

# CHAPTER 7: What Makes Faith Valid?

## Discovering the Teaching of the Bible on this Often-Misunderstood Subject

Reference: *Surprised by Faith*, pages 82-100 (fourth edition); pages 81-94 (third edition)

### Getting Focused

- Is faith blind, a mere holding on to what you know isn't true?
- Does it matter what you believe as long as you are sincere in that belief?
- How is Christian faith different from that of other religions?

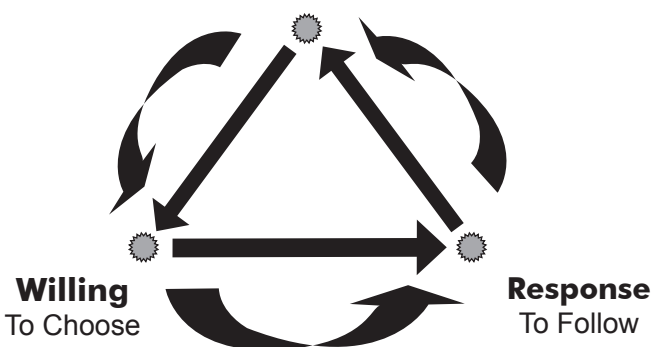
Faith is often caricatured in society as anti-intellectual and a crutch for the weak. Sometimes this caricature is established in the minds of people by the media's coverage of a few fanatical people who misrepresent faith, or by personal experience with those who fail to live out their faith consistently. In contrast, the Bible teaches that Christian faith is intellectually reasonable and logically valid because it is based on a proven and trustworthy object—the person of Jesus Christ. No one needs to “check their brain at the door” of the Christian faith.

### Making the Discovery

1. Many people in society have a \_\_\_\_\_ of the nature and meaning of Christian faith.
2. “Faith” is the translation of the Greek \_\_\_\_\_ form and “believe” is the translation of the Greek \_\_\_\_\_ form of the same biblical concept. The words may be substituted for each other in most passages—such as John 3:16—without changing the essential meaning of “trust.”

3. The Bible identifies \_\_\_\_\_ as one of the essential components of personal faith.
  - a. According to Romans 10:13-15, people cannot believe in Jesus if they have never \_\_\_\_\_ of Him.
  - b. That is because biblical faith must have an \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. The object of Christian faith is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - d. The \_\_\_\_\_ of your Christian faith is not dependent on how you feel (e.g. always sincere) or whether you have doubts, but on the genuineness of whom you are trusting, i.e. Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17).
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_ unbelievers about Jesus is something we must do if we expect them to know about and have faith in Him.

### Knowledge — Of Jesus Christ



4. The Bible identifies the \_\_\_\_\_ as a second essential component of personal faith.
  - a. A hardened \_\_\_\_\_ (i.e. will) can keep us from personal faith (Hebrews 4:7).
  - b. Each person must \_\_\_\_\_ to follow Jesus to have Christian faith.
5. The Bible identifies our \_\_\_\_\_ as a third essential component of personal faith.
  - a. The parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32) demonstrates the importance of being \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Jesus said, “...\_\_\_\_\_” (commitment to obey His teaching), to everyone who wanted to be His disciple (Matthew 16:24).

## DISCOVERY #7

**“Ah-ha!”** Christian faith is valid because its object, Jesus Christ, is certain!

## Application and Reflection

1. **The Bible says** that the object of Christian faith is Jesus Christ.

*So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ (Romans 10:17, TEV).*

**FaithSearch** Discovery demonstrates that the Christian faith is reasonable. Suppose a friend said to you, “If I had reasons, I wouldn’t need faith.” How would you answer? (Read below for suggestions.)

Our friend would have missed an important point. Evidence and reason are not required for faith but rather to discern the difference or legitimacy of various *objects* which compete for our faith commitment. Why trust Jesus rather than Mohammed, Buddha, or Joseph Smith? Without apologetic evidence, this choice becomes arbitrary. John W. Montgomery in *Faith Founded on Fact* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1978, p. 40) is clear on this point: “Evidently, what is necessary for effective Christian witness in a pluralistic world is an objective apologetic—a ‘reason for the hope that is in you’—that will give the non-Christian clear ground for experientially trying the Christian faith before all other options. Absolute proof of the truth of Christ’s claims is available only in personal relationship with Him; but contemporary man has every right to expect us to offer solid reasons for making such a total commitment. The apologetic task is justified not as a rational substitute for faith, but as a ground for faith; not as a replacement for the Spirit’s working, but as a means by which the objective truth of God’s Word can be made clear...” (See 1 Peter 3:15; John 16:8.) Without this grounding in fact, the faith of our friend could be just sentimentalism, sincerity, or even bias. It is the faith he/she grew up with (tradition) or accepts based on someone else’s authority. In contrast, evidence can establish a faith object which is validated by facts and is accepted, not blindly but as informed truth.

2. **The Bible says** that all people are separated from God by ignorance or hardness of heart, and that faith in Jesus is the only way of salvation.

*They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts (Ephesians 4:18).*

*For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus... (1 Timothy 2:5).*

*...[H]ow will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will (Hebrews 2:3-4).*

When Christians claim that Jesus is the only way to God, some find that offensive, alleging that Christianity is more exclusive than other religions. What would you say to them? (Read below for suggestions.)

This question raises two related issues. First, is it true that the Christian faith maintains that the only way of salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ? Yes, but it is not arbitrary: there are important reasons. The first reason is that the founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, taught this Himself. He said, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me*” (John 14:6). On another occasion He taught that “*no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him*” (Matthew 11:27, NIV). Furthermore, those who received their instruction in the faith from Jesus Himself also taught this. The apostles Peter and John said, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12, NIV).

Finally, there is a vital theological reason why Jesus is the only way. Someone has to remove the sin in our lives which separates us from a holy God. Only Jesus, the sinless incarnate God-man, was qualified to do this by His substitutionary death on the cross. Jesus is the only way because He alone provided the “only way” of forgiveness. A more detailed explanation of this will be given in chapter 8.

The second issue of this question is whether Christianity is more exclusive in its claims than other religions. Actually not, since all the major religions make exclusive claims. According to Muslims, Jesus was a failure and Muhammad was a success; the Qu’ran stands alone (in Arabic) as the culminating point

of divine revelation; and those outside their faith are infidels. According to orthodox Judaism, Jews are the exclusive people of God; God is one and not a Trinity; they need no redemption from sin outside the provisions of the Law; and Jesus is not the promised Messiah. Hinduism is insistent on an impersonal Brahman as god and the law of karma and reincarnation as the way to “salvation.”

All religions have exclusive claims but may seem more tolerant than Christianity because they share a common view that good deeds are the basis for individuals to achieve approval with their god. Other religions may differ from each other as to which deeds provide the greatest merit, but most agree that people can earn salvation by their individual effort and virtue. This is self-assuring to proud people and gives a sense of acceptance and accomplishment, placing people’s efforts as the central focus. Since Christianity doesn’t recognize human merit to earn heaven, but teaches that entrance is by confession of sin and faith in the person and work of Jesus only, it is perceived as personally depreciating, restrictive and narrow-minded. In essence, the Christian faith is really more inclusive than others because it offers forgiveness and adoption into the family of God to everyone without regard to wealth, social rank, race, accomplishments, etc. Christianity is unique and offers the assurance of life after death on the basis of God’s mercy and grace alone.

3. **The Bible says** that Jesus has been exalted to the highest authority in the universe, and every person will ultimately acknowledge His Lordship.

*For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).*

4. **The Bible says** that all Jesus’ followers are to be His witnesses, proclaiming that in His name there is forgiveness of sin.

*[A]nd He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations... You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48).*

Write down some thoughts on where you are in your own spiritual journey, and what the next step may be for you.

## Looking Ahead

If what you have learned in this chapter has left you feeling a little uneasy about the nature of faith, or you have a desire for something more, that’s good. You should be uneasy—and there *is* more! Something very important is indeed missing. In the next chapter we’ll discover what that is. We’ll also discover the life-changing dimensions of faith which result when we embrace Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

**Answers to “Fill in the Blanks”:** 1. misunderstanding; 2. noun, verb; 3. knowledge, heard, object, Jesus Christ, validity, Telling; 4. will, heart, choose; 5. response, obedient, follow me