

A Saving Faith (03/09/25)

Romans 10:8-13

Paul is an exceptional evangelist. Following his transformative encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, where he experienced a profound shift in his life's direction and purpose, he devoted himself entirely to evangelism. This commitment led him to embark on extensive travels as an apostle to the Gentiles, a mission that took him across various regions. During his first, second, and third missionary journeys, he established numerous churches in diverse communities throughout Asia Minor and Europe.

In addition to this significant missionary journeys, Paul harbored one final ambitious vision: to carry the gospel to Spain. At that time, many perceived Spain as the end of the world, the gospel's ultimate destination. He realized he needed to travel to Rome, which he viewed as a pivotal base for European missionary activity. He sought the cooperation of the Roman church, hoping to foster a mutual understanding of the gospel that he had been passionately preaching for the past two decades.

A key aspect of Paul's message is presented in Romans 10, where he elaborates on the faith necessary for salvation. He firmly states, "because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). This succinct statement highlights the dual components of confession and belief, which he regards as the practical essence of the Christian faith. It is vital for us to reflect on what it is we ought to confess and truly believe.

1. The focal point of our faith is Jesus Christ. To strengthen this argument, Paul quotes from Joel 2:32: "For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved'" (Romans 10:13). Through this reference, he connects the New Testament message of salvation to the prophetic declarations of the Old Testament. Joel had proclaimed an urgent warning concerning the coming Day of the Lord, emphasizing a promise of deliverance: "Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls" (Joel 2:32).

In ancient times, the kingdom of Southern Judah faced a devastating plague of locusts. Joel interpreted it not merely as a natural disaster, but rather as a divine act of judgment. This understanding prompted him to call the people to repentance, underscoring that the only way to escape God's wrath was to sincerely call upon His name. By referencing Joel, Paul reinforces that Jesus Christ is our Lord. The core tenet of our faith centers on Jesus, therefore indicating that He is the name we must invoke for salvation.

2. The cross and resurrection of Christ form the centerpiece of our faith. Paul fervently proclaims the reality of Jesus' resurrection, asserting that God raised Him from the dead. This belief represents the heart of Paul's gospel. The cross signifies atonement for sins, while the resurrection signifies the promise of new life. Our faith must balance the significance of the cross and the hope of the resurrection. Many people readily accept Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross for our transgressions but express doubts when it comes to the resurrection, viewing it as something scientifically implausible or irrational. Nevertheless, Paul asserts the crucial importance of the resurrection, stating, "And if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14).

While the crucifixion of Jesus occurred over 2,000 years ago in history, the promise of resurrection pertains to a future event. As humans, we live in the present, understanding that our earthly lives are temporary and finite. Life can end at various ages—some may live to 20, others to 50, 80, or even beyond 100. Each life has a 'Best Before' period; now is the best time for us. Because of our hope in eternal life, we are encouraged to appreciate and relish our time on earth, regardless of the trials we face. All our actions rooted in love for the Lord hold significance and meaning.

3. Paul emphasizes the necessity of receiving the gospel with our hearts and confessing it with our mouths. "For one believes with the heart and is thus justified, and one confesses with the mouth and is thus saved" (Romans 10:10). The gospel must be deeply internalized, yet it should not remain hidden within us. It becomes vibrant and powerful when expressed outwardly. We are justified through our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, as Paul writes, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written,

‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’” (Romans 1:17). This statement reveals the declaration of God’s grace, illustrating how He graciously reaches out to humanity through the grace of the Cross.

Believing in the gospel can be particularly challenging for modern individuals who have been shaped by a worldview rooted in scientific and evolutionary thinking. I too struggled for a considerable time to embrace the gospel fully. In my younger years, I would attend church regularly, yet my faith was superficial. While I enjoyed socializing with friends and participated actively in summer Vacation Bible School, I had little faith. It wasn’t until I reached the ninth grade that I began to grapple with critical questions about the Bible and its teachings. I asked the assistant pastor at my church numerous questions, seeking a deeper understanding and clarity in my faith journey.

Throughout my high school years, I began to wholeheartedly embrace the gospel. This spiritual awakening ignited a profound shift in my thinking, as the words of the Bible, once cryptic and distant, began to resonate deeply within me. The once elusive messages, particularly those found in the first chapters of Genesis, started to be understood. As I welcomed God into my heart, the awe-inspiring narrative of creation — the notion that God summoned everything into existence from utter nothingness — became not just a story, but a foundational truth I could believe in.

The medieval theologian Anselm, a pivotal figure in the development of Christian thought, articulated the concept of “Faith Seeking Understanding.” He theorized that to truly engage with the world of faith, one must first take the leap of faith and then strive to understand it intellectually. The Apostle Paul poignantly describes faith as a spiritual gift from God. Without this faith, viewing the crucifixion as meaningful in our lives seems nearly impossible. However, when we allow the grace of redemption to fill our hearts, the event of the cross evolves into a profoundly moving experience that touches our very souls. This heartfelt connection strengthens us, giving us the courage and sincerity to share our experiences with those around us.

According to Paul, the essence of the gospel is to be boldly shared through our lips. When we recount the gospel to others, we tap into the transformative power of God, which can work wonders in the hearts of listeners. After experiencing the boundless joy of the gospel during my high school journey, I felt compelled to spread this message far and wide. I carried the Four Spiritual Principles to communicate this saving message to my friends. These booklets, which serve as a valuable resource, are now in the church’s Narthex, readily available for anyone wishing to share the life-changing message. The core teachings of the Four Spiritual Principles can be encapsulated as follows:

- 1) The first of the Four Spiritual Laws asserts: “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” supported by the promise of John 3:16 and the abundant life proclaimed in John 10:10.
- 2) The second principle acknowledges the human condition: “Humanity is tainted by sin and is therefore separated from God. As a result, we cannot know God’s wonderful plan for our lives,” as articulated in Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.
- 3) The third principle reveals the profound truth that “Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for our sin. Through Jesus Christ, we can have our sins forgiven and restore a right relationship with God,” citing key passages such as Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, and John 14:6.
- 4) The fourth principle concludes with the essential act of personal choice: “We must place our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior in order to receive the gift of salvation and know God’s wonderful plan for our lives,” as emphasized in John 1:12, Acts 16:31, and Ephesians 2:8-9.

Our faith becomes a “living faith” when it flows freely from our hearts and is spoken aloud through our mouths. Jesus promises us, “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32). The emblem of The United Methodist Church is known as the ‘Cross and Flame. The cross symbolizes the sacrifice and love of Jesus Christ, while the flame represents the Holy Spirit and the fervent passion of our faith. It is my heartfelt desire that, as Methodists, we can once again ignite that unquenchable passion for the gospel in our hearts so that we may share our saving faith with others in need.