

Candy Cane Faith

What is faith in the true Christian sense? It is the deep-rooted belief or trust in the Gospel, which tells us that Jesus lived, died, was buried and on the third day rose again from the dead (1Corinthians 15:4). For the most of the world this is a ludicrous statement that a dead and rotting body could ever come back to life, let alone “ascend into heaven.” For many others, however, it is absolutely true, and on that basis they choose to call themselves Christians, but what is the basis of their faith? How important in their lives and how much reliance do they place on the absolute truth, validity and eternal value of this seemingly absurd statement? Can it be verified; must it be verified before it can become a faith of lasting substance, an ever-reliable saving faith? Can a blind faith, a faith without evidence, be a saving faith?

It seems evident that for those choosing to call themselves Christian, these are only a few of the questions which should be answered before one can comfortably settle down into the “peace which passeth all understanding,” a peace based on a faith which cannot be negated or diminished by the very worst which Satan and the world can use to attack it. This is a peace to which only a genuine Christian can aspire. Such faith must be based entirely on facts. Those facts can all be found in Scripture if one sincerely seeks.

Even the slightest amount of blind faith will be like leaven or cancer and eventually will contaminate the whole loaf, that is, weaken the faith structure, that faith in Jesus on which we must lean if our faith be real. Any amount of blind faith is a faith always in danger of faltering, of becoming doubt ridden and failing when under attack through our many natural weaknesses. It cannot, it will not, prevail over persecution and torture as has been perpetrated on Christians in the past, is being inflicted now in many parts of the world, and will be dealt out here in the not too distant future.

Belief that this cannot happen, and that pain and suffering and extreme tragedies will somehow be less severe for the Christian, is but one of the evidences of the Scriptural illiteracy, or of a refusal to believe what Scripture says. It may also be evidence of a

seduction of the mind by the evil webs spun by the false prophets, and even by genuine hearts, but ones who choose to reveal only the sunny side of Christianity.

We are all born ignorant and in total darkness as to the existence of any saving faith. The only real and effective light which exists, and which can eliminate this ignorance, is the light provided by the Holy Spirit as He illuminates and makes coherent the truths found in the Holy Bible, which is the inspired Word of God. It is only through Him that this truth is able to pierce every heart. All the lifetime studies of the Bible, all thought and research by great minds composing their doctoral theses on Scriptural meaning, and by PhD's and doctors of theology writing, their books are of no redeeming spiritual benefit unless the Holy Spirit guides the efforts. They avail nothing by way of salvation. They are but "hay and stubble" as are all such good works, even those provided by the most virtuous of mankind, unless conceived and carried out in true faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The world calls such faith a crutch, a support for the weak, for those who can't "cut it" in the "real world." The mature Christian will freely admit that they are right, but for reasons and ways different from those which the world believes. But "crutch" isn't quite the correct analogy for Christian faith that is faith in Jesus. Perhaps a "staff" or a "walking cane" would be a better choice, because they are far from being invalids as a "crutch" might suggest. Christians do walk, "they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31), "we walk in faith" (2Corinthians 5:7), "and narrow is the way" we walk (Matthew 7:14), "and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.." (Ephesians 6:15) so that they can stand firm in faith. On the other hand, Jesus said in, (John 15:5) "I am the vine, ye are the branches, he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bring forth much fruit, for without Me ye can do nothing." By this He meant that without faith in Him nothing we do has spiritual merit. So Christians are those who are helpless and useless in terms of spiritual fruitfulness, and for providing good works of lasting value, unless Christ is in their hearts, and they are willing to trust in His trustworthiness, to depend on and lean on the "cane" of faith as they walk through this treacherous stumbling block filled earthly life. The ever supporting "staff" or "cane" of

faith which steadies his or her walk is, in fact, the hallmark of every true Christian. Shepherd's always carried a staff. It was not only used to control their sheep, but it also supported them and helped them as they navigated the rough and hilly terrain on which they lived. Today, not many of us tend sheep, but many find a staff or cane a helpful implement where walking is difficult. No one can walk through this life and on into eternal life without the support of the "cane" called faith in Christ Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

For the large part of nearly 70 years I also believed "faith" or "religion" was nothing but a "crutch." While I loathed Communism, I agreed with Lenin "religion was an opiate of the masses." I believed that "religion" was truly but a crutch on which those who were weak or simply lazy, those without gumption, ambition, fortitude or strength to stand on their own feet, found it necessary to lean. Any religion would do as long as it could serve as an excuse for their own inadequacy. This was a despicable state, making one unworthy of even being called a man! I was what I believed, the epitome of self-reliance. I had trained myself from youth to need nothing from anyone, certainly not a religious crutch or a cane, or anything or anyone else to lean on or depend on in any way under any circumstances. Even after doctors from three prestigious medical institutions each pronounced the same verdict, that I had an untreatable stage 4 terminal cancer, and that I should go home and get my affairs in order because I had only 6 to 12 months to live, I found no reason to seek a crutch. Being abandoned by conventional medicine, (I now thank God for that) I proceeded to study alternative treatments with great intensity and to apply every protocol and modality of self treatment alluded to in the vast maze of literature on the subject of cancer. Nevertheless, the cancer grew, along with the pain and localized debilitation, even though through my efforts, my energy and overall health seemed to improve. During this period, I never prayed, not even once (why bother?). This was my problem, and it was up to me to solve it. After 18 months of ever worsening and painful manifestations of the problem, which spread to several organs of my body, the beast suddenly left me completely, from every part of my body, and has not returned in these, now well over 8 years.

Of course I knew that I had prevailed over the beast. It certainly wasn't the doctors, because they had nothing to offer in spite of their vast learning and experience. To them it was hopeless. But through my determination, my perseverance, my study, and my effort I had healed myself! Looking back now, how ashamed I am of my pride, my conceit, my arrogance, my self-righteousness and false self-reliance, and my gross ignorance of God's truth! I had done nothing but follow a divine procedure my heavenly Father had laid out for me before the beginning of time! Though I didn't know it, He had always been with me, guiding me, protecting me, teaching me valuable lessons and preparing me for His purpose, perhaps even to write this paper. In other papers I have written more fully the saga of my affliction, and the path toward health and healing along which He led me. Today, through our Lord's blessed mercy and His love, I need no cane for physical support, for He has blessed me with greater health, strength and youthful energy than I had 10 years ago. But I desperately need and try during every waking moment, to hold fast to, and to lean heavily on, my cane of faith, my faith in Him who healed me and for whose purpose I am here to serve. I find that whenever I fail to use it for support with every decision regarding every step I take, I risk a spiritual stumble. It's only through a continued moment-by-moment remembrance of how weak and useless I am without Him on whom I lean in faith, that I am ever able to make any real forward progress in my Christian purpose.

Perhaps now you are wondering if I am ever going to tell you the point suggested by the title of this paper. Scripture in general and our Lord Jesus in particular, used many grammatical devices such as similitudes, analogies, idioms, metaphors, and parables as teaching aids. It came to me that the "cane" or "walking stick" would be a good analogy for expressing Christian faith, in that a true faith in Jesus is what must be leaned on. It is what steadies and keeps a Christian from falling and helps him or her back on his or her feet when they do fall as they travel the difficult terrains of life. But for the "cane" to represent true Christian faith, it must be made of something, which is strong, unbendable, unbreakable and insoluble. It must not bend in the heat of lust and passion. It must not break under stress, pain or great sorrows. And it must not dissolve in the unrelenting tides of temptation and the ever-eroding weakness of our corrupt nature. For the sake of

an analogy, shittim, or acacia wood, will suffice. It is the wood of the burning bush, which burned, but was not consumed. It was the wood of Moses' shepherd staff, the rod that he carried through the wilderness, the rod, which God empowered to turn into a serpent, and through which He administered the plagues in Egypt, and it was the rod, which struck the rock, which brought forth the water. It was this wood of which the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle were made, all chosen by God Himself.

However, Christian faith comes in varying strengths and durabilities, as do materials from which one may make a cane. Perhaps the very opposite in quality from acacia wood could be a candy cane, one made simply of sugar. Hard rock candy can be easily fashioned into a cane and made to look quite strong and sturdy. However, it cannot help but crumble when leaned on too heavily, it must break when even moderately stressed, and it will melt away during a storm. So sugar candy is not a good material from which to make a strong, durable, all weather, all conditions, dependable cane, if one is seeking to have a cane be representative of a true Christian faith. Yet, very sadly, isn't "candy cane" faith the kind of Christian faith which is most prevalent today? Isn't it this type of faith of which Jesus spoke in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, the kind that fails under temptation and stress? It should not come as a surprise that such weak faith is more the norm than the exception during these final days. We live in a fat, complacent, easy-does-it, quick fix, society, addicted to comfort, pleasure, convenience, and yes, to sugar. Many who call themselves Christians, practice their faith quite consistent with this type of overall lifestyle, and why not, for most "came to the faith" guided by preaching and witnessing quite consistent with their environment. Don't most sermons from pulpits as well as Christian radio and TV even when consistent with Scripture, convey Christian "lite" messages, a "gushy Gospel," absent from any teaching other than the pleasantries and rewards side of Christian faith? How much reference, let alone serious "discussions," is there of Hell, or evil spirits or Satan or the many difficulties of Christian life, and the fact that a true acceptance of Jesus and His gift assures one of greater pain and suffering, and most likely fewer earthly rewards in this life than would likely occur otherwise? Most pastors, evangelists, and witnessing disciples, even those who know the truth and are redeemed, are so in fears of alienating or "turning off" the fragile seeker or

losing portions of their flock, that they avoid revealing the more difficult and unpleasant aspects of the true and whole commitment on which salvation depends, and which Scripture makes very clear when understood in its whole context beyond the over simplified “believe and be saved” message.

A “believer” who has not learned and absorbed the greater aspects relating to the conditions associated with God’s “free” gift of salvation, is in grave danger of being misled into a sense of eternal security when none exists. As in the parable of the sower, many will believe they are saved because of the early but only superficial expressions of what they will believe is adequate faith. This fear of “spooking” the seeker, or the novice believer, which causes those hoping to “spread the Word and bring many to the faith” to do a potentially fatal disservice to the initiate. By revealing only the touchy-feely comfortable and idealistic aspects of His Word, the seeker is “lured” into a false understanding of the faith and is thereby providing a fatal and “damnable” disservice. By presenting only the easy, the pleasant and rewarding aspects of real Christianity, they serve the seeker no better than a used car salesman, who directs focus only on the visible attribute of the vehicle, or the insurance salesman who fails to reveal the “fine print” of the policy. While our Lord would prefer that “none should perish” (2Peter 3:9), He takes no solace in filled pews, if the hearts in the pews are not filled with Him. God is more like the Marine general who seeks “a few good men” rather than like the sports promoter, whose main interest is in filling the stadium.

Jesus spoke of hell and Satan, and evil spirits, much more than He ever spoke of heaven or any earthly niceties of Christian faith. In fact, He spoke far more of the difficulties and dangers along with the pains and persecutions which would assuredly afflict those who followed and believed in Him. Knowing that we are to try to pattern our lives after His, to seek to emulate Him, doesn’t it make sense that we should also pattern our ministering, our witnessing and our discipleship after Him and His teachings?

A candy coated Gospel cannot help but increase the odds of a candy cane faith, a weak and dissolvable faith that cannot save. Add to this the many false prophets, which

contaminate many pulpits, much of the airwaves and all the book stores, and we have exposed only a few facets of the many faceted cause of the high recidivism rate of the would be believers. Oh, where are you Charlie Spurgeon, or you Donald Gray Barnhouse, or you Chuck Smith, or you Henry Allen Ironside, now when we really need you who were willing to tell the whole Truth, and to tell it like it is!!!!