



Cleansed and Fed: The Sacraments Promote Good Theology

THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH

First, some definitions:

- Theology
a system of beliefs about God.
- Doctrine
(in our use, here) a teaching of the Bible



Respond to this charge:

A study of Christian doctrine may be interesting, but it's not especially relevant to every-day life. **Might seem as though a study of doctrine doesn't apply to real life. But then why did God teach it? [Don't need to exhaust the topic here; the lesson will carry the point forward.]**

The Nature of Faith

Romans 3:21-22

²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God **comes through faith in Jesus Christ** to all who believe.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and **this not from yourselves**, it is the gift of God – ⁹ **not by works**, so that no one can boast.

Prove the following statements from the passages above:

- Faith is not a work of man.
- Faith is not an active decision of our own free will.
- Faith is not a condition we must fulfill before our salvation is complete.

The Formula of Concord (1577):

For faith does not justify because it is so good a work and so God-pleasing a virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy gospel. (SD, III 13)

Evaluate: "I'm going to heaven because I'm a believer in Jesus."

Faith isn't the *cause* of salvation. Faith doesn't make things happen ("I believe this ice will hold me" - but my faith doesn't make it so!) Faith is only as good as its object. Faith is a receiving hand (organon leptikon) for receiving God's gifts.

So then, what *is* faith? Use the following passages to provide a three-fold answer:

2 Peter 1:2

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

MIND Faith is KNOWLEDGE. **In Greek: *epiginosko*, not *oida*.**
In contrast to: "I believe in a god (nebulous as to who this god is)"

1 Corinthians 12:3

No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

WILL Faith is ASSENT. = **Agreement.**
In contrast to atheistic Bible scholar

John 14:1

[Jesus said,] "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."

HEART Faith is TRUST. = **Reliance**
In contrast to honoring God w/lips but hearts far from him

If we slip into thinking that faith is merely an intellectual exercise, how will this affect the way we listen to sermons?

Just a matter of learning things. Tell me how the gospel "works." Best compliment about sermon: "interesting." A misunderstanding of what faith is.

How can the sacraments help to encourage a proper view of faith?

Sacraments visibly demonstrate that faith needs more than explanations and how-to's. Faith needs *Jesus*. This is a good way to listen to sermons, too.

Sing or say the following hymn stanza together.

Faith is a living power from heaven
That grasps the promise God has given,
A trust that cannot be o'erthrown,
Fixed heartily on Christ alone.

*Petrus Herbert
Christian Worship Hymn 404, s.1*

The Source of Faith

2 Corinthians 4:5-7

⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

What does Paul mean when he says, "We do not preach ourselves"?

My skill, my personality, my ideas, my persuasiveness, my charisma, my logic

Who are the "jars of clay"? What point is Paul making?

All messengers of the gospel. Weakness, sin, but the message contained in us is powerful.

What kind of "power" is Paul speaking of in verse 7?

Light of knowledge of glory of God in face of X = Gospel. (Romans 1:16)

Evaluate: "Our congregation is strong because of the gifts and abilities of the called workers who serve us."

A balanced answer is key. To the extent that they use their gifts to communicate law and gospel, yes, but mostly NO. Can be dangerous to put too much onto called workers.

How can the God-given rituals of Baptism and Communion help us to understand the role a pastor may play in our life of faith?

Someone is needed to administer them, but not much skill required - all God!

Sing or say the following hymn stanzas together.

Faith finds in Christ whate'er we need
To save or strengthen us indeed,
Receiving grace from heaven's throne
And humbly sharing cross and crown.

Faith in the Savior brings us peace
And bids the mourner's weeping cease;
By faith the children's place we claim
And give all honor to one name.

Christian Worship Hymn 404, s.2,3

The Reason We Go To Church

“Nearly 22 inches of snow fell in Boston and more was expected, closing in on the 2003 record of 27.6 inches. The archdiocese in the heavily Roman Catholic city reminded parishioners that under church law, the **requirement** to attend Sunday Mass ‘does not apply when there is grave difficulty in fulfilling this **obligation.**’” (AP News, Boston, February 9, 2013).

When the weather is good, what motivation does the Boston archdiocese offer here for attending Sunday Mass? How will this kind of motivation lead a person to think about their relationship with God?

Obligation - leads either to pharisaism or despair.

If we’ve been regular in our church attendance, we might slip into thinking that we don’t need much help with our faith anymore.

- How might this kind of thinking affect our desire to go to church and our expectations concerning how our attendance will benefit us?
Merely habit. Low expectations
- How might this kind of thinking affect the form and pattern we choose for worship?
Jazz it up. Shake things up. Stop things from becoming mere habit. Healthy variety is fine, but don’t let variety be rooted in a misunderstanding of what faith is and what faith needs.

How do the sacraments help restore a proper perspective? If attending church isn’t an obligation, then why do we go? Use the Small Catechism to answer:

We might assume believers don’t need much help with faith. But scripture portrays sacraments with extreme language (crucifixion of flesh, eat and drink body and blood of Savior. Each week (each day!) we are beggars longing to be fed.

“Baptism means that the old Adam (a.k.a. “sinful nature”) in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (SC IV).

“What is the Sacrament of Holy Communion? It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ for us Christians to eat and to drink” (SC VI).

Sing or say the following hymn stanzas together.

We thank you, then, O God of heav’n,
That you to us this faith have giv’n
Through mighty Word and Sacrament
To trust the one whom you have sent.

As you have promised, grant each soul
Its holy faith’s true end and goal:
The blessedness no foes destroy,
Eternal love and light and joy. *CW 404, s.4,5*