



**Articles on Catholic Theology and Teachings -
Part 3 - Faith:
A Stumbling Block and a Balm for Christianity**



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None of the theological virtues is more confused, distorted, publicized and mocked than the virtue of faith. Yet, it is the centerpiece of nearly every Sunday sermon throughout the world and is synonymous with piety and religion in our modern culture. Centuries of heresy and a corrosion of religious teaching have wrecked havoc on the simple foundation of the Christian Way; but hope in modern society should not be lost since the average man still believes faith is necessary for a virtuous life. Instead, the real threat to modern Christianity is a distortion of the virtue of faith rather than obstinate refusal of it. An enlightening examination of faith is perhaps the best way to prevent oneself from sinking into the mire of unbelief and heresy so prevalent in today's modern Church.

In an age that respects tolerance of beliefs over the value of objective truth, it is no wonder that so many people no longer believe in the necessity of the Christian faith. Indeed a common position held today is the following: "It doesn't matter which religion you belong to as long as you are a good person. God doesn't care which religion you join as long as you mean well". This statement is an example of a modern heresy called indifference, and it has taken root throughout all levels of Christianity. If this heretical statement were to come from a Christian (and it very often does) and they were to be challenged by asking, "What about faith, isn't it necessary for salvation?" the answer would probably be that faith only means you believe in some god. After all, if God is good why would he burn someone in hell for picking the wrong religion? Here it can be seen that the proponent of indifference has struck a chord of truth: why punish the ignorant for not knowing the facts? This is the very bane of modern Christianity: a distortion of Christian doctrines with half-truths, confusion of facts and ignorance. Modernism is so insidious because it resonates with half-truths. Perhaps an examination of what faith really means is necessary to obviate religious indifference.

Faith means believing in the teachings of God without the need for direct evidence or rationalizations. Christians believe in the articles of faith because God has told us they are true, and we need no other evidence in order to live our lives according to those articles. It needs to be emphasized that faith is not a warm sensation we have in our hearts that tells us we are right. Faith is not defined as simply believing that God exists. Faith is not even a warm, gooey emotion that lets us know God loves us. In its essence, faith is intellectual and virtuous. C. S. Lewis noted in *Mere Christianity* that faith is considered virtuous because it sustains us in periods of trial when our beliefs are in doubt. Faith does not force us to believe something irrational; rather it allows us to hold true to our Christianity during periods when irrational doubt assails us.

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in fact they are evil (such as those who fool themselves into believing abortion, mercy killing, or promiscuous sex is not sinful.) Hope is necessary because it gives us utter reliance and longing for God. Without virtuous hope, a man would lose sight of God and pursue a lesser good, or he would believe God is no longer necessary for salvation. Finally, charity, also known as love, is necessary because it brings us into communion with God, the one being who loves us more than anyone else. St. Paul tells us charity is the greatest of all virtues, but hope and faith are also necessary for salvation, "faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13)". Hope and faith sustain a Christian and fuel a Christian's love for God.

At last we finally understand why faith is so misunderstood and so needed in today's modern church. True faith helps us conform our lives to God's will, and without faith guided by the Catholic Church, we are doomed to languish in manmade religions. If faith is to become the balm of the modern world rather than a stumbling block, the Christians of today must enter into the one, holy, unified, and apostolic church. For, "the church of the living God [is] the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Timothy 3:15)".



Indeed, faith is not irrational or contrary to reason, hence no Christian believes the articles of Christianity to be contrary or opposed to reason. Given this definition of faith we can understand why religious indifference is contrary to true Christianity. A man cannot have true Christian faith unless he is willing to accept and believe the articles of faith. Here we arrive at the crux of the problem: what are the Christian articles of faith and how are we to know they are those of Jesus Christ?

The source of the Christian articles are those teachings that come from God. Christians and Jews believe that God first communicated his truths to men through the Jewish prophets beginning with Abraham, father of the Jewish nation. God adopted the descendants of Abraham as his chosen people and in doing so helped to forge the first seed of salvation throughout the ancient world. It was the Jews who first received the Ten Commandments and the law of God. The Jews became the bulwark of truth in a confused, pagan world. They were the first major religion to embrace monotheism, a radical notion at the time (although it seems very orthodox and obvious today). This is not to say they were a perfect people, in fact they very often rebelled against God and turned to polytheism and it's pantheon of false gods. It took nearly four thousand years for the Jewish people to reach the point where they could go no further. Their religion was wholesome and good in that it reinforced the law of God that is written in our hearts, it encouraged prayer, and most importantly it offered an imperfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. Unfortunately, it could go no further. The Jewish faith was very stagnant and had become mired in hairsplitting over interpretations of the Mosaic law. No attempt was made to evangelize to those outside the Jewish faith because the Jews believed their religion to be hereditary: they believed the truth was meant only for Abraham's children. Finally, the imperfect sacrifices offered by the Jewish High Priests was not enough to atone for the scandal of man's sins. It was then that the God-man Jesus appeared from the obscure town of Nazareth and did things shocking, outrageous and wondrous. Himself a Jew, Jesus spoke and preached like one of the great prophets. He could cure the sick, heal the broken, raise the dead, prophesize the future, multiply bread and fish, and walk on water. Even more remarkable, he claimed to be able to forgive a man's sins. Such a statement from a Jew was considered blasphemous and outrageously conceited. The Jews must have fumed! How can a mere man claim to forgive a person's sins? For his seemingly blasphemous statements and growing popularity with the common man, the Jewish leaders had Jesus crucified. What many of the Jews did not realize however, was that this was no mere man. On the third day following his crucifixion, the followers of Christ testify to his resurrection from the dead. It was the resurrection that provided the proof that Jesus was in fact God in the flesh, and from this miraculous event Christianity was born.

Many readers have heard the story of the birth of Christianity countless times, and the point of reiterating it is to show what the basis of our faith is. We have faith in Christianity because this man Jesus proved himself to be more than a man by his deeds, words, prophetic fulfillment, and resurrection from the dead. We believe his teachings are true because we believe he is God, and his teachings and practices constitute the fulfillment (not the replacement) of the Jewish religion. Although Jesus ascended into heaven forty days after his resurrection from the dead, he did not abandon his flock. He instituted a living, visible Church led by his apostles and guided by the Holy Spirit. The leader of the infant Church, Peter (whose original name was Simon until Christ changed it), was chosen by Christ, “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18)”. The Church, led by Peter and his successors, has always been the guardians and teachers of the doctrine of Christ for, “the household of God [is] built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone (Ephesians 2:20)”. God has given us the church to instruct and interpret Christ’s teachings. No man is left to private interpretation of the Bible; rather the Church protects the original creeds of the apostles and shepherds us to the truth. One of the first leaders of the church, St. Paul instructed the early Christians to reject private interpretation of the doctrines of Christ, “no prophecy in Scripture is the subject of private interpretation.” The inevitable conclusion is that the Church plays the vital role of teacher, interpreter and protector of the Scriptures. This is why any attempt to break from the church’s teachings by abandoning the Church, starting a new denomination or railing against “the institution of the Church” is pure folly. Here is why so much confusion and error has infected “Christianity”, not because the Church has gone astray but because people have gone astray and left the true apostolic Church.

Now there can be no doubt that the Catholic Church of today is the same church as that instituted by Christ nearly 2000 years ago. Does this seem shocking? It should not, for we can see that Christ clearly instituted a church led by St. Peter in the scriptures. The name Peter is the English translation of the Greek word “Petros” which translates to “kepha” in Aramaic, the language of Christ. Kepha means rock in Aramaic, and it is clear in Matthew 16:18 that Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter (rock) in order to show that Simon was the rock on which the church would be built. Additionally, Christ said that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church; we thus have an assurance that the Church cannot fail or fall away. It makes sense that the Church would remain infallible in doctrine and teaching, even though its own leaders are still vulnerable to sin. The Church cannot fail in correct teaching and interpretation of doctrine because this would undermine the basis for all Christian faith. How could we ever be assured of the truth without an infallible, everlasting church? The Protestant reformers, no matter how good their intentions, erred seriously in defecting from the church. Although, they had good reason to protest the corruption and sins within the hierarchy of the church leadership at the time, they had no right to break from the infallible church of God. Without the Catholic Church’s councils and papal definitions of doctrine, Protestantism quickly lost its way in a sea

of conflicting doctrines and practices. The original Protestant Lutheran denomination, Anglican denomination, and Anabaptist denomination fractured into thousands of competing sects within a few hundred years after the original Reformation. Protestantism, despite the good intentions of its adherents, is nothing less than a heresy and it has led millions from the true Church.

Does the reader still need evidence that any given Protestant church is not the original church of Christ? Simply look at the doctrines of any Protestant denomination and compare it to the teachings of the original Church Fathers. The Church Fathers lived a mere fifty to three hundred years after Christ’s birth. Who better to study when confirming a given denomination’s orthodoxy? I’ll leave it to the reader to do their own research, but here are two critical examples:

- Infant baptism—Origen wrote in the 3rd century, “the Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism also to infants.” Yet nearly every Baptist, evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant denomination rejects this vital doctrine.
- Sacrifice of the Mass—Clement of Rome wrote about the bishops’ offering of masses in the 2nd century, “from the episcopate who blamelessly and holily have offered its sacrifices”. Unfortunately, only the Orthodox and Anglicans make any pretense to offer a sacrifice of the mass.

The list could go on and on, but the fact remains that Christ would not come to earth and leave his teachings without any authorized guardian and teacher. Those who claim the Holy Spirit helps each individual person correctly interpret scripture without any need for a single, authoritative church needs to open their eyes. Protestantism has tried this theory and failed: witness the countless denominations that preach conflicting doctrines. Only the Catholic Church can make any valid claim to being the historical Church, because only Catholics can attribute the succession of leadership from St. Peter through the chain of popes. So it seems that Christian faith is tied to belief in the teachings of Christ as well as membership and loyalty to the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has often been called the “ark of salvation” because the Church’s protection of Christ’s doctrines is necessary for the perpetuation of the faith.

Nonetheless, there are still those who do not understand why faith is necessary for eternal salvation. After all, what’s so great about believing a list of teachings? Isn’t being good so much more important? The Church has always recognized that three virtues are necessary for salvation: faith, hope and charity. Faith helps us to properly conform our consciences to the law of God and reinforces our loyalty to him during the best and worst of times. Without faith, a man might believe his actions are permissible when