

FAITH

“the assurance of things hoped for”

Key question

What is the essence of true faith?

Key text

Hebrews 11:1-2

“1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval.”

Key Definition

Faith

Faith is confidence in a hope or promise that is not yet a reality.

Saving Faith is trust in Christ as one's source of acceptance before God based on his atoning death and resurrection.

Introduction.

1. Judaism is a religion of behavior while Christianity is a religion of doctrinal beliefs. In this respect “faith” or “trust” is fundamental to the Christian story.
2. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Heb.11:6
3. All humans have the ability to trust (something outside themselves) but when Scripture speaks of faith, it usually means “faith in God” (or Christ) that is a part of God's plan of salvation.

A. The vocabulary of faith.

1. Faith is the noun corresponding to the verb “believe.”
 - a. As a NOUN (the faith) it refers to:
 1. A confession or body of doctrine.
 2. A community or social relationship.
 3. A culture or way of life.Note: Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22; 16:5.
 - b. As a VERB (trust) it refers to an act and posture of trust of an assumed reality that is not yet seen (Heb.11:1). This is the most common use of the term in the Bible.
 - c. “Faith” (the verb) produces “The Faith” (the noun).

- d. All humans have basic faith (trust) in something (self, science, God, etc).
2. In the Old Testament the word most often has the idea of “faithfulness.”
- a. The Hebrew word for faith is $\eta\gamma\omega\mu\alpha$, the hiphil form of AMAN “to trust or believe.” Three words are derived from this verb
- “**amen**” – 30 times - Ps.106:48 “And let all the people say ‘Amen’”
 - “**true**” – 127 times - Ps.25:5 “Lead me in Thy truth and teach me.”
 - “**faithfulness**” - Ps.12:7 “Not so, with My servant Moses, he is faithful in all My household;”
- b. The Hebrew noun corresponding to AMAN ($\eta\gamma\omega\mu\alpha$, “faithfulness” rendered “believe” in the Greek LXX), regularly denotes faithfulness in the sense of trustworthiness, and PISTIS occasionally bears this sense in the NT (Rom.3:3 of God; Matt.23:23; Gal.5:22; Titus 2:10 of man).
- c. The word EMUNAH normally refers to the faithfulness of God, and only in **Hab.2:4** is it used to signify man’s religious response to God. There, however, the contrast in the context between the temper of the righteous and the proud self sufficiency of the Chaldeans seems to demand for it a broader sense than “faithfulness” alone, the sense, namely, of self renouncing, trustful reliance upon God, the attitude of heart of which faithfulness in life is the natural expression. This is certainly the sense in which the apostolic writers quote the text (Rom.1:17; Gal.3:11; Heb.10:38).
3. In the New Testament the idea has more to do with “trust.”
- a. The Greek word is PISTIS $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ a key word in the NT, being the term regularly used to denote the spiritual state into which the gospel calls men and women, that of trust in God through Christ.
- b. The NT speaks of “faith in or unto” denoting restful reliance on that to which, or him to whom, credit is given.
- c. Both “faith” (noun), and “belief” (verb) are used virtually as technical terms (John preferring the verb “believe” or “trust”, Paul the noun “faith”) to express the complex thought of unqualified acceptance of, and exclusive dependence on, the mediation of the Son as alone securing the mercy of the Father.
- Both normally bear this whole weight of meaning, whether their grammatical object is God, Christ, the Gospel, a truth, a promise, or is not expressed at all. Both signify commitment as following from conviction, even in contexts where faith is defined in terms of the latter only (e.g., compare Heb.11:1 with the rest of the chapter). The nature of faith, according to the NT, is to live by the truth it receives; **faith, resting on God’s promise, gives thanks for God’s grace by working for God’s glory.**
- d. Some occasional contractions of this broad idea should be noticed:
1. James, alone of NT writers, uses both noun and verb to denote bare intellectual assent to truth (James 2:14-26). But here he is explicitly mimicking the usage of those whom he seeks to correct, Jewish converts, who may well have inherited their notion of faith from contemporary Jewish sources, and there is no reason to suppose that this usage was normal or natural to him (his reference to faith in 5:15, e.g., clearly carries a fuller meaning). In any case the point he makes, namely, that a merely intellectual “faith,” such as the demons have, is inadequate, is wholly in line with the rest of the NT. For example, when James says, “**Faith**

without works is dead” (2:26), he is saying the same as Paul, who says in essence, **“Faith without works is not faith at all, but its opposite”** (cf. Gal.5:6; I Tim.5:8).

2. Occasionally, by a natural transition, “the faith” denotes the body of truths believed (e.g., Jude 3; Rom.1:5; Gal.1:23; I Tim.4:1, 6). This became standard usage in the second century.
3. **From Christ himself derives a narrower use of “faith” for an exercise of trust which works miracles** (Matt.17:20 - 21; I Cor.12:9; 13:2), or prompts the workings of miracles (Matt.9: 28-29; 15:28; Acts 14:9). **Saving faith is not always accompanied by “miracle - faith,” however (1 Cor.12:9); nor vice versa** (cf. Matt.7:22 - 23).
4. Kinds of faith mentioned in Scripture.
 - a. **Intellectual affirmation** - (Matt.7:26; Acts 26:27-28; Jas.2:19) trusting that God is there and has done something.
 - b. **Miracle expectation** - (Matt.8:10-13; 17:20; Acts 14:9) trusting God to do something.
 - c. **Temporary trust** - (Lk.8:13) trusting God on an on-off basis.
 - d. **Saving faith** - trusting God from the context of regeneration. “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.” Assembly’s Shorter Catechism

B. Faith that leads to eternal life.

1. **Saving Faith** - Saving faith is a conscious commitment of one’s life to Christ’s person and work as defined by the fundamentals of the Christian gospel.
 - a. The Christian Gospel of Grace in Christ is received by faith alone. This means that human moral merit, ceremonial rites, organizational affiliations, etc. while important are not necessary conditions for experiencing the benefits of “eternal life.”
 - b. Saving faith is distinct from tactical faith, which is focused on specific expectations of God apart from justification.
2. There are two questions that challenge us as we explore this topic.
 - a. Is saving faith a gift from God (the fruit of spiritual regeneration) or is it the free response of man (resulting in regeneration)?
 1. Strict Calvinists insist that salvation is totally of God and that those who are dead in their sins cannot believe until they are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The logical order of the salvation process is believed to be (regeneration – faith – justification / sanctification). For an explanation of Eph.2:8-10 see below.
 2. Other Christians view faith as resulting in regeneration and justification. The order would thus look like this (faith – regeneration / justification – sanctification).
 - b. How is saving faith related to faithfulness? Does it inspire obedience while being disconnected from obedience or is faithfulness the flip side of the same coin so that faith and faithfulness are inseparable?
 1. The Roman Catholic church has traditionally taught that saving faith (through the sacraments) transforms the believer into a righteous person worthy of fellowship with God. The righteousness that saves is not imputed but inherent in the believer.

Protestants, following Luther and Calvin taught a forensic justification based on the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer through faith.

2. Some Protestants believe that saving faith and faithfulness (obedience to the Law) cannot be separated. "We are saved by faith alone but the faith that saves is never alone."
 3. Other Protestants believe that saving faith, while normally inspiring "good works", is independent of those works and can be valid without the "outward fruit" of an obedient life.
3. What is the Biblical testimony concerning the origin of saving faith? In short, the best support for saving faith as a product of regeneration comes from a deduction of theological assumptions in other areas. This is a strict Calvinistic position that is held more passionately by Calvin's followers than it was by Calvin himself.
- a. Various lines of support are cited by those who teach that regeneration comes before saving faith. Faith in this view is a gift of God's grace given by the Spirit when he brings about the new birth.
 1. If a person is "dead" in their sins it is impossible for them to exercise faith, which is a part of "life" in the Spirit. But Jn.5:25 suggests that the dead will one day hear the voice of God and live. It might be asked why can the dead who hear not also believe? In Romans 6 Paul argues that we have died to sin "in Christ" but being dead to sin does not mean that we cannot sin.
 2. If salvation is of grace from God and not from human energy it must be given as a fruit of the gift of the Spirit. But this line of reasoning confuses faith with "a work" of the human flesh. Nowhere is faith described as a work but just the opposite.
 3. **Jn.1:13** "... who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh **nor of the will of man, but of God**"
 4. **Eph.2:8-10** "we are saved by grace through faith and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**" In this passage the gift is more naturally connected to salvation not faith as Paul teaches in many other texts. The Greek words translated "that" and "it" are neuter and do not match "faith" and "grace" both of which are feminine making it more likely that "it" refers to the whole of salvation. John Calvin interpreted the "gift" of this passage as "salvation," and not faith (**The Epistle to the Ephesians**, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965, p. 144). This is in perfect harmony with Paul's declaration that the "gift of God is eternal life" (Rom. 6:23).
 5. **Acts 5:31** "to **grant repentance** to Israel": 11:18 "Well then, God has **granted to the Gentiles** also the repentance that leads to life." These text speak of a God giving repentance to a class of people (Gentiles), not to a particular individual.
 6. **Acts 13:48** "as many as **had been appointed** to eternal life believed" It is unclear in the Greek text that this should be understood as the middle voice. It is possible to translate the passage. Luke seems to put the response of the Gentiles in contrast to that of the Jews. The Jews "put themselves" in a position of opposition to the Gospel. The Gentiles "put themselves" in a position of reception. This would suggest a reflexive sense rather than a passive voice for the word "appointed". It would thus be rendered, "*as many as had devoted themselves to eternal life believed.*" This finds a parallel in I Cor.16:15.
 7. **Acts 16:14** "the **Lord opened her heart to respond** to the things spoken by Paul."
 8. **Acts 18:27** "he (Apollus) greatly helped those who had **believed through grace.**"

9. **II Tim.2:25** “if perhaps **God may grant them repentance** leading to the knowledge of the truth.” This passage does not refer to salvation but the correction of false teachers.
 10. **Phil.1:29** “For to you **it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe** in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Faith can be described as a gift just as suffering.
 11. **Rom.12:3** “as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” **I Cor.12:8-9** “for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, . . . to another faith by the same Spirit,” Here we are looking at ministry gifts not salvation.
 12. **Phil.2:13** “ for it is **God who is at work in you, both to will and to work** for His good pleasure.” This text refers to the Christian life not salvation. It is God’s Spirit who inspires and empowers believer’s lives.
 13. **I Pet.1:21** “who through Him (Christ) are believers in God”
 14. **II Peter 1:1** “to those who **have obtained a faith** of equal standing with ours;” In the Greek text the word “obtained” is an active not a passive participle indicating that the faith is not “received” but “achieved.”
 15. **John 6:37** “all that **the Father gives Me** shall come to Me,” **44-45** “No one can come to Me, **unless the Father who sent Me draws him,**” **65** “no one can come to Me, **unless it has been granted him from the Father.**” These verses speak of the (already) believing remnant within Israel who will recognize the Messiah and follow him.
- b. Support for the teaching that faith precedes regeneration and justification.
1. Faith (without mention of “election” or “regeneration” by the Spirit) is the most common link to the blessings of the gospel in the NT.
 2. Key texts seem to put faith before new birth.
 - **Jn.1:12** “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name;”
 - **Jn.3:14-16** “that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.”
 - **Jn.7:37-40** “that every one who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life;”
 - **Jn.20:31** “. . . but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that **believing you may have life in His name.**”
 - **Acts 10:43** “that through His name every one who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins.”
 - **Acts 11:17** “if God gave them the same gift (the Spirit) as He gave us, **who believed** in the Lord Jesus Christ . . .”
 - **Acts 13:38-39** “through Him every one who believes is freed”
 - **Acts 15:9** “cleansing their hearts by faith.”
 - **Rom.3:21-4:8** “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”
 - **Rom.9:33** “and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.”
 - **Rom.10:10** “for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation”

- **I Cor.1:21** “to save those who believe”
 - **Gal.2:16** “a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus”
 - **Gal.3:2** “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?”
 - **Gal.3:26** “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”
 - **Eph.1:13** “having also believed, you were sealed in Him”
 - **Eph.2:8-10** “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”
 - **I Tim.1:16** “for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”
 - **I Jn.5:1** “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”
 - **I Jn.5:13** “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.”
3. Observations and common sense.
 - a. If faith is the immediate gift of God why did Christ bother to witness, argue, and persuade the non-elect? He would certainly know who was elect (Jn.10:14 “I know my own and they know me.”)
 - b. Why should Paul bother to use persuasion at all? (Acts 17:3-4,17; 18:4; 19:8-9). Note that in Acts 14:1 the Apostles “spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed.”
 - c. Why did Christ marvel at unbelief?
 - d. How can unbelief be judged?
 - e. How can we explain degrees of unbelief being judged more severely?
 - f. How can demonic activity hinder a direct work of the Spirit? Lk.8:12; II Cor.4:4.
 - g. Why are some classes of people harder to win than others? Titus 1:12-13
 - h. Why does God give the gift of faith to so many Americans and to so few Libyans, Mongolians, Tibetans, Afghans, Tunisians, Turks, etc?
 - i. In Scripture, faith is always ascribed to man, not God. Lk.7:50 “**Your** faith has saved you”, Matt.9:22 “**Your** faith has made you well”, Matt.9:28-29 “it shall be done to you according to **your** faith”.
 4. What is the origin of saving faith according to Scripture?
 - a. It comes through the preaching of the Word of God. Rom.10:17 “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”
 - b. The conviction of the Spirit prepared the heart for faith. Jn.16:8-11.
 - c. God uses people to bring unbelievers to faith. Acts 26:17-18 Paul was sent to the Gentiles “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness unto light and from the dominion of Satan to God”
 - d. People are commanded to seek God. Isa.55:6
 - e. God gives people opportunity to believe in answer to prayer and witness. I Tim.2:1-6
4. How is faith related to faithfulness? For an extensive treatment of this question see **apttoteach.org** theology files #107, #108, #711, #713.

C. The Basic elements of faith.

1. **Intellectual understanding** - Faith is in general the persuasion of the mind that a certain statement is true
 - a. **Knowledge** is an essential element in all faith, and is sometimes spoken of as an equivalent to faith as in **I Jn.2:3** “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.” **Rom.10:2-3** “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but **not in accordance with knowledge**. For **not knowing** about God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”
 - b. Faith can be **a way of knowing** as in **Jn.10:38** “but if I do them, through you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”
 - a. Historical faith is the apprehension of and assent to certain statements which are regarded as mere facts of history.
 - b. Faith is the **result of teaching**.
 1. **Rom.10:14-17** “¹⁴ How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!*’ ¹⁶ However, they did not all heed the glad tidings; for Isaiah says, ‘*Lord, who had believed our report?*’ ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”
 2. **Acts 14:1** the Apostles “spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed.”
2. **A trust commitment** - Because a thing is true it is worthy of trust.
 - a. Knowledge and faith can also be distinguished in this respect, that faith includes in it assent, which is an act of the will in addition to the act of the understanding.
 - b. Faith may be described as the link between knowledge and application. The action may be inward in the sense of trusting something to be true so as to shape the direction of ones outward behavior and direction in life.
 - c. Faith comes in many degrees up to full assurance of faith, in accordance with the evidence on which it rests.
3. **Abiding faith needs four components** –Without these elements it is vulnerable and likely to be eroded with time if not abandoned.
 - a. **Intellectually convincing** – Abiding faith must find a comfortable marriage with thoughtfulness and sound reason. People of faith do not have to explain everything but they must be able to keep their head about them in their faith. 1 Cor.1:18-25
 - b. **Emotionally satisfying** – Abiding faith must sit well with the deep subjective inner life of the believer.
 - c. **Culturally relevant** – Abiding faith must pass the test of reality. It must have significance in the common sense world that we all share.
 - d. **Morally powerful** – Abiding faith must have a positive impact on moral behavior. It must successfully address the shame and guilt of sin.

D. History of the church's understanding of faith. *J I Packer (Elwell Evangelical Dictionary)*

- a. The church grasped from the first that assent to apostolic testimony is the fundamental element in Christian faith; hence the concern of both sides in the Gnostic controversy to show that their tenets were genuinely apostolic.
- b. During the patristic period, however, the idea of faith was so narrowed that this assent came to be regarded as the whole of it. Four factors together caused this: (1) the insistence of the anti Gnostic fathers, particularly Tertullian, that the faithful are those who believe "the faith" as stated in the "rule of faith" (*regula fidei*), i.e., the Creed; (2) the intellectualism of Clement and Origen, to whom *pistis* (assent on authority) was just an inferior substitute for, and stepping stone to, *gnosis* (demonstrative knowledge) of spiritual things; (3) the assimilation of biblical morality to Stoic moralism, an ethic not of grateful dependence but of resolute self reliance; (4) the clothing of the biblical doctrine of communion with God in Neoplatonic dress, which made it appear as a mystical ascent to the supersensible achieved by aspiring love, having no link with the ordinary exercise of faith at all.
- c. Also, since the doctrine of justification was not understood, the soteriological significance of faith was misconceived, and faith (understood as orthodox) was regarded simply as the passport to baptism (remitting all past sins) and to a lifelong probation in the church (giving the baptized opportunity to make themselves worthy of glory by their good works).
- d. The scholastics refined this view. They reproduced the equation of faith with credence, distinguishing between *fides informis* ("unformed" faith, bare orthodoxy) and *fides caritate formata* (credence "formed" into a working principle by the supernatural addition to it of the distinct grace of love). Both sorts of faith, they held, are meritorious works, though the quality of merit attaching to the first is merely congruent (rendering divine reward fit, though not obligatory), and only the second gains condign merit (making divine reward due as a matter of justice). Roman Catholicism still formally identifies faith with credence, and **has added a further refinement by distinguishing between "explicit" faith (belief which knows its object) and "implicit" faith (uncomprehending assent to whatever it may be that the church holds). Only the latter (which is evidently no more than a vote of confidence in the teaching church and may be held with complete ignorance of Christianity) is thought to be required of laymen for salvation.** But a mere docile disposition of this sort is poles apart from the biblical concept of saving faith.
- e. **The Reformers restored biblical perspectives by insisting that faith is more than orthodoxy, not fides merely, but fiducia, personal trust and confidence in God's mercy through Christ;** that it is not a meritorious work, one facet of human righteousness, but rather an appropriating instrument, an empty hand outstretched to receive the free gift of God's righteousness in Christ; **that faith is God - given, and is itself the animating principle from which love and good works spontaneously spring;** and that communion with God means, not an exotic rapture of mystical ecstasy, but just faith's everyday commerce with the Savior. **Confessional Protestantism has always maintained these positions.** In Arminianism there resides a tendency to depict faith as the human work upon which the pardon of sin is suspended, as, in fact, man's contribution to his own salvation. This would be in effect a Protestant revival of the doctrine of human merit.

- f. Liberalism radically psychologized faith, reducing it to a sense of contented harmony with the Infinite through Christ (Schleiermacher), or a fixed resolve to follow Christ's teaching (Ritschl), or both together. Liberal influence is reflected in the now widespread supposition that "faith," understood as an optimistic confidence in the friendliness of the universe, divorced from any specific creedal tenets, is a distinctively religious state of mind. Neo orthodox and existentialist theologians, reacting against this psychologism, stress the supernatural origin and character of faith. They describe it as an active commitment of mind and will, man's repeated "yes" to the repeated summons to decision issued by God's word in Christ; but the elusiveness of their account of the content of that word makes it hard sometimes to see what the believer is thought to say "yes" to.