

HOW IS FAITH OBTAINED?

by Walton Weaver

"The question, "How does faith come?" or "How is faith obtained?" is an important question because of the misconception some have on the subject. The misconception is to be found mostly in the disciplines and confessions of faith more than in the minds of the average church member. It is doubtful that most churchgoers know what is in their disciplines; but if that is the case, they ought to know because they are in effect embracing the doctrinal statements of the denomination's confession of faith just by being a member of that denomination.

If you were to ask the average person in any of the major denominations to define faith and tell you how faith comes, it is doubtful that he would ever come close to explaining it in terms used by most of the doctrinal statements of the major denominations. Only the theologians could have done that, and the rest of the people would have difficulty understanding the statements. They would be totally in the dark on the historical development of the doctrinal statements, and they would most certainly have given no thought to the implications of the statements.

WHAT THE THEOLOGIANS SAY

Do you know anyone, for example, who believes that faith is a gift of God, "wrought in the soul by the regenerating Spirit of God?" Yet that is the way the New Hampshire Confession of Faith tells us that faith comes. Repentance and faith are the *fruits* of regeneration, it says. And what is regeneration? It "consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind; that it is effected in a manner above our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with Divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel. . . ." How does one know when he has been regenerated or born again? By its evidence: "Its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, and faith, and newness of life."

Now who do you know that believes that? Think about it for a minute. What is regeneration? It is the new birth. And according to the definition given above, it consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind, even though the Bible itself does not say that. Only the theologians have given that meaning to regeneration. The Bible does not. The theologians would never have defined regeneration that way had they not begun with the erroneous idea that man is so blinded in heart and mind as result of total depravity that he cannot think a good thought or do a good deed. Until God miraculously gives him a new disposition of mind through a direct working of the Holy Spirit, they say, man can never be disposed to believe. And yet the Bible doesn't say that either. Only the theologians have said that.

But, again, according to the above doctrinal statements, where does faith come in, how is it obtained? They say, faith, as an inseparable grace with repentance, is a "holy

fruit" of regeneration. But remember, the "holy fruits of repentance and faith" are "wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God," according to the creeds. So not only is regeneration effected by the power of the Holy Spirit, but repentance and faith are also wrought into our souls by that same Spirit --- even though we are told that it is done "in connection with Divine truth." The point is, from beginning to end (beginning with regeneration and ending with the "holy fruits" of repentance, and faith, and newness of life), it is all of God, through the direct work of the Holy Spirit in the human soul.

Where does man come in in all of this? He doesn't, if the theologians are right in saying that both regeneration (assuming for the moment that their definition of regeneration is correct---and it is not) and the fruits of regeneration, repentance and faith, are the work of the Holy Spirit in man. Man doesn't come into it until God has done His work, e.g., after he has been regenerated and repents and believes. This work of God is designed "to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel." Of course, according to the theory man is saved at the point of faith without any response of faith on man's part at all. The "voluntary obedience to the gospel" which regeneration, and repentance and faith as fruits of regeneration, are intended to secure has nothing at all to do with salvation. Therefore, it is all of God; man has absolutely nothing to do with his salvation. Someone may say, "Oh, no, man must repent and believe in Jesus as his personal Savior." But according to the theologians, repentance and faith are "wrought in the soul by the regenerating Spirit of God." They are given to man as a gift. They are not responses of man to God, they are the gifts of God to man that produce a voluntary response to the gospel.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

If men were content to speak only where the Bible speaks on the subject of how faith is obtained, such false teaching, and the confusion that results from it, would be easily eliminated. What does the Bible itself say? Note the following, passages from the book of Acts, giving special attention to what is said about the word of God and faith (emphasis by use of italics are mine---ww):

Acts 14:1

“And it came to pass in Iconium that they entered together in the synagogue of the Jews, and so *spake* that a great multitude both of Jews and of Greeks *believed*.”

Acts 15:7

“And when there had been much questioning, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should *hear the word of the gospel*, and *believe*.”

Acts 17:11-12

“Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they *received the word* with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so. Many of them therefore *believed*; also of the Greek women of honorable estate, and of men, not a few.”

Acts 18:8

“And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, *believed in* the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians *hearing believed*, and were baptized.”

The Bible student should not be surprised that the examples in the book of Acts show us that faith was obtained by hearing the word of God preached. When Jesus sent out the apostles, He commanded them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk. 16:15). Why? The next verse tells us: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." When Jesus says, "Go preach," and then follows it with the statement that the one who believes and is baptized shall be saved, it is clear that He is telling us that the faith that men have will be gained through the preaching that is done. There is no hint anywhere in any of these verses that faith was, or would be, wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit in connection with Divine truth. Rather, it was the Divine truth preached that produced faith.

Paul is so clear on this matter: "And how shall they preach except they be sent? even as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things! But they did not all hearken to the glad tidings. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). Paul had not been trained by the theologians of our day! He did not know enough to say, "So belief cometh by the working of the Holy Spirit in our souls, in connection with Divine truth"! He only knew enough to say that faith comes by hearing the word of Christ! Which will you accept, Paul or the theologians?

Other passages are just as clear on this subject. As Jesus prayed to the Father, He said, "I have given them thy word" (Jn. 17:14), meaning He had given the word of the Father unto the apostles. He said a little later in the same prayer, "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that *believe on me through their word*" (17:20, emphasis mine--ww)). Note that, please: *believe on me through their word*. Did Jesus not know that faith is "wrought in the soul by the regenerating Spirit, of God"? No, it took the theologians to figure that out! Paul asks, "Who then is Paul or Apollos but ministers by whom you believed?" (1 Cor. 3:5). How were they ministers through whom the Corinthians were made believers? Let Paul answer: "Now I made known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:1-2). How were they made believers, how was faith obtained? By *receiving* what Paul *preached* unto them.

Need we say more? John said the things that he wrote were "written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31-32). Surely one would have to have help to misunderstand this passage and the others we have read. The Bible is clear: faith comes by hearing the word of God; not by hearing the word of God plus something else, or something else plus hearing the word of God. It is this "something else" that we do not read about in the Bible.