

Of Saving Faith (Part 2)

Heb 11:1-13; WCF 14.2-14.3

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 15 December 2019, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This is the second half of a two-part series on our Saving Faith!

Last Sunday we were reminded that our faith is a gift of God, and that it is worked *and* grown by the preaching of God's Holy Word and the sacraments.

Well, this afternoon, we will see what the Bible says about four more aspects of our saving faith.

Here is the first one...

An Implicit Trust in the Word (Saving faith has...)

Some people might say, "You Christians, you are so naïve and gullible to believe everything the Bible says!" "You just have a blind faith – a faith based on nothing!"

Well, what such people don't understand – and are unable to understand (for these things are spiritually discerned)² – is that at the time when you & I came to faith in God Triune, our faith was (and still *is*) not blind, because it is *based upon knowledge* – a knowledge/content which we have found in God's Word; a knowledge to which we, by inworking of the Holy Spirit, gave our intellectual *assent*, but not just our intellectual assent; no, also our *reliance* (or heartfelt trust)!

And so, our faith in God and in His *Word* (the Bible) is a faith consisting of the familiar three parts: *content*, *assent*, and *reliance* known by the acronym C.A.R. (or in Latin: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*).³

So, what are we saying?

Well, we say that the born-from-above person has an implicit faith in God Triune; but not just in God Triune – no, also in His Word!

It works like the implicit trust a little child has in his mum and dad! This little child does not need to weigh up every single word mum & dad say, so as to first try & make sure whether they're not perhaps lying (or evil-intended). No, this child has an implicit trust in mum & dad and everything they say!

So it is with the true Christian's attitude toward God!

You see, the true Christian is the one who has, by inworking of the Spirit, given his/her intellectual assent to (and reliance upon) God Triune. From that moment on, this born-again person has an implicit trust in God and His Word, the Bible!

And so, the Christian no longer needs to suspiciously weigh up every sentence in God's Word to try and work out whether he/she can trust it or not. No, because the Christian

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 1 Cor 2:14, ***The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.***

³ Cf. my sermon on WCF 11.2

knows this whole Word (Bible) comes from *God Triune who cannot lie*, he/she can now have an implicit child-like (not childish) trust that everything the Bible says is true!

Look, is this not why Paul wrote to the Church of Thessalonica, “...*when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe*”?⁴

See?

The Thessalonian Christians displayed that implicit trust in Christ and His Word brought to them by Paul, an Apostle who was powerfully called by Christ Himself!

See why also the Reformers said that we should have an implicit trust in God’s Word? Of course, they said this in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church which demanded that Christians also have an implicit trust in that *church’s* teachings.

How beautiful, in this regard, the words of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms: “*Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.*”⁵

In other words, what Luther said comes down to: “I have an *implicit trust* in Scripture, but not in the church, nor in its councils, nor in the pope!”

Why is such an implicit trust in God’s Word so vital for the Christian’s wellbeing?

Well, because lack of implicit trust in God’s Word is what lay at the root of the Fall of the human race!

And, my brother & sister, do you remember the specific language by which the devil, in the wilderness, couched his temptation attacks against our Lord Jesus!? Did he not try to bring Jesus to the point of questioning the trustworthiness of God’s Word!?⁶

But do you remember how our Lord Jesus replied? He said that He lived by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God!⁷

Well, so far re point 1 – Saving faith goes with an Implicit Trust in the Word of God.

Variety of Positive Responses to the Word

My brother & sister, some people always approach God’s Word with only one expectation – i.e. to find promises in there!

They’re like a man who, no matter which café or restaurant he visits, he always just wants to be served his favourite dish. And, if the restaurant does not serve that specific dish, then he stomps out in anger!

Well, the person who approaches the Bible to only ever find a comforting word of blessing in there, is the one who does not approach God’s Word honestly and objectively!

After all, you & I cannot draw whatever point *we* please from any passage.

We need to pay attention to what every passage actually says!

If we don’t do this, we will be like the preacher who always had just one message to preach, regardless of whatever text he was preaching from.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Th 2:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

⁵ Cf. e.g. <https://www.luther.de/en/worms.html>

⁶ Cf. e.g. Mt 4:3, *The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread”* (Emphasis mine).

⁷ Cf. Mt 4:4 *Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

No preacher should expect to find his same old hobby-horse saddled (and ready to ride) as he approaches whatever Bible text.⁸

And so, not only the preacher, but every person doing his/her own private Bible study needs to see e.g. if a passage is giving a *command*, or whether it gives a *threat* or a *promise*. Then we should adjust our teaching and our response accordingly!

After all, Paul writes to Timothy, *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*⁹

See the variety of emphases which God's Word holds out to us – a variety of *emphases*, which asks for a variety of *responses*.

And we see this clearly in the Bible.

For example, ...

When we read Heb 11:13, God's Word is urging you & me to, just like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and all the patriarchs, embrace all God's promises in faith! Here is Heb 11:13, *“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.”*¹⁰ What a faith-strengthening verse!

But look, when we then turn to Rm 16:26, what message do we find? Well, we find that Paul exhorts the Christians of Rome – and you & me (!) – to have *obedience* accompany our faith! You see, Paul says that God has *revealed the mystery which lay hidden for long ages past, so that all nations might believe and obey him*.¹¹

So, this is a passage which exhorts us to *obey* God!

But what about Isaiah 66:2 – what does this verse ask of us? Well, it asks of God's people (i.e. also you & me) to *tremble* at His message! Here it is: *“Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the Lord. “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles¹² at my word.”*¹³

Indeed, does not this passage remind you & me that, although we do have a *friend* in Jesus, He (our Friend) is also *the Holy One* of Israel and the *King* before whom we bow!¹⁴

So, what are we reminded of here under point 2 of this sermon?

Well, that saving faith accepts not just parts, but *the whole* of God's Word! So, faith seeks *to act* as God requires; and *to trust* what God promises *both for this life and the life to*

⁸ Illustration borrowed from Van Dixhoorn (ibid:190)

⁹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (2 Ti 3:16–17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Heb 11:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

¹¹ Rm 16:25-27 *Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen* (Emphasis mine).

¹² רָדַד ...adj.verb. of foregoing, **trembling**;—רָדַד Ju 7:3 + 3 times; יָדַד Is 66:5 Ezr 10:3—*trembling* (from fear), abs. Ju 7:3 (|| יָרָא), 1 S 4:13 (subj. לְבָבוֹ, sq. לְעַל, for, in behalf of); in awe and reverence, at word of God, sq. רָדַד Ezr 9:4 Is 66:2 (sq. לְעַל), v 5 (sq. לְאֵל); cf. רָדַד בְּמַצְנֵת אֵלֵי עֵזְרָא Ezr 10:3 (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 353). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

¹³ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Is 66:2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁴ A very appropriate (and well-put) reminder by Sproul (ibid:125).

come!¹⁵

Well so far re point 2: “Variety of Positive Responses to God’s Word.”
Here is point 3...

Main Thing: Receive Christ

My brother & sister, above and beyond what we have heard under point 2, saving faith has just one focus, i.e. to *receive* Christ (as John puts it in Jn 1:12); yes, to *believe* Christ (As Peter puts it in Acts 15:7); indeed, to *accept* or *rest on* Christ!

What do we mean?

Well, we mean that saving faith does not just look at the *blessings* which we get *from* Christ – blessings like forgiveness of our sins, and the gift of righteousness; no, faith looks to *Jesus Christ Himself!*

Saving faith loves Jesus Christ not just for the blessings we have in Him, but faith loves Him for Himself!!

You see, I have often heard someone say, “You know why your dog loves you?” “It’s because he knows he gets his food from you!”

Well, I’m sure those who say such things have not heard the true story of the dog, Capitan (Captain), in Cordoba, Argentina, who so loved his master, Miguel Guzman, that, after his master’s death, this dog went and, every night, slept next to his master’s grave – not just for one night, but every night for several years until the dog itself died of old age there right next to his master!¹⁶

If that does not prove the dog’s love for the master himself, then I don’t know what else will!

My brother & sister, true faith does not isolate the benefits we receive through Jesus from Jesus *Himself!* *It should always be clear that the good news is Jesus Himself!*¹⁷

Of course, just as the dog, Capitan, did not isolate all his master’s love-deeds from his master himself (neither his master from the love-deeds), so does faith see Christ and His love-deeds as one package!

I mean, why else would John say (in Jn 1:12) that those who received Christ became sons of God? And why would Paul then tell the Philippian jailor, “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...**”¹⁸ And why else would Paul say, “... **I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me**”¹⁹ And why would our Lord Himself have said, “**If you love Me** (not, ‘If you love the blessings you got through Me’), **you will obey My commandments**”²⁰

Question: Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus? Do you love Jesus Himself?

Here is the last point in this sermon...

¹⁵ Cf. 1 Tim 4:8, “... **for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.**”

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. <https://metro.co.uk/2018/02/22/dog-dies-next-masters-grave-living-11-years-7332627/>
Also cf. <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/dog-sleep-by-his-masters-grave/> for the truthfulness of this story.

¹⁷ Well-said by Van Dixhoorn (ibid:191).

¹⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ac 16:31). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ga 2:20). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

²⁰ Cf. Jn 14:15

Faith Growing to Full Assurance

My brother & sister, once you & I have been made right with through the sacrifice of Christ, then that righteousness of ours cannot increase or decrease!

Once right with God, always right with God!

But the same does not apply to our faith!

You see, our faith *can* increase, and it *can* get weaker!

Yes, in the every-day life of the Christian – there where we are confronted with life’s trials and temptations – your & my faith may vacillate (may go up & down)!

That’s how the father of a demon-possessed boy was able to cry out to Jesus, “***I believe; help my unbelief!***”²¹

Indeed, in this world, your/my faith is always mixed with at least some measure of doubt! And that doubt also impacts our faithfulness to God. So, just as our *faith* is always mixed with some measure of *doubt*, so is also our *faithfulness* mixed with some measure of *unfaithfulness* – yes, so is our obedience also going up & down all the time.

Why does our faith vacillate (go up & down)?

Well, because of evil – evil in *us*, evil in the *world*, and because of the *evil one*, who assails/attacks God’s loved ones!

Look, is that not why Paul says (in Eph 6:16), “***In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one***”?²²

In fact, it’s because of satan’s attacks that Paul commands the Christian to put on the full armour of God!

Martin Luther’s biography shows us how he was a prime target for the devil.

But, thank God, Luther’s assailed faith got victory through being nurtured by God’s Word and prayer!²³

RC Sproul says it well, “Christian faith is often fragile. I think every Christian knows what it is like to go through what was classically been called the *dark night of the soul*.”

At the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther stood before the most powerful human beings of his time – the Emperor and the highest officials of the Roman Catholic Church. When they commanded him to recant (abandon his views), he, at first, mumbled an answer which no one could hear. When told to speak up, he finally asked, “May I have twenty-four hours to think about it?”

See? Although Luther had gone through several years of preparation before that moment, yet, when that dreaded time came, he begged for twenty-four more hours, which they granted him!

What did he then do?

Well, he spent most of those twenty-four hours in bold prayer, crying out to God in agony, “The cause is Thine, and I am Thine. I cannot do this unless I know Thou art with me.”²⁴

My brother & sister, what do we see?

Well, peering, as it were, into the window of Luther’s soul, you & I can see the struggle

²¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mk 9:24). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

²² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Eph 6:16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

²³ For the importance of prayer in addition to the whole armour of God, cf. Eph 6:17-19, “...***and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*** ¹⁸ ***praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,*** ¹⁹ ***and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel...***” (Emphasis mine).

²⁴ Gleaned and adapted from Sproul (ibid:127)

every Christian faces at one or other point in life, because faith goes up & down! And let no one ever say (nor the pastor himself), “Pastors never struggle in their Christian faith!” Remember: pastors may be students and preachers of God’s Word – yes, they may exhort and encourage others in our God-given precious faith, yet even the pastor still remains a sinful human being – indeed, a sinner! So, let no one who stands take it for granted that he/she will forever stand.

What does God’s Word say in 1 Cor 10:12? “***So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!***”²⁵

My brother & sister, how will you & I find strength and encouragement to fight the good fight – to run the good race to the very end?

Well, by spending time in God’s Word!

And you know what? In God’s Word, it is particularly those passages where Scripture gives us examples of sinful yet godly men and women who remained faithful – it’s particularly those examples which God uses to encourage us in our faith, and even cause the believer to reach the level of assurance of salvation!

Now, I know, some people might object to us having a need to have faith heroes. But, look, God who understands our frailty and our need, has cared for it that we have plenty examples of so-called *faith heroes* in the Bible, the most striking of all in Hebrews chapter 11.

And this chapter starts off with this phenomenal statement: “***Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.***”²⁶

My brother & sister, as long as you & I live on this earth, there will be a barrier between where *we* live and where the *being of God* is. To be sure, God *is* here, but there is a *dimensional barrier* between Him and us, and even the best microscope or telescope will not make Him visible to you & me.

But we do have visible evidence of the presence of the invisible God. After all, God is constantly making His invisible power and deity known to us through the works of His hands. Look is this not what Rm 1:20 says – that the visible is used by God to reveal His invisible reality?²⁷

Heb 11:3 continues to say, “***By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.***”²⁸

See?

The Scriptures declare to you & me that God is the One who called the world into existence! *We believe that, we trust that, and it is not irrational!*²⁹

I love how RC Sproul says, “Abraham did not know, nor could he see where he was going. He was like a tourist without a map, but he knew the tour director, and the tour director said, ‘Trust Me’ – and Abraham did!”³⁰

How beautiful! You see, when Heb 11 has listed all the so-called *Heroes of Faith*, this is what it says in v.13, “***All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.***

²⁵ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Co 10:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁶ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Heb 11:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁷ My adaptation of the words of Sproul (ibid:131). Cf. Rm 1:20 ***For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.***

²⁸ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Heb 11:3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁹ Well-said by Sproul (ibid:132)

³⁰ Adapted from Sproul (ibid:132)

And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.³¹

My brother & sister (and dear young people), it is quite likely that you & I, too, will die before all God's promises are fulfilled – yes, perhaps even before our Lord Jesus returns! But, like Abraham and the rest, having seen God's promises from afar off, you & I are assured of them!

See?

See how assurance is part & parcel of a saving faith!? And where did you & I get this, our faith?

Well, from its Author – yes, the Author of our faith who, as God's Word reminds, is also the Perfecter of it!³²

AMEN (2907 words excluding footnotes)

³¹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Heb 11:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³² Cf. Heb 12:2, "***Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***"