

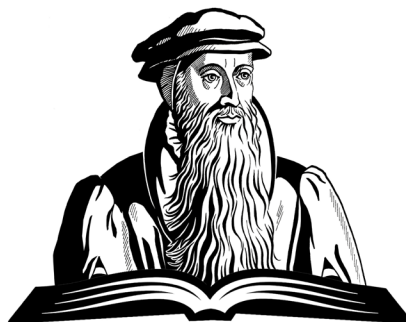
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #9, Lord's Day 7

True Saving Faith



The John Knox Institute
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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Bartel Elshout is pastor of the Kalamazoo Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan. He previously served as pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregations of Jordan (Ontario), Chilliwack (British Columbia), and Hull (Iowa). He continues to serve as a part-time instructor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He previously served as the founding principal of the Netherlands Reformed Christian School in Pompton Plains, New Jersey and as an evangelist in Denver, Colorado. He is also the translator of Wilhelmus à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death* by Theodorus van der Groe, and Alexander Comrie's *The Distinctive Marks of Saving Faith*. He was previously married to his late wife, Joan, with whom he has two children, David and Sarah, and seven grandchildren. He is presently married to Clarice.

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Sermon #9, Lord's Day 7

True Saving Faith

Read: Romans 4, verses 20 to 24
Questions and Answers #20 thru #23

i. Introduction and Review

- 1. The Necessity of Faith**
- 2. The Components of Faith**
- 3. The Object of Faith**

Introduction and Review

Congregation, the last two Lord's Days, we have focused on the glorious truth that God has provided a Mediator—a Mediator that meets all his requirements, and that meets our need. The first Question on *Lord's Day 5* was, how may I escape from the wrath of God, and how may I be restored into his favor? And we saw how very carefully the Heidelberg Catechism echoed the Word of God to show us that there are no options from our side; that it is impossible for us, as sinners, to be reconciled with God, because we cannot meet the requirements of his justice. Now, we saw that in order for those requirements to be met, that we need a mediator who is a perfectly righteous man, but also a mediator who is very God. And then, in *Lord's Day 6*, we saw the reason why the Mediator must be a perfectly righteous man, to represent us as sinners; but also why he must be very God, to be able to endure the infinite wrath of God against sin, but also to acquire for us eternal life itself. And then, then the door opened, and the Heidelberg Catechism asked that Question, *Who then is that Mediator, who is in one person both very God, and a real righteous man?* And then this joyful Answer: *Our Lord Jesus Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom—for foolish sinners, righteousness—for guilty sinner, sanctification—for unholy sinners, and redemption—for utterly lost sinners.* In other words, we have a Savior, we have a Mediator,

who exactly meets our need. We have a Savior, we have a Mediator, who fits our need precisely, as a key fits a lock. And we also considered the source of that knowledge, because, of course, that's vital. The Question is, How do we know this?—*Whence knowest thou this?*—that there is indeed such a Mediator who can save us to the uttermost? And the Answer was: *From the holy gospel, the gospel revealed by God in Paradise, published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the...ceremonial law; and finally, fulfilled...by His only begotten Son*—a gospel that is holy; a gospel that originates with a holy God; a gospel that is completely compatible with a holy God; a gospel that has its origin in the heart of God itself; that gospel that is ultimately embodied in the very person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the gospel itself.

And that brings us to *Lord's Day 7*, of the Heidelberg Catechism, and again, a very important question is asked. So please turn there with me, *Lord's Day 7*, page 34 in the back of your psalter.

Question #20: *Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?* The Answer is, *No; only those who are ingrafted into Him, and received all His benefits, by a true faith.*

Question #21: *What is true faith?* The Answer is, *True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost 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, only for the sake of Christ's merits.*

Question #22: *What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?* The Answer is, *All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic—or universal—undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us.*

Question #23: *What are these articles?* And then follows, of course, the Apostles' Creed, which we confess on a regular basis.

And so, as the Heidelberg Catechism clearly articulates and expresses the teaching of all of God's Word, the theme is a very obvious one, boys and girls. The theme, of course, is *True Saving Faith*. Because Question #21 asks that question specifically: *What is true faith?* And the word "true" is important, as we will see. So, first of all, we will see *The Necessity of this Faith*. That is expressed in Question and Answer #20. In other words, since all men have perished in Adam, are they all saved by Christ? And the Answer to that is, No, only those who believe in Christ are saved—so, *The Necessity of this Faith*. Secondly, *The Components of this Faith*. What is that true faith? So, it consists of a certain knowledge, also an assured confidence; a certain knowledge, or an assured knowledge, we could say; and an assured confidence. And we will seek to unpack what that means. So, those are *The Components of this Faith*. And then, *The Object of this Faith*—what is necessary for a Christian to believe? What should our faith focus on? And it says, *All things promised us in the gospel*. And, of course, ultimately, all of that revolves around the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, *True Saving Faith—The Necessity of this Faith; The Components of this Faith; and, The Object of this Faith*.

1. The Necessity of Faith

So, the Catechism begins by stating a very solemn truth, congregation. And that truth is that *All men are perished in Adam*—all men are lost in Adam. All men, if they die, as they are born, will perish forever. This is true of all men without exception. So the question is, since that is categorically true, for all mankind, that all men have perished in Adam, are all men then saved by Christ? And you know that throughout the history of the church, there have been those who believe in what we call *Universal Redemption*. And those who adhere to that would categorically say,

“Yes,” thereby completely denying the doctrine of hell. They would categorically say that Christ has died for all men; that he has secured salvation for all men.

Then, there is also something that is referred to a *Universal Atonement*. Now, those who hold to the view of Universal Atonement, they recognize that all men are not saved; they recognize that men will perish. And yet, what they teach is that Jesus died for all men; Jesus died for all men; Jesus died for you. All you need to do is accept by faith what Christ has already done for you. Now, in a way, that sounds attractive. And you well know that this is very prominently taught today—Jesus died for all men. But I hope you realize there’s a very serious problem with that viewpoint. Because then, how do you reconcile the fact that Jesus died for someone, and that that person would yet perish. That would mean that the sacrifice of Christ is not really effective for all men. That means that God will condemn to hell those for whom his Son died, for whom he gave his life; and then God would truly be unjust. And so, we have to reject that view as well.

And so, Christ did not die for all men, because the Bible is crystal clear that Jesus died specifically for a specific number of people. Of course, that number is vast, and no man can number the multitude of those for whom Christ gave himself. But the important truth is this—that the salvation that Christ secured by his sacrifice is not an open-ended salvation, where ultimately, the outcome of what Christ accomplished is not certain until the history of this world ends. No, the Lord Jesus spoke very, very clearly. In John 10, verse 15, he says, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” In chapter 17, verse 12, in the High Priestly Prayer, he said, “Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost.” In other words, Jesus knew precisely who he was dying for. He knew precisely who they all were, that the Father had given him eternally, from all eternity. Sinners who have been chosen in him, who have been given to him, he came to redeem in the fulness of time. And so, the work of Christ is not a question mark; it’s an exclamation mark. He has given himself for specific sinners by name. Of course, we know that that number is a number that no man, as we said, can assess; a multitude that no man can number. And of course, we should not abuse that reality, that Christ died for his people, and so therefore, salvation is beyond the reach of sinners, because we do not know who are included in that number.

That’s why we, at the service of God, we are called to preach the gospel indiscriminately to all men without distinction. Because we know that God has sovereignly chosen men from all nations, from all kinds, from all ethnic groups. That’s why, in the New Testament, we see how the apostles freely preached the gospel to all men; how they boldly proclaimed that “Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 13:38). And yet, in this Answer, the Catechism does not focus on the doctrine of election, but it focuses on faith. So, the answer is, “*No, Christ did not die for all men. All men will not be saved, but only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith.*”

Now, the word in our translation here of the original German is a bit unfortunate, because the original version of this Answer reads as follows, and it’s very important: *Only those who, by a true faith, are ingrafted into him, and receive all his benefits.* And the reason why that’s important is that, sadly, some have misinterpreted this Answer, as if it is possible for you to be ingrafted into Christ and not at all to be conscious of the fact that you are ingrafted in Christ. And therefore, a long period you may be ingrafted into Christ without ever having believed on him. That’s exactly *not* the intent of the Catechism. And it’s very clear from the commentary of Zacharias Ursinus,¹

¹ Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583), was a German Reformed theologian and Protestant Reformer who became the leading theologian of the Reformed Protestant movement of the Palatinate, serving both at the University of Heidelberg and the College of Wisdom.

one of the authors of the Catechism, that that's not at all what he meant. That's why the word "only" is important: *Only those who, by a true faith, are ingrafted into him, and receive all his benefits.* Those two belong inseparably together.

And so, what it beautifully articulates here is that God's Word teaches us, on the one hand, that true saving faith is a sovereign gift of God; it is a sovereign work of God. And so when the Holy Spirit regenerates a sinner who is dead in sins and trespasses, when he regenerates that sinner, he grafts him into Christ. When he regenerates a sinner, when he makes him spiritually alive, he transforms the sinner from an unbeliever into a believer. So the moment we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, the moment the Holy Spirit cuts us off from Adam and grafts us into Jesus Christ, at that very moment, we are a believer. But then, that faith, you see, that faith becomes active. In other words, that sovereign work of God, when we, by the Holy Spirit, who then by a true faith, grafts us into Christ, that faith is active. That faith will be exercised.

And so, Ursinus actually says this, that those who exercise faith in Christ, they will know that they are exercising faith in Christ. That's why the only reliable evidence; the only reliable evidence, congregation, of regeneration, is this faith. This faith, which is a gift of God, will always become active. And so, brilliantly here, the authors of the Catechism present faith to us as a grace, but also as a holy activity. So when Paul writes to the Ephesians, in Ephesians 2, he focuses on the fact that faith is a gift. He says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). That means simply this: if, by the grace of God, we are a true believer—and we're going to see when we look at Question and Answer #21 what that *True Saving Faith* is; how faith functions, how it is exercised. But we must never forget that that faith, by which we take refuge to Christ, that faith by which we embrace him, is indeed a gift of God. For in Matthew 16, when the disciples were asked by Christ, Whom do men say that I am? And Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And then, "Jesus answered and said...Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:13–17).

And we need to say that without apology, congregation. We need to let the Word of God speak also regarding this. *True Saving Faith* is a gracious gift from God. It is a result of the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. It is the result of being grafted into Christ. And the analogy that is used here, of course, is the analogy that we see today, even, where branches from one tree in a nursery where trees are grown, where branches from one tree are cut off and are grafted into another tree. And those who do this professionally almost never fail in doing so, and succeeding in that graft taking hold. That means that once that branch is grafted into that stem, that from that moment on forward, that branch will receive all of its nourishment, all of its liquid, all of its moisture from that stem into which it has been grafted.

That's exactly what happens in regeneration. By nature, we are connected to Adam. The Holy Spirit gets ahold of us by his sovereign, mighty, irresistible work, and he severs that connection between us and Adam. He cuts us off from Adam, and he grafts us into the Lord Jesus Christ. But you see, that explains exactly why that faith will never fail to manifest itself by taking refuge to Christ. Because, you see, when we are grafted into Christ, the very life that then flows in us, the very nature of that life is to be attracted to the Christ into whom we have been ingrafted. That's why I said the only reliable evidence of regeneration, the only reliable evidence of the saving work of the Holy Spirit, is not how deep and how long your convictions have been, because that can vary greatly. We see that in Acts chapter 16—the difference between Lydia, whose heart was open as she received what Paul had said, very calm, very collected; and the jailor who was about to take

his life. But what mattered is that both of them believed in Christ. Both of them trusted in Christ. And so, the nature, you see, the nature of that spiritual life that the Spirit of God works in us, the very nature of that life is that it will be attracted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, in John 1, verses 12 and 13, we read about faith as that holy activity. John writes, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power”—or authority—“to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” And it cannot be otherwise, congregation. It cannot be otherwise, because that life that the Spirit of God works in the heart of the sinner, that life will never miscarry. That life will be irresistibly attracted to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, the Spirit who gives us that spiritual life, the Spirit who grafts us into Christ, he works in such a way that this Christ into whom we are now ingrafted, into whom we are now united, that that Christ becomes irresistibly attractive to our soul. He works in such a way that that sinner cannot stay away from Christ. He works in such a way that the Lord Jesus Christ becomes altogether lovely and so precious. He works in such a way, showing us our sin and our wretched state, that Christ becomes exactly the Savior, the Mediator that I need. He is precisely the Savior that fits the need of my wretched soul. That’s why Peter says, To them that believe “he is precious” (1 Peter 2:7). That’s it.

That’s a question we can ask ourselves tonight. Boys and girls, I can ask you that question. What does Jesus mean to you? Is Christ precious to you? Can you lay your heart bare before an all-knowing God? Because that is the only reliable evidence that the Spirit of Christ has worked in you. Because that’s what he does. He makes Christ precious. He makes Christ altogether lovely. He makes Him irresistibly attractive. He so works that we can’t find any rest apart from Him.

And so, we can say that faith is the gift of God, and it is the activity of the living soul. Both, both are addressed here in this Answer. Turn in your Bibles with me for a moment to John 6:37, where both aspects of faith, as articulated in this Answer, are beautifully expressed by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. John 6:37. And there, we read: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” Let’s stop there for a moment. “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” So of course, there, the focus is on God’s eternal, sovereign good pleasure. And so, therefore, Christ is saying this cannot miscarry. Of all that the Father has given to me in eternity, will ultimately come to me; invariably, they will come to me. And then, the second half, “and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” There, we see the activity of faith. And so, Christ explains, in the very same verse, what that coming looks like. He promises, those who come to him shall in no wise be cast out.

2. The Components of Faith

So that leads us to the next Question, So, *What is then true faith?* And you will find that often in the Catechism, they use the word “true.” That means there’s also such a thing as counterfeit faith—faith that’s not real; faith that will ultimately not save us; faith that may have the appearance of faith, but it’s not the real thing. I’ll be very brief. I think most of you have learned that in the Catechism, and have learned that in school as well. But we know we have examples in the Bible of *historical faith*. That means that we intellectually agree with the truth of Scripture, but it has no impact on us. It bears no fruit. It does not affect our hearts at all. It is merely a matter of the mind. And, of course, that kind of faith cannot save us.

Then, there is *miraculous faith*. We saw many examples of that during that life of Christ, those who came to him believing that he was capable of doing a miracle for them, and who trusted him as such, and were healed. Then I think of the ten lepers who came to him, and all ten of them were healed, because they believed that he was able to heal them. But of only one leper we read that he

returned to give him thanks. That means that nine out of the ten had miraculous faith, and only one of them had a true saving faith, and that's why he returned to Christ.

Then, of course, there is what's called *temporary faith*. In the parable of the sower, the Lord Jesus describes temporary faith as that seed that falls in shallow ground, and because there is some soil and moisture there, it germinates and quickly comes to the surface. But because beneath that layer is a layer of rock, it doesn't last, and ultimately, it will wither. And so, there are those who will temporarily have faith; temporarily seem to rejoice in salvation. In other words, people with temporary faith are not people who simply embrace it intellectually. No, it affects them emotionally; it involves their affections. But ultimately, it bears no fruit, and therefore, proves not to be genuine faith.

And so, we see how the Lord Jesus, in that parable, how he discriminates. And he often did that, did he not, in his preaching. He did it so powerfully at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. I already alluded to it in my prayer. That's why those concluding remarks in Matthew chapter 7 are so stunning and so searching. Think about it, what Jesus says there: "Not everyone that says to me, Lord," not everyone that professes me to be their Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven; "but they that do the will of my Father" (verse 21). We focused on that this morning, that the ultimate evidence of true saving faith is that we are also doers of the Word. In other words, that we prove that we really love the Lord Jesus Christ as the living Word of God, by honoring his written Word in our every day walk and life. And so, Jesus said, It's easy to call me Lord, but if you're not a doer of my Father's will, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. There will be many,—stunning—there will be "many [who] will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" (verse 22). It will include ministers, seminary professors, Christian school teachers, elders, deacons. Have we not prophesied in thy name? Have we not done wonderful works in thy name? Have we not cast out demons in thy name? He will say to them, "I never knew you. Depart from me, thou workers of iniquity" (verse 23). Those are solemn words!

And so, Christ often discriminated in his preaching. And that's what the Catechism is doing here, when it says, *What is true faith?* And why is that so important, congregation? Boys and girls, why do we have to know the answer to that question? The answer is obvious. If your faith and my faith is not true, then we may think to enter, as so many will do in that day—Jesus tells us in Matthew 7—we will think to enter, but Jesus will say there was never a real experiential relationship between us. "I never knew you. Depart from me." And so, we need to know. It's a matter of life and death, literally.

We need to know what true saving faith is. Two components: so, *True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word*. So, when it says, "not only," it means it certainly is that. *True faith is an informed faith*—a faith that is informed by the truth of God's Word. It is *a certain*, it is an assured *knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word*. So we must not think that saving faith, then, is historical faith plus this trusting, this assured confidence. No, the knowledge of a believer is not the knowledge of someone who has merely historical faith. This knowledge is the result of the saving and enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit; a knowledge that we embrace; a knowledge that unveils to us the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in all of his beauty, in all of his riches, in all of his fulness. So, it is the knowledge of someone whose mind has been enlightened, has been illuminated by the Holy Spirit. And that's why many of our Reformed forefathers would add to this *assured knowledge* what they would call "assent." So not only that I know with absolute certainty that Jesus Christ is the only Savior, the only Mediator, the only name given under heaven,

but that I embrace that knowledge, that I agree with that knowledge. Or, to put it very simply, that I say, “Amen” to what I know. That’s what saving faith is, that we say “Amen” to what the Spirit of God has revealed to us.

First Corinthians 2, verse 14: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” So the natural man, without that illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, will not acquire that knowledge. This is a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, a saving knowledge of the gospel. This is the knowledge that Christ speaks about in his High Priestly Prayer, in John 17, verse 3: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” That word “know” is that rich word that means “who know him personally,” “who know him experientially.” That’s what Jesus meant when he said, “I never knew you.” Of course, he knows everything, he knows everyone, he’s all-knowing. But he actually said, “there was never a real relationship between us.” This knowledge that the Catechism is speaking of, this is experiential knowledge. This is knowledge that is wrought within us by the Holy Spirit, who enlightens our understanding; who sheds light upon the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ; who unveils to us his beauty, his preciousness; who unveils to us how suitable he is, how lovely he is, and in him everything is to be found that I needed for my wretched soul.

But in addition to that, it is also *an assured confidence*, or *an assured trust*. So we could simply put it this way, is that a true saving faith is we know the truth, we embrace that truth, we agree with that truth, and then we put our trust in that truth—knowledge, assent, and confidence and trust. And that trust is a very essential component of saving faith. That means that, as a sinner, I touch the hem of his garment, that’s what the woman did with the issue of blood. She had heard of him; she knew about him; and that drew her to him. And so, she comes, because her coming itself proved that she fully embraced everything she had heard about him. And when she came, she trusted in him. It was a very weak faith, but she put her trust in that Savior by touching the hem of his garment. It is then that Jesus said to this woman, “Your faith hath made you whole” (Mark 5:25–34).

So what does that trust look like? Again, it’s beautifully expressed here as we hear the echo of God’s Word. It is *an assured confidence*, first of all, that God gives freely to me...*the remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation*. And that’s stated so simply, and yet so powerfully. *Remission of sins*—there we have the negative aspect of what we need. We need to have our sins blotted out, in order to be reconciled with God, in order to escape the wrath of God and to be restored into his favor; our sins need to be removed; our sins need to be blotted out. But we also need something positively—we need *everlasting righteousness*, and we need *salvation*. And Christ has obtained both. And congregation, this is the foundational promise of the gospel. This is the portion of every sinner that trusts in Christ. When we trust in him, however feeble that trust may be, however weak that faith may be, God will grant to us the full pardon of sin, and he will grant to us everlasting righteousness and salvation.

3. The Object of Faith

So there’s a theological term for that act of trusting, that act of taking hold of Christ. We call that *appropriation*. Because that word “me” is so very important here, congregation. *An assured confidence, which the Holy ghost works by the gospel in my heart, that not only to others, but to me also*. That’s what saving faith does. Saving faith appropriates. Saving faith embraces the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you believe then that’s precisely what God desires you to do. Oh, God’s desire is that his people would appropriate by faith what he has provided for them in Christ. Oh, let me emphasize again—God does not want his children to live in doubt. He does not want them to live

in darkness. Is it not true then that there are those times of struggling? Are there not times when we struggle? Are there not times of doubt? Are there not times of darkness? Yes, those things are real, because of the weakness of our faith. But it's God's desire, through his Spirit, and through the testimony of his Word that we would experience, that when we embrace that Savior, that the truth would make us free. God wants his children to live in the joy of his salvation. He wants his children to be assured of the remission of their sins; to be assured that they are partakers of everlasting righteousness and salvation. In John 20, verse 31—which may have been the original ending of the Gospel of John, that chapter 21 was added—we have this wonderful statement: “But these are written”—John is referring to his whole Gospel—“These are written”—listen carefully—“that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”—there, we have knowledge and assent—“and that believing ye might have life through his name.” There we have the act of trusting in the Christ, who is set forth to us in the gospel.

So that God freely gives me the remission of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, and that he gives those gifts, of course, to me *freely...merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits*. True faith recognizes that. True faith is exercised by someone who knows experientially that he or she is spiritually bankrupt before God; someone who understands that I'm guilty and undone in God's sight; someone who understands that even my righteousnesses are as filthy rags in the sight of God. That's why exactly, it's precisely that experiential awareness of who I am in the sight of God, when I see myself the way God sees me. It is that awareness that makes Christ so precious; that makes him so suitable; that makes him so very attractive to my soul. And that causes there to be a matter of such great joy, that that salvation that God grants to the sinner who believes in his Son, that that salvation is gracious, and that that salvation is bestowed upon me entirely and *only for the sake of Christ's merits*.

By the way, you will notice that that word “only” and “alone” occurs frequently in the Heidelberg Catechism. And you know that that's a very famous word. When we talk about the Reformation, when we talk about the “*solas*”² of the Reformation—Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, and the glory of God alone. And that word comes through time and again. That's exactly how the Holy Spirit works. He will teach us that it is *only* in Christ that we can be reconciled with God. It is *only* through Christ that our sins can be pardoned. But it's also completely in Christ, it is fully in Christ.

And so, that *assured confidence* is wrought by the Holy Spirit through *the gospel in my heart*. That's why we who are called to preach God's Word, that's why we have to preach God's Word faithfully; that's why we have to preach the gospel faithfully. That's why we have to preach Christ in all of his fulness, in all of his glory. That's why we have to make the gospel crystal clear to you. That's why we have to offer Christ freely—freely and conditionally to you, preaching to you that gracious gift of salvation that God is going to bestow upon any sinner that believes in his Son is without money and without price. That's why we cannot stand in the Holy Spirit's way. That's why we are called as ministers of the gospel to preach the gospel in such a way that all obstacles are removed, all obstacles that separate the Savior from the sinner. And that's why we, as ministers of the gospel, have such a responsibility. Because when we preach God's Word faithfully, the Spirit will join himself; he will join himself to that witness. Because ultimately, the Holy Spirit

² *Sola* is a Latin word that means “alone” or “only.” In a 5 point response to the heretical teachings of the Arminian Remonstrants in Europe, the Synod at Dort (AD 1618–19) produced a summary of the way of salvation to be by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone, which, in Latin, came to be known as the *Five Solas*: “*sola gratia, sola fide, sola christus, sola scriptura, soli deo gloria*”.

is attracted to his own Word. That's why we have to bring his Word faithfully. So Paul writes in Romans 1, verse 16. He says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." In 1 Corinthians 1, verse 21, he writes: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The foolishness of preaching—not the preaching of foolishness—but the foolishness of preaching. Why "foolishness"? Because to the natural man, it's foolishness that by the simple preaching of the gospel, salvation is wrought in the souls of men. That's exactly the means God has ordained, and the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel to work that *certain knowledge* and that *assured confidence*. Because, congregation, when the Spirit quickens us, when he makes us alive spiritually, when he grafts us into Christ, it is the desire of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of the Father and the Son, to bring us to the full knowledge and assurance of that salvation. It is his glorious work to take out of Christ and to show it unto us.

And it says in there so simply, he works it in the heart. Now, I don't have time to really expand on that—I hope to have other opportunities to do that. But what do we mean by "the heart"? Good boys and girls, you know that I'm not talking about your physical heart that beats inside of your breast. We're talking about a spiritual heart. Now just like your body and my body cannot function without a physical heart, so our soul cannot function without a spiritual heart. So what is the "heart"? The heart is the very core of who we are. God created us with three faculties—our mind, our affections, and our will. And those three interact all the time—what we think, what we feel, and what we do. They're all interconnected. By nature, of course, the heart is corrupt; the heart is depraved. Therefore, what we think is evil, what we feel, what we delight in is evil, and what we do is evil by nature. But when the heart is renewed, when the Spirit of God works upon our heart, you see, then those three faculties begin to function correctly again. What does the Holy Spirit do? So that, with our intellect, we grasp the truth of the gospel; with our affections, we embrace the gospel; and with our will, we respond to that gospel. That's how he works. That's exactly what's lacking in historical faith—it does not affect the heart; it's only something of the mind. But when the Spirit of God works savingly, true saving faith involves all three faculties—our mind, our affections, and our will.

And finally, the Question is asked, *What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?* Again, a very simple, straightforward answer: *All things promised us in the gospel*. Ultimately, the gospel consists of promises, and all of those promises of the gospel are "yea and amen" in Christ. It is God's desire that we embrace those promises. In those promises, God opens his heart to us. In those promises, God declares who he is. In those promises, he sets before us what he will bestow upon us if we trust in his only begotten Son. And no one should ever, ever think that we may not make use of those promises. Congregation, that is a very dangerous distortion of the Word of God; no, more than that, it's heretical. It utterly misrepresents the character of God. In the promises of the gospel, God comes so near to us. In the promises of the gospel, God encourages us to take hold of him, to take hold of his very own Word. He tells us in the gospel that he will always be true to those promises. No sinner will ever trust in those promises in vain. You will always find God to be true to his Word. And of course, all of those gospel promises are beautifully summarized in John 3:16, this extraordinary statement by Christ himself, in which he gives us this profound statement about the gospel: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That's the promise of the gospel.

Now, all of this is going to be unpacked for us in the next *Lord's Days*—*Lord's Day 8*, all the way through *Lord's Day 23*, where we will have an exposition of the Apostles' Creed, that

original confession, that universal confession, that confession to which all Christians subscribe in the world; that confession that grew out of that baptismal formula that we began to look at this morning, when Christ sent his disciples into the world and to baptize the nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Then it became necessary, because of error, to unpack that statement, and out of this grew the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed masterfully summarizes the essential truths of the gospel. It begins with a confession about the Father. And then we have seven articles that unpack to us who the person of Christ is and what he has accomplished. And then it concludes by focusing on the work of the Holy Spirit. And so we can say that the Apostles' Creed summarizes the entire Word of God; it summarizes the entire gospel. And if we believe that truth; if we embrace that truth; if we assent to the truth; if we trust in that truth; if we trust in the truth of a Triune God, who has provided a full and free salvation to all who believe his Word, all who ultimately believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they shall in no wise be cast out.

And so, congregation, the question is, for me and you, are you a believer? Because without faith, it is impossible to please God. Listen to what Jesus said in John 8, verse 24: "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." That's crystal clear—"if ye believe not that I am he." If you do not believe me to be whom I am, who I have revealed myself to be; if you do not believe the record of my Word regarding me, my person, and my work, you will die in your sins. But of course, the opposite is true as well, that those who believe in him will not die in their sins. But it's black and white. It's crystal clear. You only have two options. He that believeth in the Son will have life; he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God will abide on him. And so, my dear congregation, it is a matter of life and death. And the question that we have to consider: Do I have a *True Saving Faith*? Have you trusted in this Christ? Have you come to him? Have you embraced him? Has this Christ come for you—the only name given under heaven whereby we must be saved? No other options. But thanks be to God, what a glorious option it is! What a full and free salvation! The Word of God sets before us in Christ, because it is ultimately his Son whom the Father offers to us, offers to the vilest of sinners. And as I said before, you cannot please the Father more than by believing in his only begotten Son. And that's his promise: you come to my Son, if you trust in my Son, I will receive you; I will embrace you; I will pardon you; I will adopt you; I will be a Father unto you; and you shall be my sons and my daughters. Amen.

Let's pray.

Our gracious God, we thank you for the opportunity we've had to be in thy house. And, Lord, wilt thou bless the proclamation of thy Word, as we have attempted to expound a truth that is so profoundly significant? And Lord, we pray that by grace we would have recognized ourselves also in that Answer, that we have an assured knowledge that Christ is the only one that can save us, but also that we have fled to him, that we have taken refuge to him, even if our faith has been as weak as the woman who touched the hem of his garment. O Lord, the promise of thy gospel is so crystal clear that he that comes to him will in no wise be cast out, and he that believes on him he will not perish but have eternal life. And Lord, should we not be partakers of that faith yet, O Lord, press upon us how dire our circumstances are, that we are on the verge of perishing forever, and so that we would see thee while thou art yet to be found. O that we would come to thee, and crying out, "Oh, Lord Jesus, save my soul!" Crying out to him who is so willing and able to save to the uttermost all those that come unto God by faith. And so, bless thy Word. Bless us as we go homeward and bring us there safely. Go with us in the coming week, Wilt thou would remember

us in all we do? Bless our labors, bless our children in school, keep us safely, and bring us again here the following Lord's Day. We ask it all in Jesus' precious name, amen.