

First Sunday in Lent, 2/14/2016, Romans 10:8-13. "Confession of Faith is the Window to the Heart of Faith." Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ,

"The eyes are the window to the soul." No one knows who originated this axiom. It means you can tell what is in someone's heart by looking closely into their eyes. Have you found this to be true in your experience?

We may say something similar about confession and faith. We can understand faith as the sum of all the parts in a belief system, i.e. our Lutheran faith. Or, we understand it in the narrower sense as faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior from sin. Either way, confession of faith is the window to the faith in the confessor's heart.

The Apostle Paul used faith in that second sense here in his letter to the Christians in Rome, faith in Jesus Christ. Confession and belief go hand in hand. We cannot see into the heart, only God does that. We can hear what a person declares with the mouth about what they believe.

Confession of Faith is the Window to the Heart of Faith. The gospel works faith in our hearts through which we are saved. This faith in Jesus expresses itself through outward confession.

Paul had been comparing righteousness by the law and righteousness by faith. Righteousness by the law says that whoever obeys the law will live by the law. That is impossible and our breaking the law only condemns us to eternal damnation. It is only Christ's fulfillment of the law "so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." God credits Christ's righteous under the law to us through faith.

Saving faith in Christ is very near to us. "It is in your mouth and in your heart." This faith believes "that God raised him from the dead." The believing heart justifies us, declares us not guilty of sin, because it trusts in Christ's righteousness and in his physical resurrection from the dead.

The God who did that for us is the same Lord of all-Jew and Gentile. "There is no difference," the apostle wrote. This does not mean Jews and Christians both worship God. Christians worship God, Judaism is idolatry. Paul means that God has not favored one nationality or race over another. Jesus was holy for all. Jesus died for all. Jesus rose from the dead for one and all.

The Savior did all of those things for each one of you. God has justified the world in Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and that justification becomes your assurance, "As the Scripture says, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" Paul quoted from the prophet Joel who is speaking about the end of the world. When Christ returns in judgment and God destroys the world with fire, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. The gospel works faith in our hearts through which we are saved.

The name of the Lord is his reputation, his essence. To call on his name is to trust in that reputation that the Father will take us into heaven on account of Jesus. If I have a headache, I call on aspirin or Tylenol because those names mean relief. I don't take an antacid because that name means something else.

Believers in Jesus Christ have the heart of faith. The heart of faith relies on Jesus Christ's righteousness. The heart of faith justifies us and saves us. How does that heart of faith reveal itself? What is the window into that heart of faith? This faith in Jesus expresses itself through outward confession.

The question may have occurred to you, “Why do I need to know if there is faith in Jesus in someone else’s heart? Is it any of my business? What does it matter? Those all are good questions. Those concerns and questions are not the issue, however.

Paul is making the point that where faith in the heart exists, confession of the mouth will proclaim it. The two things go together. Confession without faith is a lie not confession. Faith without confession, well, that simply does not exist. Paul wrote, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

The apostles were proclaiming the word of faith, the word of Christ. Every Christian has an open window to faith in Christ in the heart. That open window is the confession of Christ we make before the world. We make the confession that “Jesus is Lord.” He is not merely a man. He is not simply a good teacher and example. We do not say with Islam that Jesus was only a great prophet like Moses and Muhammed. Jesus lives and rules over the universe. Jesus rules the hearts of the subjects in the kingdom of God through the gospel.

We need be careful so we do not fall into the error that there is a cause and effect relationship between confession and faith. Sadly, some of our brothers and sisters in the Christian faith wrongly believe that first you must confess that you have decided to believe in Jesus, and then, the Holy Spirit comes into the heart and gives you faith and salvation. Paul teaches in his epistles that faith comes through the Word of Christ, and that confession always accompanies that faith. True faith and confession exist from the same moment.

There is a practical reason for needing to look into the confession of faith as the window to the heart of faith. First, if there is no faith and no confession, I know in my love for that soul I need to confess Jesus Christ, the object of the faith of my own heart. Sharing my faith is not preaching the gospel. I need to share Christ. That’s one reason good Christian music both ancient and contemporary does not laud my faith but glorifies Jesus Christ our Savior.

Another reason is when a person confesses faith in Christ, is he the real Christ? If not, then I may seize the opportunity to share the Scriptures and what they actually teach about Jesus. In love I can direct others away from false beliefs about Jesus and share the truths that make God’s Word.

Confession saves us not because it is a work we do. Confession saves us because it is connected to faith in the work Christ that saved us. It is like the child whose parent tells him they will punish him if he does not clean his room. The child does the work and when dad asks, “Did you clean your room?” the child says, “Yes.” The child’s confession saves him from punishment because it is tied to the work he completed.

God says he will punish us if we do not keep the law. When he asks us if we have kept it, we say “Yes, Jesus Christ did the work for us we cannot do.” Our confession of faith saves us because it is the window to the heart of faith that clings to Christ’s obedience and punishment for us.

We confess and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. That confession and faith justifies us and saves us when our Lord returns on the Last Day. Amen. <SDG>