



1. Understanding my faith

The essence of saving faith

Introduction

How would you best define saving faith?

- Learning objective facts about God **Faith has to be in something; saving faith has to be in the truth about God. but simply learning about what the Bible says doesn't mean I believe it.**
- Passive assent that what the Bible says is truth **Agreeing that Jesus died for the sins of the world is good, but am I putting my trust in him?**
- Confidence that God will keep his promises **Confidence adds a personal dimension to faith. But do I know what those promises are? Are they first article promises or 2nd article promises?**
- Trust in what I cannot see or prove **Yes, faith is essentially trust in something I can't see or prove (e.g. God, grace, heaven), but also gravity, love, fidelity.**

What do you like/not like about each definition? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each statement?

Saving faith involves three components: knowledge, assent and trust.

The Scriptures Say

1. Many look at faith merely as the knowledge of facts. Because we base our faith on certain facts, it would be easy to think that this is all faith truly is. With the following passages, show that the essence of faith really is more. It is not simply *learning*.

Hebrews 11:1 Faith is **confidence** in what we hope for and **assurance about what we do not see.** **Trust (heart) in something we can't see.**

Romans 4:19-21 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet **he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God,** but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

What did Abraham believe? What was Abraham's faith in? God's promise that an old man was going to have a son.



2. Faith is not centered in knowledge. Although we can see evidence of our faith in our lives, it is not centered in what we do either. Faith is primarily a matter of the heart. Show, from the following Bible passages, how God describes faith as a matter of the heart.

Ephesians 3:17 . . . so that **Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.**

Romans 10:10 **It is with your heart that you believe** and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Why is it important to understand that faith is in the heart, not the brain? (Babies can believe without having a conscience knowledge; cf also elderly, sleeping)

3. No one has ever been argued into believing. Although logic is used as we portray the story of God's love, logic does not change a person's will when it comes to faith. What do the following Bible passages say about the establishment and strengthening of faith?

1 Corinthians 12:3 I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," **except by the Holy Spirit.** **What's the point?** Faith is not a human decision; it is worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel in Word and Sacrament.

1 Corinthians 2:12,13 **What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand** what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.

The creation and strengthening of faith are the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

The Principles

Because the Bible clearly teaches the following truths . . .

1. I believe that faith is trust or confidence in the unseen.
2. I believe that faith is a matter of the heart.
3. I believe that saving faith is trusting in Jesus for my salvation.
4. I believe that the creation and strengthening of faith are primarily the work of the Holy Spirit.

Others teach differently: *Presbyterian* (August 16, 1928): "We hold that just as by birth a child becomes a member of a particular family, and just as by birth a child becomes a citizen of a particular state, so by birth the child of believers becomes a member of the church of Jesus Christ. When therefore, we baptize a child, we do it not to make it a member of a church, but as a formal recognition of its birthright membership, so that the question that confronts such a child when it comes to years of discretion is not whether it will join, but whether it will leave the church of Christ."

Focus

Like a Newborn

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:2,3).

Because faith is Spirit-worked, it is important to recognize that the only way it will grow is also through spiritual means. That is a function of the gospel. For those who wish to become stronger in faith, regular use of the gospel in Word and sacrament is required. Peter urges us to be greedy newborns who cannot get enough so that we grow up!

What Does This Mean?

1. Lutheran theologians have defined faith as knowledge, assent, and confidence. What role do each of these components play in saving faith? (cf. Charles Blondin) 1. Do you know what this wheelbarrow is for? Yes, you're going to push it across the falls. 2. Do you believe I can actually accomplish this task? Yes, we believe you. (Assent) 3. Who wants to get into the wheelbarrow? Silence. Faith is ultimately trust. (Confidence)

2. What happens if one of those elements is missing?

Without knowledge, it becomes blind faith.

Without assent, it is purely knowledge of facts (even Satan has this).

Without confidence, I'm not applying the truth to myself—it means I will never be sure.

3. Agree or disagree: “Justifying faith is nothing but trust in the divine mercy which forgives sins for Christ’s sake.” **Who would disagree with that? RC. Why?** Council of Trent, Session VI, Canon XII: “If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing but trust in the divine mercy which forgives sins for Christ’s sake, or that we are justified by this faith alone, let him be damned.”
4. Knowing what you do about the essence of faith, why is the Holy Spirit’s work so critical to faith’s establishment and strengthening?

Romans 10:16 Not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” **The point? Faith is not automatic, it’s not genetically passed down. It can be lost, or never gained.**

2 Corinthians 4:3,4 Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **Who keeps people from believing? The God of this age: The Devil**

1 Corinthians 2:14 The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

The natural man and the world in which we live reject true faith. Only the Holy Spirit can overcome this.

5. Agree or disagree: If I want a stronger faith, I should pray to God to make it stronger.

Yes, pray, but also feed it with the gospel. Human reason destroys faith, as does unrepentant sin, lack of nourishment, etc.

6. Agree or disagree: A person who knows the Bible well enough to answer questions of fact will always be a believer.

Disagree. That would be knowledge but not necessarily assent or confidence. Cf. James 2:19; Luke 4:34

James 2:19

19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

Luke 4:34

34 “Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

What This Means for Me

- Take a few moments to write a short statement expressing the way these truths shape what you believe and how you live.