



# Believe

"On the walls of schools, athletic and care facilities, single word messages have popped up recently in ornate script. Beside the door of a nearby living center, the word in huge letters is, **BELIEVE**. With no direct object to that verbal form, it is both vague and curious. Perhaps this is a new attempt at motivational psychology but with pointless goal. The uses of language are often curious, from barely detectable words in ancient Sumerian on small bullae (Royal seal) three thousand years old to the famed iconic, 'Kilroy was here,' scrolled onto walls from WW II era. What was the intended message? A couple of years ago that same word 'believe' was emblazoned on a background of blue with a horse shoe representing the Indianapolis Colts. Believe, what? Whatever it was, the Colts did not make it to the playoffs that year, let alone the Super Bowl."

(From Rev. Ralph Spears' presentation to the 2016 LMS Annual Conference )

The 2016 Conference Convention of the LMS was held June 18 and 19, in Chetek, WI, centered on the theme "Believe." A number of papers were presented by clergy and lay alike and

became the basis for some excellent discussion at the Saturday Conference. When the LMS was formed a little over 20 years ago, it was decided to hold an annual conference

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along with our annual convention. The conference was to be a time for theological discussion and learning for lay and clergy alike. This year's focus on "believe" was an opportunity for much sharing on a most relevant topic. As Pastor Spears mentions in our opening paragraph, the word is found most anywhere today. But what does it mean, and what is one to believe?

We, of course, were interested in dealing with "believe" in connection with the Christian faith. And in connection with this, most every presentation made the point that believing must have an object, and that the object of one's believing is of utmost importance.

The object of Christian believing is not an idea, not a body of truth(s), but a person... and a very specific Person at that... it must be the Person of the God/man, Jesus Christ, as He is revealed to us in the pages of Holy Scripture.

One of the lay presentations was most interesting in this connection. His was a look into the definition of the word 'believe,' and how the meaning of the word has changed through the years.

First, a simple definition was taken from an on-line dictionary: "1) to accept or regard (something) as true. 2) to accept the truth of what is said by (someone). 3) to have (a specified opinion)." And that was it!

Secondly, reference was made to the 1964 *American College Dictionary*. "Believe: 1) that which is believed; an accepted opinion. 2) conviction of the truth or reality of a thing, based upon grounds insufficient to afford positive knowledge: statements unworthy of belief. 3) confidence; faith; trust: a child's belief in his parents. 4) a religious tenet or tenets: the Christian belief."

Then the presenter went to the 1828 edition of the Webster's dictionary where we find the following:

BELIE'VE, *verb transitive* To credit upon the authority or testimony of another; to be persuaded of the truth of something upon the declaration of another, or upon evidence furnished by reasons, arguments, and deductions of the mind, or by other circumstances, than personal knowledge. When we *believe* upon the authority of another, we *always* put confidence in his veracity.

When we *believe* upon the authority of reasoning, arguments, or a concurrence of facts and circumstances, we rest our conclusions upon their strength or probability, their agreement with our own experience, etc.

2. To expect or hope with confidence; to trust.

I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. **Psalms 27:13.**

BELIE'VE, *verb intransitive* To have a firm persuasion of any thing. In some cases, to have full persuasion, approaching to certainty; in others, more doubt is implied. It is often followed by in or on, especially in the scriptures. To *believe* in, is to hold as the object of faith. 'Ye *believe* in God, *believe* also in me.' **John 14:1.** To *believe* on, is to trust, to place full confidence in, to rest upon with faith. 'To them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that *believe* on his name.' **John 1:7.** But there is no ground for much distinction.

In theology, to *believe* sometimes expresses a mere assent of the understanding to the truths of the gospel; as in the case of Simon. **Acts 8:37**

In others, the word implies, with this assent of the mind, a yielding of the will and affections, accompanied with a humble reliance on Christ for salvation. **John 1:12. John 3:15.**

In popular use and familiar discourse, to *believe* often expresses an opinion in a vague manner, without a very exact estimate of evidence, noting a mere preponderance of opinion, and is nearly equivalent to think or suppose.

A couple of things here. First, it appears that in 1828, *believing* was closely linked with the Christian faith and thus the biblical references. True, it dealt with daily life, but even then, examples of believing were referenced with Scripture.

And secondly, as is implied in the last paragraph, there was already some difference between true belief and what some (many) might consider believing to be.

As mentioned, believing as understood in Scripture, focuses on the person of Jesus. Paul wrote, "I know *whom* I have believed. And again, as we find it in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And John writes in John 1:12, how it is those who "receive Him [Jesus], who believed in His Name," that Jesus gave the right to become children of God.

This is no small matter. We see and hear it all the time today. "Believe in yourself." "Trust your instincts." "Go after your dreams."



Our young people are being told this continually. But clearly the teaching of Scripture stands on opposition to such kind of thinking. We have many examples in Scripture of what Paul found to be true, that in himself he could do nothing, but that he

could do all things through Christ who gave him strength (Philippians 4:13).

We need to be very careful that we are clear in this and do not 'fog' the issue in our preaching and teaching both in word and in song in the church. For example, there is a chorus that you might hear in Sunday School, or in a youth group meeting, as well as in other settings. The words are as follows, "Only believe, only believe; All things are possible, only believe. Only believe, only believe. Only believe, only believe. All things are possible, only believe."

Here we come back to a question raised in our opening paragraph. "Believe?" "Believe what?" Most anyone could sing these words and be comfortable with them. We just touched on it, "If you believe in yourself anything is possible." Someone who holds to that statement can sing this chorus. A Muslim can sing this chorus... a Buddhist, a Mormon, an atheist, can sing this chorus.

I do need to point out that there are a couple of stanzas that go along with this chorus that do point to Jesus as the necessary object of one's faith. So if the entire song is sung, the truth is there. But you will find a number of hymnbooks where only the chorus is found. And when that is the case, what is the message? And this is true in any number of other "Christian" songs.

Another important point made in more than one presentation is that true belief... is more than just knowledge or mental assent. Believing, as

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Paper prepared for the 2016 LMS-USA Conference and Convention

*"The Unique Meaning of 'Belief' in Biblical Christianity"*

Pastor Tylan E. Dalrymple

Questions:

Is belief objective or subjective according to the Bible? In other words, is Christian belief something that is completely different for each person, somewhat different, or the same for each person? Where does belief and faith begin? Does Christian belief begin with the person believing or the God they believe in? Does it start with Jesus or with man? Belief in modern terms is defined as simply "an acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists." How is Biblical belief different?

Those who claim to follow the Bible range in their beliefs. The diversity is sometimes so extreme that we might ask "What is Christian belief anyway?" Is belief a weekly trip to church? Does belief mean speaking in tongues? Is belief barking like a dog in the spirit? Is belief a cross hung around our neck? Is belief reading the Bible? Is belief eating the Lord's Supper? Is belief a parade where we all hold hands? Is belief found in prayers of a Rosary?

The Mechanistic mindset:

The most common way we try to understand a concept is to break it down into smaller components. Since the inception of the industrial age Western culture tends to treat all questions mechanically. We think that most if not all questions can be answered by breaking down a topic the way we might dissect an animal. We attempt to understand belief by looking at its parts.

All the questions I have asked thus far assume this can be done. However, can we break down the meaning of belief? Can belief be understood by its parts or do we confuse what belief really means when we try to 'narrow' it down? For example, 'Is there more to belief than participating in communion?' Is church attendance a necessary part of Christian belief? Does reading the Bible on a regular basis constitute belief? Some university professors of religion read the Bible all the time and remain unbelievers.

Maybe someone will say, "You have it all wrong, belief isn't about what you do." To that statement I would ask, Does a man who beats his spouse without remorse or repentance really believe so long as he 'thinks' or 'feels' that he is a believer? Can an abortion clinic doctor claim to be a believer in Jesus and go on murdering little babies? It seems clear that belief is in 'some way' tied to what we do? Yet, as Christians we know that works cannot erase sin. It seems we are leaving something or (to put it more clearly) 'someone' out of the picture. That someone is the *Object of belief* at the center of our discussion today.

### I AM that I AM

God once proclaimed to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:14) Jesus told the Pharisees, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58) Consequently the Jews became enraged and tried to kill the Lord right then. The point being that Jesus claimed to be the great "I AM." From the Biblical perspective God simply 'is.' There is nothing hypothetical about Him. God is! Interestingly, it is these two simple words that make belief so complex. This is where Christian belief separates itself from all other religions.

Many religions have prayer. Many religions have some form of sacrament. Most religions have a moral code or list of laws. Almost every religion has spiritual beliefs that are represented by physical actions. What they do not have is a spiritual God *who became a physical man and lived a real life*. Jesus did not merely claim to be a teacher. He claimed to be *the* teacher, *the* creator of the world, and *the* author of life. He became flesh and dwelled among us. The *incarnate Christ* is the pinnacle of the mountain when it comes to Christian belief. The *resurrection* is the axiom upon which all belief turns. Belief in the incarnation and resurrection is where faith begins. As Paul has said, "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." (1 Corinthians 15:12-19 esv)

I am not saying (and more importantly Paul is not saying) the resurrection is all that matters. **Belief in the incarnation and the resurrection is necessary, but certainly not sufficient.** In other words, our belief can't end there. Here again, we encounter the problem of all human thought. We would like to narrow things down. In one sense, we have to narrow things down. If everything and anything is permissible then what do we really believe?

Some attend worship once a year and claim to believe. Some never take part in public worship. They make belief completely individualistic. Others only believe when they are in public. What they do in private actually contradicts their public statement. There are a few who do things like laugh and bark in the spirit. They claim to believe too. Yet, what is it that they be-

lieve? Many say it's all about being 'happy.' A Bible professing Christian will reply, "Most of God's prophets including John the Baptist had some very 'unhappy' times. Jeremiah in particular found great sorrow in his life." The reply back from the happy person will generally be something like, "You're trying to ruin my happiness." This is where the rubber meets the road... so to speak.

### Paths of Righteousness

Our perspective and feelings about what it means to believe are important, but they are secondary. The primary aspect of belief is 'will' ...not our will... God's will. It is why those who believe are told to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." This statement carries with it an understanding that God is reality and that he can't be narrowed down any more than we can narrow down existence itself. Therefore, if we can't narrow down God then we certainly can't narrow down and package belief. What we can do is embrace the starting point and follow it.

What is the starting point? The starting point is belief in the resurrected incarnate Lord. How do we follow? We trust Him at His Word. **Belief is a beginning, a journey, and destination.** Belief is everything we encounter from Alpha to Omega. It means trusting everything the creator of reality says about reality. It means seeing that truth confirmed again and again as we live in the world.

Lewis described belief in the context of mathematics saying, *"If you are a Christian you do not have to believe that all the other religions are simply wrong all through. If you are an atheist you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake. If you are a Christian, you are free to think that all those religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of the truth. When I was an atheist I had to try to persuade myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most; when I became a Christian I was able to take a more liberal view. **But, of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong.** As in arithmetic - there is only one right answer to a sum, and all other answers are wrong; but some of the wrong answers are much nearer being right than others."*

Therefore, belief will sometimes appear very different although it is actually one reality, one Lord, and one truth. The difference in appearance is not because of any real difference or because we are somehow free to believe in anything we want. Rather, true belief involves walking on a path with a definite starting point and destination. Different perspectives come about because those walking along the true path of belief are at different points in the road at different times.

[You might at this point want to study the diagram on page 8]

As seen in the diagram, sometimes different roads intersect. This is confusing because it leads many to believe that there are different paths leading to the one true God - the I AM. The problem is that they are again thinking in terms of 'what if' rather than 'I AM.' *Jesus* is the way, the truth, and the life. There is only one road and *He is the road*. The word "way" or "ὁδός" in the Greek literally means 'roadway.' Only one road goes all the way to the top. However, sometimes roads converge in this world. This is how someone from an otherwise backward belief system can suddenly find their feet on the right path. God may take a particular truth and use it to lead someone into greater truth. Here's the catch.

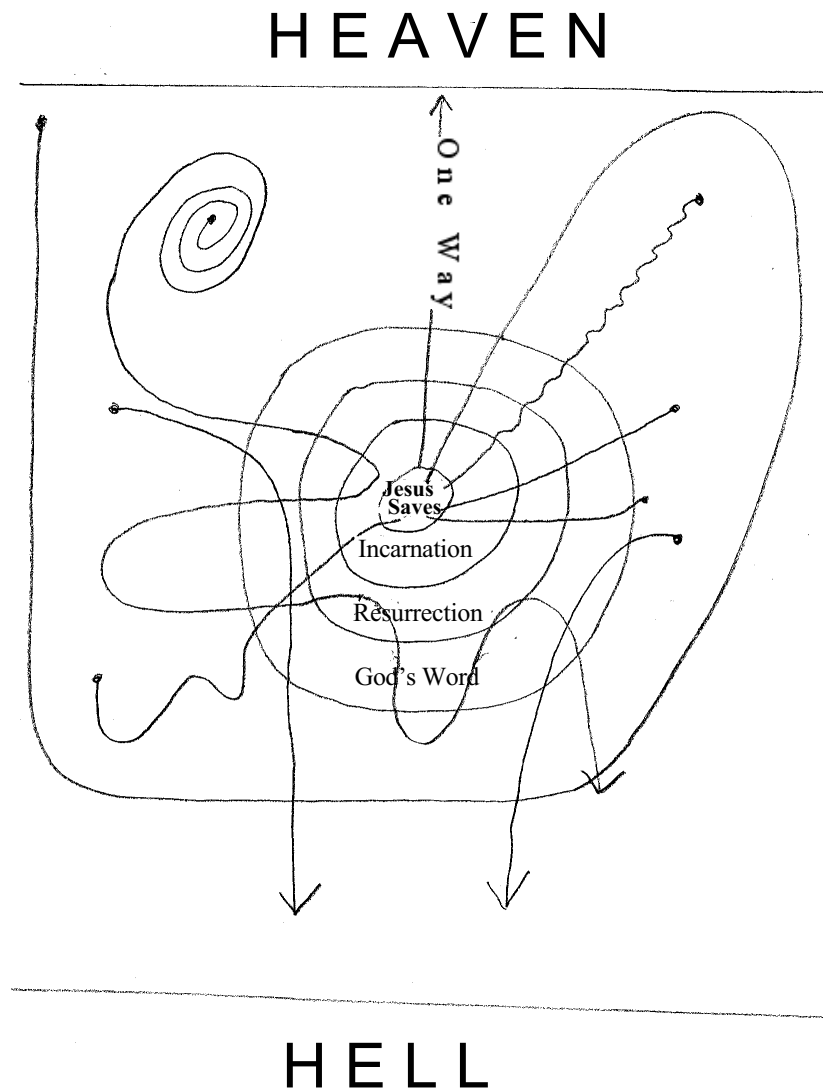
Those who say, "There are many paths leading to God" are speaking a half truth. They speak as their father Satan. Satan was seen falling from heaven. (see Luke 10:18) He who was once Lucifer (morning star) is now Satan (enemy.) He is forever on his own path of destruction. In the same way all paths in this life are heading that direction. Every person has sinned, therefore every path is heading the same direction... down. Sinful man fancies himself a god and goes to the place where all false gods reside. In other words, there are many paths leading to Hell. All who believe 'in themselves' are on the wide path.

The Bible tells us that only one road goes the right direction. 2 Corinthians 10:5 tells us, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." This means that every other belief and thought system must eventually be taken captive by the truth... by reality. Someone may start on the wrong road of belief in this life, but they can't stay there in reality. The change must happen before the end because only one path leads to the final destination. What does this mean for 'belief'?

I said that all belief starts with the incarnation. I said that no one can possibly sum up everything along the path because Christian belief is centered on God and no one can sum up or narrow down God. However, just as we can know where belief begins we can also know where it ends. Belief must end with our feet firmly planted on the path Jesus cleared with His body and blood. We must repent and change our direction. Belief happens when we 'cross over' and recognize God standing with the gate open.

Some cross the path before they can even remember. Some cross this path much later in life. For some it takes a tragedy to set them on the right path. Others are led by people God has sent into their life. Of course there are many who never 'change direction', who never repent. They all are offered the same gift, but the direction does not always change. In any case reality remains the same. Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Notice in the diagram below, only one path leads to Heaven. In one sense this path is part of heaven itself. Notice that all paths outside of Christ lead toward damnation. This is due to the fact that no one is righteous outside of Christ. It is also important to notice that each "life path" is unique. Some paths are longer and more winding than others. Still, each path at some point encounters truth on some level. It is during these encounters that we may find the way to the center of truth and "become" what we are not by physical birth - children of God. (See John 1:12-13) The different paths may also meet one another at various points along the way. This gives some the idea that there are different paths to heaven. The reality is that there is only one path that leads to eternal life. Some have several encounters with the truth and still fall away. Some are converted almost immediately - perhaps they don't even remember a time when they didn't believe. Some find the truth at the very twilight of life after a long path skirting around Him. The fact remains that the only way to the path of righteousness is through Jesus.





## *Believing, Teaching, and Confessing*

*A Paper Presented to the 2016 Conference of the Lutheran Ministerium and Synod-USA*

By Rev. Jeffrey A. Iverson

Lutherans were in disarray in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. Luther had died in 1546. Lutherans had earned the right to exist in lands where the ruler was Lutheran in the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, but theologically they were tearing themselves apart. Two major factions arose: the "Philippists," students of Luther's protégé Philip Melancthon who emphasized the distinctions in doctrine of their teacher and the "Gnesio" (or true) Lutherans who emphasized the teachings of Luther. Both were squeezed by the Roman Catholic theologians on one side and the Reformed theologians on the other.

The Lutherans needed to come to an agreement on doctrine, but initial attempts were abortive. Finally the Lutheran princes put together a committee with the theologians Jacob Andreae, Martin Chemnitz, David Chytraeus, and Nicholas Selnecker plus lay representatives from the Lutheran lands.

The document drafted by these persons was the *Formula of Concord* (1577) the final document in what we know as the Lutheran confessions or more formally *Concordia* or *The Book of Concord*. The Formula of Concord has two parts: the Solid Declaration which is the more in-depth presentation of the doctrines agreed to and the

Epitome, which is a precis, or summary of the Solid Declaration.

Why is any of this relevant to our discussion of belief? It is because of the words that these theologians used to defend true Lutheran doctrine or refute errors. That phrase is "we believe, teach, and confess." For example, the Epitome begins:

1. We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed."<sup>1</sup>

The phrase "we believe, teach, and confess" occurs in the *Epitome* about 45 times.<sup>2</sup> Many Lutheran church bodies have used these same words ever since. For example, the LMS-USA's own *Deerfield Statement of the Lutheran Confessions* begins this way.

What do we make of these three words used together? Are they synonyms? I think not, but each of these words proceeds from the other in the same way that the Nicene Creed describes the Holy Trinity.

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<sup>1</sup> Tappert, T. G. (Ed.). (1959). *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (p. 464). Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press.

<sup>2</sup> Larson, Kenneth E. (Ed.). (1989). *Concordance to the Book of Concord*. (p. 41). Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House.

We begin with believing. Belief is that God-given faith in Jesus Christ that gives us salvation. Jesus says: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16 RSV)

We begin with believing...  
then it is imperative that  
we tell others the Good  
News...

But we never end there. Once we believe, once we have that gift of faith, it is imperative that we tell others the Good News, that we teach them the Gospel. Jesus says: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20 RSV)  
Teaching proceeds from believing.

But we are still not done. We believe, therefore we teach. But we are also called upon to give testimony to our faith, to confess what we believe in. First and foremost we do this with our creeds, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian. Most of us say one or the other of these every Sunday. Once again, it is not an option: it is an imperative. If we believe, we will confess. While we bemoan the fact that secular society in the USA increasing tramples on our rights to practice our faith as we see fit, we cannot lose sight of the fact that in many Muslim countries, saying one of the creeds will get you a death sentence.

Secondly, we confess our faith using the Means of Grace: God's Word and Sacraments. We read God's Word on our own and in our families. We come to church where

that Word is publically read, sung, and proclaimed. We also partake of the Sacraments, bringing persons into God's family through the waters of Baptism and receiving forgiveness of sins in the absolution and the Lord's Supper.

Third, we confess our faith through the doctrinal statements in the *Book of Concord* and the statements of our church body, the LMS-USA.

So believing is the foundation, but teaching and confessing proceed from it, not as a new law, but as a response to the gift of God.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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(Continued from page 3)

the Bible speaks of it, involves the giving of the whole person over to the Object of his or her faith. The believer's life shows forth his or her faith. Thoughts, words and deeds are all reflective of said belief. "By their fruit you will know them" (Matt. 7:16,30). See also Galatians 5:22-26).

Another matter lifted up had to do with 'how much' it was necessary to believe to be sufficient for salvation. And again, the issue was not so much the 'amount' as it was the 'Object' and the 'giving' of one's heart, mind, and soul over to that Object. Faith (but *true* faith/belief) even if small, like a 'mustard seed,' is sufficient for salvation. But along with this 'small' faith there must be a desire/commitment to grow in grace and knowledge of Him in whom one believes. Scripture speaks of the necessity of moving from milk to solid food (see 1Cor. 3:2; Heb 5:12; Heb 5:13; 1Pe 2:2).

Two complete conference papers are included in this issue and will give the reader a feel for the basis of the discussions that were such an interesting and important part of our gathering this year.

## Some thoughts on John 14:1-3

KJV - Let not your heart be troubled: ye **believe** in God, **believe** also in me.

RSV - Let not your hearts be troubled; **believe** in God, **believe** also in me.

NIV - Do not let your hearts be troubled. **Trust** in God; **trust** also in me.

NASV - Do not let your hearts be troubled. **Trust** in God; **trust** also in me.

ESV - Let not your hearts be troubled. **Believe** in God; **believe** also in me.

We have, in this passage a *precious remedy against an old disease*. That disease is trouble of heart. That remedy is faith.

Heart-trouble is the commonest thing in the world. No rank, or class, or condition is exempt from it. No bars, or bolts, or locks can keep it out. Partly from inward causes and partly from outward, - partly from the body and partly from the mind, - partly from what we love and partly from what we fear, the journey of life is full of trouble. Even the best of Christians have many bitter cups to drink between grace and glory. Even the holiest saints find the world a vale of tears.

Faith in the Lord Jesus is the only sure medicine for troubled hearts. To believe more thoroughly, trust more entirely, rest more unreservedly, lay hold more firmly, lean back more completely, - this is the prescription which our Master urges on the attention of all His disciples. No doubt the members of that little band which sat round the table at the last supper, had believed already. They had proved the reality of their faith by giving up everything for Christ's sake. Yet what does their Lord say to them here? Once more He presses on them the old lesson, the lesson with which they first began: "Believe! Be-

lieve more! Believe on Me!"

Never let us forget that there are degrees in faith, and that there is a wide difference between weak and strong believers. The weakest faith is enough to give a man a saving interest in Christ, and ought not to be despised, but it will not give a man such inward comfort as a strong faith. Vagueness and dimness of



Like Peter on the water, we need to look more steadily at Jesus, and less at the waves and wind.

perception are the defect of weak believers. They do not see clearly what they believe and why they believe. In such cases more faith is the one thing needed. Like Peter on the water, they need to look more steadily at Jesus, and less at the waves and wind. Is it not written, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee?" (Isai. xxvi. 3.)

Rev. J. C. RYLE, 1816 - 1900AD

Table Talk  
P. O. Box 31  
Chetek, WI 54728

The LMS-USA is Lutheran Church body describing itself as *Biblical, Confessional, Evangelical, Liturgical and Congregational*. It is a 'Forum' in which there is an on going discussion of theological issues and concerns among clergy and lay alike. The LMS-USA meets annually for a Theological Conference and this publication, besides carrying news of the Ministerium and Synod, functions also as a vehicle for this continuing dialogue.

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For information or to make  
comment write:

President/Pastor, LMS-USA  
2837 East New York St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46201

Internet Contact:  
revralphs@sbglobal.net

To: