

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	12		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	II Corinthians 4:1-18		
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I Believe: What Is Saving Faith?

7. Lord's Day

Question 21. What is true faith?

Answer: True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, (a) but also an assured confidence, (b) which the Holy Ghost (c) works by the gospel in my heart; (d) that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, (e) are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. (f)

(a) James 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. (b) 2 Cor. 4:13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; Eph. 2:7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Eph. 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. Eph. 3:12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Gal. 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. Heb. 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. Heb. 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. Heb. 11:9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: Heb. 11:10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Heb. 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. James 1:6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Matt. 16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Phil. 1:19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, Rom. 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Rom. 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Rom. 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. Rom. 10:10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Rom. 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing

by the word of God. Rom. 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, Rom. 4:18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. Rom. 4:19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: Rom. 4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; Rom. 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Rom. 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; (c) Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Matt. 16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 2 Cor. 4:13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; John 6:29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Phil. 1:19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, Acts 16:14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. (d) Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. Rom. 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. 1 Cor. 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. Acts 10:44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. Acts 16:14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. (e) Rom. 1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. Gal. 3:11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. Heb. 10:10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Heb. 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. Gal. 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (f) Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Rom. 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Rom. 5:19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Luke 1:77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Luke 1:78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.

What does it mean to "believe?" Often we are merely using the word in a *hope so* fashion or as a way of affirming something that meets with our approval. We *believe* in that which we consider worthy of our confidence (i.e., "I believe in the Republican party" or "I believe that Chicago Bulls will win the NBA Championship"). But what about our *beliefs*? What about those things in which we put our trust? What is our *belief* based on? We often labor under the illusion that somehow our individual beliefs are created by sheer volition on our part. Do our beliefs correspond with reality? People believe all kinds of things with little or no evidence upon which to base their beliefs. *Blind faith*, in this sense, is all too common. Genuine faith, the kind of faith the Bible commends, is never blind. It may be weak, but it is never described as a leap in the dark. "We cannot," observed Warfield, "be said to believe or to trust in a thing or person of which we have no knowledge – of course, we cannot be said to believe or to trust the thing or person to whose worthiness of our belief or trust assent has not been obtained. And equally we

cannot be said to believe that which we distrust too much to commit ourselves to it.”¹ As we read our Bible, the importance of faith cannot be over stressed. We are told in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God. In John 6:29 Jesus says that God requires faith and in I John 3:23 faith is something God commands of us.

I. FAITH: ITS BIBLICAL DESCRIPTION

Various words are used in the Scripture to capture the meaning of faith. We read of trusting God or His Word, of seeking and finding shelter in His name, of looking to His mercy or of staying upon Him and cleaving to Him. There are three common Hebrew words for faith in the Old Testament and two Greek words in the New Testament.

- A. HE’MĪN is the hiphil form of ‘ĀMAN (from which we get “amen”). The word has a wide semantic range, but its root meaning is *firm* or *reliable* and conveys the idea of *confidence* in a person or a message.² The verb form is used in Genesis 15:6 where we are told that “Abram *believed* the LORD and He credited it to him as righteousness.”
- B. BĀTHACH is the general word use to express trust. It means to confide in, or lean upon in the sense of reliance.³ This is captured in Psalm 25:2 where we read: “In you I *trust*, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame.”
- C. CHĀSĀH means to seek refuge, flee for protection. Thus it is an expression that figuratively means to put trust or hope in God. To seek shelter or refuge stresses insecurity and self-helplessness. It emphasizes the defensive or external aspect of salvation in God, the unchanging One in whom we find shelter.⁴ Psalm 57:1 reads: “I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.”
- D. The two most frequently used words for faith in the New Testament are the noun *Pistis* and the verb *Pisteuein*. *Pistis* is used in two different senses. First it is used *subjectively* of the act of believing (cf. Romans 3:28). This is captured by the Latin expression *fides qua creditur*, “the faith by which we believe.” Second, *Pistis* is often used *objectively* of what is believed – it is descriptive of the contents of faith, *fides quae creditur*, “the faith which is believed,” (cf. Jude 3 and Galatians 1:23). “The verb *Pisteuein*,” writes Hoekema, “may mean (1) to think to be true (Matthew 24:23), or (2) to accept the message given by God’s messengers (Acts 24:14). Most characteristically, however, it means (3) to accept Jesus as the Messiah, the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation (John 3:16). In this sense faith includes more than just believing a message to be true; It also involves trusting in Christ, resting on him, and leaning on him.”⁵

II. FAITH: ITS THEOLOGICAL CHARACTER

Recently the Evangelical world has undergone an earthquake of seismic proportions. The document “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium” carried the signature of a number of high profile evangelicals. In order to establish a common theological base upon which to bring about unity, the document quietly dispensed with the Reformation’s key doctrine, *sola fide* – justification by faith alone. Evangelicals have historically *always* (sometimes in war-like tones) maintained the critical importance of *sola fide*. It seems that in the minds of many professed Evangelicals that this is no longer an important issue. Why disrupt the need for unity over the word *alone*? Again this comes back to the true nature of faith. The historic Roman Catholic position defines faith as mere credence and docility. In other words, assenting to the teachings of the mother church.⁶ The Reformers, on the other hand, argued that saving faith has three inseparable elements.

- A. Knowledge. True faith rests on knowledge. *Notitia* was the term used to denote this. How much knowledge is necessary? This is not easy to say – but in terms of saving faith we *must* have enough knowledge to realize that we are, in fact, under judgment for our

- sins and that only Christ, the God-man, can save us by His death, burial and resurrection. In the beginning this knowledge may be very slender, but it will grow (cf. I Peter 3:18).
- B. Assent. This is the activity of accepting and affirming the truth of what we have come to know. *Assensus*, as far as the Reformers were concerned, involved the whole person – and not merely a kind of token assent that simply agrees with a vague notion of truth.
- C. Trust. This is, as Warfield has noted, the most important element in the Reformers’ understanding of faith.⁷ *Fiducia* was indeed Calvin’s favorite word for defining Biblical faith – which looks away from our selves and our efforts and looks only to Christ. This trust is at once reverential (Exodus 15:31) and rests in loving confidence that God is trustworthy in what He promises (Colossians 1:23).

CONCLUSION: Perhaps no better picture of true faith has found its way into our understanding than that given us by Augustus Toplady in his justly famous hymn, “Rock of Ages.” “*Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to thy cross I cling; Naked, come to thee for dress, Helpless, look to thee for grace.*”

ENDNOTES

¹ B.B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies* (rpt. Presbyterian & Reformed, 1968), p. 402.

² Cf. the lengthy discussion by Alfred Jepsen in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* I, eds. G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 298-309.

³ Cf. R.B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 104.

⁴ Cf. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* I, eds. R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke (Moody, 1980), p. 308.

⁵ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Eerdmans, 1984), p. 134. This is an outstanding book. It deals with the doctrine of salvation in a most comprehensive way and is written in a style that the ordinary Christian can easily understand.

⁶ The official position of Rome is set forth in the Canons and Decrees of The Council of Trent (1563). Faith is assenting to God’s truth as defined by the church. However, since the common Christian cannot understand all the teachings of the church, he is only required to give assent to what the church teaches. Cf. *The Creeds of Christendom With a History and Critical Notes* II, ed. Philip Schaff (rpt. Baker, 1983), pp. 77-206. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori Publications, 1994) echoes the position of Trent by defining faith as follows: “Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace” (p. 42).

⁷ Warfield, *Ibid.*