

Of Justification (Part 2)

Js 2:14-26; WCF 11.2

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 15 September 2019, 16:30
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Our sermon has three points:

- What Saving Faith Is
- Through Faith Alone
- Through Faith Which Is Accompanied

What Saving Faith is

My brother & sister (and dear young person), what does a saving faith look like?

Well, WCF 11.2, based upon the Bible, says that a saving faith is, “...*receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness...*”

So, *what* makes up a saving faith?

Well, based upon the Bible and logic, Bible scholars have come to the conclusion that a saving faith – a faith through which you and I are made right with God – consists of the following three components/parts. We can remember them by the acronym C.A.R. ...

- **C**ontent/information (in Latin, *notitia*)
- **A**ssent² (in Latin, *assensus*)
- **R**eliance, or personal trust (in Latin, *fiducia*)

Well, taking all three under point 1 of this sermon, let’s briefly look at these components of a saving faith:

Firstly, then, **content**...

Content refers to the thing/person you believe in. After all, you have to believe in *something*!

Yet, how strange the lines in some popular songs – lines that go, for example, like the lines of the song *I believe* – a song with a very catchy tune, yet with words that call us to believe – but believe in what? In nothing? In ourselves?

*I believe a change is gonna come
Life has got a meaning
All we need is to believe*

*And I believe wisdom is inside us
Dreams and hopes will guide us
All we need is to believe*

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader’s guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman’s guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. 2: *Salvation and the Christian Life* (Chapters 9-22 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

² (ə-sěnt’)

*Even when you're feeling drawn and tired
If there's hope in your heart
You will find a way to face the day ahead*

*I believe a change is gonna come
Life has got a meaning
All we need is to believe*

*And I believe wisdom is inside us
Integrity will guide us
All we need is to believe...³*

Indeed, it seems as if this song is calling the listener to believe – it doesn't matter in what – just as long as you have integrity or sincerity inside you.

Well, will this kind of belief bring you the ultimate peace of being made right with God?

No, it can't, because it's a faith without content!

You see, when the New Testament says that we are saved through faith (through believing), it gives us the clear and solid *content* of what/whom you have to believe in, i.e. in the *Lord Jesus Christ and His saving work on the cross* for you! *That's* the content (or information) of your faith!

Now, from a human point of view, it is hard to say *exactly how much content/information* a person has to have about God, about our Lord Jesus, about his/her own sinfulness, or about the cross before he/she can have a saving faith! You see, in the Old Testament, Adam and Eve had very little information/content about Christ.

Still in the Old Testament, Abraham had more information/content about God & Christ than what Adam & Eve had, but even Abraham still did not have the full content/information proclaimed in the New Testament!

Yet, with whatever little information Abraham had, he nevertheless believed God, and God credited it to him as righteousness.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that you & I should try to get by with as little content/information about Christ as possible! No! After all, we don't live in Old Testament times. We have the full picture of Christ given by the New Testament! And even though you & I do not understand exactly how our Lord's human and divine natures are combined in Him, we trust that God knows!

Well, so far regarding the first component of faith – *content/information* (In Latin, *notitia*).

Here's the second component: **assent**...

With assent we mean intellectual assent or acknowledgement!

In other words, that's when a person does not just have the *content/information* of what he should believe in, but he now also *agrees with his mind/intellect* that *the information is true!*

And here is the scary part! You see, when it comes to the three components of a saving faith, James reminds us that even the *demons* have the first two! Yes, they

³ Cf.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=dana+winner+i+believe+lyrics&oq=dana+winner+i+believe&ags=chrome.1.0l2.14227j1j0&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

have *content/information* that Jesus is the Son of God, and they even give intellectual *assent* to that information; yes, they agree that that information is true!⁴

You see, the demons were quick to recognise Christ during His earthly ministry.⁵ Even satan, when he tempted Christ in the desert,⁶ understood exactly that Jesus was God in the flesh. Yes, satan knew it was true, but he hated that truth.

Well, so far regarding faith's second component – *assent* (intellectual assent; in Latin, *assensus*).

Here is the third (and final) component of a saving faith: **reliance** (or *personal trust*; in Latin, *fiducia*) ...

You see, in order to be made right with God, you and I must not only have the *content/information*. Neither must we just give intellectual *assent* to the truthfulness of this information. No, we must, by God's grace, also have *reliance* (or a personal trust) in Jesus Christ! I will give an illustration...

You see, I think I once told you the story of Charles Blondin⁷ who in the 1850's became the first tight-rope walker to walk across the Niagara Falls!⁸

On this tight-rope, Blondin even pushed a stove in a wheelbarrow across the Niagara Falls.

Many spectators *saw* him doing it!

So, we can say that all these spectators had the *head-knowledge* (they had intellectual assent) that Blondin can indeed carry a heavy load safely across the falls! That's their *intellectual assent* – their heads telling them that!

But what about their *hearts*, their inner conviction, their *reliance*?

Well, the answer to this question came when Blondin walked up to one of the spectators & said to him, "You have seen me pushing the stove across. Now let me push *you* across!"

How did the spectator answer?

"No way!"

See?

What a difference between *intellectual assent* (on the one hand) and *reliance* or personal trust (on the other hand)!

My brother & sister, it is similar to the difference between knowing that Jesus is *the* Saviour, and that He is truly *your* Saviour, able and qualified to save *you*!

Well, that was the third component of a saving faith, *reliance* (or *personal trust*; in Latin, *fiducia*).

So, we now had all three components known by the acronym C.A.R. – **C**ontent, **A**ssent, and **R**eliance.

⁴ Cf. Js 2:19 ***You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!***

⁵ Cf. e.g. Mt 8:28-29, ***And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. 29 And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"***

⁶ Cf. Mt 4:3 ***And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread"*** (Emphasis mine).

⁷ His real name was Jean Francois Gravelot

⁸ cf. <http://houdinireappears.blogspot.com/2007/09/12/imagine-me-on-a-tightrope> for the story of (not Houdini but) Jean Francois Gravelot who on 30 June 1859 became the first tight-rope walker to cross the Niagara falls.

And you may remember how the Heidelberg Catechism says the same thing in different words, in LD 7 answer 21...

True faith is not only a knowledge (content) and conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true (assent); it is also a deep-rooted assurance (reliance), 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.⁹

Well so far, re Point 1: “What Saving Faith Is!”

Here is Point 2...

Through Faith Alone

We have all heard *that part* of the Reformation slogan which says, “Sola fide,” i.e. “By faith alone.”

Now here’s something interesting, i.e. that, historically, the Roman Catholic Church has also taught that justification is *by faith*.¹⁰ But here is where they differ from the Reformers: You see, whereas the Roman Catholic Church said, “Justification is by faith,” the Reformers said, “Justification is by faith *alone!*”

Yes, Rome said that faith is just the *initial* stage of justification. They taught that, on top of faith, there must come something else before you can be justified with God. For them, besides faith, there must still come righteous living in order to make you right with God. So, Rome acknowledges the *fide* part of *sola fide*, but not the *sola* part! For Rome, *fide* is *necessary* but not *sufficient!*

RC Sproul illustrates it this way: “...under normal circumstances, a necessary condition for fire is the presence of oxygen. But... the mere presence of oxygen is not enough to cause a fire.”¹¹ On top of oxygen, you still need a spark!

Well, according to the Roman view, faith is like oxygen – i.e. a *necessary* condition for justification, but not a *sufficient* condition for it!

But the Reformed view (the Biblical view) says, faith is not only *necessary* condition, but it is also a *sufficient* condition for justification!

That means that, if, by God’s grace, you & I put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, then God will surely declare us righteous in His sight!

Thus, if *faith* is present, then *justification* is inevitably present as well!

But how unthinkable the Roman view, which says that you can have faith *without* justification!

Said in a different way, the Reformed (Biblical) view says, “You cannot have justification without faith, and you cannot have faith without justification!” The Roman view says, “You cannot have justification without faith, but you can have faith without justification!”

Yes, as we heard last week (from WCF 11.1), Rome teaches that a person can have faith, but if he then commits a mortal sin, then that sin destroys his justification so that, unless he then does the proper penance to make up for his sins, he will be damned!

But the Reformed (Biblical) view says, the mere possession of genuine faith is all that is required in order to receive and *keep* the state of justification! We are saved (justified) by faith alone!

⁹ Emphasis mine

¹⁰ Cf. Sproul (ibid:47)

¹¹ Sproul (ibid:48)

And we should note what WCF 11.2 continues to say, i.e. that, “*faith... is the only instrument of justification...*”

So, here are just a few words to explain faith as *instrument*...

My brother & sister, imagine a farmer has a fruit tree – a fruit tree which is suffering in severe drought! Well, thankfully, the farmer has a borehole on his farm. On the borehole sits an engine with a pump. So, what does the farmer now do? Well, between the pump and the fruit tree, the farmer now puts a pipe in place – a pipe which becomes an *instrument* by which the farmer provides life-giving water to the fruit tree! Yes, the fruit tree now gets life *through* or *by way of* (See the instrument?) this pipe!

Question: Did the fruit tree, all by itself, put that life-giving pipe in place?

No! The fruit tree has no hands – is incapable of doing that! So, the gracious/kind farmer did that!

So, if it were possible for a fruit tree to talk, would it have any reason to boast in that pipe?

No, only to thank the farmer!

My brother & sister, likewise is faith the instrument put in place by our gracious God – an instrument through which God gives life-giving salvation to you & me!

That’s why the Bible constantly says that we are saved *by way of* or *through*¹² faith, not *because of* faith. After all, faith always remains the *instrument* through (and not the *grounds* because of) which we are made right with God.

Well, so far Point 2, “Through Faith Alone.”

Here is the last point...

Through Faith Which Is Accompanied

The WCF 11.2 says, “...yet it (i.e. faith) is not the only grace in the person justified, but is always accompanied by all other saving graces. Justifying faith is not dead, but works by love.”

Well, what else is this saying but what Martin Luther has said in the so-called *Reformation Formula*, i.e. that “*Justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone*”?¹³

¹² The Greek constantly reads *dia* (διά) or *ek* (ἐκ), prepositions which, when followed by the Genitive case, always describe the *means/instrument* by/through which something is done.

Cf. e.g. Eph 2:8 **For by grace you have been saved through faith (διά πίστεως). And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...** (Emphasis mine).

Also cf. 1 Pt 1:4-5, “...an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith (διά πίστεως) are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (Emphasis mine).

Also Rm 4:16, “Therefore, the promise comes by faith (ἐκ πίστεως), so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all” (Emphasis mine).

Indeed, *dia* (διά) and *ek* (ἐκ) are markers of the means by which one event makes another event possible—‘by means of, through, by.’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 785). New York: United Bible Societies. And, for *ek* (ἐκ), also cf. Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 787). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹³ Cf. e.g. Luther: *Du sprichst: Wie geht es denn zu, dass man dennoch muss gute Werke tun, wo es doch allein am Glauben gelegen ist? Antwort: Wo der Glaube recht ist, kann er nicht ohne gute Werke sein. Genauso wie*

Of course, Martin Luther made this formula against Rome who said that you cannot be justified without faith, and that you cannot be justified without works either, because faith alone is not enough!

But the Reformation view (Biblical view) says, “Justification is by faith alone. But the faith that justifies is not alone.” This means that wherever true faith in Christ is present in a person’s soul, that faith will immediately and inevitably yield the fruit of good works. Yes, true faith is the only instrument by which you & I are justified! But good works flow out of it!

But here is a very important point: Those good works, which flow out of a true faith, contribute nothing to our justification.

Why?

Well, because the only ground of our justification is the good work of our Lord Jesus – none of our good works, even if they’re the fruit of our God-worked faith!

But here is a sad thing...

You see, there are people in some Christian circles who have taken *sola fide* (by faith alone) in a wrong direction! They are the ones who say that, if we are saved by faith alone, then we don’t have to have any fruit of that faith!

Well, this view is called the “antinomian view” (i.e. the anti-law view), which is the view of the so-called “Carnal Christian” (the *fleshly Christian* or *old-natured Christian*). To illustrate this view, RC Sproul gives the example of the young man who had professed his faith in Christ, but then continued with illicit drugs and living together with his girlfriend. When he was confronted about still living in scandalous sin, he replied, “Hey, don’t worry about it. I’m a carnal Christian!”¹⁴

See? This man’s excuse was that a person can come to a saving faith in Christ, yet never change his life!

But guess what a Reformed person would call a totally carnal Christian? Well, he will call him a *non-Christian* – an unregenerate person; a person not yet born from above!

Perhaps someone who hears this will now say, “But, pastor, are you then suggesting that people with a genuine faith in Christ are perfectly sinless?”

No, of course not!

We do not become perfect saints the minute we are born again, but we do come alive for righteousness, and our lives do begin to change immediately!

But this change will take the rest of our lives to complete – and we will struggle all the way.¹⁵

However, the idea that you can be a heartfelt Christian yet stay completely carnal (according to the flesh or old nature) – that is one of the most dangerous false teachings ever!

And our Lord Jesus clearly preached against this when He said (in Mt 7:21), “***Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.***”¹⁶

andersherum, wo Unglaube ist, da kann auch kein gutes Werk sein. Darum, wenn du glaubst, so müssen aus dem Glauben reine gute Werke folgen (WA 12,559) (cf. Thomas Jeising, Aus Glauben allein? Und was ist mit den guten Taten? <https://bibelbund.de/2017/04/aus-glauben-allein-und-was-ist-mit-den-guten-taten/>)

¹⁴ Sproul (ibid:53)

¹⁵ As the Apostle Paul testifies about himself in Rm 7:15ff.

¹⁶ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 7:21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Indeed, our Lord also said, “***By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?***”¹⁷

My brother & sister (and young people), it’s easy to *say* with your *lips* that you believe in Jesus Christ, but it’s altogether different to really *have* that belief *in your heart*!

I like the way some Bible scholars have said it: “You have to *possess* faith, and not merely *profess* it!”¹⁸

Well, is that not exactly what our New-Testament passage means? I mean, it first explains how Abraham had a living faith – a faith that produced fruit when Abraham went to Moriah and, in great faith, prepared to sacrifice his own son by God’s command!

Then James 2:24 says, “***You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.***”¹⁹

Now, this does not mean that James backs the Roman Catholic View *that we are saved by what we do*!

Rather, within their context (and the wider context of the NT), James’ words mean, “*You see that a person is proved to be right (that his faith is shown to be legitimate)²⁰ by what he does and not by a fruitless faith alone.”*

Dear Wainui member (young and old), I pray that you & I will always have that relying trust (personal faith) in our Lord Jesus – a genuine faith that will bear fruit; yes, a saving and living faith worked in you & me by the Holy Spirit from above!

AMEN (2679 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁷ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 7:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁸ Cf. Sproul (ibid:55), “The Bible teaches that justification is by the *possession* of faith and not by the mere *profession* of faith.”

¹⁹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jas 2:24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁰ For this meaning of the Greek word *dikaioō* (δικαιόω), cf. e.g. *to demonstrate that something is morally right—‘to show to be right, to prove to be right.’* ὅπως ἂν δικαιωθῆς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σου ‘you must be shown to be right when you speak’ Ro 3:4 (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 743). New York: United Bible Societies).