

“Of Saving Faith” part 2, WCF 14.1.3–4, How Faith Is Planted and How Faith Grows

2021.03.14 Sabbath School Lesson

Hopewell ARPC, Culleoka, TN

WCF 14.1

I. The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls,(a) is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts;(b) and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word:(c) by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.(d)

(a) Heb. 10:39.

(b) II Cor. 4:13; Eph. 1:17, 18, 19; Eph. 2:8.

(c) Rom. 10:14, 17.

(d) I Pet. 2:2; Acts 20:32; Rom. 4:11; Luke 17:5; Rom. 1:16, 17.

and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word

cf. LC 155, How is the word made effectual to salvation? *The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.*

Romans 10:6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) ⁷ or, “‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³ For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

¹⁴ How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: *How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!”*

¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” ¹⁷ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened

¹Peter 2:1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Acts 20:17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; ²⁰ how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. ²⁴ But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

²⁵ “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.

²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse

things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

³² "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Romans 4:9 Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. ¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹² and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

Luke 22:14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. ¹⁵ Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

¹⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

¹⁹ And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

²⁰ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. ²¹ But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. ²² And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" ²³ Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing.

Luke 17:1 Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! ² It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. ³ Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

⁵ And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. ² For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. ³ For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said:

*"So I swore in My wrath,
'They shall not enter My rest,' "*

although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: *"And God rested on the seventh day from all His works";* ⁵ and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."

⁶ Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷ again He designates a certain day, saying in David, *"Today,"* after such a long time, as it has been said:

*"Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts."*

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. ⁹ There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

¹⁴ Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. Please be aware of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are welcome to listen to the audio recording, which you may find via tinysa.com/hopewellarp)

Our father in heaven we thank you for giving us life for we were dead we thank you for giving us faith for we do not have in ourselves even to look to Christ. We thank you for the work of your spirit. That you have given yourself both in your son.

And in the spirit of your son whom you have sent into our hearts by which by whom we call you our Father and we thank you that you have told us even of the things that your Holy Spirit uses not only to give but also to grow our faith and so we pray that as we consider these things from your word.

That your word being one of those things that your spirit would be pleased to grow us in our faith for we ask it in Jesus name amen. So we're in the first paragraph of Westminster confession. 14. Which is the chapter on of saving faith and we took the first half of the paragraph last week the grace of faith whereby the elector enabled to believe to the saving of their souls is the work of the spirit of Christ in their hearts and so we found out that faith is a grace which means it's a gift and it's a gift that happens not by our working but by the spirits working so we have the who of the work of giving us faith.

And this we have the how of the giving and the how of the growing and notice that the how of the giving is one of the means of grace in particular is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the word the word ordinarily there cuts two ways one is that it leaves the liberty of God to work above beyond or even apart from his means which he can do and yet the word or.

Dinarily is also related to the word ordained that he has specifically appointed his word and commonly uses he honors that which he is appointed his word as the means by which he usually gives that faith, but we have all three of the ordinary means of grace. In the last part of the paragraph which focuses not now on how God gives faith but how God grows faith by which also and by the administration of the sacraments and prayer it is increased and strengthened so the ministry of the word and the administration of the sacraments and prayer they all increase and strengthen faith, they are means that the Holy Spirit uses to do that work, so God not only gives us faith, but he grows us in faith and, This morning one of my own children was reading in his Bible.

And he got to the place where Jesus says to the Apostles. Have I been with you three years and you still don't believe and then he flipped me flip back in his Bible to John 2 to show me how at the very first one of his miracles that says that they had believed so which was it did they believe at the start or did they still not believe after three years and mathematically the answer is yes, but we talked about how faith is a gift in the first place and the growth.

Wing of our faith is another gift. And the man for instance, he said Lord, I believe helped my unbelief that even when we have been given to believe and there are different kinds of things that are called believing but even while we are given when we have been already given to believe we still need to believe more.

We realize that our faith is weak and praise God that even the weakest genuine faith that has been given by the spirit has the same strong Christ. And has him completely although his work in us is not yet complete and so faith is something that we don't need not only to be given but to be grown in.

So so those two things make up the rest of this paragraph. In the first part then is that this work of the Spirit of Christ in the hearts of of the elect whom he is making believers by giving them faith is ordinary. Wrought or nearly done brought about work by the ministry of the word and is important that we recognize the in this word ministry they're saying the same thing as we say in the answer to larger catechism 155 when we say especially the preaching.

How is the word made effectual to salvation? The spirit of God maketh the reading but especially, Either preaching of the word and effectual means of enlightening convincing and humbling sinners of driving them out of themselves of drawing them unto Christ of conforming them to His image and subduing them to His will of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions of building them up in grace and establishing their hearts and holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

So, There's this very high view of the preaching of the word even above our reading the Bible. Is it good to read your Bible of course? The Bible is God's very words. It says that every word of Scripture has been breathed out by God. So you can have an audience with God, not only through Jesus whenever you believe in Jesus at any time you can come to the throne of grace and find mercy and obtain help not just seek.

But fine not just request but obtain in prayer well the marvelous privilege that you have in prayer you can add to that the marvelous privilege of reading your Bible that it is as if God is sitting with you breathing outwards he uses he uses the the word he invents a word actually God breathes, so it's good to read the Bible is it good to have the Bible taught to you at home by your daddy or if you're, A wife by your husband absolutely the Lord has has ordained or appointed for husbands under Christ to love their wives in part by washing them with water with the word that is part of God's plan for cleansing wives is the the continual throughout their marriage together the Christian husband reading and applying the words to his wife and knowing that it is Christ.

Who does that to his bride generally the church and who is doing it specifically to that Christian husband's bride as he uses the husband to do that and fathers are to bring up their children to nourish their children, it actually uses the same word and Ephesians six so we recently heard and our afternoon sermons.

To nourish their children in the discipline and instruction of the of the Lord training and admonition and then of course Deuteronomy six and the word of God being appointed for all of those parent child conversations, but. Where do we get this idea that it is especially the preaching of the word and so if you look they give you two footnotes to proof texts Romans 10 verse 14 how then shall they call one him in whom they have not believed and how shall they believe in him and?

I don't remember if the prepositions in or ACE are there. I think they're not actually how they believe him whom they have not heard someone who has a Greek Bible can check me on that and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard is what the New King James says and how shall they hear without a preacher and then verse 17, so then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, but as we have been doing is good for us to put the, Most.

You proof texts in their context, so that we can see what the passage passage as a whole is teaching. He says, but the righteousness of faith speaks in this way. Do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven? Now, the apostle is making application. I believe this is originally from Deuteronomy, let me.

See real quick if it gives us a footnote that tells us. Yes, this is Deuteronomy 30 it the end of the book God making plain to the nation of Israel how how generous he has been to them how good he has been to them to give him to give them his word and bringing it near them.

Do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven and the apostle says that is to bring Christ down from above God sent his son from heaven. You didn't have to go up to heaven to get Jesus and bring him down to earth. God is the one who by his power and in his mercy has done that or who will descend into the abyss that is to bring up Christ from the dead.

This point in the letter to the Romans, he's just told them he's already told them four chapters earlier and he's made other applications as well already but that the resurrection of Jesus is where the life that we have in Christ to love God and believe in Him and obey Him and offer every part of who we are as slaves unto him for righteousness.

That that all comes from the resurrection power of Jesus. And so he's taking what Moses said to Israel that do not say who will go up into heaven or who will go down into the best because the word of that God has given has God has brought it near you says isn't that so much more for you that God has sent his son down from heaven and he's raised his son up from the dead and it's his son's resurrection life that he gives you by his spirit in order to love God.

And obey God and it's out of loving God and obeying God that you do things like honor your mother and father and work hard and everything that that God has given you to do. So you didn't have to bring up Christ from the dead. He did that by his own power, but what does it say the word is near you in your mouth and in your heart, this is the word of faith which we preach.

So listen because he's here saying that. What's coming in the next couple of verses is also the work of God. He is the one who not only brought Jesus down from heaven for us and raised Jesus up from the grave but he is the one who puts his word in our heart and His word in our mouth by making us to believe it and this is one of the wonderful promises that would that that he said would come about when he sent his son and his son ascended into heaven and his son sat down and his son poured out his spirit that one of the things.

That would accompany this new covenant administration of this new administration of the covenant of grace was that God would write his word on our hearts and he does that by faith and when he does that he puts his word especially in two places in our heart and in our mouth.

The word is near you in your mouth and in your heart that is the word of faith which we preach that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you will be saved for with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation for the scripture says whoever believes on him will not be put to shame for there is no distinction between you and Greek for the same Lord over all.

Is rich to all who call upon him for whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved now this isn't just saying that if you get up in front of other people or go to a session meeting with the elders or stand in front of the church and make vows and that the words come out of your mouth that that means that you're saved and it doesn't even mean that if you think those words in your mind are in your heart that that thinking those words in your mind and in your heart.

Means you're saved he's saying what it means is that when the Holy Spirit makes you believe that and it's that belief that makes you think those words in your heart and mind it it's though it belief that you are out of which you are telling others confessing that Jesus is your Lord that that is that that is how you are saved those are the ones who cannot be lost if you believe in him you.

Will be saved if you call on if you believe in him you will not be put to shame if you call on him you shall be saved and that's what he's saying when he says how then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed and you know if someone who's being a smarty pants good could just say, you know, they could pair it out the words and these but that's not what he's talking about, he's not talking about paraded words he's talking about words that are coming out of faith that God who brought Jesus.

Down out of heaven God who raised Jesus up out of the grave has worked in your heart by giving you faith and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher and how shall they preach unless they are sent as it is written how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of the peace who bring glad tidings of good things.

But they have not all obeyed the gospel for Isaiah says Lord who has believed our report so then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God so it is God's ordinary way the way he is ordinarily appointed to give faith is by sending a preacher. And the preacher preaching the good news about Jesus that he is God the son from all eternity who added to himself a human nature and by the Holy Spirit taking some of the substance of Mary and making a body for Christ in her womb and creating for him a reasoning soul a reasonable the old word is soul that that that fully human nature that.

Second person of the trinity added to himself that in that nature he'll be lived and he obeyed perfectly and he fulfilled all of the prophecies about him and accomplished everything that God said he would do including going to the cross and suffering the wrath that our sins deserve that when God sends you a preacher who gets up in the pulpit and he does what we're doing even now.

That that is especially his means. And you can see that and you can say you could say Lord. I know you've given me a Bible and I know you've given me a daddy and we have individual worship and we have family worship but your word says in Romans 10 that it is especially the preaching of your word that you use to give faith and I need faith.

And even if you have believed in Jesus for 80 years or a hundred years, you still I need faith and that's one of the things that's one of the reasons why you come in to the public worship and you give your heart and ask God to help you in the and put his word in your heart and in your mouth by the preacher that he has sent it can be a messy thing.

The Lord knows that this is not the first congregation that has found it a messy thing to call a preacher to find out who might be available and measure character and gifting against First Timothy chapter 3 and Titus chapter 1 and and pray and go through all of the logistics of that, but the God who sovereignly rules and superintends all things is in the business of giving.

Faith to those who need Christ to be their righteousness and the ordinary way he does that is by calling preachers and sending them. And by them preaching the gospel to you. And and so is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the word that especially Romans 10 verses 6 through 17, and of course, this isn't the only place that's taught but the idea of faith being a gift.

So, it's given God's way and then the Apostle goes on by the Holy Spirit to say and this is how God does it? In fact, he almost seems to say He doesn't do it any other way. Right? It's very strongly put here. How can they believe without hearing how can they hear without a preacher?

How can they have that preacher unless one is sent? Those are rhetorical questions and they almost positively imply they can't believe in any other way but I think there's room to imply. God knows if he's willing to do it any other way but as far as we have been given.

To expect this is the way he does it. And so, this is the way when we depend upon the Holy Spirit we say I can't give myself faith. Only the Holy Spirit can give me faith and then you come to the Holy Spirit's word and this is what he says about how he gives this is what he says to us about how he gives that faith.

Is he able to in other ways? Yes. Has he by other means? I think you can make a case from various scriptures that there have been extraordinary ways that the Lord has given faith even in the womb in some cases. But, This is the way that he has given us to seek it from him because this is his appointed an ordinary means.

So we started late. And so we'll finish early we'll take the by which also and by the administration of the sacraments and prayer it has increased and strengthened next week. But you can see how far beyond now we are from the Armenian versus Reformed discussion, right? This is not just, Faith as a gift.

This is faith as a gift done by a person in a particular way and so we because we have to depend upon him to give it to us we attend upon the means that he is appointed. All right, let's pray. Father in heaven we thank you for this portion of your word and for all of your word we thank you that you have fulfilled that promise of Christ that the things that remained to be said to the apostles his spirit whom he poured out completed giving to them and saying to them so that they were written down for our instruction we thank you for teaching us reminding us what we know if we would just, Be honest with ourselves that we are not able to increase our own faith.

That we are not able to produce more from within us that we depend upon you to give it to us in the first place and to grow us in it so we praise you for the gift of your spirit and we thank you that you have appointed means so that we might be able to take actions that imply and show that we depend upon you to use the means that you have appointed to do the work for which you have appointed it help us now even as we're about to go next door and gather.

In the public worship and be gathered by Christ with that congregation and glory and hear him who speaks from heaven that we might hear with faith and that you would grow us then by your grace in our faith we ask in Jesus name amen.