

LORD'S DAY 16

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

A. Because of the justice and truth of God¹ satisfaction for our sins could be made in no other way than by the death of the Son of God.²

1. **Genesis 2:17** "...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."
2. **Romans 8:3** For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,
Philippians 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor; that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Hebrews 2:14,15 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

41. Q. Why was He buried?

A. His burial testified that He had really died.¹

1. **Isaiah 53:9** And they made His grave with the wicked; but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.
John 19:38-42 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus.³⁹ And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.⁴⁰ Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the

custom of the Jews is to bury.⁴¹ Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.⁴² So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.

Acts 13:29 "Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb..."

1 Corinthians 15:3,4 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...

42. Q. Since Christ has died for us, why do we still have to die?

A. Our death is not a payment for our sins, but it puts an end to sin and is an entrance into eternal life.¹

- 1 **John 5:24** "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life....
Philippians 1:21-23 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.²² But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall

choose I cannot tell.²³ For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

1 Thessalonians 5:9,10 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁰ who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

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

A. Through Christ's death our old nature is crucified, put to death, and buried with Him,¹ so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer reign in us,² but that we may offer ourselves to Him as a sacrifice of thankfulness.³

1. **Romans 6:5-11** For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin.⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Colossians 2:11,12 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with

Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

2. **Romans 6:12-14** Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.¹³ And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

3. **Romans 12:1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Ephesians 5:1,2 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

44. Q. Why is there added: *He descended into hell?*

A. In my greatest sorrows and temptations I may be assured and comforted that my Lord Jesus Christ, by His unspeakable anguish, pain, terror, and agony, which He endured throughout all His sufferings¹ but especially on the cross, has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell.²

1. **Psalms 18:5,6** The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. 6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears.

Psalms 116:3 The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow.

Matthew 26:36-46 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there."³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face,

and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."⁴⁰ Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?"⁴¹ "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."⁴³ And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.⁴⁵ Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners."⁴⁶ "Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

Matthew 27:45,46 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.
⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Hebrews 5:7-10 ...who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was

able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, ⁸ though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰ called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"

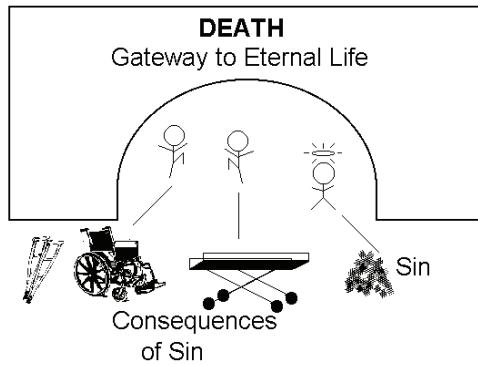
2. Isa 53

Before someone is put to death, a very serious crime must have been committed. Not all criminals are executed. The Bible directs that this punishment is exercised where the life of another has been taken, or the sanctity of life is destroyed. In our penal system, many criminals receive a sentence of a number of years in prison, and are then released. Now the question that the Catechism asks is, *'Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself even to death? Why could Jesus not have borne a lighter punishment? We confess that Christ suffered throughout His whole life on earth. Was that not sufficient as a payment? Why did He have to go all the way to the cross and to death? Why is the judgment of God so harsh?'*

The Catechism responds by referring to the justice and truth of God. We should remember what we learned back in Lord's Day 4, where we also spoke about the justice of God in relation to sin. There we spoke not only about the severe judgment of God, but also about the severity of sin. The sin which man committed was not like a wrong done between you and your friend, who are two equals. No, this sin is one that is committed against the most high majesty of God. If I committed wrong against my neighbour, I would not receive as severe a judgment as I would if I committed wrong against Queen Elizabeth. Therefore our Catechism says that sin committed against the most high majesty of God must be punished with extreme punishment, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul. God's justice demands this.

It is not just a matter of the justice of God, it is also a matter of the truth of God. God will not break His Word. God warned Adam and Eve in Paradise that if they disobeyed Him, they would surely die. Thus the payment for sin was firmly established as death. Either we pay for our own sins by way of death (a payment which we would never complete in all eternity) or we must turn to Christ by true faith in order to receive the payment which He rendered by way of His death. This much is true: whoever makes payment for sin must make payment by giving up his life. Thus it was necessary for Christ to die.

Then the Catechism asks, *"Why was Christ buried?"* The answer given is: *"To prove that He had really died."* Now we know that the soldier pierced Christ's side and blood and water flowed out. By this it was already proven that Christ was dead. Nevertheless, if Christ had immediately been raised from the dead, the disciples would have wondered whether He had really died. In this way Christ's burial gave further testimony to the fact that Christ was truly dead. In the burial there was the process of preparing the body (washing, then wrapping the body with cloth intermingled with spices). Nicodemus and Joseph would have felt that the body of Christ had grown cold and stiff. They would have seen the grey hue of death colour His skin. Through the process involved in burial, proof was given to the church that Christ had really died.



Although the Catechism does not bring this in, we should also see the burial of Christ as the last stage in Christ's humiliation. When God pronounced His curse upon man, He declared that man would return to the dust, from which he was created (cf. Genesis 3:19). When men are buried, their bodies decompose in time and return to dust. Although Christ's flesh did not see corruption (cf. Psalm 16:10, Acts 2:31), He was nevertheless buried. This then was the last part of Christ's humiliation. He was buried as a symbol of the curse that rested upon man.

Christ's burial gives us comfort, for according to Scripture, "*We are buried with Christ by baptism into death*" (Romans 6:3,4). This is one of the symbols of baptism. Immersion¹ in water is symbolic of death (cf. notes on Lord's Day 26). Thus in the sign of baptism there is the promise that we died with Christ. This means that we as believers participate in the payment which Christ offered for sin. His payment is our payment. We have passed from judgment of death to eternal life in Christ.

Now, if we share in Christ's payment, why must we still die? Isn't Christ's payment enough? Indeed, His payment is all-sufficient and is payment in full.

Believers must never view their death as a payment for sin. Then death would be something fearful. However, as Paul says,

death has lost its sting. For believers, death is no longer a punishment for sin. What is it then? For believers, death is a dying to sin and an entering into eternal life. For the believer, death is nothing more than a gateway into the perfect life of bliss. In this life we are still plagued with our old nature. Our depravity has not yet been fully removed. In this life we still commit sins which cause us great sorrow and sadness. At death we leave behind our sins and our sinful tendencies. We throw them off like dirty and defiled clothing, and we enter into that life wherein we can serve God with perfection.

Furthermore, there are in life the miserable consequences of sin, such as sickness and physical deformities. Some people must suffer a great deal of pain in this life, but all these miserable consequences of sin are left behind at the gate leading to eternal life.

However, is there no benefit to be derived already in this life from the death and burial of our Lord Jesus Christ? There is! In Q. & A. 43, the Catechism teaches us *that our old nature was crucified, put to death and buried with Him*. The old nature no longer rules us. Sin no longer has dominion over us. We are no longer slaves of Satan. To be sure, sin remains with us so long as we are in this life. Yet over against our natural depraved spirit, we have received the Spirit of God, who leads us and rules us. Thus there is the possibility that we, who are regenerated, can also live a life of gratitude to God. Now already we can offer our life as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Our obedience is still imperfect and beset with great weaknesses and shortcomings, but there is a beginning of that new obedience. Our sin is completely removed from us at the time of our death.

The Apostles' Creed ends the humiliation of Christ by saying, "*He descended into hell.*" We must focus on the meaning of this statement, for it is usually

¹Already from the first centuries, the church accepted the mode of sprinkling rather than immersion. This was done when sufficient water was not readily available. In Scripture sprinkling is often used as a symbol of cleansing (cf. Lev 14:7, Ezek 36:25, Heb 10:22), and thus is also an acceptable mode for baptism, although baptism by immersion remains the richer of the two modes.

misunderstood. When we explain this, we must examine the historical setting in which this statement was written and interpreted, for it means different things to different people in different times.

We should first note that the Scriptures use different words that are translated “hell” in the English language. There is the word “**Sheol**” in the OT. *Sheol* simply means “*the realm of the dead, both for the good and the evil.*” It does not have in itself the idea of a place of punishment or of rewards.

In the NT, there is the word “**Hades**”, which is similar in meaning to *Sheol*. Christ is said to have descended into Hades (cf. Psalm 16:10 - Acts 2:27) *Hades* is the state in which the dead exist. Yet there is also the use of *Hades* as a place where the unbelievers go, a place of torment (cf. Luke 16:23)

In the NT, there is also the word “**Gehenna**” which is translated “hell” in most versions (cf. Matthew 5:22,29,30; 10:28 et.al.). It always refers to a place of eternal punishment.

Now when we examine the statement “*He descended into hell,*” we find that there are various interpretations.

- The **Authors of the Apostles’ Creed** - understood hell to mean simply the **state of death**. Christ entered into the realm of the dead, or the grave.
- The **Roman Church** - understood hell to refer to Christ’s descent to the **place where all the OT believers existed** (Limbus Patrum). There the saints waited for Christ to reveal the gospel and take them to heaven.
- The **Lutherans** - understand hell as **the underworld where Satan and the evil angels dwell**. Christ descended into hell, they say, in order to defeat the powers of darkness and show to them His great power and glory.
- The **Reformed** - regard hell as the **state of extreme suffering** which

Christ underwent during His life (and not after His death!).

Of the various interpretations **two are possible**, namely, that of the authors of the Apostles’ Creed and that of the Reformed. We can understand Christ’s descent into hell as His descent into the grave or into the realm of the dead (cf. Acts 2:27). Or we can understand it, as our Catechism does, as a summary of the suffering which Christ endured on earth. Below is a paraphrase of these two possible interpretations:

1. Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, He **descended into the grave** (or into the realm of the dead).
2. Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. Throughout His life **He suffered hell on earth.**

Herewith we conclude the matter of Christ’s suffering and His humiliation. In the Form for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper,² we have a beautiful summary of how we benefit from Christ’s suffering. Consider the table below.

What Christ suffered	What it means for us.
He was bound...	...that He might free us from our sins.
He suffered countless insults...	...that we might never be put to shame.
He was innocently condemned to death...	...that we might be acquitted at the judgment seat of God.
He even let His blessed body be nailed to the cross...	...that He might cancel the bond which stood against us because of our sins.
By all this He has taken our curse upon Himself...	...that He might fill us with His blessings.
He cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”...	...that we might be accepted by God and nevermore be forsaken by Him.

²As found in the *Book of Praise, Anglo-Genevan Psalter*, Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* of the Canadian Reformed Churches, pg. 597.



Questions:

1. Why was Christ's life-long suffering not sufficient to satisfy the wrath of God against our sin? That is, why was it necessary for Christ to go all the way to the cross and to death?
2. The disciples of Christ were to be witnesses of His death and His resurrection. How was it made clear to them that Christ had truly died? Could the disciples of Christ have been mistaken when they laid Christ in the tomb, thinking that He was dead while really He was alive but unconscious?
3. Explain in what way Christ's burial was another step in His humiliation.
4. What does Scripture mean when it says, "*We are buried with Christ by baptism into death.*"
5. Death is the punishment for sin. Yet if Christ has removed our sins, why do we still die? Is our death a (partial) payment for our sins? What is death for us as Christians?
6. What two things do we leave behind when we pass through the gateway of death?
7. How does Christ's death benefit us now already in this life? What in us was crucified, put to death and buried with Christ? What does this mean?
8. What are some other words in Scripture that are translated as "*hell,*" and what do they mean?
9. Describe the various interpretations of the article, "*He descended into hell.*" Which are incorrect? Which are correct?
10. In the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper we have a beautiful summary of the purpose of Christ's suffering and death, wherein each one contrasts the other. Highlight the contrasting words. Eg. Christ was ***bound***; that He might ***free*** us from our sins.