

Faith Possesses Christ

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Scripture: [Hebrews 11:1-6](#)

Series: [The Anatomy of Faith \(1/8\)](#)

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Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. (Hebrews 11:1-2)

Today, we begin a new series called *“The Anatomy of Faith.”* What is faith? How does it change a person’s life? If you’ve been a Christian for 5, 10, 20 years or more, how can you grow in faith?

Evangelicals have always stressed the wonderful truth that we are justified by faith. This truth was at the center of the Reformation ¹ and it is central to a proper understanding of the Gospel today.

We have rightly placed great emphasis on justification by faith and not by works. But we have not always had a good grasp on what faith actually is. We know what it isn’t—its not works, but what is it?

A friend of mine who is a pastor told me of a high school student who he had confronted because the boy had been sleeping with several girls in the youth group. When confronted, the student said to the pastor, “I was saved when I was fourteen, and I’ll live like hell if I want to.”

The boy believes that Jesus died and rose—at least that’s what he says. Is this saving faith? We hear on the news about priests who have abused children and evangelists who have abused money. These are people who talk about faith all the time.

In the New Testament, the Apostle James warns us against a faith is nothing more than bare belief, “a faith like that will not save you.” The devil knows Jesus is the Son of God, and that he died and rose again. If you have the same kind of faith as the devil, don’t be surprised if your future is with him.

Faith Is More Than Bare Belief

Hebrews 11 gives us a long list of the heroes of faith—men and women who are examples to us of what authentic faith looks like. If you study this chapter, you’ll see very quickly that faith is always more than bare belief.

Faith is active. It does things. I’ve picked out seven verbs that illustrate the nature of the activity of faith.

1. Faith understands

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command (Hebrews 11:3).

Faith will open your understanding. The Psalmist says, "I have more insight than all my teachers for I meditate on your statutes" (Psalm 119:99). The Holy Spirit gives wisdom that cannot be achieved by the human intellect alone. It is possible to have the most brilliant mind, and yet to live like a fool.

2. Faith offers

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain... (Hebrews 11:4).

True faith will lead you to make sacrifices, to deny yourself, and to costly commitment.

3. Faith builds

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family (Hebrews 11:7).

Faith initiates projects that will be a means of advancing God's blessing and God's purpose in the world.

4. Faith obeys

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going (Hebrews 11:8).

Faith will lead you to venture into the unknown. It will lead you to get up from the place where you are and say "I must follow Christ."

5. Faith longs

They were longing for a better country--a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:16).

Faith is a forward-looking grace. It will keep your mind fixed on heaven.

6. Faith blesses

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future (Hebrews 11:20).

What a blessing to have a father who is a man of faith, a mother who is a woman of faith. Faith leaves a legacy. It brings a blessing to children, and to all who God places round you.

7. Faith worships

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff (Hebrews 11:21).

Faith will lead you to worship. Here is a man on his last leg, leaning on his staff. He is dying, but he looks up to God and he worships.

Faith is more than bare belief. It's like a living tree bursting with fruit. Wherever you read about faith in the New Testament, its fruit is always evident.

Why does faith do all these things? Where does all this life and energy come from? Why does faith understand and offer and build and obey and long and bless and worship?

Here we come to the central truth that I want us to grasp in this series.

Faith Unites Us To Jesus Christ

Faith is the way in which Christ becomes ours. It is the bond by which we become his. The reason we are justified by faith is that faith unites us to Christ who justifies.

We are justified by Christ, and Christ is ours by faith. Faith unites us to Christ, so that he becomes ours. We are not justified by the strength of our faith, but by the strength of our Savior. We are justified by faith because faith unites us to Christ who justifies.

Bishop Ryle says it well:

A believer's religion does not consist in mere intellectual assent to a certain set of propositions and doctrines... It consists in union, communion, and fellowship with an actual living Person, even Jesus the Son of God.

It is a life of faith in Jesus, confidence in Jesus, leaning on Jesus, drawing out of the fullness of Jesus, speaking to Jesus, working for Jesus, loving Jesus and looking for Jesus to come again. ²

That is what we are calling the anatomy of faith. It is not a mere intellectual assent, not a bare belief. There are two pictures or analogies in the New Testament that help us understand what union with Christ means.

A branch grafted into the tree

In the Old Testament God's redeeming work flowed through the descendents of Abraham. They were, to use Paul's picture, like the branches of God's tree.

Here is what God has done: "Some of the branches have been broken off, and you... have been grafted in... and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root" (Romans 11:17). Then he tells us how this grafting happened: "They were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith" (Romans 11:20).

Faith is the means by which you have been grafted into God's tree so that the life of Jesus Christ flows in you. Christ said, "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5). How do we come to be branches in the vine of Christ? Faith grafts you into this vine.

Being grafted to Christ will cause you to bear the fruit of Christ in your life. Faith grafts us to Christ so that his life is in you. That's why the Bible talks about being "in Christ," or Christ being in us.

A bride joined in marriage to the bridegroom

In Ephesians 5, Paul describes believers as the bride of Christ, and the Christian life as a marriage in which two become one.

Martin Luther described this beautifully:

Faith... unites the soul with Christ, as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage... it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil.

The believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own.³

Marriage changes your life, doesn't it? How it changes your life depends entirely on who you marry. Faith joins us to Christ and he shapes the change that comes to us by the union of faith.

Faith Involves the Whole Person

Think about this Jesus to whom faith joins you, and you will see what authentic faith in him looks like. Jesus is Prophet, Priest and King. He is Teacher, Savior and Lord. He promises, redeems and calls.

Faith trusts Christ who promises, loves Christ who redeems and follows Christ who calls. Faith involves the whole person: mind heart and will. Faith in Christ can never be a bare belief added to an unchanged life.

Faith trusts the Christ who promises

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1).

The believers who first read this letter had trusted Christ. Then they found themselves in great difficulties. Some of them became discouraged, as maybe you are today, and some of them were ready to give up on faith.

The writer reminds them that faith involves looking to Christ for what we have not yet received. The heroes of faith in the Old Testament, “did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance” (Hebrews 11:13). We are in the same position. We live by faith not by sight, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1).

Faith trusts because Christ promises. What that means is that you feel alone sometimes. But Christ says, “I will never leave you.” By faith you trust his promise.

You are anxious about the future. Christ says the man who fears the Lord “will have no fear of bad news, [because] his heart is steadfast trusting in the Lord” (Psalm 112:7). Faith trusts his promise.

You have people who have harmed you and spoken evil against you. Christ says, “Your righteousness will shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun” (Psalm 37:6). Faith trusts his promise.

You feel overwhelmed with a sense of your sin, and your own failure. Christ says, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). Faith trusts his promise.

Christ is going to present you one day—flawless, spotless in the presence of the Father. Faith sustains God’s people in patient endurance when what is promised has not yet been received. Do you trust Christ?

Faith loves the Lord who redeems

Christ gave himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). To know him and be joined to him creates a love in us that reflects his love. Faith unites your soul to Christ in a union of love.

A. W. Pink says,

If we are to properly preserve the balance of truth, we must note carefully the manner in which the Holy Spirit has rung the changes on ‘believe’ and ‘love’ in the New Testament.

He is concerned about people who say, “Yes, I believe.” But there is no change in their lives.

“All things work together for good to them that (not trust but) love God”
(Romans 8:28).

“The things which God has prepared for them that (not only ‘believe,’ but) love him”
(1 Corinthians 2:9).

“A crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day; and not to me only, but also unto all them that (not ‘believe in,’ but) love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8).

“The crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him...”
(James 1:12).

“Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love” (1 John 4:8).⁴

Do you love Christ?

Peter speaks in the New Testament about “trials that come so that your faith may be proved genuine...” Here’s how that happens: “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:7-8).

Here’s the faith that is proved genuine. Here’s the faith that endures trials: Faith that loves and trusts Christ—even when it faces great trials, it still loves him. You can’t see him, but you love him and you find joy in him.

Faith follows the Christ who calls

Hebrews 11 reminds us that faith leads God’s people to costly obedience in the most difficult circumstances. Some heroes of faith were tortured and refused to be released. Some faced jeers and flogging. Others were chained and put in prison. Some were sawed in two (Hebrews 11:35-39). They endured extraordinary things.

Faith trusts, loves, and follows. I’ve called this series *The Anatomy of Faith*. I want to help you discover a faith that possesses Christ, a faith that lays hold of Christ and receives from him.

I am concerned that some of us may have settled for the kind of faith that James says will not save you. One of the dangers of being brought up as a Christian is that you get enough Christianity to inoculate you against the real thing.

An inoculation works by injecting a small amount of a disease, or virus into your bloodstream. That small sample will make you highly-resistant to the real thing.

That’s great when it comes to protection from diseases, but inoculation against the true faith, by sampling a tiny bit of it, is one of Satan’s most powerful strategies in keeping

people from a living union with Jesus Christ: “I was baptized as an infant. I was brought up to believe. I’ve been to church.”

You hear the pastor talk about faith, and you say to yourself, “Well, I have that.” He speaks about Christ and you say, “Oh yes, I believe all that.” He tells you about the cross and you say, “Yes, yes, I already know that.”

And soon you settle into a pattern of assuming that you have what is being described and that there is nothing more for you to receive. You have become highly-resistant—the truth floats right over you. The power of truth is lost on you by inoculation.

Here’s my burden: I want to help you discover what it means to live a life of faith, to feed on Christ, and to grow in Christ and to have life in Christ. I want to help you to cultivate a faith that trusts Christ and loves Christ and that will follow Christ.

Conclusion

This is a series not only for us as individuals but for us as a church. It is possible for a church to believe the right things but to have very little faith.

If ever there was a moment when we need to grow in faith this is it. I feel this in my own life. We are being stretched in new ways to trust Christ more fully, to love Christ more deeply, and to follow Christ more closely.

The world desperately needs to see what living faith looks like and the only place they are going to see it is in communities of believers in places like Arlington Heights and Barrington and Itasca, who trust Christ even though they cannot see him, who love Christ even when they are facing great trials, and who follow Christ with joy, even when it is costly. So that they will say, “Who is this Christ who inspires such love, such trust and such sacrifice? I want to know him!”

A church with bare belief will never have that kind of impact. A church with true faith will. So over the next two months, I want you to join me in asking two things from God: “Lord, increase my faith. Lord, increase our faith.”

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¹ A good introduction to the Reformation, “The Unquenchable Flame,” by Michael Reeves, Inter-Varsity Press, 2009 <http://www.amazon.com/Unquenchable-Flame-Discovering-Heart-Reformation/dp/1433669315/>

² J. C. Ryle, “*Old Paths*,” p. 397

³ Martin Luther, “*The Freedom of a Christian*,” p. 62, Fortress Press, 2008
<http://www.amazon.com/Freedom-Christian-Martin-Luther/dp/080066311X>

⁴ A. W. Pink, “*Studies on Saving Faith*,” p. 96