

**July 13, 2008**

**“The only thing that counts”**

**Gal 5:6b NLT**

What is important is faith expressing itself in love.

Faith: Ever feel like you just can't trust anyone?

A Mexican bandit made a specialty of crossing the Rio Grande from time to time and robbing banks in Texas. Finally, a reward was offered for his capture.

An enterprising Texas Ranger decided to track him down.

After a lengthy search, he traced the bandit to his favorite cantina, snuck up behind him, put his trusty six-shooter to the bandit's head and said, "You're under arrest. Tell me where you hid the loot or I'll blow your brains out."

But the bandit didn't speak English and the Ranger didn't speak Spanish! Fortunately, a bilingual lawyer was in the saloon and translated the Ranger's message.

The terrified bandit blurted out, in Spanish, that the loot was buried under the oak tree in back of the cantina.

"What did he say?" asked the Ranger.

The lawyer answered, "He said, 'Get lost, you turkey. You wouldn't dare shoot me.'"

Ever feel like you just can't trust anyone?

Our text says, "What is important is faith..." We all know that faith is important in Christianity. Everything in the Christian faith is by faith. People think that faith is difficult. People say, "well, you have faith but I don't, and I don't know how to get it."

Faith is misunderstood. Faith is the simplest thing in the world and easy to exercise. First we must understand that faith is not something tangible, some sort of *thing* we have to get or lay hold of.

Faith is simply believing God. Faith is nothing more or less than believing God when He says He has done something or will do something. (e.g.) He says we are saved from our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus. Your faith doesn't save you, but faith links you to Jesus who saves you. Your faith is only the link. Faith is trusting God to keep His word.

It's so simple it's hard to explain. When I trust Pastor Nick with a job I've asked him to do, it means I've committed that task to him and leave it with him without anxiety. It is in his hands and I believe / trust he will take care of it because he said he would.

You can't say you do not have faith because you have trusted others with very important matters. You have trusted your children who are more important and precious to you than anything in this world, and you have trusted them and their care to babysitters, doctors, teachers.

You have trusted your own life to medical people, to cooks at the restaurants you dine at, to the engineer of the LI railroad some of you ride on everyday. We are completely at their mercy, yet we don't even give it much thought. We are trusting others continually. We couldn't make it through a single day if we were unable to trust our fellow man. Yet, we hesitate to say we can continually trust God.

Imagine if you acted in your human relations the way you act in your spiritual relation with God. Suppose you get up tomorrow, go out to get the newspaper, but then think, "wait a minute, I can't trust that any of this is true!" So, you put the paper aside and don't read it. Then you sit down to eat breakfast and think, "I can't eat anything on this table, I have no faith, I cannot believe the cook has put poison in this food. So, you don't eat. You walk out to your car to drive to work and think, "I can't trust the mechanic who works on my car." So, you walk to work and get there not only starving, but exhausted. Then your fellow workers, you can't trust them, or believe what they tell you. Picture a day like this, it would be a disaster. Not only that, but how would your friends feel? They would be insulted. So, what must it be when you tell God you have no power to trust Him, nor to believe His Word, and that you can't help it, because you, "have no faith." Even if we don't actually say we don't trust God, our attitude, our actions, our anxiety, anger, depression tells of our unbelief.

Is it possible that you can trust other human beings, but you can't trust God? We are believers, that implies that we believe! When Jesus says, "Come to me and I will give you rest..." do you believe Him? When God says, "I will never leave you" do you believe Him? When God says, "I love you" do you believe Him? When God says, "I will meet all your needs" do you believe Him?

Did you trust God to forgive your sins and save you? Then you can trust Him to forgive you now and believe that He saves you now! Did Jesus say He would give you the Holy Spirit? Then believe that He lives in you and gives you power and so exercise that power to live for Him.

Choose to believe God and that all His promises are yes, in Christ. Put your will over on the believing side. Say, "Lord, I will believe, I do believe." And continue to say it. Insist on believing even in the face of every suggested doubt the enemy can throw at you. Throw yourself on the Word and promises of God, and remember that trust and worry are incompatible, so put your will into your believing.

If you are a child of God you must have faith, even if it's as small as a mustard seed. Therefore don't dare say, "I cannot trust because I have no faith." Rather say, "I can trust my Lord, and I will trust Him."

Don't say you don't have faith, you do and faith is activated and energized and expressed and works through love. That's the second part of our text: "What is important is faith expressing itself in love."

Paul was making the point that we are saved by faith alone; but salvation by faith result in loving and kind works done to serve others. Genuine faith in Christ is expressed in love for others.

Paul was making the point that our salvation is not on the basis of being religious and doing religious things; it is not on the basis of keeping God's law perfectly, indeed, if it was no one would be saved. [And so as our text says, "What is important (or the only thing that counts) is faith expressing itself in love.]

However, in disregarding the law as a basis for salvation, we must not disregard its basic requirement of love. We are saved by faith, not by works. But love for others and for God comes spontaneously to those whom God has forgiven. God forgives us completely, and Jesus said that those who are forgiven much, love much (Luke 7:47).

Because faith expresses itself through love, you can check your love for others as a way to monitor your faith. If you want to know if you have faith, or if you want to know how strong your faith is, then look at how you love God and others.

Not only is our faith expressed and working through love, but our faith is activated and energized through love. So, throw your arms around faith and the expression of that faith will be love. No one can be one with Christ who is not Christ-like. Being one with Christ does not make you more spiritual, but more loving. Putting all your faith in God is not a matter of emotions, but character. It is not something you feel, it is something you are to be. You may feel, you probably will feel a sense of warmth, closeness, joy, but the vital things is not feeling, but reality.

If you are one with Christ you will be Christ-like. You may say you follow Christ, you work for Christ, you believe in the Christian religion, you can even say you love Christ, but are you like Him? Are you one with Him? Or are there two wills, two interests, two lives. Once you said, "I and not Christ," then it changed to, "I and Christ," but are you able to say, "Christ and not I at all?" 1 John 2:6 (NLT) "Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did."

You see that's all that counts. Ever play a game as a kid, and say, "Hey, that don't count!" You see trying to be religious, don't count. Going through the rituals, don't count. Working hard to do nice things don't count. Their ok, but all that counts is faith expressing itself in love. Character is the only real test.

You have faith, now exercise that faith by trusting God completely. He says He will live in you, believe it, He says you can be like the holy Christ, believe it, He says all His promises are yes in Christ, so believe them, and you will see your faith being activated and energized and expressed and working through love.