

# The One Thing That Determines Salvation

By Dr. Curtis Hutson (1934-1995)

*“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” —*

*John 3:36*

What is the determining factor in salvation? Exactly what does a person have to do to be saved? The Bible doesn't leave us in the dark. The answer is found in the Word of God.

In Acts 16:30,31 the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

The jailer was asking, “What one thing is absolutely necessary for my salvation?” and the Bible answer was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In John 3:36 Jesus divides the world into two groups: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Here you have those who are believing on the Son and those who believe not on the Son. Those who are believing have everlasting life, according to the promise

of God; and those who believe not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on them.

In John 3:18, again Jesus divides the world into two groups: “He that believeth on him is not condemned [is not under sentence]: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Here again Jesus says there are two groups: those who believe and those who believe not. Those who believe have the sentence lifted. They are not condemned. And those who believe not are under the sentence of sin, which is the second death, because they are not believing on “the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Galatians 3:26 says, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” This passage plainly says that everybody who is a child of God is a child of God by faith. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Neither time nor space permits me to share with you all the verses that say believing, or faith, is the determining factor in salvation. There are at least 153 verses in the Bible that make believing the determining factor in salvation. Mark 16:16 says, “He that believeth not shall be damned.” So if the Bible is true, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the determining factor in salvation.

I’ve heard or read a number of sermons on “saving faith”; but the Bible never puts the word “saving” before faith. Faith is not the Saviour. Jesus is the Saviour. Faith is an attitude of the soul through which Jesus saves.

The Bible never tells us to believe and be saved. It is always careful to say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” or, “Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” or, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” It’s the Object of faith that makes faith important. Faith in the wrong thing could result in a person’s damnation.

Now since faith is the determining factor in salvation, it is important to know what faith is.

So far as I know, there’s only one definition of faith in the Bible. It’s found in Hebrews 11:1. But while there’s only one definition, there are many illustrations of faith in the Bible. I think the best illustration of faith is found in Hebrews 12:2, where we find the expression, “Looking unto Jesus.”

### **I. Faith Is Not Looking At Jesus But Looking Unto Jesus**

Almost everyone will admit that Jesus Christ existed, that He was a real person. Every time we date a check, we admit the existence of Christ. Faith is not looking at Jesus as a historical personage.

James 2:19 says, “The devils also believe, and tremble.” Even the demons admit the existence of Christ. In Acts 19:15 the evil spirit in the man said, “...Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” No, faith is not looking at Jesus; it’s looking unto Jesus, which is another way of saying depending on Jesus.

Suppose someone cosigned for you to borrow money, and if you didn’t pay, the authorities would put you in jail. And suppose the money came

due and you had nothing with which to pay. You called your cosigner and said, “Bob, I’ve got problems. You know that note you signed for me—well, the money is due, and I can’t pay it.”

Your friend replied, “Don’t worry about it. Just look to me!” He means by that, “Just depend on me. I’ll pay it.”

Jesus Christ says that we owe a sin debt. Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death.” To pay what we owe, we would have to die and go into Hell and stay there forever. But He says, “Don’t worry about it. You just look to Me.”

Isaiah 53:6 says, “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Two thousand years ago God took every sin you have ever committed and every one you will ever commit, and God Almighty laid those sins on Jesus Christ. While Jesus Christ was bearing your sins in His own body, God punished Him in your place to pay the debt that you owe as a sinner.

Jesus uttered seven things while He hung on the cross. Just before dying He said, “It is finished.” Nothing can be added to it, and nothing can be taken from it. It’s complete!

His death on the cross made full payment for your sins. And now He says to you, “Look to Me! Believe that I did die on the cross for you. Believe that I did pay your sin debt and look to Me. Look to Me, and all is well.” Faith is not looking at Jesus; it’s looking unto Jesus, depending on Jesus, relying on Jesus, putting the matter of your salvation in His hands and trusting Him to get you to Heaven.

## II. Faith Is Looking Away From Everything Else and Looking Only to Jesus

Martin Luther translated Hebrews 12:2: “Aufsehen zu Jesus,” which means “looking up to Jesus”; in other words, looking away from everything else and looking only to Jesus. It means that you look away from your works.

How long do you think you’d have to work to earn Heaven? Read the description of Heaven in Revelation 21 and 22. Why, the Bible says the street in Heaven is made of pure gold. The gold is so pure it’s like transparent glass. You can see through it. Earth has no way of refining gold that pure. If you worked ten million lifetimes, you couldn’t begin to earn Heaven. And the Bible says in Ephesians 2:8,9, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

And consider this: If a man worked to stay out of Hell, the very motive would render the work ineffective. He would be working from a motive of fear. According to I Corinthians 13, all work must be motivated by love. Paul said in verse 3, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [or love], it profiteth me nothing.” So if a person worked to stay out of Hell, the motive would render the work ineffective.

A boy once asked an old preacher, “Sir, what can I do to be saved?”

The preacher replied, “Son, you’re too late.”

“What!” exclaimed the boy, “too late to be saved?”

“No,” said the preacher, “too late to do anything. You see, son, Jesus did it all two thousand years ago.”

Now wait a minute! I believe in good works, but not as an instrument of salvation. You don't work to be saved; you work because you are saved.

I would not work my soul to save,  
For that my Lord hath done,  
But I would work like any slave  
For love of God's dear Son!

“Looking up to Jesus” means I look away from my righteousness and only to Jesus. I'm for living right. You ought to live as clean, as moral and as pure as you possibly can. But Titus 3:5 says, “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.” Isaiah 64:6 says, “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.”

Now just a minute, friend. The Bible doesn't say the worst you do is like filthy rags, but the best you do. There is no way that anyone could ever be righteous enough to go to Heaven. You would have to be perfect, and there are no perfect people.

Sam Jones, the Methodist evangelist, once asked a congregation, “Does anyone here know a perfect person?” A lady raised her hand. “Yes.”

“Do you know a perfect person?”

“Well,” answered the lady, “I've never met her, but my husband talks about her all the time. She was his first wife.”

The truth is, no one is perfect. Jesus said, “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17). Faith is looking away from our righteousness and looking only to Jesus. You don’t get better to get saved. You get saved to get better, and you can’t get better until you do get saved.

A stanza from my favorite hymn says:

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.

“Looking up to Jesus” means looking away from our church membership and looking only to Jesus. Everyone who accepts Jesus Christ as Saviour should join a church. But you don’t join the church to become a Christian. Being in the church won’t make a Christian out of you any more than getting into the garage will make an automobile out of you. I’m a church member, and everybody who’s saved ought to join a Bible-believing church. Acts 2:41 says, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

On the other hand, if you’re depending on the fact that you belong to the church to get you to Heaven, you’ll go to Hell through the church. In Matthew 7:22,23 Jesus said, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will

I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

According to the Bible, many will miss Heaven even though they were church members and worked hard, even preaching or prophesying in Jesus’ name. But they will miss Heaven because they did not totally, fully, completely trust Jesus Christ. They trusted their works.

“Looking up to Jesus” means you look away from your baptism and look only to Jesus. I’m for baptism. Every person who accepts Jesus Christ as Saviour ought to be baptized, but baptism is not an instrument of salvation. It’s an outward expression of an inward experience. It’s like putting the wedding band on the finger after you are married. It doesn’t marry you, but it shows everybody that you are married. Being baptized doesn’t save you. It’s an outward symbol telling others that you believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

The man who’s depending on his baptism to get him to Heaven will go to Hell through the baptistry. Now why do I say that? Because John 3:36 says, “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Wait a minute, friend, Jesus Christ says if you’re not depending on, believing, trusting, relying on the Son, you “shall not see life; but the wrath of God” abides on you. The man who’s trusting his church membership or his baptism or his reformation or anything else other than Jesus Christ, will not go to Heaven. John 3:18 says, “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” There is no promise to those who partly believe on Christ and partly on something else.



Someone asked me, “But doesn’t the Bible say in Mark 16:16, ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...’?”

“Yes,” I replied, “but the next expression says, ‘...he that believeth not shall be damned.’” You see, believing is the determining factor, not being baptized. That’s like saying, “He that getteth on the jet plane and sitteth down, shall fly to Jacksonville, Florida; but he that getteth not on the plane, shall not fly to Jacksonville.”

It’s the getting on that gets you there, not the sitting down. But any fool knows if you get on, you ought to sit down. If you don’t sit down, you’ll wish you had sat down before you reach your final destination.

If you’ve trusted Jesus Christ as Saviour, you ought to be baptized. But you should not be baptized thinking that baptism saves you. If you do, you’re not trusting Jesus Christ; you’re trusting baptism. Faith is looking away from everything else and looking only to Jesus Christ.

### **III. Faith Is Not Experiencing a Feeling But Relying on a Fact**

I’ve dealt with people who doubted their salvation because they did not think they had the proper feelings at the time of conversion. There is not a verse in the Bible that tells a man exactly how he has to feel in order to be saved. As a matter of fact, the Bible never says you have to feel any way to be saved. Acts 16:31 says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

I remember when I was first married. We drove back to my wife’s home, and there were some friends in the yard. When we got out of the automobile, someone asked me, “How does it feel to be married?”

I said, "I feel exactly like I did a few minutes ago." But you know something? I was just as married as the fellow who had some great feeling.

Not everyone reacts the same to the same experience. I remember one night I was driving home from a revival meeting when a car overturned in front of us. Several people were badly injured. Some who saw it cried, others ran to help, while some buried their faces in their hands. One lady fainted. Now they all saw the same thing and had the same experience but reacted differently. I've seen people cry when they trusted Christ as Saviour. I've been with others who smiled, while others laughed and some even shouted; but they all had the same experience. They all trusted Jesus Christ as Saviour. No, faith is not having some particular feeling. Faith is depending on a fact.

Now here's the fact: Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ died for you. He bore your sins in His own body. God punished Him in your place to pay the debt that you owe. That's a fact. Whether you ever do anything about it or not, it's still a fact.

What you must do is believe that fact and not only believe in your head that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay your sin debt, but depend on, rely on, trust Him and what He did for your salvation.

If I were not a Christian and wanted to be, I would simply pray this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I do believe that You died for me. And here and now I do trust You as my Saviour. From this minute

on, I'm depending on You to get me to Heaven. Help me to live for You and to be a good Christian.

After praying the prayer, I would accept what God says in the Bible—that I do have everlasting life because I'm trusting Jesus Christ for my salvation: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). I mean I'd accept what God says, whether or not I ever had any feelings.

Once you make that decision and trust Christ, perhaps there'll be some feeling. But whether or not the feeling comes, the Word of God is still true. God cannot lie!

When you trust Him, you will have everlasting life. The determining factor in salvation is believing, trusting, depending on, relying on the Lord Jesus Christ.

F. G. Pentecost said, "Two and two is four—that's mathematics. Hydrogen and oxygen form water—that's chemistry. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved'—that's revelation."

You ask, "How do I know?"

"Well," he said, "the burden of proof lies with you. Put two and two together and see if you don't have four. Put hydrogen and oxygen together and see if you don't have water. And believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and see if you won't be saved."