

Our Christian Faith



Holy

Yahweh

Hell

Law

Preservation

FAITH

When we hear the word "faith" we most naturally think of what someone believes. The religious system a person subscribes to with all its teachings and practices. That is certainly a good starting point and a valid use of the term, and it tells us that faith must have content. One always believes in something even if they claim to believe in "nothing." Faith presupposes that there is information underlying one's beliefs. As Paul tells the Romans, "Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word about Christ."¹ As Christians we maintain that faith is not self-generated. Rather, it is a product of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel message,² to create the gift of faith and trust in Jesus Christ where none had existed before.³ It is an enlightenment, a turning on the light where formerly only darkness and ignorance had reigned in the heart and mind.⁴

It is tragic that in our pluralistic society, where all religions are declared to be equally valid and valued, that "faith" has been reduced to a random shot in the dark, a best guess, a blind leap, where my random leap and your random leap are equally valid simply because WE made them, and because I'm no better than you and you're no better than me, then our faiths must also be equally valid too, where one is not better than the other or even none at all. But while popular and seemingly tolerant, such a notion of faith is deceptive and self-destructing. Here again our selfish sinful minds insist on bringing our self-worth into an arena where one's worth is totally irrelevant, because when taking a leap into the dark, what matters is not WHO makes the jump, but who or what is waiting on the other side. To put it concretely, when stepping off a skyscraper it most certainly matters whether that step is into the safety of a dark stairwell or off the edge!

This is why the gospel message is entirely necessary for our salvation. It is God's voice personally calling us to trust in Christ. He alone is the way to the Father;⁵ he is the source of God's grace and truth;⁶ he is our substitute and Savior in whom we have the forgiveness of sins⁷ and eternal life.⁸ Rightly so our Lutheran Confessions state that faith must have an object, a source of confidence and certainty. Jesus Christ and his work of salvation revealed in God's holy Word is our certainty, but this faith of ours is not some philosophical speculation. It is based on the reality of God's active intervention in recorded human history—most amazingly and concretely in Christ's suffering and death for the sins of the world and his rising again from the grave. Ours is not a random shot in the dark. It is God graciously telling us, "Here is the way to safety and salvation."

From all this, it is clear that faith must contain knowledge, but it is also more than simply information, knowing a collection of facts and teachings. Indeed, one could have the whole Bible memorized word per word and letter per letter, but all that data does not save them if they do not TRUST what it says. The clearest proof of this is the devil and all his demons. They know first-hand the reality of God's existence, his glory and power and might,

¹ Romans 10:17 (NIV 2011).

² Romans 1:16-17.

³ Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 12:3.

⁴ Cf. Isaiah 9:2.

⁵ John 14:6.

⁶ John 1:14,17.

⁷ Ephesians 1:7.

⁸ John 3:16.

and yet they chose to rebel and not believe. All their information about God did them no good because their will rejected him.

But here we come to a paradox, something that looks like a logical contradiction. The Bible reveals to us that while people have the awful capacity to reject God and deny his plan of salvation in Jesus and leap headlong off the edge into nothing,⁹ we DO NOT have the capacity to accept Jesus Christ of our own free will,¹⁰ and the reason why we lack that capability is because we were all conceived in sin.¹¹ Sin was passed on from one generation to the next, going back to sinful Adam and Eve,¹² and as a result we arrive in this world spiritually dead and powerless.¹³ The Holy Spirit must perform the miracle of raising us to new life through the gospel message that Jesus Christ has done everything necessary to rescue us from sin, death, and hell.

For that reason, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that faith is the opposite of works in that faith relies on another. He writes, "To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."¹⁴ We are not saved by anything that we do, nor because of our self-worth, but because of Christ's infinite worth and what he has done for us. That makes the Christian faith one of a kind and gives us a personal confidence and peace in Jesus that nothing else can give and no one can take away.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:



- 1.) How does the knowledge and trust that you are saved by God through faith in Christ give you relief and joy?
- 2.) How does faith in Jesus change how you live and why you live?
- 3.) The Holy Spirit has given you spiritual life and eternal salvation through the gospel message. What does that make you want to do with it?



PRAYER:



Dear God, thank you for giving me faith to believe that Jesus is my all-sufficient Savior. May this gift always be my greatest and most precious treasure. Keep me in this saving way my whole life through and make me a messenger of the same good news that has saved me. Amen.

⁹ Luke 13:34; Acts 7:51.

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 12:3.

¹¹ Psalm 51:5.

¹² Romans 5:12-14.

¹³ Ephesians 2:1-3.

¹⁴ Romans 4:5.