

The Doctrine of Saving Faith

Wayne Grudem has aptly written that, “Saving faith is trust in Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 710).

I. Saving Faith Is a Personal Trust in Christ

Robert Peterson summarizes well the traditional Protestant understanding of saving faith in this regard:

Traditional Protestant theology has identified three aspects of true faith: knowledge (*notitia*), assent (*assensus*), and trust (*fiducia*). A certain amount of *knowledge* is essential to true faith – the basics of the Gospel. However, having this knowledge does not insure salvation. [See, for example, Romans 1:32.] *Assent* means accepting the knowledge of the Gospel as true; it means saying 'yes' to it. One could have *notitia* [knowledge] and *assensus* [assent] and still not be saved. [See, for example, John 3:1-15; Acts 26:27-28.] Trust (*fiducia*) in Christ as Savior is also necessary for true faith. This involves confidence that his saving work saves *me*. (*Christ and Salvation Syllabus*, p. 108)

cf. James 2:19

First, Scripture speaks in a special way of *believing in* Christ. cf. John 3:16

Wayne Grudem is helpful in explaining the sense of the Greek phrase employed by John and commonly used in the New Testament:

John 3:16 tells us that “whoever *believes in him* should not perish but have eternal life.” Here John uses a surprising phrase when he does not simply say, 'whoever *believes him*' (that is, believes that what he says is true and able to be trusted), but rather, “whoever *believes in him*.” The Greek phrase *pisteuo eis auton* could also be translated “believe *into* him” with the sense of trust or confidence that goes *into* and rests *in* Jesus as a person. Leon Morris can say, “Faith, for John, is an activity which takes men right out of themselves and makes them one with Christ.” He understands the Greek phrase *pisteuo eis* to be a significant indication that New Testament faith is not just intellectual assent but includes a “moral element of personal trust.” Such an expression was rare or perhaps nonexistent in the secular Greek found outside the New Testament, but it was well suited to express the personal trust in Christ that is involved in saving faith. (*Systematic Theology*, p. 711)

Second, Scripture speaks of believing in Christ as *receiving* Him. cf. John 1:12

Third, Scriptures speaks of believing in Christ as *coming to* Him. cf. Matthew 11:28-30; John 6:35; 7:37-38

II. Saving Faith Is Relinquishing Trust in Ourselves

cf. Romans 3:20-24, 28; 4:5; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 3:8-9

III. Saving Faith is a Gift of God

cf. John 6:65; Acts 13:48; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Ephesians 2:8; 1 John 5:1

Anthony Hoekema is helpful in his discussion of this 1 John 5:1:

The Apostle John tells us, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten by God” (1 John 5:1, JB). The word rendered “has been begotten” (*gegennetai*) is in the perfect tense in the Greek, a tense which describes past action with abiding result. Everyone who has faith, John is therefore saying, reveals that he or she has been begotten or born of God and is still in that regenerate state. Since God is the sole author of regeneration, and since only regenerated persons can believe, we see again that faith is a gift of God. (*Saved By Grace*, p. 145)