

LORD'S DAY 18

46. Q. What do you confess when you say,
He ascended into heaven?

A. That Christ,
before the eyes of His disciples,
was taken up from the earth into heaven,¹
and that He is there for our benefit²
until He comes again
to judge the living and the dead.³

1. **Mark 16:19** So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

Luke 24:50,51 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.

Acts 1:9-11 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹ who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

2. **Romans 8:34** Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High

Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

Hebrews 7:23-25 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. ²⁴ But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 9:24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us...

3. **Matthew 24:30** "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Acts 1:11 ...who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

47. Q. Is Christ, then, not with us until the end of the world, as He has promised us?¹

A. Christ is true man and true God.
With respect to His human nature
He is no longer on earth ²
but with respect to
His divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit
He is never absent from us.³

1. **Matthew 28:20** "...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

2. **Matthew 26:11** "For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always.

John 16:28 "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father."

John 17:11 "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are."

Acts 3:19-21 "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Hebrews 8:4 For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law...

3. **Matthew 28:18-20** And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me

in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

John 14:16-19 "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever; ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him

nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.

John 16:13 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

48. Q. But are the two natures in Christ not separated from each other if His human nature is not present wherever His divinity is?

A. Not at all, for His divinity has no limits and is present everywhere.¹ So it must follow that His divinity is indeed beyond the human nature which He has taken on and nevertheless is within this human nature and remains personally united with it.²

1. **Jeremiah 23:23,24** "Am I a God near at hand," says the LORD, "and not a God afar off? ²⁴ Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?" says the LORD; "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the LORD.

Acts 7:48,49 "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: ⁴⁹ 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, or what is the place of My rest?..."

2. **John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 3:13 "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

Colossians 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

49. Q. How does Christ's ascension into heaven benefit us?

A. First, He is our Advocate in heaven before His Father.¹ Second, we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, our Head, will also take us, His members, up to Himself.² Third, He sends us His Spirit as a counter-pledge,³ by whose power we seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and not the things that are on earth.⁴

1 **Romans 8:34** Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

1 **John 2:1** My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

2. **John 14:2** “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”

John 17:24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”

Ephesians 2:4-6 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus....

3. **John 14:16** “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever...”

Acts 2:33 Therefore being exalted to the right

hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

2 Corinthians 1:21,22 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, ²² who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

2 Corinthians 5:5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

4. **Colossians 3:1-4** If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.



In this Lord’s Day we deal with the second part of Christ’s exaltation, that is, His ascension into heaven. The first question and answer in this Lord’s Day deals with two things:

1. the *fact* of Christ’s ascension
2. the *value* of Christ’s ascension.

Regarding the fact of the ascension, the gospels and the book of Acts expressly mention that the disciples were witnesses of it. Christ could have ascended without anyone knowing it, or at most one or two. However, Christ intentionally called all His disciples together in order that they might all serve as witnesses, to dispel any doubts that might have otherwise arisen. For the ascension of our Lord is too important to question.

Regarding the importance of the ascension, the Catechism also wishes to make it clear that Christ ascended into heaven for our benefit. It might be difficult for us to understand how His departure could actually benefit us. We might see greater advantage if He remained with us. This is not so. Perhaps an example would illustrate this.

During the years of World War 11, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands had to flee from the Germans. She fled to England and ruled her people from there. When

she fled to England, there were many that thought that she was forsaking them. However, she was not running out on her people. She went to England for her people’s benefit. She could do more for her people in England than if she had stayed in Holland. In the same way Christ has left us for our advantage. He can do more for us from heaven than He could do on earth.

Christ is working in heaven for our salvation. Sometimes we think that at His death Christ’s work was completed, especially when at His death He cried out, “*It is finished!*” However, in saying that, Christ only implied that His earthly ministry was complete. He had **acquired** salvation by making full payment for sin. Yet Christ’s work has not come to an end. There still remains the task of **applying** the salvation which He had acquired, and this work Christ performs from heaven. (The distinction between acquiring salvation and applying it was discussed already in the previous Lord’s Day when we defined justification.)

In Lord’s Day 12 we spoke about Christ’s threefold office. There we stated that Christ continues to work in this threefold office of Prophet, Priest and King.

1. As our **Chief Prophet**, He pours out the Holy Spirit upon the church, and

He ensures that the Word of God is proclaimed.

2. As our **High Priest**, Christ continues to intercede for us at the Father's right hand. For this reason, the Catechism says that Christ is our **Advocate**, which is another word for **Lawyer**, someone who pleads for our cause before the Father.
3. As our **Eternal King**, He continues to rule over us with His word and Spirit, as well as defends and preserves us against the attacks of the evil one.

If Christ has ascended, and He has, how could He say to His disciples just before His ascension, "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20). One of two must be true: either He is still with us, or He lied. The latter could never be true. Thus it leaves us with the former. Christ is still with us.

In accordance with the Scriptures, the Catechism states that with respect to Christ's human nature, He is no longer with us. His human nature is in heaven. But you will also remember that Christ is both true God and true man. Although His human nature is limited to heaven, this is not the case with Christ's divine nature. The divine nature cannot be limited to one place. The divine nature of Christ cannot be fully contained in the human nature. It is everywhere present. Thus with respect to His divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit, Christ is still with us.

Are these two natures separated then? No they are not! They are very much joined together in heaven. In heaven we find Christ's human as well as His divine nature. They are united in the person of Christ. Yet the divine nature cannot be limited to the same restrictions as the human nature. Thus the human nature of Christ is in heaven personally joined to His divine nature. Yet the divine nature of Christ goes beyond the human nature, and is everywhere present, also on earth.

One might compare it to this example: a litre of water contains more than could possibly fit into a cup. If you try to fit it

in you will fill the cup but the rest will overflow the brim of the cup and will spread everywhere. Likewise Christ's divine nature is far greater than His human nature. His divine nature cannot be restricted to the human nature. It fills the human nature, but it overflows everywhere.

When we speak of Christ's divine nature, we speak especially about His **divinity** and **majesty**. These words refer to Christ's almighty power and His supreme authority. With respect to these, Christ is as close to us as when He walked on earth. For Christ does not need to be present to exercise His power and authority. Do you remember the centurion who requested Christ to heal his servant? (cf. Matthew 8:5ff.) When Christ was still some distance from the centurion's house, he bade Jesus not to come closer, for he was not worthy to have Christ enter his house. He asked Christ to stay where He was, and from that distance to give the command for the sickness to leave his servant. He believed that Christ's power could transverse the distance that physically separated them. The same is true today. Even from heaven Christ exercises all power and authority on earth. That is a great comfort for us!

We are also surrounded by Christ's **grace** and His undeserved kindness. When Christ walked on earth He had compassion upon those who suffered the miseries of this broken life. However, Christ's ascension has not changed this. Christ is still fully aware of our trials and tribulations, and He is just as compassionate today as He was then. He might not relieve us of all our burdens, but He will give us the strength to bear them. He also gives us rest for our souls, and a hope for a glorious future.

Lastly, Christ is with us in the Person of the **Holy Spirit**. In a way, Christ is closer to His followers now than when He was with them while He was on earth. Before Christ *walked with* them, but now Christ *dwells in* them (cf. Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20). Through the Spirit Christ dwells in us, and we dwell in Him.

It should be clear to us that we are not poorer because of Christ's ascension. Just the opposite! We are richer. We have lost nothing, but gained much.

How does Christ's ascension benefit us? The Catechism teaches us that we benefit in three ways.

1. Christ is our Advocate before the Father

We have gained an *Advocate* or *Lawyer* before the Father (cf. Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1). He pleads for us with the Father. Think of this example: If we wanted to have a job at a certain place, it would be much easier for us to get that job if we were a friend of the boss's son or daughter. Then we could say to our friend, "*Will you please put in a good word for me to your father, because I sure would like that job.*" When we pray to God, Christ intercedes for us. He pleads with the Father for our sake, and for Christ's sake the Father answers our prayers (cf. John 14:13).

2. Christ's ascension pledges our ascension

When Christ ascended into heaven, something very significant happened. A man had entered into the presence of God. Christ, as a true man, entered into the dwelling of God not made with hands (cf. Hebrews 9:11). This was something significant, because man had been cast out of and barred from God's presence because of sin. This was made evident in paradise when God cast Adam and Eve out of His garden. (cf. Genesis 3:23,24). This was also made evident to the saints of the Old Testament when God secluded Himself in the Most Holy Place, into which no man was permitted except the High Priest once a year (as a type of the Christ). Anyone who dared to enter the Most Holy Place would surely die. Yet Christ entered into the heavenly sanctuary.

The Catechism teaches us that Christ's resurrection is a pledge that we shall be admitted into the presence of God together with Him. To understand how Christ's ascension can pledge (guarantee) this, we must remember who Christ is. Christ is not simply a single individual. He is our

legal Head and Representative. Whatever privileges He secured, He secured not just for Himself but also for us. We share in all His work and rewards. Thus when Christ was accepted into the presence of the Father, we were also legally accepted. That Christ was welcomed into God's presence is a pledge (guarantee) that one day we too shall be welcomed into God's presence.

Christ assured His disciples that they would join Him in His Father's presence. He told them that He was going to heaven in order to prepare a place for them in His Father's mansion (cf. John 14:1ff.). When our parents or grandparents emigrated from the Netherlands to Canada or Australia, often the husband would go first, and then after he had things settled somewhat, he sent for his wife (and children). In the same way Christ is considered the church's Groom. He is busy getting things ready for us. And when everything is ready, He will come and take His bride (the church) to Himself in heavenly glory and splendour. We should not understand this to mean that we will spend eternity in heaven. Rather, God will dwell with men again as it was in paradise, making His dwelling on earth again.

Our reunion with Christ is sure, for Christ is not only called the Groom of the church, He is also our Head, representing us. What He does Himself, He does for us. Now Christ is already in heaven. And if the Head is in heaven, we may be assured that Christ will also take us, His members to Himself. Thus Christ's ascension is a pledge or guarantee that Christ will come back for us and take us to Himself where He is.

3. Christ sends us His Spirit as a counter-pledge

A *counter-pledge* is a twin pledge, a pledge that corresponds with a previous pledge. An example of a pledge and counter-pledge are the rings given in marriage. A man gives his wife a ring as a pledge of his love and faithfulness towards her. In

return, he receives from his wife a ring as a counter-pledge of the promise.

In this instance the pledge is that a Man (Christ) has gone to dwell with God. The counter-pledge is that God (the Holy Spirit) has come to dwell with man. The two pledges complement each other. Together they promise that we will dwell with God and He with us.

We know that by nature we are not fit to live in God's house. We are impure and unholy, defiled with sin and horribly corrupt. We might doubt whether God, who is pure and holy, would ever accept us. Now God could never accept us the way we are. God could not permit sinners to dwell with Him. We would need to be changed. We would need to be purified,

sanctified. We would need a new nature, recreated in holiness. And that is going to happen. When we are presented to the Father, we are going to be perfect, without spot or blemish due to sin (cf. Ephesians 5:27). We are going to be made fit to live in the presence of God.

As proof of this, Christ has given us the Holy Spirit Who now already changes us. We are being renewed, recreated in holiness (cf. Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 3:10). We see the changes in our lives. We can see the works of the Holy Spirit in us (cf. Ephesians 5:8ff., Galatians 5:22). That gives us proof that Christ is making us fit to be admitted into the presence of God, where we will live eternally.



Questions:

1. What is the second "step" of Christ's exaltation?
2. What two things does the Catechism point out with respect to the ascension of Christ?
3. What did Christ do to give us ample evidence of His ascension?
4. Explain why Christ's departure from earth and His ascension into heaven actually benefit us more than if He had remained on earth?
5. Was Christ's work altogether finished when He said, "*It is finished!*" To what do these words refer?
6. What is Christ doing for us in heaven as our chief Prophet? As our High Priest? As our eternal King?
7. The Catechism distinguishes the two natures of Christ. What are these two natures? Are these two natures both present everywhere? In what sense is Christ still with us?
8. Were Christ's two natures separated from each other after the ascension? Can you give an example to explain how they are united, yet one exceeds the boundaries of the other?
9. What does the Catechism mean when it says
 - a. that Christ's divinity and majesty are always present with us?
 - b. that Christ's grace is always present with us?
 - c. that Christ's Spirit is always present with us?
10. Are we poorer with Christ in heaven than the disciples were with Christ on earth?
11. With Christ's ascension, we now have an Advocate in heaven. What is an advocate, and how does His advocacy benefit us?
12. What was so significant about Christ's ascension?
13. The Catechism says that Christ's ascension is for us a pledge. What is a pledge, and what is pledged?
14. What do we need to know in order to understand how Christ's ascension can serve as a pledge that we will be admitted into God's presence with Christ?
15. What is a counter-pledge? What counter-pledge did Christ give us, and what is pledged?
16. What is the Holy Spirit doing in us? What does this prove to us?