**The faith by which we are incorporated into Christ ~** Sermon from Rev. J.J. Arnold in Amersfoort

1971

Liturgy:

Sing: Psalm 147: 1

Sing: Psalm 62: 5, 7

Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 1: 12 - 22

Sing: Psalm 56: 4

Text: Lord’s Day 7

Sing: Psalm 147: 6

Sing: Psalm 56: 5

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

There is only one means of salvation: we must be incorporated into Christ by a true faith; we must not draw something from Him; but we must receive all His benefits. Becoming one body with Him.

How many people are being saved? As many people as have been incorporated into Him by that true faith; and are one body with Him; are branches of the vine, those who take their life from the vine and also bear fruit.

So faith is decisive.

And I may now administer to you the joyful message of this decisive faith . We must be restored. We, who are fallen away, must become the new humanity. A humanity has fallen and a humanity will rise. Fallen in Adam. Saved in Christ. Not individuals have fallen, humanity has fallen and every member in it. No individuals are saved, humanity is saved, and everyone as a member thereof. Who are lost, are burned? The branches that are cut off. Who can live? Every branch that bears fruit that remains in the vine.

I may therefore administer the Gospel about:

**THE FAITH BY WHICH WE ARE INCORPORATED INTO CHRIST,**

whereby you may hear about:

1. the true faith;

2. the true content of faith;

3. the true confession.

**ONE**

The true faith.

Now unfortunately it is necessary that we speak of a true faith, just as we are forced to speak of canonical Bible books and of the true church. After all, there is also a counterfeit faith, just as there are apocryphal Bible books and we must speak of the false church. Everything our Christ gives, what He works and does, Satan mimics. Instead of a true faith versus a counterfeit faith, we can also speak of a living faith versus a dead faith. And we could still say it differently.

I don't need to comment on that now. You know all this. Faith without works is dead, just as a body without a soul is dead; therefore not a body, but a corpse. Now the devil would like us to be satisfied with a dead faith, with a corpse. Sometimes he seems to succeed. Not only in James' days - according to the circumstances of that time (for Satan keeps track of time) - but also in our days and under our circumstances, something is held to be faith, which is not faith.

The confession therefore does not ask without great cause: what is a true faith?

And then it's not hard for us. By the way - why is it difficult? We make it difficult because of unbelief and little faith. But where there is true faith, the faith that works through love, the difficulties become less and less - or of a different character. They melt away like wax before the sun. And the sun shines joyously here. And believing is no different than basking in the sun and enjoying it. Not as lazy people in "blissfully doing nothing," but as working people, who enjoy working and work while enjoying themselves. You don't know how to express it; but you live, delivered from curse and death. You are saved.

After all, what is true faith?

Or rather: what is truly believing? What is true concurrence? After all, believing is saying yes. Saying amen every time. It is practicing covenant fellowship. And that is not that you believe at one time and that you then, for example, confess your faith. No - it is always saying amen. Amen, on what? To the YES of God. We have to do with God. And if we are having to do with God, can there be any doubt when this one true God reveals Himself to us? The Bible is God's Self-revelation. The Bible is so rich and full; inexhaustible.

Our Triune God has so much to say about Himself, in order that we, sinners, will cherish the miracle of His fellowship; that we may boast in the free grace that moved him from eternity; so that we are astounded about His salvation in His Son Jesus Christ.

We knew nothing at all anymore. We knew nothing about the creation of heaven and earth, nothing about Him as Creator. We no longer knew anything about the image of God. We no longer knew anything about paradise and the kingdom of God and the law of love in that Kingdom, in which the King is Father, our Maker, our Husband. We knew nothing about reconciliation and the ways to reconciliation. We knew nothing about the new heaven and the new earth. We didn't know it and we don't know it. What is humanity, what is the church, what are the means of grace? The LORD must tell us everything. And it goes against our thinking and reasoning. The mind of the flesh is enmity against God.

So now: believe? That is to trust. Everything here is a matter of trust, from A to Z. It is to answer those luring words of love with love. That is why unbelief is so shameful and a small faith so sad. In the latter case, we think too little of Him who first created, and preserved ever since, both heaven, sea and earth, and who chooses sinners, while in the first case we start questioning the Word of the God of truth. Unbelief is to make God a liar through people who are liars. Unbelief is idolatry and image worship: making a god in our own image.

But believing, that is holding as true all that God has revealed to us in His Word. We have to listen to it, hear it. For we must know. It is to acknowledge or know as true. Whoever believes wants to know the Bible and will therefore know the Bible and all of the Bible: everything that God has revealed to us in His Word. Whether it is about the creation of heaven and earth or about Christ on the cross; whether it's about the creation of the woman from the man or about "honor your father and your mother"; whether it is about the talking snake and the talking donkey and the crowing rooster or about the admonishment not to forsake the gathering of believers or about the Lord’s Supper. In all this He has revealed Himself to us: He is this God and that is how He is.

And we believe this, even if it would seem ridiculous, unscientific and foolish in everyone's eyes.

How foolish the Lord’s Supper looks, a piece of bread and a sip of wine; how foolish baptism appears, some water over a child's head; how foolish it looks when the Scriptures speak of the way we should be in the church of the living God; the manner of electing overseers and deacons. How foolish the cross is! Yet that is how God reveals Himself.

He makes Himself known in the Son of His love.

He says of Jesus Christ that this is how He comes, that this is Him, and that this is how He works. Whoever believes this - whoever believes in the Son, also believes in the Father and in the Spirit, and has eternal life. They trust that the forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness and salvation have been given from God, not only to others, but also to them. For they know of mere grace, of what Christ has worked and earned for them. Now there is mercy. You know that there are not just some people preserved somewhere, but you know that you are and will be preserved yourself. This certain knowledge is at the same time a firm confidence. This certain knowledge, by which I hold to be true everything that God has revealed to us in His Word, is at the same time a firm confidence that I am saved with all those others in a world under judgment. Whoever kept the words of God has passed from death to life. The words of God - is all that God has revealed to us in the Bible.

We rely on our God.

It is an absolute certainty!

**TWO**

The true content of faith.

There is more.

We heard of true faith; we can also hear about the true content of faith.

I have to comment on that, although it has already been discussed in the first point. We cannot avoid the question: what does a Christian need to believe?

You have to pay attention here. In our days it is said that a Reformed person must always believe the entire Bible. A Reformed person therefore also has a confession, which he has always maintained. But times have changed. We must start thinking in relationship to the world. And if we are going to do that, we have to say something different. We have to ask whether we should really stick to the whole confession, every sentence? And also: to the entire Bible?

Yes, if you understand it in such a way that you can leave a lot aside. For now it is only about the heart of the Gospel and the heart of the confession (or core) And whoever only accepts the core of the confession and accepts the core of the Bible, they can differ over very many things: they can approve of letting go of the baptism of the young children, and if need be, can even accept the authority of the pope. They can make speaking of the confession about God's election and that of the Scriptures about overseers and deacons as "circumstantial truths", as non-decisive, can be changed without objection. They can have questions about the reliability of the Holy Scriptures and leave matters of Scripture criticism up "for discussion" ... As long as you believe the heart of the Gospel and hold each other to it ...

But, brethren, what would you say about a boy who claims that he doesn't care about that girl's 'figure', her hands, her feet, her ears; if need be they can be cut off, as long as he keeps her heart?

What would you say about someone who is not interested in the circumference of the circle, that circumference would at most be a side issue - as long he has the center?

Of course you will say: I will not discuss such foolishness; if you would even take the trouble to say anything about it.

But such foolishness is sold in the church as the most precious wisdom. Could anyone act as foolish, or become so befuddled as in the church?

If the Holy Spirit withdraws and allows for surrender to mindlessness and error ... (what them)?

But back to our confession.

The question is not: what should a Reformed person believe? The question is: what should a Christian believe? There is only one content of faith. And it's not about what you believe, about what you have to believe. It is about something that is necessary. There is only one faith and you cannot add anything to its content. There is not a special Reformed faith distinct from another legitimate faith. There is only one faith; you cannot take anything away from its content. There is no legitimate liberal or other faith beside a Reformed faith: the first is unlawful; what can be trusted there? Imagine that one has the right to believe this and that the other has the right to believe that. What is actually revealed to us then?

Salvation would depend on people.

We can also speak of the Christian religion and of the Reformed religion. But we are talking about the same religion. In our time we must even speak of the Reformed religion in order to speak reliably of the Christian religion. Because woe to us if we have a special Reformed religion. We can only be more reformed and we are only reformed because we have returned from unbelief to faith; from apostasy to love; from self-wisdom to the wisdom that is from above, and because we keep returning to it again and again.

So it is a wonderful answer: *all* that we are promised in the Gospel.

Again we profess the word "*all*" here.

In the first answer of our Lord’s Day we came across this word: accept *all of His benefits.*

In the second answer we came across the word: to believe *all* that God has revealed to us in His Word.

And now in the third answer: *all* that is *promised us in the Gospel.*

Now the same thing has been said three times, albeit in different words.

*All* that God has promised in the Holy Gospel is: *all* that He has revealed to us in His Word, that is, *all* the benefits of Christ.

Because the whole Bible is nothing other than Gospel: paradise, patriarchs and prophets, sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law and consequently evangelists and apostles. In all this the Bible is no different than the Self-revelation of the Triune God in the Son of His love. By all this, the Bible is only the pouring out of our salvation from an abounding Christ with His limitless gifts and powers.

And when do we have our Christ? When we accept all His benefits. We cannot receive something from Him, some benefits, and leave out the others. We cannot accept the forgiveness of sins and at the same time cancel a house visit. We cannot accept help in sickness or comfort at a deathbed while at the same time not recognizing the law of God or despising doctrinal discipline. It is one revelation, one Gospel, one salvation, one Christ,

When a contrast is made between "core" or "heart" of the Gospel and "fringe" or "periphery; when a distinction is made between "essential" and "secondary" in the sense that one is bound to one and not to the other, then:

The confession is no longer considered true;

Our profession is no longer what we are promised to believe;

We are no longer taking all His benefits.

Then, with all good intentions and with all compassion, there is a turning away from the one true God and a turning to the perverse gods of this age. Basically, people are now going to decide what grace is. Are election and good will, anger and revenge, and reprobation no longer a wonder and of most importance?

A disaster for the church: its demise. These will slowly become strange words; not only in the books of theologians, but also in the daily devotionals of families, in sermons and in the upbringing of children.

Fortunately God's holy Word is not an unclear Word; and it is fortunate that the Catechism respectfully replicates God's holy Word.

We do not determine the content our faith. The church does not determine the content of our faith. A minister or an ecclesiastical colleague do not determine the content of our faith.

Our God has determined all this. He did know what we must know, and what we were allowed to know. He did not make it difficult for us. He makes it all light. He has been so good to reveal so much about Himself and His dear Son. But that cannot be without obligation. We shall trust Him. He builds this trust precisely through that Word. He removes us from ourselves and draws us entirely to Himself. We will let ourselves be preserved, and not rescue ourselves and in no way determine what is necessary for our salvation ourselves. He lets us know and so makes us contemplate on what is needful for our salvation. This salvation is so wonderful; so unusual, so rich, so deep. We should not just become a little saved; we must be saved by the one (complete) salvation. We have our Bible. Now only grace, only faith, only the Word applies, only from and through and to God.

It is all or nothing.

**THREE**

Now we have the true confession.

That is how we come to our third point.

We heard of the true faith; the true content of faith; we also hear of the *true confession*.

Our text speaks of the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith. Those articles are called a summary.

They do not indicate the main points of the contents of our faith. They are the summary of the contents of our faith.

There is an important distinction between main points and summary. Using ‘main points’ assumes that there are also side issues, which you naturally also can confess and of which it is even wise to maintain them, but that you can also leave them out. How great a struggle this has not incurred. Have people not spoken about “ spirit and essentials“, without being reminded, by these wretched words, of the dark nineteenth century, and of the liberation by God from them through the succession of 1834) and the Doleance?

And also, in the twentieth century, people basically spoke in the same vein. You can have the three forms of unity in which much is confessed; but wouldn't it be wise to let something go of it from time to time? The Remonstrant, Lutherans, Libertarians, Baptists will not maintain all of those confessions; we want to go to the world-church with them to fight our battles. So we confine ourselves to the heart, the core, the main points. And what is that main point? Well, we will decide that together. And the Remonstrant and Roman Catholics and Reformed people of all stripes, and others as well, want to go *"back"* to the articles of our Catholic and undoubted Christian faith. These are what they call the main points. You can use all kinds of beautiful words: ‘concentrating the confession‘, which always sounds better than ‘reducing the confession‘. But now only: "Jesus is Lord," or "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" - becomes the main point.

What is confessed then about the marks of the church; about the offices; about what happens at the death of the children of believing parents, about baptism and about wrath and eternal judgment - that falls outside the "main points", that can still be talked about later- but will it not soon be silenced?

But the text states it differently.

Here comes the word summary.

Everything is included in a major summary. A ‘summary’ does not even know about main points and side issues. Our summary knows only of an inexhaustible wealth of revealed knowledge; about the depth of confessing, of the inexpressible treasures of Christ's benefits. The summary only knows about the Word of God with which you will never be finished. And the word ‘summary’ says that the wealth of knowledge, of treasures, and the words of God are all together one; because our God is one. Everything can be summarized in that one word GOD. God the Father with all His works; God the Son with all His works - God the Holy Spirit with all His works.

And when we then speak of a summary, there will soon be false teachers. But the Holy Spirit also works. The times go on. The battle is increasing. And what was first said in a summary must now be said more fully. The Belgic Confession is born. The Heidelberg Catechism is born. The Canons of Dordt are written. Perhaps a new confession will be necessary and written as the times go on, and the cunning deceptions grow but also the love that opposes them flourishes. But nothing new is said in all that. Nothing is added to what we believe. What is summarized in the summary is explained more fully and confessed. After all, we do not confess separate truths or individual articles (as if they could exist); but we confess one truth, one God, one Lord Jesus Christ with all His benefits. And whoever takes anything away from the Three Forms of Unity in the twentieth first century, does not return from side issues to the main point, but nibbles away from the one truth, from the Holy Word, also attacking principal matters.

How beautiful our professing is - and our confession is.

Our God spoke His divine YES - His Word.

The church says AMEN to it.

YES and AMEN, Word and answer; faith producing Word and confessing word of faith. And the confessing word of faith comes through the faith producing Word. God works on our trust. And nibbling at the confession is playing with the trust that God requires of us! It is being faithless to a faithful God.

For whoever begins to nibble at the confession will continue by nibbling at the Word. In the last century, one of the confession breakers later said that he began to speak of "spirit and essentials" when it came to confession, but ended up making a distinction between what is true and what is not true in the Bible. It cannot be otherwise.

But all that He has revealed to us in His Word, all that He has promised us in the Gospel, is also all that He has given the church to confess.

Shall we *trust* our God? That is the question now at stake.

They have spoken of a trust crisis among us. We have to trust each other more. If someone tests the spirits, it is taken ill of him. It appears they don’t trust people.

Now - there is indeed a crisis of mutual trust. We live in an age of the most intense crisis of mutual confidence that history has ever seen. The *confessions* are thinned out, if anyone still even wants to know about it. Scriptures are cut apart, and the facts that God has revealed to us are called folk tales; sometimes myths or sagas too; sometimes as examples used by the rabbis or apostles or of “fundamentalists".

But this crisis of trust is not that lying people are not trusted, that prophecies are put to the test. This crisis is the most outrageous injustice that can take place in the world, for it is *the* ***LORD*** *who is not trusted*. They play a game with the Bible. They play with the confessions. First with the confessions and then also with the Bible. For the gist of the matter is that when the confession is attacked, the Bible is attacked, even though the attacker himself does not know who or what he is attacking.

But you still let yourself be rescued, don’t you, and therefore you are blessed and also blessed in the future? So do not have a crisis of trust, but a confession of trust:

Upon God, whose word I praise, on the LORD of hosts, Whose word I praise,

I trust in God, I do not fear; what would they do to me?

**AMEN**