

Text

(Pre-readings Ps 19 and Hebrews 11)

Eph 2:8

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God

Pray

Main Point

Faith is Rational

Introduction (300)

Hook

Faith has often been associated with irrationality.

Something opposite to sound reason.

People talk about taking a leap of faith. Leaping of a ledge (real or figurative) despite sound reason.

Is Faith about ignoring facts, turning off your rational thinking and simply accepting something to be true despite everything telling you otherwise?

Some people think of faith in that way, but this is not Biblical faith!

Much the opposite.

When the Bible talks of saving faith, it talks of a reasoned, rational belief, based on truth and consistent with reality.

There is nothing irrational about Faith. Faith is rational.

This is our topic this evening as we continue through our study of the 1689. We have now reached chapter 14: Saving Faith.

Outline

To help us navigate through this topic, that **Faith is Rational** we will break up our time into three parts:

1. The Source of Faith
2. The Structure of Faith
3. The Sureness of Faith

Part 1 – The Source of Faith

From the Confession

So let us begin with our first part: The Source of Faith.

If you do have a copy of the confession, turn with me to chapter 14, and listen to how the confession summarises the source of Faith in paragraph 1:

*The grace of faith, whereby the elect are **enabled** to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily brought by the ministry of the Word; by which also, and by the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, prayer, and other means appointed of God, it is increased and strengthened.*

Faith given By God

The first thing to notice is that God enables believers to have faith. This is important to keep in mind.

Yes, faith is our responsibility. Faith in fact, is the first element in the order of salvation in which we are an active participant. We **must** have faith.

But the very ability to have faith is a gift of God. The ability to believe is the work of the Spirit of Christ in our hearts.

As Eph 2:8 says:

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God

This is the truth the confession is talking about. We are enabled by God to have faith.

Faith Brought through Preaching

The second thing to notice about this paragraph is the means God uses to bring about saving faith.

God could have used

- a special brew you have to drink,
- or a special ritual you have to perform,
- or some chant you have to sing to give us faith

But God has decided, in his wisdom, to use the Preaching of the Word as the ordinary means to enable sinners to believe.

Remember Romans 10:14,17

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

God has chosen to work through the preaching of the word to save sinners. People are saved through explaining God's word and showing how it is relevant to them.

Application - Corporate and Private Preaching

When we think of preaching, we think primarily of preaching in a corporate setting on a Sunday morning or evening. There is a special working of the Spirit of Christ as his church gathers. We know that to be true, and we have a high view of the Lord's day because of that.

But we do not limit preaching the word in the sense Romans 10 talks about to a corporate setting.

When you have a conversation with a friend and you explain to them who Jesus Christ is, what he did on the Cross and how that is specifically relevant to your friend, you are "preaching" to them in the way Romans 10 is talking about. You are proclaiming God's word to them.

The promise that saving faith comes from hearing the message is relevant to those private conversations, too.

So, yes, we invite people to hear the Word preached on a Sunday and we "preach" to them privately in the hope that they would have faith.

Faith Strengthened by the Word

The confession also states that our faith is strengthened by the preaching of the Word as well as other means.

Baptism, the lord's supper and prayer are specifically spelled out as means God uses to strengthen our faith. (Additional means are spelled out in chapter 22 of the confession)

And in a real way, these other means are also preaching Christ.

Every time someone get's baptised, going into the water and out of the water proclaims the death and resurrection of Christ and how sinners can be united with him.

Every time we take the lord's Supper, we are reminded of how Jesus Christ bled and died for us because we needed a saviour.

Every time we pray we declare our dependence on God and his trustworthiness to save us.

The Word is proclaimed in all of these means.

And by this proclamation of the Word/of Christ our faith is strengthened.

Application - Where do you go to strengthen your faith?

So when you know your faith is weakened, where do you turn to? What means do you use? Do you use the means God has given you?

Yes faith is a gift, but you must accept the gift in the way the giver gives it.

Link

Faith is a gift of God, and He uses the means of preaching the word to enable and increase that gift.

But what is faith? What is the nature or essence of faith?

If it is not a leap in the dark and a turning off of rational, what is it?

This brings us to our second section: The Structure of Faith

Part 2 – The Structure of Faith

Three Elements of Faith

Faith is an incredibly important thing. We are saved from eternal hell through faith.

We can't afford to get faith wrong.

Thankfully, the teaching on faith in the Bible is rich and completely sufficient for us to understand it.

Wise men and theologians have given faith three elements in order to reflect the rich teaching on this matter.

Saving faith is made up of three parts, each important in our understanding of faith.

These are:

1. Knowledge (Notitia)
2. Conviction (Ascensus)
3. Trust (Fiducia)

All three of these components make up the structure of Faith.

Illustration of the road sign

I want you to think about driving along a road you have never driven before.

Maybe you are on a road trip with you family in the far north.

Now if you have been in the far north, the roads are not like Canterbury, and you are constantly negotiating bends in the roads.

Now road engineers from NZTA have done a helpful thing where they have put a sign before the corner to tell you what a safe speed is to go around that corner. Some corners are 85 corners, some are 25 corners.

So there you are, driving along at 100 km. You see a sign that says 85 km corner ahead. You slow down and go through the corner safely.

Now in those few moments of negotiating that corner, knowledge, conviction and trust were all in play.

First you saw the sign. Knowledge. Some facts were conveyed to you. Important facts in that moment.

Second you were convinced that that sign was an official sign from NZTA. It was not a local who did a painting, or a coincidence, or a bad joke. You were convinced this sign was truly representing the safe speed limit for that corner.

And then finally you showed trust. You entrusted yourself, and your whole family to the fact that 85 was a safe speed. If the corner was actually a 35 corner

and you hit it at 85 you and your family would crash and die.

You trusted the sign with your life and consequently changed speed.

So negotiating a corner involves knowledge, conviction and trust.

Saving Saith also has these three components.

Knowledge

Let's think more about knowledge first

Romans 10:14 is helpful here again:

*¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? **And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?** And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*

To believe in something, you need to know about it. There are certain facts that are to be learned. Truths to be understood.

Or better, to trust someone you need to know something about them. The more you know someone, if they prove trustworthy, the more you will trust them.

God has revealed truths about himself and key truths about ourselves.

These are objective truths that can be discussed, understood, and known. These truths can be studied and researched and wrestled with. God has given us our brain and wants us to interact with reality.

Listen to Psalm 19:7-9 as it talks about God's revelation.

*⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.*

*The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.*

*⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.*

*The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.*

*⁹ The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.*

*The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.*

Our faith is based on God's word. God's word provides a knowledge base that forms part of our faith. There is no "wishful thinking" or irrationality about it.

Application – Key elements to know

And when it comes to initial saving faith, we agree that the knowledge base may be rather small. It is not necessary to understand all the Bible has to teach in order to be saved.

But a basic knowledge **is necessary**.

Specifically, a basic knowledge of Jesus Christ and of yourself.

- Who is Jesus Christ? He is the Son of God who became a man.
- What did he do? He died on a cross to pay for your sins.
- Who am I? You are a sinner who broke God's law and deserve to go to hell
- How can I be saved? You can be saved by trusting that Jesus paid for your sins.

This basic knowledge about Jesus Christ and yourself is a necessary part of Saving Faith. And God's word provides the basis for these truths.

Just like the NZTA road engineers gave a speed sign to negotiate the corner and live, God has given us His Word to navigate life and live.

But knowledge is not enough. Seeing the road sign is not enough to be safe on the road. You must also be convinced it is placed there by an authority.

Conviction

That is the next component of faith: Conviction.

You can have a lot of knowledge about The Lord of the Rings without being convinced it is true. And fair enough too.

Likewise, you can have a lot of knowledge of the Bible and think it is a mere fairy tale.

But biblical faith takes that knowledge revealed in God's word and is convinced it is true because God is the author.

Because the Bible is God's word, we take it as valid and true. Just like you take an official road sign as valid and true.

Our conviction is directly linked to who we know God to be.

Listen to how Hebrews 11:13 puts it:

Heb 11:1-3

*Now faith is **the assurance** of things hoped for, **the conviction** of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³ By faith we*

understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Knowing who God is, what he is like, and how he acts gives us reason for confidence in his word. Which means even in the midst of suffering our convictions stands strong. Listen to how Paul puts it in 2 Tim 1:12

*¹² That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because **I know whom I have believed**, and **am convinced** that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.*

Paul had faith. He had knowledge about God and he was sure that knowledge was true.

Trust

The third and final element of Faith is Trust. Or more specifically, personal trust in Jesus Christ.

Listen to how the confession put's it:

but the principal acts of saving faith have immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, and resting upon him alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

Saving faith has it's ultimate component in personally trusting in Jesus Christ as your Saviour.

This is usually the component when we typically think of Faith, but this trust is not to be separated from knowledge and conviction.

It is because of knowledge and conviction that we trust Jesus Christ fully.

And this trust in Christ is best seen in contrasted with a trust in yourself.

Listen to how Paul puts it in Philippians 3:3, 8-10

³For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God^[b] and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh

Then he lists how he could have confidence in the flesh, with his supposedly perfect obedience of the law, picking up at verse 8 he continues by saying what he does trust in

*For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may **gain Christ**⁹ and be **found in him**, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—¹⁰ **that I may know him** and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Paul had a choice. You have a choice.

On one side, you can trust your efforts, your good works, your religious activities.

Or you can trust Christ. His perfect righteousness. His death. His Resurrection.

Saving Faith trusts in Christ

And note how immensely personal it is. It is a personal trust. It is a trust between one person and another.

John Murray put it this way ***“It is an entrustment of ourselves to Him. It is not simply believing him, it is believing in him and on him”***

Jesus Christ is a person, he is alive, and he invites you to trust him as saviour.

How do you finish this sentence:

“I know I am a sinner and deserve to go to hell, but I will be ok because....(fill in the blank)”

How you finish that sentence shows what you trust in. Or better yet, who you trust in.

Do you trust in yourself? Your works and your deeds?

Or do you trust in Jesus Christ? His works and his deeds?

Link

Saving faith involves knowledge, conviction and trust.

Anyone is capable of the bare minimum of these to be saved.

Now we know that faith can be strong or weak, but as long as it is true faith, it is saving faith.

Which brings us to our third and final section: The Sureness of Faith

Part 3 – The Sureness of Faith

From the Confession

The last paragraph of chapter 14 acknowledges the varying degrees of faith in believers, and points us to the fact that if we have faith in Jesus Christ, he will see us to the end, because he is the one who has given us the faith and he is the one who will see it to the end.

Listen to how the confession puts it:

This faith, although it be different in degrees, and may be weak or strong, yet it is in the least degree of it different in the kind or nature of it, as is all other saving grace, from the faith and common grace of temporary believers; and therefore, though it may be many times assailed and weakened, yet it gets the victory, growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

Temporary Believer

A weak faith does not mean a false faith.

And a zealous individual does not mean a true faith.

When the confession uses the term “temporary believer” it is talking about those instances where someone appears to be a Christian, but falls away. Think of the parable of the Sower. In Matthew 13:20-21 Jesus explains the seed sown in rocky ground:

²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away

1 John 2:19 also talks of the one who seemed to be a believer, but who ultimately showed otherwise.

The key of true faith is not zeal or outrageous work, but on a personal trust in Jesus Christ as your saviour based on being convinced of the knowledge presented in the Bible.

True faith is to connect yourself to the steam engine that is Jesus Christ.

The engine is moving in a certain direction and it will bring the carriages to destination.

Now it is true that as a passenger you can walk down the carriages and seem to be moving backwards. (a weak faith)

And it is also true that someone on foot may seem to be going the same direction as the steam engine, and even moving quick than the person with a weak faith. (a zealous false faith)

But as time goes on, the passenger who is walking down the train will be taken to the destination. In time they learn to walk in the same direction as the engine, even running in the right direction to get close to Christ.

While the person on foot will grow tired and disillusioned as they depend on their own strength, and ultimately they will not make it to destination.

The key difference is personal trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Jesus is the author and finisher

Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of our faith. Listen to how Hebrews 12:1-2 puts it:

Heb 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

He is worthy of our trust.

Conclusion

Saving faith is the work of God. He performs this work through the preaching of the Word.

In His word, God has given us signs to help us navigate life. Just like we have signs to help us navigate corners on a windy road.

God has given us key truths we are to know. Truths about ourselves and truths about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Just like NZTA sets up signs to share knowledge about the road.

We have a choice to accept God's word as authoritative or not. Is the bible a fairy tale or does it have authority? Just like you need to decide if this sign a legitimate NZTA sign or if it is a fraud?

And we have a choice to personally trust Jesus Christ as our saviour. The alternative is to trust our own actions. Just like a fool may trust their driving skills and take a 35 km corner at 100km instead of trusting the road sign.

Friends, just like it would be completely irrational to not have faith in a legitimate road sign, so it is completely irrational to not have faith in the God of the universe.

We are not merely negotiating a windy road, we are negotiating eternal destiny between heaven or hell.

As Christians we are confident of our eternal destiny because of knowledge, conviction and trust in the Person of Jesus Christ. That is true Saving Faith.

Let me end by reading Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith^[b] into this grace in which we stand, and we^[c] rejoice^[d] in hope of the glory of God.

Let us pray