THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

Lord’s Day 1

Q. 1. What is thy only comfort in life and death?

A. That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil, and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.

Q. 2. How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?

A. Three; the first, how great my sin and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance.

Comments

The Heidelberg Catechism (HC) was penned by Zacharias Ursinus, professor at Heidelberg University, Germany, under the behest of Elector Frederick III. It was first published in 1563, but only became part of the Three Forms of Unity adopted by the Dutch Reformed Churches at the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619.

One who is familiar with the Westminster Shorter Catechism will immediately notice the difference in style between the two catechisms. The WSC is sublime, succinct, systematic and objective. The HC is personal, warm and often subjective. Apart from these outward difference, and the fact that the WSC reflects a more mature development of Covenant Theology, the contents of the two catechisms are largely in agreement. One who holds to the WSC would generally have no difficulty at all with the doctrine laid down in the HC and vice versa. Such is the unity of faith that exists between the different Reformed traditions.

Since the third edition of the Catechism, the 129 questions and answers have been divided into 52 Lord’s Day with the view of having the Catechism preached through once a year in the churches that adopt it as a standard. Our brief survey of this beautiful Catechism will follow this division.

The first two questions, as given above, are really introductory questions. Question 1 reminds us how we may have meaning in life by reclaiming what has been lost to mankind on account of the Fall of Adam, namely, comfort. Because of the entrance and existence of sin, and the consequent separation from God, man can no more naturally
have any peace of conscience, nor assurance of any favourableness or blessedness in this life or the life to come. Man continues to yearn after comfort or freedom from pain and distresses, but this comfort eludes him who searches by his own effort. It can only be found in the Lord Jesus Christ, by those who are united with Him by grace through faith. My chief comfort, therefore, comes through knowing that I belong wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ who has redeemed me by His blood, thereby delivering me from the power of sin and Satan and rescuing me from the wrath of God. And as Christ has paid an infinite price for my redemption, I have the assurance that He will preserve my soul and body both in life and death, so that nothing will separate me from His love. And not only so, but He gives me His Holy Spirit to assure me of His love, and to enable me to live a life pleasing to Him.

Question 2 gives a summary of the knowledge that we need to have in order that we may enjoy this comfort. This three-point summary forms the outline of the rest of the Catechism, viz., Knowledge of (1) My sin and misery (Q. 3–11); (2) The way of deliverance (Q. 12–85); and (3) How to live a life of gratitude (Q. 86–129).
The First Part—of the Misery of Man

Lord’s Day 2

Q. 3. Whence knowest thou thy misery?
A. Out of the law of God.¹

Q. 4. What doth the law of God require of us?
A. Christ teaches us that briefly, Matthew 22:37–40, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.”¹ This is the first and the great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Q. 5. Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?
A. In no wise;¹ for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbour.²

Comments

Because of the Fall of Adam, all men descending from him by natural generation are under God’s wrath and curse. And so every person deserves damnation, not only because of the guilt of Adam imputed upon him, but also because of his corrupt nature and rebellion against God. Now, man is created in the image of God, and so every man has a natural conscience (Rom 2:14–15). But the mind is darkened by the Fall and the conscience dulled so that unless God reveals to us in clear concerning the misery to come, most of us will simply drift along and fail to take heed to the danger that awaits our souls. This is why God gives us His laws, especially the Moral Law which is summarised in the Ten Commandments. These commands show us the standard of holiness required by God, and so at the same time shows how far short we fall: ‘by the law is the knowledge of sin’ (Rom 3:20). We may say that the Law of God is like a portrait displaying the holiness of God and, at the same time, a mirror reflecting our shortfall.

Man ought to walk according to the Law. But this is impossible because of indwelling sin and because the Law demands more than mere outward conformity. This fact is especially highlighted through the Lord’s summary of the Ten Commandments in Mathew 22:37–40; for here, we are taught that to keep the Law is synonymous to loving God and loving man perfectly. In other words, the Law must be kept in love. The believer must delight in God with his whole being and so obey Him out of love. At the same time, the basis of our obedience in regards to the laws that pertain to our relationship with our neighbour must be founded not only upon our love for God, but upon our love for our neighbour.
But there is a problem. Under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we know that it is impossible for us to keep the demands of God because we are naturally inclined to hate God and our neighbours. The Apostle Paul, relating his conversion experience, tells us: ‘I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died’ (Rom 7:9). Before his conversion, Paul was very sure he had kept the laws perfectly, but once the Holy Spirit regenerated his soul, he realised that he had not kept the Law at all, and was in fact unable to keep the Law perfectly, according to the demands of God.

It is under this circumstance that the Law shuts us up to Christ. Thus Paul exclaims: ‘O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Rom 7:24–25a). The Law, under the illumination of the Spirit, shows our inability to save ourselves, so that we have no recourse but to cast ourselves upon Christ; and ‘conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law’ (Rom 3:28). Rather, he is ‘justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus’ (Rom 3:24).
Lord’s Day 3

Q. 6. Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?

A. By no means; but God created man good,\(^1\) and after His own image,\(^2\) in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him.\(^3\)

Q. 7. Whence then proceeds this depravity of human nature?

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise;\(^1\) hence our nature is become so corrupt, that we are all conceived and born in sin.\(^2\)

Q. 8. Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?

A. Indeed we are;\(^1\) except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.\(^2\)

Comments

In the last question, we note that we can in no wise keep the Law of God perfectly, for we are prone by nature to hate God and our neighbours. The immediate and inevitable question that springs from there is: Why is this so? Why is it that we are prone to hate God and our neighbours? Did God create man wicked and perverse? If not, where did this depravity come from?

The answer to whether God created man wicked and perverse is: Of course not. The Scripture asserts that after God had created all things, including man, He beheld all that He had made, and ‘behold, it was very good’ (Gen 1:31a). Thus Solomon, writing under inspiration, declares: ‘God hath made man upright’ (Ecc 7:29b). Man was created in the image of God, with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).

But under the temptation of Satan, Adam and Eve fell into sin when they ate of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The result of the Fall was that their nature was corrupted, and not only that, but all who descended from them by natural generation would also inherit a corrupt nature from them, according to the declaration of the psalmist: ‘Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me’ (Ps 51:5; cf. Job 15:14).

This hereditary corruption, together with the imputed guilt of Adam’s first sin (not mentioned in the HC, but see WSC 18), is commonly called Original Sin. It is on account of Original Sin that all men since the Fall are by nature wholly incapable of doing any good, i.e., anything that is righteous in God’s sight. The Apostle Paul affirms this doctrine when he tells us that we not only ‘come short of the glory of God’ (Rom 3:23), but are ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ (Eph 2:1). Man is, in other words, Totally Depraved. He is depraved in every aspect of his being: body, soul, mind, heart and will.

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\(^{1}\) Gen 1:31; \(^{2}\) Gen 1:26–27; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; \(^{3}\) Eph 1:6; 1 Cor 6:20.
Two implications may be derived from this doctrine: Firstly, even what may be perceived to be the most righteous deeds of the natural man, are in fact tainted with sin. The prophet Isaiah leaves no room for doubt when he says: ‘all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags’ (Isa 64:6a). Secondly, as Question 8 teaches us, the only way that man can become capable again of doing any good or anything pleasing in God’s sight is when he is regenerated by the Spirit of God. This is why the Lord taught Nicodemus, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’ (Jn 3:3). That is to say, unless a man is regenerated by the Spirit of God, he cannot be saved since he would have no regard for the glory of God at all.
Lord’s Day 4

Q. 9. Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in His law, that which he cannot perform?

A. Not at all; for God made man capable of performing it; but man, by the instigation of the devil, and his own wilful disobedience, deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts.

Q. 10. Will God suffer such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?

A. By no means; but is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in His just judgment temporally and eternally, as He hath declared, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”

Q. 11. Is not God then also merciful?

A. God is indeed merciful, but also just; therefore His justice requires, that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God, be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul.

Comments

In the last two Lord’s Days we learned that fallen man is unable to keep God’s law perfectly, but God requires man to keep the law perfectly on the pains of eternal death. This is impossible and it does seem that God is unfair in His requirement, just as it would be unfair and unjust for a mother to penalise her 2-year-old for being unable to read! But is God unjust? Obviously not! God is not unjust because He had made man capable of obeying Him perfectly; but Adam our representative father, under the temptation of Satan and his own wilful disobedience, fell into sin and so deprived himself of that ability to keep the commandments of God perfectly. And since he is, by nature and divine appointment, our federal representative, he forfeited the divine gifts necessary for perfect obedience for us too. Let me give a loose illustration. Suppose you are a citizen of country X, which has an elected president. Suppose when the nation first gained independency, the World Bank gave a loan of $100 billion to the president as the head of state, to start up the economy, on condition that each citizen pays an interest to the bank every year. The president is supposed to distribute the amount to every citizen in the nation in order that all may start up their businesses. But instead of doing so, he squandered the whole amount away in big-time gambling. Presently the president died, and the citizens discovered themselves to be debtors. Now, would it be right for the citizens of the city to sue the World Bank for unfairly withholding funds from them and requiring that they pay the yearly tax? Obviously not. Would it be wrong for the World Bank to sue the citizens of the city in order to recover the losses, seeing it was their president who wasted the
money away? Obviously not. So it is the case that God is not unfair to require all men to keep His laws perfectly.

So, it is right that God should punish us for our rebellion against Him. But notice how the Catechism speaks of God being ‘terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins.’ Our original sin, as we noted earlier, is the guilt of Adam’s transgression imputed on us as well as the corruption of our nature by which we are inclined to evil, and by which we break out into actual transgressions of the Law in words, deeds and thoughts.

But now the question is: Isn’t God merciful? Can’t He simply overlook our sin? The answers to these two questions are yes, and no. Yes, God is merciful. We are taught this fact repeatedly in the Scripture. But no, He cannot deny His justice or fairness by overlooking sin. He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13). Sin must be punished. Sin against an infinite God must justly suffer infinite punishment.
The Second Part—of Man’s Deliverance

Lord’s Day 5

Q. 12. Since then, by the righteous judgment of God, we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, is there no way by which we may escape that punishment, and be again received into favour?

A. God will have His justice satisfied:¹ and therefore we must make this full satisfaction, either by ourselves, or by another.²

Q. 13. Can we ourselves then make this satisfaction?

A. By no means;¹ but on the contrary we daily increase our debt.²

Q. 14. Can there be found anywhere, one, who is a mere creature, able to satisfy for us?

A. None; for, first, God will not punish any other creature for the sin which man hath committed;¹ and further, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God’s eternal wrath against sin, so as to deliver others from it.²

Q. 15. What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?

A. For one who is very man,¹ and perfectly righteous; and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God.²

Comments

God is not only loving and merciful, He is also perfectly holy and just. Concerning His holiness, the prophet Habakkuk says: ‘Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity’ (1:13). Similarly, the Apostle John says: ‘God is light, and in him is no darkness at all’ (1 Jn 1:5). This means that God cannot tolerate sin, and no one who remains a sinner in His sight can come into His favourable presence. Moreover, as God is sovereign over the universe, and omniscient, we can expect Him to deal with sins rather than overlook them. The LORD Himself says in His Word: ‘I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me’ (Ex 20:5), and ‘I will not justify the wicked’ (Ex 23:7). Thus we can expect all sins to be punished no matter how minor they may appear to man. In order to satisfy the perfect justice of God a sinner must either be punished for his sin himself, or someone else must be punished on his behalf.

But fallen man can never make satisfaction for his own sin by himself, not only because his sin against God is of infinite heinousness, seeing that God is infinitely pure, but because he sins constantly, and even all his righteous deeds, including any deeds of penance, are filthy rags in the sight of God, so that he increases his debt even as he tries to pay it. This is why the reprobate must remain in eternal damnation away from the favourable presence of God.
The only way that sinners may be reconciled to God is by having a substitute, who has not incurred the wrath of God and who would not incur the wrath of God, pay on his behalf. So in the Old Testament, the people were taught to offer animals as their substitutes. Animals are amoral, and therefore do not sin against God. But ‘it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins’ (Heb 10:4). Animals, being amoral, have no righteousness, and animals are not made in the image of God as man is. The Old Testament sacrifices therefore do not satisfy divine justice. They must point to a greater sacrifice. This sacrifice must share the same nature as man, and yet he cannot be an ordinary man because he must be without sin and yet able to endure the wrath of God for all the sin of the elect against God. This man is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who is fully man, perfectly righteous, and fully God. Not only does He represent man to satisfy divine justice, but as the God-Man dying for men, He demonstrated the forgiveness of God for our sin, since in Him God paid our debts.
Lord’s Day 6

Q. 16. Why must he be very man, and also perfectly righteous?

A. Because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which hath sinned, should likewise make satisfaction for sin;\(^1\) and one, who is himself a sinner, cannot satisfy for others.\(^2\)

Q. 17. Why must He in one person be also very God?

A. That He might, by the power of His Godhead, sustain in His human nature the burden of God’s wrath;\(^1\) and might obtain for, and restore to us, righteousness and life.\(^2\)

Q. 18. Who then is that Mediator, who is in one person both very God, and a real righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ:\(^1\) “who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”\(^2\)

Q. 19. Whence knowest thou this?

A. From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise;\(^1\) and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets,\(^2\) and represented by the sacrifices\(^3\) and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly, has fulfilled it by His only begotten Son.\(^4\)

Comments

Last Lord’s Day, we saw how fallen man is unable to make satisfaction for his own sin, and concluded by anticipating the answers to this week’s questions that the only mediator between God and man, who is able to make satisfaction for our sin, is the Lord Jesus Christ—the eternal Son of God—who took on human nature in order to bear our sin on our behalf. Christ has to be fully man because only one who has the same nature as man can truly represent man. Additionally, He must be perfectly guiltless and righteous because otherwise He will have to pay for His own sin, and so can never satisfy for others. It is for this reason that the Lord Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, with the ‘power of the Highest’ overshadowing His incarnational mother (Lk 1:35), so that Adam’s guilt is not imputed on Him, nor Adam’s corruption inherited by Him.

As Mediator, moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ must be fully God. This is because if it were not so, then His human nature (by which He suffers on our behalf) would not be able to sustain the wrath of God against sin, of which the elect of God throughout the ages are guilty. As the God-Man whose human and divine natures are hypostatically united to each other, Christ was not only able to sustain the infinite wrath of God, but in so doing He restores to us righteousness and life. This is the gospel, the good news of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.
All of Scripture points to this Saviour, often times very directly, such as at Genesis 3:15—’And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.’ This first giving of the Gospel shows us that Christ would be born of a virgin, and would endure death and the wrath of God for the sake of the elect, in order to rescue them from the bondage of sin and Satan and reconcile them to God. Elsewhere in the Scripture this same Gospel was proclaimed and prophesied by the patriarchs and the prophets and also by the entire ceremonial system of the Old Covenant. In regard to the ceremonial system, for example, the tabernacle itself was a type of Christ, and the bloody animal sacrifices all point to the historical reality that Christ would bleed and die as a propitiatory sacrifice for His children.
Lord’s Day 7

Q. 20. Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?
A. No: only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith.  
1Mt 1:21; Isa 53:11;  2Jn 1:12–13; Rom 11:20; Heb 10:39.

Q. 21. What is true faith?
A. True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel, in my heart, that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.  
1Jn 6:69; Jn 17:3; Heb 11:3, 6;  2Eph 3:12;  3Rom 4:16, 20–21; Heb 11:1; Eph 3:12; Rom 1:16;  4I Cor 1:21; Acts 16:14; Mt 16:17; Jn 3:5;  5Rom 10:14, 17; Mt 9:2;  6Rom 5:1;  7Gal 2:20;  8Rom 3:24–26.

Q. 22. What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?
A. All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us.  
1Jn 20:31; Mt 28:19–20.

Q. 23. What are these articles?
A.  
I. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:  
II. And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord:  
III. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary:  
IV. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell:  
V. The third day He rose again from the dead:  
VI. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty:  
VII. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead:  
VIII. I believe in the Holy Ghost:  
IX. I believe an holy catholic church: the communion of saints:  
X. The forgiveness of sins:  
XI. The resurrection of the body:  
XII. And the life everlasting. AMEN.

Comments

Although all men are fallen, not all men will be saved by Christ, but only such as have been elected in Him, who would in due time be united with Him by faith. Saving faith may be understood as having three elements: (1) Notitia: An acknowledgement of what is proposed (Eph 1:7 etc); (2) Assensus: An agreement that what is proposed is true (Jn 1:12 etc); and (3) Fiducia: A wholehearted belief that everything proposed is true which results in heartfelt response of the will (Is 26:3–4 etc). Since the natural man is spiritually blinded and dead in sin, only those whom God purposed (in election and predestination) to be united with Christ will have faith. This faith is a gift of God (Eph 2:8–9). It is not something self-generated. It is God-given, firstly, because God reveals what we are to believe, secondly God convicts us as to the truth of what is revealed, and thirdly, He changes our hearts in the new birth so that we trust in Christ wholeheartedly.
But the question that is commonly asked is what am I to know and believe? The simple answer to this question is: ‘all that God has revealed.’ That is to say, the believer must believe everything whatsoever God has revealed. Today, all that God has revealed is in His written Word. Therefore believers must believe ‘all that God has revealed… in His Word.’ Of course, this does not mean that we must know everything that is taught in the Bible, but it means that no true believer would reject anything taught in the Bible as truth. Conversely, this means that one who has very little knowledge may still be saved. Thus the thief on the cross did not know very much, but he believed everything that the Lord taught him and he was found in Paradise with the Lord that same day. But in general, under normal circumstance, every believer should know and believe some basic doctrines. This is the purpose of one of the earliest creeds known as the Apostle’s Creed (though it was probably not penned by the Apostles). This creed is given in Q. 23 and will be expounded in the following weeks up to Lord’s Day 22, Q. 58.
**Lord’s Day 8**

**Q. 24. How are these articles divided?**

A. Into three parts; the first is of God the Father, and our creation;\(^1\) the second of God the Son, and our redemption;\(^2\) the third of God the Holy Ghost, and our sanctification.\(^3\)

**Q. 25. Since there is but one only divine essence, why speakest thou of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?**

A. Because God hath so revealed Himself in His Word,\(^2\) that these three distinct persons are the one only true and eternal God.

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**Comments**

The Apostles’ Creed, as we noted was a very early creed. Its earliest form was possibly written by the immediate disciples of the Apostles themselves (though the form which we have today came into use only about A.D. 750). During those early days of New Testament Christianity, many of the biblical-theological constructions that we are familiar with today had not yet entered the confessional language of the Church. One such construction is the doctrine of the Tri-unity of God, which, though definitely biblical, was not apprehended to the degree we understand it today until about the 4th century. Most of the propositions, which made up the doctrine, were however already understood by many. For example, it was generally understood that there are three divine Persons involved in our creation, salvation and growth in grace. Thus, the Creed (as presented in Lord’s Day 7), has three parts corresponding to the person and work of the three Persons in the Godhead, namely, God the Father, our Maker (Art. I); God the Son, our Redeemer (Art. II–VII) and God the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier (Art. VIII–XII). This division is naturally not a clean-cut division, seeing that the work of the Persons of the Godhead are not exclusively the work of any one of them. For example, though we speak of Christ our redeemer, God the Father is involved in our redemption in our election, and God the Holy Spirit regenerates us. In fact, if we think about it carefully, we must finally acknowledge that no work of God can be accomplished without the involvement of all three Persons of the Godhead. This is not surprising, seeing that although there are three persons (or subsistence) in the Godhead, there is only one essence (or substance, or being, or existence). This doctrine of the Tri-unity of God is beautifully expressed in our Shorter Catechism: ‘There are three persons in the Godhead,—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory’ (WSC 6).

The Heidelberg Catechism does not have such a succinct and sublime statement of the Trinity, but it acknowledges that this is a doctrine revealed in the Word of God: which is indeed the case. Particularly, the doctrine of the Trinity is based on seven propositions, which may be derived from the Scriptures, viz.:
1. There is only one living and true God (Deut 6:4; Jer 10:10).

2. The Father is God (Isa 63:16; Ps 90:2).

3. The Son is God (Jn 8:58; Jn 18:6; Rom 9:5; 1 Tim 3:16; Col 2:9; 1 Jn 5:20; Acts 20:28).

4. The Holy Spirit is a Person (Jn 14:16–17).

5. The Holy Spirit is God (Heb 9:14; Ps 139:7–8; 1 Cor 2:10–11; 1 Cor 12:11).

6. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct (Gen 1:26; Mt 3:16–17).

7. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one (Mt 28:19; 1 Jn 5:7; 2 Cor 13:14).

These seven propositions are the basis of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. To prove that the Trinity is biblical we need only to prove the verity of each and every one of the propositions. Moreover, in as far as it can be shown that they are biblically provable, it can also show to be heretical false doctrines such as Arianism (Christ is of like-substance to the Father), Sabellian modalism (the three persons of the Godhead are but modes of the one and only person in the Godhead), and tritheism (there are really three gods).
Q. 26. What believest thou when thou sayest, “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (who of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them; 1 who likewise upholds and governs the same by His eternal counsel and providence2) is for the sake of Christ His Son,—my God and my Father; on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt, but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body: 3 and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears turn out to my advantage; 4 for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, 5 and willing, being a faithful Father. 6

Comments

The confession: ‘I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth’ is loaded with meaning, and is beautifully expanded by the Heidelberg Catechism.

First, it expresses our acknowledgement that God the Father is our heavenly Father on account of Christ, which is why the Lord Jesus teaches us to call Him our Father (Mt 6:9), and similarly the Holy Spirit encourages us to call Him our ‘Abba, Father’ (Rom 8:15). Now, the way we address a person (when we do so meaningfully) reflects our attitude towards the person and how we perceive the person to view us. When we address God as our Lord, we are acknowledging that we are His subjects and that He has every right over us. But when we address God as Father, we are acknowledging that we are His children, and that as His children, we love Him, rely on Him and believe that He loves us and constantly has our good in His mind (as a father would his child; cf. Mt 7:9–11). What a tremendous privilege it is that puny and sinful creatures like us can approach God as our loving heavenly Father.

Secondly (but not in order), we confess that God is the Maker of heaven and earth. By this we are acknowledging that He made all things, and He made all things for His own glory. Now, this is a doctrine that has always been confessed since the beginning of the Church. God made all things out of nothing (ex nihilo). Nothing existed by itself, and all of nature in its present form is made by God out of nothing. We are not denying that different species of dogs or cats or horses developed over the centuries through cross breeding and genetic mutation. But we do deny the theory of evolution, whether theistic or otherwise, that teaches that higher life forms evolved from lower life forms. The Bible is clear that God made heaven and earth (Gen 1 and 2). He created the animals after their kind (Gen 1:20–25). He formed Adam from the dust of the ground and Eve from the rib of Adam (Gen 2:7, 22). Man did not take millions of years to become man through a series of chanced evolution or even God-directed evolution. God spoke and everything was made. This doctrine we declare to be truth, and we declare it without apology. Yes, it is by faith we believe, for ‘through faith we

1 Genesis 1 and 2; Ps 33:6; 2 Ps 115:3; Mt 10:29; Heb 1:3; Jn 5:17; 3Jn 1:12, 16; Rom 8:15–16; Gal 4:5–6; Eph 1:5; 1 Jn 3:1; 4Ps 55:22; Mt 6:26; 5 Rom 8:28 and 4:21; 6Rom 10:12; Mt 6:26 and 7:9–11.
understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear’ (Heb 11:3). Unbelieving scientists may ridicule our faith, but do they not also believe in evolution by faith, seeing that evolution is not observable or provable? Whereas creation is not only revealed in the Word of God, but is imprinted in the hearts of men, for Paul says: ‘For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse’ (Rom 1:20). Someone who has not been taught or misled into believing evolution will naturally see that God exists.

Thirdly, we confess that God is almighty. By this we mean that God is all-powerful and sovereign over all things. He not only makes all things, but he brings all things to pass according to His wisdom and good pleasure. It is because God is our loving heavenly Father and is almighty, that we can have the confidence that God hears our prayers, is able and willing to answer our prayers; and that if He chooses not to answer our prayers as we prayed, that He is right and His actions are good for us. Also, because He is almighty, we have the confidence that ‘all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose’ (Rom 8:28). And so the child of God is humbly submitted to God his faithful heavenly Father in all and every circumstances that befall us.
Lord’s Day 10

Q. 27. What dost thou mean by the providence of God?

A. The almighty and everywhere present power of God;¹ whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures;² so that herbs and grass, rain and drought,³ fruitful and barren years,⁴ meat and drink, health and sickness,⁵ riches and poverty,⁶ yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.⁷

Q. 28. What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?

A. That we may be patient in adversity;¹ thankful in prosperity;² and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father,³ that nothing shall separate us from His love;⁴ since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.⁵

Comments

The Westminster Shorter Catechism has an excellent succinct definition of God’s works of providence, namely: ‘God’s works of providence are, His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions’ (WSC 11). This statement appears to focus on the living beings, such as men, angels and animals, although there is no doubt that the framers of the Catechism believe that ‘all things…from the greatest even to the least’ (WCF 5.1) are upheld, directed, disposed of and governed by God. Notice how HC 27 says the same thing, but in very concrete terms pertaining to heaven, earth, creatures, plant growth, weather conditions, health, economic conditions, etc. Notice how all these things are said to be upheld by God’s fatherly hand rather than by chance as commonly understood.

This catechism question therefore teaches us that we ought to be students of providence, to see the display of the power of God everywhere. We must see God’s hand in every natural phenomena, and disaster. We must see the hand of God in every accident and act of man. We must see the hand of the Lord in every opportunity and circumstance in our lives. We must understand and believe that nothing happens by chance or mere coincidence or fate. Why are you reading this article at this time? No, it is not just because of the secondary causes, such as the fact that the worship service has ended and no one is talking to you right now. It is, rather, because God has, in His wisdom, decreed that you should be reading this article at such a time and circumstance and He has brought it to pass by His sovereign power.

Theology must not just remain in our minds. What theology we have learned must govern our lives and cause us to have a different view of the things that happen in the world. We must see that all things are under the sovereign hand of God, who works all things for His own glory and for the good of His Church.
Thus, the child of God who understands and believes in sovereign providence will be patient in adversity, knowing that God is still working out all things according to His wisdom for the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28). He is also thankful in prosperity because he knows that it is God who provides all that he has. Finally, the child of God who understands and believes in the providence of God would be confident that nothing will be able to separate Him from the love of God because Christ shed His blood for his redemption.
The Second Part—of God the Son

Lord’s Day 11

Q. 29. Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is a Saviour?

A. Because He saveth us, and delivereth us from our sins;¹ and likewise, because we ought not to seek, neither can find salvation in any other.²

1 Matthew 1:21; ² Acts 4:12.

Q. 30. Do such then believe in Jesus the only Saviour, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

A. They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Saviour;¹ for one of these two things must be true, that either Jesus is not a complete Saviour; or that they, who by a true faith receive this Saviour, must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation.²


Comments

The name ‘Jesus’ was not chosen by Mary or Joseph, but by the Lord Himself. Shortly after the Lord was conceived in Mary’s womb, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, and said to him:

Thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Mt 1:20–21).

This name ‘Jesus’ (Ἰησοῦς) is really the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew ‘Joshua’ (['vwhɔyÔ], which means ‘Jehovah is salvation.’ Jehovah or Yahweh was the name by which God had chosen to be known to His covenant people (Ex 3:14–15), so the name ‘Joshua’ or ‘Jesus’ speaks of God’s salvation for His own people. This is why the angel did not simply say: ‘for he shall be a saviour,’ but ‘for he shall save his people from their sins.’ The Lord Jesus would save all His people, i.e., all His elect—for whom He died—from their sins.

In that sense, the Lord is the Saviour, and He is not just any saviour, but the one and only Saviour who is able to save us from our sin, i.e., from the wrath of God due to our sin and from our bondage to sin. The Lord Jesus says: ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me’ (Jn 14:6); and Peter confirms: ‘Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12).

These scriptural references make it very clear not only that there are no other saviours nor ways of salvation, but that anyone who receives the Lord by faith has all that is necessary for their salvation. Thus the Apostle John says: ‘He that hath the Son hath life’ (1 Jn 5:12a).
The implication of this doctrine is that unless a person professes Christ to be his only Saviour, and trust not in any other thing to save him, he cannot be saved. Thus no one, no matter how ‘righteously’ he lives, can be saved if he does not believe that Christ suffered and died as a propitiatory and substitutionary sacrifice to save sinners. Thus, one who in addition to trusting Christ also trusts in angels or some departed saints or his own good works to help him or to deliver him from damnation cannot expect salvation. His reliance on any other ways of salvation would indicate his lack of trust in Christ, or that he trusts in a Christ who is not the same as He who is revealed in the Bible as the alone and sufficient Saviour.
Lord’s Day 12

**Q. 31. Why is He called Christ, that is anointed?**

A. Because He is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost,\(^1\) to be our chief Prophet and Teacher,\(^2\) who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; and to be our only High Priest,\(^3\) who by the one sacrifice of His body, has redeemed us, and makes continual intercession with the Father for us;\(^4\) and also to be our eternal King,\(^5\) who governs us by His Word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation, He has purchased for us.\(^6\)

\(^1\) Heb 1:9; \(^2\) Deut 18:18; Acts 3:22; Jn 1:18 and 15:15; Mt 11:27; \(^3\) Ps 110:4; Heb 7:21 and 10:14; \(^4\) Rom 8:34; \(^5\) Ps 2:6; Lk 1:33; \(^6\) Mt 28:18; Jn 10:28.

**Q. 32. But why art thou called a Christian?**

A. Because I am a member of Christ by faith,\(^1\) and thus am partaker of His anointing;\(^2\) that so I may confess His name,\(^3\) and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him;\(^4\) and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life;\(^5\) and afterwards reign with Him eternally, over all creatures.\(^6\)

\(^1\) 1 Cor 6:15; \(^2\) 1 Jn 2:27; Joel 2:28; \(^3\) Mt 10:32; \(^4\) Rom 12:1; \(^5\) Eph 6:11–12; 1 Tim 1:18–19; \(^6\) 2 Tim 2:12.

**Comments**

The term ‘Christ’ (Greek: Cristov~) is not part of the name of the Lord, contrary to popular understanding. It is really the title of the Lord, meaning ‘anointed one.’ The Hebrew for ‘anointed one’ is ‘Messiah’ (j’yvim;). This means that when we talk about the Old Testament saints longing for the Messiah, we are essentially talking about their longing for Christ.

Now, in the Old Testament, there were three classes of people who could be called anointed ones. They were: (1) the prophets, thus Elisha was anointed to be a prophet by Elijah (see 1 Kings 19:16); (2) the priests, thus Aaron and his sons were anointed to the priesthood by Moses (see Exodus 28:41); and (3) the kings, thus Samuel anointed David to be king (see 1 Samuel 16:13). The Lord Jesus Christ was the long-expected Messiah who is anointed—not with oil but with the Holy Spirit—to all these three offices. He is the Prophet *par excellence* (Deut 18:18; Jn 1:1), He is Great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4; Heb 4:14) and He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords (Isa 9:6–7; Rev 19:16). As Prophet He reveals to us, by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation (cf. WSC 24; Heb 1:1; Jn 16:13). As Priest He once offered up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and He continues to make intercession for us at the right hand of the throne of God (cf. WSC 25; Heb 4:14; 7:25; 9:28). As King He subdues us to Himself by His Word commanding and instructing us and His Spirit illumining and working regeneration in us. He also rules and defends us, and restrains and conquers all His and our enemies (WSC 26; 2 Cor 10:5; Mt 11:29; 2 Tim 4:18).

These things also relate to us as Christians. We are called Christians not only because we are the disciples of Christ, but because we are members of Christ by faith and
therefore are partakers of His anointing. The Apostle John refers to this anointing when he says: ‘But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him’ (1 Jn 2:27). But what is this anointing? Well, for all intents and purposes, it is equivalent to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every believer at the point of regeneration and union with Christ by faith. It is therefore through the anointing that believers receive all the benefits of redemption, which Christ procures for us as the Anointed Prophet, Priest and King, such as (accordingly) knowledge and faith, forgiveness and peace of conscience, victory over sin and final glorification.
Q. 33. Why is Christ called the only begotten Son of God, since we are also the children of God?

A. Because Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God;¹ but we are children adopted of God, by grace, for His sake.²

Q. 34. Wherefore callest thou Him our Lord?

A. Because He hath redeemed us, both soul and body, from all our sins, not with gold or silver, but with His precious blood,¹ and hath delivered us from all the power of the devil; and thus hath made us His own property.

Comments

No one but Christ alone is known in the Scriptures as the ‘only begotten Son of God’ (Jn 3:18; cf. Jn 1:18; 3:16; 1 Jn 4:9). This instructive description of the Lord has a twofold significance.

On the one hand, it distinguishes the Lord from believer. The Scripture calls believers ‘children of God’ (Mt 5:9; Lk 20:36; Rom 9:8; etc.). But this is only because we have been adopted by God to be His children on account of our union with Christ, He ‘having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will’ (Eph 1:5), and has given us the ‘Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father’ (Rom 8:15).

On the other hand, the phrase ‘only begotten Son of God’ speaks of the eternal and natural relationship between the Father and the Son, or, in theological jargon, it speaks of the personal properties or the subsistence of the second person of the Trinity, namely, that He is eternally begotten of the Father. The significance of this designation of the Lord may be seen particularly in the words of the Apostle John in John 1:18—’No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.’ Notice how John highlights the fact that ‘the only begotten Son’ has always been with His Father. In other words, He is the eternal Son of God. He did not become the Son of God, but has always been the Son of God, and remains the Son of God. This doctrine of eternal generation agrees well with the words of the Lord when He says: ‘For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself’ (Jn 5:26).

When we consider the difference between the son-ship of Christ with the Father and our own son-ship with the Father, our hearts ought to be filled with wonder at the realisation that there is a vast difference between the two kinds of son-ship, and yet, the Lord tells us: ‘As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you’ (Jn 15:9). No one can possibly imagine the love between the heavenly Father and His only begotten Son because they are of the same essence, and yet the Lord tells us that He loves us with the same love that His Father loves Him!
And not only so, but His love for us is unconditional, has no equal reciprocation from us, and yet is costly. ‘But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,’ says the Apostle Paul (Rom 5:8). Christ laid down His life for us in order to be a propitiation for our sin, i.e., in order to pay our debt of sin owed to God, by which we are estranged from God and are deserving of God’s infinite wrath. Thus Christ is our Redeemer. He shed His blood on the Cross of Calvary as our redemption price. In this way Christ delivers us from the wrath of the Father, and at the same time rescues us from the power of the devil who holds us captive to sin. This being so, we belong to Christ as slaves belong to their master. This is why we call Him Lord. But thanks be to God, He is a master we do not need to serve with servile fear, but with love and gratitude, for He Himself calls us His friends (Jn 15:15) and His brethren (Heb 2:12) on account of our adoption.
Lord’s Day 14

Q. 35. What is the meaning of these words—“He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary”?

A. That God’s eternal Son, who is, and continueth true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted.  

Q. 36. What profit dost thou receive by Christ’s holy conception and nativity?

A. That He is our Mediator; and with His innocence and perfect holiness, covers in the sight of God, my sins, wherein I was conceived and brought forth.

Comments

The Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He has always been God, and He did not cease to be fully God at His incarnation, for ‘in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily’ (Col 2:9). So when the Apostle Paul says that Christ ‘was made in the likeness of men’ (Phil 2:7), he is really referring to Christ taking on human nature so that He is, from hence, fully God and fully man.

Christ must be fully man in order that He may be a true representative of man. But in order that He may save us by paying for the penalty due to our sin, and by representing us in righteousness, Christ must be sinlessly perfect. He must not only be without actual sin, but He must be without original sin, i.e., without guilt on account of Adam’s sin and without a corrupt nature. And not only that but if Christ were to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah (e.g., 2 Sam 7:13–14; Ps 132:11; Isa 9:6–7; 11:1–2), He must also be the true seed of David.

How could so many conditions be fulfilled in one man? With God nothing is impossible! First, in order that Christ be fully man, He had to be conceived in the womb of a woman like all men are. Secondly, in order that He be without original sin, He must be conceived in the womb of a virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35; Isa 7:14). That way, unlike all men descending from Adam by natural generation, the Lord Christ would be without original guilt, seeing that He not be in the loins of Adam when he fell at his first transgression (cf. Heb 7:5, 10). Also, thirdly, by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, and the creation of a perfect human soul to be united with the body formed of the flesh and blood of the virgin, the Lord Christ was preserved from original corruption. Moreover, fourthly, that the prophecies concerning the seed of David be fulfilled, the virgin Mary, who was of the lineage of David (Lk 3:31), and was espoused to Joseph who was of the house of David (Mt 1:20; Lk 1:27), was chosen.

1 Jn 1:1; Col 1:15; Ps 2:7; Rom 9:5; 1 Jn 5:20; 2 Jn 1:14; Gal 4:4; 3 Mt 1:18; Lk 1:35; 4 Ps 132:11; Acts 2:30; Rom 1:3; Phil 2:7; Heb 4:15.

1 Heb 2:16–17; 2 Ps 32:1; 1 Cor 1:30; Rom 8:3–4.
In the Gospel accounts, we are told that when Joseph found out that Mary was with child, he had assumed that she was unfaithful and was ready to put her away (Mt 1:19), but the angel of the Lord appeared unto him and assured him that the child was ‘conceived… of the Holy Ghost’ (Mt 1:20). Joseph therefore took Mary to wife, but knew her not till she had delivered the Lord (Mt 1:24–25). In this way, the Lord was legally the son of David (by adoption), and naturally the son of David by lineage through Mary. So the Lord was a rightful heir to the throne of David.

The knowledge of this amazing arrangement that God has made for our salvation ought to fill our hearts with wonder and gratitude to the Lord for the love and care that He has shown us in providing for our redemption.
Lord’s Day 15

Q. 37. What dost thou understand by the words, “He suffered”?

A. That He, all the time that He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, sustained in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind;¹ that so by His passion, as the only propitiatory sacrifice,² He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the favour of God, righteousness and eternal life.

Q. 38. Why did He suffer under Pontius Pilate, as judge?

A. That He, being innocent, and yet condemned by a temporal judge,¹ might thereby free us from the severe judgment of God to which we were exposed.²

Q. 39. Is there anything more in His being crucified, than if He had died some other death?

A. Yes [there is]; for thereby I am assured, that He took on Him the curse which lay upon me; for the death of the cross was accursed of God.¹

Comments

Whenever we think of the Lord’s suffering, most of us would think of the events leading up to the Cross, as well as His suffering on the Cross. However, we must realise that the Lord’s suffering on our behalf did not only begin after Gethsemane. He was no doubt suffering, afflicted, and ready to die from His youth up (Ps 88:15). This is why the prophet Isaiah tells us that He would be ‘acquainted with grief’ (Isa 53:3). The Lord is fully God, but He took on human nature, was born of a virgin and lived as man, in order to represent men. We need have no doubt that He suffered from birth, for He must have suffered the natural pangs of hunger and thirst, and sorrow, as well as constant vexation in His soul as He beheld evil in the world and experienced the effects of wicked works. For ordinary men, we may not call these suffering, but remember that the Lord was perfectly holy and righteous. He needed not to suffer the consequences of the Fall. Yet He suffered for our sakes that we might be reconciled to God.

The fact that Christ did not suffer for His own sin (He being tempted at all points like as we are, and yet without sin) is highlighted in His trial before Pilate, as Pilate pronounced Him guiltless on numerous occasions. Moreover, in His suffering under Pilate as a judge, we are reminded that we are guilty before the Supreme Judge of the world, but our guilt was borne by one who is without guilt before God and man. ‘For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him’ (2 Cor 5:21), says the Apostle Paul.
The manner in which the Lord died, moreover, fulfilled Old Testament prophecies and types, and also provided a further lesson for us concerning what our guilt deserves. He shed His blood because ‘without shedding of blood is no remission’ (Heb 9:22). His hands and feet were nailed to the Cross to fulfil the words of Psalm 22:16b–17,—’They pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.’ He was, moreover, hung on the Cross in order that He might bear the curse of God which was upon us for our transgression of His Law. The law of Moses declares: ‘he that is hanged is accursed of God’ (Deut 21:23). Thus the Apostle Paul exclaims: ‘Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree’ (Gal 3:13).
Lord’s Day 16

Q. 40. Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself even unto death?

A. Because with respect to the justice and truth of God,\(^1\) satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God.\(^2\)

Q. 41. Why was He also “buried”?

A. Thereby to prove that He was really dead.\(^1\)

Q. 42. Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die?

A. Our death is not a satisfaction for our sin, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life.\(^1\)

Q. 43. What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?

A. That by virtue thereof, our old man is crucified, dead and buried with Him;\(^1\) that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us;\(^2\) but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.\(^3\)

Q. 44. Why is there added, “he descended into hell”?\(^1\)

A. That in my greatest temptations, I may be assured, and wholly comfort myself in this, that my Lord Jesus Christ, by His inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies, in which He was plunged during all His sufferings, but especially on the cross, hath delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell.\(^1\)

Comments

We are continuing with our study on the Humiliation of Christ. We saw last Lord’s Day that Christ’s humiliation begun the minute He was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, but His sufferings intensified as He headed to the cross where He would die for His sheep. He had to die because the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23)—physical and spiritual. In order to pay for the penalty due to our sin, to satisfy the justice of God, and to propitiate God’s holy wrath against us, Christ had to die. If this is so, it may be asked why must the elect still die, seeing that our Substitute has already been punished. The answer is that death for the saints is not punitive. It is a means by which God puts to death completely our corrupt nature, and an entrance to our eternal home.

In the meantime, the death of Christ has purchased many privileges for His saints. Since they are no more under God’s wrath and curse on account of what Christ did, God the Holy Spirit indwells them and works grace within them so that they die unto sin and are more and more renewed in their minds and transformed in their lives.
An additional question is asked concerning the phrase ‘He descended into Hell,’ which is found in the apostolic Creed as it was received in those days and today as well. This phrase, which did not appear in the earliest versions of the Creed, is variously interpreted by Reformed commentators. In the *Westminster Larger Catechism* (Q. 50), it is noted that the phrase refers to Christ’s ‘continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death, till the third day.’ Here, in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, it is taken to refer to the intense suffering of Christ on the cross. Many Presbyterian ministers prefer this view, but as the phrase is not a biblical one, it does not really matter which view is adopted as long as we do not think that Christ *literally* descended into Hell.
Q. 45. What doth the resurrection of Christ profit us?

A. First, by His resurrection He has overcome death, that He might make us partakers of that righteousness which He had purchased for us by His death;\(^1\) secondly, we are also by His power raised up to a new life;\(^2\) and lastly, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection.\(^3\)

**Comments**

The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is so important that the Apostle Paul regards it as a vital Gospel verity, which if not believed would render our faith meaningless. He says: ‘If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins’ (1 Cor 15:17). Amazingly, however, there are many today who claim to be Christians who do not believe this important doctrine. These are the liberals, whom, as Machen rightly observes, have a totally different religion from Christianity. It does not take a lot of intelligence to know that Machen is right, for this is exactly what the Apostle Paul says in the text we just quoted.

But why is the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ so important? The catechical statement we are considering gives us three inter-related reasons, all of which may be proved from the Scripture.

First, we know that the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead indicates the divine acceptance of the sacrifice which He made on behalf of His people (cf. Acts 13:33). This is why the Apostle Paul teaches us that if Christ were not raised, we are yet in our sins; for if Christ were not raised, then His sacrifice on our behalf had not been accepted. Elsewhere, Paul says the same thing positively by teaching us that Christ ‘was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification’ (Rom 4:25).

Secondly, we know from Scripture that there is a close connection between the physical resurrection of Christ and our spiritual resurrection or our regeneration (cf. Jn 5:24). This connection is founded upon our union with Christ, and is the basis of what the Lord said to Martha: ‘I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live’ (Jn 11:25). For this reason, the Apostle Paul teaches us that we were ‘buried with him by baptism unto death’ (Rom 6:4) and ‘risen with Christ’ (Col 3:1), that we may ‘be also in the likeness of his resurrection’ (Rom 6:5). That is to say that just as our baptism seals our union with Christ and signifies our death to self and sin, on account of Christ’s death, so we are made alive on account of Christ’s resurrection. The Apostle Peter similarly teaches us that God ‘hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead’ (1 Pet 1:3). We are, in other words, quickened spiritually by the same power of God by which He raised the Lord from the dead.
Thirdly, the resurrection of Christ is a divine pledge and assurance that all who are united to Christ will also be raised in a blessed resurrection at the last day. Paul speaks about this blessed hope in a number of places. He tells the Corinthians that ‘Christ [is] risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept’ (1 Cor 15:20). And writing to the Romans, he says: ‘But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you’ (Rom 8:11).
Q. 46. How dost thou understand these words, “He ascended into heaven”?

A. That Christ, in sight of His disciples, was taken up from earth into heaven;¹ and that He continues there for our interest,² until He comes again to judge the quick and the dead.

Q. 47. Is not Christ then with us even to the end of the world, as He hath promised?

A. Christ is very man and very God; with respect to His human nature, He is no more on earth;¹ but with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit, He is at no time absent from us.

Q. 48. But if His human nature is not present, wherever His Godhead is, are not then these two natures in Christ separated from one another?

A. Not at all, for since the Godhead is illimitable and omnipresent,¹ it must necessarily follow that the same is beyond the limits of the human nature He assumed,² and yet is nevertheless in this human nature, and remains personally united to it.

Q. 49. Of what advantage to us is Christ’s ascension into heaven?

A. First, that He is our advocate in the presence of His Father in heaven;¹ secondly, that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, as the head, will also take up to Himself, us, His members;² thirdly, that He sends us His Spirit as an earnest,³ by whose power we “seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not things on earth.”⁴

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Comments

One of the most comforting thoughts in Christian theology is the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ did not remain in the grave after He died for His Church. Instead, He arose from the dead and ascended back to Heaven and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. There He sends His Spirit to indwell us as an earnest (deposit or pledge) of our eternal inheritance in heaven (Jn 14:16; 2 Cor 1:22; 2 Cor 5:5). There He intercedes continually for us (Heb 7:25). And not only so, but we have His assurance that He has prepared a place for us in Heaven, and one day He shall bring us unto Himself, that we may have perfect and unhindered fellowship with Him for ever and ever (cf. Jn 14:2; Eph 2:6).

But our Lord is not only in Heaven, He is—as He has promised—with us always, even unto the end of the world (Mt 28:20). But how can He be with us, when He is in Heaven? He is with us not only by His Spirit, by Whom He is reminding us and guiding us of all that He teaches us (Jn 14:26), He is with us in person also. How can this be so? It can be so, as our answer above tells us, because He is fully God and fully Man.
Though His body is in Heaven, He is omnipresent in His divinity. And since there is an inseparable unity (hypostatic union) between His divine nature and His human nature, seeing that He is one person, the fact that His divine nature is present with us means that His human nature is also with us. Or to put it in another way: we are brought into the presence of His human nature by His divine nature.

Now, we must realise that this truth is not just a philosophical speculation. It answers the question: How could the Lord be with us as He promised when He is in Heaven? It is a tremendously comforting thought that He is not only with us in the Spirit, but with us in Person, as it were, holding our hands as we walk our pilgrim journey home.
Lord’s Day 19

Q. 50. Why is it added, “and sitteth at the right hand of God”?  
A. Because Christ is ascended into heaven for this end, that He might appear as head of His church,¹ by whom the Father governs all things.²

Q. 51. What profit is this glory of Christ, our head, unto us?  
A. First, that by His Holy Spirit He pours out heavenly graces upon us His members;¹ and then that by His power He defends and preserves us against all enemies.²

Q. 52. What comfort is it to thee that “Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead”?  
A. That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered Himself for my sake, to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven:¹ who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation,² but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory.³

Comments

Most of us are right-handed, and I believe most people throughout the history of the world were right-handed. Thus, we don’t find anyone described as right-handed in the biblical records, whereas there are special mentions of left-handed persons (Judg 3:15; 20:16). The right hand is, for this reason, almost universally a symbol of power. It is commonly understood that a right hand man of a king is the second most powerful man in the kingdom. This symbolic significance of the right hand is also true in the Scripture. The Lord Jesus Christ is said to be sitting on the right hand of God or the right hand of power (Mk 16:19; 14:62). Of course, God is a spirit, and Christ is sitting on the throne because judgment has been committed to Him (Jn 5:22), so we are not to think of Christ as literally sitting beside the Heavenly Father in Heaven. No, when the Scripture speaks of Christ as being seated at the right hand of God, it refers to Christ’s exaltation to a position of incomparable eminence, power and authority. It is in this position that Christ is the King and Head of the Church. It is in this position that He intercedes for us, defends us and preserves us, and blesses us with all spiritual Heavenly blessings (Eph 1:3).

It is also from this position that the Lord Jesus Christ will return as Sovereign Judge and King of kings (Mk 14:62). On that day, every single person who ever lived in this world will be judged. Believers need not fear to go to that judgement because the Judge Himself is also our advocate (1 Jn 2:1), and He has laid down His life to pay the penalty due to our sin. Thus, all believers will be vindicated of charges brought against them by earthly councils or by Satan the accuser of the brethren. This is why the first New Testament martyr, Stephen, was granted a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). The fact that He is standing is of
great significance, for remember that Christ is the Judge, and we would expect the judge to be sitting down. But Stephen saw that He who is the Judge of all was standing up to defend him as his advocate. By this powerful vision Stephen was comforted with the knowledge that though the Sanhedrin condemned him, he is assured of acquittal and vindication at the Heavenly tribunal.
The Second Part—of God the Holy Ghost

Lord’s Day 20

Q. 53. What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?

A. First, that He is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that He is also given me, to make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits, that He may comfort me and abide with me for ever.

Comments

Reformed dogmatics is classically presented under six loci, viz. Theology (doctrine of God and His creation and providence), Anthropology (doctrine of man in relation to God), Christology (doctrine of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ), Soteriology (doctrine of the application of the work of redemption), Ecclesiology (doctrine of the Church and of the means of grace), and Eschatology (doctrine of the last things). It is interesting to note the omission of Pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit) as a major locus. The reason for this omission is that the person of the Holy Spirit is generally dealt with under the first locus as part of the presentation of the doctrine of the Triunity of God. Moreover, the work of the Holy Spirit is generally covered under the fourth locus, as the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Godhead, who is especially responsible for the application of the redemption purchased by Christ, to the individual believer. This is how the Westminster Standard deals with Pneumatology. However, it is useful for these points to be gathered and reiterated as it is done here in the Heidelberg Catechism.

Here we are told first of all about the Person of the Holy Spirit. He is the same in substance, equal in power and glory with the Father and the Son. Secondly, we are taught that He is sent by the Father and the Son to us, in order to apply the benefits of redemption decreed of the Father and procured by the Son. He does so firstly by working faith in us in our regeneration or effectual calling, thereby enabling us to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Master as He is presented to us in the Gospel (Gal 3:14). Secondly, having indwelt us at our new-birth, He continues to sanctify us, causing us to die more and more unto sin and live more and more unto righteousness as we make diligent use of the means of grace (1 Pet 1:2; 2 Thes 2:13; Rom 8:11; Phil 2:13). Thirdly, the Holy Spirit illumines our hearts that we may understand the Scriptures when we read or hear it (1 Cor 2:14), and then He brings to mind all that we have learned or have been taught (Jn 14:26). Fourthly, He assures us of the Father’s love (Rom 8:15; 5:5), and comforts us in times of trials and afflictions (Acts 9:31). Fifthly, the Holy Spirit abides with us and therefore preserves us in our faith for ever (Jn 14:16; 1 Pet 4:14).

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a much disputed and misunderstood subject. Throughout the history of the Church there have been sects which refuse to acknowledge the personality and divinity of the Spirit. Today, these are mainly found
amongst Liberal Unitarians, Jehovah Witnesses and other cults, all of which, we would not regard as being Christian. Then there are those who see a sharp discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments, who would argue that the Holy Spirit did not indwell believers in the Old Testament, thus effectively teaching that God has two people and two ways of salvation. These are the classical Dispensationalists. Then there are those who argue that the Holy Spirit’s baptism is a second blessing (from regeneration and indwelling), and that those who receive it would break out in tongues and other manifestations. These are the Charismatics and Pentecostals. In this short article, we are unable to address all these errors. But it behoves the believer to look them up and study how we may give an answer to those who teach these false doctrines should we have occasions to be confronted by them.
Q. 54. What believest thou concerning the “holy catholic church” of Christ?

A. That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world,\(^1\) gathers,\(^2\) defends, and preserves to Himself\(^3\) by His Spirit and Word,\(^4\) out of the whole human race,\(^5\) a church chosen to everlasting life,\(^6\) agreeing in true faith; and that I am and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.\(^7\)

Q. 55. What do you understand by “the communion of saints”?

A. First, that all and every one, who believes, being members of Christ, are in common, partakers of Him, and of all His riches and gifts;\(^1\) secondly, that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members.\(^2\)

Q. 56. What believest thou concerning “the forgiveness of sins”?

A. That God, for the sake of Christ’s satisfaction,\(^1\) will no more remember my sins,\(^2\) neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God.\(^3\)

Comments

Some years ago I was at a meeting in which a Reformed minister was giving an introduction to the Creeds and Confessions of the Church. An elder from a certain Presbyterian church happened to be visiting, and when he heard the reference to the ‘holy catholic church’ in the Apostles’ Creed, he was somewhat taken aback and asked why we were studying a Catholic creed! The minister could hardly believe his ears that the question was posed, but it did show how necessary his introduction was.

Well, the fact is that the term ‘catholic’ does not refer to the ‘Roman Catholic Church.’ It simply means ‘universal.’ The ‘holy catholic church’ refers to the Church universal. Now, traditionally Reformed theologians speak about the Visible Church Universal and the Invisible Church Universal. The Visible Church Universal comprises all the baptised members in congregations that may be regarded as true local churches. The Invisible Church Universal comprises all the elect of God throughout the world and throughout the ages, including those not yet born. A person who professes faith is a member of the visible church, although his membership is ratified only by water-baptism. On the other hand, a person who is an elect is a member of the invisible Church, and his membership is ratified by Spirit-baptism. Thus, we may say that the ratified membership of the Church Invisible is defined by the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ rather than by membership in the local church.
By the term ‘holy catholic church,’ the Apostles’ Creed and the Heidelberg Catechism are referring to the Church Invisible. But no member of the Church Invisible, whose membership has been ratified in regeneration, will remain outside the Church Visible for long. Their regeneration will always be followed by conversion and the experience of forgiveness of sin. Then they will inevitably seek membership in a local congregation so that they may not only enjoy the fellowship of other redeemed saints, but have the opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts for the advantage and salvation of other Christians. This privilege of involvement in the lives and testimony of other believers is commonly denoted ‘communion of saints.’
Lord’s Day 22

Q. 57. What comfort doth the “resurrection of the body” afford thee?

A. That not only my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head;¹ but also, that this my body, being raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ.²

1 Lk 23:43; Phil 1:23; 2 1 Cor 15:53; Job 19:25–26.

Q. 58. What comfort takest thou from the article of “life everlasting”?

A. That since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy,¹ after this life, I shall inherit perfect salvation, which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man” to conceive, and that, to praise God therein for ever.²

1 2 Cor 5:2–3, 6; Rom 14:17; 2 1 Cor 2:9.

Comments

The Scripture teaches us that, at the point of death, our souls will immediately enter the presence of Christ our Lord in heaven (Lk 23:43; Phil 1:23). Our bodies, however, being laid in the grave, will remain in the grave, where they will in all probability disintegrate and return to dust. But the Scripture assures us that our bodies will not remain in the dust, for one day, when the Lord returns again to judge the world, our bodies will be reconstituted again and raised from the ground, like unto the glorious resurrected body of Christ, and reunited with our souls. This hope of the resurrection is shared by all Christians throughout the ages, including the Patriarch Job who, when he was undergoing intense suffering, was able to exclaim in faith: ‘And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God’ (Job 19:26).

But it may be asked: Why do we need a resurrection? If we can enjoy God in the spirit, why do we need a body? Well, the simple answer is that the body is part of our existence. We are incomplete without our body. Think about it. You cannot feel as you do now without a body. You cannot smell nor taste without a body. You cannot hear in the same way as you hear now without a body. Think about the physics involved in noise production and you know that without a body you cannot enjoy music as you do now. You cannot see as you see without a physical body. Think about the physics relating to the eyes and you will immediately realise that without the body, we will not have the same perception as we have today. The physical world of colours, smells, taste, noise and textures are adapted by the wisdom of our Creator for our creaturely enjoyments. God has made us with a soul as well as a body, so we must not entertain a false notion that whatever is physical is of no value. I suspect that in eternity we shall enjoy God and His presence both spiritually and physically.

Hand in hand with our hope of the resurrection is our hope of eternal or everlasting life. Of course, while the resurrection is future, our eternal life has already begun both in terms of duration and of quality. It is sad that many para-church groups, in seeking to win converts to Christianity, have emphasised the duration of everlasting life but
neglected the more important aspect of enjoying and glorifying God. So it is emphasised that since your life will never end, you are already enjoying eternal life. This is true as far as it goes, but they neglect to mention everlasting life is meaningless except that it is enjoyed in the presence of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is defining the quality of eternal life when, in His high priestly prayer, He speaks of eternal life as knowing God as the true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (Jn 17:3). Thank God that a true believer will also enjoy a foretaste of eternal life today as we commune with God through the Lord Jesus Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit. But our full enjoyment of life eternal remains yet in the future.
Q. 59. But what doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this?

A. That I am righteous in Christ, before God, and an heir of eternal life.\(^1\)

Q. 60. How art thou righteous before God?

A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ;\(^1\) so that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them,\(^2\) and am still inclined to all evil;\(^3\) notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine,\(^4\) but only of mere grace,\(^5\) grants and imputes to me,\(^6\) the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ;\(^7\) 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;\(^8\) inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.\(^9\)

Q. 61. Why sayest thou, that thou art righteous by faith only?

A. Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith;\(^1\) but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, is my righteousness before God;\(^2\) and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only.\(^3\)

Comments

For the last 15 Lord’s Days, we have been studying the doctrinal tenets in the Apostles’ Creeds. If we take a step back and look at the Apostles’ Creed (Lord’s Day 7) and all that we have covered, you will realise that most of the things that have been said have been objective theological truths. Though knowing these truths does not make a person a Christian, it is essential for a Christian to know and believe these truths. These truths therefore should be given great priority in the instruction of Christian homes. It is sad that many Christian parents (and Sunday Schools) today consider character-building subjects as more important than these doctrinal truths, and so their instructions are skewed accordingly, for after all, it is hard to see any fruit as arising from ‘those cold theological facts.’ Unwittingly, however, these parents (and Sunday Schools) are nurturing a new generation of liberals.

Our fathers in the faith knew better. These theological verities are the foundations of the Christian life. If a young believer grasps these truths and believes them with his whole heart, the rest of his Christian life will almost invariably be ordered aright. But why is this so? It is so because the whole problem with man is sin and depravity, and unless that is dealt with, no meaningful progress can be made in the Christian life. Moreover, the Scripture teaches us that sin can only be dealt with by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can a sinner appear as righteous in the sight of God, and therefore enjoy eternal life. Faith does not
make us worthy of salvation (Q. 61). In fact, our faith will always be imperfect because of indwelling sin (Q. 60). But faith unites us to Christ.

But what does it mean to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, faith is essentially knowing, agreeing and trusting. Therefore true faith in Christ can mean none other than knowing and agreeing with all that is revealed in the Scripture concerning Christ and His work, and therefore trusting Christ to deliver us from sin and from the wrath to come. Now, all the basic theological propositions in this regard, which we ought to know, are summarised in the Creed. Caspar Olevianus, who is believed by many to have contributed to the framing of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, puts it well:

Through all the Articles of Faith it has been demonstrated that everything necessary for our eternal salvation is in Jesus Christ and that He was not a partial but a complete Jesus, or Saviour, who fully accomplished everything necessary for our salvation. Therefore, whoever is grafted into Christ through a true faith has and possesses everything within that is necessary for salvation (*A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism* [Paternoster Press, 1995], 108).
**Lord’s Day 24**

**Q. 62. But why cannot our good works be the whole, or part of our righteousness before God?**

A. Because, that the righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.

1 Gal 3:10; Deut 27:26; 2 Isa 64:6.

**Q. 63. What! do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?**

A. This reward is not of merit, but of grace.

1 Lk 17:10.

**Q. 64. But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?**

A. By no means: for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

1 Mt 7:17–18; Jn 15:5.

**Comments**

We have seen that our justification or acceptance before God for eternal life is entirely by grace through faith—it is neither through good works nor keeping of God’s Law. The Apostle proves this doctrine in his letter to the Romans by showing that all men are sinners: there are none righteous and all have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:10–23). If that is the case, then all attempts at doing good works will fail before the absolute holiness of God, seeing that so long as the heart has any remnant of corruption, our motives will be corrupted and therefore our deeds will be defiled. This Paul contends definitely: ‘Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law’ (Rom 3:28).

But this doctrine does raise a few legitimate questions. In the first place, does not the Scripture teach that God will reward His saints (Mt 5:12; 16:27; Mk 9:41; 1 Cor 3:8, 14; Rev 22:12; etc.)? If that is the case, then how could our good works be not good enough to be meritorious? Does not God reward us because we deserve reward for our good works? Well, there is no doubt that God will reward His saints, but we must not forget that God is not a debtor to us to reward us because even our good works fall short of His perfection. Any reward that God gives to us, then, must be reckoned not as being meritorious or deserving of God’s reward, but as being of grace—Of grace because of our union with Christ and because the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us. The *WCF* has perhaps the most excellent confessional statement on this doctrine ever penned:

16.5 We cannot, by our best works, merit, pardon of sin, or eternal life, at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come, and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom by them we can neither profit nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins; but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable
servants;… and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God’s judgment.

16.6 Yet notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in Him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unproveable in God’s sight; but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.

But in the second place, if good works cannot merit God’s reward, then would that not make Christians lazy and careless? Certainly not, for firstly, all true believers have their hearts regenerated so that they desire to do good; and secondly, should not the thought that, even though our good works are imperfect we may have a reward on account of Christ, spur us to do good even more than if our good works were meritorious, in which case our work must be perfect in order to receive anything!
The Second Part—of the Sacraments

Lord’s Day 25

Q. 65. Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?

A. From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.¹

Q. 66. What are the sacraments?

A. The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof, He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, viz., that He grants us freely the remission of sin, and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross.¹

Q. 67. Are both Word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, as the only ground of our salvation?

A. Yes, indeed: for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross.¹

Q. 68. How many sacraments has Christ instituted in the new covenant, or testament?

A. Two: namely, holy baptism, and the holy supper.¹

Comments

We have seen that our salvation is by grace through faith alone. But the question is: Where does faith come from? If we were dead in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, how can we have faith? The Scripture teaches us that faith comes in two ways. It comes firstly by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit: ‘By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God’ (Eph 2:8; cf. Jn 3:3; 1 Cor 2:14). Secondly, it comes by the preaching of the Gospel: ‘How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?’ (Rom 10:14). An unbeliever under the ministry of the Gospel may be likened to a blind man sitting in darkness with a Bible in his hand. In order for him to benefit from the Gospel, he needs both to have his sight restored through regeneration, and light through the preaching of the Word. Or, to put it in another way, he needs the outward call through preaching and the inward call through the new birth. Sadly, many professing believers today are ready to dispense with preaching and would rather have entertainment during worship.

What about the sacraments? If there are those who question the necessity of preaching, there are even more who question the necessity of the sacraments. In fact, even those, who faithfully attend to the sacraments, would wonder what the sacraments are for.
When they listen to a good sermon their hearts are often warmed and they feel challenged, but when it comes to the sacraments, they feel nothing. So it appears to such that the sacraments are superfluous. But are they? The Catechism teaches us that the sacraments are signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace, by which God ‘the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel.’ A fuller discussion on the Sacrament may be found in our Confession of Faith. But here, we are taught that God ‘assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ.’ We are, in other words, by the tangible means of the sacraments, given assurance that we are indeed recipients of the benefits of redemption purchased by Christ. When a father embraces his son, he assures him of his love, and conveys his love. His love for the son is not dependent on the embrace, but it is both a tangible expression as well as a symbol of the bond between them.
The Second Part—of Holy Baptism

Lord’s Day 26

Q. 69. How art thou admonished and assured by holy baptism, that the one sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is of real advantage to thee?

A. Thus: That Christ appointed this external washing with water, adding thereto this promise, that I am as certainly washed by His blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water, by which the filthiness of the body is commonly washed away.

Q. 70. What is it to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?

A. It is to receive of God the remission of sins, freely, for the sake of Christ’s blood, which He shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross; and also to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin, and lead holy and unblamable lives.

Q. 71. Where has Christ promised us, that He will as certainly wash us by His blood and Spirit, as we are washed with the water of baptism?

A. In the institution of baptism, which is thus expressed: “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” and “he that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.” This promise is also repeated, where the Scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration, and the washing away of sins.

Comments

Many years ago, when kneeling before the congregation awaiting to receive baptism, I thought that I would feel a tingling sensation down my spine or feel my heart strangely warm when the water is poured on my head. However, apart from feeling the coldness of the water running down my face and neck, I felt nothing. Sometime later I began to wonder if baptism is just an empty, symbolic membership ritual that brings remembrance and provokes mental reaction akin to the initiation rites that boy scouts go through before they are allowed to wear the scarf. Does baptism have only mental significance?

The way in which Q. 69 is worded in the version of the Heidelberg Catechism we are using in this study series gives us the impression that baptism serves only to excite the mind concerning certain truths. This, however, does not give the whole truth concerning the Reformed doctrine of baptism. Another version of Q. 69 reads: ‘How is it signified and sealed unto you in holy baptism that you have part in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross?’ (see G.I. Williamson, The Heidelberg Catechism: A
Though sounding more ambiguous, this version makes it clearer that baptism is more than symbolic. It not only signifies, but seals; or as our Confession has it: ‘by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost’ (*WCF* 28.6). This conferment is not tied to the moment of time when baptism is administered, but it does speak of a close connection (under ordinary circumstance) between the act (such as pouring) and symbol (water) and the reality symbolised.

The outward experience of being (symbolically) washed with water is tied to the inward spiritual reality of being washed by the blood of Christ and the Spirit of Christ. This spiritual washing is known as regeneration (Tit 3:5). In other words, baptism is a visible means and representation of Christ’s invisible work of regeneration in our heart. A person being baptised ought to be, by the sign, excited to remember what Christ did for him, and also be assured that Christ will regenerate his heart if He has not already done so. Baptism does not point to faith but to regeneration. This is why infants may be baptised too.
Lord’s Day 27

Q. 72. Is then the external baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?

A. Not at all: for the blood of Jesus Christ only, and the Holy Ghost cleanse us from all sin.\(^1\)

Q. 73. Why then doth the Holy Ghost call baptism “the washing of regeneration,” and “the washing away of sins”?

A. God speaks thus not without great cause, to-wit, not only thereby to teach us, that as the filth of the body is purged away by water, so our sins are removed by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ;\(^1\) but especially that by this divine pledge and sign He may assure us, that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really, as we are externally washed with water.\(^2\)

Q. 74. Are infants also to be baptised?

A. Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant\(^1\) and church\(^2\) of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ,\(^3\) and the Holy Ghost,\(^4\) the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church; and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers\(^5\) as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision,\(^6\) instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant.\(^7\)

Comments

In our last study we saw that there is close connection (a sacramental union) between water baptism and the inward spiritual reality of regeneration that is pointed to. This doctrine is not a Roman invention as some claim, but really comes from the fact that the Scripture speaks of the sign and the reality in the closest connection. For example, when Ananias met Paul after his Damascus Road conversion experience, he said unto him: ‘Arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord’ (Acts 22:16). Paul himself would subsequently refer to regeneration as ‘the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost’ (Tit 3:5), and it appears that when he speaks of baptism, he has in mind both the sign and the reality (see 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:27 for examples).

This leads us to believe with the Reformers that ordinarily every Christian must be baptised, and that outside the visible church there is no ordinary means of salvation. Although God can work without and above the means in our salvation, He has ordained the means of grace and, ordinarily, His Holy Spirit communicates grace through the means. That is to say, baptism, as a means of grace, is efficacious only when the Holy Spirit joins the outward sign with the inward grace. In other words, we must not swing to the cultic or Romish position and imagine that it is the act of

\(^1\) Mt 3:11; 1 Pet 3:21; 1 Jn 1:7; 1 Cor 6:11.
\(^2\) Rev 1:5; 1 Cor 6:11; 3 Mk 16:16; Gal 3:27.
baptism that saves us, or that baptism regenerates us. If it is baptism that saves, then why did Simon Magus and Judas Iscariot remain unconverted despite being baptised? Also, what would happen to elect infants dying in infancy before being baptised?

When baptism is received by faith, the child of God is assured that God has really granted inward grace. What about infants of believing parents? We baptise infants because in the Old Testament, the infants of the covenant people of God were circumcised to mark them as being recipients of God’s covenant too (Gen 17:7). In the New Testament, we are God’s covenant people, and the Apostle Peter teaches us: ‘For the promise is unto you, and to your children…’ (Acts 2:39). Therefore as we mark out adult believers from the world with baptism, so we also mark out our children from unbelieving children with baptism, believing that God will make good His promise to save them.
The Second Part—of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ

Lord’s Day 28

Q. 75. How art thou admonished and assured in the Lord’s Supper, that thou art a partaker of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross, and of all His benefits?

A. Thus: That Christ has commanded me and all believers, to eat of this broken bread, and to drink of this cup, in remembrance of Him, adding these promises: first, that His body was offered and broken on the cross for me, and His blood shed for me, as certainly as I see with my eyes, the bread of the Lord broken for me, and the cup communicated to me; and further, that He feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, with His crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as I receive from the hands of the minister, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ.¹

Q. 76. What is it then to eat the crucified body, and drink the shed blood of Christ?

A. It is not only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the pardon of sin, and life eternal;¹ but also, besides that, to become more and more united to His sacred body, by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us;² so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth,³ are notwithstanding “Flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone”;⁴ and we live, and are governed forever by one spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul.⁵

Q. 77. Where has Christ promised that He will as certainly feed and nourish believers with His body and blood, as they eat of this broken bread, and drink of this cup?

A. In the institution of the supper, which is thus expressed:¹ “The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said: eat, this is my body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying: this cup is the new testament in my blood;² this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.³ For, as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come.” This promise is repeated by the holy Apostle Paul, where he says: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body; because we are all partakers of that one bread.”⁴

² Ex 24:8; 1 Cor 11:26; 4 Eph 5:29–32; 1 Cor 6:15, 17, 19; 1 Jn 3:24; 3 Jn 6:56–58; Eph 4:15–16.
⁴ 1 Cor 11:23; Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19; 2 Ex 24:8; Heb 9:20; 3 Ex 13:9; 1 Cor 11:26; 4 1 Cor 10:16–17.
Comments

It is interesting to note that the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper is treated more extensively than any other doctrine in the Heidelberg Catechism. The reason for this apparently disproportionate emphasis is in the fact that during the time of the Reformation, the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper was so greatly distorted under the papacy that when the Protestants seceded, they had difficulty defining what is right. Rome believes that the bread and wine become the actual flesh and blood of Christ after they are consecrated. Zwingli swung to the other end and claimed that Christ is not really present in any special way at the Supper. Luther reacted against what he perceived to be extremism and declared Zwingli to be having a different spirit. Calvin, on the other hand, struck a middle ground, teaching that Christ is really present, though not corporeally in the elements, and that when we partake of the elements, we are nourished spiritually, whereas one who partakes unworthily partakes poisons to his own soul. The Heidelberg Catechism, quite obviously, is based on Calvin’s viewpoint.
**Lord’s Day 29**

**Q. 78. Do then the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ?**

A. Not at all: but as the water in baptism is not changed into the blood of Christ, neither is the washing away of sin itself, being only the sign and confirmation thereof appointed of God;¹ so the bread in the Lord’s Supper is not changed into the very body of Christ;² though agreeably to the nature and properties of sacraments, it is called the body of Christ Jesus.³

**Q. 79. Why then doth Christ call the bread His body, and the cup His blood, or the new covenant in His blood; and Paul the “communion of the body and blood of Christ”?**

A. Christ speaks thus, not without great reason, namely, not only thereby to teach us, that as bread and wine support this temporal life, so His crucified body and shed blood are the true meat and drink, whereby our souls are fed to eternal life;¹ but more especially by these visible signs and pledges to assure us, that we are as really partakers of His true body and blood (by the operation of the Holy Ghost) as we receive by the mouths of our bodies these holy signs in remembrance of Him;² and that all His sufferings and obedience are as certainly ours, as if we had in our own persons suffered and made satisfaction for our sins to God.³

**Comments**

In the same night wherein the Lord Jesus was betrayed, He instituted the Lord’s Supper by taking bread, breaking it and giving it to His disciples, saying: ‘Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me’ (1 Cor 11:24; cf. Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22). And then He took the cup and said: ‘this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’ (Mt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:25). Most of us reading these words of the Lord, would no doubt know intuitively that the Lord was speaking in a figure. He could not mean that the bread actually becomes His flesh and the wine actually becomes His blood. Yet, this is actually what Roman Catholicism teaches in her repugnant doctrine known as transubstantiation. And this is the reason why every Protestant creed arising from the Reformation times makes mention that the bread and wine do not become the actual body and blood of Christ.

To be fair to Rome, however, we must admit that certain somewhat enigmatic statements in Scripture, could have led her theologians to believe against reason that transubstantiation is biblical. Did not the Lord say: ‘For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him’ (Jn 6:55–56)? And did not the Apostle Paul ask: ‘The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread

¹ 1 Cor 10:1–4; 1 Pet 3:21; Jn 6:35, 62–63; ² 1 Cor 10:16, &c., and 11:20, &c.; ³ Gen 17:10–11, 14; Ex 12:26–27, 43, 48; Acts 7:8; Mt 26:26; Mk 14:24.

² 1 Jn 6:51, 55–56; ² 1 Cor 10:16–17 and 11:26–28; Eph 5:30; ³ Rom 5:9, 18–19 and 8:4.
which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?’ (1 Cor 10:16)? How should we understand these statements?

Q. 79 teaches us that we understand them in terms of the sacramental union between the elements and the spiritual realities that they represent. That is to say, there is such a close connection between the elements and their spiritual reality that when we, by faith, partake of the bread and wine physically, we partake of the body and blood of Christ spiritually. As the bread and wine nourish us physically, so the crucified body and shed blood of Christ nourish us spiritually when we partake of the bread and wine by faith. But the bread and wine are not the flesh and blood of Christ. Eating the bread and wine without discerning and believing what they represent is not only without value, but spiritually hazardous (1 Cor 11:29). Doing so would in some ways be like eating a handbill advertising some delicious pizza! The purpose of the handbill is to make you salivate and head for a pizzeria; it serves no more than that. The elements of the Lord’s Supper are intended also to point us to Christ, to hunger and thirst after Him, but there is also a sacramental union between the elements and the spiritual reality so that if we partake by faith, we have the assurance that Christ will grant us the spiritual benefits pointed to by the elements, namely union with Him.
Q. 80. What difference is there between the Lord’s Supper and the popish mass?

A. The Lord’s Supper testifies to us, that we have a full pardon of all sin by the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which He Himself has once accomplished on the cross;¹ and, that we by the Holy Ghost are ingrafted into Christ,² who, according to His human nature is now not on earth, but in heaven, at the right hand of God His Father,³ and will there be worshipped by us:⁴—but the mass teaches, that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered for them by the priests; and further, that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshipped in them; so that the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry.⁵

Q. 81. For whom is the Lord’s Supper instituted?

A. For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ;¹ and that their remaining infirmities are covered by His passion and death;² and who also earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened, and their lives more holy;³ but hypocrites, and such as turn not to God with sincere hearts, eat and drink judgment to themselves.⁴

Q. 82. Are they also to be admitted to this supper, who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly?

A. No; for by this, the covenant of God would be profaned, and His wrath kindled against the whole congregation;¹ therefore it is the duty of the Christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and His Apostles, to exclude such persons, by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, till they show amendment of life.²

Comments

The popish mass is one of the most obnoxious inventions of Romanism. While we can allow that transubstantiation, though superstitious and repugnant to reason, can be obtusely argued from the Scripture, the mass (which slipped into the church by way of transubstantiation) is pure pagan idolatry. Wilhelmus à Brakel describes it this way:

This they call the mass, in which the celebrant (whom they call the priest) stands before a table (which they call an altar) decorated with silver, gold, and other physical ostentations, and with images, crosses, and burning candles (even during the middle of the day). He furthermore performs many ridiculous and ludicrous ceremonies such as the removal of a book from one location to the other, the making of knee-bends, the repeated overturning of stones, the ringing
of bells, and a muttering behind his garment which he has lifted up from behind him. Last of all, he makes a Christ, that is, a God, out of his wafer, which he then lifts above his head and shows to those who are present for the purpose of worship. This they do while bending their knees and smiting upon their breasts with great reverence. After the bread-god has been worshipped, he breaks him in pieces with a feigned trembling of his limbs—as if he were terrified. He then consumes him, upon which he empties the cup with one draught, having made its wine into the blood of his God. This then is a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, be it for the living or for the souls in purgatory, who are strengthened by it as a hungry person is strengthened who dreams that he eats. Having concluded this, he declares, ‘Ita missa est,’ that is, this is in return for your money (Wilhelmus à Brakel, The Christian’s Reasonable Service, 2.535–536).

Need we even add that ‘Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many’ (Heb 9:28; cf. 7:27).

Q/A. 81–82 have to do with the doctrine and practice of restricting the Table. Due to rampant individualism, most churches today practise ‘open communion,’ and some even argue that the church has no right to exclude anyone from the Lord’s Table. They say that Paul only requires personal self-examination. But they who argue this way fail to realise that the Lord’s Supper is a corporate rather than individual exercise, for the Apostle Paul says: ‘The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread’ (1 Cor 10:16–17). And, therefore, when members of the congregation partake of the Lord’s Supper unworthily, we can expect the chastisement of the Lord (1 Cor 11:30–31) to fall upon the whole congregation. This, plus the fact that the standard of morality even amongst Christians today is widely varying, demands that the elders of the church exclude from the Lord’s Supper, such as are under church discipline (Mt 18:17–18), or are visitors who are unknown to the congregation.
**Q. 83. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?**

**A.** The preaching of the holy gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers.

**Q. 84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?**

**A.** Thus: when according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ’s merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God, and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted: according to which testimony of the gospel, God will judge them, both in this, and in the life to come.

**Q. 85. How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by Christian discipline?**

**A.** Thus: when according to the command of Christ, those, who under the name of Christians, maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent therewith, and will not, after having been often brotherly admonished, renounce their errors and wicked course of life, are complained of to the church; or to those, who are thereunto appointed by the church; and if they despise their admonition, are by them forbidden the use of the sacraments; whereby they are excluded from the Christian church, and by God Himself from the kingdom of Christ; and when they promise and show real amendment, are again received as members of Christ and His Church.

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**Comments**

Romanism until recently taught that there is no salvation outside the Romish church (now the Pope has declared that all religions lead to the same God!). To buttress their doctrine, Romanism teaches that the keys of the kingdom were committed to Peter and then, by apostolic succession, to the Popes and priests so that they had the power in their persons to determine who should be admitted into Heaven and who should be excluded. They base their assertion on Matthew 16:19, where the Lord said unto Peter: ‘And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ The Romish doctrine, however, cannot be sustained when Scripture is compared with Scripture, because what the Lord committed to Peter, He also committed to all the other disciples in John 20:21–23 where the Lord sent out His
disciples to preach the Gospel with the words: ‘Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained’ (Jn 20:23). The key of the kingdom, or the office of binding or loosing, is that of preaching. Calvin explains:

What is the sum total of the gospel except that we all, being slaves of sin and death, are released and freed through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom 3:24)? And that they who do not receive or acknowledge Christ as their liberator and redeemer are condemned and sentenced to eternal chains (cf. Jude 6)? (ICR 4.11.1).

In the same way, the office of loosing and binding is also elaborated by the Lord in Matthew 18:15–18 in the context of church discipline or the power of rulers of the church to excommunicate someone from the fellowship. Here the Lord tells the disciples: ‘Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’ (Mt 18:18). Does this mean that ministers have the power to admit or refuse admittance to Heaven to anyone? Certainly not! For this will be reading into the text what is not there. All that the Lord says with regard to excommunication is: ‘Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican’ (Mt 18:17); in other words: ‘declare or regard him to be an unbeliever.’ Calvin is again incisive:

The church binds him whom it excommunicates—not that it casts him into everlasting ruin and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repents. It looses him whom it receives into communion, for it makes him a sharer of the unity which it has in Christ Jesus. Therefore that no one may stubbornly despise the judgement of the church, or think it immaterial that he has been condemned by the vote of believers, the Lord testifies that such judgement by believers is nothing but the proclamation of his own sentence, and that whatever they have done on earth is ratified in heaven (ICR 4.11.2).
The Third Part—of Thankfulness

Lord’s Day 32

Q. 86. Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merits 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 conversation, others may be gained to Christ.

1 1 Cor 6:19–20; Rom 6:13 and 12:1–2; 1 Pet 2:5, 9–10; 2 Mt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:12; 3 2 Pet 1:10; Gal 5:6, 24; 4 1 Pet 3:1–2; Mt 5:16; Rom 14:19.

Q. 87. Cannot they then 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 unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

1 1 Cor 6:9–10; Eph 5:5–6; 1 Jn 3:14–15; Gal 5:21.

Comments

Men are creatures of extreme! As Rome errs in the way of legalism by making good works meritorious, so there are others who err by way of antinomianism by teaching that repentance and good works are not essential to salvation.

The Reformed view presented in this Q/A is the correct biblical balance: Our Salvation is by grace through faith alone; but this faith, which is not meritorious, is not alone—it manifests itself in good works. We may illustrate the three positions thus:

Rome: Faith + Works → Justification

Antinomian: Faith → Justification – Works


The Scripture speaks of the necessity of good works as a fruit of true saving faith in numerous places. For example, James says: ‘faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone’ (Jas 2:17). The fact is that anyone who claims to have faith but does not evidence any change in his life, and does not produce good works or fruit, cannot be telling the truth. For as the Lord says: ‘Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit’ (Mt 7:17). Good fruit, and therefore good works is one of the means by which a believer may be assured of the genuineness of his faith. Good works, moreover, is a means by which the saints manifest their gratitude to God, and also an instrument to gain sinners to Christ.

The importance of good works figures in numerous of the Lord’s parables. In the parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14–30), for example, we find the two-talent man and
the five-talent man being rewarded by their master for bearing fruit with the talents that He has placed in their charge. He said to them both: ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord’ (Mt 25:21). There is no doubt that the Lord is speaking about rewards in Heaven or at the last day. He says elsewhere: ‘For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works’ (Mt 16:27). Although every cup in Heaven will be full–brim full—yet not every cup will have the same capacity. On the other hand, we find the one-talent man producing nothing and being cast out into ‘outer darkness: [where] there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Mt 25:30). This cannot be but referring to Hell. The one-talent man proves his unregeneracy by his fruitlessness.
**Lord’s Day 33**

**Q. 88. Of how many parts doth the true conversion of man consist?**

A. Of two parts; of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man.¹

**Q. 89. What is the mortification of the old man?**

A. It is a sincere sorrow of heart, that we have provoked God by our sins; and more and more to hate and flee from them.¹

**Q. 90. What is the quickening of the new man?**

A. It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ,¹ and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.²

**Q. 91. But what are good works?**

A. Only those which proceed from a true faith,¹ are performed according to the law of God,² and to His glory;³ and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men.⁴

**Comments**

Conversion is customarily spoken of as having two parts: repentance and faith. Repentance is a turning away from sin, faith is a turning away to God. But faith and repentance are really volitional responses due to changes in our inner man, which are wrought by the Holy Spirit who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). These inward changes may best be described as in Q/A 88, as having two parts: mortification of the old man and quickening of the new man.

Now, we must not think that the regenerate person has two natures that are independently warring against one another (as some imagine passages, such as Romans 7:23, are teaching). No, the Apostle Paul teaches us that ‘our old man is crucified with [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin’ (Rom 6:6). And he says: ‘Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new’ (2 Cor 5:17). These verses clearly teach us that regeneration involves a renovation of our nature rather than an implantation of a new nature. This new nature is not completely void of corruption, but daily, by the power of the Holy Spirit, our old man or old inclination to sin is put to death (mortified), and our new man, or new desires after Christ are exercised. So more and more, we hate sin and are grieved when we know God is displeased with our deeds, words or thoughts. At the same time, more and more we deepen in our love for God and His Word, and more and more we desire to please God and to conform to the image of Christ. This is the process of sanctification.

The work of sanctification, moreover, manifests itself in repentance, faith and good works. Good works are not simply what appear to be good in the sight of man. In the
sight of God, no unregenerate persons can ever do any good work, for all his righteousness would be tainted with sin and are as filthy rags before God (Isa 64:6). A regenerate person can have a true desire to do good works or, in other words, a true desire to glorify God by what he does. And although his actions can never be perfectly pure in this life (i.e., his motivation will have a mixture of godly desires and selfish designs, however minute the traces of it), his deeds are by grace acceptable to God on account of the righteousness of Christ imputed to him, if they are done by faith.
Q. 92. What is the law of God?

A. God spake all these words, Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5, saying: I am the LORD thy God, which hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

I. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

II. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

III. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

IV. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

V. Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

VI. Thou shalt not kill.

VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

VIII. Thou shalt not steal.

IX. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.

Q. 93. How are these commandments divided?

A. Into two tables;\(^1\) the first of which teaches us how we must behave towards God; the second, what duties we owe to our neighbour.\(^2\)

Q. 94. What doth God enjoin in the first commandment?

A. That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry,\(^1\) sorcery,\(^2\) soothsaying, superstition, invocation of saints, or any other creatures;\(^3\) and learn rightly to know the only true God;\(^4\) trust in Him alone,\(^5\) with humility and patience\(^6\) submit to Him;\(^7\) expect all good things from Him only;\(^8\) love,\(^9\) fear,\(^10\) and glorify\(^11\) Him with my whole heart; so that I renounce and forsake all creatures,\(^12\) rather than commit even the least thing contrary to His will.\(^13\)

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**Q. 95. What is idolatry?**

A. Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God, who has manifested Himself in His Word, to contrive, or have any other object, in which men place their trust.\(^1\)

\(^1\) 2 Chr 16:12; Phil 3:18–19; Gal 4:8; Eph 2:12.

**Comments**

The Ten Commandments summarises the Moral Law of God. It is known as the ‘words of the covenant’ (Ex 34:28) and is given very special emphasis by God Himself, when compared to His other commands. All the other laws of God were given by God’s inspiration to Moses and the prophets, but the Ten Commandments alone were spoken audibly by God in the hearing of the people (Ex 20:1, 19; Deut 5:4). All the other laws of God were inscribed using the pens of men, but the Ten Commandments were inscribed with the finger of God on tables of stone—twice (Ex 31:18; 34:1, 28). And again, the Ten Commandments alone, of all the laws of God, were placed in the Ark of the Covenant by God (Heb 9:4). Moreover, it is very clear that the breaking of these commandments was considered by God to be much more heinous than failure to worship Him with burnt offerings and sacrifices (cf. Jer 7:22–23; Jer 11:2–4; Ex 19:5–6; 1 Sam 15:22).

It is clear that the Ten Commandments can be divided into two parts, with the first four commandments dealing with our duty to love God with our whole being, and the second six commandments dealing with our duty to love our neighbour as ourselves. While the second table is quoted in the New Testament (e.g., Mat 19:18–19; Rom 13:9), the commandments in the first table are not directly quoted anywhere in the New Testament. The most likely reason for this is that the first table, which deals with our duty to love God, is so sacred and fundamental that it is sacrilegious for the Jews and early believers not to know them or strive to obey them.

Q/A 94–95 deal with the First Commandment. It is interesting to note that most people today will think of idolatry being forbidden in the Second Commandment rather than the First, but I believe the Reformed creeds are correct: Idolatry has to do with the worship of or the giving of honour to other gods, whether they are cast in iron or wood or otherwise. Therefore idolatry is the breaking of the First Commandment. The Second Commandment, on the other hand, has to do with the worship of Jehovah with the use of images.

Of course, the First Commandment is also broken when we give the honour and priority due to God to anything, even if we may not consider them to be gods. Thus, if my life revolves around my career, then my career has become my idol. In the same way, if I do not believe in the existence of God, but believe only in myself, then I have become my idol. I am then guilty of I-dolatry.
Lord’s Day 35

Q. 96. What doth God require in the second commandment?

A. That we in no wise represent God by images,1 nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word.2

Q. 97. Are images then not at all to be made?

A. God neither can, nor may be represented by any means:1 but as to creatures; though they may be represented, yet God forbids to make, or have any resemblance of them, either in order to worship them or to serve God by them.2

Q. 98. But may not images be tolerated in the churches, as books to the laity?

A. No: for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have His people taught, not by dumb images,1 but by the lively preaching of His Word.2

Comments

Most of us today take it for granted that Exodus 20:3–17 should be divided into the Ten Commandments as we understand them today, namely that the Second Commandment begins with verse 4,—’Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image…,’—and the Tenth Commandment begins with verse 17,—’Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house….’ Few realise that Roman Catholicism divides the commandments differently. For them, the Second Commandment begins with verse 7,—’Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain…’; while their Ninth Commandment is ‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house’ (v. 17a), and their Tenth Commandment begins with the second part of verse 17,—’Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife….’ It is easy to see how such a division would make the commandments easier on the conscience of a Catholic who is practising the veneration of images, for were the First and Second Commandments separated, it would be easy to see that the Second Commandment forbids the use of images to worship Jehovah. But when the two commandments are lumped together, it would be easy for the Catholic to reason that the prohibition against the bowing to images has to do with images of pagan gods! And at the same time it would not be difficult to justify the use of images in the church (but see Q/A 97–98).

That said, we should note that in fact, not all the Protestants in the 16th Century Reformation divided the Ten Commandments the way we do. In particular, the Lutherans kept the Roman division of the commandments. Now, the Lutherans do not use images like Rome, so is there any practical ramification to their difference with us on the Second Commandment? I am afraid so. The Reformed understanding of the Second Commandment is well expressed in the answer for Q. 96—’That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has
commanded in His Word.’ That is to say, the Second Commandment not only forbids the use of images in the worship of God, but regulates the manner in which we should worship God (images are but an instance of what is forbidden). This manner is expressed in Deuteronomy 12:32,—‘What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it’ (see context: vv. 30–31); or in other words, ‘whatsoever is not commanded or sanctioned in the Word of God is forbidden.’ The Lutherans, not having such a stricture, would rather say: ‘Whatever is not forbidden is allowed.’ What is the principle adopted by most modern churches, including those that profess to be Reformed or Presbyterian, today? It is not hard to tell that it is the Lutheran principle! This is the reason why many churches have no qualms about introducing puppet shows, skits, mimes, videos and slide-shows, etc., into their worship hours. These things, after all, are not expressly forbidden in the Word of God! O how many would rather please God, than pamper the flesh, and return to the old paths!
Q. 99. What is required of the third commandment?

A. That we, not only by cursing or perjury, but also by rash swearing, must not profane or abuse the name of God; nor by silence or connivance be partakers of these horrible sins in others; and, briefly, that we use the holy name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence; so that He may be rightly confessed and worshipped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works.

1 Lev 24:11 and 19:12; Mt 5:37; Lev 5:4; 2 Isa 45:23–24; 3 Mt 10:32; 4 1 Tim 2:8; 5 1 Cor 3:16–17.

Q. 100. Is then the profaning of God’s name, by swearing and cursing, so heinous a sin, that His wrath is kindled against those who do not endeavour, as much as in them lies, to prevent and forbid such cursing and swearing?

A. It undoubtedly is, for there is no sin greater or more provoking to God, than the profaning of His name; and therefore He has commanded this sin to be punished with death.

1 Lev 5:1; 2 Lev 24:15.

Comments

The Third Commandment is: ‘Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain’ (Ex 20:7). What does it mean to take the name of God in vain? It means using the names, titles or attributes of God in such a way as to empty it of meaning. When do we use the name of God in our daily life? We use it legitimately in vows and oaths. A vow is a promissory oath. Now, when we take an oath, what we are in effect doing is to call upon God not only to be our witness to what we say, but to chastise or punish us if we should break our word. This being the case, a person who tells a lie under oath (i.e., perjures) is taking the name of God in vain in a very heinous way, for he would in essence be using God’s holy name to bolster his lie and therefore showing contempt to God and contempuously challenging Him to defend the honour of His name.

Another way in which the world uses the name of God in vain is to curse and swear in His name. There is of course legitimate swearing, which is the same as vows and oath, but there is also abusive swearing. Abusive swearing or cursing always involves the vain use of the name of God because it calls upon God to curse or punish someone as if God is obliged to do as commanded. But the worst form of using the name of God in vain must be to use the name of God as a swear-word or even an interjection. Those who do so would often claim that they mean no offence, or that they say their interjection or swear-word without thinking. But this does not in anyway diminish the severity of their offence against God, for it does indeed empty the name of God of its meaning.

Are Christians guilty of breaking the Third Commandment too? Certainly, and four of the most common ways are: (1) Failing to speak up or, worse, feeling no offence when someone we know uses the name of God or the name of Christ as a swear-word.
(2) Using the name of God flippancy in exclamations, such as: ‘My God!’ or ‘My Goodness!’ (3) Using the name of God as punctuation in prayer; example: ‘Lord God, help me, Lord; Lord God, I am in distress, Lord, I know you can help, Lord God, for, Lord God, you can do all things, Lord.’ (4) Singing the name of God without reverence or understanding.
Q. 101. May we then swear religiously by the name of God?

A. Yes: either when the magistrates demand it of the subjects; or when necessity requires us thereby to confirm fidelity and truth to the glory of God, and the safety of our neighbour:¹ for such an oath is founded on God’s Word,² and therefore was justly used by the saints, both in the Old and New Testament.³

Q. 102. May we also swear by saints or any other creatures?

A. No; for a lawful oath is calling upon God, as the only one who knows the heart, that He will bear witness to the truth, and punish me if I swear falsely;¹ which honour is due to no creature.²

Comments

During the days of the Reformation, there was a group of Protestants known as the Anabaptists, or the radical Reformers, who believed that it is always wrong to swear religiously in the name of the Lord. Their basis for their conviction is the words of the Lord in Matthew 5:34–37:

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

At first reading, the words of the Lord do seem to be giving a blanket prohibition of swearing or of oaths and vows. But this cannot be the case, firstly, because the Apostle Paul practised it without giving a hint that he thought it improper (e.g., Rom 1:9); secondly, the writer of Hebrews speaks of God swearing (Heb 6:16–17); and, thirdly, notice that the Lord does not condemn swearing in the Lord’s name, but swearing by the furnishing of the temple. We therefore believe, with the magisterial Reformers, that the Lord was in fact condemning the Jews’ habit of swearing rashly and trivially. Perhaps the Jews had trivialised the making of an oath so much that they knew better than to swear in God’s name!

But to swear by any creatures, whether they be saints or angels, or by any objects, whether sacred or otherwise, would always be sinful. This is because God alone is able to see our hearts, whether we be speaking the truth, and God alone has the power to execute judgement in the case when we break our vows or tell a falsehood. Therefore when a believer swears in the name of God, it is really an appeal to His omniscience, omnipotence and justice. To swear by any other thing is always evil, not only because it would be a violation of Deuteronomy 6:13, ‘Thou shalt... swear by
his name,’ but because it would rob God of the honour due Him and would involve a
superstitious idolatry in which the thing sworn by is ascribed some power it does not
have.

Naturally, since all vows and oaths involve our calling upon God to exercise His holy
justice, we must never swear unadvisedly and over minor matters. Oaths and vows
ought rather to be taken only in ‘matters of weight and moment.’ This would include
testifying in a trial or making important declarations or even in swearing allegiance to
a nation—which, of course, would be on condition that it does not compromise our
faith and fidelity to the Lord.
Q. 103. What doth God require in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the ministry of the Gospel and the schools be maintained;¹ and that I, especially on the Sabbath, that is, on the day of rest,² diligently frequent the church of God,³ to hear His Word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord,⁴ and contribute to the relief of the poor,⁵ as becomes a Christian. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by His Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.⁶

¹ Deut 12:19; Tit 1:5; 1 Tim 3:14–15; 1 Cor 9:11; ² Tim 2:2; ¹ Tim 3:15; ³ Lev 23:2; ⁴ Acts 2:42, 46; ¹ Cor 14:19, 29, 31; ¹ Cor 11:33; ⁵ ¹ Tim 2:1; ⁶ Isa 66:23.

Comments

The Heidelberg Catechism is an excellent catechism, especially for its warmth and devotional expression of Reformed theology. However, we should realise that it does differ from the Westminster Standards at a couple of points, one of which being on the treatment of the Fourth Commandment. The Heidelberg Catechism follows the Continental view of the Christian Sabbath, which essentially teaches that it is not obligatory for Christians to sanctify one whole day in seven as a holy Sabbath unto the Lord. This Continental view is not extremely apparent at the first reading of the answer to Q/A. 103. However, we can see it if we think carefully about the second part of the answer, viz.: ‘that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by His Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.’ The exposition follows closely Calvin’s remark that ‘the purpose of [the Fourth] commandment is that, being dead to our own inclinations and works, we should meditate on the Kingdom of God, and that we should practise that meditation in the ways established by him’ (ICR 2.8.28). According to Calvin, although the Fourth Commandment designates a stated day of public worship and prescribes a day for bodily rest, its main purpose is to serve as a foreshadowing of the spiritual rest enjoyed by believers. With all due respect, we believe Calvin to be in error at this point. Jonathan Edwards seems to have Calvin’s view of the Sabbath in mind when he says:

Some say, that the fourth command is perpetual, but not in its literal sense; not as designating any particular proportion of time to be set apart and devoted to literal rest and religious exercises. They say, that it stands in force only in a mystical sense, viz. as the weekly rest of the Jews typified spiritual rest in the Christian church; and that we under the gospel are not to make any distinction of one day from another, but are to keep all time holy, doing everything in a spiritual manner.

But this is an absurd way of interpreting the command as it refers to Christians. For if the command be so far abolished, it is entirely abolished. For it is the very design of the command, to fix the time of worship. The first command fixes the object, the second the means, the third the manner, the fourth the time. And if it
stands in force now only as signifying a spiritual, Christian rest, and holy behaviour at all times, it doth not remain as one of the ten commands, but as a summary of all the commands (‘The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath,’ in *Works* 2.95).

We are compelled to agree with Edwards! The day which must be kept as the Sabbath by Christians is now the first day of the week since Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week (cf. Ps 118:22–24). The Fourth Commandment, moreover, is morally, universally and perpetually obligatory upon all men until it finds fulfilment in the eternal Heavenly rest of the children of God. In the mean time, all men have a duty to set aside the whole of the first day of the week as a day of rest and worship.
Q. 104. What doth God require in the fifth commandment?

A. That I show all honour, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience;\(^1\) and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities,\(^2\) since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.\(^3\)

Comments

The Fifth Commandment is really a bridge between the first table and the second table of the Ten Commandments. Most of us understand the Fifth Commandment to belong to the second table, but when we look at the commands in the second table, we realise that there is an immediately apparent order of weightiness to the commandments. It is more severe to break the Sixth Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ than to break the Seventh Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery’; and it is more severe to break the Seventh Commandment than the Eighth, ‘Thou shalt not steal’; etc.

Why then is the Fifth Commandment placed where it is placed? I would suggest that, firstly, it is because the Fifth Commandment is the first commandment pertaining to man’s relationship with fellow men—every child must learn it. If a child fails to submit to his parents, he will not learn the meaning of law and authority; and all other laws would consequently have little weight for him. But secondly and more importantly, I believe the Fifth Commandment is where it is because parents and all other persons who have ruling power over us are placed in positions of authority by God Himself (Rom 13:1). Yes, parental authority must be understood as being God-given rather than being natural and circumstantial. In the animal kingdom, parental authority in the case of social animals is natural and circumstantial, but that also means that once a male animal grows stronger than its parents, it would normally assume authority and may even kill or expel its father. It is sad that in the modern humanistic and evolutionistic (or, should we say, animalistic) society, there are many children with no moral regards to parental authority, and would submit to their parents only as long as their parents are stronger or richer than them. This is both unnatural (for we are men created in the image of God, rather than mere animals, as some reckon), and sinful because it is contrary to God’s Law.

Because our parents and all in authority over us are set in their place of authority by God, to rebel against them is to rebel against God unless what they require of us is rebellion against God in the first place (cf. Acts 4:19; 5:29). Therefore, children, as long as they remain unmarried, must submit themselves to the instruction and corrections of their parents even if they be harsh, unloving and inconsiderate. Therefore wives must submit to their husbands in the Lord. Therefore an employee must serve his employer faithfully as long as what he is tasked to do is not unlawful.
Therefore students must be obedient to their teachers and do all their assignments diligently. Therefore, citizens in a nation must obey their civil government as long as it is in power even if they think that it is not ruling justly and honestly. Therefore, members of a church must submit to such as have rule over them in the church (as long as they have not been lawfully deposed) even if they should discover that they do not after all bear the qualifications necessary to be officers in the church. Moreover, disobedience for the Lord’s sake on one matter, because an instruction or rule given is contrary to God’s Word, does not automatically invalidate the power of the authority. Conscientious disobedience must be on a case-by-case basis.

When we are under a tyrannical or unkind authority, there will always be a tendency to want to rebel or to shake off as it were the yoke of bondage unlawfully. However, in view of the fact that all authorities are set over us by God’s decree, we ought never to do so. We ought rather to pray for these authorities, and whenever possible to admonish them in the Lord. Similarly, we should attempt to help and strengthen, rather than discourage, those whom God has set over us but are fraught with shortfalls and weaknesses.
Lord’s Day 40

Q. 105. What doth God require in the sixth commandment?

A. That neither in thoughts, nor words, nor gestures, much less in deeds, I dishonour, hate, wound, or kill my neighbour, by myself or by another;\(^1\) but that I lay aside all desire of revenge;\(^2\) also, that I hurt not myself, nor wilfully expose myself to any danger.\(^3\) Wherefore also the magistrate is armed with the sword, to prevent murder.\(^4\)

Q. 106. But this commandment seems only to speak of murder?

A. In forbidding murder, God teaches us, that He abhors the causes thereof, such as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge;\(^1\) and that He accounts all these as murder.\(^2\)

Q. 107. But is it enough that we do not kill any man in the manner mentioned above?

A. No: for when God forbids envy, hatred, and anger, He commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves;\(^1\) to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and all kindness, towards him,\(^2\) and prevent his hurt as much as in us lies;\(^3\) and that we do good, even to our enemies.\(^4\)

Comments

The Sixth Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ is perhaps the most well known of the Ten Commandments. Many modern professors of faith, who are unable to cite most of the commandments, and even unbelievers, will be quick to cite this commandment when asked what the Ten Commandments are. Most people know it is wrong to commit murder. Yet, ironically, this is the command (together with the Eighth Commandment) that many people in the world will use to show that they are good and righteous. They say, ‘We are good people. See, we do not kill nor steal, and therefore we can expect to go to heaven when we die.’ We see from such a statement that many regard murder as the greatest sin, and assume that if they do not commit murder, that they are therefore innocent.

Not only does the world refuses to believe that a failure to worship and honour the living and true God as God (First Commandment) is in fact the greatest sin \textit{vis-à-vis} the Ten Commandments, but the world forgets that the Sixth Commandment is not only about physical murder. This is what the Q/A’s above are seeking to address. Any deed or thought that is unloving towards another is in fact a breaking of the Sixth Commandment.

The Lord Jesus, we must remember, is He who most clearly shows us that this is the right way to interpret the Sixth Commandment and all other commandments. He says:
Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire (Mt 5:21–22).

By these words, the Lord teaches us that we must not merely equate the Sixth Commandment with murder, but with any act that may be in anyway related to murder. Thus unrighteous wrath, vengeance, malicious thought, slander, abortion, suicide, failure to ensure safety and health, etc., are all transgressions of the Sixth Commandment. In fact, a failure to love our neighbour as ourselves is failing to meet up to the requirements of the Sixth Commandment.
Q. 108. What doth the seventh commandment teach us?

A. That all uncleanness is accursed of God: \(^1\) and that therefore we must with all our hearts detest the same; \(^2\) and live chastely and temperately; \(^3\) whether in holy wedlock, or in single life. \(^4\)

Q. 109. Doth God forbid in this commandment, only adultery, and such like gross sins?

A. Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, He commands us to preserve them pure and holy: therefore He forbids all unchaste actions, \(^1\) gestures, words, thoughts, desires; \(^2\) and whatever can entice men thereto. \(^3\)

Comments

The Seventh Commandment is ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’ But again, we must not think that the commandment only forbids the physical act of adultery involving at least one married person. As the Fifth Commandment has to do with relationships, and the Sixth Commandment has to do with life, so the Seventh Commandment has to do with chastity. As such, the Seventh Commandment forbids all forms of unchastity and impurity, whether in deeds, words or thoughts and desire; and ‘whatever can entice men thereto,’ such as drunkenness, pornography or lewd dressing.

This broad understanding of the Seventh Commandment is especially important in our modern day society where even adultery proper is glamorised on television, and teenagers consider fornication to be a necessary part of growing up. Indeed, even some who profess to be Christians would try to wriggle their way out of guilt in much the same way as Bill Clinton, the ex-president of the United States, by insisting that their behaviour does not directly contravene the Seventh Commandment.

But the Word of God is clear. The Lord Jesus says, ‘Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart’ (Mt 5:28). That is to say, the Seventh Commandment does not only forbid the actual act of adultery or fornication. Even lust is forbidden, not to mention anything more than that.

Sadly, the violation of this commandment has brought much sorrow to otherwise godly Christians and even ministers of the Gospel. Yes, we must not think that all who have fallen into this sin are incorrigible and morally loose. Like King David, many otherwise morally upright believers have been tempted and drawn almost irresistibly (Prov 7:21–22) in a moment of weakness, to do some things which they would regret too late (Prov 7:23). There is, of course, forgiveness in Christ even for the worst sin for the repentant sinner. But no one ought to presume that he will receive forgiveness even as he engages in sin against God. And so, the believer ought rather to be forewarned. To be forewarned is to be forearmed! Let us therefore take serious heed to the Apostle Paul’s command to ‘Flee fornication’ (1 Cor 6:18). Let us
seek to avoid any situation that may give rise to temptation (remember that fornication and adultery amongst professing believers almost always arise out of innocuous situations, as those who have fallen will testify). Let us therefore seek to imitate Joseph, not only in his fleeing from Potiphar’s wife, but in his refusal to ‘be with her’ (Gen 39:10)!

I believe young people especially should avoid being found in the same room alone with an unrelated member of the opposite gender except for the briefest moment. I always remember how Richard Baxter, when he catechised on a one-to-one basis the women members in the church, would make sure that another woman observed from the corner of the room. Such precautions should not be viewed as paranoiac but prudent, seeing how the remnant of our sinful nature may rear its ugly head when it is least expected.
Q. 110. What doth God forbid in the eighth commandment?

A. God forbids not only those thefts, and robberies, which are punishable by the magistrate; but He comprehends under the name of theft all wicked tricks and devices, whereby we design to appropriate to ourselves the goods which belong to our neighbour: whether it be by force, or under the appearance of right, as by unjust weights, tells, measures, fraudulent merchandise, false coins, usury, or by any other way forbidden by God; as also all covetousness, all abuse and waste of His gifts.

Q. 111. But what doth God require in this commandment?

A. That I promote the advantage of my neighbour in every instance I can or may; and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others: further also that I faithfully labour, so that I may be able to relieve the needy.

Comments

The Eighth Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not steal,’ has to do with ownership of property. God has assigned to everyone a portion of the things of this world to enjoy and to manage. This command teaches us to respect and protect this apportionment of God, as well as to procure anything that we do not at present have only by biblically lawful means.

We call the act of secretly taking possession of something that does not belong to us theft. If we take possession by force, then it is called robbery. Theft and robbery are the most recognisable ways of breaking the Eighth Commandment, and they are usually punishable under any civil law. But as Q/A 110 reminds us, there are many other ways of breaking the Eighth Commandment. Indeed, all dishonesty and unfairness related to buying and selling or acquisition of goods would be a violation of the Eighth Commandment. Likewise, wastage and abuse of anything whether assigned to us or belonging to someone else would be a violation. And similarly covetousness not only violates the Tenth Commandment, but also the Eighth Commandment, for covetousness is theft in the heart.

Conversely, the Eighth Commandment requires us to uphold the rights of our neighbours and to deal with them as we desire to be dealt by them. Thus, if someone publishes a book which we find useful, then the Eighth Commandments teaches us to purchase it rather than to make illegal copies. Of course, it would be different if the owner of the book expressly gives permission to copy. The same goes for software, video and music. It should be noted that violation of copyrights involves loss of income or royalties which rightly belong to the copyright holders.
The Eighth Commandment, moreover, requires us to secure a regular income so that we may contribute to the needy (Eph 4:28), as well as to manage our wealth wisely so that we do not squander away what God has graciously assigned to us.
Lord’s Day 43

**Q. 112. What is required in the ninth commandment?**

* A. That I bear false witness against no man,¹ nor falsify any man’s words;² that I be no backbiter,³ nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard;⁴ but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit,⁵ as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God;⁶ likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it;⁷ also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honour and good character of my neighbour.⁸

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**Comments**

The Ninth Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour,’ has to do with the maintenance of truth between man and man. While it may be quite shocking for a believer to discover that a hitherto credible professor of faith has been deliberately spreading falsehoods, experience teaches us that many unbelievers tell lies routinely and unashamedly. How many of us who are believers have been taken in by the smooth talking of unbelieving salesmen? We thought that they were telling the truth, only to discover too late that we have been cheated in one way or another. How many of us have felt hurt because we were too naïve to think that anyone could lie straight to our face?

The sad truth is that men are by nature liars. Men, by nature, are held captive to sin and Satan, who is the father of lies (Jn 8:44). And since lying, unlike murder or adultery, often leaves no evidences many an unbeliever, accustomed to the ways of the world, will lie without his darkened conscience discernibly indicting him.

But falsehood is not just contained amongst unbelievers. It can also be a constant temptation to believers because of the remnant of corruption. For this reason, it is necessary for believers to be well acquainted with the many ways in which we may fall into this sin. We must avoid them and also flee to Christ in repentance when we discover their appearance. We must do so bearing in mind that all lies and deceit are “the proper works of the devil” which do incur the “heavy wrath of God,” though they may not be discovered by our fellow men in our lifetime.

Q/A 112 gives us a succinct summary of the many ways we can break the Ninth Commandment. Firstly, we break the commandment by bearing false witness against another person or falsifying his words. That is to say, we sin if we say something false about someone or about what he said to another person or persons, whether in informal or formal situations. Secondly, backbiting and slander are also breaking of the Ninth Commandment. This is related to the first point, but slander and backbiting involve not just falsehood but malicious character assassination. Thirdly, it is also a breaking of the Ninth Commandment if we form judgments about another person based on unsubstantiated hearsay.

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The Ninth Commandment, of course, is not about not promoting falsehood. It is also about promoting truth and justice. As God is truth, the Christian must love the truth and seek to maintain it at all cost. We must maintain not only the truth of the Gospel, but seek to defend and promote the good name and honour of our neighbour. Thus we must never be part of spreading unfounded rumours. We must rather seek to correct falsehoods about someone that we are aware of once it comes to our ears.
Lord’s Day 44

Q. 113. What doth the tenth commandment require of us?

A. That even the smallest inclination or thought, contrary to any of God’s commandments, never rise in our hearts; but that at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness.¹

Q. 114. But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?

A. No: but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience;¹ yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.²

Q. 115. Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

A. First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature,¹ and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin, and righteousness in Christ;² likewise, that we constantly endeavour and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come.³

Comments

The Tenth Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s,’ condemns the sin of covetousness or the lack of contentment in the lot that God has assigned to us. It is the nature of it that is emphasised in the catechism however, for it makes it explicit that the Ten Commandments must not only be kept externally but in our hearts and minds. From the testimony of the Apostle Paul, it appears that it was particularly this aspect of the Ten Commandments that pressed upon his conscience at his conversion. For he says: ‘I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died’ (Rom 7:7–9). Perhaps the Apostle Paul had felt that he was keeping sufficiently perfectly all the laws, because he was keeping them with external religious rigour. But the Tenth Commandment deals with what is entirely in the heart. There is no external performance required that may blind one into thinking that he is keeping it. Therefore once the heart is illumined by the Spirit of Christ and shown to be deceitful and desperately wicked, it becomes immediately obvious that no mere man can keep the Tenth Commandment. And if we can’t keep this (as it were) least of the

¹ Rom 7:7, &c.
² Rom 7:14; ² Rom 7:22, 15, &c., Jas 3:2.
³ 1 Jn 1:9; Rom 3:20 and 5:13 and 7:7; ² Rom 7:24; ³ 1 Cor 9:24; Phil 3:12–14.
Commandments, how could we be said to be keeping all the rest of the Commandments with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk 12:30)?

In other words, the Ten Commandments display our wickedness rather than our righteousness. They tell us how we ought to live, not because we are able to obey them perfectly, but because they are a standard God has set for us, and because they shut us up to Christ for cleansing of sin and strength to live unto God.
The Third Part—of Prayer

Lord’s Day 45

Q. 116. Why is prayer necessary for Christians?

A. Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us:¹ and also, because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them.²

1 Ps 50:14–15; 2 Mt 7:7–8; Lk 11:9, 13; Mt 13:12; Ps 50:15.

Q. 117. What are the requisites of that prayer, which is acceptable to God, and which He will hear?

A. First, that we from the heart pray to the one true God only, who hath manifested Himself in His Word,¹ for all things, He hath commanded us to ask of Him;² secondly, that we rightly and thoroughly know our need and misery, that so we may deeply humble ourselves in the presence of His divine majesty;³ thirdly, that we be fully persuaded that He, notwithstanding that we are unworthy of it,⁴ will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer,⁵ as He has promised us in His Word.⁶

1 Jn 4:22–23; 2 Rom 8:26; 1 Jn 5:14; 3 Jn 4:23–24; Ps 145:18; 4 2 Chr 20:12; 5 Ps 2:12 and 34:18–19; Isa 66:2; ⁶ Rom 10:13 and 8:15–16; Jas 1:6, &c.; Jn 14:13; Dan 9:17–18; Mt 7:8; Ps 143:1.

Q. 118. What hath God commanded us to ask of Him?

A. All things necessary for soul and body;¹ which Christ our Lord has comprised in that prayer He Himself has taught us.²

1 Jas 1:17; Mt 6:33; 2 Mt 6:9–10, &c.; Lk 11:2, &c.

Q. 119. What are the words of that prayer?

A. Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Comments

There is a common saying amongst Christians, that ‘Prayer changes thing.’ This statement has some truth to it if we see prayer as an intermediate means by which God brings to past His sovereign decree. When the citizen of a nation requests his king to do something on his behalf, and the king finds his request to be reasonable and consistent with his own policy and accedes to the request, we may say that the request was instrumental in the change that was made. However, if we think about it carefully, we will realise that it is the king who made the change, not the request or the requestor. Think on the fact that the king could have answered the request negatively! So it is with prayer, God hears and answers our prayers, but He sovereignly determines the unfolding of His providence. Not only so, but God and His providence are in no way contingent upon prayers, unlike the case of the king.
Sadly, however, many professing Christians urge prayer because ‘Prayer changes things,’ by which they imply that God is kind of a spinelessly indulgent king or a divine Santa Claus who will not turn down any requests. The Scriptures and the catechism statements we are considering are opposed to that kind of idea about prayer. We must pray not because prayer changes things, but because prayer is a manifestation of gratitude and dependence, and also because God requires that we receive His blessings only through prayer.

The Scripture gives us many directions on prayer. The Lord’s Prayer provides us a pattern, which we may follow in our prayer. But more than that, the Scripture teaches us the manner in which we are to pray. For example, we must pray, firstly, according to God’s revealed will. That is, we must pray only for such things He has promised in His Word to give us. Secondly, we must pray with a deep sense of humility and dependence upon God to be our provider. And, thirdly, we must pray in the name of Christ. That is, upon the merit of Christ’s mediatorial work on our behalf, and a reliance upon His intercession for us.
Q. 120. Why hath Christ commanded us to address God thus: “Our Father”?

A. That immediately, in the very beginning of our prayer, He might excite in us a childlike reverence for, and confidence in God, which are the foundation of our prayer: namely, that God is become our Father in Christ,\(^1\) and will much less deny us what we ask of Him in true faith, than our parents will refuse us earthly things.\(^2\)

Q. 121. Why is it here added, “Which art in heaven”?

A. Lest we should form any earthly conceptions of God’s heavenly majesty,\(^1\) and that we may expect from His almighty power all things necessary for soul and body.\(^2\)

Comments

Prayer is the soul’s conversation with God his Maker. But God is transcendently holy, and infinite in greatness, whereas man is a finite creature of dust that is unholy on account of sin. This being the case, how can man converse with God without being guilty of gross audacity and presumption? The answer is that he cannot, except in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the God-Man, the only mediator between God and men (1 Tim 2:5), who Himself declared: ‘No man cometh unto the Father, but by me’ (Jn 14:6). Prayer, then, must not be regarded only as a duty, but as a great privilege, which was purchased for the children of God by the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the Lord Jesus Christ did not only make our prayers acceptable to God; He makes our prayers sweet to God and praying sweet to us because we are not only justified in Him, but are adopted into the family of God in Him. Christ is the only begotten Son of God, and we, on account of our union with Him, are reckoned as His adoptive brethren (Heb 2:12); made joint-heirs with Him (Rom 8:17); and enabled by His Spirit to approach God as our ‘Abba, Father’ (Rom 8:15).

This is the basis of the Lord’s teaching us to come to God as ‘our Father.’ Because of what Christ has done, we must not come to God as a severe judge or a tyrannical king. We must come to Him as our Heavenly Father who loves us, is pleased with our petitions, and is ready and able to answer them. This is a great encouragement for us to pray. It is also an assurance that when we pray, God’s answer will be perfect and loving. We know by experience that sometimes a child may go to his father for some thing, which would in fact be harmful for him. An indulgent human father may sometimes give in to the child because he myopically considers the present pleasure of the child but fails to consider the long-term or permanent effect of his indulgence. Not so our heavenly Father who knows all things. When we come unto Him, we know He is fully able to fulfil all our requests; and yet He would only accede to our requests if it would work for our good (Rom 8:28) and His own glory.
But as with all things, it is possible for us to abuse our privilege because of sin. Just as it is easy for a child to take for granted his father’s love and begin to speak to him without due respect, so it is easy for a child of God to forget the great distance between God and him so that he comes to prayer without due regards to God’s majesty and greatness. So it is important for us to remind ourselves that our Father is ‘in Heaven.’ He is our Heavenly Father. We must never conceive of God in our minds in terms of any earthly images, and we must never speak to Him as if it is our right to do so; much less should we ever come to prayer with the attitude that God owes it to us to do what we desire. We must come to Him with the full realisation that He is ‘our Father, which art in Heaven.’
Lord’s Day 47

Q. 122. Which is the first petition?

A. “Hallowed be thy name”\(^1\); that is, grant us, first, rightly to know thee,\(^2\) and to sanctify, glorify and praise thee, in all thy works, in which thy power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy and truth, are clearly displayed;\(^3\) and further also, that we may so order and direct our whole lives, our thoughts, words and actions, that thy name may never be blasphemed, but rather honoured and praised on our account.\(^4\)

Comments

The Lord’s Prayer comprises a preface, six petitions and a conclusion. The first petition, “Hallowed be thy name,” is a call upon God to glorify His own name, for the chief end of man, and indeed of all creation, is the glory of God.

God, of course, is able to make all things redound to His own glory. And indeed, ultimately all things will, by God’s sovereign outworking of providence, work together for His own glory. But in praying “Hallowed be thy name,” we are not only praying that God will glorify His own name (He certainly will, as He created all things for His own glory); we are praying also that we will be enabled to consciously acknowledge God’s glory displayed in His creation and providence; and that we will consciously and positively glorify God with our lives.

What does it mean to glorify God? Of course, God is perfect in glory, and nothing that we can do can ultimately add to or subtract from His glory. Therefore to glorify Him must refer to manifesting or displaying His glory to other creatures, as well as demonstrating our acknowledgement of His greatness, and our submission to His authority. In praying “Hallowed be thy name” we are petitioning God to enable us to live in such a way that our thoughts, words and deeds exalt Him rather than bring shame to His name, for we bear His name. Just as a prodigal, unfilial and disobedient son brings shame to his father’s name, so too our lives can blaspheme our Heavenly Father’s name (cf. Rom 2:24; Tit 2:5). And how easily we can do so because of our remaining corruption! How we need God’s support and help that we may be instruments of His praise and glory in this world that He has set us in.

May the Lord not only hear our humble petition, but remind us of our vulnerability and cause us to meditate on His worthiness and flee to Him constantly through the Lord Jesus Christ our mediator. Let us learn to pray “Hallowed be thy name,” as we seek His strength to bear a good testimony at work. Let us pray the same in regards to our witness at home and in the midst of our relatives and friends. And yes, let us pray “Hallowed be thy name,” when we are going through difficult times, when our decisions and demeanour are especially being observed not only by other believers, but by unbelievers as well.

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\(^1\) Mt 6:9; \(^2\) Jn 17:3; Jer 9:23–24; Mt 16:17; Jas 1:5; \(^3\) Ps 119:137–138; Lk 1:46; Ps 145:8–9; \(^4\) Ps 115:1 and 71:8.
Q. 123. Which is the second petition?

A. “Thy kingdom come”\(^1\), that is, rule us so by thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to thee;\(^2\) preserve and increase thy church;\(^3\) destroy the works of the devil,\(^4\) and all violence which would exalt itself against thee; and also, all wicked counsels devised against thy holy Word; till the full perfection of thy kingdom take place,\(^5\) wherein thou shalt be all in all.\(^6\)

\(^1\) Mt 6:10; \(^2\) Ps 119:5; \(^3\) Ps 51:18; \(^4\) 1 Jn 3:8; \(^5\) Rom 16:20; \(^6\) Rev 22:17, 20; \(^6\) 1 Cor 15:15, 28.

Comments

The second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come,” is one of the most commonly misunderstood petitions in the prayer today. Many recite the prayer week after week, thinking that it is a call upon God to bring on the millennial rule of Christ upon the earth. “Only when Christ is sitting as King on the throne in Jerusalem and there be peace in the world, will this prayer be answered,” they say. “This world in its present state is hopeless. It is getting worse and worse, and therefore our prayers should be that Christ would come quickly to establish His Kingdom,” they add.

This common notion, which has arisen out of a Zionist Dispensationalism, was foreign to our fathers in the faith, and might even have been regarded as heretical were it proposed as an interpretation of our Lord’s words. Far more meaningful and biblically consistent is the interpretation of our fathers, which may briefly be summarised in the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

In the second petition… we pray, That Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened (WSC 102).

The astute reader may notice that the Heidelberg Catechism does not say we are to pray for the hastening of the kingdom of glory, but we must realise that in praying for the advancement of the kingdom of grace, we are praying for the hastening of the kingdom of glory, for it is when the full number of the elect be brought into the kingdom that the kingdom of glory will find its culminating fulfilment. This same idea is expressed in the Genevan Catechism, which reads almost like a commentary of the two catechetical statements already mentioned:

Minister. What understand you by the kingdom of God in the second petition?

Student. It consists chiefly of two branches—that He would govern the elect by His Spirit—that He would prostrate and destroy the reprobate who refuse to give themselves up to His service, thus making it manifest that nothing is able to resist His might.

M. In what sense do you pray that this kingdom may come?
S. That the Lord would daily increase the numbers of the faithful—that He would ever and anon load them with new gifts of His Spirit, until He fill them completely: moreover, that He would render His truth more clear and conspicuous by dispelling the darkness of Satan, that He would abolish all iniquity, by advancing His own righteousness.

M. Are not all these things done every day?

S. They are done so far: that the kingdom of God may be said to be commenced. We pray, therefore, that it may constantly increase and be carried forward, until it attain its greatest height, which we only hope to take place on the last day on which God alone, after reducing all creatures to order, will be exalted and pre-eminent, and so be all in all (1 Cor 15:28) (Tracts [Calvin Translation Society, 1849], 2.76–77).
Q. 124. Which is the third petition?

A. “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”; 1 that is, grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, 2 and without murmuring obey thy will, 3 which is only good; that so every one may attend to, and perform the duties of his station and calling, 4 as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven. 5

Comments

What does the will of God refer to? There are those who speak of God’s will as having many facets: decretive will, desiderative will, perceptive will, punitive will, etc., etc. But such formulations are often used to justify contradictory assertions concerning God’s purpose in the world. In this way, someone may say, “God wills to have all men, without exception, to be saved,” and in the same breath say, “God does not will to have all men, without exception, to be saved.” When asked how that is possible, he replies: “God wills desideratively that all will be saved, but decretively, He does not will all to be saved.” This clever innovation is akin to saying: “1 is not 0, mathematically; but 1 can be 0 emotionally.” It makes our glorious, sovereign God into a complex, contradictory being of man’s imagination.

Neither logic nor Scripture may be summoned honestly and rationally to support such a doctrine. However, the Scripture does speak of the will of God in two distinct, though related, ways, much like the way we speak about man’s will. When a man does anything, he does it according to his will. But a man may also write a will, in which he declares how he wishes his estate to be distributed after his decease. It does not take much thinking to see that the two wills are actually quite different. One refers to the man’s volitional choice; the other refers to his directive for others to do.

In the case of God, His will refers firstly to His eternal counsel or purpose, which is also brought to pass in the providential outworking of what He has decreed. Notice the difference between man’s will and God’s will. Man’s will is contingent upon circumstance, whereas God’s will does not depend on anything. He declares “the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 46:10). This is the “will of God” referred to in passages such as Acts 13:36, Romans 1:10 and Romans 15:32. But there is something else that is designated the “will of God” in the Scripture, which is akin to the second meaning for man’s will, namely His precepts, especially as contained in His Word. This is the “will of God” referred to in passages such as 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Romans 12:2 and Mark 3:35. We may call this God’s “preceptive will,” but we must remember that it is of totally different nature from His “decretive will.” In God’s decrees, He determines and brings to pass all things according to His wisdom, whereas in His precepts He commands us as to what our duties towards Him are.
What is the will of God referred to in the third petition? Well, I believe it primarily refers to God’s precepts, so that it is a prayer that we and others will be obedient to God’s Word and ordinances (such as God’s call through His church to serve Him). But in all likelihood, the Lord is also referring to the outworking of God’s decrees so that it is a prayer that we will humbly submit to God’s providential dealings with us. Just as the prayer ‘‘hallowed be thy name’’ is also a prayer that God will cause us to glorify Himself, so ‘‘thy will be done’’ is also a prayer that God will make us submissive to His will, both as He reveals in providence (so we acquiesce) and as He reveals in His Word (so we obey).
Lord’s Day 50

Q. 125. Which is the fourth petition?

A. “Give us this day our daily bread”;¹ that is, be pleased to provide us with all things necessary for the body,² that we may thereby acknowledge thee to be the only fountain of all good,³ and that neither our care nor industry, nor even thy gifts, can profit us without thy blessing,⁴ and therefore that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures, and place it alone in thee.⁵

¹ Mt 6:11; ² Ps 145:15; Mt 6:25, &c.; ³ Acts 17:25 and 14:17; ⁴ 1 Cor 15:58; Deut 8:3; Ps 127:1–2; ⁵ Ps 62:11 and 55:22.

Comments

The answer to this catechism question gives us one of the most succinct and beautiful expositions of the Fourth Petition in the Lord’s Prayer.

The Fourth Petition is quite obviously, in the first place, a prayer to the Lord to provide our daily necessities as we live in this present pilgrim life. Yes, the Lord does teach us that we should not be overtly concerned about these things—food, drink and raiment (Mt 6:25), because God knows our needs and will provide them (Mt 6:32). The availability of daily bread ought therefore not to be a source of worry for the Christian. We should rather give priority to seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt 6:33). However, as we are but mere creatures dependent upon the Lord for our existence, it is presumptuous to think that God owes it to us to provide our needs. We ought therefore to come unto God humbly to ask Him to provide us with all that we need.

As we do so, in the second place, we acknowledge that all good things, including our daily bread, come from God. ‘The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the L ORD shall not want any good thing’ (Ps 34:10). Yes, in general, God provides for us through secondary means, such as our own hard work, or gifts and payments from others; but ultimately, it is still God who provides. The Christian who prays according to the Fourth Petition, acknowledges this fact; and also that unless these things are given with God’s blessing, they cannot profit us. Anything obtained by fraud or ethical compromises, for example, does not come with God’s blessing, and therefore cannot be profitable for us. Indeed, the Christian should be aware that what he receives in this world may affect him detrimentally. So King Agur prays: ‘Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the L ORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain’ (Prov 30:8–9). The Christian, who is aware of the subtle influence of the things of the world, would come to the Heavenly Father praying that He would only provide such as is good, and not such as he would derive enjoyment thereby.

Therefore, in the third place, when we pray ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ we are also acknowledging that we have no confidence in any creature, including ourselves, to provide that which is best for us. Our confidence must rest upon God alone.
Lord’s Day 51

Q. 126. Which is the fifth petition?

A. “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”;¹ that is, be pleased for the sake of Christ’s blood, not to impute to us poor sinners, our transgressions, nor that depravity, which always cleaves to us;² even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbour.³

Comments

‘And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.’ That is: Be pleased, for the sake of Christ’s blood, not to impute to us miserable sinners our manifold transgressions, nor the evil which still always cleaves to us. As we find this witness of Thy grace in us be it our full purpose heartily to forgive our neighbour.

There are really two parts in this petition, though it is intricately tied. The first part is a plea to God to forgive us our debts against God or, in other words, our sins. But have not all our sins already been paid for and forgiven in Christ’s one perfect sacrifice (Heb 9:28; 10:12; Col 1:14)? Why then does the Lord teach us to ask for forgiveness?

First of all, God’s forgiveness of our sin is not a mere abstract intellectual notion. All whom He forgives will confess their sins, and it is those who would confess their sins that He forgives: ‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (1 Jn 1:8–9). Anyone who thinks he is forgiven and therefore does not think it necessary to confess his sins cannot possibly have experienced forgiveness.

Secondly, though our sins have been paid for so that we are no longer subject to God’s wrath and condemnation, we are yet subject to His fatherly displeasure when we sin. Thus the Psalmist acknowledges that God will not hear one who is entertaining known, unrepented sins in his heart: ‘If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me’ (Ps 66:18); and he speaks of how guilt weighs him down: ‘When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer’ (Ps 32:3–4).

We must therefore come before the Lord, daily, to confess our sins. We should do that so God will, for Christ’s sake, turn His fatherly displeasure from us that we may again enjoy the joy of His salvation (Ps 51:12) and the blessedness of forgiveness (Ps 32:1–5). Unrepentance on our part will not only make or cause us to lose our joy of fellowship with God, but may render us liable for chastisement by the Lord.

The second part of this petition is not really a petition, but an acknowledgment that we understand what it means to be forgiven: ‘as we forgive our debtors.’ One who

¹ Mt 6:12; ² Ps 51:1; ³ Jn 2:1–2; ⁴ Mt 6:14–15.
understands how greatly he has been forgiven by God, or how great a price it was by which God forgives us, will forgive others for their little debts against him. Are these debts not insignificantly small compared to our debt to our Master? Remember the Parable of the Unforgiving Steward (Mt 18:23–35). No one who evidences an unforgiving spirit can claim to have been forgiven by God without mocking God, for that unforgiving spirit itself is a grievous sin which needs first to be repented of.
Lord’s Day 52

Q. 127. Which is the sixth petition?

A. “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”; 1 that is, since we are so weak in ourselves, that we cannot stand a moment; 2 and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, 3 the world, 4 and our own flesh, 5 cease not to assault us, do thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, 6 but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, till at last we obtain a complete victory. 7

1 Mt 6:13;  2 Rom 8:26; Ps 103:14;  3 1 Pet 5:8;  4 Eph 6:12; Jn 15:19;  5 Rom 7:23; Gal 5:17;  6 Mt 26:41; Mk 13:33;  7 1 Thes 3:13 and 5:23.

Q. 128. How dost thou conclude thy prayer?

A. “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever”; 1 that is, all these we ask of thee, because thou, being our King and almighty, art willing and able to give us all good; 2 and all this we pray for, that thereby not we, but thy holy name, may be glorified for ever. 3

1 Mt 6:13;  2 Rom 10:12;  3 Jn 14:13; Ps 115:1; Phil 4:20.

Q. 129. What doth the word “Amen” signify?

A. “Amen” 1 signifies, it shall truly and certainly be: for my prayer is more assuredly heard of God, than I feel in my heart that I desire these things of Him.

1 2 Cor 1:20;  2 Tim 2:13.

Comments

The sixth petition of the Lord’s Prayer is worded in a most unusual way: ‘Lead us not into temptation.’ Most of us would readily agree with Q/A 127 that this is a petition that ‘God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted’ (WSC 106). However, the first impression we get when we read this petition is that God does lead people into temptation and we are petitioning Him not to lead us into it. This impression, however, cannot be right, for as James says: ‘Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man’ (Jas 1:13).

Why then did our Lord frame the sixth petition the way He did? He did so, it appears, to emphasise God’s sovereignty even in the circumstances in which we may come under temptations. Indeed, it is because God is sovereign and is, through His providence, powerfully bringing all things whatsoever He has decreed to pass, that we can have any confidence that He is able to hear and answer our prayers to keep us from evil.

As we come to the Lord pleading the sixth petition, He gives us the assurance that He is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it (1 Cor 10:13).
Finally, in the conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer, we are reminded again of our dependence upon God as well as the fact that our lives and desires must be to glorify God. Therefore no one can honestly pray the Lord’s Prayer unless he believes that God’s chief end for him is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.