

Faith Comes by Hearing

By David Pharr

“Faith” is the trust that results from believing true testimony. The gospel (good news) of Christ is the message concerning him, his requirements and his promises. We can know the message because he appointed men as his “witnesses” to testify what is the truth (Lk. 24: 46-48); Acts 1:8, 2:32; 10:39-42). The “preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (1 Pet. 1:12). Though people may use the term “faith” in various, and often careless ways, the only saving faith is that which comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

“Hearing” does not suggest a mere listening or even mere thoughtful consideration. Rather, it is being made aware of essential truth and trusting that it is accurate. One may hear it from an explanation of the Scriptures (Acts 8:30ff) or by his own reading of the word of God (Eph. 3:4; Luke 1:1ff). It never comes by superstitions, intuitions, or feelings.

That “faith comes by hearing” is demonstrated in every conversion story in the book of Acts. Jesus had said that “repentance and remission of sins” would begin to be preached in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost Peter and the other apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, used the prophecies of the Old Testament and their own testimony as Christ’s witnesses to convince a great audience “that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” The text continues: “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart...” (Acts 2:36f. It was hearing the truth that turned them from being ignorant unbelievers into convicted sinners. They were told to “repent and be baptized... Then they that gladly received his word [hearing of faith] were baptized...” (Acts 2:38-41).

The ministry of Stephen in Samaria gives the same emphasis. Philip preached Christ “and the people with one accord gave heed unto the things which Philip spake, hearing, and seeing the miracles which he did” (Acts 8:5f; cf. vs. 12). Later in this encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch Philip explained the meaning of scripture and “preached unto him Jesus.” When the man heard what Philip taught, he was convinced to believe and obeyed in baptism (Acts 8:26-37).

Even Saul of Tarsus had to be “told” the Lord’s message (Acts 9:6). It is significant that Christ did not plant the truth directly (miraculously) into Saul. It was necessary that he hear the message from Ananias (Acts 22:12-16).

Peter was sent to Cornelius to tell him “words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14. The entire account is found in Acts chapters ten and eleven. However, it is in Peter’s later recall of the events that a special point is made

about how Cornelius' faith came by hearing. Peter said, "Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (Acts 15:7).

Luke, in the history of Acts, records the preaching in Philippi that led to the conversion of Lydia. He says she "heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14). That she "attended" to what she heard means that she was receptive and obedient, being baptized.

The jailer at Philippi asked what to do to be saved. The first thing he was told was that he must "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." In order to believe, however, one must first hear. "How then shall they call on him whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). Thus, the text says, "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord..." (Acts 16:30-34).

In the great commission Jesus had said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." What must not be overlooked is how this connects with the preaching of the gospel. To believe one must hear and it is the gospel the apostles preached that must be heard (Mark 16:15-16). The way the Bible records the conversion of people at Corinth shows a perfect correlations with what Jesus said in the Great Commission. "Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8 emp. Added). Later Paul would remind them of "the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have [heard and believed]" (1 Cor. 15:1).

In Acts 19 Paul had to explain to men at Ephesus what was the difference between the baptism of John the Baptist and baptism in the name of Christ. "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5). It should be noted that others through the centuries and today may not have been scripturally baptized because they have not heard the truth on the matter.

"But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).