

Time: The Week of the Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost & the Day of Saint James of Jerusalem, Brother of Jesus and Martyr, Tuesday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012, Concordia University Irvine chapel service

Text: Romans 10:17 and Others

Title: "Sola Fide/Faith Alone"

In Jesus' Name. Amen. We sin against God and we hurt ourselves when we perpetuate the language about having salvation and faith when we say something like, "All you have to do," or "All we have to do," is to have faith. And while technically one could make an argument that this language *might* be used to convey Scriptural truth, most often something entirely different is meant. This very popular way of speaking in pop-American Christianity seems like a good thing. After-all, aren't we encouraging faith itself? And isn't faith necessary for salvation in Christ Jesus? So what's wrong with that?

But we are reminded that it is often the subtle mistakes that cause us to take wrong turns and as a result, to stray from Scripture. It is a fantastic irony that we could firmly establish sola-gratia (grace-alone) and sola scriptura (Scripture-alone) and then come back and contradict both with a blurry understanding of sola fide (faith-alone).

What is often meant by "All you have to do" or "All we have to do is to have faith" is the strong inference that at the end of the day God requires the exertion of your will to accept Him, to open your heart so as to permit salvation to be completed. Make no mistake about this dear Christians, this is at the core, synergism/a cooperating with God and it clearly conflicts with what St. Augustine said, "Grace is not grace in any way, unless grace is grace in every way." Which is to say in our consideration today of faith that the moment we insert human disposition, human will, human acceptance as prerequisite for salvation, then grace is no longer grace...we have now made faith not from grace, but from us, and the pure gift is contaminated by the religion of man.

Putting so much stock in faith of course has a name. It is called fideism. It is for all intents and purposes having faith in faith, but this does not give the assurance we need. Many have sincerely "opened their hearts to Jesus," have genuinely "decided to accept Jesus"...and in many and various ways had in some form rested on the actual act of faith – fideism – and then at some later time realized that they had all kinds of doubts: had they been sincere enough? Did they "do it right"? Did they have the correct balance of knowledge, acceptance, and trust? Was their trust strong enough? And in every case, their concern was faith itself, and not the object of faith who is Jesus.

On this day when we remember St. James of Jerusalem, brother of Jesus and martyr, we would be wise to consider that when James is admonishing us and commanding us, “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting (James 1:6),” then we must employ the hermeneutical principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture more than ever. Remember what the father of the possessed child said when seeking help from Jesus (as recorded in Mark 9:24): **“I believe; help my unbelief!”** In so far as you have faith in faith, you will be filled with doubts; but in so far as you hold to the One that faith clings to (Jesus), then and only then is faith powerful; then and only then does faith have a sure footing.

To say “all we have to do is to have faith” forgets that God Himself says that true children of God are NOT born by “the will of the flesh nor of the will of man (John 1:13).

To say, “all we have to do is to have faith” is in fact epically superfluous. If I were to say that all you have to do is to have faith that you have neurons and synapses conducting electrical impulses in your brain, this “faith” does not make it so; if you focus on your breathing or if you don’t, you will still breath; if you are more or less self-conscious about your heart beating, your circulatory system will still function. Saving faith is not about focusing on faith, but is a gift from God that is entirely occupied not with faith itself, but with Jesus Christ. Saving faith is disinterested in faith; saving faith is entirely interested in Jesus Christ. Becoming self-conscious about faith misses the object of the faith; saving faith could care less about itself; saving faith reaches out for Jesus and when the empty hand of faith grabs hold of Him by the grace of God; it does not look at the hand, but it looks upon the Savior whose blood has covered your every sin. I conclude with an excerpt of an awesome dialog written by Bo Giertz in *The Hammer of God*, notice that the dying man Johannes wants to look within himself, but Katrina who is ministering to him does not focus on faith for the sake faith, but presents to the man Jesus, the founder and perfecter of faith who creates faith not relying on your will which only has power to resist God, but relies on the Word of Christ which has all power to CREATE faith (Romans 10:17)! [please refer to this splendid book, pgs. 29-31 in the 1960 Augsburg Publishing House edition]