



## What does it mean to put your faith in Jesus Christ?

The magazine you are reading is called *Evangel: The Good News of Jesus Christ*. In it you will often read a call to believe or to put your faith in the Jesus Christ. Sometimes, the authors will explain what this means; other times, they may take for granted that the reader knows what this means. In this issue, I would like to write a whole article on what it means to believe in Jesus Christ or to put your faith in Him. I am going to do this by structuring the article around a definition of faith someone gave about 450 years ago. The definition goes like this: "(Faith) is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit." Bear with me and keep reading as I unpack this definition bit by bit for you.

### **Faith is knowledge**

Notice that faith is, first of all, knowledge. The author of this definition stresses this because people in his day said that you could have faith without knowledge. In order to be saved, you did not have to understand anything. All you had to do acknowledge that the church was right. But is this really true? Imagine if you are looking for a spouse. Would you be satisfied with someone telling you that so and so would be a good spouse for you without you knowing and understanding anything about your prospective spouse? I'm sure you wouldn't. You would want to know and understand some things about your prospective spouse yourself before you enter into a love relationship with her. And that is what believing in Jesus Christ is about. It's about entering into a love relationship with Jesus Christ! That's why it should not surprise us that this is also what the Bible says. Jesus, for instance, says,

*"This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."*

(John 17:3)

This does not mean, however, that we believe in Jesus Christ or put our faith in Him because we know and understand everything. In this life, because we are so limited in our knowledge and understanding, there are many things about the Christian faith that we will not understand. In such cases, according to the author of our definition, *"we can do nothing better than suspend judgment, and hearten (= encourage) ourselves to hold unity with the church."* Thus, in saying that faith is knowledge we simply mean that faith is not ignorant of what it believes, but involves a limited understanding of what and who it believes.

### **Faith is knowledge of God's benevolence toward us in Jesus Christ**

Second, faith is knowledge of God's benevolence or mercy towards us in Jesus Christ. We find this benevolence or mercy of God in the Bible. The Bible and faith can never be separated just like you cannot separate the rays of the sun from the sun itself. This means that in general the whole Bible is the focus of our faith. But in a more particular sense, it is what the Bible tells us about God's benevolence or mercy towards us that is the focus of our faith. More precisely, we can say that it is the word about Christ in the Bible that is the focus of our faith. He is the One to whom the whole Bible points. God's benevolence or mercy toward us in Him forms the heart of the Bible. Thus, when we believe we put our faith in Jesus Christ who is the substance of the Bible.

## **Faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us in Jesus Christ**

Third, faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence or mercy toward us. Faith is firm and certain because what God says in the Bible about his mercy towards us in Jesus Christ is dependable and reliable. Consequently, faith puts its full weight on these promises and trusts that they are true. Faith does this because God Himself is faithful and dependable. Moreover, Jesus Christ has proven what God has said about his mercy towards us to be true. Jesus' life, death and resurrection are one big manifestation that God can be trusted when He says that in Jesus Christ He is merciful toward us. Thus, it belongs to the very essence of faith to be firm and certain.

Yet, notice that this certainty of faith is not just an objective certainty in the reliability of what the Bible says about God's benevolence or mercy towards us. This certainty of faith is also a subjective certainty or inner persuasion that God is benevolent or merciful not just to others, but also to you personally. God the Father not only loves others, He also loves you. Jesus Christ came into this world not only for others, but also for you.

Yet, because our faith in Jesus Christ is always under attack, it is not always firm and certain in practice. For instance, faith is sometimes under attack by our own unbelief (Mark 9:24). Other times, faith is under attack because of our anxiety or doubts. Yet, even though our faith is constantly under attack, the outcome of our faith is never in doubt. This could be illustrated by comparing faith to a shield (Ephesians 6:16). Comparing faith to a shield, the author of our definition writes:

*When, therefore, faith is shaken it is like a strong soldier forced by the violent blow of a spear to move his foot and to give ground a little. When faith itself is wounded it is as if the soldier's shield were broken at some point from the thrust of the spear, but not in such a manner as to be pierced. For the godly mind will always rise so as to say with David, 'If I walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evils, for thou art with me.'*

(Psalm 23:4)

Faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us in Jesus Christ revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts.

Fourth, faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts. This knowledge is first revealed to our minds. In our minds, we receive a limited knowledge and understanding of God's mercy toward us in Christ. But faith is more than simply an intellectual knowledge and understanding in the mind. What we know with our heads must also shoot deep roots in our hearts.

The difference between these two kinds of knowledge could be explained as followed. Knowledge in the head could be called knowledge by description. Knowledge by description is simply having information about God's mercy toward us in Jesus Christ.

Head knowledge that shoots deep roots in our hearts could be called knowledge by acquaintance. Knowledge by acquaintance leads you into direct contact with the reality of Jesus Christ that you know about. Knowledge by description tends to just "flit in the brain." Knowledge by acquaintance, however, is a life-transforming reality. Jesus Christ comes to live in your heart so that you live in Him and He lives in you. As a result, He changes the way you think, speak and act. In fact, He forms his own thinking, speaking and behavior in you and through you. Believing in Jesus Christ brings this life-changing reality about in your life.

## **The bond of the Holy Spirit**

How do we receive this firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us in Jesus Christ revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts? Or put differently, how do we receive this knowledge by description of God's mercy toward us in Jesus Christ that shoots deep roots in our hearts so that it becomes a life-transforming knowledge by acquaintance?

The answer to this question lies in the secret working of the Holy Spirit. The author of our definition of faith writes about this in the following way:

*We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the father, he has to become ours and dwell within us.*

How does this happen? How does what Christ has done for us become what Christ does in us? This happens through the Holy Spirit because the *"Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself."* And He does that through giving us the gift of faith. Faith that is *"firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."* Giving us faith is the Spirit's main work. In doing so, He unites heaven and earth by raising us up to fellowship with Christ in heaven and bringing Christ into our hearts to fellowship with Him on earth.

### **Do you want to receive this gift of faith?**

Do you want this gift of faith? If you do, ask God to give it to you. Then use the means through which He works faith in your heart. Start reading in the Bible. Remember how we compared the relationship between the Bible and faith to the relationship between the sun and its rays. Just like the sun and its rays can never be separated, so the Bible and faith can never be separated either. Also remember that the heart or substance of the Bible is God's benevolence or mercy toward us in Christ.

Then become a member of a church that submits itself to the Bible. Attend the worship services and get involved in the life of the church. Someone once said: the proof of the pudding is in the eating. This also is true for the Christian faith. If you want to know whether the Christian faith is true and want to receive this gift of faith yourself, immerse yourself in the Bible and the life of the church. You will be surprised what begins to happen to you. Thanks for reading.

Dick Moes

© 2016  
[www.christianstudylibrary.org](http://www.christianstudylibrary.org)