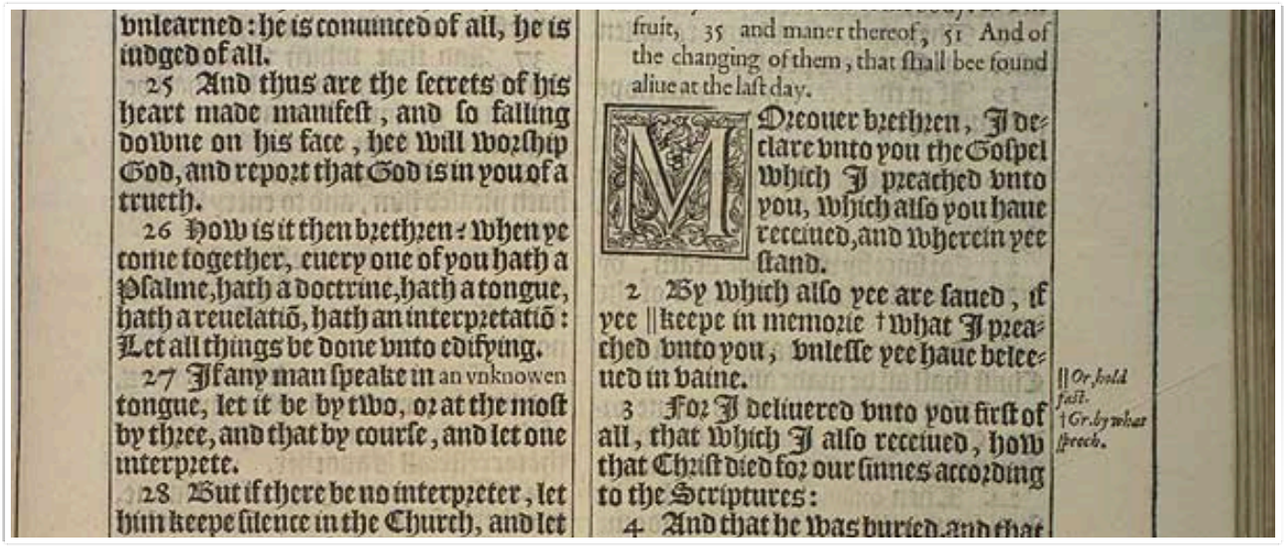
vnlearned: he is conuinced of all, he is
iudged of all.
25 And thus are the secrets of his
heart made manifest, and so falling
downe on his face, hee will worship
God, and report that God is in you of a
trueth.
26 How is it then brethren? when ye
come together, euery one of you hath a
Psalme, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue,
hath a reuelatiõ, hath an interpretatiõ:
Let all things be done vnto edifying.
27 If any man speake in an vnknowen
tongue, let it be by two, or at the most
by three, and that by course, and let one
interprete.
28 But if there be no interpreter, let
him keepe silence in the Church, and let

fruit, 35 and maner thereof, 51 And of
the changing of them, that shall bee found
aliue at the last day.
Moreouer brethren, I de-
clare vnto you the Gospel
which I preached vnto
you, which also you haue
receiued, and wherein yee
stand.
2 By which also yee are saued, if
yee ‖keepe in memorie †what I prea-
ched vnto you, vnlesse yee haue belee-
ued in vaine.
3 For I deliuered vnto you first of
all, that which I also receiued, how
that Christ died for our sinnes according
to the Scriptures:
4 And that he was buried, and that

‖Or, hold fast.
†Gr. by what speech.

What Is The Right Response To The Gospel?

Timothy Berg

Like 0

Sunday, July 02, 2017

In a recent FB conversation, a few questions came up about baptism and the relation of baptism to salvation. I started to paste in a link to what I had written before about the issue, only to realize that I had never finished and published it! We began a previous series of blog posts (and in fact began this blog as a whole) with a post asking the question, "What Is The Gospel?" and sought the answer to that question in Paul's summary of the Gospel in I Cor. 15. (See the post here). I had intended to later write a second post that would treat the remaining Pauline data, and then one that incorporated the rest of the NT data. I have yet to finish those posts (sorry, you know - life.) But I should never have left things hanging simply with the question of what the Gospel *is*, for the Gospel always calls for *response*. It is not information that can simply be shared in an impersonal way. In the interest of a more helpful approach to understanding the Gospel message and how to most faithfully share it, we are separating into two different categories the message of the Gospel and the response it inherently demands. In truth, these can never be separated, but logically, they can helpfully be seen as two separate things. Thus, the question arises, what is the response that the Gospel calls for?

“What Must I Do To Be Saved?”

How does “The Power of God” which saves (Rom. 1:16) become active and effectual in the heart of sinful man? How should a sinner convicted by the Spirit respond to the Gospel? What elements of response are part of Christian conversion? People have proposed a variety of different possibilities, and often they can quote a Scripture passage or two to support their view. For example;

- Repentance? (Acts 3:19; 17:30; 26:20; Luke 13:3)

- Faith? (John 3:16; Acts 16:31)
- Baptism? (Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38)
- Public Profession? (Rom. 10:9-11)
- Receiving the Spirit? (Acts 2:38; 10:44-48 with 11:16-18; Acts 19:2)
- Confessing your sins? (Matt. 3:6)
- Calling on God? (Rom. 10:13)
- Doing good works? (James 2:24)
- Following Jesus? (Matt. 4:19; etc.)

Various of these responses are often mentioned together in the NT. A call to repent and follow him is most prominent in Jesus own preaching ministry. Faith and repentance figure most clearly in Paul's writings. Faith and works figure most prominently in James. Faith and perseverance figure most prominently in Hebrews. Five of these are interwoven throughout the stories in Acts; *Repentance, Faith, Confession, Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and Baptism*. Sometimes only one or two of them are mentioned, but in different pairings. For example, we see conversion where *repentance* is connected to *baptism* in Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:37-38; 11:15-18; 13:24; 19:4. But we see conversion where *faith* is connected to *baptism* in Acts 8:12-13; 8:35-39; 10:43-48; 16:14-15; 16:31-34; 18:8; 19:4-5. We see conversion where *repentance* is connected with *the gift of the Spirit* in Acts 2:38; 10:47-48; 11:16-18. But we see *faith* connected with *receiving the Spirit* in Acts 19:2; Rom. 10:16; Heb. 3:18-19, Acts 10:43-48, and *baptism* connected with *receiving the Spirit* in the stories of the conversions of Cornelius, 11:17; Paul 9:17-18, and Paul again in 22:13-15. We see forgiveness of sins connected to *repentance* in Acts 5:31; 8:22; 26:18-20; Luke 24:47; Luke 3:3; 5:32; 15:7, 10; 17:3-4. But we see forgiveness of sins connected to *faith* in Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; 26:18; 15:8-9, and we also see *baptism* connected to the same forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38; 22:16; and Luke 3:3 and perhaps also Ephesians 5:26. Numerous examples of other combinations could be pointed out. Robert Stein, after careful study of the data in Luke-Acts concludes,

> *"The interconnectedness of repentance, faith, and baptism is witnessed to by the fact that they all lead to the forgiveness of sins. It would certainly be wrong to think that Luke believed these were three separate ways of receiving forgiveness: the "repentance" way, the "faith" way, and the "baptism" way. On the contrary, he understood them as all part of the experience of becoming a Christian.... From what we have seen in Acts with respect to becoming a Christian, five integrally related components took place at the same time, usually on the same day: repentance, faith, confession [of Jesus as Christ and Lord], receiving the gift of the Spirit, and baptism." [1]*

In NT times, these would all have occurred almost simultaneously. That is, all of these responses happened essentially at the same time (with good works and perseverance continuing to manifest themselves), and all were together considered to be part of the one larger package known as conversion. It was only later in the history of the church that we began to separate them in time, and the question of "which of these are an essential part of salvation?" became pressing in some minds. Ideally, the question would be unnecessary, since every conversion would involve each, as it did in the NT. However, because these elements of response are often separated in time, and because some in the history of the church have invested one or another with special significance, often leading to a great deal of strife, the question presses upon us. Since it is God who grants the gift of the Spirit, and since Baptism is always seen as following after faith (Believer's Baptism), we might think of the proper response to the Gospel which makes one a Christian as essentially a single act of *Repentance-Faith-Confession*. However, if we look at the whole of the biblical testimony, we find that there is only one response that is always essential, and which is alone the response to the Gospel message that brings justification to the lost soul. The other responses, while they can be seen as an integral part of faith, can more properly be seen as flowing *out of* that initial response. And that singularly important initial response is *faith*. As The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of 1831, which I was reared on (mostly in its modified BBFI form, and then much later in its sadly distorted HBBC form), states,

"We believe that justification...is bestowed not in consideration of any works of righteousness which we have done; but solely through faith..."

(NHBC, Genesis 15:1; Habakkuk 2:4; John 3:16, 18; 5:24; 6:40, 47; Acts 10:43, 16:31; Romans 3:28; 4:5; 5:1; 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; The Whole Argument of Gal. 2:15-4:7; The Whole Argument of Romans 3:21-4:25).

Jesus healed the woman with the 12-year hemorrhage, and declared to her that, "your faith has saved you" (Matt. 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20). Jesus asked of Jairus, "only believe" (Mark 5:36). Jesus declares the sinful woman forgiven of her sins (Luke 7:47), and explains to her, "Your faith has saved you" (7:50). Jesus heals ten lepers, and only one returns thankful, and finds salvation beyond physical healing, and is told, "your faith has saved you" (Luke 17:19). The blind man is healed, and given spiritual sight, and told, "your faith has saved you" (Luke 18:42). John makes clear that his intent for his Gospel is, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah," and this believing is what brings eternal life (John 20:30-31). Christians in Acts are commonly described as "believers," and their conversion referred to as, "believing," because the most fundamental part of being a Christian is believing the Gospel, thus we are primarily, "those who believe" (Acts 4:4; 8:12; 9:42; 10:43; 11:17, 21; 13:12; 13:39, 48; 14:1, 23; 15:7; 16:31, 34; 17:12, 34; 18:8, 27; 19:4; 21:20, 25; 22:19). Paul likewise most commonly describes his readers as those who believe (Rom. 3:22; 4:11; 10:4, 14; 13:11; I Cor. 3:5; Gal. 3:22; Eph. 1:19; Phil. 1:29; I Thess. 1:7; 2:10, 13; II Thess. 1:10; Tit. 3:8) or have faith (Rom. 1:8, 12, 17; I Cor. 2:5; 15:14, 17; II Cor. 5:7; 8:7; 13:5; Phil. 2:17; I Thess. 3:6; II Thess. 1:3, 4; 3:2; I Tim. 1:5, 19; II Tim. 1:5; Tit. 1:1). In Paul, salvation is for, "those who believe" (Rom. 1:16; 10:8; I Cor. 1:21; 15:2, 11; Eph. 1:13; 2:8-10, and eternal life is granted to those who believe the Gospel (I Tim. 1:16; Col. 2:12) by faith. Paul regularly declares that the imputed righteousness of Christ is granted to those who believe (Rom. 1:17; 4:5, 9, 11, 12, 13; 5:1; 9:30, 32, 10:6; Gal. 3:8, 11, 24). [3]

Westminster Larger Catechism

"Q. 73. How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?

A. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness."

Bridgeway Statement of Faith

"We believe that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world and will, through the work of the Holy Spirit, draw the elect to faith in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We are therefore justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. No ordinance, ritual, work, or any other activity on the part of man is required in order to be saved."

Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solo Christus

The Analogy of Marriage

When do a married couple become married? When does it become official? When the minister pronounces them? When they say I do? When they kiss at the altar? When they consummate the marriage with physical union? All of these things and more will normally take place on the same day, and are all part of what it means to get married. But, in the eyes of the state at least, the thing that actually "seals the deal" is the signing of the marriage license.

The Analogy of Ingredients vs. Active Ingredients

Another way to think of this same idea is with the analogy of active vs. inactive ingredients. Just think of Cocoa Puffs. Lots of ingredients go into Cocoa Puffs. All kinds of different dyes, syrups, etc. But very few of those ingredients are essential to the essence of what it means to be a Cocoa Puff, and Cocoa Puff without some of them, while less than an ideal Cocoa Puff, would be a Cocoa Puff still (though perhaps a discolored one!). I think of the elements of conversion in a similar way. A Half-dozen or so elements can be seen in the NT to be a part of what we call "conversion." And these elements normally all came at basically the same time. But when we break down what is essential and what isn't essential to the essence of justification, only one of those elements is an "active ingredient."

Ingredients
Repentance
Faith
Baptism
Confession
Profession
Active Ingredients
Faith

What is Saving Faith?

Westminster Larger Catechism

> *"Q. 72. What is justifying faith?*
>
> *A. Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation."*

Faith is the same thing as belief (πίστις or pistis) in the NT, often as a verb (To Believe/To have Faith). Reformer Francis Turretin explained that saving faith always has three basic elements; [4]

Content (Notitia)

- Intellectual Understanding

This means that one understands the content of the Gospel message. This element (and sometimes also the next element with it) is sometimes referred to as "Hearing" in the NT, (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 13, 43; Mark 4:9, 23, 33; 8:18; Luke 6:27; Gal. 4:21; Acts 22:9; etc.), so it's sometimes seen as part of faith, and sometimes seen separately as the prerequisite to faith (like in Romans 10:9-11).

Conviction (Assensus)

- Emotional Assent

This is, "to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust, believe" (BDAG 1). Examples of this element being prevalent in "faith" - II Thess. 1:10; 4:14; John 2:22; 4:50; 11:27; 12:38; 14:10; 16:27, 30. This means that one assents to the content of the Gospel message. He or she accepts that it is true that Jesus is God, that Jesus died for their sins, and that Jesus rose from the grave. This is what most people think of when they think of "faith" or "believing." But without the final element, this is not saving faith.

Commitment (Fiducia, Trust, Reliance)

- Volitional Decision

This is, "to entrust oneself to a person in complete confidence, believe (in), trust, with implication of total commitment to the one who is trusted. In [biblical] literature God and Christ are objects of this type of faith that relies on their power and nearness to help, in addition to being convinced that their revelations or disclosures are true." (BDAG 2)

> *"[saving faith] is understood as the acceptance of the Christian Kerygma [the gospel message]. It is thus saving faith which recognizes and appropriates God's saving work in Christ...it is apparent that acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord is intrinsic to Christian faith along with acknowledgment of the miracle of his resurrection, that is, acceptance of this miracle as true. The two statements constitute an inner unity. The resurrection is not just a remarkable event. It is the soteriological fact in virtue of which Jesus became the Lord." (TDNT).*

Examples of this element being prevalent in "saving faith" - Acts 5:14; 16:34; Acts 13:12; 18:8; Titus 3:8; Matt. 27:42; John 3:15-18; 4:39; 6:29, 30; 8:30-31; 12:44; Romans 10:10-14; 2 Tim. 1:12; I Tim. 3:16; I Pet. 1:21; I John 3:23.

This final element is the point of *decision*. It is the volitional element that contains an act of the will. It is the point at which one chooses ultimately to respond to the initiative of God's Spirit with a willingness to rest in Jesus; to entrust one's eternity and salvation to him and him alone. One can come to understand the Gospel message, and believe it is true, yet still refuse to accept it (at least, in my own understanding, with which some would disagree). Someone can know Jesus is Lord, but refuse to submit to him. Faith is not saving faith until it includes this element of *commitment* to Jesus. (See John 2:23-25). However, none of us can "choose" Jesus apart from His work of grace in our hearts (Rom. 3:10). Therefore, in one sense, as Michael Patton has pointed out, it is more appropriate to think of this final element not as "commitment," but as "consent." That is, to recognize as a lost sinner that it is not I that comes to Jesus, but rather that Jesus has been pursuing me the entire time I have run from him. And at the "crisis moment," I don't really commit to him so much as stop running from His pursuit of me. It is, like Paul, to realize that the whole time I have lived apart from Christ, I have been "kicking against the goads," (Acts 22:14), and faith really just means that I stop kicking, and give in to God. This Consent/Commitment (Trust, Reliance) can express itself in many different ways;

- Confessing Christ
- Asking for forgiveness
- Calling on God
- Praying to receive Christ
- Asking Jesus into your heart (but only if there is sufficient Gospel content present before this somewhat misguided prayer)
- Walking an aisle/Raising a hand/Standing

There is no magic formula of expression. Faith means simply to rely on the Person and Work of Christ for salvation, and it can be expressed in many different ways. But Faith that is missing any one of these three elements is deficient, and cannot save.

When we witness, our goal is to see God (who alone can do this work) develop all three of these elements in the sinners heart, so that the sinner places their faith in Christ to save them. And this will inevitably lead us to make the same passionate appeal to the lost that described the apostolic witness. God is (I believe) passionately pursuing every person that you come in contact with. But the means by which He will prick their hearts and redeem the souls of his elect is through the hearing of the Gospel, and He will not accomplish this work until the Gospel reaches them.

"It seems to me that we have a good deal to learn from this courageous challenge [of the early church to the lost]. We find it hard to be both loving and firm. We shy away from confrontation. We are embarrassed to claim Jesus is the only way. It is regarded as intolerant, narrow minded and discourteous. But that is what our forbearers did. And that is what their descendants in many parts of the world are doing today. The rate of conversion to Christ worldwide is something like 100,000 a day, the vast majority of it in the Two-Thirds World. And they preach in the face of entrenched faiths like animism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. A great many perish for their pains. But they insist on Jesus Christ as the only way. They do it because whereas all other faiths represent men and women in search of God, this gospel portrays God in search of us. There is no other religion in the world that maintains anything remotely similar."
(Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*)

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[1] This quote and most of the material in this paragraph is taken from Stein, Robert, "Baptism in Luke-Acts" in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ,* now the best defense of Believer's Baptism in English. Available Here. A similar brief article by the same author treating much the same issue can be found here. Believer's baptism (or credo-baptism) is the position that one must first exercise faith in Christ before being baptized (as opposed to infant baptism, or pedo-baptism). A helpful, gracious discussion of the different evangelical perspectives was held here.

[2] *"We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two ordinances of the church to be observed until the time of Christ's return. They are not a means of salvation but are sacramental channels of God's sanctifying grace and blessing to the faithful in Christ Jesus. Only those who have personally and consciously placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are qualified to receive the sacraments (Matthew 26:26-29; 28:19; Romans 6:3-11; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; 1 Peter 3:21)."* (Bridgeway Statement of Faith)

[3] This paragraph is my attempt to briefly summarize the biblical data in the excellent biblical, historical, and systematic, defense of Sola Fide, or justification by Faith Alone, provided in Tom Schreiner, *Faith Alone-The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught, and Why It Still Matters*, in "The Five Solas" Series. Available here.

[4] See R. C. Sproul elucidate these three elements here. The three-fold division and development was original to Francis Turretin in *Institutes of Elenctic Theology (2 Vols.)*. The division has been expounded in an extremely helpful way with a devotional perspective by Michael Patton in the book, *Increase my Faith*, for which I am deeply grateful to my friend, and which has shaped my own thinking greatly.

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