

Heidelberg Catechism 20-21 – Faith: Necessity and Nature

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: How you catch em is how you will keep em! That is the sage 贤明的 warning from a fellow minister. He was warning about those who throw out gimmicks 花招 – like bait to fish - to bring people in to the church without requiring them to have faith in Jesus Christ. But not only gimmicks. There are others who use polished speech, flowery 华丽的 language, and human comforts to bring in people into the church. Others lighten the gospel where it is not so strong in condemning sinners. Today we will take some time to examine the necessity of faith and the nature of faith, knowing that without faith in Jesus Christ, no one is able to be truly saved.

Our headings are: The Necessity of Faith, and the Nature of Faith.

Our goals are: That you will thank God for the gift of faith, that you will work to strengthen your faith by receiving God's Word, and that you adjust your evangelism to make sure the demands of God's Words are clear to the hearer...knowing that they can only come to God through true faith.

20 Q. ARE ALL MEN SAVED THROUGH CHRIST JUST AS ALL WERE LOST THROUGH ADAM?

A. No. Only those are saved who by true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all his blessings.

The Necessity of Faith

1. God saves no one unless he has true faith in the works of Jesus Christ: that he lived, that he died, and that he lives for him.

That strong belief with confident hope in Christ and his work is a must...

John 3:16"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

2. Further, you must continually show this faith in your life. Faith is not a one time event. Faith is not a ceremonial thing.

Faith is not an abstract idea. It is real. And this faith must continue. This real faith is not the "faith" that is used to represent a system of belief, like you might say: "We belong to the Christian Faith.") You are bound to have true, living, active, continuous faith in God.

3. Consider how God judged Israel because they thought that faith was inherited...passed on naturally from father to son...instead of being individually required.

Romans 11: 16 ...and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

God did not spare those who did not remain in the faith. And they could not plead for salvation based on who their earthly father was ...or who their ancestors were ...or by the fact that they were circumcised. They had to have faith for themselves – faith in Christ and his work...a continuous active faith.

4. This means the noblest man, or the most charitable woman, or the boy who helps his parents, or the girl

who speaks the truth to her friends, that nice father-in-law who remembers your birthday cannot enter into heaven on account of those good actions. Do you realize that all, every single one of your non-Christian friends and acquaintances, even those born in a Christian home, will go to hell...that is...unless they have faith in Jesus Christ? That nice old lady in the next cubicle at work...that neighbor, who seems kind and friendly and picks up your garbage can when the garbage men throw it on the road, will go to hell...and stay in the eternal fires of hell... There are no shortcuts. There is no other way to please the true God but by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Nature of Faith

21 Q. WHAT IS TRUE FAITH?

A. True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel.

that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation.

1. First, what is this true faith that you must have in order to receive salvation? True faith is **knowledge, and conviction** that God's Word is true.

John 17: 3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

The word "know" here means to love or to experience. It means "to know in the heart" – to have "intimate knowledge." This results in a firm conviction that Christ died for sins. We can say then that faith believes to be true what you may not be able to see...like your salvation...and like how God created the world...You believe with all your heart that God created and recreated though you did not physically see any of it. You are convinced that it is true. Consider also our memory passage from Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

It means you are absolute belief in Christ – that he saved you.

2. Second, true faith is **deep-rooted assurance (you are convinced – the conviction continues)** that your sins are forgiven and you have been made forever right with God. This is why we say that "faith" is the hand that receives. And faith in a continuing action. It is nothing you have done but what you have received...just like father Abraham. He was firmly convinced by God's promises and waited for God's blessings. Look at how Paul describes Abraham's faith!

Romans 4: 18 who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." 19 And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. 20 He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

And now look at how this faith is expressed in your personal assurance!

Hebrew 4: 14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

3. Third, that true faith is worked in you by God **through his Holy Spirit** and none else. The Holy Spirit moves you to know, be convinced of, and be assured that Christ died for your sins. This further testifies that faith is a gift...that the Holy Spirit works... as man naturally would not want to believe in God, nor is man able to believe in God. No one is able to even call God "Father" unless the Holy Spirit works in him.

Matthew 16: 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Jesus further explained this in light of his conversation with Nicodemus that a man is passive in his birth, just as you were in your new birth. He opens men's hearts as he did to Lydia. Acts 16:14.

John 3: 5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

4. Fourth, true faith is worked by the Holy Spirit in you **through the Word of God.** No other book contains the way of salvation. The Holy Spirit does not use any other book. If someone does not believe the Word of God, the Holy Bible, they are bound for hell.

Romans 1: 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness

of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Romans 10: 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1Corinthians 1: 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

I use some extra passages here because this is very important when you speak to those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. This is why it is essential that you not say: If God is going to save anyone he will do it without the use of means. God is pleased to use you to bring his Word to the hearer and the Holy Spirit is then pleased to use that word to bring new life to the lost. God uses his Word to kindle the fire that results in salvation. And this is why he trained men to do the job. He sent out 12, then 70, then 500, then all his disciples throughout the world to preach – and they were to preach the full Gospel, which is found from Genesis to Revelation! (Luke 24)

One more note on this: You will see that the teaching of God's Word takes time. This is often a long process. You have to work to see men engrafted into the kingdom. Don't be confused by what you saw at Pentecost. That was exceptional. Those 3000 who believe that day were already knowledgeable of much of the Bible... from their youth. They went to Jerusalem to worship! And maybe one last, last thing: The Gospel must be pointedly preached to achieve the effect. It must never be watered down as it would result in weak faith.

5. True faith is the common characteristics of all who believe. And that true faith comes from Jesus

Christ alone. Let me give you a couple of useful passages you can read at home or use to prove the object of your faith. Romans 3:21-26 and Ephesians 2:10. Also:

Galatians 2: 16 "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

God would not have given anyone of you faith if Christ had not perfectly obeyed and suffered for you. It is because of your restoration to favor with God that he is pleased to give you faith so you can receive the precious work of Jesus Christ. When you are grafted into the vine you will be nourished.

Romans 1: 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

6. This faith that you have as a gift of God is effective forever. It saves you and it sanctifies you.

Conclusion:

Everyone needs faith to be saved. Faith receives the work of Christ. Faith comes from hearing the Word and the working of God's Holy Spirit. There is no other way of salvation.

Brothers and Sisters:

1. Thank God for what you have – a true faith that makes you grab hold of Christ's work and makes you spiritually rich... give you heaven as your home with treasures that not even Revenue Canada can't take!
2. Continue to listen to the Word of God read and explained and pray that the Holy Spirit will strengthen your faith.
3. Let the Gospel go out and pray that the Holy Spirit will work through the Word as you speak it. Of course, if someone will not listen, don't use force. Matthew 7: 6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces." But you must make every effort to let the Gospel go out so nice and nasty people will be saved.

Finally, if you are not a Christian... you can have one definite expectation... you will die in your sins and go to hell. If you want to be a Christian and have hope, receive what Christ has done for sinners... receive his life and his death.