urgent such improvement may be. This insistence seems to mere human reason to be an indirect, if not aimless, means of obtaining the moral improvement of men. The need of moral improvement is most evident, and simply to try to help men to be better would seem to be the direct and logical thing to do. However, the divine program strikes deeper and purposes a new creation out from which good works can flow and apart from which there can be no acceptable works in the sight of God. Unsaved men are thus shut up to the one condition upon which God can righteously make them to be new creatures in Christ Jesus.

With regard to the necessity of a new creation the unregenerate are blind in their minds (2 Cor. 4:3-4). So also about this need a multitude of professing Christians are poorly taught, resulting in a well nigh universal misconception of the demands of the gospel. When dealing with the unsaved, false issues are often raised and these unscriptural demands appear in many forms. Satan's ministers are said to be the ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14-15). They waive aside the Bible emphasis on a new birth, which is by the power of God through faith and which is the only source from which works acceptable to God can be produced, and devote their energy to the improvement, morally and righteously, of the individual's character. Such workers, in spite of their sincerity and humanitarian motives, are by the Spirit of God said to be "the ministers of Satan."

The fact that the unregenerate are blinded by Satan in regard to the true gospel of grace is the explanation of the age-long plea of the moralist: "If I do the best I can God must be satisfied with that, else He is unreasonable." Granting that anyone has ever done his best, it would still be most imperfect as compared with

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the infinite holiness of God. God cannot, under any conditions, call that perfect which is imperfect, and He is far from unreasonable in demanding a perfect righteousness, impossible to man, while He stands ready to provide as a gift all that His holiness requires. This is exactly the offer of the Gospel. The Scriptures do not call on men of this age to present their own righteousness to God; but invite unrighteous men to receive the very righteousness of God which may be theirs through a vital union with Christ. The appeal is not self-improvement in the important matters of daily life, but that "the gift of God which is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" might be received. When this eternal issue is met the more temporal matters of conduct are urged; but only on the grounds of the fact that divine salvation has been wrought for sinful man wholly apart from his own works.

The question confronting each individual, therefore, is that of the basis upon which this new creation can be gained. In such an undertaking man is powerless. All his ability must be forever set aside. It must be accomplished for him, and God alone can do it. He alone can form a new creation; He alone can deal with sin; He alone can bestow a perfect righteousness; He alone can translate from the powers of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son.

If it were only a question of power to transform men the creative power of God has always been sufficient; but there was a greater difficulty caused by the fact of sin. Sin must first be judged, and no favor or grace can be divinely exercised until every offense of righteousness has been fully met. God cannot look on sin with the least degree of allowance, and so He can grant His favor only by and through the cross wherein, and only wherein, the consequences of sin have been forever met in His sight. Thus salvation can be accomplished, even by the infinite God, only through Jesus Christ. Hence it is that a simple trust in the Saviour opens the way into the infinite power and grace of God. It is "unto every one that believeth," "For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

This one word "believe" represents all a sinner can do and all a sinner must do to be saved. It is believing the record God has given of His Son. In this record it is stated that He has entered into all the needs of our lost condition and is alive from the dead to be a living Saviour to all who put their trust in Him. It is quite possible for any intelligent person to know whether he has placed such confidence in the Saviour. Saving faith is a matter of personal consciousness. "I know whom I have believed." To have deposited one's eternal welfare in the hands of another is a decision of the mind so definite that it can hardly be confused with anything else. On this deposit of oneself into His saving grace depends one's eternal destiny. To add, or subtract, anything from this sole

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condition of salvation is most perilous. The Gospel is thus often misstated in various and subtle ways. The more common of these should be mentioned specifically:

First, The unsaved are sometimes urged to pray and hope for an attitude of leniency on the part of God toward their sins: whereas they should be urged to *believe* that every aspect of favor and expression of love has already been wrought out by God Himself. They are not believing God when they beseech Him to be reconciled to them, when He is revealed as having already accomplished a reconciliation. The Gospel does not inspire a hope that God will be gracious: it discloses the good news that He has been gracious and challenges every man but to *believe* it. A criminal pleading for mercy before a judge is not in the same position as a criminal believing and rejoicing in the assurance that a full pardon is granted and that he can never be brought again into judgment.

Second, It is a most serious error to intrude any form of human works into a situation wherein God alone can work. People are sometimes led to believe that there is saving value in some public confession of Christ, or profession of a decision. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." This is salvation. "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." This is the voice of the newborn child speaking to and of its Father. The only condition on which one may be saved is to *believe*.

Third, It is equally as great an error to give the unsaved the impression that there is saving virtue in promising to try to "lead a Christian life." No unregenerate mind is prepared to deal with the problems of true Christian living. These problems anticipate the new dynamic of the imparted divine nature, and could produce nothing but hopeless discouragement when really contemplated by an unregenerate person. There is danger, as well, that by forcing the issues of future conduct into the question the main issue of receiving Christ as Saviour may be submerged in some difficulty related to the proposed standards of living. There is an advantage in a general morality, "Sabbath observance," temperance and attendance on public and private worship; but there is no saving value in any, or all, of them. It is true that a person who enters into these things might be more apt to hear the saving Gospel of grace than otherwise; but on the other hand, the sad fact is that these very things are often depended upon by the religiously inclined to commend themselves to God. A clear distinction is found in the Bible between conversion and salvation. The former is there found to indicate no more than the humanly possible act of turning about, while the latter refers to that display of the power of God which is manifested in the whole transformation of saving grace.

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Fourth, A person is not saved because he prays. Multitudes of people pray who are not saved. Praying is not believing on the Lord Jesus Christ; though the new attitude of belief may be expressed in prayer. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." In no Scripture is salvation conditioned on asking or praying. It is faith in the Saviour Who gave His precious blood a ransom for all. The publican, living and praying before the cross, pleads that God would be propitiated to him a sinner. The issue *now* can only be one of believing that God has been so propitiated.

Fifth, No person is now required to "seek the Lord." In Isaiah 55:6 it is said to Israel, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found," but in the New Testament relationship we are told to believe that the "Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Sixth, It is an error to require repentance as a preliminary act preceding and separate from believing. Such insistence is too often based on Scripture which is addressed to the covenant people, Israel. They, like Christians, being covenant people, are privileged to return to God on the grounds of their covenant by repentance. There is much Scripture both in the Old Testament and in the New that calls that one nation to its long-predicted repentance, and it is usually placed before them as a separate unrelated act that is required. The preaching of John the Baptist, of Jesus and the early message of the disciples was, "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"; but it was addressed only to Israel (Matt. 10:5,6). This appeal was continued to that nation even after the day of Pentecost or so long as the Gospel was preached to Israel alone (Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19. See also Acts 5:31). Paul mentions also a separate act of repentance in the experience of Christians (2 Cor. 7:8-11. See also Rev. 2:5).

The conditions are very different, however, in the case of an unsaved Gentile, who is a "stranger to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world," and equally different for any individual Jew in this age. In presenting the Gospel to these classes there are one hundred and fifteen passages at least wherein the word "*believe*" is used alone and apart from every other condition as the only way of salvation. In addition to this there are upwards of thirty-five passages wherein its synonym "faith" is used. There are but six passages addressed to unsaved Gentiles wherein repentance appears either alone or in combination with other issues. These are: God "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30); "Repent and turn to God" (Acts 26:20); "Repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18); "Repentance and faith" (Acts 20:21); "The goodness of God that leadeth to repentance" (Rom. 2:4); "All should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). That repentance is not saving is evidenced in the case of Judas, who repented and yet went to perdition. It is worthy of note that there

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are twenty-five passages wherein "believe," or "faith," is given as the only condition of Gentile salvation to one passage wherein repentance appears for any reason whatsoever. It would seem evident from this fact that repentance, like all other issues, is almost universally omitted from the great salvation passages, that such repentance as is possible to an unsaved person in this dispensation is *included* in the one act of believing. The statement in 1 Thess. 1:9-10 may serve as an illustration. Here it is said: "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven." This represents one all-inclusive act. Such is the accuracy of the Bible. Had the record been that they turned from idols to God, the act of turning from idols would have stood alone as a preliminary undertaking and would suggest a separate work of repentance. In Acts 11:21 it is stated that many "believed and turned to God." This is not difficult to understand. The born-again person might thus turn to God after believing; but there is no revelation that God is expecting works meet for anything from that which He has termed to be *dead* in trespasses and sins.

To believe on Christ is to see and believe the all-sufficiency of His saving grace. This most naturally includes abandoning all other grounds of hope, and the experiencing of such sorrow for sin as would lead one to claim such a Saviour. It is doubtful if the sinner of "this present evil age" can produce greater sorrow than this, and of what avail would greater sorrow be? No estimate is possible of the wrong that has been done in demanding the unsaved of this age to experience some particular degree of sorrow for sin, over which they could have no control, before they could be assured that the way was open for them to God. Multitudes have been driven into unrealities or into hopeless doubt as they have thus groped in darkness. The good news of the Gospel does not invite men to any sorrow whatsoever, or to works of repentance alone: it invites them to find immediate "joy and peace in believing." Repentance, according to the Bible, is a complete change of mind and, as such, is a vital element in saving faith; but it should not now be required, as a separate act, apart from saving faith.

The Biblical emphasis upon Gentile repentance or any repentance in this age will be more evident when the full meaning of the word "believe" is understood.

Seventh, Moreover, no Scripture requires confession of sin as a condition of salvation in this age. A regenerate person who has wandered from fellowship may return to his place of blessing by a faithful confession of his sin. 1 John 1:9 is addressed only to believers. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The unsaved person must come to God by faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8).

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Believing is related in the Bible to two other actions: "Hear and believe" (Acts 15:7; Rom. 10:14); "Believe and be baptized" (Acts 8:13; Mark 16:16 R. V.). In the latter passage it may be noted that baptism is not mentioned when the statement is repeated in the negative form. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; and he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." The unsaved person is condemned for not believing rather than for not being baptized. Thus *believing* here, as everywhere, is the only condition of salvation.

The far-reaching importance of believing may also be seen in the fact that men are said to be lost in this age because they do not *believe*. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). "He that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16 R. V.). Likewise when the Spirit is said to approach the unsaved to convince them of sin, He is not said to make them conscious or ashamed of their personal transgressions. One sin only is mentioned: "Of sin, because they believe not on me" (John 16:9). "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). The sin sacrifice of the cross is forever satisfying to God. What God does is based on His own estimate of the finished work of Christ. The facts and conditions of salvation are based on that divine estimate rather than upon the estimate of men. That men are not now condemned primarily because of the sins which Christ has borne is finally stated in 2 Corinthians 5:14, 19 R. V.: "We thus judge, that if one died for all, therefore all died"; "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses." The greatest problem for the infinite God was to provide the reconciliation of the cross: the greatest problem for man is simply to *believe* the record in its fulness. To reject the Saviour is not only to refuse the gracious love of God, but is to elect, so far as one can do, to remain under the full guilt of every sin as though no Saviour had been provided, or no sacrifice had been made. No more terrible sin can be conceived of than the sin of rejecting Christ. It gathers into itself the infinite crime of despising the divine mercy and grace, and, in intent, assumes the curse of every transgression before God. Thus men are electing to stand in their own sins before God. It will be seen that this personal choice becomes a part of the final judgment of those who believe not. Jesus said: "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). At the judgment of the wicked dead before the Great White Throne, those standing there are said to be judged "according to their works." There is additional evidence recorded against them at that judgment seat: their names are not written in the Lamb's book of life. This might be taken as evidence that they have rejected the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." It should be added that it was the divine program in this age that the Gospel should be

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preached to every creature. And thus every person should have heard and either accepted or rejected the message of Grace. God alone can righteously judge those who have never heard because of the failure of His messengers.

The Apostle John in his Gospel uses the word "believe" in its various forms about eighty-six times and never related to repentance or human works and merit. This Gospel, which so clearly states the present way of life, is said to be written for a definite purpose: "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

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