

What Use is Evidence to the Holy Spirit?

"A God without wrath, brought men without sin, into a world without judgment, through the ministration of a Christ without a cross"
(H. Richard Niebuhr).

It is common in Lutheran circles to hear the expression, "*faith is a gift of God*" (meaning it's a work of the *Holy Spirit*). Although this statement is indeed true, whenever it is spoken in the absence of its context, it gravely distorts the Gospel of Christ who clearly "*desires all people to be saved...*" (1 Tim. 2:4 - **boldface mine**). Since it is obviously true that multitudes don't believe in Christ, it hard to escape the impression made by this quote that God must be withholding this "*gift*" from lots of people. One goal of my essay is to make clear that it is NOT God who is resistant, but rather we ourselves (Acts 7:51).

Recently one congregational member expressed strong disapproval of my use of apologetics¹ in my preaching by insisting that the Holy Spirit doesn't employ *external* means (evidence) to bring people to faith in Christ. Lutheran-Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) Christians seem especially inclined to assign *innate* power to the proclamation of the Gospel solely by declaring it to be sufficient in itself to "create faith." On first reflection, St. Paul might *seem* to affirm this view (Rom. 1:16b). Yet that perception rests on falsely equating the concept "Gospel," with the Gospel message *as a whole*, as Paul also uses this term (Rom. 2:16). Indeed Luther states extensively that this same message entails **both** law and Gospel.

It is essential to understand just what it is that stands between sinners and faith in Christ. The problem is NOT metaphysical,² but hamartiological,³ that is, our sinfulness. Though Lutherans hold that Christ's love is so deep as to seek us out (Luke 19:10) to the extent of giving His very life for our sins (Mark 10:45), it is also true that sin has so corrupted our hearts that we persistently resist His saving invitation (Rom. 5:8) to the potential end of shutting out His grace altogether (Matt. 16:26). God's grace is NOT irresistible (Heb. 3:12-13). While God woos us to say "Yes" to Him, He won't override our "No!"⁴

The Bible employs the concepts of truth and falsehood almost a thousand times across both Testaments.⁵ With respect to the point of this paper, some roles that truth-claims play in the broad proclamation of the Gospel include: 1) confronting sinners with the manifest truth of the existence of God as Creator (Rom. 1:19), 2) highlighting our propensity to ignore such evidence (Romans 1:18, cf. 3:19-20), and consequently 3) our ultimate liability to judgment for rejecting the logical conclusions these claims point to (Rom. 1:20b-21). Without exception every single one of these Bible references assumes a classical view of truth-claims, which holds that a given assertion of any such claim can *only* be *substantiated* by **reconciling** the assertion that is under consideration with the **actual state of affairs** that the claim purports to address.⁶ In summary, apart from evidence that stands independent of the claimant, neither Scripture nor the Holy Spirit has the necessary means to either establish the truth of its claims, or convict us sinners for our failure to measure up to truth as is manifested by God's law, be it His moral commandments or identifiable ontological⁷ indicators. It is ONLY when sinners are "convinced" (John 16:8) of our fallen-ness (Mark 2:17) that we consent to the remedy that is offered by

¹ This word entails the assembly of varieties of evidence and rational arguments which affirm that the Gospel of Christ is true.

² This is a fancy word for the nature or essence of an entity. My point is that human nature as intended from creation does not lack the capacity to know God. Adam and Eve prior to their fall into sin experienced a direct relationship with Him (Genesis 2:18f).

³ The word, based on the Greek word for sin, *harmartia*, explicates the reality of sin in all of its aspects.

⁴ See my paper, "When Lutherans Exaggerate Otherwise Valid Objections to 'Decision' Theology," n. 14.

⁵ *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. (Thomas Nelson, 2001).

⁶ See my two essays, "Truth is Never Less than One," and "Does the Bible Permit Denigrating Science in Order to Maintain our Faith?," both of which can be found, as with every other one of my writings referenced here, at my website: www.christianityontheoffense.com.

⁷ Pertaining to matters of existence, e.g. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1a).

the Great Physician, Jesus Christ. It is my deepening conviction that the pervasive apathy toward the Gospel in our day is due, in large part, to the failure of Christ's Church to proclaim the law of God in its every aspect, to the end that people are truly convicted of the reality of our sinfulness.

Finally, it is vital to consider the posture that the Holy Bible in *actuality*⁸ takes with respect to rational arguments and scientific and historical evidences. From my argumentation thus far, it might nonetheless seem reasonable to deem that the Holy Spirit's drawing force is an innate power which is comparable to the attractational qualities of a magnet. Since, however, it is Scripture which is the final authority on this matter, we must set aside such prejudices and pursue the texts of the Bible directly. What we there discover is that Scripture itself (as I substantiate⁹) in actuality employs apologetic strategies of all kinds from beginning to end. In another essay I highlight specifically the apologetic methods employed by the Apostles Peter, John, and Paul.¹⁰ Even Jesus substantiated the truthfulness of His very own words by saying to His disciples, "*Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me **for the sake of the works themselves***" (John 14:11 – **boldface mine**). So, then, the Holy Spirit, who is the ultimate author of Holy Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16), does indeed employ both facts AND reason in order to convince sinners that His word is true.

The Holy Spirit at bottom does not bypass reason, but instead breaks through our obstinate will which is too blinded by sinful self-centeredness to allow Him in.

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⁸ It is one thing to embrace the Bible as the Word of God in an abstract, general sense; but a very different matter to investigate and then obey what it *actually* teaches.

⁹ See my paper, "The Pervasive Employment of Apologetics in the Bible."

¹⁰ See my essay, "The Elephant Standing Between Secularists and their receptivity to the Gospel."