



OUR DAILY BREAD
Resources for Spiritual Questers

Blind Faith - Not!

-Rev. Jane Siebert

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the New Church of the Southwest Desert in Silver City, New Mexico*



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Readings

Jeremiah 31:33-32

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.¹

John 6:45

It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.²

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² Ibid.

Do you ever watch the YouTube videos from *Off the Left Eye*? While I was searching for a message for today, “Why Have Faith” came across my email stream and I watched it, all minute and a half. It made me think. I want to explore the topic of Faith with you.

I was brought up in a mainline Protestant church that put faith above all else. Faith was essential to secure one’s relationship with God. The answer to most of my questions was, “Just have the faith of a small child”. Faith was the basis for salvation, “Just believe in Jesus and you will be saved”. Faith and belief were synonymous and I was to believe without question, because doubt meant I did not have faith. This did not work for me. First doctrinal point: God does not expect us to have a blind faith. When I first read this in Swedenborg’s little book, *Doctrine of Faith*, I was overjoyed. I knew it in my heart; I felt it; but I had never seen it written. Why would God create me with a brain if God just wanted me to set my questioning brain aside when it came to religion and “Just believe”? Even those small children that supposedly had the faith I was supposed to have, asked questions. That’s what kids do – ask questions. That’s what searchers do Swedenborg wrote it 50 years ago, and it’s still relevant today:

“Nowadays, people understand ‘faith’ to mean nothing more than thinking that something is true because the church teaches it and not because it is obvious to the intellect. In fact, the common saying is, ‘Believe, and don’t doubt.’ If someone replies, ‘I don’t understand it,’ people say, ‘That’s why you have to believe it.’”³

He hit upon the circular lack of reasoning that was driving me crazy and making me doubt the whole religion thing in my teens and at university? He goes on:

“The result is that today’s faith is faith in the unknown and can be called ‘blind faith’; and since it involves a decree from one person to another, it is faith handed down from the past. . . . this is not a spiritual faith”.⁴

God does not ask us to have blind faith. I have seen blind faith let people down. The promise that if we have “faith” we will get what we ask for has caused people to question God, question God’s love for them, and question their own faith, laying blame on themselves because things did not go the way they had believed and prayed. I remember sitting with a young father

³ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Life / Faith*. New Century Edition ed. West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2015. Print.

⁴ Ibid.

whose son had had cancer and was in remission for 2 years. We were sitting together while his son was in for testing if his cancer had returned. He tried to not even let the possibility that his son might have a reoccurrence of cancer enter his thinking because God had answered their prayers 2 year ago and his son was “healed”. If he didn’t have “good enough faith”, “strong enough faith”, he was sure the cancer would come back. What a heavy burden. Faith is supposed to help us, not bind us.

We also have the tendency to think we can give our faith to someone else. You have a good experience that deepens your faith and you want to share it so that they will have a “better faith”. It is like the story of David and Goliath. David was just a young boy going against this giant. King Saul, tried to give David his tunic and his armor, because David didn’t have any. When David put it on, it didn’t fit; he couldn’t walk around in it. David said, “I cannot go in these because I am not used to them.” When we try to give away our armor, our faith, to someone else, it doesn’t fit. It may work for us, but not for them. So what did young David take? He took his slingshot and chose 5 small stones from the stream. Stones represent truths and these were worn smooth, which means they are truths that have been used and proved by experience. And five means just enough, a handful. And David had to find them himself. He had just enough truth/faith to help him succeed in his battle with Goliath, who represents those thoughts that lead us to think we are better than others in the interior sense.

This brings us to my second doctrinal point: faith is an inner recognition of truth. The Doctrine of Faith goes on:

“Real faith is simply recognizing that something is so because it is true. This means that people who are devoted to real faith both think and say, ‘This is true, and that’s why I believe it.’ That is, faith is dependent on truth, and what is true is the object of faith. So if we do not understand that something is true, we say, ‘I don’t know whether this is true or not, so I don’t believe it yet. How can I believe something that doesn’t make sense to me? It may be false.’”⁵

It is the truth that sets us free to have faith. I believe and have faith that God is all love. I used to believe that God caused bad things to happen to punish me; that is not a very loving God.

⁵ Ibid.

I thought that when I got picked up for speeding, it was God punishing me. I failed to see that the reason I got picked up was because I was speeding.

Later as I examined why I believed this, I remembered someone telling me this. But now I questioned this belief; it didn't really make sense. The police were punishing me and I deserved it. I needed it, so I would slow down. God didn't make the policeman do this; it was his job. I broke the law. Maybe God was more about love than punishment. When I had this new understanding of God, it made more sense. It helped me to trust God. I found I even treated people around me better when I didn't think of God as causing bad things to happen to me. The truth set me free. And we don't have to be super smart to know when something is true.

God gives this gift to all of us as we read in Jeremiah: "I will put my truth in their minds and write it on their hearts". And in John: "God will teach all of them." God comes to us, knocks on the door of our hearts, reveals what is true, in the way we can accept it. It is as different for each of us as we are different from one another. Who would think that there is only one way to believe, to understand God, to live our life, when God created us each individually. Our friend Swedenborg goes on:

"All the same, the widely-shared opinion is that no one can understand things that are spiritual or theological because they are supernatural. However, spiritual truths can be grasped just as earthly ones are—perhaps not as clearly, but still, when we hear them we do get a sense as to whether they are true or not. This is especially so in the case of people who have a longing for truth."⁶

But how do we know if what we believe is true. I'm sure you know some people that believe some things that you just aren't so sure about. Reading on:

"The people who have an inner recognition of what is true are those who have a spiritual love for truth. There is a spiritual perspective, [...] a perspective that inflows in the case of people who have a longing for truth and tells them inwardly whether what they are hearing or reading is true or not."⁷

We know we never know the full Truth; we have a perception of truth because we are human. Even when we say God is love. That means different things to each one of us here; we

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

carry our perception of that truth. And that is why we must stay open and keep longing for truth. We must keep learning and reading and talking with others. This is where church comes in. We are all taught by God, but sometimes we need help separating the wheat from the chaff. And it's not a onetime thing, but a forever teaching. This doesn't preclude the mystery of God. Doubt and mystery are not the same thing. I have faith in prayer, although I do not understand how prayer works. I have faith in prayer because I have experienced the difference prayer makes in my life. It

still doesn't really make sense to me, but thanking God and seeking guidance through prayer works. I have a longing for it. The third doctrinal point, is probably the most important: Faith cannot be separated from how we live.

The latest translation of Swedenborg's works put *The Doctrine of Life* and *The Doctrine of Faith* together in one volume because they are so intertwined and one cannot be understood without the other. It is called *Life/Faith* and is available as a free download from the Swedenborg Foundation. Swedenborg emphasizes that true faith can only occur in people who love others and treat them well. You have to live your faith to make it real. And this brings me back to what started my search about Faith in the first place – the video from *Off the Left Eye*, “Why Faith Matters”. I'd like to end with these words from Curtis Childs:

“If I could have something, I'd want you to be happy that I have the faith that I have. Not because I have the same faith you do or because it makes me more similar to you, but because when I go into my faith, into my church, or my mosque, or my ashram, or into my room, or into my heart, I'm going there for you. Even if I don't know you yet, I go to my faith to make it so that you're more glad you met me when we do meet. I go to my faith to learn humility, to seek clarity, kindness and compassion, to seek the truth of life. But not just in the abstract, I'm not there just to feel, but to train, so that the compassion I read about becomes compassion for you when your car breaks down, and that the humility I aspire to makes me really listen to what you have to say. The clarity is to see how I can really help. For whatever truth I seek to find in that holy place, it's found to be used, and used in that holiest of all places, the space that connects two human beings. So you have your space. I have mine, my life, my heart, and I have my faith, and I hope as

we grow to know each other more and more, you'll be glad that I do.”⁸

Amen.

*“Religion is all about how we live, and the religious way to live
is to do good.”*

-Emanuel Swedenborg, *Life/Faith* §.1

⁸ “Why Have Faith?” YouTube video. Posted by "Off the Left Eye" March 16, 2017.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5IvnY0xau8>