

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.
Series: The Benefits of Salvation
Faith in Christ
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Faith is a gift of grace. The grace of faith is that grace whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls. Faith is the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word of God. Faith increases and is strengthened by the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments, and prayer. Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of one's faith.

By this faith, a believer believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word of God. The Word of God is inspired and infallible (in its autographs). God Himself speaks therein. The authority of God Himself gives the Word its authority. The believer acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come.

The principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong, may be often and in many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory; growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ, who is both the Author and finisher of our faith.

(adapted from the Westminster Confession of Faith, XIV/i-iii)

Faith is not some simple soulish act, some general faith which accepts the Bible as the Word of God and accordingly accepts the Christian religion as true. (John 2:22; 4:50; 5:46, 47; 12:38; Acts 24:14). **Saving faith is a faith that looks to Jesus Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life.**

The nature of saving faith. Saving faith consists of three elements: knowledge, assent, and trust. We have to have knowledge of a thing or person in order to believe or trust in that thing or person. We must likewise give assent in order to trust and we must commit ourselves to that in which we place our trust.

Knowledge. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by [or through] the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). People must love the truth in order that they may be saved (2 Thess. 2:10) This truth speaks of repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:25). Faith is not the enemy of knowledge; faith devoid of knowledge is believing the lie which leads to condemnation (2 Thess. 2:11, 12). Faith involves knowledge because we are to "believe that..." We see this in the following verses:

Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24; John 11:42; John 14:11; John 16:27; John 20:31; Romans 10:9; 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 John 5:1; 1 John 5:4.

Who Jesus is, a definition of His identity, is vital to our placing our trust in Him. Who is Jesus that I should trust Him?

Assent. This refers to the conviction that the knowledge we have gained about Jesus is indeed factually true and that the provisions of the gospel of Christ correspond exactly to our spiritual need. We can know the components of the gospel and we can have a keen comprehension of how the several propositions contribute to the gospel and yet still not believe that they are factually true or that they address our spiritual needs. We must answer, Do you believe it to be true?

Trust. Assent is cognition passed into conviction, so faith is conviction passed into confidence. In this third aspect of saving faith the sinner transfers any and all reliance for pardon and cleansing away from himself and his own resources and from all other gods, goddesses, or “ways” to “god” in complete and total abandonment to Christ. The person receives Christ and rests entirely in Christ for salvation. It is a trustful resting and hearty reliance involving a transfer from and a transfer to, confidence, and hope in Christ.

John 3:15; Acts 13:39; Luke 24:25; Romans 9:33; 10:11; 1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Peter 2:6; Acts 9:42; 11:17; John 1:12; 2:11, 23; 3:16, 18, 36. Romans 4:5, 24; Gal 2:16; Phil 1:29; 1 Peter 1:8; 1 John 5:10, e.g.

The mediatory function of faith. Roman Catholicism teaches that faith even when informed by love, earns merit which deserves the divine approval in what is called condign merit. The Reformers saw that the saving power of faith resides not in itself, but in Jesus Christ, the Savior on whom faith rests. It is not a mere frame of mind or attitude of heart that saves. In other words, it is not faith that saves, but faith in Jesus Christ. And strictly speaking, it is Christ that saves through faith. The saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith or in the attitude of faith or in the nature of faith, but in the object of faith. It is not the faith that has saving energy; it is Christ, the object of faith. Christ is the saving power and Christ alone.

Saving faith is a gift of grace. It is the diametrical opposite of law keeping with regard to its referent, and it is the only human response to God’s effectual summons which is congruous with grace.

The “gift character” of faith as procured by Christ and effected by regeneration. Like repentance unto life, faith in Jesus Christ is a saving gift. It was divinely provided for in election, procured for the elect by Christ’s cross work, and is actually wrought in the believer as a second effect of God’s Spirit’s regenerating activity in conjunction with the ministry of the Word.

Acts 13:46-48 Luke teaches here that, unlike the blaspheming Jews who repudiated the Word of God and judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (reflexive action), the reception of the Word of God by the believing Gentiles was due to the fact that they had been appointed unto eternal life (passive voice). Luke traced the Gentiles’ believing reception of the Word of God back to their divine election as the ultimate source from which their faith originated.

Acts 16:14. Lydia’s heart response to Paul’s word was a faith response, prompted by the Lord’s regenerating work of “opening” or enlightening her heart to it.

Acts 18:27. Philippians 1:29. It has been given on behalf of Christ...to believe on Him.

Ephesians 2:8, 9. Saving faith is the gift of God as are grace and salvation.

Faith versus Law-keeping. Paul pits faith over against all law keeping as the diametrical opposite to it as to what one is to trust for salvation. Trusting in law keeping relies on the human effort of the law keeper himself to render satisfaction before God. But by the keeping of the Law, no one is justified. The Law cannot give Life. The Holy Spirit is the Life-Maker, the Life-Producer.

The one who believes in Jesus Christ repudiates and looks entirely away from all human effort to the cross work of Jesus Christ who by His sacrificial death alone rendered satisfaction before God for people. How is God satisfied? What satisfies God so as to obtain our salvation? Only what Jesus has accomplished, and because of who Jesus is.

Romans 3:28; Romans 4:14; Romans 10:4; Galatians 2:17; Gal. 3:11; Phil. 3:9;
Romans 3:20; 4:2; Gal. 2:20, 21; 5:4; Titus 3:5

Salvation is by grace alone, by faith alone. Paul explicitly demonstrates that if salvation is to be effected by God's grace (undeserved favor), it can only be by faith whose nature as an action relies upon someone else and not oneself or one's works. The effectiveness of salvation comes only on believing the necessity and sufficiency of what Christ accomplished to satisfy divine justice for sin. This means trusting what someone else (Jesus) has done for you and gives to you. Why through faith in Christ? That it might be according to grace. Romans 4:16, Romans 11:6, Galatians 5:4.

Summary: Quoting from Dr. Robert L. Reymond's Systematic Theology,

"Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel." (*Shorter Catechism, Ques. 86*). Along with repentance unto life, it is the human response to God's effectual summons of the elect sinner into fellowship with His Son. It is effected, as is true repentance, normally in conjunction with the ministry of the Word of God and by the regenerating operations of God the Holy Spirit **in the human spirit**.

Because of

(1) God's universal command issued to all people to repent (Acts 17:30),

(2) His universal invitation extended to all people to come to Him (Isa 45:22; Matt 11:28; Rev. 22:17), and

(3) the all-sufficiency of Christ's cross work to save sinners,

no sinner need fear that Christ will refuse to save him/her or not be able to save him/her if he/she repents and comes to Him. In these great gospel truths resides the guarantee that Christ is able and willing to save every sinner who truly repents and believes.

As soon as the sinner, in response to God's effectual summons, turns from his/her sin and places his/her confidence in Jesus Christ and His vicarious cross work, "thereby uniting him/her to Christ in His effectual calling, God the Father immediately does three things: He justifies the person, definitively sanctifies the person, and adopts the person

into His family. Each of these divine acts requires a deeper look, but prior to doing that we will next consider the nature of the Christian believer's union with Christ through faith." (Reymond)

As we close, let's listen to some pertinent Scriptures:

John 1:11-13 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:11-13 ESV

John 3:16-18, 36 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God...Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. John 3:16-18, 36 ESV

John 5:46, 47 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? John 5:46, 47 ESV

Romans 10:4, 8-13, 17 **4**For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. .. But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); **9**because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10**For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. **11**For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." **12**For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. **13**For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ...**17**So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:4, 8-13, 17 ESV

1 John 5:1-5 **1**Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. **2**By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. **3**For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. **4**For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. **5**Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 1 John 5:1-5 ESV

Luke 24:25-27 **25** And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26** Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" **27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Luke 24:25-27 ESV

Philippians 1:29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, Philippians 1:29 ESV

Acts 13:46-48 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. **47**For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”**48**And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:46-48 ESV

Ephesians 2: 8, 9 **8**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9**not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8, 9 ESV

Romans 3:19-25 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **20**For by works of the law no human being^c will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. **21**But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— **22**the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: **23**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24**and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25**whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. Romans 3:19-25 ESV

Galatians 2:20, 21**20**I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in (or of) the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. **21**I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. Galatians 2:20, 21 ESV

Matthew 11:27-30 **27**All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. **28**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30**For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matthew 11:27-30 ESV

Revelation 22:17 **17**The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. Revelation 22:17 ESV

Bibliography: Reymond, Robert L. A New systematic Theology of the Christian Faith. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998.

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