

## The Faith

The goal of pastoral instruction issues a summons that compels every Christian: “Till we all attain unto the unity of *the faith*.” What is “the faith”? The word πιστις (pistis), translated “faith” in this verse, occurs some 243 times in the New Testament.

It most frequently depicts the grace of personal trust in God and Christ. For example, Paul speaks of: “testifying both to Jews and Greeks repentance toward God, and *faith* toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

Sometimes, as in this text, it denotes the entire collection of verbal propositions about the things of God that Christ and the apostles taught and that true Christians confess.

These two uses stand closely connected. Clearly Christ is the special focus and object of saving faith: “*faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*.” Saving faith has three essential elements: knowledge, assent, and trust.

It is knowing the story of Jesus, affirming that story to be true, and trusting, personally and exclusively, in the living Jesus of that story, for acceptance with God and deliverance from sin.

This knowledge and assent consist in commitment to the set of apostolic assertions concerning the person, life, and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Saving faith involves not only knowing this body of apostolic doctrines, but also affirming that they are true.

Thus, even when *pistis* primarily signifies the grace of saving faith, the body of Christian doctrine is always implicitly in view, because saving faith includes knowing and affirming that body of sound doctrine to be true. We use “faith” this way in our doctrinal statements and hymns. We call a compendium of our doctrines a confession “of faith.” When we entitle it, “the things most surely *believed* among us,” we recognize that our doctrines express the content of our faith... “Therefore, we shouldn’t balk at the idea that the biblical term for the body of sound doctrines is “the faith.”

From a thorough survey of this biblical testimony, I have culled out 21 texts in which *pistis* explicitly depicts the body of Christian doctrine: Acts 6:7, 13:8, 14:22, 16:5, 24:24; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 1:23; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:19, 3:9, 13, 4:1, 6, 5:8, 6:10, 21; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:13; Jude 3.

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