

If you wouldn't purchase a used car from this man,  
why would you believe what he says about things eternal?



While the intentions are probably good, big-smile, never-doubting, always-confident “faith” is a uniquely, and relatively recent, American false and foolish phenomenon worthless in the time of real trials and needs – it certainly isn't the Gospel! “Big-grin” faith is a caricature of Christianity that actually destroys what it is trying to motivate – because everyone has doubts, sin, trials that this foolishness not only does not comfort, but leads to greater confusion and doubts. It is hard enough (even with grace) getting through the many trials of life; but believing we have “got it” and nothing can shake us (the “Don't worry! Be Happy!” philosophy) leaves us defenseless just at the point and time we need to know about and expect difficulties (and how to get through these “patches” – how to seek and find grace).

Martin Luther is much more realistic:

Seeing then that the devil, that deviser of a thousand wiles, is able so to print in our hearts so manifest and shameful a lie, that we would swear a thousand times it were an undoubted truth, we must not be proud, but walk in fear and humility, calling upon Christ our Lord, that we be not led into temptation. Worldly and secure men, which having heard the Gospel once or twice preached, do by and by imagine that they have received abundance of the Spirit, fall at length in like manner, because they fear not God, they are not thankful unto him, but persuade themselves that they are able, not only to hold and defend the doctrine of true religion, but also to stand against the devil in any assault or conflict, be it never so great. Such are meet instruments of the devil to bewitch and to throw down to desperation.

On the other side, say not thou: I am perfect, I cannot fall; but humble thyself, and fear, lest if thou stand today, tomorrow thou be overthrown. I myself, although I be a doctor of divinity, and have now preached Christ, and fought against the devil in his false teachers a great while, by mine own experience have found how hard a matter this is. For I cannot shake off Satan as I desire, neither can I so apprehend Christ as the Scripture setteth him forth; but oftentimes the devil setteth before mine eyes a false Christ. But thanks be to God who keepeth us in the Word, in faith and in prayer, that we may walk before him in humility and fear, and not presume of our own wisdom, righteousness and strength, but trust in the power of Christ, who is strong when we are weak, and by us weak and feeble creatures continually overcometh and triumpheth; to whom be glory for ever. Amen Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians

page 194

His point? We are all midgets in comparison to the battle ever and always before us! We have no hope in and of ourselves. And just as no person has adequate “free” will to accomplish faith in Jesus Christ, no person (even when saved by God's faith given them) is able to retain this faith without daily grace. Who has yet to move mountains by their faith? Yet:

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done.” Mt 21:21

To make it totally clear that it all depends on Him and His power, Jesus also said:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." Jn 15:5 - 8

Who has not woken up and wondered (about what yesterday was so sure and certain), "Is it really true?" This shows our weakness – to recapture the truth we will either look internally ("I can . . .") or externally ("Help my unbelief" . . . "Have mercy on me, a sinner" . . .) for the help and strength – to pride or humility (the latter being the only catalyst for grace). This is a second kind of faith – seeking in the face of doubt. Faith, like a body, is made up of many "muscles" so that it is increased and improved with exercise (tension against these muscles). And just as physical exercise should never end, until death, spiritual trials will not either – so we can continue building spiritual muscles.

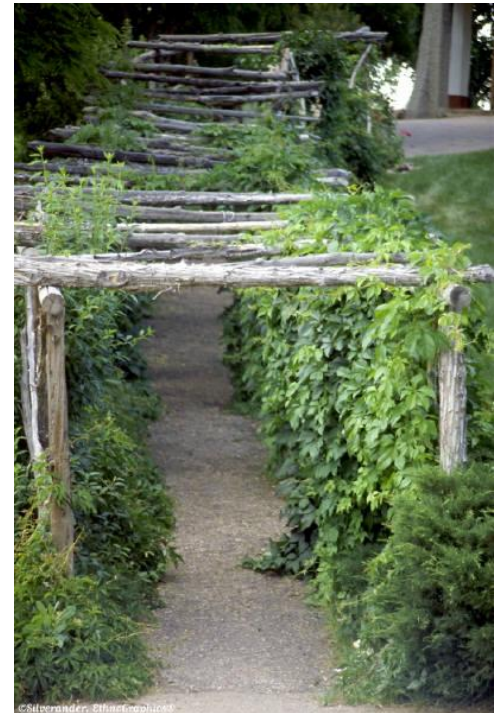
We must learn to live within this context and truth or give in and give up and slowly decline.



"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and ***only a few find it.***" Mt 7:13 - 14

This is the Gospel  
and ONLY Gospel!

There is a narrow gate leading to a narrow way – if we fail in the first we will never reach the second. But even if we make it to and through the first (the gate) we must as diligently (though developing disciplines) stay on the narrow road – many have left it to their sorrow and destruction!



The great Martin Luther knew what many big-smile, never-doubting, "big-grin," always-confident "faith" . . . preachers, and their followers don't admit – finding faith is easy (if God puts it before you and gives you eyes to see the narrow door and opens it for you); retaining it, on the other hand, is a life-long, trial-filled, challenge of staying on a narrow, often hard and seemingly dangerous, road of developing disciplines leading to what John Bunyan called the Celestial, eternal, City – if we believe the *Bible* this is the single way to eternal life! Martin Luther encouraged:

But thanks be to God who keepeth us in the Word, in faith and in prayer, that we may walk before him in humility and fear, and not presume of our own wisdom, righteousness and strength, but trust in the power of Christ, who is strong when we are weak, and by us weak and feeble creatures continually overcome and triumpheth; to whom be glory for ever. Amen

Yes, it is all by grace. That said, we do and must cooperate with this grace! The great goal then?

***Grow*** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!  
Amen. <sup>2Pe</sup> 3:18