



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 7.4.3 – The Doctrine of the Way of Salvation (Soteriology)

### Objective Faith and Subjective Faith

In the New Testament the word “faith” almost always refers to the trust in the heart that clings to Christ the Savior and the promises of God. This is known as subjective faith, that is, the faith by which one believes. For example, “faith” is clearly understood this way in Galatians 2:16, where we read: **“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.”** So also in Galatians 2:20: **“The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”**

There are also a few examples of objective faith, that is, the faith which is believed or the doctrine (or teaching) that is believed. One example of this is in Jude 3, where we read: **“I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”** Jude, the brother of Jesus and James, here is speaking of the body of doctrine that has been given to Christ’s Church. We are to proclaim and protect and defend this doctrine, so that it is not contaminated by false teachers.

### Intellectual Faith

Faith can also refer to an acceptance of a certain truth without trusting in that truth for salvation. Jesus’ brother James refers to such intellectual faith on the part of the demons: **“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!”** (James 2:19).

### Sincere Faith and Hypocritical Faith

Faith can be described as being sincere or hypocritical. Sincere faith produces the right kind of love, which is what God wants to create in His believers. Paul wrote to Timothy: **“The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith”** (1 Timothy 1:5). On the other hand, there are some who claim to have faith, but their lack of the fruits of faith proves that they do not have faith. James asks: **“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ...Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works... Faith without works is dead”** (James 2:14, 18, 20). The kind of faith that has no evidence of any fruit is not really faith at all.

Christ is our only Savior from sin, and we are saved alone by faith in Him, not by our own works, but all those who truly believe in Christ will show their faith in Christ by how they live their lives. Martin Luther summarized this truth by saying that faith alone justifies, but faith is never alone.

### Little Faith and Great Faith

The Bible also talks about having little (or weak) faith and having great (or strong) faith. It is important to remember that we are not saved by the amount of faith we have – even a tiny bit of sincere faith in Jesus saves. As we discussed in the previous lesson, we should not focus on our faith (and how strong or weak it is), but rather on the object of our faith: Jesus Christ and His life, death and resurrection. We are saved by trusting in what Jesus has done for us, no matter how strong that trust may be.

So, having little faith is not the same as having no faith. Jesus often scolded His disciples because their faith was so little and so weak. When we believers in Christ worry about such things as lack of food or

clothing, we need to remember Christ's words: **"If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"** (Matthew 6:30). When Jesus' disciples were out on the Sea of Galilee in a storm and Jesus came to them walking on the water, Peter wanted to walk on the water also. Jesus told Peter to come to Him on the water. At first Peter's faith was strong and he actually walked on the water like Jesus, but when he saw what the wind was doing, he lost faith and began to sink. Jesus pulled him out of the water, saying to him: **"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"** (Matthew 14:31).

At another time Jesus' disciples were concerned because they had forgotten to bring bread for their voyage. Jesus said to them: **"O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up?"** (Matthew 16:8-9).

On the other hand, Jesus called attention to the strong faith of the centurion of Capernaum and the woman of Canaan. Of the centurion He said: **"I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel"** (Matthew 8:10). The centurion believed Jesus could heal his servant simply by saying a word. To the woman of Canaan Jesus said: **"O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire"** (Matthew 15:28). Jesus at that point healed the woman's daughter.

One's faith may fluctuate at times. It might be stronger one day and weaker the next. Since faith does not come from us, but is created by the Holy Spirit through God's Word (Romans 10:17), it is important have our faith continually strengthened by remaining in His Word (John 8:31-32).

### **Saving Faith is a Matter of the Heart**

The Bible often emphasizes that saving faith is a matter of the heart, not just the head. When the Bible refers to the heart, it is not referring to the body's organ that pumps blood, but to the innermost emotion and feeling of the believer. For example, David wrote: **"I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation"** (Psalm 13:5). Faith is a matter of the heart, and only God knows what is going on in the innermost feelings and thoughts of a person. When Peter reported on his visit to the home of Cornelius and mentioned how God had given the Holy Spirit to these Gentile believers, he said: **"Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith"** (Acts 15:7-9).

The apostle Paul also spoke of faith as a matter of the heart, for he wrote to the Christians in Rome: **"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"** (Romans 10:9-10). Faith includes the idea of head knowledge and assent to the truths of God's Word, but the key element is trust in the heart.

### **Questions**

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1. What is the difference between subjective faith and objective faith?
2. What kind of faith do the demons have?
3. What is it that shows that faith is not sincere?
4. How do believers give evidence of their faith to others?
5. Give examples of "little faith" among Jesus' disciples?
6. How do we show little faith in our lives today?
7. What made the faith of the centurion and the woman of Canaan so great?
8. How is the word "heart" used in the Bible?
9. Why is it so important that we have faith in Jesus in our hearts?
10. How does the Holy Spirit create faith in Jesus in human hearts?