

Orthodoxy - Faith

New City Catechism Q.30: What is faith in Jesus Christ?

A: Faith in Jesus Christ is acknowledging the truth of everything that God has revealed in his Word, trusting in him, and also receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1, ESV)

Sola fide was one of the great battle cries of the Reformation: Faith alone acts as the instrument of our justification, not any works of the law. But what is faith? Precise definitions are very important for words as central to Christianity as “faith.” We do not want to confuse ourselves or others on a topic so essential to our salvation.

The author of Hebrews tells us, under the inspiration of the Spirit, that faith is defined as an “assurance of things hoped for” and a “conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). In the New City Catechism, this definition is further broken down into three actions that we take: 1) acknowledging the truth of what God has revealed 2) trusting in God and 3) receiving and resting on Christ for salvation. Let’s take a look at each of these actions individually and see how they apply to our life that we now live, as Christians, “by faith in the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20).

First, faith is acknowledging that God exists and his Word is true. If you think this sounds obvious, then you are in good company. The author of Hebrews says, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6, ESV, emphasis mine). How can you please God without believing he exists? Before any other aspect of faith can be examined, belief in God and in the truth of his word is necessary. Often when people convert to the Christian faith, you can see them begin to acknowledge the truth of Scripture. Maybe they started as atheists, and now they believe in God. Perhaps they denied the miracles in Scripture, but now they believe in the resurrection and the virgin birth. Acknowledging these truths is the prefatory action of faith. Do you acknowledge the full truth of God’s word, or are there parts of his revealed Word that you do not believe, or even just dislike?

Secondly, faith is trusting in God. This is different than simply believing in God. We can believe all of these things about God in our head, but trust is actually living like we believe them. Every time we knowingly sin, it shows the disconnect between what we acknowledge to be true and what we trust. We may acknowledge that God hates lying, but when the temptation comes we give in, because his wrath does not feel like a present reality. We may acknowledge that God is our provider, but when we look to the future we become anxious trying to figure out how we will make it, because we lack the childlike faith that depends fully on God’s providence (Matt. 18:3). Trusting in God requires a humility that merely acknowledging the truth does not require.

Thirdly, faith is receiving and resting on Christ alone for salvation. Resting on Christ means humbly trusting in God’s promises. The promises of God are humbling, because we do not make them come to pass—we simply receive them. Take, for example, the promises of God to Abraham. God promised to give Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars and grains of sand on the seashore (Gen. 22:17). But Abraham grew old and still did not have a single child. How could God possibly make his descendants numerous if his wife, Sarah, was past child-bearing age, and they still had no children? Abraham did not trust the promise of God and had a child with his servant Hagar instead, but God, of course, was faithful and gave Abraham and Sarah a son, Isaac, in their old age. The promise of God was beginning to be fulfilled, but disaster struck again when God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Moriah. Isaac was the only legitimate descendant of Abraham. If he died, how could Abraham have descendants?

As Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac, God intervened and provided a ram to be slaughtered instead. Thousands of years later, when God's promises were still being fulfilled, no ram was provided when the Father took out his wrath on his only Son on Mt. Calvary. Jesus bore our sins in his body that was broken; his blood atoned for the sins of many. We look back on these promises of God and trust that he has provided salvation from his wrath against evil, and we look forward, trusting in his promise that evil will be visibly defeated at the Second Coming. In Christ, every promise is yes and amen (2 Cor. 1:20). To receive and rest on Christ is to rest on the promises of God. Look back on all of the promises that God was faithful to in the Scriptures: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Jesus Christ. Do you receive God's promise to forgive those who repent and rest in Christ's victory over sin and death?

The author of Hebrews defines faith as the "assurance of things hoped for" and the "conviction of things not seen." We did not witness the resurrection, yet we live with a firm conviction that it happened. Even though Christ has not returned and we have not yet been made holy, we live with an assurance that God will remain faithful to his promises, and this assurance affects our daily lives. Do we acknowledge the truth of God's word? Do we trust God in all things? Do we receive and rest on the promises of God, revealed in Christ alone, for our salvation? May we have a childlike faith that depends on God as he has revealed himself to us in his Word.

- *Written by Henry Bolin, Christ Covenant Church, Columbia South Carolina*

Ministry Together - Global Missions Praying Together

Global Missions Prayer Focus

Garry and Anita Chambers - Mission to the World

Regional Director for the Caribbean and Indigenous Ministries in North America

The Chambers are missionaries with MTW who received support from Covenant Presbyterian Church for over 20 years. The Chambers first served as missionaries to Haiti and then to Belize. Both Garry and Anita continue to be very involved in the ministry of the Presbyterian Medical Clinic in Belize but are mainly serving as Regional Director for the Caribbean and Indigenous Ministries in North America.

Some prayer requests are as follows:

- ❖ Pray for the Presbyterian Medical Clinic as it provides primary care to the area of Belize.
- ❖ Pray for Garry Chambers as he serves the medical clinic from March 21 to April 3. Pray for Anita as she serves as the Medical Ministry Coordinator for the Americas, coordinating medical teams serving the region and works closely with the medical volunteers serving as the clinic in Belize.
- ❖ Pray as two professors from Campbell University visit the medical clinic and consider an internship program at the clinic for Campbell students.
- ❖ Pray for a leadership program to develop in Grenada at the Granada Institute of Theological Education. (GITE) The goal is to have three classes in 2020 and an additional three classes in 2021.
- ❖ Pray for six pastors actively serving sixteen Presbyterian Congregations in Belize.
- ❖ Pray for Garry and Anita as they care for Garry's mother of 98 years in their home. She is staying with them in Florida and is enrolled in a local hospice program.
- ❖ Pray for wisdom for church sessions, commissions and committees of PCB. (Presbyterian Church in Belize)
- ❖ Pray for John and Karen Stodghill and Ray and Michelle Call as they minister in Belize.
- ❖ Pray with MTW that God will raise up 1% of the total membership of the Presbyterian Church in America to serve in cross-cultural missions.

- This information was provided by Gary Collier, Christ Covenant Church - Global Missions Team