

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 43—What is Faith in Jesus Christ? Q. 86

Introduction

Faith is a resting on the testimony of another—which means its entire reliability rests on the character of the one doing the testifying.

In order to be reconciled with God, God requires not simply faith in a general sense, but faith in His Son Jesus Christ *as He's offered to us in the gospel* in Holy Scripture.

In the gospel, God puts forth His Son, saying to sinners: *Behold my Son! Believe on Him, believe in Him, receive and embrace Him, and you will be saved.*

Faith in Jesus Christ is *saving*, not because of anything in the faith itself, but because it rests upon and embraces and receives the Saviour who saves: Jesus Christ.

And faith is required by God as the means to receive Christ because there's *no other way* for those who have nothing to receive from Christ everything. Faith is by nature and definition *self-denying* and *other-relying*. And when that "other" is Jesus Christ, that faith serves as a means of God's saving grace: the means to receive Christ Himself and all the benefits of redemption that come with Him to everyone who believes.

The Nature of Faith in Jesus Christ

- I. Faith in Jesus Christ is a *saving* grace.
 - A. If the soul of a man reaches out for help and remedy to Jesus Christ as He's offered in the gospel, then it automatically results in the saving of that soul, simply because Jesus Christ is a Saviour who saves, Acts 16.31.
- II. Faith in Jesus Christ is a *saving grace*. That means it's a gift of God and not a work of the soul itself.
 - A. To believe in Jesus Christ is a *gift* of God. It's a work of the Holy Spirit in our effectual calling, cf. Eph 2.8-9; Phil 1.29; Jn 6.65; WSC 29-31.
 - B. That's why those who believe on Jesus Christ have no ground for boasting: *not only because* the faith with which they rest on Christ is a gift and the work of the Holy Spirit, *but also because* Jesus Christ is offered to sinners as *a whole Christ* bringing *a whole salvation*. He can't be received in any other way.
- III. Faith in Jesus Christ *saves* because *it receives and rests on Him alone as He's offered in the gospel*.
 - A. Can you see why faith is not only a means of grace but a requirement of God?
 1. It's a means of receiving God's grace because it's a self-denying, empty hand reaching out to Christ. It's simultaneously a confession of my need and of His supply, of my lost and sinful condition and of His saving power. And these are the two things the Spirit works when He comes effectually to save a man: he shows him his true self and Christ's true self, and then enables the soul to reach out to receive and embrace Jesus for salvation.
 2. And it's a requirement of God because nothing so exalts His Son as the Saviour He is and nothing so beautifies the salvation He brings than when a helpless, hopeless, lost, and undone sinner, cries out to Jesus saying, "Lord, save me or I perish! Give me Jesus or I'm undone!"
 3. Faith in Jesus Christ saves because, by the gracious, saving work of the Holy Spirit, it relies on His testimony that He is the Saviour of sinners, that He is able and willing and ready to save every sinner who comes to Him, and that of those who come to Him, He won't cast out or lose any.
 - B. The *objects* of saving faith are:
 1. Jesus Christ. His Person. Saving faith is *in* Him and *on* Him and therefore *unites us to His Person*.
 2. Christ's work. Saving faith rests chiefly on His work as the Mediator between a holy God and sinful man (WSC 20-26) and receives Him as Prophet, Priest, and King, trusting in His saving atonement.
 3. Christ's promise. Saving faith rests on Christ, not merely to teach us, to guide us, to help us, but to entirely save and redeem us by applying to us all the benefits of His finished salvation.
 - C. The *results* of saving faith are:

1. *Union* with Christ the Saviour who saves.
2. *Communion* with Christ in all the benefits of His Person as Saviour and of His work to save.
3. *Justification, Adoption, Sanctification (with all the benefits that accompany and flow from them) and Glorification* (WSC 29-38).

The Expressions and Phrases in Scripture to set forth Saving Faith

- I. Faith is described in Scripture by several images for our better understanding.
 - A. It is a *looking up unto Christ* for help, Jn 3.14-15; 6.40. To look up to Him, who was lifted up on the cross to be a propitiation for sin, is the way to be disburdened of guilt.
 - B. It is a *coming to Christ* as to a Physician of souls, Jn 5.40; 6.37, 44.
 - C. It is a *receiving* of Christ, *accepting* Him as He is and *consenting* to be His, Jn 1.12. In faith, there is a giving and a receiving (like in marriage) as we give ourselves to Him to be His and receive Him unto ourselves to be ours.
 - D. It is a *believing*, expressed in Scripture by acts of leaning, resting, relying, staying, and sometimes rolling ourselves onto God, 2Chr 16.7; Isa 10.20; Ps 22.8.
 - E. It is an *eating* of the flesh of Christ and a *drinking* of His blood, Jn 6.47-51; 53-57.
- II. Because faith saves by *spiritually uniting us* to the Person and work of Christ as the Saviour who saves, it's described in Scripture by several earthly analogies.
 - A. The union of husband and wife, Eph 5.23.
 - B. The union of head and body, Eph 1.22-23.
 - C. The union of the foundation and a building, Eph 2.22; 1Cor 3.11.
 - D. The union of vine and branches, Jn 15.5.
 - E. "So that when we willingly betroth ourselves to Christ, and consent to take Him *for our Lord and Husband, and to be His loyal spouse*; and when we are willing to be in subjection to Him, and to be ruled by Him, *as the members of the body are by the head*; and when we depend and rest and rely on Him alone for our salvation, *as the stones rest upon the foundation*; and when we derive grace and holiness from Him *as the branches derive juice, virtue, and sap from the root and stock*, and do bring forth fruits in Him and unto Him, then there is *a real and spiritual union* wrought by the Spirit of God between Christ and our souls, there is *true saving faith* indeed." Cradock.

Inferences

- I. Though Christ's death on the cross is able to save sinners (and will in fact procure salvation to the elect), no man is actually saved by it until he *closes with Christ by faith*.
- II. True saving faith is not a strong persuasion that all our sins are forgiven and that God loves us, but a resting on and receiving the testimony of Christ that He is the Saviour and that He will save all who come to Him.
- III. Savingly believing on Christ is not an act of man's power or mind or heart, but is worked by grace in the soul of an elect sinner by the Spirit of God, WSC 31.
- IV. A true believer may fear and doubt his faith in Christ and yet be truly saved. He's not saved by faith that is strong or confident or assured or free of doubts, but by the placing of his faith in Jesus Christ, however weak, fragile, or fearful. It's the *object* that saves, not the *faith itself*.
 - A. A weak faith in Christ does not differ in character from a strong faith in Christ, and therefore saves.
 - B. *However*, the weakness of our faith renders us fearful, doubtful, liable to temptation, inefficient in Christ's service, and unhappy and uncomfortable. *Hence*, there's the abiding necessity to use the means of grace in order to grow our faith so that we mature.
- V. To believe on Christ is to take Him as Saviour and Lord. None come to Christ *by faith*, but they cleave to Him *by love* and live to Him *by obedience*. True *faith* in Christ will beget *love* for Christ, and *love* will bring forth *obedience*.
- VI. The surest mark of true faith is a new and holy life, 2Pet 1.1-11.