

“I can believe
what I want
as long as I’m
sincere.
Right?”



Sunday Bible Study
10:05am • January 3, 2021



I Need An Answer

“I can believe what I want as long as I’m sincere. Right?”

“The talk was flying over his head. Nicodemus struggled to keep up. “Jesus, I don’t get it.” With that, Nicodemus became the first to ever hear the sentence.

Does not this one sentence rise to the surface on the sea of human talk? Are these not the most important words ever spoken? And what is our part but merely the thoughtful spiritual inhale?

“For God ...” Pause. You can’t picture the infinite Lord in your mind. We’re too small for that. So conceive of him as best you can, by His awesome works. Search his fingerprints. Let images play in front of you --- your best sunset across your favorite lake, your sweetest memory of a moment you did not create, your little boy or little girl. Do you remember God?

“... so loved ...” Think of love. Have you ever felt it, almost unbearably sweet, as you looked down on your small, sleeping child? She seems to contribute nothing to the family but her demanding tantrums and her piercing midnight cries. All she offers is her own need. It is enough. She is everything. If you lost her, what would you give to feel her arms around your neck again? This love, the love of God, is the only why we can ever discern regarding the mystery that follows.

“... the world ...” Think of the world, but don’t just think of purple skies and mountain grandeur. Think of people, billions on people, and not only the “nice ones.” Think of looting mobs and seamy nightclubs. Imagine Auschwitz. Conjure up a crowd milling around a cross. They’re laughing. This too is the world.

“... that He gave ...” What does it mean to give? No conditions. No strings. Unearned. Undeserved. One moment the thing is rightfully His, the next it is completely yours. A treasure is placed into empty hands. “I want you to have this.”

“... His one and only Son ...” Now think of Jesus. Think of Him giving the little girl back to her mom and dad ... and their pleasure so deep. Think of His ache to present Jerusalem back to His Father ... as He cries so hard. Think of the One who would do anything for the feel of arms wrapped around Him.

“... that whosoever believes in Him ...” The word *believes* may jump out here, but I also want you to notice the next two words, **in Him**. The reason is simple. Can the drowning man hang on to any old thing if he just hangs on hard enough? Can just anything be placed in the mouth of a starving human? Will any old grown-up leg do for clinging to if you’re a child lost in the mall? Can you really just believe “whatever you want, as long as you’re sincere?” No. This particular sentence promises that whoever believes **in Him** ...

“... shall not perish but have eternal life ...” If these aren’t the most important words in the world, it’s because these are other words that hold the very same miracle. “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” “By grace you have been saved, through faith” ... “It is finished.”

read John 3:14-21

(Rev. Mark Paustian, *Prepared to Answer*, pp.64-65)

Faith Saves

Word has gotten out among casual observers that we Christians believe “faith saves.”

??? – Is that “the message” a Bible based Christian wants to share with the world? Why or why not?

“Can’t I believe whatever I want, as long as I’m sincere?”

??? – Both halves of that question are rather puzzling ... when it comes to faith, is “believing whatever I want” a logical thesis? Why or why not?

??? – “as long as I’m sincere” ... when you think any faith held sincerely enough ought to win God’s approval, are you truly using the words *faith* and *believe* the way the Bible does? Explain your answer:

??? – Explain the concept ... “faith is only as good as what you have faith in.”

“Sincerity is an issue”

??? – How so?

“Point is – what we are holding onto with our faith clearly comes first. Only after that is settled does the matter of how firmly we hold our faith even enter the picture.”

??? – Which of the following is most on line with Scripture?

- A. “Faith does not save because of itself, but because of Christ, to whom it clings.”
- B. “We must think of salvation as a kind of transaction between God and us in which He contributes grace and we contribute faith.
- C. “It is mine to be willing to believe; it is the part of God’s grace to assist.”

Faith's Requirement

Faith requires something ... what is it?

- A. An iron will that does not let go**
- B. A promise**
- C. A strong feeling**

Take a look at the following passages and figure it out ... Faith requires something ... what is it?

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Numbers 6:27

"So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

Isaiah 43:25

"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Luke 7:48

Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."

Matthew 28:6

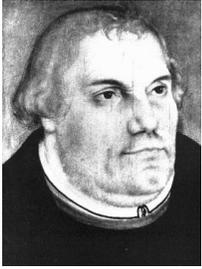
He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

2 Corinthians 5:19

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Revelation 21:6

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.



Luther called it a “monster of uncertainty” to direct the poor sinner, desperate for assurance of peace with God, anywhere but to Christ crucified.

EVALUATE this theologian’s statement

EVALUATE Rev. Paustian’s words:

Faith does not complete the work of salvation nor add any bit of merit. It simply receives what God has done entirely without your help. In fact, notice that you are not being asked to believe something – that God loves you in Christ -- that isn’t really true until after you believe. His love for you is fact, whether you believe it or not. (p.67)

Scripture helps:

Eph 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast.

Rom 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Rom 4:5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Evaluate Mark Paustian’s summary:

Faith, at its beautiful best, has a certain unconscious quality. Its eyes are not on itself but on that which it has grasped.

Think of a father who shows his little girl every single day how much he loves her. When she holds his hand as they walk along, she doesn’t say, “Look at me, everybody. I’m really holding on now.”

She’s not thinking about the holding of his hand at all. She just does.

Meditation?

The meditation God commands is never separated from the Word of God.

"Mindfulness" and other meditation practices lack the external Word, and thus will lack the promises and hope we receive from God.

Do You Believe?

1 Samuel 15:29 He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."

James 1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, **nor does he tempt anyone;**

Isaiah 45:5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me,

Jeremiah 17:10 "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, ...

Psalms 5:4-5 You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. ^s The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; **you hate all who do wrong.**

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "**All authority** in heaven and on earth **has been given to me.**

Ephesians 5:5 For of this you can be sure: **No immoral, impure or greedy person--** such a man is an idolater-- **has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ** and of God.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;** the old has gone, the new has come!

Romans 9:15 For he says to Moses, "**I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.**"

Romans 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and **was raised to life for our justification.**

if you do believe these things ... WHY? THE WORD(s) speaks for itself

2 Tim 1:5

I have been reminded of **your sincere faith**, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

1 Tim 1:5

The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a **sincere faith**.

Rom 3:25-26

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who **have faith in Jesus**.

Rom 4:5

However, to the man who does not work but **trusts God** *who justifies the wicked*, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Rom 5:1

Therefore, since we **have been justified through faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Rom 9:30-33

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." ³³ As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one **who trusts in him** will never be put to shame."

Rom 10:17

Consequently, **faith comes from hearing the message**, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

1 Cor 15:14

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is **your faith**.

Gal 2:16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but **by faith in Jesus Christ**. So we, too, have put **our faith in Christ Jesus** that we may be **justified by faith in Christ** and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Gal 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by **faith in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Gal 3:22

But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given **through faith IN JESUS CHRIST**, might be given to those who believe.

Eph 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- one Lord, **one faith**, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Phil 3:8-9

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, 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 is **through faith IN CHRIST**-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Col 1:3-5

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of **your faith IN Christ Jesus** and of the love you have for all the saints--⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel

Col 2:5-6

For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm **your faith IN Christ** is. ⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,

2 Tim 3:14-15

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation **through FAITH IN Christ Jesus**.

1 Pet 1:21

Through him you **believe IN God**, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Rev 2:13

I know where you live-- where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce **your faith IN me**, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city-- where Satan lives.