

BC art. 22; Rom. 3: 21-28; The Purpose of Faith I. The Object of Faith II. The Instrument of Faith III. The Sola of Faith  
 Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when someone tells us a story that seems outlandish- farfetched- we tend to say- I don't believe you. This statement- I don't believe- questions the validity and truthfulness of the story you have just been told. But what if a person tells you about an event that took place- and you respond by saying- I believe you! You have just judged this person reliable and their testimony true. Well, when it comes to being a Christian, we are called to believe something- someone who is called the Truth. Today we are going to be looking at the purpose of faith. What is faith and what is it used for? Is faith the one thing that God requires of us- is believing God something that we can do on our own? The context in our Belgic is this- how are sinners reconciled to God? Specifically, if Jesus died for us to satisfy the justice of God as we saw last week, how do we benefit- by what mechanism do we receive the works of Jesus? We will consider this theme: Jesus Christ produces faith in our hearts so that we might know and trust in Him alone.

### **I. The Object of Faith**

We start in our first point by considering the object of faith. What makes faith- a true faith? Faith in the Greek is the work- *pistis*- meaning a trust and reliance. To have faith is to have confidence which is based on true knowledge. Heb. 11 says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Historically, faith has been defined as a knowledge, assent and trust. Or as LD 7 put it- true faith is a knowledge, conviction and assurance created in me by the Holy Spirit. Having faith can be compared to a decision you make when you cross a bridge. If you have faith in this bridge- trusting that this bridge will hold you- you are making a decision based on your observations about the bridge- which translates into action when you cross the bridge. But it is not your faith that makes the bridge strong! As Christians, the object of our faith is Jesus Christ! We place our faith IN Jesus. The strength of that faith is found in the One upon whom that faith is rooted. True faith looks to and depends on Jesus alone- specifically relying on Him for the forgiveness of sins and the life ever lasting. True faith has both an objective and a subjective side. There is a content to true faith- we know something about Jesus as we confess what He has done. True faith must have a true knowledge- which is revealed in God's word. But there is also an subjective side- what He has done has

been done for me! There is change within. The academic takes root in our personal heart. True faith is produced within- our self is changed as we are humbled and we cling to the rock that Saves! But where does faith come from? Does it just fall out of the sky or randomly sprout within us? No- as our article states, true faith is produced in my heart by the Holy Spirit. Normally the Spirit uses the preaching of the Word to produce this work within. Faith is kindled within- like the starting of a fire when a match is stuck. Like a seed being planted within which grows over time, faith is planted within our hearts. It is the Spirit that teaches us- instructing us concerning our utter dependence on God. He gives us faith so that we might believe. We learn to acknowledge who Christ is- and rely on what He has done! So to be clear, faith is not something that we do and it is not in the abstract. We do not have faith that is blind- or faith that trusts in faith. It is not a blind leap- a vain or empty trust. We often hear- everyone has to believe in something- as long as you believe in something. No- true and saving faith trusts in Christ and in Him alone. The Spirit teaches us to know something about a certain someone! Since Jesus is the object of our faith- the strength of that faith comes from the object! The merit of the faith- its validity- is directly linked to the one in whom we trust! And the content of that faith is trusting what Christ did to be sufficient for me- and to believe that He is who He says He is. Relying on Him and depending on His works. Our faith saves because that faith is in Jesus who is mighty to save! We are justified by faith we read. Saved through faith Eph. 2 reminds us. By faith we come to enjoy the benefit of justification.

## **II. The Instrument of Faith**

But what does it mean that we are saved through faith? In our second point we are going to consider the instrumentality of faith. Our BC article states this twice- faith is an instrument. Now being an instrument means that faith is a dependant means. Children, if you take home an instrument- how much noise does that instrument make? Well- the trumpet remains silent and the flute a dead pipe, right? The instruments do not make any noise themselves- they are only active when someone picks them up and uses them- right? Well, when we consider faith as an instrument, we are seeing how faith must be used by someone to link us to someone. As a trumpet only makes noise when air passes from our lips- so faith only saves if it produced by the Spirit and unites us to Christ. We do not place

our faith in our faith- it is only saving faith if that faith brings you and unites you to Jesus. And only those who have the Spirit working within them will have this kind of faith. As I Cor. 2:14 states, without the Spirit our mind cannot accept the things of God. The words of the Gospel and the work of Jesus Christ are folly to us- we will not understand and embrace them as true and applicable to us if we do not have the Spirit working within. So we could say, as the breath of man makes the trumpet sound so the Spirit of God makes faith come alive.

As a Divine work, this faith is an enduring faith. This instrumental work of faith is not a one and done event- faith is not something that happens once and then functions no more. On the contrary, true faith both unites us to Christ and keeps us in communion with Him along with His benefits. True faith is a living, active and consistent event. Like a covenant relationship, it is steadfast. Once true faith is wrought within our hearts- it will remain until we reach the end and goal of that faith- which is the salvation of our souls. True faith cannot be lost. Faith is often called a conduit- a pipeline by which Christ's blessings flow to us. By faith we are justified- and as we cling to Christ, we are not only united to Him- but also His works become ours. By faith we are with Christ- by faith we fellowship and commune with Him even today! Faith is also a gift! By grace we have been saved- through faith. Or by way and manner of faith- with faith as the instrument by which we are joined to and kept in Christ! How do we get this instrument- it is given to us by the Spirit! So not only the working of that faith- but that faith itself is something we receive! Faith is a uniquely divine work- it is an act of God whereby we learn to acknowledge what is true. It is a gift- not only because it is freely offered- but also because it is conferred and produced within us! Like an empty hand that holds what is poured into it- so our faith is the empty hand which the Spirit opens- so that we might receive what God graciously gives. As II Thes. 2:13 reads, God chose you to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this He called you through the gospel. So then, faith is not separate from the gospel, but rather we learn to trust in Jesus who is revealed to us in the Gospel. The very same gospel that the Spirit preserves and delivers to us as a church. As you can see, not only was the sending of Jesus an act of grace- so also the Spirit and His work, the recording and delivery of the gospel message, and the production of faith within our hearts are all part of this package of divine grace! Everything we need is here provided so that we might be saved! As Rom. 10 reminds us, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

### III. The Sola of Faith

But if God has done all this- if the call for, production of and ability to believe are all an act of God- where does man fit in? In our last point we see that true faith is a faith that is uniquely a work of God and not a work of man. We are saved by grace through faith alone in Christ alone! The sola of faith means that since Christ's merits are completely sufficient- and since the Holy Spirit alone can produce this necessary faith in our hearts- we cannot add to that faith nor can we boast in the fact that we believe since it is not a work of man. This last point really is a response to the teaching within the Roman church- as BC art. 22 reads- therefore we say with Paul that we are justified by faith alone or justified by faith apart from works of the Law. In quoting from Rom. 3:28- our article is bringing home the point that faith is not a work of God and man- nor is our faith only a part of the solution to our sins. If Christ is the complete and sufficient savior- the perfect and only mediator- than no other work or mediator is needed. Thus we seek nothing more. Salvation is not by faith in Christ along with my works. And even faith is not a work that I perform. So salvation remains a work of God alone- as the Spirit produces the necessary faith within our hearts- and it is through that faith that we are joined to Christ and we receive His merits. Since this faith is sufficient- or more specifically- since Jesus' works and merit are sufficient- when we are joined to Christ His sufficiency covers all my want and need. It is for this reason that true faith- even if that faith is small like the size of a mustard seed- if that faith is still a true faith that faith is saving faith! Not that this faith saves- but that any true faith having united us to Christ- gains all His works for us. So then it is not strong faith that saves- but faith in a strong and sufficient Savior who saves! It is not our belief that makes us acceptable to God- but the merits of Christ alone!

To conclude, we are saved by grace through faith. But knowing what faith is and where it comes from is not enough. We must move beyond the theory and hypothetical to the practical and personal. Do you have this saving faith evident in your life? We all need the Holy Spirit to produce this faith within! If you know, believe and depend on Jesus for your salvation -rejoice that this instrument has been produced within your heart! We all need to pray for this faith to be rooted and to grow within. Remember, it is not our faith that saves us, but Christ who saves through faith in His name. As Heb. 10 says, the righteous one shall live by faith!