

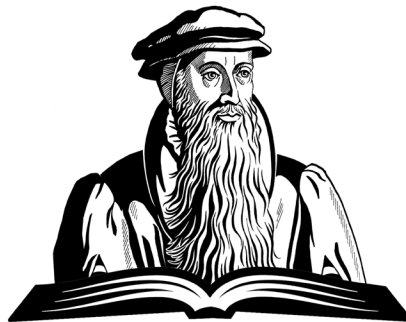
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #30, Lord's Day 23

Justifying 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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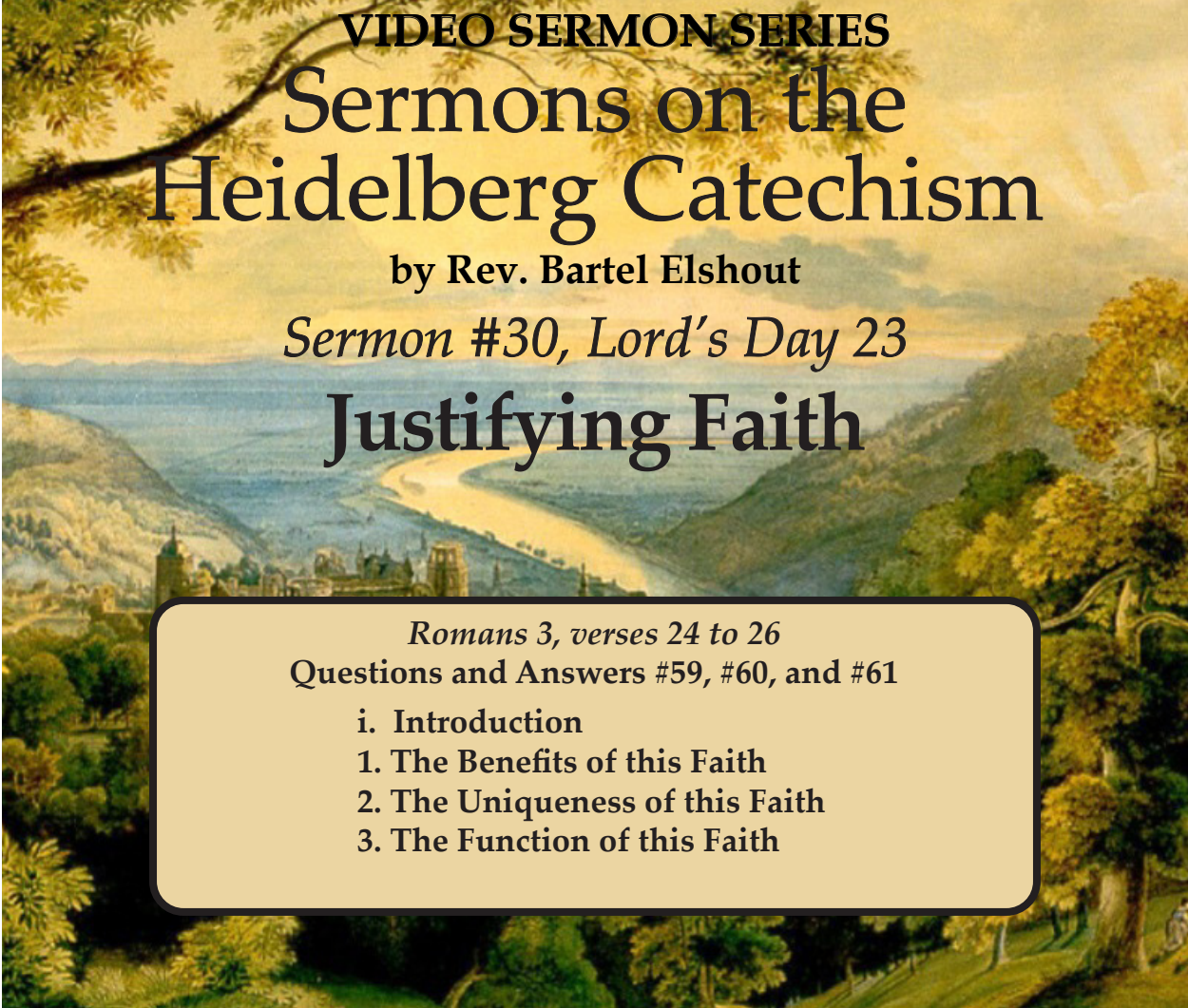
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Sermon #30, Lord's Day 23

Justifying Faith

Romans 3, verses 24 to 26

Questions and Answers #59, #60, and #61

i. Introduction

- 1. The Benefits of this Faith**
- 2. The Uniqueness of this Faith**
- 3. The Function of this Faith**

Introduction

Boys and girls, I know that you are all very familiar with the parable of Jesus about the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:10–14). And Jesus says something very amazing about that publican—a publican who was viewed as the worst imaginable sinner. Jesus says about that publican, that he went home justified (verse 14). That means that he went home with his sins forgiven. And you know how that publican came to the temple. There was a Pharisee who stood in the midst where he could be seen by everyone. There was a man who was so convinced that he was pleasing in God's sight, and was really saying to God that God should be thankful for a man just like him. He looked down upon that publican. "I'm not like other sinners," he said. And there was this publican; he stayed in the background. He did not dare to even lift up his eyes. And he uttered a very simple prayer. Boys and girls, you know what that prayer was—very simple: Oh, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (verse 13). In the Dutch Bible it says, "O God, be gracious to me, the sinner." So I want you to think about that simple prayer; maybe your moms and dads can go over that with you again at home. There are three important words in that simple phrase: *God, the sinner*, and between those two, is *grace*—God, the sinner, and grace.

And the wonderful thing about that story, what Jesus teaches us so simply, that God answered

that prayer. Because that publican realized who God was, and he realized who he was, and so the only hope for him was in the grace of God. And what reminded him of the grace of God was that alter in the temple, that alter, on which, every morning evening, a lamb was killed. And that publican understood his only hope was in that sacrifice. He realized that God could only be gracious to him on the basis of that sacrifice. And that was his hope. So here was a man who was aware of who God was; he was aware of who he was. He realized he was a sinner; he had absolutely nothing to show forth; that his only hope was in the grace of God. And so, actually, you could put it this way: “O God, please give me the exact opposite of what I deserve. O God, I’m a sinner. And because I’m a sinner, I deserve judgment. But Lord, for the sake of that sacrifice, give me the opposite of what I deserve.” And that simple prayer was rewarded. Jesus said, not that Pharisee, who stood there, really pounding his own chest, not that Pharisee, but this man, this man went home justified. That simple prayer, that simple prayer by which that publican put all his trust in the grace of God set forth in that sacrifice; that simple prayer secured for him a full and free pardon of his sin.

And so tonight, we’re going to look at that *Justifying Faith* of the publican, set before us in Lord’s Day 23 of the Heidelberg Catechism. And there we read,

In Question #59: *But what doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this?*

And that refers to everything that has been explained to us from Lord’s Day 9, all the way to 22. What profit do you gain from believing all of this?

The Answer is: *That I am righteous in Christ, before God, and an heir of eternal life.*

Question #60: *How art thou righteous before God?*

The Answer is: *Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding—nevertheless—God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin; yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me, inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.*

Question #61: *Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only?*

The Answer is: *Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness—or quality—of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only.*

And so, this wonderful Lord’s Day, the most famous of all the Lord’s Days in the Heidelberg Catechism, talks about *Justifying Faith*, the faith that justifies, the faith by which I obtain the full pardon of sin and restoration into God’s favor. First of all, *The Benefits of this Faith*, set forth so simply, and yet so profoundly, in the Answer to Question #59, two foundational benefits: that I am righteous in Christ before God, and an heir of eternal life—*The Benefits of this Faith*. Secondly, *The Uniqueness of this Faith*, because the Answer to Question #60 says, *Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ*. And you can check this—the word “only” occurs five times in this Lord’s Day, and the older children know that that word “only” was so important in the Reformation, when we talk about the *Solas* of the Reformation:¹ “Sola,” that means “only.” And the emphasis of the Reformation was on Scripture only, grace only, faith only, Jesus Christ only, all glory to God

¹ The Five Solas of the Reformation, in Latin, *SOLA GRATIA, SOLA FIDE, SOLUS CHRISTUS, SOLA SCRIPTURA, SOLI DEO GLORIA*—interpreted as, salvation is by Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

alone. And so, this word comes through clearly in this Lord's Day—five times it occurs—so, *The Uniqueness of this Faith*. And thirdly, *The Function of this Faith*, and that's addressed in Question and Answer #61. So what do you mean when you say that you are righteous by faith only? And then, the Answer clearly sets before us that that faith is indeed the means whereby we obtain the blessing, but there is nothing in faith that merits that favor. Faith is not a good work which merits God's favor. So, *The Benefits of this Faith*; *The Uniqueness of this Faith*; and *The Function of this Faith*.

1. The Benefits of this Faith

Congregation, what an important question is Question #59, *But what doth it profit thee?* again, very, very personal. You know, the Heidelberg Catechism begins with the Question, *What is the only comfort in life and death?* What is the only comfort that can carry me through this life, and beyond this life, into eternity? And this Lord's Day is very, very crucial, a very crucial component of that only comfort that the Christian may possess. Now, the question for me, and the question for you, is this—are you benefiting from all this? Are you profiting from all this? Do you believe all this that has been set before us? And the Heidelberg Catechism has gone to great lengths to unpack for us all that is expressed in the Apostles' Creed, which we just read, ultimately, which revolves around the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And a great deal of time was spent focusing on the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Three Lord's Days were devoted to his names, #11, #12, and #13; three Lord's Days to his humiliation, the steps of humiliation, #14 through #16; and three Lord's Days to his exaltation, #17 through #19; followed by several Lord's Days dealing with the work of the Holy Spirit. Now, all of this together, what the Catechism is saying, let's consider all of this together, what benefit do you now derive from everything that has been communicated, *that thou believest all this?* And the Answer is so simple, and so straight forward, and yet so profound: first of all, *That I am righteous in Christ, before God*. And that phrase “before God” is so important, because what that means is that if I truly believe all this with my whole heart, then I am not just righteous, but righteous before God. And congregation, that's the root of the matter. We need to know that we are righteous before God. We need to know that there is nothing between God and us. We need to know that we are compatible with God—that's what that means—that we are fully compatible with God, a God who is a righteous God, a holy God, that we are accepted by that God. Because that's what really matters. It doesn't matter what I think of you. It doesn't matter what you think of me. What matters for us and for our children is how God views us.

And then, it says it so beautifully, for the believer, for the true believer, the Bible tells us clearly that we are righteous—as we'll see in a moment—not with a righteousness of our own, but that we are righteous, that we are compatible with God, that we are acceptable to God *in Christ*. Oh, that's the very essence, you see. And so, dear believer, Christ is not only the one who has merited your salvation—oh, let me say it again—he *is* your salvation. He is the complete embodiment of your salvation. It is in him that the believer is righteous before God.

And, it says, *an heir of eternal life*. So not only does faith in Christ restore us in a right relationship with God, but it secures for us the blessing and the prospect of eternal life. John 3, verse 36: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” Oh, how extraordinary are those blessings, those blessings that are the portion of every true believer in Christ—to know that because of him, God is favorably disposed towards me; and because of him, God can say, “I see no iniquity in my Jacob, and no perverseness in my Israel.” To know that in Christ, everything that separates me from God is utterly removed. And that because of that, the believer has the blessed prospect of eternal life.

We considered that last week—eternal life.

Boys and girls, do you remember what we mean by “eternal life”? What does it mean to be alive? Not just physically alive, but what does it mean to be really alive? Why were Adam and Eve living souls before they fell? What was it that defined their life? They were alive because they had a personal and intimate relationship with God, and they lived in the enjoyment of that relationship. They lived in communion with the God who made them. Or, to use theological terms, they enjoyed union and communion with God. That’s what defined their life. And that’s the blessed future that awaits God’s children. Their blessed future is that on the basis of that finished work of Christ, the believer may know that they will have eternal life; that they may look forward to an eternity, into which they will ever and forever enjoy union and communion with God.

And congregation, that can only be our portion, if we have truly trusted in Christ. Because apart from Christ, outside of Christ, we stand condemned. Apart from Christ, we will perish. Without Christ, without being a partaker of him and his finished work, we cannot appear before God; then, it will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; then, a righteous God will condemn me; he will righteously condemn me for my sins. But if we are in Christ, the God against whom we have sinned, the God whom we have offended; the God who declares that he can by no means clear the guilty, if we are in Christ, if we have trusted in Christ, that God will fully and irreversibly pardon us. Oh, that’s the beauty of Psalm 130, that precious Psalm, a Psalm that was so very dear to John Owen.² Oh, where he had the heart of the gospel, Lord, if thou shouldst mark iniquity; Lord, if thou wouldst hold me accountable for who I am and what I have done, who can then stand before thee? But with thee, there is forgiveness that thou mayest be feared. That’s the gospel, you see.

That’s the gospel that Martin Luther³ discovered at last. Martin Luther, who struggled so long; Martin Luther, who so much longed for God’s favor, and who thought that God was only angry at him; who tried so hard by all of his works to please God. And God allowed that, in his wisdom, he allowed him to struggle, so that Luther would be the one, the man who he raised up to discover this wonderful doctrine that is set before us in Lord’s Day 23. And what a discovery it was for him! Luther thought, Luther thought that the righteousness of God was against him. And then the scales fell from his eyes, when he read, in Romans 1, “For the just shall live by faith” (verse 17). He read about a righteousness that would not damn him, but a righteousness that would save him. And then, the Holy Spirit unveiled to him that Christ has secured that righteousness. And then he found peace for his soul—the famous tower experience. And he writes, “It was as if the gates of Paradise opened to me”—justified by faith.

So let’s look at that, in the second place, when we consider,

2. The Uniqueness of this Faith

How, then, *How art thou righteous before God?* And what an important question that is as well. It is as if the authors are saying, “Remember, everything hinges on that answer. Your eternal destiny hinges on this Answer”: *Only—sola—Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ.* Very often, the Heidelberg Catechism inserts that word “true.” They were well aware of the fact that there is a

² John Owen (1616–1683) was an English Puritan Nonconformist church leader, theologian, and vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford. One of the most prominent theologians in England during his lifetime, Owen was a prolific author and poet, still widely read by Reformed Christians today, and is known for his writings on sin.

³ Martin Luther (1483–1546), was a German priest, theologian, author, hymn writer, professor, and former Augustinian friar, who was the seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation in Europe.

lot of counterfeit faith, or we would say today, faith that is fake, faith that is not real. People who claim to believe in Christ, and yet, their life ultimately contradicts their profession. And so, the Bible talks to us about miraculous faith. It talks about temporal faith, historical faith, ultimately, all of which is not faith. But true faith, the faith that was defined for us already in Lord's Day 7, that wonderful Lord's Day as well, *What is true faith?* It's *not only a certain knowledge...but also an assured confidence*, that Christ has also done this for me, that he has given his life as a ransom, even for me.

It is that true faith, that true faith that is born in the depths, that true faith that is expressed in Psalm 130. Why was it that the psalmist so rejoiced that with thee there is forgiveness, for Christ's sake?—precisely because he realized who he was in himself. He cried out of the depths. Oh, his sin was not just a theological truth for him. Oh, when he wrote that Psalm, his sin was experientially real, painfully real to him. He knew that he could not stand before God. And therefore, he will filled with joy, and he cried out triumphantly, But with thee, the God before whom I cannot stand, with thee there is forgiveness.

And so, true faith never functions in a vacuum. True faith is always exercised by sinners who know why they need to exercise such faith. True faith is exercised by sinners who realize that there is no hope except in Christ; who understand, not only theologically, but who understand experientially, that there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved; a true faith in Jesus Christ.

I am first going to read the main sentence before I deal with now follows: *So that—so that... God...grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ.* What an amazing statement that is, and he does that *without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace.* So the Catechism goes out of its way to emphasize that all human merit is entirely excluded here. There's absolutely nothing in us that moves God to bestow such a blessing on one who exercises true faith. Because, congregation—I've said this before and I'll say it again—there's nothing that pleases God more as when a sinner believes in his Son. When we trust in Christ; when we take refuge to him; when we believe in him; when we touch the hem of his garment, God is supremely pleased, because, when we honor his Son, we honor him. You see, when we, as a guilty and undone sinner, when we take refuge to Christ, and thereby we acknowledge that we truly understand who God is; that we exalt him to the highest; that we acknowledge that God is who he is; that he is a God that can by no means clear the guilty; that he can only be reconciled with me through his only begotten Son. And that's why God will honor even the feeblest exercise of faith, because faith supremely honors his Son, and therefore, it supremely honors him.

And what does God do by those who exercise that true faith? He *grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ.* Or, to put it simply, everything that Christ has done, everything that he has accomplished by his perfect sacrifice, fully satisfying all the claims of God's justice, having merited a perfect righteousness and his holiness, everything about him, everything about his person and work, God grants and imputes that to me, the sinner, purely out of grace, only of mere grace—SOLA GRATIA.

Well, what does that mean that he *imputes* it to me? That's a very important word in the Bible. That's why we read Romans 3, verses 4 and 5, where that word occurs several times. So let me try, also for the children, let me try to explain again what that word means. So what that means is this—that *God gives me credit for what Christ has done, as if I had done it myself.* So, today, we would use the word "charge." So when we all have our charge cards in our wallets. So actually, we could call them "imputation cards." So when we use that card, that purchase gets charged to

my account. It's imputed to me, and as a result, I have to pay the bill ultimately. Now, what does God do? When we trust in Christ, when we put our trust in him, he credits everything that Christ has done, he credits that to my bankrupt sinner's account. It's like a man who has gone bankrupt, a man who cannot pay his creditors; and a wealthy person, out of sheer mercy, decides to provide that bankrupt man with what he needs to pay his creditors. And he transfers, he transfers his wealth into the empty account of that bankrupt man. And as a result, he is debt-free. He can pay his debts. That's what happens, because spiritually, we are bankrupt. We are bankrupt—utterly bankrupt. We have nothing except sin—nothing. And we, by grace, put our trust in Christ, God transfers the wealth of Christ—what he has done—and he credits it to my bankrupt sinner's account.

Even so, the Catechism says beautifully—*Even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin; yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me.* That means this, congregation—from that moment on forward, God views me, the sinner, as if I am Christ. God views me in light of all that he has imputed to me; and God now treats me as if that righteousness is my righteousness, as if that holiness is my holiness, as if that obedience is my obedience. That's astonishing, congregation. And it says here, God views me *as if I never had had, nor committed any sin.* That's how profound the gospel is. That's how profound it is that God bestows upon the sinner. That's why the verse in Numbers 23, verse 21 is so very beautiful. When God says of a people who were unworthy of it, people who had corrupted themselves, who yielded to the temptation that king Balak put before them, who made themselves guilty of fornication; by the mouth of Balaam, he says, I see no iniquity in my Jacob, and I see no perverseness in my Israel, all because God made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Oh, this is the gospel. This is the wonder of the gospel. This is a way of salvation that no human brain could have ever conceived. This is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions. In all other religions, you have to somehow seek the favor of God or of a god by your works and by your deeds. The gospel says, by simply trusting in Christ, God will credit to your account everything that Christ has accomplished. And so, what God does, you see, when we put our trust in his Son, first, he—listen carefully—first, he constitutes us righteous, he makes us righteous by imputing to us the righteousness of Christ. And then, based on what he himself has granted to us, he then declares us righteous. So when God declares the believer righteous, it is entirely consistent with his being, with his just and righteous being, even though that righteousness is not my own. It is what Luther called *the alien righteousness of God*. He meant a righteousness that is outside of myself, a righteousness that God provides. And so, God gives us what he requires. He can only be reconciled with us on the basis of righteousness. And we have none. But when we put our trust in Christ, he grants it to us, he makes us righteous, and then he declares us righteous. He is just, and the justifier of those that believe in his only begotten Son (Romans 3:26).

And it's all the more remarkable when you then read what the Answer first says: *So that*, so that, and you see what now follows will really identify the true believer, because the true believer will understand the language of what now follows. *So that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil*—that's the experiential reality of God's children until they die. That painful awareness time and again that I grossly transgress all God's commandments. Oh, the language is so strong here. We cannot minimize sin. Oh, the Catechism calls it by its name; for what it really is.

But *my conscience*—you see, that's what happens when we are true believers. We have a conscience that functions again, a conscience that performs its proper function within me. This

not only happens once. Time and again, God's children face that painful reality, that I continue to grossly transgress all of God's commandments. Not only that, and not only am I a transgressor, but I *kept none of them*. Not only sins of commission, but sins of omission that I failed to do what God requires of me, *and am still inclined to all evil*. Which believer does not struggle with that painful reality? *Inclined to all evil*—that doesn't mean that we commit all evil, but which believer has not struggled with that unsettling reality, that evil can just manifest itself, can just bubble up so quickly. Paul writes about it in Romans 7, when he says, When I want to do the most holy thing, that evil is present with me. But now, the beautiful thing, *Notwithstanding*, notwithstanding of the fact that that remains true until our dying day—*notwithstanding*, all that, *God...grants and imputes to me*.

I want you to notice, what now follows exactly matches that confession. So for a believer, whose conscience accuses him that he has grossly transgressed all of God's commandments, there is the perfect satisfaction of Christ. For the believer who painfully realizes that he keeps none of them, there is the righteousness of Christ. And for the believer who struggles with the fact that he's still inclined to all evil, there is the holiness of Christ. You see then, what God imputes to me, what he credits me with exactly matches my need as a sinner. Oh, how beautiful this sets before us that Christ is a Savior that exactly fits my need, and a suitable Savior—a Savior who fits my need as precisely as a key fits a lock.

But you see, we will never see the wonder of this, we will never see the value of such a Savior unless this is reality. It's against the background of who I am and remain in myself until my dying day; it is against that background that the gospel shines so brilliantly; it's against that background that I see the beauty, and the loveliness, and the suitability of Christ. And time and again, I take refuge to him.

And it says, *inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart*. Actually, this, I've been told by several commentators, that the Latin actually said, "that is," *as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart*—not just a mind, but a believing heart. And so, this is a lifelong learning lesson for God's children. Let me be very clear. Let me be plain. The very first time we exercise faith in Christ, as feeble as that exercise may be, at that moment, God justifies me. Faith justifies, even weak faith, even beginning faith, even feeble faith. Because that faith is focused on the object of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But you see, God's children also need what we call daily justification, because the rest of our lives, we continue to struggle with sin. And that's why the life of a believer is the life of which Brakel⁴ says, "We take refuge to Christ," he says, "thousands upon thousands of times." That's the life of grace. And we come to him over and over again, and the Catechism is saying, the more we embrace him, the more we learn to embrace him and rest in him alone, the more we will begin to experience the wonder of what God bestows upon us. The more we begin to realize what it is that Christ has accomplished even for me, the more Christ will become our all and in all, the more we will experience that peace which passes all understanding.

Congregation, that is God's desire. It is God's desire that his children would understand this, that they would grasp it. And that's why we have such a sacred responsibility to preach the gospel biblically, and faithfully, and correctly, and to direct you time and again to this precious Christ. And so, the notion that justification by faith is only experienced by very few, and is something that is only reserved for the spiritually elite, is so utterly contrary to the Word of God, so contrary to

⁴ Wilhelms á Brakel (1635–1711), aka "Father Brakel", was a Protestant Reformed minister and theologian in the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands, famous for his 4 volumes, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*.

the very character of God. No, it's faith, that simple act of faith, that secures this blessing for us.

3. The Function of this Faith

Question #61: *Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only?—Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith.* Now why did they add this? Because the authors did not want us to misunderstand what they mean. They don't want us to make the erroneous conclusion that somehow there is worthiness in my faith, that it is my faith, the act of my faith that makes God to be gracious, no. It's because that faith is directed to Christ, the object of faith, that's what moves God to be gracious. So there is no worthiness in the act of faith itself. And how comforting that is. In other words, it's not the quality of my faith; it's not the quantity of my faith; it's not the strength of my faith that secures these blessings. No, it's faith, in all of its simplicity. That's why I often refer to the woman with the issue of blood; that was very weak faith, very weak faith (Luke 8:43–48). She didn't even dare to face the Savior; she came behind him, and she tremblingly touched the hem of his garment. That was enough. Jesus says to her, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." That simple, trembling act of faith, because it was directed towards him. That's why he recognized it. And so, what a comfort that is, because every believer struggles with the weakness of their faith. Our faith can be so weak, we can stumble, and we struggle, and we need to be taught time and again, we need to be redirected time and again to look to Christ, and to rest in him alone.

But, it says, only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ—there, you have those triple blessings that exactly match our need: his satisfaction for my gross transgressions; his righteousness for my failure to keep any of them; his holiness to cover my unholiness—all of that is my righteousness before God.

Oh, the wonder, the wonder of this glorious gospel. That's why we have to comfort you with this. "Comfort ye my people" (Isaiah 40:1), preach this to my people, make sure my people understand that their warfare is accomplished, that their iniquity is pardoned, and they have received double for all their sins. Oh, the wonder of this imputed righteousness, that it is *as if I never had had, nor committed any sin, yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me.*

And it says, finally, *That I cannot receive and apply—or appropriate—the same to myself any other way than by faith only.* And so, that simple act of faith, by which the sinner appropriates—appropriates, that's a legitimate biblical concept—appropriates that which Christ has done. Oh, God does not merely want his people to declare that they see in Christ their only hope. No, God wants his people to know that he did this for them. He wants them to appropriate what he has done for their very own soul. That's why living by faith is so simple, and yet it's so difficult—so difficult, because we're so inclined, so inclined, especially when we sin, and when we fail again, when we stumble again, how inclined, at least I am, how inclined again that we become works oriented. And somehow we think that because of what I did, or because of what I said that somehow I have to persuade God to be gracious to me, and somehow I have to get my act together and...no, it's precisely then when again you are faced with the bitter reality of who you are and remain in yourself; it's precisely then that you need to look to Christ again. That's why Calvin⁵ beautifully calls faith "a humbling grace." Think about that—a humbling grace. What does he mean by that? Well, when also, as a believer, when I have to take refuge to Christ again, I have to

⁵ John Calvin, or, Jean Calvin, (1509–1564) was a well-known French theologian, pastor, writer, and leading Reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, after whom many Reformers patterned their teachings.

again acknowledge that I am a wretch in myself. And sometimes we think that we're doing quite well in the Christian life, and then we fall, and we stumble, and we fail, we fall flat on our face. And then, all that's left again is, nothing but a sinner. That's why Calvin says it's a humbling grace, because for me to take refuge to Christ alone, means that I once again recognize that even my righteousnesses are but as filthy rags in the sight of God.

Oh, congregation, how art thou righteous before God? How? Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Oh, my congregation, have you learned, by grace, to take refuge to this Christ? Has this Christ become precious to you? Have you learned to see that in this Christ, God has provided everything that you need as a wretched sinner? Have you learned the wonder *that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God...grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ.*

That's why, if you have not come to this Christ, you cannot appear before God, and you will appear before him, but he will forever condemn you. Because outside of Christ, God can only, a righteous God, can only do the righteous thing, that is, to condemn you forever. But thanks be to God that we may preach this Christ, this complete Christ, and may declare to you in his name; that in him, there is the righteousness that you need; and in him everything is to be found; in him God offers a full and free salvation to you; in him, God declares that no matter who you are, that the vilest of sinners, if they take refuge to Christ, even Manasseh, who in his prison cell, pleaded upon God's promises, God was gracious, even to that man. And therefore, oh, do not rest. Boys and girls, do not rest until you trust in this Christ. Oh, you may come to him. He has said, suffer the children to come to him. Oh, you may come to him now, you may come to him as young as you are. He will in no wise cast you out. And dear believer, oh, may God grant that again and again, every day, we may put our trust in Christ, and we may experience that being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Amen.

Let's pray.

Our gracious God and Father in heaven, oh, we thank thee for this glorious gospel, for this foundational truth of thy Word, so eloquently and movingly set before us in Lord's Day 23. Oh God, wilt thou teach us by thy Spirit, that we may understand and grasp the rich gospel expressed in it, that time and again, we may take refuge to Christ, and time and again, we may lay our hand upon him, and time and again, we would rest in nothing else but Jesus Christ and his righteousness. Remember those who are still outside of him, who do not yet know him savingly. Oh, what a dangerous condition to be in! We will surely perish apart from him. Oh, that they would seek thee while thou art yet to be found; that they would come in response to the generous and loving invitation of the gospel; that they would come pleading thy promise that thou wilt in no wise cast out those who come to thee. Go with us into this week. Again, we ask for thy blessing upon each of us. Bless us in the workplace. Bless us at home. Bless us in our marriages. Bless our children. We pray that also this coming Friday, we may gather here again to consider once more the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name. Amen.