HC LD 7; Heb. 11:1-16; Rom. 11:17-24; Living by True Faith I. Defining True Faith II. Receiving True Faith

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, do you believe? “Believe in what?” should be the proper response. “I Believe” is a common phrase applied to a whole host of subjects. You will see a poster at a baseball game that says- I Believe. On TV you will see a group of people in New Mexico with a bumper sticker boasting- I Believe- next to a picture of a UFO. Unfortunately, I Believe has become little more than a catch phrase. Someone who believes is just someone who hopes for something. But as we will see today, believing is more than just an optimistic hope! As we continue our journey through the Catechism, last week we finally heard the name above all names. The only substitute, mediator and deliverer who can save us is our Lord Jesus Christ. But the fitting follow up question is this- who does Jesus save? Does Jesus save everyone- are all people saved indiscriminately? Does everyone enjoy the benefit of Christ work equally? If not, who does Jesus save? So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ saves those who are united to Him in true faith. As we consider the topic of true faith today, it is vital not only that you can define faith but also that you be able to answer this question- do I have true and saving faith?

**I. Defining True Faith**

In our first point, we begin by defining faith. Only those who have faith will be saved- so we must know what this thing called faith is. To be clear, we are defining true, Christian faith. As Heb. 11 opens, now faith is the assurance and conviction. The word faith is “pistis” in the Greek- and it means to believe or trust. To depend or rely on. As QA 21 will unfold, true faith is a knowledge, trust, conviction and assurance. Going back to Heb. 11, we read, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Assurance is a confidence- true faith is certain that something is real and true. Things hoped for are, in reality, things that will be. Added to this, faith is a conviction of things not seen. True faith is not built upon what the physical eye can perceive- but rather what the eye cannot see. A conviction is connected to assurance- with the added emphasis on evidence. Sometimes the word for conviction is used as a correction against something that is false. It could be said that conviction corrects error. So in the definition of faith in Heb. 11 we find that those who have faith are convicted- they are certain and assured. They know that something is true. This truth builds a hope based on promises and a firm stance built upon what cannot be seen. True faith is not just wishful thinking. Perhaps you have heard faith described as a blind leap- a hope filled step in the dark. Like those who whistle in the dark because they are scared- the world tells us that faith if for the weak. But to be clear here- faith is not just a blind and baseless leap- it is not a groundless whistling in the dark. We are not just hoping for something to happen in spite of all the evidence! No- true faith is not a vague hope for something better- nor is it based on imagination. All of this is to say that true faith, although not based on what we can see with our physical eyes- is still based on something! True faith is based on the promises and character of God! Perhaps I can illustrate it this way. True faith is not closing your eyes and jumping off cliff into the unknown. Rather, true faith is like a blind child listening to the voice of his father. This blind child cannot see- but he can hear! This father calls his child to walk- to step forward. Now although this child cannot see- he knows that their father is a strong, loving, kind and faithful father. It is this trust in the voice of the loving father that motivates the child to keep walking in faith! So true faith does have grounds- it is anchored in the truth! There is merit and a reason why we believe! It is because the one in whom we believe is worthy of our trust- He is dependable, faithful and true! Although we cannot see him now in the flesh, we do behold him with the eye and ear of faith! In fact, the more we learn about God in the Bible the stronger our faith becomes! The more we get to know Him- the more we will trust Him!

So what do we read about Jesus in the Bible? Well, we saw last week that the gospel is found in the OT and NT. This gospel clearly reveals the person and work of Jesus Christ! His sacrifice is sufficient- His work is certain and complete! He will save all those who call upon Him! He will never cast out or drive away any who call on His name! So the faith that we have is not limited or dictated by our present circumstances. Rather, our faith is based upon certain truth and future fulfillment of promises. For example, I believe that God the Father created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. See Heb. 11:3. By faith we know this is true- but I was not there! I believe it because the Bible reveals it! Or I believe in Jesus and the resurrection of the dead. Mary and Martha’s brother was dead- Lazarus was in the grave. But yet, they believed! Their faith in Jesus was not limited to what they could see- but rather it was based on who Jesus was! They knew Jesus could raise the dead- as Jesus revealed Himself to be the resurrection and the life! This truth is particularly pressing- when our loved ones end their earthly journey- it is our faith in Jesus that hold us together! Specifically- our faith in Jesus who is the resurrection and will raise the dead! He will do what He has promised- even if I can’t now see it! I am assured that what I hope for will one day be- I am convicted that what has been promised will one day be seen! That is true faith! So true faith not only believe that God is- that He exists- but that He is a good and faithful God! True faith clings to the promises that God has made- trusting what the Word reveals about His work! It is this foundation of faith that enables us to walk- being confident that God is who He says He is and will do what He has promised! It is this kind of faith that is pleasing to God- and this kind of faith that makes us pleasing to God as Heb. 11:6 states! With faith, it is possible to please God and if anyone would approach God, they must believe that God is!

**II. Receiving True Faith**

Now that we have considered what faith is, in our second point we consider how this true faith might be received. Notice that this faith must be received- it is a gift that is given- it is something that is produced within us. By grace we are saved through faith- as a gift as Eph. 2 puts it. Although believing is something that we told to do- the command is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ- it is also true that the ability to believe is something that must first be given. As QA 21 explains, true faith is worked in me through the gospel and by the Holy Spirit. Faith is not a work of our hand or the product of our desire. We cannot stir ourselves up to believe. It is sovereign work of God. He impresses the truth upon me- as the Spirit gives us eyes to see and ears to hear. By the Spirit I can discern and understand spiritual truth. As Heb. 11:3 says, by faith we understand. So when the Holy Spirit regenerates us, we begin to understand spiritual truth. But as I said before, the command to believe is also a command. As recorded in Acts 16, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. So faith is both a gift and a command! Augustine put it this way- “Command what you will, only give what you command.” So although God must give this gift of faith- we are still the ones who must act by believing. Perhaps I can illustrate it this way. Imagine that your wealthy uncle wants to give you a gift of a million dollars. He writes you a check and puts that check in your hand. All you need to do it endorse it. Now you’re writing your name on the back of the check is not a work to earn the money- but you must still do it. In a similar way, Jesus Christ has earned and credited His righteousness for you- it is put in your hand. Now, by the strength of the Spirit, you can write your name on the back the of the check. This illustration is not perfect- but it does capture the fact that our faith is not a work that earns anything- even though it is a command we receive and something we must embrace to make it ours.

Added to this, a true and living faith is a personal faith. As QA 21 says- I hold this as true- I trust- not only others- but I too am forgiven and granted righteousness. So although faith is a gift- it is also a personal action and conviction. Trusting and obeying- repenting and believing- is still something that we must do. So a generic and general faith will not do. It is not enough to say that Jesus is a savior or thee Lord! He must be my Savior and my Lord! Because the fact is- not all have faith! As John 3:18 says- whoever does not believe is condemned already. Not everyone will be saved! Although the death of Jesus was powerful enough- it was sufficient to save all mankind. It is also true that Jesus died for His sheep- He laid down His life for His sheep! He prayed for those who would believe in His name! So QA 21 makes clear- not all people will be saved. Only those who have true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all His benefits! So for us- as Christians- the aspect of faith that we are called to is this- receiving and accepting. We- You must lean upon Him and depend on His works. So true faith is personal. You cannot and will not be saved because your parents believed. You will not be saved because you belonged to a good church. You will not be saved simply because you were a basically good person. No- salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone! You cannot deceive God! Added to this, true faith is a rare thing! Not everyone who says- Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom. Consider Matthew 7:14- the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life- and those who find it are few. Broad is the gate and easy the way that leads to destruction! We must all heed this warning- not everyone has faith and many people will die in their sins. There is a danger in being raised in the church- and that danger is hypocrisy and presumption. People can be so comfortable discussing Christian topics- they hear about Jesus and faith all the time that they never stop to ask themselves the question- do I actually believe what I am hearing? Have I actually given up trust in myself- to rely on this man of sorrows for my salvation? So to be clear- going to a Christian school does not make you a Christian! Going to a Biblical church does not save you! The way is narrow and the path is hard- true faith is a rare thing! Earlier we read from Rom. 11. The same issue is found. Those who assumed they were in with God were actually cut off. The Jews were proud- they were arrogant and they boasted about their status. We have Abraham as our father! But when Jesus came, they rejected him! Let it be known- you cannot and will never be able to save yourself! Rather stand in awe- wholly look to Jesus in humility! Call on Him with a heart of faith and He will rescue you!

As we close, true faith is often compared to an open hand. We can only accept what God places in our hand. Paul compares Jesus to a vine that we need to be grafted into. Faith is like a pipe- a conduit by which the blessings of Christ flow to us. As John 3 reminds us, whoever believes in Him will never perish but will have everlasting life. Jesus Christ saves those who are united to Him in true faith. So I ask you- have you placed your hope- your faith in Christ alone? If you have- then His blessings are yours- His life is yours! Praise God for the rich gift of saving faith produced in your heart by the Holy Spirit!