

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Topical Bulletin, July 2018

The importance of the individual sinner having FAITH in Jesus Christ cannot be overemphasized since the Holy Bible clearly states: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (John 3:36; Ephesians 2:8-9 KJV) Accordingly, FAITH IN CHRIST is a necessary gracious gift of God and not something one can produce in himself or herself; and, FAITH IN CHRIST SAVES only because it personally receives the forgiveness of sins and salvation that Jesus Christ has graciously earned for the entire world by His perfect life and atoning death on the cross where He paid for all the sins of all people with His holy and precious blood, for it is written: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. ...and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (John 3:16-17; 1 John 1:7; Romans 3:23-24; 6:23 KJV) Thus, FAITH IN CHRIST as one’s personal Savior and Lord is vital if one would be and remain saved.

The questions to be addressed in this month’s Topical Bulletin relate to the necessity of having and retaining faith in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior and Lord, for it concerns each and every Christian to know: ***Can faith in Jesus Christ be lost? Can faith once lost ever be regained? Does every sin by a Christian result in a loss of faith?*** The foregoing questions will be answered in the light of the Holy Scriptures.

It will be beneficial to first review what FAITH is, and SAVING FAITH in particular: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Hebrews 11:1-6; Romans 4:1-3, 20-25; 5:1-2 KJV) The word “faith” is a translation of the Greek root word πιστις {pis'-tis} meaning: “belief or confidence evoked by another’s reputation for trustworthiness, in NT with focus, whether explicit or implied, on God or Christ for aid or salvation **faith, trust, confidence.**” [Danker,

Thus, SAVING FAITH is always personal trust in the gracious promises of the Gospel. SAVING FAITH is full trust and confidence of one's heart in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord – confidence which includes relying completely on Christ's atoning work and not relying in any measure on one's own works – "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." (Romans 10:10-11 KJV) SAVING FAITH is NOT mere historic or general knowledge about Jesus Christ and other Biblical doctrines since even the devils have such an historic-faith, for we read in James 2:19, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." Hence, we Christians in possession of SAVING FAITH "walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7 KJV), "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Romans 8:24 KJV) We Christians do not see Jesus with our physical eyes, but we believe on Him with our heart as our personal Savior and Lord because God has gifted us with faith that the Holy Ghost wrought in us by means of "the gospel of Christ... for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 1:16-17; 10:17 KJV) Furthermore, the Holy Ghost keeps us in the faith by means of the Gospel since Holy Writ reports that "the word of God... effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:13 KJV)

Keeping in mind what SAVING FAITH IN CHRIST is, what it does, and how we receive it and persist in it; the first question that we will consider is: ***Can faith in Jesus Christ be lost?*** The answer is given by Christ Himself in His exposition of the parable of the sower, where He says, "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience." (Luke 8:11-15 KJV) The word "believe" in the underlined portion of the above text is a translation of the Greek root word πιστεω {pist-yoo'-o} meaning: "have **confidence/faith.**" [Danker, Greek/English Lexicon] Therefore, note that some people believe in Jesus but subsequently fall away in time of temptation— they truly believe for a while, but then they lose their faith in Christ as they do not remain rooted in Jesus with heart-deep conviction. So, faith in Christ can certainly be lost, for the Apostle Paul declared to the young pastor Timothy: "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck." (1 Timothy 1:18-19 KJV) The phrase "having put away" is a translation of the Greek root word αποθεομαι {ap-o-theh'-om-ahee} meaning: "in imagery **reject, discard.**" [Danker, Greek/English Lexicon] Thus it is that saving faith can be lost by one's own fault and heinous sinful actions, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12 KJV)

Hence, we read in our Lutheran Confessions, Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article III, of Repentance: "It is, accordingly, necessary to know and to teach that when holy men, still having and feeling original sin, also daily repenting of and striving with it, happen to fall into manifest sins, as David into adultery, murder, and blasphemy, that then faith and the Holy Ghost has departed from them [they cast out faith and the Holy

Ghost]. For the Holy Ghost does not permit sin to have dominion, to gain the upper hand so as to be accomplished, but represses and restrains it so that it must not do what it wishes. But if it does what it wishes, the Holy Ghost and faith are [certainly] not present. For St. John says, 1 Ep. 3, 9: *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, ...and he cannot sin.* And yet it is also the truth when the same St. John says, 1 Ep. 1, 8: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* [Triglot, page 491]

The next question to be answered is: ***Can faith once lost ever be regained?*** Thankfully, the answer is YES, for by God's grace, a person who has fallen from faith can be converted again and restored to faith in Christ (unless one commits the sin against the Holy Ghost, for then one stubbornly and wilfully blocks the very means God uses to gift one with saving faith) {the sin against the Holy Ghost will be subject matter for a future ILC Topical Bulletin}.

Two examples from the Holy Bible of Christians who lost their faith and were subsequently restored to faith are: David in the Old Testament; and, Peter in the New Testament.

David sinned greatly and lost his faith by wilfully committing the sins of adultery and murder in the case with the woman Bathsheba and her husband Uriah the Hittite. The entire account can be read in the 11th chapter of 2nd Samuel. David wilfully piled up sin upon sin, for after seeing Bathsheba and her beauty, "David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I *am* with child." (2 Samuel 11:4-5 KJV) David then attempted to cover up the incident, for "David sent to Joab, *saying*, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David. And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded *of him* how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered. And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king's house, and there followed him a mess *of meat* from the king." (2 Samuel 11:6-8 KJV) Obviously, David hoped that Uriah would go home and have intimate relations with Bathsheba so it could be claimed that the baby was Uriah's. When that plan failed, "David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent *it* by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die." (2 Samuel 11:14-15 KJV) Thus, Uriah died due to David's orders. David was no longer a man of faith in the promised Messiah, the Christ, for David was for a time impenitent as he served his sinful flesh rather than serving the Savior.

However, David was later restored to faith, for we read in the 12th chapter of 2nd Samuel, "And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich *man* had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor *man* had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this *thing* shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou *art* the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of

the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife *to be* thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give *them* unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst *it* secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." (2 Samuel 12:1-13 KJV) David sincerely repented and was restored to faith by the grace of God as the Holy Ghost worked through the Word of God.

Yes, David repented – David was contrite and trusted in the Lord to forgive him – for it was about that time when David said: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free spirit. *Then* will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: *and* my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it*: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar." (Psalm 51:1-19 KJV) It is clear from the foregoing words of Holy Scripture that David was again a man of true repentance – contrition and faith – for he trusted in God's mercy and the cleansing that the Lord only can supply and does supply in the Savior, Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, in whom David believed when he wrote by inspiration of God: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." (Psalm 110:1 KJV)

The case with Peter was that he sinned greatly and lost his faith by wilfully denying Christ three times after Jesus' arrest, for Holy Writ reports: "Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before *them* all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another *maid* saw him, and said unto them that were there, This *fellow* was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto *him* they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art *one* of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly." (Matthew 26:69-75 KJV) Luke's account reveals: "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly." (Luke 22:61-62 KJV) Thus, Peter's fall from faith did not long endure, but did occur;

thankfully, the Holy Ghost worked through the WORD of Christ in Peter's heart and he wept bitter tears of repentance.

Jesus had warned Peter and the other apostles prior to the incident, for in Matthew 26:31-35 we read: "Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all *men* shall be offended because of thee, *yet* will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples." The word "offended" is a translation of the Greek root word σκανδαλιζω {skan-dal-id'-zo} meaning: "to give offense, cause to stumble; **Offense at Jesus is the opposite of faith in him.** The disciples take offense and fall at the passion (Mk. 14:27; Mt. 26:31)." [Kittel/Bromiley, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament]

Yes, Jesus had plainly warned Peter, saying, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (Luke 22:31-32 KJV) Peter's faith would fail, but would not fail permanently because Jesus had prayed for him and Peter would therefore be converted and once again have faith in Christ as his personal Savior and Lord. It all happened as Jesus said it would. The word "faith" is a translation of the Greek root word πιστις {pis'-tis} meaning: "belief or confidence evoked by another's reputation for trustworthiness, in NT with focus, whether explicit or implied, on God or Christ for aid or salvation **faith, trust, confidence.**" [Danker, Greek/English Lexicon] The word "converted" is a translation of the Greek root word επιστρεφω {ep-ee-stref'-o} meaning: "to 'change mode of thinking/ belief', **turn about/around.**" [Danker, Greek/English Lexicon] Thus, shortly after Peter fell from faith, he was restored to faith in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord.

The fact that both David and Peter had truly fallen from faith is evident by their wilful and deliberate sinning, for Jesus plainly states: "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." (Luke 11:23; Matthew 10:32-33 KJV) The fact that faith in Christ can be restored – by reiterated conversion – to those who have lost it is evident from the following Scripture passages: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Galatians 4:19-20; Revelation 2:5 KJV) The word "repent" is a translation of the Greek root word μετανοεω {met-an-o-eh'-o} meaning: "to 'have a serious change of mind and heart about a previous point of view or course of behavior', esp. in the face of extraordinary developments **repent.**" [Danker, Greek/English Lexicon]

The final question to be answered in this month's Topical Bulletin is: **Does every sin by a Christian result in a loss of faith?** The answer is NO, for the INVOLUNTARY sins of the believer, sins of weakness (known by the theological term "venial sins") – which in themselves are deserving of eternal death – ARE FORGIVEN FOR JESUS' SAKE, in whom the believer trusts and confides, and in whose strength the Christian continually repents of his or her sins, for the believer heartily declares with David the psalmist: "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the

LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether. More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: *and* in keeping of them *there is* great reward. Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” (Psalm 19:7-14 KJV) Fellow Christians, Jesus is He, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” (Ephesians 1:7 KJV) Comforting news indeed!

However, if a Christian deliberately, wilfully, and knowingly transgresses God’s Law, such sins (known by the theological term “mortal sins”) destroy faith in Christ, so that if the person perpetrating such a sin would die in that state of unbelief he or she would go to hell, for such a person has returned to the state he or she was in before conversion— the state of being “dead in trespasses and sins.” (Ephesians 2:1 KJV) Romans 8:13 declares in no uncertain terms: “if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” Accordingly, if believers give up the struggle against sin so that sin again rules them, they have fallen from grace and lost faith. We all need to take the following words from the Holy Bible to heart: “*This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Galatians 5:16-17; Romans 6:1-4 KJV)

Realize that ALL the sins of unbelievers are “mortal sins” because unbelievers reject Christ, for whose sake alone God pardons sin. Jesus plainly states: “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins.” (John 8:24 KJV)

Therefore, we need to continue in repentance – contrition and faith in Christ – throughout our entire lifetime in this world. We need to persist in making regular use of the Word of God, for Jesus says: “If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32 KJV) We Christians all need to honestly and regularly confess as did the Apostle Paul: “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” (Romans 7:18-25 KJV) Let us thank and praise the Lord with our heart, lips, and life for His amazing grace and mercy, for “*It is of* the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.” (Lamentations 3:22 KJV)

m.e.l.