

A study of Jesus Christ

A study of Jesus Christ would not be complete unless we look very carefully into the matter of faith. Perhaps one should have started this study with the subject faith but studying faith after having dealt with the deeply moving material of Christ's sacrifice and his value in our lives before we were even born, makes for a much deeper understanding of the very instrument with which this valuable bounty is applied to us.

Our deliverance, liberty and eternal life are a bounty completely and solely vested in Christ, and the Father's decree to have it so. There is no means by which we can claim participation in this bounty outside of that means specifically set in place by the owner of the bounty. The owner, Jesus Christ, has from the beginning architected a means by which some sinners, destined for eternal damnation with all other sinners, may be lifted out of the pool of death into which all of mankind fell after our First Parents rebelled against God and were deprived of their eternal lives. That means is faith.

In our study so far we have explained the mode of our deliverance and liberation through Christ. This part of the study is to lay out exactly how we are made partakers of this bounty to which we have contributed absolutely nothing. We must also inquire why not all are made partakers but only some, and also who are those who are made partakers.

We know from common sense that if nobody would participate in the fruits of Christ's sacrifice, that his sacrifice would have been in vain because his sacrifice has as its goal to deliver his people from death and bestow upon them a glorious eternal life, better than the eternal life that Adam and Eve had before they squandered it.

If faith is, then, the instrument by which we share in the fruits of Christ's sacrifice, it stands to reason that without Christ or the preaching of the gospel, faith would have no advantage to anyone.

An interesting question is whether all men, who perished in Adam, are saved by Christ. The answer is clear in the Bible: No, only those who are engrafted into Christ and who receive all his benefits by a true faith are the objects of the merits of his sacrifice. We see two distinct concepts to that question's answer, namely, *only those*

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engrafted into Christ and by a true faith. The former tells us that salvation is limited and exclusive. The latter reveals to us how participation is possible.

If we read John 3:3; 3:36 and Mat 7:18 and 21, we see that the Bible is unambiguous about the exclusiveness of participants.

Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Joh 3:36 He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

Mat 7:18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ²¹Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

Some may be tempted to think that the reason why all are not saved through Christ is that some deficiency exists in the merit and grace in Him, but that is not the case. The atonement of Christ is for the sins of the whole world. That means that even if every person who ever lived would apply Christ's merit in a true, saving faith, the dignity and sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice would not be exhausted.

So, the exclusiveness of participation in Christ's bounty does not lie with Christ's sufficiency or dignity, but it has everything to do with the engrafting into Christ through the instrument of faith. Or, we may correctly state that people are excluded from Christ's merits by their own unbelief: they reject the benefits of Christ offered in the gospel. It is in this manner that they perish, by their own fault, and not because of any insufficiency in the merits of Christ.

The Bible explains to us how one can become engrafted into Christ by faith. First, by the prophecy of Isaiah so that we may know that this was not an invention of the New Testament, but that it has been properly foretold by the prophets. It is crucial that we avail ourselves of this since Christ said that the law, the prophets and the psalms speak about him.

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Isa 53:11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

Joh 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, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

The reason why only those who believe are saved is because they alone lay hold of and embrace the benefits of Christ. In them alone God secures the outcome for which He graciously gave his Son to be killed. Only those who believe know the mercy and grace of God and return suitable thanks to Him, through works that are pleasing and acceptable to Him: good works.

So, we may summarize what has been said as follows: Although the satisfaction of Christ is perfect and sufficient, not all obtain deliverance through it because only those who believe the gospel and apply the merits of Christ to themselves by a true faith.

Some may object by saying, if grace exceeds sin then all who have perished by the sin of our First Parents should be saved through Christ. Not so. Grace exceeds sin with respect to the satisfaction it made to the justice of God and not with respect to its application to the sinner. That all are not saved through the merits of Christ is solely due to the unbelief of those who reject those benefits that is freely offered.

Some may object by saying that all those ought to be received into favor for whose offences a sufficient satisfaction has been made. We claim that a sufficient satisfaction has been made, therefore, all ought to be received into favor or else God is either unjust to men or there is something detracted from the merits of Christ.

It is true that Christ's sacrifice was sufficient but there are no conditions to that truth. Christ's sacrifice was sufficient. Period. But it doesn't mean that Christ's sacrifice is automatically applied to all who fell. Only those who believe in him will not perish, says the Scripture clearly in John 3:16. How would Christ have suffered, died, and rose up again for those who despise Him? Our First Parents were driven

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from the Garden so that they may not eat of the tree of life and live in sin forever. (Gen 3:22-24). How would Christ suffer all these unspeakable horrors so that his enemies may live in sin forever? It's absurd.

Some may object saying that our First Parents subjected us all to condemnation but Christ saved only a portion of the human race, which implies that there is greater power in the sin of Adam to condemn than there is in the satisfaction of Christ to save.

It doesn't imply that at all. The magnitude of Christ's benefits is not measured by the multitude of those who are saved through it but by the magnitude of the benefit itself. The same sacrifice would have been required to deliver even one believer from the clutches of eternal death than it would have been deliver all of mankind. The sacrifice of Christ to save was a far greater achievement than the rebellion of our First Parents was to condemn.

The act of our First Parents caused permanent separation from God causing mankind to lose their ability to glorify God (they couldn't pass on to their posterity that which they didn't have), so all of mankind was deprived of this ability. The act of Christ removed the separation between God and man, but God's enemies also strive to reclaim eternal life not to glorify God but to live in rebellion forever. To ensure that God's enemies are not using Christ's sacrifice to gain access to God, all have to apply the benefits of Christ with faith, something only those whose names have been written in the book of life are able to do.

In this preamble the need to understand faith in all its facets has been clearly illustrated as it is the very instrument through which the elect separates themselves from the reprobate. It is appropriate, then, that we ask, what is true faith? In our answer to this question, it will become evident that the purpose of faith is to separate the children of God from the world, or to make them holy. This is done because it is the means by which we are made partakers of the Mediator and because the preaching of the gospel is worthless without faith.

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True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in his Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Spirit works by the gospel in my heart, that not only to others but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace and only for the sake of Christ's merits.

To study the answer we have given to the question 'what is true faith', we should look at the following six questions:

- I. What is faith?
- II. How many kinds of faith do we find in Scripture?
- III. How does faith differ from hope?
- IV. What are the efficient causes of justifying faith?
- V. What are the effects of faith?
- VI. To whom is faith given?

I. What is faith?

The word *faith* signifies *doing* because that which is declared is performed. It is the assurance and truth of contracts and of whatever may be spoken by those who are trusted and is the foundation of justice.

According to the common definition, faith is a certain knowledge of facts or conclusions to which we subscribe on the testimony of faithful witnesses, or a certain knowledge of experiences. Faith could be held in divine things as well as in human affairs. The former may also be called theological faith. A more exact definition of faith ought to be given taking into account all the different forms of faith mentioned in the Scriptures.

Faith, in general, of whatever kind mentioned in the Bible is a certain knowledge of what is revealed concerning God, his will, works, and grace, based on divine testimony. We may also say that faith is our acceptance of every word of God delivered to the church, in the law and the gospel on account of the declaration of God himself.

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Faith is also often taken for the doctrine of the church or for those things of which the word of God informs us, and which are necessary to faith, as when it is called the Christian faith and the Apostolic faith. It is, likewise, often used for the fulfillment of ancient promises or for the things themselves, which are believed, such as in

Gal 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

II. How many kinds of faith do we find in Scripture?

Scripture speaks of four kinds of faith, namely, historical faith, temporary faith, faith in miracles, and justifying or saving faith.

1. Historical faith.

Historical faith is to believe that every word of God is true and divinely delivered and revealed, whether by voice, by oracles or by visions or by any other method of revelation by which God will make his will known to us. It is called *historical* because it is merely a knowledge of those things that God is said to have done, do now, or will do hereafter.

1Co 13:2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

Acts 8:13 Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Phillip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

Simon the magician is a good example of historical faith. He was the local magician but very good in his craft and amazed many people with his magic tricks. When Phillip performed miracles it is clear that he professed the gospel, glorifying God alone. Simon proclaimed himself to be a great man, but he was amazed at the miracles of Phillip and he believed (he was even baptized), not in the gospel that Phillip preached but because Phillip appeared to be a better magician than he was.

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We cannot tell when someone believes in His name without believing the gospel, but Jesus told us about them.

Joh 2:23 - 25 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. ²⁴But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, ²⁵and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

2. Temporary faith.

Temporary faith is to believe the doctrines of the church accompanied with a profession and joy but not with a true and abiding joy, such that would arise from a consciousness that we are the objects of divine favor, but from some other cause, so that it endures only for a time. When affliction increases it dies away.

One may also say that it is to temporarily rejoice in the knowledge of the gospel but not to apply the promise to oneself or because of a sense of the grace of God in the heart, but for other causes.

We know that this type of faith exists from the following:

Mat 13:20, 21 The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

The causes of this joy are in a manner infinite and different in different individuals, yet they are all temporary and when they fade the faith that is built upon them, vanishes away.

Hypocrites rejoice in hearing the gospel, either because it is new to them or because it seems to calm their minds while it delivers them from earthly burdens. Or, they seek under its profession a cloak for their sins and hope to reap rewards and advantages, such as riches, honor, and glory. But as soon as they are called to bear the cross, they fall away because they have no root in the gospel's promise but only in themselves.

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Hypocrites also do not rejoice as true believers do, which is from a sense of the grace of God and from an application of the benefits of Christ to themselves, but they rejoice in their state of accomplishment of their absorption into the household of the faithful without being truly part of the promise of the gospel and the body of Christ.

Temporary faith differs from historical faith only in the joy which accompanies it. Historical faith has nothing more than mere knowledge while temporary faith has both knowledge and joy.

Devils believe historically and tremble, as we read in James 2: 19, but they do not rejoice in the knowledge that they have but must wish that they rather didn't know what they know. They do not even profess themselves to be followers of this doctrine although they know it is true; they would rather oppose it bitterly because they hate it with all their might. These are the ones who would claim that an injustice was done to them because Christ didn't atone for their sins, as we saw in one of the objections earlier; or they deny that are living in sin at all.

Some may object by saying that the devil has often professed Christ, therefore, it cannot be said that he hate this doctrine. Yes, it can, because hating this doctrine means not professing Christ to advance and promote the doctrine but to mingle it with his own falsehoods and thus cause it be suspected of various falsehoods.

It's for this reason that Christ commanded the demon to be silent.

Next week we will be looking at Faith in Miracles and Justifying Faith.