

What is faith?

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[0 : 00] Well let's turn now back to John chapter 1 and tonight we're going to look for a few moments at the words you find in verse 12 especially in chapter 1.

John 1 verse 12 we can read at verse 11 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 or authority to become children of God who were born not of blood not of the will of the flesh not of the will of man.

But of God. And recall we're looking at some of what we call topical studies looking at various topics that arise very frequently in our conversation of important words but asking ourselves do we really know the meaning of them precisely or in depth we've looked in already at worldliness and something of what that is and holiness we try to do some sort of opening up of that as well very briefly.

Tonight as we look at this passage the question before us is what is faith? Faith is one of the most commonly used words as we interact with each other as believers as we talk about our salvation as we talk about our relationship to Christ as we talk about what people need to do in order to be saved.

Faith. Faith. Faith. Faith. Faith. Faith. Faith. belief. so because it's so prominent in the scriptures. There's hardly a topic other than God himself more prominent and frequently mentioned in the Bible than faith, the faith of God's people.

[1 : 37] And of course faith, as we use the word ordinarily, has different shades of meaning. And people can perhaps have a wrong idea about what faith is if we just think of the word faith as it's normally used in everyday conversation.

And I'm particularly concerned in these studies to try and open things up in a way that will help especially the younger ones, and especially not just the younger in years, but younger in faith as well, younger in following Christ, those who have just set out on that journey or haven't been long on the journey. But then again, it doesn't matter how long we've been on the journey. Some of these things will be important to us to remind ourselves of or to just again unpack and look at the various parts of them so that we can gain a greater appreciation of them. Now not all of these topical studies by any means we're hoping to do are going to be theological ones.

We'll do other things like maybe the membership of the church. What does it mean to be a member of the church? What does the Bible mean by belonging to the church? And what do we mean by church membership? Things like that. But one or two of them will also be on the more theological side. But I hope simply enough for us to follow it and to be able to actually understand something more of it.

Of course, the most important thing about faith is not so much that we understand as much as possible about it, though that's good. The most important thing is not to have a full understanding of it, but to have faith, to exercise faith.

But yet when you say that, the more you actually open it out and begin to look at the different parts of it, just like many other things, the more you understand these parts of it and how they go together to form faith or believing, the more appreciated you have then for faith.

[3 : 37] And the more ready you are then to really understand faith for what it is and how we should use it. And what I want to do is really to use the catechism definition. The shorter catechism definition asks the question, question 86, what is faith?

And it's very interesting how it actually replies to that, how the answer is given. 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.

Now, like so many of the catechisms, indeed you could say all of the catechisms, that is a brilliant summary of faith and what it is. Faith, in terms of its main component parts, if you like, are specified in that very short definition in the catechism.

And if we actually follow that definition in our minds or learn that by heart, that will always help us to really understand it. It's something you can go back to again and again and again when somebody asks you, what does it mean to be a believer?

Well, you can come back to that as your summary and you can go back and say, well, this is what my believing really is. This is what my faith is about. And therefore, this is what I want you to have as well.

[5 : 11] So, as we look at that, what is faith? The first thing is, faith is a saving grace. But you notice it says, faith in Jesus Christ. Let's deal with the saving grace part of it first of all.

Why does the catechism say, faith is a saving grace? Well, first of all, because faith itself doesn't save us.

It is God who saves us by giving us faith. As we'll see in a minute, by enabling us to believe so that we actually reach out and take Christ as our saviour.

But it's important, and it was important in the way the catechism actually put it down, that faith is a saving grace. When you think about grace, you always think about something that comes from God.

You don't produce it yourself. Grace is the favour of God, or you like, the favour of the love of God in action. And in other words, what the catechism is reminding us of is that our faith has actually come from God in the way that it has been produced in us.

[6 : 20] We'll see in a minute how that is. But it is a saving grace. Faith doesn't itself save us. God saves us by giving us faith so that we receive Christ and come, as we'll see, to rest upon him.

It is a saving grace. And remember the shorter catechism again in question 30. It's always great to see the way the catechisms, one logically follows the other or leads into the others.

It's a great study in itself just to see the arrangement in the catechisms and how the topics actually flow into each other. And that's important as well. Because it asks us, how are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?

In other words, how do we come to possess the salvation that Jesus, by his work, has obtained for us? We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ.

By the way, the Holy Spirit applies it to us. How does the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

[7 : 40] The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us. And thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

Then the next catechism is, what is effectual calling? You see, the logical way it's arranged, but come back to that one. How does the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

Having said before that, that it is applied to us efficaciously or powerfully by the Spirit. How does the Spirit do that? By working faith in us.

See, that's what it says here in the text, isn't it? And of course, the catechism is taken from the teaching of the Bible. It's a summary of the teaching of the Bible. 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.

In other words, this is talking about what chapter 3 in John calls our being born again. And inside of the rebirth which God brings about, our spiritual rebirth, our bringing us to life spiritually, from the deadness of our sins, inside that rebirth is the working of the Spirit, giving us faith.

[9 : 05] And in the Spirit giving us faith, we are then given that faith which makes it possible for us to actually receive Christ and rest upon him.

So that's why it says, firstly, that faith is a saving grace. It's from the grace of God. We didn't produce it. It's by the Spirit of God that we've come to have it.

And as the Spirit of God produces faith in us, so it's then that we are able to accept Christ and receive him, and rest in him. And then it says, Faith receives and rests upon Jesus Christ.

Now again, just think of the question, What is faith? And the first thing in the answer is, Faith in Jesus Christ is.

It didn't say that in the question, it didn't say, What is faith in Jesus Christ? It said, What is faith? And it says, Faith, the faith the Bible speaks about, in Jesus Christ is.

[10 : 14] In other words, you cannot think of faith, except as it is faith in Jesus Christ. Now I know that some of you here can follow that from the very outset of your spiritual experience.

You were always aware of Jesus Christ, and where he stood in relation to God the Father, what God the Father did in sending him into the world, what role, work Jesus had in our salvation.

Others of you will not have had that necessarily from the start. I know there are some who only had a general comprehension of God, and weren't at that stage necessarily able to see where did Christ fit into all of that.

But the fact is, it doesn't matter whether you begin with that, just the sense of God, in the totality of God, or precisely with Jesus Christ. The fact is, ultimately you come to realize that Christ is at the middle of it all.

And as you are taught by God through the Bible, through the Holy Spirit, you then come to see that, yes, it is faith in Jesus Christ, because Christ is the mediator.

[11 : 23] Christ is the one between me and God. Christ is the one who has come from God to me, as a sinner, to save me, to provide salvation for me. Therefore, I need to believe in Jesus Christ.

Remember, the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, where Paul and Silas in prison, a great earthquake, the upheaval in the prison, and the chains, the gates being broken, everything, the jailer coming in, terrified, threw himself down and said, what must I do to be saved?

What was Paul's answer? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. Faith in Jesus Christ.

And that's what you find here, isn't it? He came to his own, this word that was with God, this person that became Jesus Christ in the flesh. He came to his own, and his own did not receive him, but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name.

Who believed in him, in his character, in his person, in what he was revealed to be, they're the ones. Those who believed in him, who were given the right to become the children of God, by God the Father.

[12 : 42] So it is faith in Jesus Christ. And then, the catechism says, faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby, we receive Jesus Christ.

And then, we rest upon Jesus Christ. The first thing is, we receive Jesus Christ. And that's what it says here too, isn't it? To all who did receive him.

So receiving Christ is very much part of what happens when you believe, or by believing, through faith, this faith of the Bible, is faith that receives Christ.

Faith is a receiving grace. As a saving grace, it is a receiving grace. It is something that you bring, by which you bring Christ, to be in your own possession.

In other words, you think of God receiving us, accepting us, coming to approve of us. Before that happens, we need to receive Christ.

[13 : 52] We need to receive the Savior, the one in whom our righteousness is placed. And therefore, by receiving him, we do so by faith, by receiving him, we come to be accepted with God.

I want to think of the other catechism, number 31, we mentioned it a minute ago. That follows on from how the Spirit works faith in us.

And thereby, unites us to Christ in our effectual calling. And our effectual calling, as it goes on to describe that, is a number of things, but the end of it is what's important for our study tonight.

Whereby, in other words, the things that he mentions there in our effectual calling, where God calls us powerfully to be joined to Christ. How does he do that?

He enlightens our mind in the knowledge of Christ. In other words, when you come to believe, you're not like some people will tell you, who don't want you to, who don't really have much time for the Christian life, or things like believing.

[15 : 01] They'll tell you, you're actually just acting without knowing really what you're doing. Faith, all the things to do with faith, it's just people believing things blindly without any sort of knowledge at all.

How can you believe in a God you don't see? You're just doing things without knowing what you're doing. Well, that's not what the Bible tells you at all. When you come to know God, when God reveals himself to you, you know who he is.

You know he's described in his word. You know that's a reliable truth. And therefore, when you come to believe, and you come to be effectually called by God, part of that is he enlightens your mind in the knowledge of Christ.

He convinces you of your sin. And he renews your will. The three things. And these three things in our effectual calling, then the Catechism says, whereby we are persuaded and enabled to embrace Jesus Christ.

See what he's saying. It's saying we embrace Jesus Christ. We throw our arms around him. We come to realize this is our salvation. This is our savior.

[16 : 20] This is the way by which we come to be accepted with God. This is the answer to our sin and to our guilt and to our lostness. And when God reveals it to us and when we understand it then as he enlightens our mind and convinces us of our sin and renews our will, what happens?

You are persuaded and you are enabled. You're given the capacity. You're given the ability that you don't have yourself. Because you see, the Bible tells you you must believe.

And the Bible also tells you you can't create faith. So why does the Bible say I must believe if I'm going to be saved and at the same time God knows that I can't create or produce faith myself because God's grace gives it to you.

The thing that you can't produce yourself because you're a lost sinner, God in his marvelous grace, God in his provision for you by his spirit persuades and enables you to embrace Christ.

The spirit works faith in you thereby uniting you to Christ in that effectual call. Isn't that a fantastic combination of things?

[17 : 42] Isn't that something that really highlights the wonderful grace of God as Ephesians 2 and Ephesians 1 rather going through that whole list of wonderful things by which that epistle begins?

Long sentence full of wonderful things of salvation but in the middle of that sentence Paul can't go further until he said these few words unto the praise of his glorious grace.

Unto the praise of his glorious grace. Your believing is unto the praise of his glorious grace. Your being persuaded and enabled to embrace Christ is unto the praise of his glorious grace.

That's where it's come from. That's what's produced it and you're thankful tonight that you're a believer. Not that you've produced it yourself. You're thankful you haven't. But you're thankful that God has enabled you.

That God has given you this great gift as Ephesians 2 again puts it. So you receive Christ and you see that's again one of the marvelous things isn't it?

[18 : 54] He enables us. He persuades us. He works faith in us. But it is you who believes by that. God doesn't push Christ onto us against our will.

When you come to embrace Jesus as your Savior you believe in him. you embrace him. You welcome him. And it's the grace of God that has enabled you to do that.

But it is you who does it by the grace of God. What a fantastic wonderful God we have. That all of that is to the praise of his wonderful grace.

So you receive Christ. But then the Catechism goes on again to say again in line with our text that you rest upon Christ alone for salvation.

So you receive Christ and you rest upon Jesus Christ. Let me just paint a picture. I want you to imagine that you're in the house near to a very deep ravine or gully or gorge.

[20 : 08] bridge. And on the other side of the gorge is someone that you know is the best architect in the world. And he's trained up his son as well to be a marvelous engineer.

engineer. And this architect has designed a bridge to come across from the other side of the gorge where he is to where Yule House is on this side. And he begins building the bridge.

And eventually the bridge is finished. The architect the father has designed it and he's given it to the engineer son that he's trained up to build it. You know him personally.

You know his qualifications. You know that he's the best in the world. You know that nobody else could build a bridge like that. Designed and built by the expert.

And then one day the ground around you the trees everything are on fire. The only way out is across the gorge.

[21 : 13] If you fall down into that gorge you're dead. A long way down there's a river at the bottom. rocks at certain death. The only way out of the danger that's going to engulf you, the fire that's going to burn up your house, you have to go across that bridge.

What do you do? You go across it. Why do you go across it? Because you trust the builder. You know who's built it. You know it's not going to collapse under you. So you make your way across safely to the other side.

Perhaps you can imagine your friend the architect and his son on the other side encouraging you to come. Resting upon Christ is precisely that.

You absolutely trust in him and in his work. You know that he is the expert. That he has built the bridge from eternity across to where we are in our lostness.

that the only way out of the fire that's coming behind us of the judgment of God is across that bridge. And you see the beauty is when you come to know God in the ways that we've described a minute ago you know that that bridge is safe.

[22 : 32] You don't doubt if that bridge is going to carry your weight. You rest upon it. you put absolutely every trust in it and across you go.

That is what Christ is to faith. Faith rests upon him as well as receives him. You go across and you go across safely.

You trust in him as a person and you trust in his work that you can't separate from his person. He came to his own and his own didn't receive him. His own people, the Jewish people.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God. They've gone across the gorge. They've entered into the family of God.

They're actually accepted with God. They are now safe within his custody, safe within his security. They are in Christ. And by faith, they have come into the possession of that security.

[23 : 43] They have come to receive this Christ. And they've come to rest upon him for salvation. But there's one word we missed out in the catechism.

Because it doesn't just say that they receive Christ and rest upon him for salvation. It says they rest upon him alone for salvation.

Go back to the picture of the bridge. There you are with the fire catching up with you, with your house about to be engulfed, and with your knowledge of who's built that bridge, how assured you are that it will take your weight and everything you're going to carry.

You don't need it. You don't even think of coming to that bridge and say I'd better take some more reinforcement with me, I'd better take something just to make sure it holds me up. Nor do you go to that bridge and say I don't like the look of that part of it, I'd better take that away or I'd better do something to that.

It is perfect as it is. And you don't come to this Jesus Christ and begin thinking about which parts don't really match up to your expectations.

[24 : 55] Which bits do you think you can do without, which bits you could add to what he's done? you rest in him and you receive him alone for salvation.

Why is that important? It's important because our whole salvation depends on the perfection of Christ.

And the Catholicism said Christ alone because it was quite possible and it was, and it is still quite possible as it was then, to think of something else that you need along with Christ.

Or to actually discover, as some people will tell you nowadays, actually we know better now than that people actually rise from the dead. So we have to take that little bit out of the Bible that tells us about Christ by his own power, rising from the dead and leaving behind an empty tomb that's just something the disciples made up to try and explain things that couldn't be explained.

Well of course they couldn't be explained in human language because it happened as they said. And that's why Christ alone is the Christ we receive by faith and rest upon by faith.

[26 : 23] Christ alone. alone. The reformation, you remember that the reformers set up what they called the great, what's nowadays called the solas of the reformation.

There's such important things for our own understanding of why we believe and what we believe and what our salvation is about. The solas mean the alone things or the only.

It's the word only or alone. It's Christ alone. By faith alone. by the grace of God alone.

So it's by the grace of God alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. You don't add to the grace of God. You don't add or take away anything from the Christ that grace has provided.

You don't try to put something along with faith or take something away from faith as the means by which you receive and rest upon Christ. It's alone.

[27 : 26] It's what does the job perfectly. Just as it is with the person of Christ himself and with the grace of God that provided him for it. So, faith receives and rests.

What is faith? It's a saving grace. It's from the free love of God to his people. It's faith in Jesus Christ.

He's central to it all. it's faith that receives Christ. It's faith that rests upon Christ. And Christ alone is received and rested upon.

But then there's one final thing in the catechism which helps us understand faith or completes the definition. Christ alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.

As he's offered to us in the gospel. Of course, when you think of the word receive there, that itself implies that he's offered to us.

[28 : 36] You only receive something that's extended to you by way of a gift or by way of something that's offered to you. That's how it is with our salvation, with salvation in Christ.

The gospel offers Christ to him. Or you could say God or Christ himself offers himself to us in the gospel. The gospel being the good news that the Bible contains.

The preaching of the gospel, the reading of God's word. The gospel is the good news that there is salvation in Jesus Christ for sinners. That's the good news.

The good news. And in that gospel, that good news, Christ is offered to us. And as we've explained, it is by faith that we receive him.

Faith is a receiving of him and a resting upon him. But there is something else, I think, in that catechism definition, unless I'm mistaken, that's as he is offered in the gospel, it confines our understanding of Christ to what the gospel says about him.

[29 : 48] because, you see, you're very familiar yourselves today with definitions of Christ and who he is and what he's done that are not in keeping with what the gospel says, with what the word of God actually says.

You don't receive and rest upon the Christ of liberal theology, of modernist theologians who cast out so much of what the Bible contains that you cannot understand with human reason.

He's not the Christ that's in people's ideas of what a Savior should be. He's not the Christ that fits with human imagination as to who Jesus is or who they would like Jesus to be.

He is Christ fully and completely and absolutely as he comes across to us in the Bible. This great Christ who was before John the Baptist.

Why did John the Baptist say he was before me? Because he was talking about God. The Christ who is fully God. The Christ who is fully human.

[31 : 03] Who became flesh. The Christ who died. The death he died at Calvary. The death the Bible describes. Not just a Roman crucifixion, but a divine transaction where he rendered to the Father an atonement for our sins.

Where he paid the price of our sin. Where he experienced hell in his own soul. The lostness. The hell. The damnation. That rightly should have been ours.

But he took it for us. That's the Christ you receive. If you're receiving Christ by faith. That's the only Christ the Bible knows of.

The Christ who is all of that and more than that. You receive the Christ who is your great prophet and your great high priest and your great king. You receive him as the one, as the prophet who teaches you the things that you need to know and the way to go.

As the high priest who has offered himself and who is now making intercession for you remembering you at God's right hand and as the king who has absolute authority and claim and right over every single atom of your being and every single iota of our life and our lifestyle that's the Christ that we receive.

[32 : 29] That is the Christ that we rest upon because no other Christ will do us will do for us will save us but the Christ that God has actually provided and you only have to look at the I am's of this gospel we looked at them some time ago it's a while now but all you've got to do really is look at these definitions and you'll find how exclusively Christ is presented to us as the saviour the mediator I am the door there's no other door I am the way the truth and the life there is no one else as the way the truth and the life I am the good shepherd who lays down my life for the sheep there is no other good shepherd who goes as far as to lay down his life for his sheep I am the resurrection and the life there is no other one that has come by his own power back from the dead to actually be a basis upon which his people can build their hopes he is that he is all of that and by faith this is the one you receive what a marvelous

God you have because by faith you are enabled to receive that whole Christ every single bit of him every single thing that he has done for you every single aspect of his person for you you receive you bring into your possession you rest upon nothing less than that Christ will do and nothing less than that Christ has given you that's why faith is such a wonderful God honoring thing that's why it's such a an indescribable privilege to be a believer to be a man or woman boy or girl of faith because that's the faith that God produces in us let me finish with another question it's a question often discussed in fellowships will there be faith in heaven how many nights have been taken discussing that question different versions different answers some very definite no's some very definite yes some half and between well will there be faith in heaven you can answer it by two other questions will you stop receiving

Christ no will you stop resting in Christ when you get to heaven no well then faith exists in glorified believers in their heavenly state because they go on receiving Christ and receiving from him and they go on trusting in him resting upon him even though they will see him where they didn't see him in this world but just because we see him doesn't mean we stop believing in him may God bless these thoughts let's pray our gracious God we thank you for faith we thank you that it is your great gift of grace to us and we are humbled oh Lord as we read your word and realize what you have done in order to bring us to believe in you we thank you that that faith as produced by your creative work by your spirit is a faith that enables us indeed to receive and to rest upon you we pray we pray that you would strengthen our faith that we might be like the disciples who when they beheld some of the wondrous miraculous works that you did said in prayer

Lord increase our faith and Lord we pray that you would increase our faith for us in this world in which we live that is so unbelieving and so different to the faith that you have given your people help us to go on believing and trusting in you and grant that whenever temptation comes our way to be drawn aside from that path of believing obedience help us we pray to resist it and enable us to overcome grant these mercies to us we pray for your glory's sake Amen