

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 17: Faith

Last time: *Conversion must begin with God's effectual calling in our lives. Our sinful nature means that he must change our hearts. Confusing the order of salvation can lead to misunderstanding the gospel.*

Conversion

Regeneration (God's work of effectually calling us) is distinguished from Conversion (our response in repentance and faith).

Is conversion our act or God's act?

Michael Horton writes, *"In regeneration, we are passive recipients of God's grace...In conversion, however, those now quickened by God's Spirit through the gospel respond in repentance and faith, though these too are the gift of God."*

WCF 14 On Saving Faith

14.1 The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.

It is not God who believes in Christ, we do. We are active. The Holy Spirit enables us to act, but we must act. Repentance and Faith are commands.

I. Faith

Faith is putting your trust in what is said on the testimony of another.

- **Philippians 1:27** *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,*
- **2 Corinthians 4:13** *Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak,*
- **2 Thessalonians 2:13** *But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*
- **John 4:50** *Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.*

Faith isn't merely the ability to believe things that are hard to believe. It isn't a general trust that God exists or even that he will be good to me.

It is a response to the testimony of the Word of God concerning Jesus' work.

Christian Faith has...

- An Object: Christ
- A Content: Atoned for Sin
- A Subject: for me

WCF 14.2a. *By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come.*

Saving faith is completely passive. It is passive with respect to God. But, it then becomes active in our obedience to the commands and promises of God.

WCF 14.2b *But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.*

Faith is more than knowledge or assent. You can believe in unicorns without needing to trust one at any point in your life. The Greeks believed in the existence of their gods, but did not need these gods.

Three Aspects of Faith

1. Ascent to the Truth (act of the intellect)

What truth do we ascent to?

- **Romans 5:1** *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- **1 John 1:8–9** *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
- **Romans 2:23** *You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.*
- **Ephesians 2:8** *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*

2. Receiving

This is an act of the will. It is a conviction that I am a sinner and Christ is the only suitable savior for me.

This moves beyond learning the facts. Children can understand and state that Jesus died for sins. Faith receives that truth personally.

3. Resting

Conviction is important but is not faith until it moves to reliance.

C.R. Vaughan's Letter to Robert Dabney:

You want more faith. Do you remember, in the stress of your trial, how faith comes? Let me remind you, although you know it. You know we are sanctified through the truth.

Sanctification is just the growth of the particular graces of the spirit, of which faith is one. Just here is where Christians make a great mistake. When they want more faith, or want to know whether the faith they have is the right sort of faith, instead of looking at the things to be believed, they turn their eyes inward and scrutinize their faith. They want to see something in their faith to trust in, something that will certify their faith. Of course, self-examination is all right, but not when it practically substitutes faith for our Lord, grace and righteousness. Even a great theological thinker is as apt to make that mistake when he has come into the practical stress of this awful world as a common Christian.

Now, suppose a traveler comes to a bridge, and he is in doubt about trusting himself to it. What does he do to breed confidence in the bridge? He looks at the bridge; he gets down and examines it. He doesn't stand at the bridge-head and turn his thoughts curiously in on his own mind to see if he has confidence in the bridge. If his examination of the bridge gives him a certain amount of confidence, and yet he wants more, how does he make his faith grow? Why, in the same way; he still continues to examine the bridge.

Now, my dear old man, let your faith take care of itself for awhile, and you just think of what you are allowed to trust in. Think of the Master's power, think of his love; think how he is interested in the soul that searches for him, and will not be comforted until he finds him. Think of what he has done, his work. That blood of his is mightier than all the sins of all the sinners that ever lived. Don't you think it will master yours? Think of his great righteousness: will it not avail for all you hope to gain? That great work is enough; it needs not to be supplemented; it meets every demand. It warrants you to come into the King's very presence, assured of welcome, because you can come in the name of the King's Son...Think of the Master when you want your faith to grow...

*Your brother,
C.R. Vaughan*

Objective Faith

14.3 This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory: growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

We are not saved by the quality of our faith, but by the object of our faith. Faith always looks outside of itself.

Luke 17:5-6 *The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" [6] And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.*

Ordinary means

14.1 The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.

How are these outward and ordinary means of grace (Word, sacrament, and prayer) different than methods you use to strengthen your faith?

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: Faith is a gift of God working in us. It becomes our response to God's act of salvation where we ascent, receive, and rest to the truths of the gospel.