

# HRA Reformation Voice

The Voice of the Heidelberg Reformation Association  
August 2011

## THIS ISSUE:

# LORD'S DAY 7

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# THE MIRACLE OF FAITH

LORD'S DAY 7

by Wilbur Bruinsma

What is true faith? That is a highly important question. The answer to this question will determine the direction of a man's entire theology. If it is a work man performs, man has reason to boast. If it is a work of God, then all our boast is found in God alone. The answer to the question: "what is true faith?" has been one of great debate and has separated the church of today into two opposing camps.

On the one hand, there is the camp of what has become known in church history as the camp

of the Arminians. In the late 1500s and early 1600s there was a large movement in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands under the Remonstrants. The main proponent of the view of the Remonstrants was Jacobus Arminius - hence the name Arminianism. The Remonstrants maintained that faith was an act of man by

which he accepted a salvation earned for all through the death of Christ. If a man accepted Christ by this act of faith then salvation became his, and, as a result, God would choose or elect him to be one of His children. According to the Arminian man's salvation as well as his election depended upon this act of faith.

On the other hand, there is the Reformed faith. In 1618 and 19 the Synod of Dordrecht met and condemned the error of the Arminians. The men of Dordt maintained that faith is a work of God in the heart of those whom He had already chosen from eternity. Also, this faith is not something found in fallen man, but a work that comes with the salvation

Christ earns only for the elect. True faith to the Reformed believer then is that act of God by which He grafts us into Jesus Christ. Once grafted into Christ this faith activates a man's heart and soul that he knows God and trusts in Him.

Lord's Day 7 deals with the subject of faith. So will this article.

## A Gracious Work.

It is true that at the time of the Synod of

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Dordt in 1618 a major victory was won against the error of Arminianism. But this victory was short lived. Within but a few years Arminianism made inroads into the church by means of errors that sought to blend Arminianism with Reformed thought. A type of "semi-Arminianism" slowly influenced churches of Reformed persuasion. It

was around the time of the American Revolution that revivalism under the Wesleys and others made rapid inroads into the church. The Wesleys openly taught Arminianism in the form of free-willism. Man had a free will to choose either for the good or for the evil. Faith was the natural ability of man to accept Jesus Christ into his heart. By means of this act of man the salvation which Christ earned for everyone and offered to everyone in the preaching could be his. But a man must also beware because if salvation is gained by this act of man it can also be lost again if a man would change his mind and fall away from faith. This view has now engulfed much, if not most, of

Christendom. For that reason, we must be clear on the Scripture's teaching of faith.

Faith cannot be an act of man by which he accepts an offered salvation. This view of faith dictates against everything we learn in Scripture. When Adam fell into sin the entire human race fell with him. Everyone was plunged into the corruption of sin. Man lost his perfection. This means fallen man is totally given over to sin. He is unable to seek after God. The mind of fallen man is only hatred against God. If it is true, as the Arminian claims, we must accept Jesus Christ before He can save us, then no one can be saved. And that because no one has the ability in him to accept Christ. No man fallen in Adam is able or even desires to seek after God or Christ. And if the choice is given to fallen man he will not come to Christ.

Faith therefore is purely and wholly a miracle! From beginning to end it is a miraculous work. God must first take hold of a dead sinner and infuse in him a new life. A dead man has no ability to make himself alive. That is true physically but it is also true spiritually. God must breathe into us a new life. And that *has* to take place before anyone could possibly choose for Christ. This is why the faith of the Arminian is what is called an "easy faith". If it is an act of man then anyone can easily accept Jesus if he wants.

Contrary to this idea of faith, the Bible teaches us that true faith is not another innate ability of man. It is, however, a work God performs in us by which we who were incapable of knowing God and seeking after Him now become capable in Christ. Faith is at its core a spiritual power infused into us at the time of salvation and never something we have before. This is emphasized in Scripture, for example, Ephesians 2:8 and Philippians 1:29. The Bible speaks

of the depravity or corruption of fallen man in terms of blindness. A blind man is unable to see. He has no natural ability in him to see. He cannot by some act of his own begin seeing. This is true of the human race spiritually. We are unable to see God or seek after God. We are blind to God and to Jesus Christ. But Jesus performs in us the miracle of faith. At the moment of regeneration we are given the power of faith and we are made to see the things of God and of Christ.

This is why Jesus said in John 6:65 to the Pharisees: "No man can come to me except it were given unto him of my Father." You and I cannot work faith in the heart of a person. We might be able to bring him under the preaching of the gospel as we are called to do. We might witness to him of our faith, but it is God who must work faith. It is God who must change the heart so that he who is blind spiritually might see. Faith is truly a miracle.

But what is this power of faith that is worked in the hearts of God's elect? How is this power worked in us? What is true faith - at its center, in its essence? That act of God in us by which He miraculously binds us to Christ that as a result we become one with Christ. The Bible describes this work of God as grafting (Q & A 20). Just as a branch is grafted into a tree so also are we grafted into Christ. The idea is a simple one. Christ is the vine in which all life is found. Apart from him there is no life. God miraculously takes each of His children (who are dead branches ready to be burned) and at the time of regeneration grafts them into Christ. The life of Christ then flows into them and makes them alive. That life consists of all the blessings of salvation found in Christ. At that moment we are given eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to understand the things of the

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kingdom of God. That is the work of God's grace in us!

And it is truly a gracious work of God. It is not a work that He works in just anyone. The Catechism points out that not everyone who perished in Adam is saved in Christ. It is a work which God chose to perform only in those whom He elected in Christ from eternity. Did they deserve this work? Did they merit it or earn it? Could they in anyway boast in their salvation? Not at all! They cannot boast in their works. Neither can they boast in their faith! Salvation - faith itself - is a gift of God! The only boast we have is in God's grace! He has given something to his people that we did not deserve! Why me? Why you? We really cannot say! We are humbled because of our own unworthiness before God! Why does God give the gift of faith to some and not others when all deserve to perish in their unbelief? Because so it seemed good in His sight!

#### **An Effectual Work**

Yet the idea of true faith does not stop at this point. Often the Reformed believer is accused of saying nothing more of faith. The Arminian claims that faith is an act of man in distinction from a work of God. He will point to many different examples in Scripture where men or women believed on Jesus Christ and were saved. He will then accuse the Reformed believer of robbing a man of his responsibility before God and making of faith only a work of God *on* man rather than *in* a man. This accusation is not true! The Reformed believer recognizes the teaching of Scripture in all of these examples. We are aware of Paul's response to the question of the Philippian jailor: "Sirs, what must

I do to be saved?" Paul answered: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." We do not dispute the fact that faith is something that a person must exhibit. But this gives no reason for us to ignore the fact that God is the one who must work faith in us prior to the time we exhibit it in our lives.

When God works in us the power of faith then it is an effectual work. The heart and life of one in whom God works becomes actuated. The Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ by faith. That work sparks life in our hearts, minds, and desires. We are not given a new soul, but our soul which was enslaved to sin is now

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made alive spiritually. And that affects our thinking and willing. The work of God in us by which we are bound to Christ results in activity in the life of the believer. For example, a doll might be able to move its arms and legs or maybe even cry when it has a battery or two in it. But that doll will do nothing and can do nothing unless we put the batteries in it. The batteries are what gives the doll its power and ability to move. Yet, when we look at the doll we say, the doll is moving. It

is crying or talking. The power of the batteries work in and through the parts of the doll. But the power to do this belongs to the batteries!

The same is true of the child of God. When God grafts us into Christ then the life of Christ dwells in us. He works in us the ability to think and desire and move in accordance with that life in us. But we are not dolls. We are rational, moral creatures. We reason; we desire. All these are made alive by faith. As a result faith becomes an activity in the life of the child of God - a life that never dies since the Holy Spirit is not a battery that loses its power. Neither are

we as Reformed believers afraid to look squarely at those passages that refer to people in faith turning to Jesus Christ. Surely we do! We are given to know our sin and the misery it causes, and we consciously turn to Christ and embrace Him. I desire salvation in Him. I crave the blessings that are found in His cross. In fact, we are not even afraid to say that we consciously choose for Christ. When I am placed before the choice of Christ or sin - then, by the work of faith in me, I consciously am able to choose for Christ! Take the power pack of the Spirit away and I cannot. But when the Spirit is working in me activating my heart - my will and my intellect - then I consciously choose the side of God's people. I consciously believe in Christ and take His side over against the side of evil in this world! Faith is an activity in the heart and life of a child of God which God is constantly working in Him.

May I say that faith is my act? Yes! I may say, "I believe!" We say that when we stand up and make confession of faith in the church: "I believe!" The father

of the demon-possessed boy at the foot of the Mt. of Transfiguration said: "Lord, I believe! Help thou my unbelief!" Faith is an activity of man. But remove the Spirit - remove the battery and there is no activity!

This also is the reason we can never lose faith. When the Spirit enters the heart of a man that Spirit remains! We cannot fall away from the power of faith, though the activity of faith can be so weak in a man - almost extinguished at times.

What then is true faith? It is knowledge. By faith I know that God is God. I know that he created and sustains all things. I know God is the God of salvation who has for the sake of Christ forgiven sinners of their sins. I know that God is the heavenly Father who has adopted his children in the blood of

Christ and therefore works all things together for their good. I know God as the one who has given his people everlasting righteousness and salvation and that He has done this merely of grace and for Christ's sake. In short, I am given the knowledge of everything that God has revealed in His Word. And in that knowledge I hold it all as truth!

The life of Christ in me also actuates my will. I have an assured confidence that everything I know of God is true in His relationship to me personally! He is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth who has created all things and controls every little detail of his creation. I do not chafe at that! I rejoice in it because I know and am confident that if this God is my God (and he is) then nothing and no one in

this world can be against me. Nothing will be able to separate me from his love in Christ Jesus! Nothing! The remission of sins? Righteousness? Everlasting life? It is all mine. Christ did not just earn that for others. He earned it for me! God has adopted me to be his child. I have that

assurance. I have that confidence! I believe! And if I am to choose to live in the tents of wickedness or to take up my cross and follow Jesus - I'll follow my Savior! In Him is life - my life is in Him. All that I am, comes from Him! That is faith.

The Catechism at this point leaves us with something to contemplate: true faith must also have content. If faith is the knowledge of everything that is revealed in God's Word then that Word is the content of my faith. The gospel is the object therefore of what we believe. That gospel is briefly summarized in the Apostles Creed. This creed will be treated in future Lord's Days of the Catechism.

*Wilbur Bruinsma is the pastor of Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Pittsburgh, PA.*

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# THE DANGER OF ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED

by Howard Sloan

I get the question a lot “Do you believe in once saved, always saved?” Those who are asking the question often expect a “yes” or “no” answer, but I rarely give one. The question is not that simple for me. I usually respond by saying that I do not like the terminology of Once Saved, Always Saved (from here on OSAS) or even “eternal security,” but prefer “perseverance and preservation of the saints.” This is the point where I get the strange look. Why don’t I say I agree with OSAS? It starts with a flawed understanding.

## THE POPULAR CONCEPTION OF OSAS

When most people ask about OSAS or even eternal security, they usually mean that once a person accepts Christ – however that is defined- they are assured of escaping the fires of hell and entering the gates of heaven regardless of how they live. This is the caricature that is presented today, and has been for centuries. The regardless is where the problem begins. This is different from the Reformed doctrine of perseverance of the saints. In perseverance of the saints, there is no regardless. Our eternity is not secure because of how we live once we respond to the gospel. However a true response to the gospel will see fruit in keeping with repentance and will persevere in Christ until the end. But let’s examine how and why this popular conception of OSAS is problematic.

## AN EXAMPLE OF OSAS MISUSED IN EVANGELISM

When I was in college, I was involved in Campus Crusade for Christ. Their famous evangelistic tool was “The Four Spiritual Laws.” After a person prayed the prayer to receive Christ, we moved on to “How to Know That Christ Is in Your Life”

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*Did you receive Christ into your life? According to His promise in Revelation 3:20, where is Christ right now in relation to you? Christ said He would come into your life. Would He mislead you? On what authority do you know God has answered your prayer? (The trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word.)*

So after appealing to the trustworthiness of God as proof of security. 1 John 5:11-13 was quoted.

## ***The Bible Promises Eternal Life to All Who Receive Christ***

*“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may **know** that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:11–13). (emphasis is in the original)*

This along with the mention of Hebrews 13:5 were meant to assure the person who prayed the prayer that they were in fact in possession of eternal life. So what is the problem with this? The problems lie well before these assurances are given. The problems often lie in a misunderstanding of true faith, of evangelism, of the work of the Holy Spirit, and of good works.

## MISUNDERSTANDING OF TRUE FAITH

Heidelberg Catechism answer 21 teaches us that

*“True faith is not only a sure knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also a hearty trust, which the Holy Spirit works in me by the gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.”*

Faith is more than an intellectual understanding of some truths, or a prayer once prayed. Biblical faith is not the easy-believism that is taught by so many today. John Hendryx of Monergism.com helps us here.

*“Essentially, the teaching of “easy-believism” (which proponents prefer to call “free grace,” or some similar term), asserts that the faith which saves is mere intellectual assent to the truths of the gospel, accompanied by an appeal to Christ for salvation (at the end of his life, ... According to proponents of the “free grace” movement (i.e. “easy-believism”), it is*

*not required of the one appealing for salvation that he be willing to submit to the Lordship of Christ. In fact, at least according to some proponents, the person appealing for salvation may at the same time be willfully refusing to obey the commands of Christ; but because he has intellectual faith, he will still be saved, in spite of his ongoing rebellion.”<sup>1</sup>*

Easy-believism is not true Biblical faith. Real faith involves two key aspects that the Heidelberg addresses: truth and trust. True faith is not about understanding a few basic truths and believing them. True faith has a “hearty trust.” A hearty trust in Christ as Lord and Savior will not and can not leave itself at the altar. Peter challenges us to rethink was faith is.

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*1 Peter 1:5-9*

*who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, as was necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your*

*faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Peter certainly seems to preaching faith that is more than a momentary decision. Peter even speaks of “the tested genuineness of your faith.” That means two things regarding the nature of faith. First, that

faith is testable. Trials are one of the means that God uses to test or try our faith. Secondly, that there is faith that is genuine and false faith. False faith will not obtain with salvation of their souls. Some may find this a startling and troublesome statement. But what people often call loosing salvation is in fact the loosing of faith that was not genuine. Genuine, Spirit-worked faith is not losable, but we will deal with that more as the study proceeds. This misunderstanding of faith has also lead to a misunderstanding of evangelism.

## MISUNDERSTANDING OF EVANGELISM

There are two great faults in modern evangelistic methods that relate to the discussion of OSAS. The first is preaching that emphasizes escaping hell. It presents the gospel as some kind of divine fire insurance. A.W. Pink noticed that trend.

*“First, with many it is because they are willing for Christ to save them from hell, but are not willing for Him to save them from self. They want to be delivered from the wrath to come, but they wish to retain their self-will and self-pleasing.”<sup>2</sup>*

If all God intends it too keep people out of hell, then this type of preaching is fine, and OSAS makes sense. God punched their ticket to get out of hell, and enter heaven. But keeping people out of hell is not God’s intended purpose, it is a benefit but not the purpose of salvation. 1 Peter 2:9-10 shows that God’s purposes are much grander and more wonderful.

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy*

*nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

We are saved, not just to avoid the wrath of God, but are saved unto being God’s people. We are saved unto being proclaimers of God’s excellencies. We are those made to walk in his marvelous light. That is a far different salvation than some preach.

But another thing is absent in much modern evangelism – repentance! Sometimes it is not absent as much as it is redefined. Biblical repentance

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involves turning from sin and turning to Christ. It involves putting sin off, and putting on the righteousness of Christ. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 7:9-10

*As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance*

*that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

The problem with some evangelistic messages is that they equate grief over sin with repentance of sin. They is no putting sin to death that is demanded. Repentance, if preached at all, is sorrow for sin and turning to Christ for forgiveness, but not for newness of life.

## MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The work of the Holy Spirit is a major sticking

point with those who disagree with OSAS and those that hold to it. Remember that the Heidelberg Catechism said “a hearty trust, which the Holy Spirit works in me by the gospel.” True faith is not the results of man’s will or a convincing argument, but it is the work of God by His Spirit. Many fail to miss the full import of John 1:12-13.

*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

If “hearty trust” is worked by the Spirit, then it is something that can not be lost or abandoned. But there is another dimension of the Spirit’s work that is missed when OSAS is misunderstood or misrepresented.

#### MISUNDERSTANDING OF GOOD WORKS

The indwelling of the saints by the Holy Spirit is inseparable from the purpose of good works in the life of the believer. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks about this in questions 86 and 87.

*Q. 86. Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?*

*A. Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits*

*thereof; and that, by our godly way of life others may be gained to Christ.*

*Q. 87. Can anyone be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?*

*A. By no means; for the holy scripture declares that no immoral person, idolater, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

The problem with the popular conception of OSAS is that it separates belief in Jesus from the necessary consequences of the new birth. If we who by faith are born again by the Spirit of God, then it must mean more than just a faith that receives the

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benefits of salvation without an essential change in the way we live. The Heidelberg Catechism states exactly that. There is a connection between our salvation, good works, and holy lives. Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:9 “*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit*

*of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*” Paul states clearing if you are in Christ, you have the Spirit of God. He relates the indwelling Spirit to life in the Spirit as something that follows from it in Romans 8:12-15.

*So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as*

sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

Paul clearly taught that the person who is in Christ by grace through faith has the Spirit of God, and having the Spirit of God manifests itself in being led into righteousness and away from the deeds of the flesh. One flows from the other. This is critical in understand the difference between OSAS as it is often conceived, and the Biblical doctrine of perseverance and preservation of the saints.

Rev. Howard Sloan is pastor of St. Paul’s Reformed Church in Bedford, PA, and it the moderator of the HRA. All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

**(Endnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/qna/easybelieve.html>

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Pink, Saving Faith. Monergism Books, mobi edition. Location 126.

***“True faith is not only a sure knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also a hearty trust, which the Holy Spirit works in me by the gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.”***  
***(Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 21)***

## Noteworthy Dates & Events

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### OCTOBER 2011 ISSUE:

#### LORD’S DAY 8.

*Deadline for articles and reviews is September 15, 2011.*

• *The board will meet in October to discuss upcoming issues of the Reformation Voice as well as planning for future events. If anyone is interested in hosting an HRA event, please contact Rev. Howard Sloan at [pastorsloan@comcast.net](mailto:pastorsloan@comcast.net)*

#### Editorial Policy for the Reformation Voice

1. The Executive Committee shall serve at the editorial committee for the Reformation Voice. They shall have the right to select or reject any content for inclusion in the Reformation Voice.

2. Content may be submitted by members, pending members, or members of member churches. The Executive Committee may also solicit the right to (re)print articles from other authors or reviewers whose writings may be of value to the membership of the HRA.

3. In keeping with the purposes of the Association, books reviews in the Reformation Voice shall be reflective of the purposes and standards of the Association.

4. The Reformation Voice shall not be used as a platform to voice views and positions that are particular to a denomination or group. Rather, it should seek to promote those theological positions which are held in common by all who hold to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort.