

Faith.

Text: Col. 2:6-10

Suggested Hymns:

395, 158, 321, 284, 368

- 1) Faith Is A Firm Reliance Upon God's Eternal Word
- 2) Faith Is A Steadfast Confidence In God's Mercy
In Christ
- 3) Faith Is A Lively Hope Of Glorious Things
Yet To Come

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Colossians 2:6-10, ***⁶ As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷ rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.***

⁸ Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In the Epistle to the Colossians St. Paul warns against a self-styled philosophy which detracted from the person and work of Jesus Christ.

There were certain Jewish Christians who had combined with their Christianity a rabbinical system of religion, and a rigid observance of Jewish festivals. These people were endangering the simple faith of the Colossian Christians.

The Judaisers claimed that their philosophy completed the Christian faith and life. Paul, however, showed that in Christ the Colossians were already complete in Him and therefore did not need a supposedly superior philosophy to fill them to the brim.

Having put the Colossians on their guard and having exhorted them to remain in the faith, Paul says, "***⁸ Beware lest anyone cheat you.***"¹ He also told them

that they had a far superior circumcision in connection with Christ than the mere circumcision of the flesh.

The Judaisers merely cut off a bit of skin; but the circumcision of Christ, the circumcision made without hands, i.e., the Sacrament of holy Baptism, effected the entire *“putting off the body of the sins of the flesh.”*² Being *“buried with Christ in Baptism,”* the Colossians had risen with Him; for He had made them alive from the death of sin, forgiving them all their transgressions.

Since Christ had triumphed over principalities and powers, St. Paul told the Colossians³ not to let anyone judge them, usurp judicial authority over them, dictating to them regarding meat, drink, holy days, new moons, and Sabbath days.

The Inseparable Relation of Justification and Sanctification:

The text before us is a powerful admonition to lead a holy, sanctified life. *“Walk in Him!”* Let your whole life, your whole conduct, revolve about Christ. Let Him be the heart and centre of all you do, and say, and think.

That is not possible except as a fruit of faith.⁴ We learn from Hebrews 11:6 that *without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Our text emphasises that fact, *“Rooted and built up in Him” — “like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season,”*⁵ is a house built on the solid rock foundation of Christ.

If you have by divine grace apprehended by faith the justifying merits of Jesus Christ, a sanctified life is sure to be the result. He is your Lord, who has redeemed you, that you may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

“Established in the faith,” you will be *“abounding in it with thanksgiving.”* Your life will be a constant expression of gratitude for the great salvation which He wrought, by which He redeemed you from sin and crowned you with everlasting kindness.

Sanctification is not possible without justification; and justification cannot exist without Sanctification as it is a sure and inevitable consequence.

Justification and Sanctification cannot be separated any more than the two sides of one and the same page of this Holy Book can be torn from each other. Destroy either one, and you may be sure that you have destroyed both.

While our text, then, speaks forcefully of Sanctification, it at the same time gives us occasion to ask the ever vital question — *What Is Faith?*

Let us consider this question today. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Faith Is A Firm Reliance Upon God's Eternal Word

What is faith? First, it is a firm reliance upon God's revealed Word.

The Apostle admonishes the Christians in the congregation at Colosse, and all of us, to abide and to walk in Christ "*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus*" and "*as you have been taught.*"

He wants you to know no other Christ, and to have no false conception of Christianity. That gives you occasion to ask, *How did you receive Him? How were you taught the Christian faith?* You know the answer: Through the infallible Word of God, as it has been proclaimed through His blessed Apostle.

The Word of God the Sole Foundation of Faith

The Word of God is the sole foundation of our faith, of all our faith. Not just in some matters, in some doctrines, or points of doctrine; but in all of its parts, whether they pertain to the heart and centre of the revelation which has been graciously given us for our salvation, or whether they lie in its further circumference and periphery.

Our faith must rest upon the Word of God, and upon it alone. Is this the foundation of your faith — the Bible, all of the Bible, nothing but the Bible?

You know that efforts are made today, as there always have been, also among professed Christians, just as was the case in Colosse in the days of the Apostle Paul, to add more or less to the Bible or to subtract some bits from it.

You hear a great deal today, also among Lutherans, of the false claim that it is enough for fellowship to agree in the great fundamentals of the Christian faith, and that whoever wants to insist on full loyalty to the Word, also in so-called non-fundamentals, must be regarded as a schismatic and an ugly disturber of the peace of the Church.

Such a one, you are told over and over, stands in the way of true unity between the various bodies of confessed Christians, who could and should be one, if it were not for such obstructers of ecumenical plans.

But the Apostle's "*as you have been taught*" reminds us that the Word of God cannot thus be divided. You cannot follow the Holy Spirit's guidance in one part of Christian doctrine and not in another. He whose holy temple you are will not allow you to bring the offering of a "strange fire,"⁶ of a false zeal, contrary to truth, on the altar of your heart.

Whoever ignores or wilfully despises the Word of God in any single point, be it ever so little, is not being established in the faith, but has made a shipwreck of it.

Prayer Is Not a Means of Grace

Just now, in the work of Christian evangelism, there is, again, a false emphasis on prayer, as though it were a means of grace; and, indeed, the only means of grace that some professed Christians know.

When the unconverted ask, or are supposed to be asking, "*What must I do to be saved?*" they are more often than not told: "*Down on your knees and pray! That is the way to Christian enlightenment, the way to peace with God.*"

Now, you know that we cannot, in its proper place, make too much of Christian prayer. But never forget that prayer is the mark of an already converted person. It is one of the first things a Christian man will do. It was so in the case of the Apostle Paul.

When Ananias feared to carry out the Lord's instruction to go to Paul and heal him of the blindness with which he had been stricken on the Damascus road, because he did not yet know of his conversion, the Lord said, "*for behold, he is praying.*"⁷

By that token Ananias could recognise the miracle which God had wrought in the heart of Saul, the great persecutor of the Church. A true Christian will, in the words of our text, "abound" in prayers of "thanksgiving." He will pray without ceasing.

But when faith is to be wrought in a human heart, this can only be done by God's regenerating Word. Such faith cannot be produced by prayer in itself. Real prayers are an activity and manifestation of faith, which already exists.

And unconverted souls cannot pray correctly. The Word of the Gospel, and that alone, can effect the total change of heart which makes a person a Christian. It must always remain the foundation of Christian faith.

No Substitutes! Not Feelings, Not Human Wisdom, Not Works

Again, too often people confuse faith with feeling. They base faith on mere sentiment. But once more, such a delusive thing as one's feelings can and dare never be substituted for the sole true foundation of faith, which is God's Word, and that alone.

Mere human sentiment and feeling, however pious it may appear to be, and however seemingly reliable and uplifting for the moment, must in every case prove a great and fatal deception at last.

Human wisdom and human works cannot in any measure serve as a foundation of faith.

2. Faith Is A Steadfast Confidence In God's Mercy In Christ

In answer to the question, *What is faith?* in the second place, it is a steadfast confidence in God's mercy in Christ.

Soul-destroying error assumes no end of forms.

The faith and Christian life of believers in the congregation at Colosse in the days of the Apostle Paul were threatened by certain Jewish converts who claimed to have a superior kind of Christianity. They said that Paul's was of an inferior kind, too simple, too easy, and unsophisticated.

They practised and advocated a self-styled, superior Christian philosophy or wisdom; the last word in what was supposed to be regarded as real Christianity. It consisted in fasting and refraining from certain things. Such Christian exercises were meant to supplement and complete the deliverance wrought by Christ.

The Apostle earnestly warns against such a false philosophy or supposed Christian wisdom. He calls it by its right name "*empty deceit*."

God's Last Word to a Christian Soul

There is not a thing that you can add to the work of Christ. Men have not only tried to do this in the days of the Apostle Paul. There have always been such people who have been guilty of such vain self-deceit.

There are those today who falsely suppose that they can add to the work of Christ by offering to God what they consider works of supererogation, wrought by their own hearts and hands. But God has told you once and for all: “***you are complete in Him***”

You rightly sing:⁸

Thou, O Christ, art all I want
More than all in Thee I find.

All that you can do —and if you are a true Christian, you will be doing just that — is to thank God constantly for all that He has done for you and continues to do for you — thank God by the life that you now live in Him in whom you know you are complete.

And you will know that, even so, the imperfection of your best works of thanksgiving, flowing from a grateful heart, for of Christ who of God ***became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption***⁹ — you must be constantly covered by the spotless robe of God’s own righteousness in Him, which alone can make you perfect in His sight.

Examine Yourselves Whether You Are In The Faith

Now, what of your faith in the light of this answer to our question, *What is faith?* Is your faith built solely on Christ? Do you fully trust that you have all you need in Him, and in Him alone?

When people try to sell you their counterfeit wares, do you constantly resort to the divine assurance that you have all you need or can have, in Christ? Is it your constant endeavour, under the guidance of God’s gracious Spirit, always to learn to know Christ better, and to take more perfect comfort in the riches of divine grace that you have in Him? Is your faith of this kind?

3. Faith Is A Lively Hope Of Glorious Things Yet To Come

But once more the answer to the question *What is faith?* is that it is a lively hope of glorious things yet to come.

Our text does not expressly mention this thought and dwell on it at length. But it suggests it in those very words: ***“you are complete in Him.”***

Let us ask: *What is it that you have in Christ?* If you answer this question truly and more fully, you will not only have to say: *“God is mine. He is my loving Father in Christ. He daily forgives me all my sins for His sake. He richly gives me all I need in soul and body. He makes all things work together for good to me, however different it may seem at times.”* But more than that, you will say: *“Heaven is mine.”*

All the riches of an eternal abode are mine, mine to enjoy in Christ. They are mine by faith now. They will certainly be mine in a more real and abiding sense, unalloyed by earthly pain and sin and deceitful pleasure, hereafter.

We read in Hebrews 11:1, ***“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”***

Faith the Title Deed to Eternal, Heavenly Riches

Many centuries ago, a woman by the name of Dionysia, in ancient Africa, lost a case in a lower court over a piece of land to which she laid claim. Not satisfied with the decision of the lower court, she was determined to take her case to a higher court in Alexandria.

She sent her slave to that city, with the legal documents safely encased in a stone box. On the way, the slave lost his life in a fire which destroyed the inn where he had slept for the night.

For 2,000 years the sands of the desert covered the ruins of the inn, the charred bones of the slave, and the stone box. Archaeologists have uncovered these remains.

In the box they found the legal documents. They read the note which this woman had sent to the judge in Alexandria, *“In order that my lord, the judge, may know that my appeal is just, I attach my title deed.”*

The word rendered “substance” in our Bibles, in the assurance that ***“faith is the substance of things hoped for,”*** is the same word this woman used in describing her title deed.

Faith is your title deed to heaven. You may be sure that God will honour it at the right moment. The riches of heaven are in His hands, waiting to be delivered to you. They are yours by faith now.

God's Conclusive Answer

There is God's own answer to your question, *What is faith?* God, who by His Holy Spirit has through the life-giving Word of the Gospel wrought a living faith in your heart, will also keep you in it. He alone is able to do this.

Let us conclude with Philippians 1:6, ***He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Col. 2:8-11

² Colossians 2:11

³ Colossians 2:16-17

⁴ John 15:1-5

⁵ Psalm 1:3

⁶ Lev. 10:1

⁷ Acts 9:11

⁸ Hymn 158

⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:30