

Article: How do you spell Faith?

Many people get into theological difficulty because they misspell the simple word “faith.”

Many people think and speak as if they spelled the word “faith” with a capital “F” in the middle, overshadowing the rest. They see faith as an achievement of the human ego deciding to believe and trust. They make faith in some sense a good work that accomplishes or contributes something toward salvation.

Faith is not a human work, a human product. Faith is God’s work (John 6:29). It has to be God’s work because we cannot even begin to do anything toward it on our own (1 Corinthians 2:14). Faith must be based on God’s power, not man’s wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:5).

If we produced our own faith, faith would be silly. We would be trusting and believing ourselves instead of God. That would be idolatry. If we convinced ourselves to believe that our sins were forgiven, faith would not be standing on solid ground. It would only be wishful thinking.

If someone has been mad at you and you want to know that he has forgiven you, you must hear it from him. It is no good merely to imagine that he has forgiven you. He must tell you, show you, convince you. If we are to be convinced that God has forgiven our sins, we must be convinced by God. God convinces, assures, and reassures us through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. That directs our attention not to ourselves but to Christ.

The Law directs our attention to ourselves. It tells us what sinners we have been. It shows how we have deserved eternal damnation by offending God in thought, word, and deed. But the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, directs our attention away from ourselves and to Christ alone.

John 3:16 should be read in context. Read John 3:14-15 and compare that with Numbers 21. The Israelites who were bitten by the fiery serpents died if they looked within themselves for the resources to fight off the venom. They lived when they looked outside themselves, to the brass serpent on the pole. If we sinners look within ourselves for anything to contribute to our salvation, we die. Our constant gaze should be directed to Christ and His cross, where He, the sinless Son of God, suffered and died in our place to pay for our sins.

Christian faith is faith in Christ! It is not faith in ourselves. It is not faith in faith. It is faith in Christ alone. Faith receives the gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation for Christ’s sake alone. Faith does not earn or accomplish anything for our salvation. It does not even go out and get it. The gift is delivered by God the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. Then good works result from salvation.

But do not I believe? Yes, I believe. I do the believing in the same way in which Lazarus did the walking when he came out of the tomb (John 11). He walked out of the tomb but had not raised himself from death. The Christian believes in Christ but has not raised himself from spiritual death to the life of faith. Jesus gave Lazarus life through His Word. Jesus has given us life through His Word (Ephesians 2:1-10).

How should we spell “faith”? We should spell it with a very small, humble, contrite “f” kneeling at the foot of the next letter- the cross! The cross should be written large. The cross of Christ is what matters. The cross of Christ is what has made the difference.

Christianity emphasises Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). Liberalism emphasises God the Father. Charismaticism emphasises God the Holy Spirit. Both also emphasise man. But the Father wants to be known as the One who has loved us so much that He gave His only Son for our salvation (John 3:16; Romans 8:32). The Spirit wants to be known as the One who testifies to the Son and glorifies Him (John 15:26; 16:14).

Christianity emphasises Christ. For Jesus is not merely God and not merely man. He is both God and man in one Person. We are saved purely and only because of God incarnate. The only Man we trust, glorify, and worship is the Man who is God, who has died for our sins and rose again - Jesus Christ alone!