



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 7.4.6 – The Doctrine of the Way of Salvation (Soteriology)

Faith as the Receiving Instrument

It is important to remember that our faith in Christ does not earn or merit the forgiveness of sins, as though God rewards us for our good action of faith by giving us eternal life. Christ is the one who has earned eternal life for us by His life, suffering, and death in our place. His resurrection proves to us that what He did in our place is sufficient to earn eternal life for us and for everyone else in the whole world. Faith in Christ is only the instrument or the means by which we receive for ourselves what God has won and accomplished for everyone.

When Jesus cried out: **“It is finished”** (John 19:30) from the cross, our salvation was an accomplished fact – a finished product – ready to be offered and distributed to the world as a free gift. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead proved that the work of redemption had been successfully completed, and that all of our enemies (Satan, sin, death, hell) had been absolutely and permanently defeated.

For this reason, the apostle Paul tells us that if we think we can add something ourselves to our completed salvation, we in fact lose what He has done for us. These are Paul’s clear words: **“Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace”** (Galatians 5:2-4). The false teachers in Galatia were telling the Galatians that what Christ did was not quite enough to save them; they would also have to be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul then tells them that if they wanted to be saved by their own works, they would have to do more than succumb to circumcision; they would have to keep God’s entire law perfectly. But anyone who tries to save himself by his own works, even by his own faith, if he thinks of his faith as a work deserving a reward, will lose Christ and in fact will forfeit the salvation Christ won for him.

This faith in Christ is only the receiving instrument. Faith receives what Christ has done; it does not add anything to what Christ has done. The salvation that Christ won for us is complete in itself. As the prophet Isaiah foresaw: **“Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins”** (Isaiah 40:2). The Gospel (or Good News) of Jesus is complete in itself: forgiveness of sins for all sinners through what Christ has done. Jesus said to His disciples: **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15). How do we receive this Gospel and enjoy its benefits? **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved”** (Mark 16:16). The reconciliation is complete; it is a ready blessing offered to the world. **“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself”** (2 Corinthians 5:19).

If we think of faith as our contribution to our salvation, we do not understand the concept of grace. Paul writes: **“Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed”** (Romans 4:16). If God contributed 99% of our salvation, and our faith is our contribution of 1%, our salvation would no longer be certain and it would no longer be by grace alone. Faith does not contribute anything; faith simply receives the 100% contribution by God. Thus, it is false teaching when someone says to a sinner: “God has done His part by making your salvation possible through Christ. Now it is up to you to finish the job by doing your part and consciously choosing to believe in what Christ has done.” Faith is not our contribution to our salvation. Faith, in fact, is also

God's contribution, for it is God who creates the faith in our hearts that receives the Gospel He brings to us. This is why faith in Christ is always contrasted with works. We are saved by faith, not by works (Romans 3:28).

The Gospel of John speaks of receiving Christ and points out that those who receive Christ are those **"who believe in His name"** and become **"children of God"**. John then quickly adds that these believers in Christ are **"born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"** (John 1:12-13). This belief in His name and this new birth all come from God.

The Bible carefully avoids any expression that gives the impression that we are saved because of¹ our faith. The Bible only talks about faith as the way by which or through which² salvation is received.

It is not wrong to speak of believers as receiving Christ as long as we realize that this receiving of Christ is not our own work but a result of *God's* working in us. Paul writes: **"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving"** (Colossians 2:6-7). The Holy Spirit convinces the sinner to recognize that Christ's reconciliation of the whole world applies also to him, and so he begins to take comfort in that fact and rejoice in his salvation. He is led to apply the Gospel truth of universal justification to his own individual situation, as Paul did when he said: **"The Son of God...loved me and gave Himself for me"** (Galatians 2:20).

Questions

1. Why is it important that we do not think of faith as a work we do?
2. How should we think of faith?
3. What was wrong with what the false teachers in Galatia were saying?
4. What did Jesus mean when He said "It is finished" from the cross?
5. What is the Gospel (the Good News) of Jesus?
6. How much of our salvation has God contributed?
7. What part of our salvation do we contribute?
8. What must we remember when we talk about receiving Christ?
9. Why does the Bible avoid saying that we are saved because of faith?
10. Why is it important for a believer to say that Jesus died for him?

¹ This would be expressed in Greek with the preposition *dia* (διά) with the word "faith" in the *accusative* case. This construction does not occur in the New Testament.

² This is expressed in Greek with the preposition *dia* (διά) with the word "faith" in the *genitive* case. This construction (meaning "by which" or "through which") occurs in Romans 3:22, 25, 30; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:14, 26; Ephesians 2:8; Ephesians 3:12, 17; Philippians 3:9; Colossians 2:12; 2 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 6:12.

Two other ways of expressing "by which" or "through which" are the *dative* case alone or the preposition *ek* (ἐκ, "from"). The dative case is used in Acts 15:9; Romans 3:28. *ek* is used in Romans 1:17; Romans 3:20; Romans 4:16; Romans 5:1; Romans 9:30; Romans 10:6; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:8, 24.