

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

TEACHING OUTLINES

By

Rev Arthur van Delden ©

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LORD'S DAY 1

1. Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?
- A. That I am not my own,¹
but belong with body and soul,
both in life and in death,²
to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.³
He has fully paid for all my sins
with His precious blood,⁴
and has set me free
from all the power of the devil.⁵
He also preserves me in such a way ⁶
that without the will of my heavenly Father
not a hair can fall from my head;⁷
indeed, all things must work together
for my salvation.⁸
Therefore, by His Holy Spirit
He assures me
of eternal life ⁹
and makes me heartily willing and ready
from now on to live for Him.¹⁰

1. **1 Corinthians 6:19,20** Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

2. **Romans 14:7-9** For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

3. **1 Corinthians 3:23** And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Titus 2:14 ...who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

4. **1 Peter 1:18,19** ...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 2:2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

5. **John 8:34-36** Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. ³⁵ And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. ³⁶ Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

Hebrews 2:14,15 Inasmuch then as the children

have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself 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.

1 John 3:8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

6. **John 6:39,40** "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰ And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 10:27-30 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. ³⁰ I and My Father are one."

2 Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

1 Peter 1:5 ...who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

7. **Matthew 10:29-31** "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. ³⁰ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Luke 21:16-18 "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head shall be lost...."

8. **Romans 8:28** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.
9. **Romans 8:15,16** For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God....
- 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.

Ephesians 1:13,14 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

10. **Romans 8:14** For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

2. Q. What do you need to know in order to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A. First,
how great my sins and misery are;¹
second,
how I am delivered
from all my sins and misery;²
third,
how I am to be thankful to God
for such deliverance.³

1. **Romans 3:9,10** What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.¹⁰ As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one."

1 John 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

2. **John 17:3** "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Acts 4:12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Acts 10:43 "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

3. **Matthew 5:16** Let your light so shine before men,

that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Romans 6:13 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.

Ephesians 5:8-10 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

1 Peter 2:9,10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

The first Lord's Day serves as an introduction to the Catechism. The Catechism, in turn, serves as an introduction to, and a summary of, God's Holy Word. For this reason we can say that the first Lord's Day is one which sums up the whole gospel. The Catechism is the message of the gospel in a nutshell.

If this is what the Catechism does, then why does the Catechism speak about *comfort*? Why doesn't the first question read: "*What is the summary of the Bible's message?*"

In the first place, we should realise that one of the purposes of the gospel is to give us comfort. In Romans 15:4 we read that the Bible is not only meant to instruct

us, but also to encourage and comfort us by giving us hope. *"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."* The Bible is therefore a book of comfort. The Catechism reflects this purpose of Scripture, for it too, endeavours to give us comfort.

Furthermore, the time in which the Catechism was written also gives us a clue to why it begins with a reference to our comfort. The greatest jewel of the Reformation was the comfort which the church had long lost because of doctrinal heresy. As long as God's children were burdened with the doctrine of *"work salvation"* (earning your salvation by means of your good works), they had no real comfort, no rest for their souls. For just as we know today, so the genuine children of God knew then how great their sins were. They also knew how great God's demand is, which they could never fulfil because of their sinfulness. They knew that if salvation depended upon their own works, they could never have real assurance of their salvation, for they could never be sure whether they had done enough to be saved. Thus they could never have comfort or rest for their souls.

Another reason lies in the political and religious climate of the time. The early years of the Reformation were times of persecution. That was especially true for the Huguenots in France, many of whom lost their lives because of their faith. The news of this persecution would reach the ears of all the Reformed. How fitting for Ursinus and Olevianus to begin with a word of comfort in such trying times.

How do we define *"comfort?"* Comfort is ***the peace of mind that arises out of God's promised mercy, which eases fear, anxiety and sorrow.*** What causes this fear in us? What arouses this anxiety? From where does this sorrow arise? From our fall into sin! Our sin arouses the wrath of our holy and jealous God. And the consuming wrath of God makes us tremble in fear. Furthermore,

our sin is punished with God's curse. And the effects of this curse, such as pain, sickness and death, all give birth to sorrow.

As we mentioned in our definition, comfort arises from the mercy of God. That is clear from Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 1:3, where Paul describes God as *"the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort."* The only source of comfort lies in the mercy of God which He has shown to us in Christ Jesus. That is why the Catechism says, *"What is your only comfort?"* There is no other comfort than that which comes from our gracious God, through the forgiveness of our sins and the righteousness of Christ. In Isaiah 40:1, we read *"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" says your God. "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned."* Israel's comfort was based on God's promise that her punishment would come to an end, because God would pardon her sins.

The unbeliever who is ignorant or who rejects the comfort that arises from God's grace looks for another source of comfort. Nevertheless, the most they can find in this life is some temporary respite from the miserable consequences of sin. They might be able to amass some wealth, so that they can enjoy some physical comforts, such as a nice home and good food. They do not have the discomfort of being left out in the cold, nor the discomfort of hunger pains. They might be able to make advancements in medicine, which alleviate some of the pain and suffering which man would otherwise experience. Yet such "comforts" only affect the outward body. The believer, however, enjoys peace of mind. His soul is quieted within him.

The Catechism describes our comfort as belonging to Jesus Christ. What does it mean to belong to Jesus Christ? It means that we become His responsibility. He has made Himself our Saviour, our Redeemer, our Protector, our Provider. One might compare it to a child. In a room full of children someone might ask a mother,

"Which child belongs to you?" Parents have the responsibility to provide for their children's needs, to guide them and protect them from harm, to look out for their well-being. The life of an orphan in a third world country where there is poverty and famine is not a good life. He does not belong to anyone. Yet he is not able to stand on his own and provide for himself. Can you imagine what joy he would feel if he were adopted by loving parents who could provide him with what he needed for life? How comforting it would be for him to know that he belonged to someone, that someone was willing to be responsible for his life, his well-being. That is what it means to belong to Jesus Christ. We were like orphans - or worse! We had sold ourselves to Satan through sin. We had become his children. Yet Satan did not seek our well-being; he sought our ruin. How wonderful to belong to Jesus Christ!

The Catechism says that I belong with body and soul to Jesus Christ. That means that I belong completely to Him. All of me belongs to Christ. Not just my soul is His, but also my body. He owns me completely, totally. Paul wrote, *"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's,"* (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

Then the Catechism says that I am His in life and in death. This means that I belong to Him always. I don't belong to Christ just in this life. Even when I die I still belong to Christ. In every situation, at all times, I belong to my Redeemer. Nothing can separate me from Him. Paul wrote, *"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,"* (Romans 8:38,39).

Since we belong to Christ, we are brought into a special relationship with the Father. The Catechism speaks about "my

Heavenly Father." On account of what Christ has done, the Father adopts us again as His children. That means that we are now under the care of our heavenly Father. He will look out for our good. Not a hair can fall from our head without our Father's will. And even if it sometimes seems as though evil things happen to us, yet we may be sure that everything that happens to us is working towards our salvation, even if we cannot understand how that is possible. God is much wiser than we are.

How does one come to belong to Christ? Christ bought us. He paid the price of our sins. Not with gold or silver, but with His precious blood. He bought us through His suffering and death. That was the price that had to be paid in order to release us from the bondage to sin and death. And now that Christ has released us, He continues to watch over us lest we should come under bondage to sin again. For Satan tries to gain power over us, wanting to enslave us as before. Yet Christ preserves us and will not allow us to come under Satan's dominion again. He will cause us to persevere and to remain faithful to the end.

Belonging to Jesus Christ does not mean that we are free in the sense of being able to do whatever pleases us. *"I am not my own,"* says the Catechism. We are free from the grip of the devil, and we belong to Christ. Satan once ruled us, but now we are ruled by Christ. He rules us by His Word and Spirit. Now we must do what He tells us to do. We must obey Him. He is our Lord, our Master, (cf. Romans 6:15-23).

Of ourselves we are not willing to do so. By nature we are rebellious and we want to do our own will. And our sinful nature can alarm us. Will we submit ourselves to Christ's rule? But here, too, we are comforted. For Christ promises to work in our hearts with His Holy Spirit, so that we are heartily willing and ready to obey Him. As Paul wrote, *"for it is God who works in you both to will and to do [or work] for His good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:13).

In order to experience the comfort of belonging to Christ, it is necessary for us to know three things.

We must come to know how great our sins and misery are. There is no comfort in the knowledge of our sin and misery itself. It only makes us feel very bad about ourselves. The knowledge of our sin and misery only serves to frighten us. Yet this knowledge is necessary, for it incites us to look for healing. Unless we know that we are sick, we seldom go to a doctor. In like manner, no one will look for redemption from sin and misery unless he first comes to know his sin and misery.

The Catechism says that we have to learn how great our sins and misery are. We do not go running to a doctor if we have a cold or some other minor ailment. We only go if we have something quite serious, and something that won't go away by itself. This is what the Catechism will teach us: that our sin is very great. It will lead to eternal death. Furthermore, the Catechism will teach us that our "ailment" will not go away by itself, or by our ministrations. We need a spiritual physician.

It is no comfort to know that we are horribly sick and are going to die. In fact, some doctors are reluctant to tell their patients how serious their illness is if there is no cure. For this knowledge won't benefit them. In some ways, ignorance is bliss. The only time that such knowledge would really be of any benefit is when there is a cure.

It is the same with our knowledge of our sin and misery. If there was no forgiveness of sins and no redemption, then we could just as well remain ignorant about our spiritual condition. Yet if there is a cure, we want to be told about our disease so that we might go to the physician who can heal us.

Thus the knowledge of how great our sins and misery are will only be of comfort to us if we at the same time are told of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Thus the second aspect of that knowledge, which is necessary to have as comfort, is

the knowledge of the deliverance, which is in Christ Jesus our LORD.

The Catechism says that our comfort also hinges on the knowledge of how we are to show ourselves thankful for such deliverance. The reason is two-fold.

- a. First, we who have been redeemed by God are required to show our thankfulness to Him by walking according to His will. God is angry with those who continue to walk in sin. But by nature we don't know God's will. We don't know how to show ourselves thankful to God for His grace. God must teach us what is good and acceptable in His sight. We can only have the comfort of knowing that God is pleased with us if we know we are walking according to His will.
- b. Second, God promised that we who have been redeemed from sin through Christ will also produce fruits of thankfulness through the Spirit. These two go hand in hand. Christ's work of redemption and the spiritual fruits of thankfulness are inseparable. If we see the Spirit producing fruits of thankfulness in our lives, then we have the comfort of knowing with certainty that Christ has redeemed us. But we need to know what these fruits of thankfulness are so that we can recognise the Spirit's work in us.



Questions:

1. What is one of the first purposes of the gospel?
2. Why would we say that "*comfort*" was the greatest jewel of the Reformation?
3. In what way did the religious and political climate of the day prompt the authors of the Catechism to begin the Catechism by speaking about our "*comfort*"?
4. What is comfort?
5. Why does the Catechism speak about our "*only*" comfort?
6. Why doesn't the Catechism mention wealth or medicine as sources of comfort?
7. How does the Catechism describe our comfort? What does that mean?
8. To what degree do we belong to Jesus Christ? When do we belong to Him?
9. How does our relationship to Jesus Christ affect our relationship to God the Father?
10. What is the comfort of having God as our heavenly Father?
11. How does one come to belong to Jesus Christ?
12. Can anything or anyone separate us from Christ?
13. To belong to Jesus Christ also means that Christ is our Lord and Master? What does that imply?
14. Are those who belong to Christ willing to submit to Him and live in obedience? How is this possible?
15. What three things are necessary in order for us to experience this comfort?
16. Does the knowledge of our sins and misery itself give any comfort? Why must we know about our sins and misery, then?
17. Will the knowledge of our sin and misery itself comfort us? What else must we know?
18. Why does our comfort hinge on the knowledge of how we are to show our thankfulness?

The First Part

OUR SIN AND MISERY

LORD'S DAY 2

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| 3. Q. From where do you know your sins and misery? |
| A. From the law of God. ¹ |

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| 1. Rom 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the | law is the knowledge of sin.
Rom 7:7-25 |
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| 4. Q. What does God's law require of us? |
| A. Christ teaches us this in a summary in Matthew 22:
<i>You shall love the Lord your God
 with all your heart,
 and with all your soul,
 and with all your mind.¹
 This is the great and first commandment.
 And a second is like it,
 You shall love your neighbour as yourself:
 On these two commandments depend
 all the law and the prophets.²</i> |

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| 1. Deuteronomy 6:5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." | 2. Leviticus 19:18 "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." |
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| 5. Q. Can you keep all this perfectly? |
| A. No, ¹ I am inclined by nature to hate God and my neighbour. ² |

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|---|---|
| 1. Romans 3:10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one."

Romans 3:23 ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

1 John 1:8,10 ...If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, & the truth is not in us. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us. | Romans 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. |
| 2. Genesis 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 8:21 And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done."

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" | Ephesians 2:3 ...among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Titus 3:3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. |

In Lord's Day 1 we learned that in order to live and die in the joy of our only comfort, we must come to know about our sin and misery. Now in Lord's Day 2 we will discuss the source of this knowledge. Before we do, we want to understand what is meant by the term: *sin* and *misery*.

SIN - those acts that man commits in rebellion against God.	
MISERY - the punishment which God inflicts upon the rebellion of man.	
↓ Spiritual misery	↓ Physical misery
The heart of man became hard, with the result that man hates God.	The body of man was subject to sickness, pain, and ultimately to death.
The mind of man became darkened, with the result that man became foolish in his thinking, no longer knowing God.	The realm of nature was also cursed, resulting in natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, cyclones, droughts, and the like.
The will of man became enslaved to evil, with the result that man was inclined only and always to evil.	The animal kingdom was also cursed, with the result that animals have turned in hostility against man and against each other.

The Catechism asks the question, "*From where do you know your sins and misery?*" We might be inclined to think that knowledge of our sin would come from man's own conscience. After all, fallen man *retains some notions about God, and about natural things, and about the difference between what is honourable and shameful*" (Canons of Dort, III/IV, 4. cf. also Romans 1:19,20, 2:14,15).

Furthermore, there are many things in this world that should tell us about our misery. All the sickness and death in the world, all the violence and crimes, all the hatred and war, should make our misery evident to us. We would think that the newspaper would be quite sufficient to make us know our misery.

However the Catechism teaches us that the conscience of man is not enough to give him knowledge of his sins, neither is the experience of misery enough to give us knowledge of our misery.

There are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, the word "*know*" which the Catechism uses, means more than just *know about* sin. It carries with it the idea of *acknowledging sin* before God. This is something that the natural man refuses. Even though his conscience may accuse him of doing wrong, he suppresses this knowledge (cf. Romans 1:18). Though he may know about his sin, he refuses to acknowledge it in humble repentance before God.

In the second place, things such as sickness and death are sufficient to tell us *that* there is misery, but they cannot tell us *why* there is misery, and that is certainly what the Catechism has in mind when it speaks about *knowing* our misery.

Still further, although our sins and misery should be apparent to us from what we experience in daily life, our mind does not register the signals that come to us. That is because our mind has become impaired through sin. We might use the example of a severely mentally handicapped child, who because of the severity of his handicap does not even realise his condition. Scripture says that the mind of fallen man has become darkened and senseless (cf. Romans 1:21). Because of this mental darkness, we do not come to know our sins by what we experience in life.

Another reason for having to learn about our sin and misery is because we are all alike. All men are conceived and born in sin. All men are by nature corrupt. All men are the same. And if all are the same, we conclude that this is normal. If we all had six fingers on each hand, we would think that this is normal. We would not know better. In like manner, all men are depraved. Thus we tend to think that this is natural. Imperfection is a part of humanity. "*To err is human,*" they say. Yet

it is not; imperfection is abnormal. God created us perfect but we have become depraved through our fall into sin. (This teaches us that we should not judge the correctness of what we do by looking to what most other people do. Sometimes we say, “*everybody does it!*” which seems to imply that it must be acceptable. However, what society in general accepts or what our church friends accept is not necessarily what God accepts.)

There is no way in which man can come to know his misery from what he experiences in himself, in fellow man or in daily life. Yet we have seen that it is very important that we possess a true knowledge of our sins and misery, otherwise we will not turn to God and seek the forgiveness of our sins and redemption from our misery. From where, then, shall we come to know our sins and misery?

God must teach us this. And He does. How? God teaches us our sins and misery through the law. When referring to the law, we refer to all the demands which God has set down in His Word. These are summarised in the Ten Commandments and in Matthew 22:37-40. In the law we come to see what God requires and what we were originally capable of rendering. We see ourselves, as we ought to be. And when we examine ourselves in the mirror of God's law, then we find that we are not what we ought to be and we do not do what we ought to do. By measuring ourselves by the law of God, we find that we fall terribly short of the obedience which God requires of us.

In saying that God teaches us our sins and misery through the law, we must not think that the law alone is capable of giving us this knowledge. A man can memorise the law through and through, and know it completely by heart, and still not come to know his sins and misery, that is, still not come to acknowledge his sins and misery to God. There is need for the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts men of sin through the law. Christ said in John 16:8, “*And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin.*”

Think of the effect the Holy Spirit had upon the people of Jerusalem whose hearts were previously closed to the gospel. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the crowds who listened to Peter's sermon came to acknowledge their sin. Peter closed his sermon by saying, “*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*” (Acts 2:36) And then we read of the response from the people. “*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”*” (Acts 2:37). The conviction of sin comes from the Holy Spirit who uses the law as His instrument.

What does God demand of us? One might say that God demands obedience from us. And that is certainly true. Yet that answer does not cover the depth of God's demands. It is possible to render ‘obedience’ but to do so in such a way that God is not pleased (cf. Psalm 50; Isaiah 29:13; Joel 2:13; Matthew 23). God is not pleased with external or ritual obedience. He desires obedience from the heart. God wants our love. That is why the law is summarised in Q. & A. 4: “*You shall love the Lord ... and your neighbour as yourself.*” It is possible to obey God without loving Him (an empty obedience). However, it is impossible to love without obeying (cf. John 14:15).

Furthermore, God requires **perfect** love, **complete** love, love for both God and our neighbour. The summary of the law emphasises this when it says, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” Three times the word “*all*” is repeated. And the reference to *heart*, *soul* and *mind* certainly emphasises the fact that God demands that we sacrifice our whole self as a living sacrifice of love and gratitude to God.

Through God's law we come to know what wretched persons we are. We have wandered away from God through our disobedience. We have lost all the wonderful gifts which God had given us

at creation, gifts such as purity, integrity and uprightness. Now we are left with none of these gifts and we are unable to do any good. This is what we confess in Q. & A. 5: *Can you keep all this perfectly? No, I am inclined by nature to hate God and my neighbour.*

There are some who claim that the law is no longer in force today. They say that in the Old Testament there was the law, but today there is grace, i.e., the command to love. In the Old Testament they had to strictly obey these laws, but in the New Testament we only have to love God and our neighbour. However, Christ said that the law has not passed away (cf. Matthew 5:17) and as we read in John 14:15, love for God will produce obedience to His commandments.

Does this mean that we have to keep all the Old Testament laws? It is evident that we do not do so any more. For example, we no longer sacrifice sheep and goats. There are some laws that are still in force and some that are not. We should distinguish between the different types of laws in the Old Testament.

1. In the Old Testament there were **civil laws** that were used in governing the people. For example, there were laws for restoring that which was stolen. There were laws for criminals, etc. Although these can and should be used as a guideline for us in the New Testament, we cannot apply them directly. For in the Old Testament, Israel was a theocratic nation, which means that both the church and the state were identical. The church leaders were also the civil leaders. In the New Testament, however, church and state are separate.
2. In the Old Testament there were also **ceremonial laws** that involved matters of worship. There were laws regarding holy days, sacrifices, cleanness and uncleanness. These also are no longer in force because they were intended to direct people's attention to the coming Christ. However, Christ has come and the "shadows" have

passed away. We should still study them and learn from them, for they give us a better understanding of Who Christ is and what He has done.

3. In the Old Testament there were also **covenantal laws**. They are laws which apply for life in the covenant. These laws are summarised in the Ten Commandments as we find them in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and they are worked out further in Scripture. These laws do not pass away. They remain in force always. Just as God's covenant with man is eternal, so these covenant laws will apply eternally. They are the standard by which we must govern our daily life at all times. And when we examine our lives in the light of these commandments, we realise that we fall grievously short of that obedience which Christ requires of us.



Questions;

1. What do we understand by our sins?
2. What do we understand by our misery? What are the two aspects of our misery?
3. What effect has sin had upon our heart, mind and will?
4. What effect has sin had upon our body, upon the realm of nature and upon the animal kingdom?
5. Does knowing about our misery simply mean that we *know about* sin? What is meant?
6. There are at least three reasons why the experiences of misery (such as sickness and death) are not enough to teach us about our sin:
 - a. In light of Romans 1:18 what does the natural man do with the awareness of his sin against God?
 - b. What can the experience of misery (such as sickness and death) not tell man? Why not?
 - c. Why can we not learn about our spiritual misery by observing fellow man?
7. How does God teach us about our sins and misery?
8. What, besides the law, is needed to make us acknowledge our sins and misery? What does John 16:8 say?
9. Why are the demands of the law summarised as "*You shall love the Lord ... and your neighbour as yourself?*"
10. What is emphasised in the words, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul and all your mind?*"
11. Are we able by nature to show this love to God and our neighbour?
12. Does the command for love replace the command for obedience to the law?
13. Describe the three types of laws in the old dispensation. Which laws do we have to keep in the new dispensation?

LORD'S DAY 3

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

A. No, on the contrary,
God created man good¹ and in His image,²
that is, in true righteousness and holiness,³
so that he might rightly know God his Creator,⁴
heartily love Him,
and live with Him in eternal blessedness
to praise and glorify Him.⁵

1. **Genesis 1:31** Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.
2. **Genesis 1:26,27** Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in His own
- image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
3. **Ephesians 4:24** ...and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.
4. **Colossians 3:10** ...and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.
5. **Psalms 8**

7. Q. From where, then, did man's depraved nature come?

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise,¹
For there our nature became so corrupt ²
that we are all conceived and born in sin.³

1. **Genesis 3**
2. **Romans 5:12,18,19** Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned....¹⁸ Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through
- one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.
3. **Psalms 51:5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

8. Q. But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined to all evil?

A. Yes,¹ unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.²

1. **Genesis 6:5** Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
Genesis 8:21 And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.
Job 14:4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!
- Isaiah 53:6** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
2. **John 3:3-5** Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

In this Lord's Day we must pick up the thread from the previous Lord's Day. There we confessed that man is inclined by nature to hate God (cf. Romans 8:7) and his neighbour (cf. Titus 3:3). This hatred of God means that we are not able to fulfil God's law. We saw last time that God will not accept a loveless obedience. God wants service from the heart. Thus love lies at the root of every commandment, and love is also the fulfilment of the law (cf. Romans 13:10). Christ said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (John 14:15). However, man has an overpowering tendency to hate God and to disobey Him.

This Lord's Day asks, *"Did God create man so wicked and perverse?"* Did God create man so wilfully disobedient and stubborn? Man asks this because he tries to escape the guilt that this evil nature brings upon him. If we answer *"Yes, God made man this way!"* then the guilt is not ours, but God's. Yet the Catechism immediately upholds God's innocence and holiness. It is not God's fault. He created man good, in righteousness and holiness. When God created man, man enjoyed a right relationship with God. Man was innocent, without any spot or blemish due to sin. Man was created good. Man could conform his will to God's will. Man could do what God demanded.

Scripture says that God created man in His own **image**. An image is a likeness or a reflection of something or someone. Man reflected the likeness of God. That we bear God's image does not mean that we look like God as far as appearance is concerned. Rather, it means that **we resemble God insofar as we reflect qualities that God possesses in perfection**. Man was given a mind that enabled man to reason. He was given a heart by which man was able to love. He was created with a sense of justice, of knowing what was good and right. These are qualities that are found in God. In this sense, we resemble God.

There is a second element to man as the image-bearer of God, and that is the

element of **office**. Just as a man might receive an office as elder, deacon or minister in the church, so man received from God the office of being God's image-bearer. In this office he is called to reflect God's image on earth. Man is given the exalted position of ruling this creation on God's behalf. He was to represent God by using his God-like qualities.

After creating man so glorious, God placed man on probation. This means that man was put to the test. God wanted to test the faithfulness of man, whether man would obey or not. Thus God said, *"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"* (Genesis 2:17). At this time the devil, the fallen angel and arch enemy of God, came and tempted man. How did he do this? By twisting the truth. He took what God said and changed it just a little so that it became a lie. The devil was very crafty, very sly. Moreover, the devil told the lie in such a way that it appeared that what he offered man was better than what God offered man, and man fell for the lie. Man listened to the serpent and disobeyed God.

We speak here of '*man*' and not just Adam and Eve. That is because Adam held another position as well as being the image-bearer of God. Adam was also the head and representative of all those who would be born from him. Think of this example: a teacher decides that he doesn't wish to mark thirty-five exams. Instead, he chooses one student to represent the class. He will be the head and representative of all his classmates. Whatever mark he receives on the exam will be *"imputed"* or reckoned to all the students. If he receives ninety five percent, all the students receive ninety five percent on their report. Yet if he fails the test, then all the students fail as well. The one student acts on behalf of all his classmates.

In a similar way, God appointed Adam to be the head and representative of all men who would be born from him. Since all men are descended from Adam, all share in his sin. What Adam did not only

affected himself, but it affected all men. His sin is “*imputed*” (charged to the account) of every child that was born to him. That is what Paul says in Romans 5:18,19 “*Through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation. ...By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.*” Because of this, we do not speak about Adam’s fall, but about the fall of mankind. Adam’s sin is our sin. We call this first sin “*original sin*.”

You might say: “That’s not fair!¹ Why should I be punished for Adam’s sin?” Yet we must remember that God gave Adam that unique position as our head and representative. Was it not God’s right as Creator to do what seemed good in His sight? Indeed, this was God’s right. We must be careful not to measure God by our sense of right and wrong, and restrict His actions to our sense of justice. God had every right to test all men in the one man Adam. Later, in LD 7, we will see that God sent another Adam, the last Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ. God sent Him to earth as man, so that He could take the test that Adam failed. He did this as our Head and Representative. He passed the test and God imputes to us His mark, His perfect obedience. In Christ, we pass the test. More about that later.

There are **two effects** of man’s fall into sin:

1. Through original sin (the sin of Adam, our representative in Paradise) **man became guilty and subject to condemnation**. Every child that is born, shares in original sin. That means that every child is conceived and born in sin and is therefore subject to condemnation. There is no such thing as an innocent child (except the

Child born in Bethlehem). Original sin is sufficient to condemn even a tiny infant. Thankfully, the children of believers share in Christ’s act of righteousness just as they shared in Adam’s act of disobedience. The children of believers are saved because they are incorporated into Christ, their new Head and Representative.

2. The second effect of man’s fall into sin was that **man became depraved (corrupt) and a slave to sin**. Original sin affected not only man’s legal standing before God, but also man’s nature, his character. As a result of original sin, man lost all but some small traces of the excellent qualities that God gave him at creation. His mind became infected with the lie, so that he could not think properly any more. His heart became hardened so that he could not love any more. In the beginning, man was able to conform his will to God’s will. Yet after the fall into sin, man’s will was inclined to all evil. He could no longer will to do what was good. He was no longer able to fulfil the glorious position of representing God. Instead, he represented the devil. The “**original sin**” of Adam brought upon man a corrupt nature, which in turn induces man to commit further sin. The sins that we commit as a result of our depraved nature are called “**actual sins**.”

Man’s sin put him under the curse. Since man cannot do the good that God demands, God punishes him by withholding His blessings. This was portrayed to man in the curse that was pronounced over him after the fall. Man was expelled from the Garden of Eden. Man would have to work very hard, but his work would not

¹ It may appear that Romans 5:12-19 contradicts Ezekiel 18:20, and on the basis of the latter, some deny the transferral of Adam’s guilt to all his descendants. This is not the case, however. Perhaps the best way to understand the distinction between Romans 5 and Ezekiel 18 is by the example of those who receive the “power of attorney,” and those who do not. Normally, no one can officially conduct business on my behalf. I myself must approve the sale, which I do by signing the bill of sale. Yet there is a provision in our law whereby I may appoint someone else to conduct business on my behalf. I give him “*the power of attorney*.” He is permitted to sell my house or my car, even without my approval or without me signing the bill of sale. In conducting business on my behalf, I am fully bound by his actions, even if a sale is not to my liking. In this sense, God gave Adam and Christ the “*power of attorney*” to legally represent man (cf. Rom 5:12-19). Beyond these two persons, each man is liable only for what he himself does (cf. Ezek 18:20).

be blessed. The ground would bring forth thorns and thistles. Man would not have a pleasant life on earth. No, he would have a miserable life. To the woman came the curse of bearing children in pain. Illness, disease and death have entered the world through sin and the earth itself was subjected to the curse, as can be seen in earthquakes, storms, droughts and floods, etc.

Furthermore, man became subject to eternal death. That does not mean that man would cease to exist forever. That is not what eternal death is. Eternal death is the eternal separation from God. Having fellowship with God is life and the source of joy. Nevertheless, fallen man no longer deserved to enjoy fellowship with God. He does not deserve to enjoy the blessings of God. He is sentenced to an eternal existence apart from God, an eternal existence of suffering.

The Catechism stresses that this original sin has affected all men, and affected them totally. We are unable to do any good. We can do nothing that pleases God because of our depravity. We are inclined to all evil and thus we are sentenced to eternal death. Read what Genesis 6:5 says. God saw that one hundred percent of the thoughts of man's heart is one hundred percent corrupt one hundred percent of the time. There is no good left in man (cf. Romans 3:11-12; 7:18). Our best works are like filthy rags (cf. Isaiah 64:6), and our heart is desperately wicked (cf. Jeremiah 17:9). We are by nature children of wrath and dead in sin (cf. Ephesians 2:3-5). Apart from the redeeming grace in Christ Jesus, we cannot bear any good fruit (cf. John 15:4-5). Apart from the regenerating work

of the Spirit, no one would seek God (cf. Romans 3:11), nor confess Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3).

However, is there no way we can rid ourselves of this depravity? Can we not free ourselves from it, or change our dirty nature like we would change our dirty clothes? No, we cannot change ourselves. We cannot decide to turn over a new leaf. We can no more change our nature than a leopard can change his spots or an Ethiopian the colour of his skin (cf. Jeremiah 13:33). Yet the Catechism does not want to deny all possibility of doing good. For while we cannot change ourselves, the Catechism will go on later to show that God changes us. What we cannot do, God can and does. We cannot make ourselves clean again, but God is able to do this. Scripture speaks about recreation, about being born anew. No one but God, who created us in the first place, can recreate us. This is the work of God, the Holy Spirit.

This recreation or regeneration places man back into the service of God. Man is once again able to bear God's image, though not perfectly in this life. We are being recreated in the image of God. Through the working of the Holy Spirit within us, we are able to reflect God and rule this creation for Him. Yet we can only do so in part, in fact only for a small part. For our old nature is not entirely put to death until the day we die. All our life we must fight against that old nature which remains in us against our will. We will elaborate more about this when we come to Lord's Day 33.



Questions:

1. What does man try to do when he asks whether God created man so wicked and perverse?
2. Describe what the Catechism means when it says that man was created "*in true righteousness and holiness.*"
3. There are two elements to man's creation in the image of God. What are they?

4. God used the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for one purpose, and the devil used it for another purpose. Explain these different purposes.
5. When we speak about the fall into sin, we speak about "*man*" and not simply about "*Adam*." What position did Adam hold? Illustrate this with an example.
6. Is it fair for God to impute Adam's sin to us all? What other "*imputation*" does Scripture speak of besides the imputation of Adam's sin to us? Is that fair?
7. What are the two effects of man's fall into sin?
8. What aspects are there to the penalty for man's sin?
9. How extensive is man's depravity? Prove this from Scripture.
10. Can man rid himself of his depravity and turn over a new leaf?
11. Is there any hope of deliverance from this depravity?
12. What are some other words for regeneration?
13. What are those who are regenerated able to do again? Can they do this perfectly?

LORD'S DAY 4

9. Q. But does not God do man an injustice by requiring in His law what man cannot do?
- A. No,
for God so created man
that he was able to do it.¹
But man, at the instigation of the devil,²
in deliberate disobedience³
robbed himself and all his descendants
of these gifts.⁴

1. **Genesis 1:31** Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.
2. **Genesis 3:13** And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

1 Timothy 2:13,14 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

3. **Genesis 3:6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.
4. **Romans 5:12,18,19** Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned, ...¹⁸ Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

10. Q. Will God allow such disobedience and apostasy to go unpunished?
- A. Certainly not.
He is terribly displeased
with our original sin
as well as our actual sins.
Therefore He will punish them
by a just judgment
both now and eternally,¹
as He has declared: ²
Cursed be every one
who does not abide by all things
written in the book of the law,
and do them (Galatians 3:10).

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."

Exodus 34:7 "...keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Psalms 5:4-6 For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. ⁵ The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity. ⁶ You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Psalms 7:11 God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

Nahum 1:2 God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; the LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness....

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...

Ephesians 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment....

2. **Deuteronomy 27:26** 'Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

11. Q. But is God not also merciful?

A. God is indeed merciful,¹
But He is also just.²
His justice requires
That sin committed
against the most high majesty of God
also be punished with the most severe,
that is, with everlasting,
punishment of body and soul.³

1. **Exodus 20:6** ...but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Exodus 34:6,7 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷ keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Psalms 103:8,9 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. ⁹ He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever.

2. **Exodus 20:5** ...you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me...

Exodus 34:7 "...keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

2. **Deuteronomy 7:9-11** "Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; ¹⁰ and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. ¹¹ Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them."

Psalms 5:4-6 For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. ⁵ The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity. ⁶ You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Hebrews 10:30,31 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

3. **Matthew 25:45,46** Then He will answer them, saying, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me. ⁴⁶ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."



In Lord's Day 1 we profess our faith in the grace of God, the only avenue by which we can escape the punishment of sin and still appear before God. That way is Jesus Christ. Yet man is inclined to look for some other avenue rather than Christ. Man wishes to escape God's wrath and appear before God by travelling down a different avenue, in which it allows him to retain some of his pride. However, there is no way that man can retain his

pride, because there is no other avenue of escape and no other avenue to the Father besides Jesus Christ. As Christ said, "*No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6).

In Lord's Day 2 we saw that the avenue of "**good works**" was closed. Man is inclined to think that he can arrive at God's grace himself, by doing good. Yet Lord's Day 2 points out that man cannot

do good works in his own power. Man cannot perform what the law of God requires.

In Lord's Day 3 another avenue was closed to man. That was the avenue of **"innocence."** If man is inclined by nature to all evil, then perhaps he is able to place the blame on God for creating him with that nature. However, we learned that God created man good. Man cannot place the blame for his sin and misery upon God. Man is solely to blame.

Now in Lord's Day 4 other avenues are closed which man might try to walk down in order to escape God's wrath. In Q. & A. 9, man admits that he is to blame. Nevertheless, having admitted this, he questions whether God can still hold him responsible for that which he is not able to do. Man tries to reach the grace of God by walking down the road called **"inability."** Is God just (fair) in asking from us that which we cannot perform? We would say that if a teacher gives an exam which he knows is too difficult for the students, the exam was not fair. The teacher expected more from the students than they could render. That is the point of Q. & A. 9. Is it fair of God to expect more from us than we are able to render? Should God not change His demands? Should He not make His demands easier so that we can render them?

The Catechism defends the justice of God by mentioning that, when God created man, He created man with the ability to keep these demands. It is man's own fault that he lost this ability through sin. Man must not try to place the blame on God. Consider this example: I hire a contractor to build me a house, and I pay him half of the cost with which he is supposed to buy the necessary materials. He cashes the cheque but promptly gambles it away. He comes to me and says, "I cannot build your house. I squandered your money." Do I not have the right to hold him to his contract? Do I not have the right to take him to court? I certainly have! So God is perfectly just in requiring of us what we were capable of doing before our fall into sin.

In fact God would be unjust if He did not uphold His original demands. God's justice lies in His faithfulness to His covenant that He made with man. Let us realise that there are two sides to the coin. God has to be fair to Himself as well as to man. Suppose that I hired a young man to mow my lawn and agreed to pay him twenty dollars for the three hours work that it would take him. It would be unfair if after he had cut the lawn I told him that he still had to prune the rose bushes and weed the flower beds before he would get the twenty dollars. I would be increasing the demand, which would be unfair to the young man. Yet I would also be unfair to myself if I lowered the demand. Paying the young man twenty dollars for working only one hour and for mowing only one third of the lawn, I would short-change myself.

God is incapable of such injustice, either towards man or towards Himself (cf. 2 Timothy 2:13). Therefore the demands of the covenant must remain unchanged.

God's faithfulness to man prevents Him from increasing the demand

God's faithfulness to Himself prevents Him from decreasing the demand.

Now what? We cannot render this perfect obedience. The road called **"inability"** is closed. We are directed to go to Jesus Christ, Who has come to earth as our Representative. He came to render this required obedience for us. If we go to Christ in faith we will receive Christ's righteousness (which means perfect obedience to God's law).

However, man first wishes to try another avenue. He tries to walk down the avenue called **"overlook"**. He wonders whether or not God might simply overlook his sins. Maybe God will forget all about them and not punish us for our disobedience. Maybe God will do what parents sometimes do. A child who has done something wrong says to his Mum, "Sorry Mum! I will not do it again." Then Mum overlooks the wrong and the child is not punished. Yes,

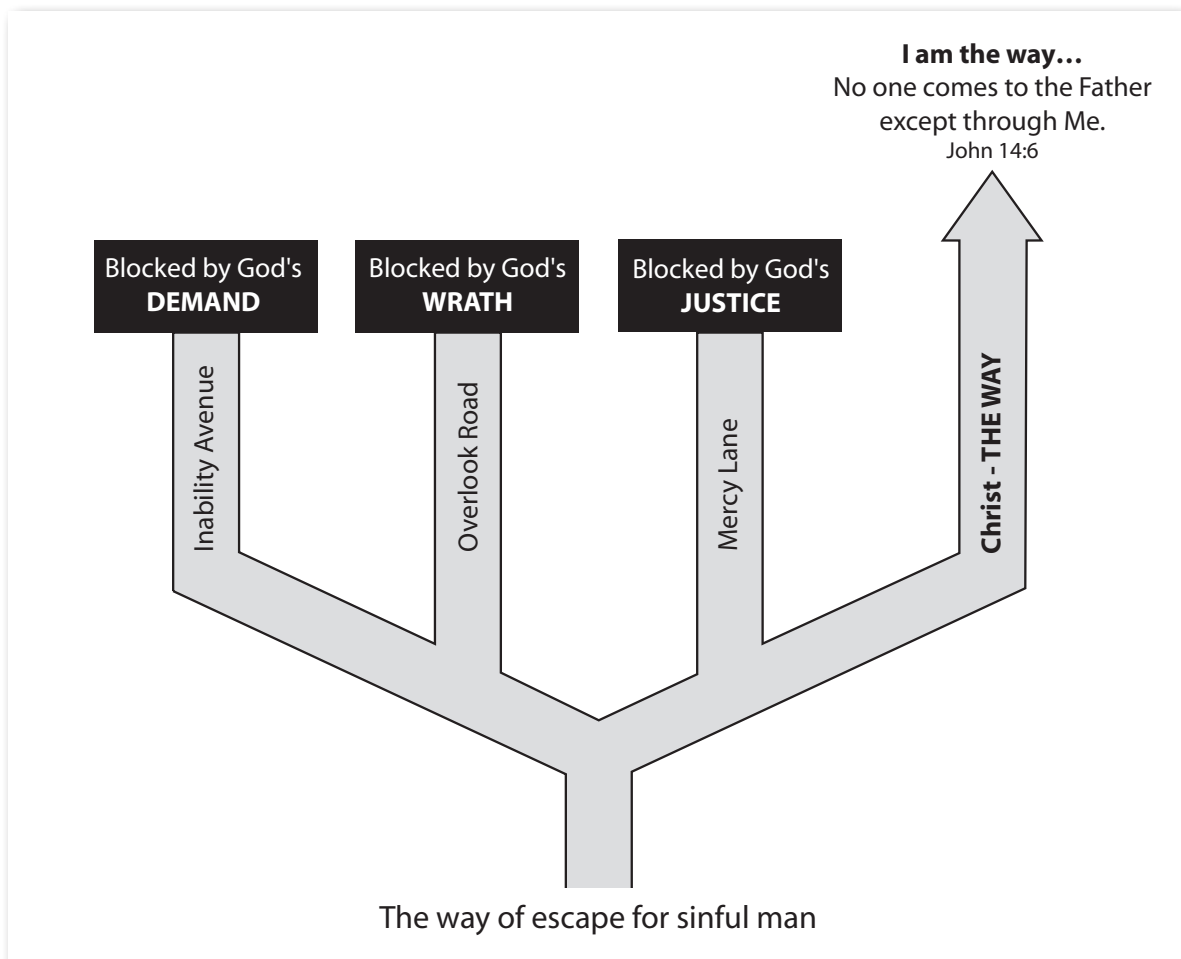
maybe God is like that "mother". Maybe God will overlook our wrongdoing.

Yet again we confront God's faithfulness to the covenant. God is faithful, not only to His covenant demand, but also to His covenant wrath. The Catechism stresses this when it says: *"Therefore God will punish sin, as He has declared!"* God has spoken, and always keeps His Word. *"And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent."* (1 Samuel 15:29).

Furthermore, we should examine what prompts us as humans to overlook something. If a cashier in a department store overcharged us five dollars, we would likely go back and demand our five dollars. However, if she overcharged us only five cents, we would probably overlook it. The point is that we will only overlook those things which are unimportant to us. We will not overlook important things.

We might be inclined to say that God should overlook our sins, for how serious are they? Yet our sins are very serious. Our sins are nothing less than treason! Our sins are nothing less than spiritual adultery. Our sins offend God greatly. He is terribly displeased with them. He will not overlook them. Thus once again, the Catechism blocks the road called **"overlook."** Man is directed to go to Jesus who bore God's wrath for our sins. God's wrath no longer burns against those who cling to Christ.

Still man tries one more avenue. He pleads clemency. He tries the avenue called **"mercy."** *"But is God not also merciful?"* Can we not trust in God's mercy to deliver us from our sins and misery? Yes, God is merciful! He will deliver us, but not apart from satisfying His justice. These two seem to be opposed to each other. We might suppose that God is either one or the other, but that He cannot be both. However, the Catechism



teaches us that God is both just and merciful. His justice and mercy go hand in hand. God's mercy and justice meet in the person of Jesus Christ.

In Christ, the demands of the covenant are met. Christ obeyed the law of God perfectly. He did so on our behalf, and this obedience, this righteousness, is ours if we turn to Christ in faith. By faith we receive

these benefits of Christ. Furthermore, the wrath of the covenant is satisfied in Christ. Christ bore our punishment and curse. By His stripes we are healed. Yet be certain of this: there is no mercy apart from justice. If there were, we would have no need of Christ. There is, however, no other avenue than Jesus Christ.



Questions:

1. Man tries various avenues to escape God's judgment. In Lord's Days 2 & 3, what blocks his escape down each of these avenues?
2. In Lord's Day 4 man tries three other avenues to flee God's judgment. The first avenue is *inability*.
 - a. How does man try to use this avenue to escape God's wrath?
 - b. What blocks the road?
 - c. Why is God not unjust in maintaining His high demands?
 - d. Can God justly lower His demands if He wanted to? Why or why not?
 - e. With the road of *inability* closed, where is man directed to go? Why?
3. The second avenue is *overlook*.
 - a. How does man try to use this avenue to escape God's wrath?
 - b. For what two reasons will God not overlook our sins?
 - c. With the road of *overlook* closed, where is man directed to go? Why?
4. The third avenue is *mercy*.
 - a. How does man try to use this avenue to escape God's wrath?
 - b. What blocks the road? Does this roadblock contradict God's mercy?
 - c. With the road of *mercy* closed, where is man directed to go? Why?

The Second Part OUR DELIVERANCE LORD'S DAY 5

12. Q. Since, according to God's righteous judgment we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, how can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour?

A. God demands that His justice be satisfied.¹ Therefore we must make full payment, either by ourselves or through another.²

1. **Exodus 20:5** ... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me....

Exodus 23:7 "Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked."

Romans 2:1-11 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ² But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. ³ And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵ But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of

wrath and of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who "will render to each one according to his deeds": ⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; ⁸ but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, ⁹ tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; ¹⁰ but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹ For there is no partiality with God.

2. **Isaiah 53:11** He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.

Romans 8:3,4 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, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

13. Q. Can we by ourselves make this payment?

A. Certainly not.
On the contrary, we daily increase our debt.¹

- 1 **Psalm 130:3** If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

Matthew 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Romans 2:4,5 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not

knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵ But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God...

14. Q. Can any mere creature pay for us?

A. No.
In the first place,
God will not punish another creature for the sin which man has committed.¹
Furthermore, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.²

1 **Ezekiel 18:4,20** “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die. ²⁰ The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

Hebrews 2:14-18 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. ¹⁶ For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He

does give aid to the seed of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

2 **Psalms 130:3** If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

Nahum 1:6 Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him.

15. Q. What kind of mediator and deliverer must we seek?

A. One who is a true¹ and righteous² man, and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is at the same time true God.³

1. **1 Corinthians 15:21** For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

2. **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.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Hebrews 7:26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

3. **Isaiah 7:14** Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and

bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jeremiah 23:6 In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

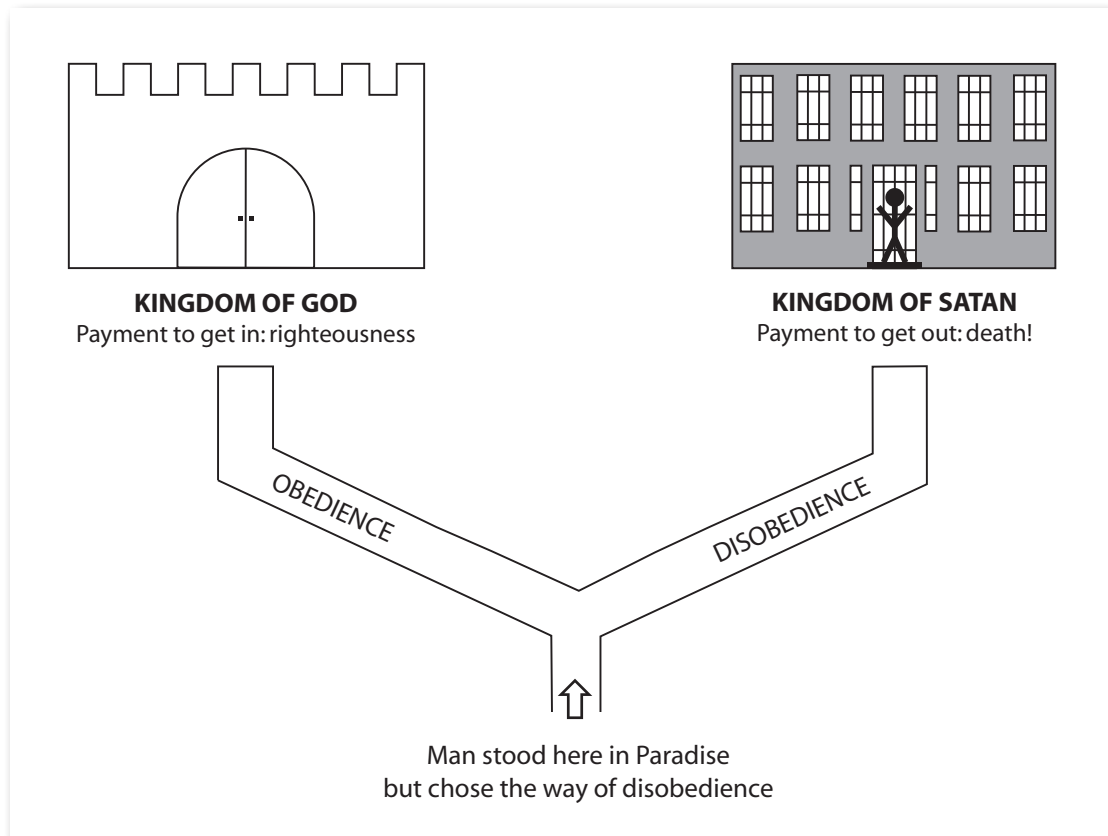
John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Romans 8:3,4 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, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

With Lord's Day 5 we begin the second part of the Catechism. This is the part that deals with **Our Deliverance**. The word “*deliver*” means *to set free, to liberate, to rescue, or to save from someone or something*. The second part of the Catechism deals with our deliverance from our sin and misery, which we spoke about in the first part of the Catechism.

If you scan through the questions and answers in this second part of the

Catechism, you will notice that the second part is the largest. We only spent a little time dealing with our sins and misery. Why is that? Why do we not spend more time dealing with our sin? We could answer that nothing more is to be gained by spending more time with sin. We have drawn a Scriptural picture of man. We have seen that man is able to do nothing good and is an heir to eternal death. If we continue to spend too much time on ourselves, we might become depressed and discouraged. Yet that is not the



purpose of the Bible or the Catechism. The Bible is a book of comfort. Therefore the Catechism places the emphasis not upon ourselves, but on God's grace in Christ, our Saviour.

The Catechism begins by asking, "*How can we escape this punishment and be received into favour again?*" It speaks about "*escaping this punishment*" and "*being received into favour*." These phrases appear to mean the same thing, but there is a difference. Consider 2 Samuel 14:24, where we read that David allows Absalom (who killed Ammon) to come back to Jerusalem without fear of being punished. Yet David did not wish to see Absalom. He was forbidden to come to the palace. He escaped his punishment, but he was not received into favour. Now we wish to have both. We do not only wish to be redeemed from the kingdom of darkness, but also to be admitted into the kingdom of God.

In order to escape this punishment and to be received into God's favour again, there are two payments that must be made. Why two? In Paradise there was only

one thing that God required, and that was obedience to His commands. But now that man has fallen into sin, there is an additional payment to be made. This should become evident in the diagram.

Notice that in the diagram there are two doors that must be opened. The door to escape from the prison of Satan's kingdom, and the door to enter God's kingdom. There are two payments that must be made before each of these doors are opened.

1. The **first payment** that must be made before the door of the kingdom of darkness can be opened is the payment of **death**. Christ made this payment for us throughout His life, by His suffering and death.
2. A second payment is required to allow us to enter the kingdom of God. It is a different payment than the first. That should be stressed. Sometimes people think that Christ's death opened the door of God's kingdom. But that is not really correct. Christ's death opened the doors of the kingdom of

darkness, so that we might go free. However, a different payment was required to open the gates of God's kingdom. That payment is obedience or **righteousness**. Before anyone will be admitted into God's kingdom, he must have rendered perfect obedience to God's law. This is the second payment that Christ rendered for us, not by His death, but by His walk of life, by His daily obedience to God's commandments. These two payments make up what the Catechism refers to as "full payment."

Actually, we have jumped ahead of ourselves. For we have already spoken about Christ making this payment for us. But before we will turn to Christ, we must be convinced that we ourselves cannot pay. For we are proud. We would rather not have to depend upon someone else to pay our way. We would like to be able to say we paid the price. Thus the Catechism asks whether we ourselves are able to make the necessary payment.

In its answer the Catechism focuses upon the second payment, namely, the payment of righteousness, the rendering of obedience to God's law. Can we render that payment, that obedience? This same question will be asked in Lord's Day 24 - *"But why can our good works not be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of it?"* There the Catechism answers, *"Because the righteousness which can stand before God (which is acceptable to God) must be absolutely perfect, and in complete agreement to the law of God, whereas even our best works are all imperfect and defiled with sin."* It is this same fact which underlies the answer given in Lord's Day 5. We cannot even begin to pay our debts because everything we do is defiled with sin. In fact, instead of reducing our debt, we only increase it daily.

Now Scripture teaches us that there is the possibility of substitution. That was clear to the saints in the old covenant. On the Day of Atonement, for example, the priest would confess the sins of the people, laying his hands upon the goat as

a symbol of the transferral of the people's guilt upon the animal. Then the animal was slain. This symbolised to the saints of old that God would provide a substitute.

Now concerning the first payment (death) the Catechism asks whether a creature could possibly make payment for our sins. The Catechism denies this possibility for two reasons:

1. **It would be unjust.** God entered into a covenant with man, whom He made in His own image. Man alone was created able to render obedience to God's demands. Man alone disobeyed. It would be unjust if God punished another creature for the sins which man committed. You may ask, *"What about the sacrifices in the Old Testament?"* Yet these sacrifices were never offered as a payment for sin. They were symbols pointing ahead to the only sufficient sacrifice which could pay for sin: the sacrifice of Christ, the true Lamb. Moreover, even if an animal could die for us and make payment to release us from the kingdom of Satan, it could not make payment required for admission into the kingdom of God, for an animal cannot render obedience to God's commandments. It must be man who makes payment.
2. **No mere creature would be able to bear the wrath of God.** When the Catechism speaks about *"creature"*, man is included as well. The wrath of God is extremely heavy because our sin was extremely serious. Therefore, the one who would bear God's wrath must have super human strength, that is, strength that goes beyond that which humans possess, or that of any creature for that matter. For this reason, our Mediator had to be more than just a man; He had to be true God.



Questions:

1. With what does the first part of the Catechism (LD 2-4) deal? Why doesn't the Catechism spend more time with this?
2. In Lord's Day 5 we begin with the second part of the Catechism. What does it deal with? How many Lord's Days are included in this second part. Why is it so long?
3. What distinction can be made between these phrases: "*escape this punishment*" and "*being received into favour*"?
4. What payment is required for us to escape the punishment that we have incurred through sin?
5. What is the payment required for us to be received into God's favour again?
6. What must we conclude about our own ability to render this payment? Why?
7. Is it possible for a substitute to make these payments for us on our behalf? Show this from Scripture.
8. Why can a creature not make the payment for our sins?
9. What purpose were the Old Testament sacrifices not intended to serve? What purpose did they serve?
10. Why can a creature not make the payment required for admission into the kingdom of God?
11. In what manner has Christ made the first payment whereby we escape the punishment of sin?
12. In what manner has Christ made the second payment whereby we are received into favour again?

LORD'S DAY 6

16. Q. Why must He be a true and righteous man?

A. He must be a true man
Because the justice of God requires
that the same human nature which has sinned
should pay for sin.¹
He must be a righteous man
Because one who himself is a sinner
Cannot pay for others.²

1. **Romans 5:12** Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned ...
¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.

1 Corinthians 15:21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

Hebrews 2:14-16 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.
¹⁶ For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.

2. **Hebrews 7:26,27** For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; ²⁷ who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.

17. Q. Why must He at the same time be true God?

A. He must be true God
so that by the power of His divine nature ¹
He might bear in His human nature
the burden of God's wrath,²
and might obtain for us
and restore to us
righteousness and life.³

1. **Isaiah 9:6** For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

2. **Deuteronomy 4:24** "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

Psalms 130:3 If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand?

Nahum 1:6 Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him.

3. **Isaiah 53:5** But He was wounded for our

transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

Isaiah 53:11 He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

18. Q. But who is that Mediator who at the same time is true God and a true and righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ,¹
whom God made our wisdom,
our righteousness and sanctification
and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).

1. **Matthew 1:21-23** "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." ²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

Luke 2:11 "For there is born to you this day in the

city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

19. Q.	From where do you know this?
A.	From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise. ¹ Later, He had it proclaimed by the patriarchs ² and prophets, ³ and foreshadowed by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law. ⁴ Finally, He had it fulfilled through His only Son. ⁵

1. **Genesis 3:15** "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

2. **Genesis 12:3** "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 22:18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Genesis 49:10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

3. **Isaiah 53**

Jeremiah 23:5,6 "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. ⁶ In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Micah 7:18-20 Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old.

Acts 10:43 "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

Hebrews 1:1 God, who at various times and in

various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets...

4. **Leviticus 1-7**

John 5:46 "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me."

Hebrews 10:1-10 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. ² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. ³ But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. ⁵ Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. ⁶ In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. ⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me; to do Your will, O God.'" ⁸ Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), ⁹ then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. ¹⁰ By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

5. **Romans 10:4** For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Galatians 4:4,5 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Colossians 2:17... which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ

In the previous Lord's Days we have seen that we cannot escape God's covenant wrath. Every sin must be paid for. Neither will we be received in favour again unless we fulfil God's covenant demand. We need a Mediator (a mediator is someone who intervenes, who "goes between" two parties with the goal of bringing the two parties together again.)

Already in Lord's Day 5 we learned that we do not just need any mediator. He must be special. He must be man, but not just any man. He must be a true and righteous man. Furthermore, he must be more than man; he must be true God. This is what we will discuss in this Lord's Day.

Before we do, however, it would be good to understand that we are dealing with a mystery here. We cannot understand how a person can be true man and true God at the same time. We believe it because the Bible teaches this to us,¹ and we accept it in child-like faith even though we do not understand it.

In the first place, our Mediator must be **TRUE MAN** (that is, a real man). There are two reasons:

1. Our Mediator must be a true man, that is, real man, in order to bear the **curse** of the covenant. Our Mediator could not be an animal or an angel, for our just God will not punish a different creature for the sins which man has committed. Man sinned, not an animal or an angel. Thus God will only punish man, not an animal or angel.

Our Mediator must be a true man, that is, real man, in order to fulfil the **demand** of the covenant. God established His covenant with man whom He created in His own image. Man knew God as no other creature knew Him. Man loved God as no other creature could love Him. No other creature could render the perfect obedience out of love that God demands in the covenant. Consider

this example: a couple have lost their only child. Friends encourage the couple to purchase a little dog to help fill the void. Yet as affectionate as a dog may be, it can hardly serve as a substitute for a child who is flesh of their flesh, and bone of their bone. A dog cannot render the same love that a child can. In like manner, no creature could possibly serve as a substitute for man whom God created in His own image.

2. In the second place, our Mediator must be a **Righteous man** (righteous means to be free from the guilt and pollution of sin) in order to bear the **curse** of the covenant. A sinner owes a great debt to God. And someone who is deeply in debt himself, cannot pay for the debt of someone else. For example, you might want to help out a friend who is in debt and must pay his creditor one thousand dollars. If you had the money you might pay his debt for him. Yet if you are also one thousand dollars in debt like him, you cannot possibly pay for his debt. In the same way someone who is a sinner cannot pay for the sins of another. For this reason our Mediator had to be free from debt (sin). Only then could He possibly pay for the debt (sins) of others. For this reason our Mediator had to be a righteous man.

Furthermore, our Mediator must be a righteous man, free from the *pollution* of sin, so that He might be able to fulfil the **demand** of the covenant. He must not share in the horrible corruption that has come upon fallen man. His understanding must not be impaired, nor his heart sinfully inclined, or his will enslaved to evil. He must be pure in heart, clear in understanding and free in will, so that He can render that perfect obedience which God requires in the covenant.

3. In the third place, our Mediator must be **True God** (that is, real God). He must have more than just the title

¹ The Scripture proofs for the humanity and the divinity of Christ will be given in Lord's Day 14.

of God. He must have the power and worth of God.

Our Mediator must be true God in order to bear the **curse** of the covenant. This is true for two reasons:

a. Our Mediator must possess the power of God. The burden of God's wrath against the sins of all the elect is far too heavy for any creature to bear, including man. Consider this example: Suppose that the punishment for our sin is forty lashes with a whip. Now God has chosen "144,000" persons who are to be redeemed (a figurative number). If a man were to take the punishment of all the elect upon himself, he would receive forty lashes for each of the "144,000" which totals 5,760,000 lashes. No human being would be able to stand up under such punishment. He would die long before he fulfilled the payment. For this reason our Mediator must be more than just a man. He must be true God so that by His divine power He might bear the full weight of God's wrath.

b. Our Mediator must possess the **worth of God**. He must be true God in order to give His sacrifice sufficient value to atone for the sins of all the elect. Consider this example. If a rebel movement, hostile to a government, wishes to have ten of its members released from prison, they might take a man hostage in order to demand the release of their fellow rebels. They would not take just any man hostage. Rather, they would choose a man of high standing in the government, a man of great importance. His life would be worth the life of the ten captive rebels. In a similar way our Mediator would have to be more than just an ordinary man. In order for His death to serve as ransom for the "144,000", He must be true God.

In the Canons of Dort, II, 4 (cf. Book of Praise, pg. 546) we confess; this death is of such great value and worth because the person who submitted to

it is not only a true and perfectly holy man, but also the only-begotten Son of God.

Having considered the requirements of our Mediator, the Catechism turns to His identity. Who is this Mediator? Jesus of Nazareth, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, legal son of Joseph, the Son of David, of the tribe of Judah.²

The Catechism quotes 1 Corinthians 1:30, which says that Christ is our wisdom. Wisdom could be defined as the best means to the best goal. Christ is the best (and only) means to the goal of our salvation. Over against the wisdom of the world, Christ is our wisdom. The world rejects the idea of the crucified Christ as a means of escaping the misery that characterises this present world and seeks its own means of healing the brokenness of life. The world regards as foolish the idea that the crucified Christ is the way of escaping the misery of this present world. Instead, the world seeks its own way of healing this brokenness. But what is foolish in the eyes of the world is the wisdom of God.

Christ is our **righteousness**. Righteousness is the absence of the guilt of sin; perfect obedience to God. Through His suffering and death, Christ has removed our guilt and acquitted us (declared us 'Not Guilty') before God. He has also rendered for us full and perfect obedience to God's law. He has borne the curse of the covenant and fulfilled its demand on our behalf. As a result, the Father looks at us as though we had never committed any sin and as though we had kept His law perfectly.

Christ is also our **sanctification**. Sanctification means purity, holiness. Christ is our holiness. He not only makes us holy; He is our holiness. Instead of looking at how impure and unholy our affections are, God looks past us and looks at the purity and holiness of our Representative, Christ. Furthermore,

² In Lord's Day 14 we will discuss how Christ could be a true and righteous man, and at the same time true God, through the miraculous conception of the Holy Spirit, and by being born of the virgin Mary.

through the working of His Spirit, He also causes us to be holy. He renews us by His Spirit and cleanses us from our sinful inclinations so that we walk in holiness.

Christ is also our **redemption**. Redeem means, to buy back, to restore something to its previous owner. Having given Himself as the ransom for sin, offering the price of His precious blood, more precious than gold or silver, Christ has redeemed us. He bought us so that we might once again be children of God.

Not everyone believes that Christ is both true man and true God. Throughout the history of the church there have been some who have denied either His humanity or His divinity. Some thought that God could never lower Himself so deeply as to take upon Himself the human flesh. They claimed that Christ only appeared to be human. He had a phantom body. Others said that Christ was not really true God. Some said that He was adopted as God's special Son. Others said that He was given some special divine powers. It should be clear to us that if we deny either the humanity of Christ or His divinity, then

we lose our Mediator. It is important for our comfort and our salvation that we maintain the two natures of Christ.

From where do you know all this? From the gospel. Gospel means 'Good News' or 'Glad Tidings.' The Bible is the good news of our redemption in Jesus Christ. The whole Bible points towards the Christ, from the very first page to the very last. Even in the Old Testament all the sacrifices and prophecies pointed towards Christ and found their fulfilment in Him. We call the Bible 'holy' because it is distinct and to be distinguished from every other book written. For the Writer of this "Holy Bible" is God Himself. (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16 ; 2 Peter 1:20,21) And since God wrote the Bible, having inspired men through the Holy Spirit, the Bible is infallible, that is, without error. Moreover, the Bible is the sole authority that governs what we believe and how we live. We read in Lord's Day 25 that the Bible is the instrument which the Holy Spirit uses as His tool in working and strengthening faith. We will write more about that then.



Questions:

1. In this Lord's Day we speak about our Mediator. What is a mediator? What is a mediator intended to accomplish?
2. What is meant when the Catechism speaks of a *true* man?
3. For what two reasons must our Mediator be a true man?
4. What is meant when the Catechism speaks of a *righteous* man? In what two senses do we speak of our mediator as righteous (He must be free from both the _____ of sin and the _____ of sin.)
5. For what two reasons must our Mediator be a righteous man?
6. For what two reasons must our Mediator be true God?
7. What do we read in 1 Corinthians 1:30?
 - a. Define wisdom. In what way is Christ our wisdom?
 - b. Define righteousness. In what way is Christ our righteousness?
 - c. Define sanctification. In what way is Christ our sanctification?
 - d. Define redemption. In what way is Christ our redemption?
8. Do all people agree that Christ was a true man? What do they believe?
9. Do all people agree that Christ was true God? What do they believe?
10. Why is it really important that we believe in the two natures of Christ?
11. What does the term "*gospel*" mean?
12. When we speak of the gospel, do we refer only to the first four books of the New Testament?
13. Why is the Bible called "*holy*"?
14. The Bible is infallible. What does that mean?

LORD'S DAY 7

20. Q. Are all men, then, saved by Christ just as they perished through Adam?
- A. No.
Only those are saved who by a true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all His benefits.¹

1. **Matthew 7:14** "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

John 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the

Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Romans 11:16-21 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.¹⁷ And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,¹⁸ do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."²⁰ Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

21. Q. What is true faith?
- A. True faith is a sure knowledge
Whereby I accept as true
all that God has revealed to us in His Word.¹
At the same time it is a firm confidence²
that not only to others, but also to me,³
God has granted forgiveness of sins,
Everlasting righteousness, and salvation,⁴
out of mere grace,
only for the sake of Christ's merits.⁵
This faith the Holy Spirit works in my heart
by the gospel.⁶

1. **John 17:3** "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

John 17:17 "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

Hebrews 11:1-3 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.² For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.³ By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!

2. **Romans 4:18-21**...who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall

your descendants be."¹⁹ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb.²⁰ He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,²¹ and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...

Romans 10:10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

3. **Galatians 2:20** "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

4. **Romans 1:17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Hebrews 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

5. **Romans 3:20-26** Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Galatians 2:16 ...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

6. **Acts 16:14** Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1 Corinthians 1:21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

22. Q. What, then, must a Christian believe?

A. All that is promised us in the gospel,¹ which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach us in a summary.

1. **Matthew 28:19** "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."

John 20:30,31 And truly Jesus did many other

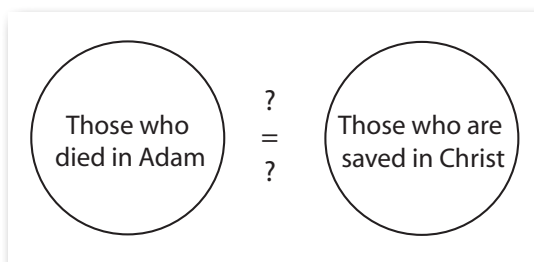
signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

23. Q. What are these articles?

A. I. 1. I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.
II. 2. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son, our Lord;
3. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary;
4. suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell.
5. On the third day He arose from the dead;
6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
7. from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

- III. 8. I believe in the Holy Spirit;
 9. I believe a holy catholic church,
 the communion of saints;
 10. the forgiveness of sins;
 11. the resurrection of the body;
 12. and the life everlasting.

In Lord's Day 6 we saw Who our Redeemer is: our Lord Jesus Christ. In this Lord's Day the Catechism wishes to instruct us concerning those who benefit from Christ's work of redemption, and how they receive Christ's benefits. In question 20, the Catechism draws the following picture for us, and asks whether this picture is correct.



We have already studied and learned that everyone perished with Adam. He was our head and representative in paradise. What he did affected us all. Now the Catechism points out that Christ is the last Adam. Is it true that he represents all men? Is Christ the Head of all men? To these questions the Catechism answers, "No!"

Some people believe that Christ saves all men. They believe in what is called *universal atonement*. There are some places in Scripture which seem to indicate universal atonement (cf. Rom 5:18, "Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life." Also, 1 John 2:2, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.")

However, when we consider the rest of Scripture, we find that Christ's benefits are not given to all. Christ said, "*Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*" (Matthew 7:14). Again He said.... "*whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16). It is clear to us that not all believe and therefore not all will be saved. Those texts that use the word "all" or "*the whole world*" use this word to show that Christ is not only the Saviour of Jews; He is the Saviour of all tribes and nations.

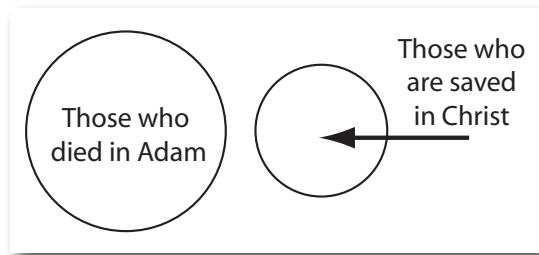
Who does Christ save, then? Only those who have Him as their Head and Representative. And how does one come to have Christ as his Head and Representative? By faith.

The bond that binds us to the first Adam is not the same bond that binds us to the last Adam. We are connected to the first Adam by a **biological** or *physical bond*. Adam was the representative of all those who would be born to him. It is a bond established by birth, and since all men have been born from Adam, he is the representative of us all.

Yet it is a different bond that connects the redeemed to Christ, the last Adam. It is certainly not a biological or physical bond, because Christ did not marry nor father any children. Rather, it is a **spiritual bond** - *the bond of faith*. Only those who believe will be grafted into Christ. We could also say that the bond to the first Adam is **birth** or **generation**, while the bond to the last Adam is **rebirth** or **regeneration**.

From the Scriptures we come to realise that the circle of those who are represented

by the first Adam is larger than of those represented by the last Adam. For not all will believe the gospel. The correct diagram is this:



The Catechism speaks about being “grafted” into Christ. This is in reference to John 15:1-11 and Romans 11:16-21. Grafting is often done on trees. To graft means, to take a shoot of one tree and fit and secure that branch to a “host” tree so that the shoot grows and becomes one with the tree into which it is grafted. In the same manner, God takes us, who are dead branches from the dead tree (the first Adam), and grafts us into the living tree (the second Adam). The result is that the sap of the living tree begins to flow into the dead branch and it becomes a living branch. In agriculture, the shoot is secured to the tree by means of a cloth. In God’s work of salvation, we are secured to Christ by means of faith. Christ’s blessings then flow to us who are grafted into Him.

The next question the Catechism asks is, “*What is true faith?*” This question implies that there is also a false faith, which is really no faith at all, but appears to be faith at first. Sometimes people possess a great knowledge of the Bible. They can quote many texts, yet they do not have faith, because they do not accept the promises therein. They do not place their trust in Christ. Some call this “*historical faith*.”

In reality, “*historical faith*” is no faith at all. For faith, as we shall see shortly, is more than just a sure knowledge of Scripture. It is also an acknowledgment that what Scripture says is true.

Sometimes we meet people who are very zealous for the Christian religion. Yet after a time their zeal dies and they no longer

serve the Lord or live according to His commandments. It is like the seed that fell on shallow ground in the parable of Matthew 13. Some call this “*temporary faith*.”

In reality, “*temporary faith*” is no faith at all. For true faith never dies. Those who truly believe will never fall away from faith completely. They may fall into sin, but they will never cease to believe. For the seed of regeneration is an imperishable seed that will not die. Peter wrote, “[*You have*] *been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever*” (1 Peter 1:23). Faith is worked in our hearts by the power of God, and God’s power is invincible (i.e. though it might be resisted, it cannot be conquered).

Faith consists of two parts: a true knowledge and a firm confidence.

In the first place, faith requires true knowledge. “*And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?*” (Rom 10:14). Without the knowledge of Scripture there can be no faith. We also stress with the Catechism that faith acknowledges that what Scripture says is true. It is not only knowing what the Bible says, but also acknowledging it as true. Faith is both a sure knowledge and an acknowledgment of the Scriptures.

Notice that the Catechism says that faith is an acknowledgment of **all** of Scripture. It is not as though we may believe part of it, and disbelieve other parts. This is done by many that profess to be Christians. Modern Christianity teaches us that all we have to believe are the essentials. There are even some who go so far as to say that it does not matter **what** you believe, as long **as** you believe. They suppose that even adherents to the Islam religion can be saved. However, our Catechism says that faith accepts **all** that Scripture reveals.

Faith is also a firm confidence in the merits that Christ has obtained for us, namely, the forgiveness of sins, righteousness and eternal life. The believer is confident that Christ has paid for him the full price

of his sins. He is confident that Christ has also rendered perfect obedience (righteousness) for him on his behalf, so that the Father regards him as having perfectly kept all the commandments. The believer is confident that on the basis of these two preceding merits, he is also made an heir to eternal life.

Faith is a gift from God. (We will explain this further in Lord's Day 25). We do not come to faith by ourselves, for as we learned in Lord's Day 3 we are totally depraved. Of ourselves, we would never seek God (Romans 3:11) Of ourselves we would never come to Christ (John 6:44). Of ourselves we would never confess Christ as our Lord and Saviour (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3). Faith is a gift (cf. Ephesians 2:8).

How does God work this faith in me? The Catechism says that the Holy Spirit works faith. As His tool, the Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures. He inspired the Bible and He uses the Bible to work faith in our hearts.

Faith is worked in our hearts through the preaching of God's Word.

The content of our faith is summarised briefly in the Apostles' Creed. The Catechism, which is a more elaborate summary of God's Word, will spend fourteen Lord's Day explaining the Apostles' Creed. The elaborate summary of God's Word was necessary because many false churches that taught doctrinal errors accepted the Apostles' Creed (such as the church of Rome, and many other false churches).

It is called the Apostles' Creed, not because the apostles wrote it, but because it contains the faith that was handed down to the church by the apostles. The exact date when it was written is unknown to us, but it is found in its final form about 340 AD. It was probably written as a teaching instrument for the early converts to the Christian faith and for their children. It serves the same purpose today. We will study this creed in Lord's Day 8 to 22.



Questions:

1. How many people share in the sin of Adam? Do the same number of people share in the redemption of Christ?
2. What is "*universal atonement*"? Is this Scriptural? Prove your answer from Scripture.
3. Who share in the work of Christ, then?
4. What bond connects men to Adam? What bond connects men to Christ?
5. What does Scripture mean when it teaches that believers are "*grafted into*" Christ?
6. What is historical faith? Why is this not real faith?
7. What is temporary faith? Why is this not real faith?
8. Faith consists of two indivisible parts. What is the first part?
9. What more is required than just knowing the Bible? Is this true for just parts of the Bible? Do all who profess to be Christians do this?
10. What is the second part of faith? What does this mean?
11. What does Scripture mean when it says that faith is a gift of God?
12. How does God work this faith in us?
13. What is the purpose of the Apostles' Creed?
14. Is the Apostles' Creed sufficient as a summary of the Christian faith? Why or why not?
15. Why is this creed called the "Apostles' Creed"?

LORD'S DAY 8

24. Q. How are these articles divided?

A. Into three parts:
the first is about God the Father and our creation;
the second about God the Son and our redemption;
the third about God the Holy Spirit
and our sanctification.

25. Q. Since there is only one God,¹
why do you speak of three persons,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

A. Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word²
that these three distinct persons
are the one, true, eternal God.

1 **Deuteronomy 6:4** "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!"

Isaiah 44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God."

Isaiah 45:5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me,

1 Corinthians 8:4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.

1 Corinthians 8:6 ...yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

2. **Genesis 1:2,3** The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

Isaiah 61:1 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

Isaiah 63:8-10 For He said, "Surely they are My people, children who will not lie." So He became their Savior. ⁹ In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. ¹⁰ But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them.

Matthew 3:16,17 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Matthew 28:18,19 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."

Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."

John 14:26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

John 15:26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Galatians 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

Titus 3:5,6 ...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior...

In this Lord's Day we speak about God's being, His essence, His nature, about what God is. This is very hard for us to do, for whenever we want to describe something that is unknown to us, we compare it to something we know. We say that the unknown is like something else, except that it differs in this or that respect. Yet when we speak about God, we have nothing with which to compare Him. *"Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."* (Psalm 40:5). *"To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?"* (Isaiah 40:18).

When we speak about God, we must be careful to limit ourselves to what God reveals concerning Himself in Scripture. We must not draw our concept of God from anything that we see in this world. This is what the natural man does. He makes God a reflection of himself or of other things that he sees in creation. In Romans 1:23f. Paul says that the ungodly *"changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things... They worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator."* Therefore we must draw our concept of God from the Scriptures and not from our own mind.

Even when we draw our concept of God from the Scriptures, we have difficulty to comprehend God. We are finite, but God is infinite. We are limited in our knowledge, but God is illimitable. God says about Himself, *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:8,9) We must realise then, that we are very limited in understanding, especially when we speak about God.

Nowhere is that more true than when we discuss the doctrine of the Trinity.

Trinity means three. When we speak about the Trinity, we speak about the three Persons who make up the one God. There is one God, not three. Yet this one God is comprised of three divine Persons; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

On what do we base such a doctrine? First of all, we should realise that we do not find the word "Trinity" in the Bible. Neither do we find in Scripture such an elaboration on the Trinity as we might like. There is no place where this doctrine is set forth in specific words. Nevertheless, we are not left without a basis for this doctrine. The truth of this doctrine is found in the Bible. It is not something which man has dreamed up. The very fact that this doctrine transcends the comprehension of man would argue that it does not arise out of man's mind. For the things that arise out of man's mind can be understood by the mind of man. Yet the Trinity is not really understandable. For this reason man is inclined to deny it and adopt a doctrine which he can understand.

There are texts in Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments, which speak about God being One. Think for example of Deuteronomy 6:4, *"Hear O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one!"* Also 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, *"...we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him..."*

The Athanasian Creed (cf Book of Praise, pg 439-440) describes what this oneness or unity in God means. There is but one God, not three. The Father, Son and Spirit are equal in power, glory and majesty. None of them are created, but all three of them are eternal, without beginning and without end. Whatever the Father is, that is the Son and Spirit also. Thus there is but one God.

Nevertheless, Scripture also shows that in the one Godhead, there are three Persons.

In the very beginning of the Old Testament we read that God refers to Himself in the plural: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness (Gen 1:26).

Furthermore, we read in Genesis 1:2 that the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters at the time of creation.

In Isaiah, 63:8-10, we read, *For He said, “Surely they are My people, children who will not lie” so He became their Saviour. In all their affliction, He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and he fought against them.”* This is one place in the Old Testament where the Trinity is referred to, though not in the specific terms as we are familiar with today. *He* refers to God the Father, who has adopted the Israelites as His sons and daughters. We also read about *the Angel of His Presence*, which is normally understood as a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ. Lastly, it speaks about the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity is more clearly revealed in the New Testament. That is understandable. Before the Son became incarnate, and before the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all flesh, there was little need to speak about these distinct Persons in the Trinity. Yet since the Son took upon Himself our human nature, and since the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us, the Scripture speaks about these three Persons of the Godhead.

We see the Trinity at work at the baptism of Christ. We see Christ in the water; we hear God the Father speaking from heaven; and we see the Holy Spirit descending upon Christ in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:18).

At the end of Christ's ministry on earth, prior to His ascension, He said to the disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). (For a discussion on the deity of Jesus Christ and

of the Holy Spirit, I would refer you to what is written under Lord's Day 14 & 20.)

The apostle Paul closes his letter to the Corinthians with this triune benediction: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

The doctrine of the Trinity is important to us when we consider the work that the three Persons of the Godhead accomplish. It is with respect to their work that we find comfort in the knowledge that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all true God. The Catechism also stresses this when it ascribes a particular work to each Person in the Trinity:

1. God the **Father** and our **creation**; which is the divine work whereby God brings into existence things that formerly did not exist.
2. God the **Son** and our **redemption**; which is the divine work whereby God reclaims man from his bondage to sin and death, and binds man to Himself in faith and love.
3. God the **Holy Spirit** and our **sanctification**, which is the divine work whereby God purifies man from his corruption and depravity, making man a new and holy creature again.

What a comfort to know that the Father is true God. As Creator-God, He has the whole world in His hand, so to speak. All things in creation are in His control. Nothing happens by chance, but according to His divine will. The Catechism will deal further with this in Lord's Day 9 & 10.

What a comfort to know that Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is true God. As we have already seen in Lord's Day 5 & 6, our redemption depends upon Christ's deity. Only through His divine power was He able to bear the wrath of God against the sin of the whole world. Only because of His divinity did His sacrifice have sufficient value to make payment for our great debt.

What a comfort to know that the Holy Spirit is true God. For the work that He

must do in recreating man is just as great as the work of creation. He must give life to those who are spiritually dead in sin. He must heal the broken mind of man; He must implant a new heart in man; He must set the will free. These are operations that no man can accomplish. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit is true God and can easily accomplish these works in us.

We have apportioned each of the various works of creation, redemption and sanctification to one of the three Persons in the Godhead. We describe Father's work as the work of creation. Yet we do not mean that the Father was the only divine Person involved in the work of creation. From John 1:3,4, we learn that all things were created through the Son (the Word). The Spirit, the Author and Giver of Life, was also present at creation (cf. Genesis 1:2).

The work of redemption is assigned mostly to the Christ Who gave His life. Nevertheless, it is not only His work. The

Father so loved the world that He sent His Son (cf. John 3:16). It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that Christ was conceived in the womb of Mary, and this power strengthened Christ throughout His earthly ministry. It is the Spirit who also applies the work of Christ to the elect (cf. John 16:14). He binds them to Christ by true faith and imparts to them what they have in Christ.

The work of sanctification that is assigned to the Spirit, is not only the Spirit's work. We read in Scripture that Christ lives within men and He enables them to live holy lives (cf. Romans 8:9; Ephesians 3:17).

From these texts we learn that there is essential harmony and co-operation between the three Persons in the Trinity. They are one in essence, and they are also one in their work. Thus both the work of creation and the work of recreation are the work of our one Triune God, *Yahweh*.



Questions:

1. What is God's *being*? Why is it difficult to say anything about the being of God?
2. To what must we limit ourselves when speaking about the being of God?
3. What does *Trinity* mean? When referring to God, to what does it refer?
4. Is the word "*Trinity*" found in the Bible? If not, why do we use it?
5. What does it mean that God is one?
6. Why is the doctrine of the Trinity more clearly revealed in the New Testament?
7. What works are assigned to the various Persons of the Trinity? Describe what each work means.
8. How does the deity of the Father (that He is God) comfort us? How does the deity of the Son comfort us? How does the deity of the Spirit comfort us?
9. Are the works that the Catechism has assigned to the Father, Son and Spirit, unique to them alone? What can be said about the works of creation and recreation?

God the Father and Our Creation

LORD'S DAY 9

26. Q. What do you believe when you say:
I believe in God the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth?
- A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who out of nothing created heaven and earth
and all that is in them,¹
and who still upholds and governs them
by His eternal counsel and providence,²
is, for the sake of Christ His Son,
my God and my Father.³
In Him I trust so completely
as to have no doubt
that He will provide me
with all things necessary for body and soul,⁴
and will also turn to my good
whatever adversity He sends me
in this life of sorrow.⁵
He is able to do so as almighty God,⁶
and willing also as a faithful Father.⁷

1. Genesis 1& 2

Exodus 20:11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Job 38 & 39

Psalms 33:6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

Isaiah 44:24 Thus says the LORD, "Your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb:" I am the LORD, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself..."

Acts 4:24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them..."

Acts 14:15 ...and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them..."

2. **Psalms 104:27-30** These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season.²⁸ What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good.²⁹ You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.³⁰ You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth.

Matthew 6:30 "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown

into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?..."

Matthew 10:29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will..."

Ephesians 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will...

3. **John 1:12,13** But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Romans 8:15,16 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...

Galatians 4:4-7 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Ephesians 1:5 ...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...

4. **Psalms 55:22** Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

4. **Matthew 6:25,26** “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ...”

Luke 12:22-31 Then He said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. ²³ Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? ²⁵ And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁶ If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸ If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? ²⁹ And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. ³⁰ For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹ But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you...”

5. **Romans 8:28** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.
6. **Genesis 18:14** “Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you,

according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”

Romans 8:31-39 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. 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. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” ³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

7. **Matthew 6:32,33** “For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you...”

Matthew 7:9-11 “Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! ...”



The heading above this and the next Lord’s Day reads: **God the Father and Our Creation.** We saw in the previous Lord’s Day that each of the Persons in the Godhead has a work that is attributed mainly to Him. God the Father is called the God of creation. His work is not limited to the actual work of creating, but also involves upholding or maintaining this creation, as well as governing it. This latter thought will be more fully developed in Lord’s Day 10.

“*Creation*” means “*to bring something into existence which did not exist before.*” God made from nothing everything that is now seen (cf. Hebrews 11:3). At one time, there were no atoms or molecules, which are the building blocks of all things visible. God created these as He created all things. God

created plants, animals and man, when no such thing or persons existed before. God created everything out of nothing. This is something that is impossible for us. We always need materials in order to “*create*” something. If we want to make a house, we need building materials. If we want to paint a picture, we need canvas, brushes and paint. Yet God created everything out of nothing.

Scripture tells us that God created the earth and all that is in it in six days. This is very much questioned today. There are those who flatly deny any involvement of God. In fact, there are many that deny that God exists. They believe that the world took billions of years to “*evolve*” to its present condition. All life stems from a simpler form of life, which in the

beginning originated spontaneously out of dead matter. They believe that somehow just the right atoms and molecules mixed together to form the structure of a living organism. From this one living organism all life has come, and over the years has progressed to the highest level called "man." This theory is called "Evolution." It contradicts the Scriptures, and is itself without scientific evidence. Furthermore, it fails to answer a most basic question: Where did these atoms and molecules come from?

There are others who endeavour to combine both the Bible and the theory of evolution. This theory is called "*theistic-evolution*." This theory wants to keep God in the picture and in control, but at the same time it wants to make room for the modern theory of evolution. According to the theory of theistic-evolution, God created the first atoms and molecules. God also controlled the conditions whereby the first simple life was given to dead matter. God actively took part in the progression or evolution of this simple life, until it finally reached the goal that God set, namely, the existence of man. They deny the six days of creation, and they maintain that this word "day" is used figuratively for a long period of time. Ultimately, they say that each "day" in Genesis 1 were periods of billions of years. This does injustice to the simplicity of Scripture. Nowhere in the Bible do we read of a day as anything different from the day to which we are now accustomed. God is Almighty. God can do everything He desires. Why would we want to deny what Scripture says so clearly?

Furthermore, theistic-evolution makes it impossible to believe in Adam as a historical figure, who is the first father of all men. And to deny this truth of Scripture is to ultimately deny the *position* of the first Adam, namely, that of being our head and representative. If Adam was not our head and representative, then his sin (original sin) in paradise is not real, and neither is our participation in this sin and its consequences real. Still worse, if we deny the position of the first

Adam, we are forced also to deny the corresponding role of the last Adam, upon which our salvation rests (cf. Romans 5:14-19; Corinthians 15:22).

When we speak about creation of the heavens and the earth, we must also include the creation of angels, of which the Bible speaks very little. We do not know all that we might like to know about them. Nevertheless, we know all that is necessary. (cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 12).

We know that God created them, like all things, and that God created them good. We know that under the leadership of one angel, a number of them (one-third of the angels, according Revelation 12:4) fell from God's favour. They rebelled against God and from that day they have endeavoured to destroy God's creation. The fallen angels are called "*demons*."

Angels were created to be messengers for God and servants of God's elect. They are called God's ministering spirits, who also serve to guard the saints. Although we do not each have our own "*personal guardian angel*," the angels are always on guard to protect God's people from harm and danger (cf. Psalm 91:11,12).

God is not only the Creator but also the Upholder and Governor of this creation. When we speak of God as the Upholder of heaven and earth, we refer to the fact that all things owe their continued existence to God. For all life-giving and life-sustaining power lies in God. If God were to withdraw Himself from His creation, creation would cease to exist. For this creation is dependent upon God as a very sick man is upon a life-support system. If you were to pull the plug from the life-support system, the man would die. In the same way, if God were to "pull the plug on creation" by withdrawing Himself from it, creation would disintegrate into nothing.

We also speak of God as the Governor of heaven and earth. Everything what happens today is determined by the will of God, and apart from God's will, nothing happens. He decides what will happen when and where. He decides this

on the basis of His eternal counsel. This refers to the plan that God established for the universe before it was created. This plan includes everything from the great things to the most insignificant things in creation.

Thus far we have spoken about the work of creation. We should realise, however, that the main thought of this Lord's Day is not the Father's work of creation. That is an important thought but not the main thought. If we take away all the subordinate clauses in this Lord's Day, we are left with the main thought, which is: *"The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... is ... my God and my Father."*

The knowledge that God is the Creator would have no value for us if we did not first know that this Almighty Creator is our Father. Perhaps an example might help to make this clear. That a certain man has sufficient wealth to provide all our needs means little to us if he and we are strangers. Yet if that wealthy man were our father, it would mean a great deal, for we could be sure that he would use his wealth to supply our needs. In a similar way, it would mean little to us to know that God is the Almighty Creator. Yet if we know that this Almighty God is our Father, it means a great deal.

God is our Father. In a way, God could be considered the Father of all men, in so far as the term '*father*' indicates the source of origin. In a sense, God is the Father of all men because God created all men. Nevertheless, the Catechism speaks of God as our Father. That is, God is the Father of believers. For although all men were created as sons of God, all men disobeyed God. All men are by nature children of the devil (cf. John 8:44). God disowned all men. However, from the midst of fallen men, God adopted us again as His children through Jesus Christ. Not all have been adopted as sons and therefore not all men have God as Father.

We have God as our Father. That is the main thought of this Lord's Day. It is a wonderful thought to think that we have such a great Father! The name '*father*' is

a term of endearment. A father seeks the well-being of his children. So God seeks our well-being. He is far greater than any earthly father, for an earthly father would often like to give his children things which he is not able to give. For example, an earthly father would like to give healing to his sick child, but he cannot. Yet our heavenly Father is the Creator God. There is nothing in all of creation that lies outside of His power. He is able to give us all that is good because He is Almighty God. And He is willing to give us all good because He is our faithful Father.

We, who have God as our Father in Christ, know thereby that He looks upon us with sympathy and with favour. All that He allows to happen to us and around us is for our good. He knows our needs and He cares for us. He will provide us with all the things that we need for body and soul.

Everything what happens in our lives, from the great things to the insignificant things. Every movement in creation, every development, and every change is governed by God. Apart from God's will, nothing happens. We need to remember this also in difficult times, when things may go differently than we expect or desire, even when things seem to be out of control and turn out badly. As we will see in the next Lord's Day, even these come from the hand of our God and Father. In all these things our Father is working for our good. He will cause adversity to work for our benefit.

Such knowledge evokes or elicits trust from us. We may and we must trust Him completely. It is both *may* and *must*. For what we confess in this Lord's Day is the basis for the first commandment, "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*" As our Catechism explains in Lord's Day 34, we must not have anything or anyone instead of or in addition to God, in which or in whom to place our trust. Since we have so great a Father Who has created and Who upholds all creation, we must place our complete trust in Him alone.



Questions:

1. What does it mean “to create?” Are we able to create anything in the real sense of the word?
2. Explain the theory of evolution? Is this theory in harmony with Scripture?
3. Explain the theory of theistic-evolution? Is this theory in harmony with Scripture?
4. How much do we know about the angels? Were they created good? What was their function?
5. What do we mean when we say that God upholds heaven and earth?
6. What do we mean when we say that God governs heaven and earth?
7. What is the main thought of Lord’s Day 9? Why does the Catechism stress this as the main thought?
8. Can we rightly speak of God as the Father of all men? Explain why (not).
9. How has God become our Father?
10. Why is it so comforting to know that God is our Father?
11. Why is so comforting to know that our Father is *God*?
12. What response should the Fatherhood of God evoke from us?

LORD'S DAY 10

27. Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. God's providence is
His almighty and ever present power,¹ whereby, as
with His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth
and all creatures,² and so governs them that
leaf and blade,
rain and drought,
fruitful and barren years,
food and drink,
health and sickness,
riches and poverty,³
indeed, all things,
come to us not by chance⁴
but by His fatherly hand.⁵

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 17:24-28 "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

2. **Hebrews 1:3** ...who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high....

3. **Proverbs 22:2** The rich and the poor have this in common, the LORD is the maker of them all.

Jeremiah 5:24 They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the LORD our God, who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest."

John 9:3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor

his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."

Acts 14:15-17 ...and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, ¹⁶ who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

4. **Proverbs 16:33** The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

5. **Deuteronomy 32:39** Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.

Lamentations 3:38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed?

Amos 3:6 If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?

Matthew 10:29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will."

28. Q. What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by His providence?

A. We can be patient in adversity,¹
Thankful in prosperity,²
and with a view to the future
we can have a firm confidence
in our faithful God and Father
that no creature shall separate us
from His love;³

for all creatures are so completely in His hand
that without His will
they cannot so much as move.⁴

1. **Job 1:21,22** And he said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”²² In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

Psalms 39:10 Remove Your plague from me; I am consumed by the blow of Your hand.

James 1:3 ...knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

2. **Deuteronomy 8:10** When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 ...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

3. **Psalms 55:22** Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

Romans 5:3-5 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope.⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Romans 8:38,39 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing,

shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4. **Job 1:12** And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Job 2:6 And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.”

Proverbs 21:1 The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

Acts 17:24-28 “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’



In this Lord’s Day we will discuss the providence of God. By “*providence*” we mean that power of God whereby He governs and rules all things in His creation. Everything that happens, happens according to the will of God and in accordance with His plan for the fullness of time. The Catechism leaves no room for anything to fall outside the scope of God’s control. All things are in God’s power. Even the most insignificant things imaginable are under His direction. In Lord’s Day 1 we confessed this when we said; “*that without my Father’s will not a hair can fall from my head.*” What is more insignificant than a hair from our head? Yet God controls even such minute events. There is absolutely nothing in this universe that is not sovereignly controlled by God.

If this is so, and it is, then there is no such thing as chance, fate, fortune or luck. God’s providence leaves no room for belief in, or talk about, lucky charms, rabbit’s feet or four-leaf clovers. God’s providence leaves no room for black cats, broken mirrors or Friday 13th. For there are no forces in this universe, personal or impersonal, which are not controlled by God. God is sovereign, that is: God is in control of all things. He decides what will happen, and when, where and how, etc. This is God’s providence.

In Lord’s Day 9 we confessed that God works all things for our good. In saying this, the Catechism has simply quoted the apostle Paul, who wrote, “*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who*

are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28).

That all things work together for our good is easy to believe when things go the way we suppose they ought to go. We think that health and prosperity are good for us. Yet do we think the same of sickness and poverty? When we experience great difficulties, it becomes harder to believe in the providence of God. If a mother or father dies, who still has young children at home, we would have difficulty in seeing the good of such a death. The mother or father might well wonder, "How can this turn out for our good and the good of our children?" We know that there is a great need for that parent to remain with his or her family. All children need a mum and a dad. Yet even in times like that we have to believe in the providence of God, as difficult as it is. We must and we may believe that God has a purpose for this. We must and may believe that this, like all things, will turn out for our good and for our salvation.

It is also hard to trust in God's providential care when we do not receive the things we think we urgently need. During World War II there were many in the Netherlands who suffered from shortage of food. In such times when the stomach cried out in pain for food, it was difficult to trust that God would provide what was needed. The temptation to take matters into one's own hands and steal some food was great, and many gave in to that temptation.

When we speak about the providence of God, the question concerning sin and evil also enters the picture: "Do these also come by the hand of God?" We must speak carefully and reverently here. God created all things good, but all things are not good any more. Some of God's good creation has lost their excellence at the fall of Satan and of man. This evil in and around us makes the life of God's children difficult. Do we believe that this is also in God's control? Or does Satan have free reign to do as he pleases?

Here, too, we profess the providence of God. There is no creature, neither Satan nor man, who can act in a manner outside of God's control. God did not create sin and evil, but He certainly controls them both. God hardens the heart of whomever He wills, and He softens the heart of whomever He wills (cf. Rom 9). This becomes clear in the case of Pharaoh. Pharaoh was completely in God's power. He could do only that which God allowed him to do. God did not cause him to sin, yet God certainly controlled that sin. God can, and often does, put a bridle on sin. God prevents both Satan and evil men from having free reign in their work of destruction.



Why does God permit sin if He is able to stop it? God permits it because He is able to use it for the fulfilment of His purpose and counsel. Do you remember the story of Joseph? Remember how his brothers sold him as a slave? His brothers wanted to destroy him. No doubt Joseph asked the Lord when he was carted off, "*Why have You allowed this to happen, LORD?*" He must have wondered why God did not intervene to prevent this horrible sin. Yet in Genesis 50:20, we read what Joseph says to his brothers: "*You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.*" God used the sin of Joseph's brothers for the good of Jacob's family. God used a bad situation for his good. This does not give those who do wrong an excuse, since it turns out good anyway. No, God will judge them for the wrong that they have done.

The providence of God must be believed also in those times when it seems that the ungodliness of man reigns freely. How many people asked during World War 1 where God was in the concentration camps, where thousands of innocent

Jews were killed. Many people said that they could not believe in a God of providence after seeing or hearing about such events. Yet even in these terrible situations (and in others like it, such as wars, earthquakes, epidemics etc.) God reigns supreme.

God allows these things to happen. Why? Perhaps it is to bring judgment upon the ungodly. Perhaps it is to test the faith of God's people. The exact reasons cannot be known. Yet this we know, that God will use even the evil that occurs, to promote His purpose and plans. In all situations of life God is governing and guiding history to the consummation of the ages, the day of Christ's return.

In the history of the church, there have been those who say that God exists, and that God created the world, but that He no longer takes an active part in the governing of this world. They are called "*Deists*." They believe that God created the world with a self-governing mechanism like that of a clock. God wound it up, so to speak, and then left it to run on its own without any continued participation on God's part.

If this were true, then there would be no use for prayer. If all things run according to some mechanism then save your breath, for a machine cannot hear or change its course.

Since we know about God's providence, we are able to pray. If God did not rule, there would be no use for prayer. It would be futile, worthless. Yet since we know that God rules all things, we can ask Him for help in all situations.

The doctrine of God's providence should make us patient in times of difficulty. Patience in such times means more than just waiting for things to get better. Patience means trusting that even these difficult times will turn to our advantage. This means that we willingly accept adversity because God sends it for our advantage. Whenever we grumble or complain in times of adversity, we display a lack of trust in God's providential care

over us. How that must grieve our most gracious Father!

The doctrine of God's providence should also make us thankful in times of prosperity. This thankfulness is more than just being happy or joyous. It is possible to be happy in one's prosperity without even thinking about God's providence behind it or thanking God for it. Furthermore, we must continue to trust in God in these times of prosperity. It is all too easy to forget about our dependency upon God, and think that we have things in our own control.

This doctrine of providence should also give us a confident hope about our eternal security. There is nothing in all of creation, whether physical forces or spiritual forces which can separate us from the love of God, for God governs both the physical as well as the spiritual realm of creation. Paul wrote eloquently of his confidence for the future: "*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 8:38,39).



Questions:

1. What do we mean by the providence of God?
2. Does God only govern the important events in life, or also the insignificant? Can you show this from the Scriptures?
3. What is the opposite of providence?
4. Give some examples of how men deny the providence of God.
5. When is it easy to trust in the providence of God? When is it difficult? Give an example for each.
6. Does the sin and evil which man commits also come under the providence of God?
7. Why does God permit evil to occur? What can we be confident of in such times?
8. Describe the theory called "*Deism*."
9. The providence of God should evoke three responses from us. Which are they, and why does God's providence evoke these responses?

God the Son and our Redemption

LORD'S DAY 11

29. Q. Why is the Son of God called *Jesus*, that is, Saviour?
- A. Because He saves us from all our sins,¹ and because salvation is not to be sought or found in anyone else.²

1. **Matthew 1:21** "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

Hebrews 7:25 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.

2. **Isaiah 43:11** I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior.

John 15:4,5 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides

in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Acts 4:11,12 "This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. ¹² Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...

30. Q. Do those who seek their salvation or well-being in saints, in themselves, or anywhere else, also believe in the only Saviour Jesus?
- A. No.
Though they boast of Him in words, they in fact deny the only Saviour Jesus.¹
For one of two things must be true:
either Jesus is not a complete Saviour,
or those who by true faith accept this Saviour must find in Him all that is necessary for their salvation.²

1. **1 Corinthians 1:12,13** Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Galatians 5:4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

2. **Colossians 1:19,20** For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, ²⁰ and by

Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Colossians 2:10 ...and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

We begin to explain the second part of the Apostles' Creed which deals with the second Person of the Trinity, God the Son. The names given to Him are of great importance. Our fathers could easily have put the question of this Lord's Day in this manner: "*What do you believe when you say, 'And I believe in Jesus Christ.'*" Yet they did not. They wish to emphasise the importance of the name "*Jesus*," for the name of Jesus serves as a guarantee of our salvation. His Name means "**Saviour**." (In the next Lord's Days the Catechism will stress the importance of the name "*Christ*" and again the title "*Lord*.")

Hebrew	Greek	English
Joshua	Jesus	Saviour

Actually, it is not the name but the *giving* of the name, which serves as a guarantee that Jesus is really our Saviour. We say this because other men were given the name *Jesus*. The name *Jesus* is the Greek form of the Jewish name *Joshua*. In the Old Testament we read of four persons who were given this name. There was Joshua, the son of Nun, who led the people of Israel after the death of Moses (cf. Exodus 17:9). There was also Joshua of Beth-Shemesh, in whose field the cart bearing the ark of the LORD came when it was sent back to Israel by the Philistines (cf. 1 Samuel 6:14). The third Joshua whom we meet in Scripture was the son of Jehozadak, the high priest who led the exiles home from the captivity, along with Zerubbabel (cf. Haggai 1:1). The fourth Joshua was the governor of Jerusalem in the days of King Josiah (cf. 2 Kings 23:8).

That Jesus bore this name is in itself no guarantee that He is truly the Saviour of His people. **The guarantee is in the giving of this name.** The other men who bore the same name were given this name by their parents. Yet Mary and Joseph did not choose this name for their Son. They were commanded by God to give Him this name. The angel Gabriel said, "*You shall call His name Jesus*," (cf.

Matthew 1:21). **God gave this name to His Son.** And because God called Him *Jesus*, we are assured that He is what His name indicates. God gave this name to His Son for our sake, that we might be assured that Jesus is really our Saviour.

From what would He save us? This was made clear in the birth announcement which the angel Gabriel proclaimed to Joseph. "*He will save His people from their sins*" (cf. Matthew 1:21). It was necessary for the angel to point this out, for the Jews looked for a political redeemer to save them from the power of the Romans. Yet that was not Jesus' work. He came to deliver His people from their sins. He would deliver them not merely from earthly powers but from spiritual powers, which held them in bondage to sin and to death.

There is still a need to emphasise this today in light of the preaching of what is called the **Social Gospel**. It preaches Jesus as the Saviour of society life. It teaches that Jesus is the Man who came to free men from racial discrimination and inequality. He is the Man, for example, who would fight against apartheid as it existed in South Africa, just as He broke down the barrier of hostility between Jews and Samaritans when He spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well. The Social Gospel teaches that Christ came to deliver men, not from their *sin* but from their *misery*. He came to help the sick and the oppressed, the poor and the hungry.

While it is true that Jesus also saves us from the misery of sin, He could do so only after He had delivered us from our sin. For the cause of our misery is sin. Only when sin is removed can the misery of life be removed. Thus the first purpose of Jesus' work was to deliver us from our sins.

We, too, must be careful not to lose sight of the first purpose of Jesus' saving work. Our prayers for deliverance from the misery of life are often more ardent than our prayers for deliverance from our sins. When we experience illness or wasting

disease, we pray with great fervour for deliverance from them. Yet how often is our prayer for the forgiveness of sins not just a "one-liner" at the end of our prayer? We, too, can easily overlook the great need for salvation from sin, and focus our faith on Jesus as the One who redeems us from our misery. Christ saves us from both, our sins and our misery, but in the first place He saves us from our sins.

When we make the confession, "*I believe in Jesus Christ,*" we do more than confess Him as *our* Saviour. We also confess that He is our *only* Saviour. There is no one besides Him from whom we can receive redemption from our sins and misery.

He is our exclusive Saviour, but He is also the all-inclusive, the complete Saviour. There is no Saviour besides Him, and we need no other Saviour in addition to Him. In Him we find everything we need for the redemption of body and soul.

In Lord's Day 6 we learned that our Mediator must be true God and true man. We emphasise here again the two-fold reason why our Saviour must be divine:

1. Our Saviour must have **divine power**, for He must bear the sins of all God's elect, of all the "144,000" whom God has chosen to redemption. The weight of so many sins is greater than any mere creature could bear. Our Saviour must have divine power to be able to bear the heavy burden of God's wrath.
2. Furthermore, our Saviour's death must have **sufficient value and worth** if the death of the one Man is to suffice as payment for the sins of many. Also for this reason our Saviour must be true God. *The death of the Son of God is ... of infinite value and worth, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world ... because the person who submitted to [death] is ... the only-begotten Son of God.* (Canons of Dort, II, 3,4, Book of Praise, pg. 545,546).

Salvation could not come from one who was only true and righteous man, but also from one who was true God. God

must save His people. That was declared throughout the Old Testament: "*Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD*" (Deu 33:29). "*But Israel shall be saved by the LORD*" (Isa 45:17). "*Yet I am the LORD your God ever since the land of Egypt, and you shall know no God but Me; for there is no savior besides Me*" (Hosea 13:4).

Earlier we mentioned that the name *Joshua* (from which the name *Jesus* is derived) means *Saviour*. To be more correct, it means *Yahweh is salvation*. (In Hebrew, the suffix *Jo* is an abbreviation for *Yahweh*. The remainder of that name *-shua* is the Hebrew word for salvation.) Even the name of Jesus (*Joshua*) shows us that salvation is the work of *Yahweh*, and not the work of man.

In the gospel according to Matthew, the reference to the name *Jesus* is seen as the fulfilment of the Immanuel-prophecy. Matthew wrote, "*And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.*" *All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us"*(cf. Matthew 1:21-23).

The fact that Jesus is called Immanuel "God with us" proves that Jesus is true God. *Yahweh* Himself came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Son of God *incarnate*, (which means *in the flesh*). The fact that Jesus is the Son of God assures us that He is a complete Saviour. We need no other besides Him.

Since Jesus is a complete Saviour, the Catechism teaches us that it is wrong to invoke the aid of the saints. (To *invoke* is to call upon in prayer.) This was commonly done prior to the Reformation. In the bull "*Injunctum Nobis*", issued by the Council of Trent in 1564, the church of Rome defended this practice and encouraged its members to continue it. In this declaration, the members of the church of Rome were to profess, "*I*

*hold that the saints reigning together with Christ should be honoured and invoked, that they offer prayers to God on our behalf.”*¹ In another decree from the same council we read, *“It is a good and useful thing to invoke the saints humbly and to have recourse to their prayers and to their efficacious help to obtain favours from God through His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord who alone is our Redeemer and our Lord.”*²

The Catechism declares that the invocation to saints is a denial of the honour and all-sufficient work of Christ as Mediator. The Roman Catholics vehemently deny this in words. Yet when we look closely at their teaching concerning the *“efficacious help”*, it becomes clear that they are able to intercede with God on our behalf where we are not able. Thus they are more powerful than we, mere mortals. And when we look at the history of the veneration of saints in the Roman church, we find that Mary certainly becomes a rival for Jesus Christ.

Just as Christ was born without sin, Rome also teaches that Mary was *“immaculately conceived.”*

Just as Christ remained free from sin all His life, Rome also speaks about Mary’s *“sinless soul.”*

Just as Christ sacrificed Himself, Rome also teaches that Mary sacrificed her son to God. They even dare to speak about Mary as the co-redeemer of the human race.

Just as Jesus was taken up after death to heaven, Rome also teaches that Mary has been raised and taken into heaven like Christ (the *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*).

Let me copy for you a letter addressed by the Pope Pius X to the bishops of the world and an apostolic letter from Pope Benedict XV, both from this century.

*“As a result of this union of suffering and willing between Mary and Christ, she most deservedly merited to be the restorer of the lost world and therefore the dispenser of all gifts that Jesus has won for us with his death and his blood.... She is holier than all and more closely united with Christ, and as he has chosen her as his associate for the work of human salvation. She is the principal agent in distributing graces.”*³

*“As [Mary] suffered and almost died together with her suffering and dying Son, so she surrendered her mother’s rights over her Son for the salvation of the human race. And to satisfy the justice of God she sacrificed her Son, as well as she could, so that it may justly be said that she together with Christ has redeemed the human race.”*⁴

Although the church of Rome declares that Jesus is the only Saviour, yet their doctrine contradicts this. Mary is Christ’s associate. One is not saved by Christ alone, but also through the mediation of Mary who applies or distributes the merits of Christ. Such statements are nothing less than a denial of the all-sufficiency of Christ.



¹ Quoted from *The Church Teaches, Documents of the Church in English Translation*, trans. by J.F. Clarkson et.al., Tan Books and Publishers, 1973, p. 8.

² Ibid., p. 215.

³ The Encyclical *Ad Diem Illum*, 1904, as quoted in *The Church Teaches*, ibid., p. 210.

⁴ The Apostolic Letter *Inter Sodalicia*, 1918, ibid., p. 211. This means that Mary was joined with her son, Jesus Christ in both the suffering of Christ and in His willing. That is, just as Christ suffered willingly, so Mary suffered willingly. Her own heart was pierced with sorrow when she saw her son die, but she was willing to offer Him as a sacrifice for the salvation of the world.

Questions:

1. What does the Greek name "Jesus" mean in English? What is the Hebrew equivalent used in the Old Testament?
2. What is more important than the name Jesus? Why is it so important?
3. What kind of saviour were the Jews of Christ's day looking for?
4. From what did Jesus come to save us?
5. From what does Jesus save us according to the Social Gospel? Is this the first purpose of Christ's saving work?
6. Is there any danger of us losing sight of the first purpose of Jesus' saving work? If so, explain why.
7. What do we mean when we say that Jesus is our exclusive Saviour and our all-inclusive Saviour?
8. Give two (2) reasons why our Saviour had to be true God?
9. What does the name Joshua mean? What does this signify?
10. What does Immanuel mean? Who is our Immanuel? What does this say about our Saviour?
11. Why is it wrong to seek the aid of saints through prayer? Who promoted prayers to the saints? Why did they promote them?
12. What has occurred in the church of Rome concerning Mary, the mother of our Lord? Why is this wrong?

LORD'S DAY 12

31. Q. Why is He called *Christ*, that is, Anointed?
- A. Because He has been ordained by God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit,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;³ our only High Priest,⁴ who by the one sacrifice of His body has redeemed us,⁵ and who continually intercedes for us before the Father;⁶ and our eternal King,⁷ who governs us by His Word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in the redemption obtained for us.⁸

1. **Psalm 45:7** You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. (cf. also **Hebrews 1:9** where it is quoted in reference to the Son).

Isaiah 61:1 “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound....” (cf. **Luke 4:18** where it is quoted in reference to Christ).
2. **Deuteronomy 18:15** “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear....” (cf. **Acts 3:22** where it is quoted in reference to Christ).
3. **John 1:18** No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

John 15:15 “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”
4. **Psalm 110:4** The LORD has sworn and will not relent, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” (cf. **Hebrews 7:17** where it is quoted in reference to Christ).
5. **Hebrews 9:12** Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 10:11-14 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.
6. **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 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;
- 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.
7. **Zechariah 9:9** “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (cf. **Matthew 21:5** where this is quoted in reference to Christ).
- Luke 1:33** “And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

8. **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 10:28 "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

Revelation 12:10,11 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. ¹¹ And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."

32. Q. Why are you called a Christian?

A. Because I am a member of Christ by faith¹ and thus share in His anointing,² so that I may
as prophet confess His Name,³
as priest present myself
a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him,⁴
and as king fight with a free and good conscience
against sin and the devil in this life,⁵
and hereafter reign with Him eternally
over all creatures.⁶

1. **1 Corinthians 12:12,13** For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (cf. Also **vss 14-27**).

2. **Joel 2:28** And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions (cf. **Acts 2:17** where it is quoted in reference to Christ).

1 John 2:27 But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

3. **Matthew 10:32** Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

Romans 10:9,10 ...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Hebrews 13:15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

4. **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.

1 Peter 2:5 ...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light....

5. **Galatians 5:16,17** I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

1 Timothy 1:18,19 This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck....

6. **Matthew 25:34** Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...."

2 Timothy 2:12 If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

In the previous Lord's Day we dealt with the name "*Jesus*." In Lord's Day 12 the name "*Christ*" is explained. Again we find, just as was the case with the name Jesus, that the name "*Christ*" has a Hebrew and a Greek form with an English equivalent. You should become familiar with these names and their English meaning.

Hebrew	Greek	English
Messiah	Christ	Anointed

Before speaking about the anointing of Christ, the Catechism speaks of Christ's ordination. The word "*ordain*" carries with it the meaning of being set apart according to God's decree, God's special plan. When we speak about ordination (for example of office bearers in the church), it means more than just appointment. Men appoint other men to a specific task. However, when a man is ordained, it is God who calls him and appoints him to that office. It is not an office that a man takes upon himself, but one that is laid upon him by God.

This is also the meaning of Christ's ordination. He was sent by the Father to be our Mediator according to His plan that was established in eternity.

We also confess that Christ was anointed, as His name signifies. Anointing symbolised two things:

1. Anointing symbolised the divine **appointment or ordination to a special office**. In the Old Testament, those men who were given a special office were anointed, such as **prophets** (eg. Elisha, cf. 1 Kings 19:6); **priests** (eg. Aaron and his sons, cf. Exodus 40:13-16); and **kings** (eg. Saul, cf. 1 Samuel 10:1; David, cf. 1 Samuel 16:13; Jehu, cf. 1 Kings 19:16).
2. Anointing symbolised the **preparation for office**. Anointing was a part of one's daily toiletry in Israel, at least if one could afford oil. In the harsh dry climate of Israel, oil was useful in preserving the body moisture. Without it, the skin could become parched and cracked, which would be quite painful

and lead to possible infection and inability to work. Thus someone who was to work in the heat would anoint himself with olive oil. It appears that from this custom, anointing with oil came to have the symbolic meaning of preparation for one's work, to which he was especially called. Thus the anointing with oil signified the anointing with the Holy Spirit, who equips men to do the work of the office to which they are ordained (cf. Isaiah 61:1).

From this we conclude that the idea of **anointing and office are inseparable**.

We speak about Christ's anointing to a threefold office of Prophet, Priest and King. However, before we speak about Christ's threefold office, we do well to look at the history of this office. This threefold office existed already in paradise. In the beginning, before the fall into sin, every man held this threefold office. God created man as a prophet, priest and king. Yet when man fell into sin, he lost the ability to fulfil these offices. Therefore man needed a Redeemer. We could speak of the redemptive work of Christ as the restoration of man to this threefold office.

Christ was the last Adam. As the first Adam was created a bearer of this threefold office, so also the last Adam, Christ, was made a bearer of the same. Christ was anointed to be our chief Prophet, our great High Priest and our eternal King.

When was Christ anointed? He was anointed at His baptism. He was not anointed with oil. Christ was not baptised with the symbol of the Holy Spirit, but with the Holy Spirit Himself, who descended on Christ in the form of a dove.

As our Chief Prophet, Christ restores to us the knowledge of God, His plan of redemption, and His will (how He wants us to live). Christ did this while He was on earth and He continues to do so at His Father's right hand. Through this work of Christ, we again come to know God

and are thus able to have communion with Him through this knowledge. This knowledge which we have of God, is itself an important part of our salvation. For eternal life is to know God, to have intimate fellowship with Him. This knowledge Christ restores to us whose minds are darkened through sin.

As our great High Priest, Christ gave up His life in order that He might conquer death and restore life to us. Christ was both the Priest and the sacrifice for sins. Christ continues in heaven as our High Priest, who intercedes (pleads) on our behalf with the Father. Moreover, He continues to shower His blessings upon us through His Spirit.

As our eternal King, Christ defeated our great enemy Satan. Through His death, He conquered the prince of darkness and He continues to defend His church from their enemies. The day is coming when Christ our King will wage the final battle with His and our enemies, at which time they will be completely destroyed and removed from the presence of His people. Yet not only does He defend His people; He continues to govern and rule them by His Word and Spirit. He lays down the laws of the covenant as rules for life in the Kingdom of God, and He leads them down the paths of righteousness by His Spirit.

Now Christ has not only come to fulfil the threefold office for us, He also came to restore us in this office as well. We, who are grafted into Christ by faith, share in Christ's anointing. That is why we are called "*Christians*," which means "*anointed ones*." Through the work of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, we are restored and enabled to fulfil the threefold office of prophet, priest and king. The Holy Spirit is poured out upon us, as promised in our baptism, and we are equipped to serve as prophets, priests and kings.

As prophets, we are called to profess Christ's name. This means that we must be willing to bear witness to the work of Christ at all times, even in times of

persecution. We must publish abroad His wonderful name among those with whom we come into contact in our daily life. (cf 1 Peter 2:9). Never are we permitted to deny Him, for He has warned us: "*But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.*" (cf. Matthew 10:33).

As priests, we must offer ourselves up as living sacrifices (cf. Romans 12:1,2) That means that we deny our own wishes and live in obedience to God in all matters of life. We never do what we want, but what God wants. We must keep ourselves from all evil, and keep God's commandments. Furthermore, we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices, such as songs and prayers of praise and thanksgiving (1 Peter 2:5). That is our work as priests.

As kings, we are called to fight against all evil in this world. We may not simply sit back when we see sinful situations, but we must confront them and endeavour to correct them. This applies in our own lives as well as in church and in society. In every area of life we are called to defend Christ's name and work for the advancement of His kingdom. If we do this, we will remain kings with Him in the life to come, and we will reign with Him over all creatures on this earth.

It is a great privilege to be called Christians (anointed ones), but it is also a very great responsibility. There is no room in Christ's kingdom for lazy and slothful servants. If we are restored to our office as prophets, priests and kings, then we must be very busy working to fulfil these offices.

As youth of the church, you have the name of Christ written upon your foreheads, as signified in your baptism. You are called to be prophets, priests and kings. Furthermore, you have also received the promise that the Holy Spirit will equip you with all you need in order to fulfil this threefold office. You must work very hard in preparing and training yourselves, so that in the near future you may stand before Christ's congregation and promise to fulfil the tasks given to you as office bearers in Christ's kingdom.

Questions:

1. What does the Greek word "*Christ*" mean in English? What is the Hebrew equivalent used in the Old Testament?
2. Prior to being anointed, Christ was ordained. What does that mean? When was Christ ordained?
3. What is the first thing that anointing symbolised? Who were anointed in the Old Testament? Give examples.
4. What is the second thing that anointing symbolised? Explain the custom behind this symbol? What does the oil symbolise?
5. Describe the office to which Christ was anointed.
6. Who originally received this office? What happened? What is the goal of Christ's redemptive work?
7. When was Christ anointed? With what was He anointed?
8. What does Christ do as Prophet? As Priest? As King?
9. What else does Christ do than fulfil the three-fold office for us? What name do we receive as a result of this? What does this name mean?
10. What must we do as prophets? Where, when and how do we fulfil these duties?
11. What must we do as priests? Where, when and how do we fulfil these duties?
12. What must we do as kings? Where, when and how do we fulfil these duties?

Additional Questions:

13. How do the duties of Christ's three-fold office differ from Adam's in paradise before the fall?
14. What is the relationship between the three-fold office (to which all believers are appointed) and the special offices in the church (ministers, elders and deacons)?

LORD'S DAY 13

33. Q. Why is He called God's *only-begotten Son*,
Since we also are children of God?

A. Because Christ alone
is the eternal, natural Son of God.¹
We, however, are children of God by adoption,
Through grace, for Christ's sake.²

1. **John 1:1-3** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

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 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Hebrews 1 (especially **vss 2,3** ...His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³ who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.... cf. also **vss. 8-12** But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." ¹⁰ And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the

earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands.

¹¹ They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; ¹² Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail." (These verses quote texts from the Old Testament which are applied to God, and in the New Testament are specifically applied to the Son of God. From these texts it is evident that the Son is true God.)

1 John 4:9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

2. **John 1:12** But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

Romans 8:14-17 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Galatians 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

Ephesians 1:5,6 ...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

34. Q. Why do you call Him *our Lord*?

A. Because He has ransomed us,
body and soul,¹
from all our sins,
not with silver or gold
but with His precious blood,²
and has freed us from all the power of the devil
to make us His own possession.³

1. **1 Corinthians 6:20** For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Timothy 2:5,6 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,

2. **1 Peter 1:18,19** ...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of

Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

3. **Colossians 1:13,14** He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

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.

In this Lord's Day we must speak about two remaining titles or names which belong to Jesus Christ: the titles "Son" and "Lord."

The title "Son" brings certain ideas to our mind. Some of them apply to Christ's relationship to the Father, while others do not. Two ideas that **do not** apply are:

1. **that of origin** - A son owes his existence to his father and mother. Yet we may not speak of Christ coming into existence. There was never a time when the Son did not exist. The Son, like the Father, is eternal.
2. **that of being under authority** - A son is under the authority of his father. This, however, does not apply to Jesus Christ as God's Son. In His divinity, the Son is not subject to the Father. They are equal in authority. Only when Christ humbled Himself and took the form of a servant did He become subject to the Father (cf. Philippians 2:6ff.). As man Christ said, "My Father is greater than I," (cf. John 14:28).

Two ideas which come to mind in the title "son" and which **do** apply to Christ are:

1. **that of likeness** - We have a saying, "Like father, like son." We expect children to look like one of their parents. We always look for that likeness. And we expect them to have many of the same qualities and characteristics. So the Son of God is like His Father. In the Athanasian Creed (pg. 438 of the Book of Praise), we read: "(7) *Such as the Father is, such is the Son.... the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.*" It goes on to compare the Father and the Son, as we will do below:

The Father is:	The Son is:
Uncreate	Uncreate
Incomprehensible	Incomprehensible
Eternal	Eternal
Almighty	Almighty
God	God

This does not mean that they are exactly the same in every respect. The Athanasian Creed describes one of the differences between them as well. "*The Father is of none; the Son is of the Father.*" In Art 8 of the Belgic Confession, we confess that the Father is the cause, origin, and beginning of all things visible and invisible. The Son is the Word, the wisdom and the image of the Father. Thus we also see a difference in the work which we have already described in Lord's Day 8 of the Catechism.

2. **that idea of "relationship"** - We expect a close bond to exist between father and son. Such a relationship exists between the Father and the Son of God. There is a bond of love that unites them. The Son loves the Father (John 14:31) and the Father loves the Son (John 17:24).

The Apostles' Creed calls Christ "*the only begotten Son of God.*" The verb "**beget** - **begat-begotten**" means "**to father a child**." A woman conceives and bears a child; a father begets a child. As we have seen already, this is not to be interpreted as though the Father precedes the Son in time. For the Son is eternal. The term "begotten" emphasises the likeness between the Father and the Son. Just as humans give birth to humans, and animals give birth to their own kind, so the begotten Son of God is God, very God of very God.

Not all Bible translations render the Greek word in question as "*only begotten*." "Some (such as the RSV and the NIV) translate this word as God's "*only*" Son or "*one and only*" (cf. John 1:14,19). Although it may seem otherwise, the difference is not really that great. For the intent of the phrase "*only begotten*" is to emphasise the uniqueness of Christ's sonship to God in comparison with ours, as the Catechism stresses. There is no other Son of God like Christ. Although we are sons of God, we are so in a very different way. For Christ is the eternal, natural Son of God. He is very God of very God.

We, however, are mortal and finite. We are created sons.

We can speak of ourselves as being God's sons in two different ways. In the first place, we may say that we are sons of God in light of God being our Creator. In this sense, God is the Father of all men. However, when man sinned, he no longer bore God's image, and that relationship was broken. Instead, man bore the image of Satan. Thus mankind really lost that title of being sons of God. Man became a child of the devil. (cf. John 8:44).

Nevertheless, Christ came in order to restore us to the position of sons. For His sake, we are adopted as sons of God (cf. Galatians 4:5). We are once again given the position and the ability to bear the image of God, for we are being renewed in Christ's image. In this sense, the Scripture even speaks about believers as those who are "*begotten of God*" (or as it is sometimes translated "*born of God*"). We are reborn through the power of the Holy Spirit, recreated in God's image (cf. 1 Peter 1:3; 1 John 3:9). It is this unique relationship which we as believers have with God which is usually referred to when we speak about God as our Father, and we as God's children.

When we consider the impact of this on our lives, it should become very clear that if we have been made sons, and if we have been made image-bearers again of God, then we must also bear this image in everything we do. We must be holy, as our Father is holy. It should be like Father, like son. We should do the things that please our Father, submitting ourselves to Him as obedient children.

There is a rich comfort that comes with being children of the Father in Christ. Our heavenly Father looks upon His children with sympathy and with love (cf. Psalm 103:13). He knows our needs, and He is working for our good in every situation. This should give us great happiness as children of God.

There is also the title "*Lord*," which means "*Master*." This title "*Lord*" is an English word. In the olden days, the

servants or slaves would address their masters by saying, "*Yes my lord*."

We confess that Christ is our Lord, our Master. We should realise that in the beginning God was our Lord and Master. We were created to be "*slaves of God*." To be God's slave was not grievous to man in paradise, for God is a very gracious Master. He sought for our well-being. He provided us with all things we needed to do our work for Him. And the work we had to do was not burdensome. It was very pleasant. It was good to be God's slave. (In this respect, think of those slaves in the Old Testament who loved their masters and wanted to remain slaves even though they could be free –Read Exodus 21:1-6).

However, man was tempted with so-called freedom. The serpent promised Adam and Eve that they would become like God themselves determining what was good and what was evil, what they could and could not do. Man, in his foolishness, found this "*freedom*" appealing. Yet how sadly he was deceived. Man was never created to rule over himself. He was given the position of ruling over all of creation, but God remained the Ruler of man.

The "*freedom*" which Satan offered actually led to man's bondage. Mankind was sold under sin to Satan. Satan was given the power to rule over man. Satan became the cruel tyrant who seeks to destroy man who has come under his power.

The ungodly think that they are free. They think that they are doing what they want. They look at Christians as being slaves of their religion, which prevents them from doing many exciting things. They do not see the reality of their slavery. They are slaves of sin, slaves of Satan. Satan rules over them. Through his lies, he blinds them so that they cannot see the truth of their bondage. Through his power, he induces them to do evil things.

Man cannot free himself from his bondage to sin and Satan. Because of his sin God has given him into the power of Satan, and he remains in Satan's power until full payment has been made to God for

his sins. The only possible way by which man can be set free is by way of making complete payment. Since man is not able to make that payment, he cannot free himself from the tyranny of Satan.

Instead of leaving man in this slavery to sin and Satan, God was pleased to redeem man and restore Him to the position of being God's servant. (**redeem = to buy back**). It was God's gracious will to have His Son Jesus Christ make payment for our sin. Thus Christ redeemed us, not with silver and gold, but with His precious blood. He bought us with His blood.

Since He has bought us we are not our own. We belong to Jesus Christ. We are His possession. This means that we may

not do with ourselves as we please. In 1 Corinthians 6:19,20, Paul says, "*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*" Christ has redeemed us and set us free from the tyranny of Satan. The freedom that we have in Christ, however, is not a freedom to sin, but a freedom to righteousness. We have been restored as slaves of God (cf. Romans 6:5,6 & 16-18). We have been set free from the power of sin so that we might once again serve God with our whole life.



Questions:

1. Which titles of Christ do we speak about in Lord's Day 13?
2. By necessity, earthly fathers are always older than their sons. Is God the Father older than God the Son?
3. A son is under the authority of his father. Is the Son of God under the authority of God the Father? In what sense can we say that He is?
4. A son is often like his father. Is the Son of God like the Father? If so, in what way. If not, in what way do they differ?
5. What other idea does the title "*son*" convey about the relationship between the Father and the Son?
6. What does the word "*beget*" mean? What must we not think when we speak about the only begotten Son of God? What does this term emphasise?
7. How do some Bible translations render the phrase "*only begotten*"? What does that translation emphasise? Is the difference really that great?
8. In what two senses can we say that we are sons of God? Which sense is usually referred to when we speak about ourselves as sons of God?
9. Can we also speak of ourselves as "*begotten (or born) of God*?" If so, in what way? If not, why not?
10. What impact does our "sonship" have upon our life?
11. What is another word for the title "*Lord*?" What kind of relationship between Christ and us is highlighted by this title? (We are Christ's _____ and He is our _____).
12. Who was our master in paradise? Was this good?
13. With what did Satan tempt man? Could this ever be possible? Why or why not?
14. Are unbelievers free? If not, who is their lord or master?
15. How has Christ become our Lord? What does the word "*redeem*" mean?
16. If we are servants or slaves of Christ, can we speak about ourselves as being free? If not, why not? If so, how?

Additional Question:

17. In Romans 9, Paul emphasises that not the children of the flesh are the children of God, but the children of promise. What does this mean. Consider 1 John 3:9 in your answer.

LORD'S DAY 14

35. Q. What do you confess when you say:
*He was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary?*

A. The eternal Son of God,
Who is and remains true and eternal God,¹
Took upon Himself true human nature
From the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary,²
Through the working of the Holy Spirit.³
Thus He is also the true seed of David,⁴
and like His brothers in every respect,⁵
yet without sin.⁶

1. **John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 10:30-36 "I and My Father are one." ³¹ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. ³² Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" ³³ The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God." ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"?' ³⁵ "If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), ³⁶ "do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

Romans 1:3 ...concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh....

Romans 9:5 ...of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Colossians 1:15-17 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

2. **Matthew 1:18-23** Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

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.

Galatians 4:4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

Hebrews 2:14 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,

3. **Luke 1:35** And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."

4. **2 Samuel 7:12-16** "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. ¹⁵ But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever."

Psalms 132:11 The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: "I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body."

5. **Matthew 1:1** The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

Luke 1:32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David."

Romans 1:3 ...concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh...

5. **Philippians 2:7** ...but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

6. **Hebrews 4:15** For we do not have a High Priest

who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 7:26,27 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; ²⁷ who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

36. Q. What benefit do you receive from the holy conception and birth of Christ?
- A. He is our Mediator,¹ and with His innocence and perfect holiness covers, in the sight of God, my sin, in which I was conceived and born.²

1. **1 Timothy 2:5,6** For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time....

Hebrews 9:13-15 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? ¹⁵ And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

2. **Romans 8:3,4** 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, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Galatians 4:4,5 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

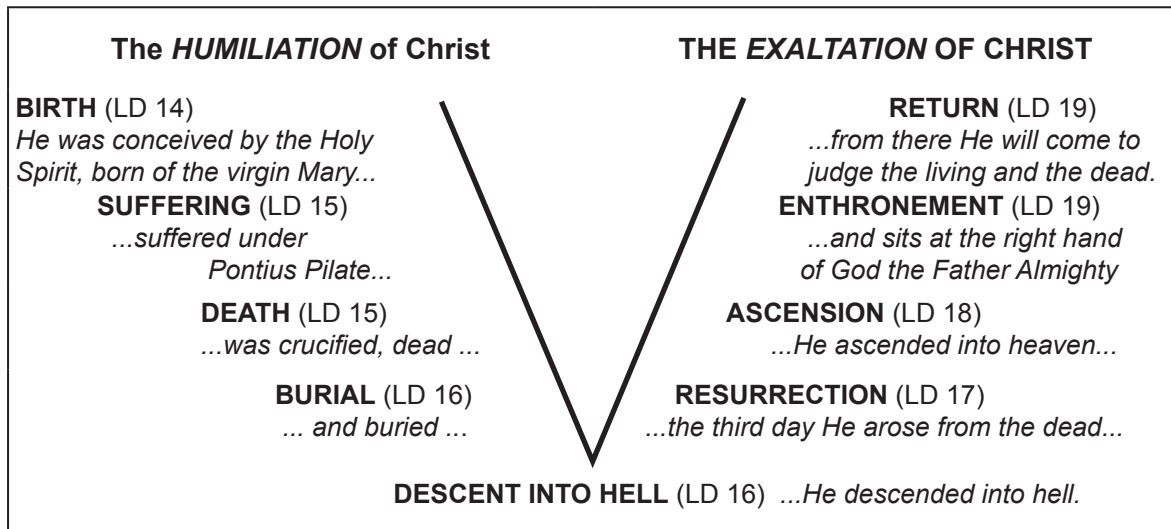
1 Peter 1:18,19 ...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

We have now finished dealing with the *names* of Christ and their significance. In Lord's Day 14 we begin to deal with the *work* of Christ. We continue to follow the pattern of the Apostles' Creed which first speaks about the work of Christ accomplished in His humiliation, which is covered in Lord's Day 14-16 of the Catechism. (By Christ's humiliation we refer to the fact that Christ did not cling to His rightful honour and glory, but took the form of a servant, and a suffering servant at that.)

Thereafter the Apostles' Creed deals with the work of Christ accomplished in His exaltation, which are covered in

Lord's Day 17-19. (By Christ's exaltation we refer to the fact that Christ again received the honour and glory that He had with the Father prior to His incarnation). Christ's humiliation and exaltation is shown in the diagram on the facing page.

In this Lord's Day we deal with the first "step" of Christ's humiliation, namely, His birth. (When we refer to Jesus we speak about His birth, for Jesus was a true Man born of a woman. Yet, when we speak about the Son of God, we speak about His *incarnation*, for the Son of God is not born, but begotten (see the previous Lord's Day). Incarnation



means “the assumption or taking on of the human nature.”

The incarnation of Christ was a matter of humiliation. For through this act the Creator-God assumed the nature of a creature. The majestic divinity took on lowly humanity. Though He was equal with God, He did not cling to that equality, and He took the form of a servant (cf. Philippians 2:6-8), and placed Himself under the authority of His Father (cf. John 14:28).

In the previous Lord’s Day we saw that Christ **is** the eternal Son of God. Now in this Lord’s Day the Catechism stresses that the Christ **remained** true God even when He became Man, which was necessary if He was to be our Mediator. This necessity is borne from two facts:

1. No creature could bear the burden of God’s wrath against sin and still survive to save others from it. Yet by the **power** of His divinity, Christ could bear God’s wrath.
2. Only the death of one who was truly divine would have sufficient **worth** to pay for the sins of the “144,000” whom God has elected (cf. Canons of Dort, II, 3,4). If Christ were only a man, His death would be sufficient to pay for the sins of only one man. This is something that we have discussed already in Lord’s Day 6.

Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ is true God. This becomes clear from the following: ¹

1. By the **names** given to Christ.
 - a. Christ is called **God** (cf. Isaiah 9:6, John 1:1, 20:28, Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, 1 John 5:20).
 - b. Christ is called the **Son of God** (cf. Matthew 4:3-6, Mark 5:7, Luke 8:28).
 - c. God Himself calls Christ His **Son** (cf. Matthew 3:17, Matthew 17:5).
2. By the **attributes** given to Christ
 - a. omniscience- (cf. John 1:48, 2:25, 21:17).
 - b. omnipresence- (cf. Matthew 18:20, 28:20).
 - c. omnipotence- (cf. Matthew 11:27, 28:18, John 5:17, Colossians 1:16,17).
 - d. eternity - (cf. Isaiah 9:6, John 8:58, 17:5).
 - e. immutability (unchangeableness) - (cf. Hebrews 13:8).
3. By the **works** of Christ
 - a. creation and preservation of world- (cf. John 1:3, Hebrews 1:3).
 - b. election - (cf. John 15:16, Acts 9:15).

¹ Cf. P.Y DeJong, *The Church’s Witness to the World*, Paideia Press, 1980, pg. 197-202.

- c. forgiveness of sins - (cf. Mark 2:7-10).
 - d. resurrection of the dead - (cf. John 5:21,28,29).
4. By the **honours** given to Christ (cf. Luke 24:52, John 5:23, Acts 7:59, Hebrews 1:3). He is worshipped (Hebrews 1:6), yet only God was to be worshipped (Luke 4:7-8, Revelation 22:8).

Already in the early church the divinity of Christ was denied. A man named Arius (256-336 AD) confessed that Jesus was a creature and not of the same essence (being) as God. Sozzini (Socinus) (1539-1604) who denied the Trinity, thus also the deity of Christ, also confessed this heresy during the time of the Reformation. These heresies continue to exist. Arius is the spiritual father of modern-day Jehovah's Witnesses, and Sozzini is the spiritual father of the Unitarians.² We could also consider the Mormons in this respect, for while they confess that Jesus is God, they will not confess that He is very God of very God, of the same essence as the Father and equal to the Father in eternity and majesty.

Besides the fact that Christ was true God, the Catechism also stresses that Christ was *true man*. In the history of the church there have been those who denied the possibility of the Saviour being true man. The Gnostics of the first centuries denied the humanity of Christ. They taught that all physical or material things were of lower value than spiritual things and even considered them sinful. They declared that Christ had only a spiritual body.

Others, like the Docetists, taught that Christ only appeared to have a human body. They taught that Christ had a spiritual body from heaven and went through His mother without assuming any of her physical properties, just as water goes through a tube without taking any of its properties. Christ, they said,

was not true man. He only appeared to have a physical body.

In Lord's Day 6 we learned that it was necessary for our Mediator to be true man. The justice of God requires that the nature that sinned must pay for sin. God will not punish any other creature for the sins which man has committed.

Luke's genealogy of Christ (cf. Luke 3) shows the lineage of Christ traced through Mary and brings it all the way back to Adam. Luke wishes to show his Gentile readers that Christ was true man, the son of Adam through Mary. He assumed a real human nature. That Christ was true man is clearly taught in Hebrews 2:14, "*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.*"

We also learned that our Mediator had to be a **righteous** man. (A righteous man is a man who is obedient to God's law, and who has not committed any sin or transgression.) For someone who is himself a sinner cannot pay for the sins of others.

Now we know that every one who is a descendant of Adam is born with sin. We call that *original sin* (in contrast to *actual sins*, which are those we commit in our own person). The depraved nature of man is passed on to his offspring. No one born of man is righteous. Speaking about man born of woman, Job says, "*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!*" (Job 14:4). All the descendants of Adam share in the original sin of Adam. All are born unrighteous.

Now if Christ was to be a righteous man, it is clear that He could not be born of man. He must not inherit the sin of an earthly father. Yet He must be man. He must be true man, but He cannot be born of man.

In order that Christ should be both true and righteous man, God the Holy Spirit, in a most miraculous way, overshadowed

² The Unitarian churches or assemblies can be found in America, England, Germany and a few in Australia.

the virgin Mary and caused her to be with child. Being born of woman meant that Christ took the human nature from Mary. He was a man like us in every respect except for the fact that He was without sin, without the inherited guilt and pollution of Adam. This was possible because He was not conceived by man, but by the Holy Spirit.

In choosing Mary to be the mother of the Mediator and in choosing Joseph to become his adoptive or legal father, God fulfilled His promise to David that He would cause an heir to sit upon David's throne, and who would rule for ever in an eternal kingdom. Both Mary and Joseph were of David's house. (That Mary is of David's line is clear from Romans 1:3; 9:5, where we read that Christ was descended from David's line according to the flesh.) Joseph was actually the heir to the throne. Had the line of David continued to rule Israel, Joseph would have been crowned king. By his marriage to Mary, Joseph became the legal father of Jesus, and Jesus became the legal heir to the throne of David. In this way the promise to David was fulfilled. This is shown in Matthew's genealogy (cf. Matthew 1) that traces the legal status of Christ as David's heir through Joseph's lineage. Thus our Mediator is truly our eternal King.

Now our Catechism is always very practical. It asks the question, "*How does*

Christ's holy conception and birth benefit us?" And it gives us the answer. Christ was not only the son of Adam, that is, a true man. Christ occupied a position like that of Adam. Christ is the last Adam. Just as the first Adam represented us when he fell into sin and we were thus born in sin, so also Christ represents us and we share in His holiness.

This does not mean that we are now born without sin. Rather, it means that Christ covers the sin in which we are conceived and born. The Father does not look at us as we are in ourselves, but looks upon us in Christ. Christ's holiness, His purity and innocence are imputed to us so that the Father regards us as holy, pure and innocent.

This is a wonderful comfort for parents. By nature the children who are born to us are children of wrath. Like all other children they are conceived and born in sin and subject to condemnation. However, through God's grace in Christ they are sanctified, and Christ covers their sin so that they are acceptable in God's sight.

In a way the miracle of Christ's birth is reflected also in our miraculous rebirth. Through the work of God the Holy Spirit, new life is wondrously conceived in us and we are reborn. And through this "holy re-conception" we are being transformed so that more and more we display this innocence and perfect holiness of Christ.



Questions:

1. How does the Apostles' Creed divide the work of our Lord Jesus Christ? What do we deal with in Lord's Days 14-16? What does that mean?
2. What are the four "steps" of Christ's humiliation?
3. We distinguish between the birth of Christ and the incarnation of the Son of God. Why do we do that? What does incarnation mean?
4. For what two reasons must our Mediator be true God?
5. By four means Scripture proves that Jesus is true God. Name them!
6. Quote (in full) two texts for each of these four means, and explain how these texts show us that Christ is true God.
7. Name some ancient and modern heretics who deny the deity of Christ.

8. Besides stressing the divinity of Christ, the Catechism also stresses His humanity. Do all believe that Christ was true man? Who do not, and how do they explain his physical appearance?
9. Why must our Mediator be a true man?
10. How does Luke 3 show the humanity of Christ? What does Hebrews 2:14 say?
11. Christ is also a righteous man. What does that mean?
12. We distinguish between two kinds of sin. Describe them.
13. Why was it so important that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus Christ?
14. Why was it so important that Mary was the biological mother of Jesus Christ?
15. What was the lineage or ancestry of Mary and Joseph? Why is this important?
16. What benefit do we receive from Christ's holy conception and birth?
17. What comfort do parents receive from Christ's holy conception and birth with a view to their children?
18. Can we say that the miracle of Christ's miraculous birth is still reflected today?

LORD'S DAY 15

37. Q. What do you confess when you say that He *suffered*?

A. During all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end, Christ bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race.¹
Thus, by His suffering, as the only atoning sacrifice,² He has redeemed our body and soul from everlasting damnation,³ and obtained for us the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life.⁴

1. Isaiah 53

1 Timothy 2:6 ...who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

1 Peter 2:24 ...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.

2. Romans 3:25 ...whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.

1 Corinthians 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

Ephesians 5:2 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.

Hebrews 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

1 John 2:2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

3. Romans 8:1-4

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.")

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Hebrews 9:12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

1 Peter 1:18,19 ...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

4. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Romans 3:24-26 ...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Hebrews 9:15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

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

A. Though innocent, Christ was condemned by an earthly judge,¹ and so He freed us from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us.²

1. **Luke 23:13-24**

John 19:4, 12-16 Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him." ...¹² From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."¹³ When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.¹⁴ Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"¹⁵ But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"¹⁶ Then he delivered Him

to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away.

2. **Isaiah 53:4,5** Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.")

39. Q.	Does it have a special meaning that Christ was crucified and did not die in a different way?
A.	Yes. Thereby I am assured that He took upon Himself the curse which lay on me, for a crucified one was cursed by God. ¹

1 **Deuteronomy 21:23** "...his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.")



In this Lord's Day we deal with the second "step" of Christ's humiliation, namely, His suffering. We must answer some questions such as "**Why** did He suffer? **When** did He suffer? **How** did He suffer?"

Let us begin with the first. **Why did Christ suffer?** We know from the Scriptures that suffering is the result of sin. Suffering is God's punishment upon sinful men. Yet in the previous Lord's Day we learned that Christ was without sin. He Himself did no wrong to merit such suffering. Why then did He suffer? You probably know the answer. It was because Christ assumed a special role. He became our Representative, our Mediator. God sent His Son into the world so that He might bear our punishment for us. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we read, "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God*

in Him." Thus Christ did not suffer for His own sins, but He suffered for your sins and mine.

It is good to remember this suffering of Christ. Some "Christians" think that God simply forgives and forgets about our sins without demanding payment. They put the emphasis on the love of God, and they deny the justice of God. They do not believe that God's justice requires full satisfaction for sin. Yet God swore to Adam and Eve that the punishment for disobedience was death. God cannot revoke His word. God is faithful, both to His promises and to His threats. Thus there was the need for payment. Furthermore, God's justice demanded it. In His love, however, God also sought for the redemption of man. Thus He sent a Mediator, a righteous Man Who would make this payment on our behalf. Christ

bore the wrath of God against the sin of us all.

The next question that must be asked is, **when did Christ suffer?** We immediately think of the cross. However, we must not restrict Christ's sufferings just to the cross. Yes, that is where His suffering was greatest, but Christ's suffering began at the beginning of His life. We mentioned that already in Lord's Day 14 when we drew the descending stairs of Christ's humiliation. Christ's sufferings began right at the beginning of His life. He was born to poor parents. At His birth, there was no room for Him in the inn, which symbolised what Christ said later: *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head"* (Matthew 8:20). The rejection of Christ began already at His birth. Herod threatened his life so that He had to flee. And His suffering continued throughout His life. During His earthly ministry He was misunderstood, misquoted. He had to endure weakness of faith in those who loved Him, and open hostility from those who hated Him. Yet the suffering of Christ reached its horrible climax on the cross. Thus the Catechism correctly says that Christ suffered from the beginning of His life on earth to the end thereof.

The Catechism also speaks about **how Christ suffered**, that is, He suffered in body and soul. Christ's affliction was not limited to the whipping He received from the hands of Pilate's men prior to His crucifixion. It was not limited to the pain that came from the crown of thorns put on His head. It was not limited to the agony of nails piercing His hands and feet. It was not limited to the horrible pain of slow suffocation that came through crucifixion. There was also the spiritual suffering of Christ in His soul. Since man had sinned in body and soul, our Mediator was to be punished in body and soul. Christ suffered in both that He might deliver both from destruction.

Christ's spiritual sufferings were also life-long. He endured the shortcomings of His parents as a child in Nazareth. He bore the abuses of His brothers and His peers. He

suffered the taunts of the Jews and even more, He had to endure the rejection of God. For three hours the sun ceased to shine. In Scripture, light is a symbol of God's favour; darkness is a symbol of God's disfavour, of being forsaken by God. After the three hours of darkness, Christ cried out, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* That was the greatest suffering of Christ! Men on earth have experienced greater physical suffering than Christ, but none on earth have experienced any spiritual suffering comparable to that which Christ endured.

What role did Pontius Pilate play in this divine drama of salvation? Sometimes it is said that the mention of Pilate in the creed is simply for the sake of knowing when Christ died. It used to be the custom to date events by mentioning the rulers of that time (cf. Luke 1:5; 2:2) rather than by the year to which we are accustomed.

However, Pilate's name has a much more important purpose than just giving the date of Christ's death. We have to ask ourselves just who and what Pontius Pilate was. He was the Roman governor of Judea. He was the highest Roman official in the land. Pilate represented Caesar. Yet both Pilate and Caesar represented God. For there is no authority except that which is given by God (cf. Romans 13:1). Thus government rulers, even when they act sinfully, act on God's behalf.

Thus the judgment which Pilate gave was spoken on behalf of God (cf. 2 Chronicles 19:6, John 19:11, Romans 13:4). It was God who judged Christ through Pontius Pilate, His representative. A short while after Christ died, the Jews stoned Stephen to death, and they thought they had stoned Paul to death as well. (cf. Acts 14:19) Although the Jews had tried at times to kill Christ (cf. Luke 4:29; Matthew 26:4), God would not permit Him to be killed by a street gang or an angry mob. His death would follow an official, though hasty trial, and a man acting on God's behalf would order His execution.

In order to appreciate this more, we must also realise who Christ represented. He

represented you and me. What really happened on the day when Pontius Pilate judged Christ? God judged you and me. The sentence Christ bore was the judgment of God for our sins. Christ bore God's severe judgment that should have fallen upon us. Since we have been judged in Christ, we do not have to fear the Day of Judgment that is to come. Payment has already been made for our sins.

We must also deal about *the manner in which Christ died*. It was not just any manner of execution. No, Christ died on the cross, which seems to portray complete rejection by man and God. He who was crucified hung suspended between earth and heaven. Men would not allow him life on earth, and God refused him entrance into heaven. Perhaps we read more into the cross than is warranted. One thing is certain; that God's curse was laid upon the one who was crucified (cf. Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). Thus we are assured that Christ, by dying on the cross, bore the curse that lay upon us.

Now in all this we have been stressing the fact that Christ suffered in order to deliver us from suffering. Nevertheless, believers suffer in this world just as the unbelievers do. Why is this? If Christ suffered the wrath of God for us, why

do we still suffer? First of all, we should never consider the sufferings of Christians as a judgment of God. If we become seriously ill, we should not immediately think that God is punishing us. It is true that some actions bring with it their own punishment. For example, those who practice homosexuality are subject to the disease called AIDS (cf. Romans 1:27). Yet each time we become ill, or something terrible happens to us, we should not immediately seek the cause in something we did. As Christians we are no longer subject to the wrath of God. Christ has paid for our sins in full.

Nevertheless, we are still subject to the consequence of our sins as long as we live. Sometimes God uses suffering as a means to humble us if we become arrogant. Sometimes God uses suffering to test faith or to build character (cf. Psalm 119:71; Ecclesiastes 7:2-4; James 1:3; Romans 5:3-4). Whatever the purpose God has in mind, we must never think that God is angry with us, or that we have to pay for sins. Christ has done this once for all. Full payment has been made. We may be assured that whatever evil God sends us in this life is for our good and for our salvation.



Questions:

1. What is the second "step" of Christ's humiliation?
2. Why is there suffering on earth? Is this also the cause of Christ's suffering?
3. Does God forgive sin without demanding payment or satisfaction? Why (not)?
4. When did Christ's sufferings begin? (Illustrate your answer with examples).
5. Was Christ's suffering only physical? Has anyone suffered greater physical pain than Christ?
6. Why was it necessary for Christ to suffer spiritually? Describe the spiritual suffering of Christ? Has anyone on earth suffered greater spiritual anguish?
7. What does light and darkness symbolise in Scripture?
8. Both Christ and Pontius Pilate were more than just individuals acting on their own behalf. They were both representatives. Of whom? What really happened, then, on the day that Pontius Pilate condemned Christ? What comfort does this afford us?
9. The normal means whereby the Jews executed criminals was by stoning. Is it significant that Christ was crucified? What assurance do we receive from this fact?
10. If Christ suffered in order to take away sins, why then do believers still suffer? What must the children of God never think if they experience difficulties in life?

LORD'S DAY 16

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| 40. Q. | Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself even unto death? |
| A. | Because of the justice and truth of God ¹ 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.

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| 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...

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| 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,"

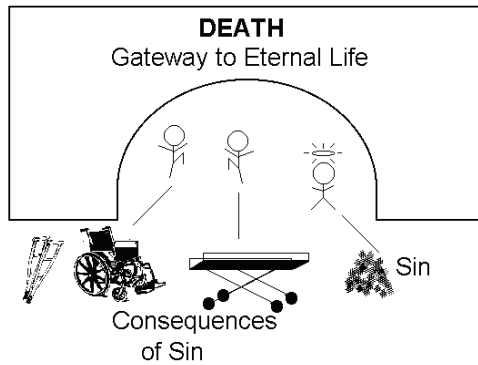
2. Isa 53

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.

LORD'S DAY 17

45. Q. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?

A. First,
by His resurrection
He has overcome death,
so that He could make us share
in the righteousness
which He had obtained for us
by His death.¹
Second,
by His power
we too are raised up
to a new life.²
Third,
Christ's resurrection
is to us a sure pledge
of our glorious resurrection.³

1. **Romans 4:25**...who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

1 Corinthians 15:16-20 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.¹⁷ And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!¹⁸ Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.²⁰ But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

1 Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

2. **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.

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.

2. **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.
3. **Romans 8:11** But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

1 Corinthians 15:12-23 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.¹⁴ And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.¹⁵ Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up; if in fact the dead do not rise.¹⁶ For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.¹⁷ And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!¹⁸ Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.²⁰ But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.²¹ For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Having dealt with Christ's humiliation in Lord's Days 14-16 the Catechism now directs its attention to Christ's exaltation or His glorification. (Lord's Days 17-19). After humbling Himself to the very deepest reproaches of death, He was honoured and glorified by the Father. The resurrection is the first step in Christ's exaltation.

It is interesting to note that the Catechism does not seek to prove the reality of Christ's resurrection, but refers only to the benefits thereof. This is due, no doubt, to the fact that the resurrection was a fact accepted by all at the time of the Reformation. Sadly, it is not the same today. There are those who not only question, but flatly deny the resurrection of Christ. Many today say that Christ lives, but only in the hearts and memory of His followers.

Scripture, however, goes to considerable lengths to impress upon us the reality of the resurrection. Christ appeared to Mary and the other Mary (Matthew 28:1-10). He appeared to Simon (Luke 24:34). He appeared to the two walkers on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). He appeared in the upper room to His disciples, and then again when Thomas was with them (John 20:19ff.). He appeared to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1). He appeared to more than five hundred at one time and also to James (cf. I Corinthians 15:6,7). He appeared to all these before His ascension (Acts 1:1-3). And lastly He spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus (I Corinthians 15:8).

In these appearances Christ manifested Himself as raised with a physical body, the same as He had while He lived on earth. Thomas could touch the marks of His crucifixion. Jesus could eat with His disciples in the upper room and again at the Sea of Tiberias.

It is important to stress that Christ rose with a physical body, for the Lutherans believe that the resurrected body of Christ was a spiritual body. There are some texts that first appear to support this idea. Christ was able to leave the tomb,

though the stone was not moved from the entrance of the tomb. Christ was also able to enter the upper room where the disciples were gathered though the door was locked. After speaking with the men travelling along the road to Emmaus, Christ suddenly disappeared. However, we should remember that God's divine power can defy the laws of nature. Think of Peter, for whom an angel of the Lord unlocked the prison doors (Acts 5:19). Surely the risen Christ is as powerful as the angels! Think also of Philip, who after speaking with the Ethiopian eunuch, suddenly disappeared and was found in Azotus, kilometres away (Acts 8:26-40). Just as the laws of nature were suspended for men like Peter and Philip who had physical bodies, so the laws of nature were suspended for Christ Who rose with a real, physical body like that which He had while living on earth.

Christ was not the first and the only One to rise from the dead. The prophet Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:34). Christ raised the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:14). Christ also raised His friend Lazarus (John 11:44). However, Christ's resurrection is not to be viewed in the same light as these other resurrections. There is the obvious difference in that these others rose from the dead, only to die again later, but Christ rose never to die again. Yet more importantly, Christ did not rise just as a single individual, but as our Representative, just as we died with Christ, so also we were raised with Christ. Christ's resurrection is our resurrection, just as Adam's sin and death is our sin and death. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:21,22: *"For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."* By His resurrection Christ did not only break the power of death that held Him; He also broke the power of death that held us captive. The Catechism acknowledges this when it focuses upon the benefits, which we receive from the resurrection of Christ.

The Catechism describes the benefits of Christ's resurrection. The benefits are threefold: our justification, our sanctification and our glorification.

Justification

When man fell into sin he became guilty of breaking God's law. He incurred judgment upon himself. He brought upon himself the just wrath of God. Man had to be punished but Christ took our guilt upon Himself, and bore the punishment for our sin in His body on the cross. In this way our sins were removed. He satisfied God's justice for us. He paid the penalty that we would have had to pay.

When Christ rose from the dead, He overcame death. Death was the curse that rested upon us because of our sin. By submitting to death, Christ made payment for God's wrath. Since the payment was made in full, it was impossible for Christ to be held by death. Where the guilt of sin is removed, the punishment for sin must also be removed. The fact that Christ rose from the dead gives us assurance that payment was made in full and that we who belong to Christ are thereby freed from that curse. We are now declared "Not Guilty" by God the Judge. We have no payment to make for our sins. Christ made full payment for us. He did this once for all time in His earthly suffering. His payment was a one-time act accomplished in the past. As a result of Christ's payment, God looks at us as though we never committed any sin. He looks at us as law-abiding people. Thus we may define ***justification as the legal declaration of God whereby He declares us "not guilty" (on the basis of Christ's suffering and death), and "perfectly obedient" (on the basis of Christ's obedience or righteousness).***

This justification is not a gift that we receive automatically. Christ must apply to us this gift which He acquired by His death. We distinguish between acquiring salvation and applying salvation. If a child burns himself, his father might go

to the chemist and acquire (purchase) some medicated ointment. Yet it is not enough to acquire it. The ointment must be applied to the wound. In like manner, Christ must apply to us the benefits that He has acquired (purchased) for us by His death. He must make us share in this gift. How does He do this? By incorporating us into Himself by faith. By faith we come to share in all of Christ's benefits (Lord's Day 7). Thus we see another need for Christ's resurrection.

In the example above, the child might be capable of applying the ointment himself. Yet in the case of our redemption, man cannot apply Christ's benefits to himself because man is dead in sin. He cannot believe of himself. The risen Christ not only has to acquire salvation for us (which He did during His life and death on earth). He must also apply salvation to us by working faith in our hearts (which work Christ performs from heaven through the Holy Spirit).

The Arminians disagree with this. They teach that Christ acquires certain benefits, but it remains for man to apply them to himself (cf. Canons of Dort, RE II 6, Book of Praise, pg. 550). They can say this because they do not believe that man is dead in sin. He is sick, but he is still capable of doing something, namely, of applying Christ's benefits to himself by faith. Thus the Arminians deny the ongoing work of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, of applying salvation to us.

Sanctification

Sin did not only affect man's *legal standing or state* before God, it also affected his *condition*. When man fell into sin, he incurred not only *guilt*, but also moral *depravity*. He became a corrupt being, inclined to all evil and incapable of doing any good. Man's mind was polluted and darkened; his heart was made callous and hard; his will was perverted and bent towards evil.

When Christ rose from the dead, He received from the Father the authority to send the Holy Spirit to dwell in the

hearts of men (cf. John 14:16,26; 16:7). Christ was crowned King of kings, and He was given the authority to rule the hearts of those whom the Father gave Him. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we who are by nature dead in sin, are made alive. The old sinful nature that we all inherited at birth is crucified more and more. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are restored more and more to the image of Christ.

Whereas justification is based upon the one-time act of Christ's suffering and death, sanctification is based upon the continuing work of our living and glorified Lord. Sanctification is not a one-time act, but an ongoing process of renewal, which the risen Christ performs in us from heaven. Thus we may define ***sanctification as the process whereby Christ puts to death our old nature and renews us in His image through the working of the Holy Spirit.***

Glorification

We have now seen that the fall into sin has affected our state before God (we are guilty) and our condition (totally depraved). Although through Christ we are justified as well

as sanctified, we are not completely free from sin. There remains in us remnants of the old nature. Furthermore, there remain consequences of sin which affect our bodies, and which are not removed in this life. There is sickness, disease and death. Even though we are being renewed after the image of Christ, there is at the same time a continual deterioration of our bodies. The life we now experience will come to an end by death (unless our Lord returns before we die).

However, that does not create a dark future for us. Rather, there remains for us a bright future. At death, we leave our bodies behind while we go to dwell with Christ in heaven. Yet the time will come when our bodies are raised and renewed, and then we shall receive a glorified body. Christ's glorious resurrection is a sure pledge of our glorious resurrection because He is our Head and Representative. If the Head is glorified, so shall the body. ***Glorification might be defined as the change which the saints will undergo at the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, when all the remaining effects of sin are removed and death itself shall be no more, when man is made perfect again.***



Questions

1. What does the Catechism deal with in Lord's Days 17-19? What does that mean? What is the first "step" in Christ's exaltation?
2. Why doesn't the Catechism prove the reality of the resurrection? Is there a need for such proof today? Does Scripture give ample evidence of it? Give some examples.
3. Did Christ rise with His real physical body, or was it a spiritual body? Can you give evidence of this?
4. Who denied that Christ rose with a physical body? Are there some events that would seem to suggest that Christ's risen body was spiritual? How can we explain these texts?
5. Christ's resurrection was not the first and only resurrection from the dead. Name some others. What important difference is there between Christ's resurrection and that of others?
6. The benefits of Christ's resurrection are threefold. Name them.
7. Define justification. How does the resurrection of Christ assure us of our justification?
8. We distinguish between *acquiring* and *applying* salvation. Explain what these words mean?
9. Regarding the application of our salvation, explain why Christ must be raised.
10. Define sanctification. Regarding our sanctification or renewal, explain why Christ must be raised.
11. Define glorification. How does the resurrection of Christ assure us of our glorification?

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

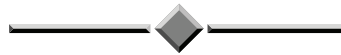
return, he receives from his wife a ring as a counter-pledge of the promise.

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?

LORD'S DAY 19

50. Q. Why is it added,
And sits at the right hand of God?

A. Christ ascended into heaven
to manifest Himself there
as Head of His Church,¹
through whom the Father governs all things.

1. **Ephesians 1:20-23** ...which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.²² And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Colossians 1:18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn

from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

2. **Matthew 28:18** And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

John 5:22,23 "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son,²³ "that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

51. Q. How does the glory of Christ our Head, benefit us?

A. First,
by His Holy Spirit
He pours out heavenly gifts
upon us, His members.¹
Second,
by His power
He defends and preserves us
against all enemies.²

1. **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.

Ephesians 4:7-12 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

⁸ Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."

⁹ (Now this, "He ascended"; what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) ¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ....

2. **Psalms 2:9** You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.

Psalms 110:1,2 The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool."

² The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength

out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

John 10:27-30 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. ³⁰ I and My Father are one."

Revelation 19:11-16 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. ¹³ He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. ¹⁵ Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

46. Q.	What comfort is it to you That Christ <i>will come to judge</i> <i>The living and the dead?</i>
A.	In all my sorrow and persecution I lift up my head and eagerly await as judge from heaven the very same person who before has submitted Himself to the judgment of God for my sake; and has removed all the curse from me. ¹ He will cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but He will take me and all His chosen ones to Himself into heavenly joy and glory. ²

1. **Luke 21:28** “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”

Romans 8:22-25 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Philemon 3:20,21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Titus 2:13,14 ...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify

for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

2. **Matthew 25:31-46**

1 Thessalonians 4:16,17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 ...since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, ⁷ and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰ when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

In this Lord's Day we speak about the enthronement of our Lord Jesus Christ, the third “step” of His exaltation. With this we confess that Christ has ascended to His heavenly throne and rules as King over the church and the world.

Many “Christians” deny that Christ is reigning already. In Revelation 20:4 we read: “*And [the saints] lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*” They interpret this to mean that Christ will establish a literal thousand-year kingdom (or millennium) in the future.

We must understand, however, that the book of Revelation is filled with symbols. That is also true with the numbers in this book. They are not intended to be interpreted literally, but symbolically. (History has seen numerous sect leaders who have predicted the time of Christ's return using these and other symbolic numbers from Scripture, but whose predictions have failed.

The number “one thousand” is a symbolic number. It is the product of ‘ten’ (the number of fullness) multiplied by itself three times (‘three’ is the number of

perfection). $1000 = 10 \times 10 \times 10$ or 10^3 . This means that Christ will reign for a perfect and full measure of time, however long that might be.

This reign is not something we still await, but is already in progress. Christ began this “thousand year” reign when He ascended into heaven. Scripture teaches us that Christ received power and authority at the time of His ascension (cf. Matthew 28:19,20).

When Christ ascended into heaven, He sat down on the throne next to the Father. The phrase, “*He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty*,” shows us two things:

1. **Christ’s glory** - To sit at the right hand was the highest mark of honour that a king could give to someone. This implied a sharing of the rule. When someone sat on the right hand of the king, he received a very noble position in government (cf. 1 Kings 2:19; Psalm 110, Matthew 20:21; Hebrews 1:3). The Catechism refers to Christ’s ascension as “*the glory of Christ*” in question 51 of this Lord’s Day.
2. **Christ’s authority** - The right hand is usually stronger than the left, so that sitting on the right hand was a more favoured and powerful position than sitting on the left (cf. Exodus 15:6,7; Psalm 118:15,16). The one who possessed greater authority would sit on the right hand of the king.

We must not think of Christ sitting on the floor beside the throne of the Father. He has been given an exalted position in heaven. Christ is King seated upon a throne! Christ said, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21).

The Father has not given up His throne or power. Both the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ are seated upon the throne in heaven. That means that they share the power. As the Catechism teaches us: the Father governs all things through Christ (cf. Matthew 28:18, John 5:22).

Concerning the authority which Christ has received, and the realm over which He rules, we make this distinction:

1. Christ is **King of the church** - He governs the church and defends it by His Word and Spirit. He remains the King of the church forever.
2. Christ is also the **King of creation** - Christ has been given authority to govern all things in creation. The Father has given Christ this authority over creation to further His church gathering work. When the work of gathering the church is completed, Christ will hand over His kingship over creation back to the Father (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

The catechism follows the statement of Christ’s enthronement with the question of the profit of His enthronement. “*How does the glory of Christ benefit us?*” The answer is two-fold:

1. The glorified Christ grants us **heavenly gifts**. In the early years of the Christian church, (in the time of the apostles), extraordinary gifts were given, such as speaking in tongues and miracles of healing. Although some today still claim to have the gift of tongues and the gift of healing, these claims are doubtful. These gifts were unique to the apostolic era.

This does not mean that the present day church is without gifts. We still receive many gifts, the chief one being the Holy Spirit Himself. As described by the apostle Paul: “*When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men...And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers* (Ephesians 4:8,11). We also continue to enjoy many gifts of the Spirit, such as knowledge, faith, love and hope. (Galatians 5:22). These are some of the gifts that the enthroned Christ gives us through His Holy Spirit.

2. The glorified Christ grants us **heavenly protection**. We, as Christians, need

this protection because our enemies never cease to attack us. We have four enemies, over whom our Lord gives us victory:

a. our own flesh - (cf Romans 6:14; 7:21-25). Scripture speaks of the war that rages in the believer. It is a war between the old nature and the new nature. It is a war between doing evil and doing good. By nature, we are prone to hate God and to rebel against all His commandments. The renewed Christian must struggle all his life against the old nature.

b. the world - (cf Luke 21:10-19, John 16:33, 17:14). Since we are renewed by the Holy Spirit we think and act differently than the world does. This disturbs the world. The light that shines through the piety or holiness of the saints exposes the world's evil. When they see our good deeds, their conscience accuses them of sin. Thus we incur the hatred of the world, which like to put out the light, and have us join them in their darkness.

c. Satan - (cf. Romans 16:20, 1 Peter 5:8). He is the deceiver of the world, the liar. He is God's enemy and also the enemy of all those who belong to God. He cannot destroy God, but he takes great pleasure in destroying everything and everyone who belongs to God.

d. death - (cf 1 Corinthians 15:26). The last enemy that we must face in life, is death. That is the last effect of sin that we must bear before our entry into eternal life, which is free from all the misery of sin. Christ has already defeated this enemy so that death cannot hold us.

As we have stated, there is great need for heavenly protection. Because of our weakness, we would not be able to stand for a moment if we had to stand by ourselves. Our enemies are greater than us, and we need protection if we are to persevere in our salvation.

This protection is granted to us through our glorified Christ. All things are in His control. He governs all history for the sake of the elect. Nothing can happen without His will. Thus we are safe when we hide ourselves under the pinion of His wings. Then we have assurance of what Paul speaks of in Romans 8:38-39, "*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

In this life we must bear many evils at the hands of our enemies. Sometimes it seems as though they get away with it all. There does not seem to be any punishment for those who do evil against God and against us. We seldom see divine justice meted out to those who sin (cf. Psalm 73). It doesn't seem fair. Yet the Apostles' Creed also speaks about the justice of God. God will not allow these sins to go unpunished. Thus there is added to the creed, "*He will come to judge the living and the dead.*"

Those who do not cling to Christ, and who do not seek the forgiveness of their sins must make payment themselves for their wrongdoing. Christ will enter into judgment with them, and they will have to give account for every wicked deed done and every careless word uttered. Because they have not repented of their sins nor clung in faith to God's grace in Jesus Christ, they will be condemned.

Their condemnation is horrible. In the first place, it is **extreme**. It is anguish of body and soul. In the second place, it is **eternal**. Listen to how Scripture describes the condemnation of the ungodly:

"If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in

the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” (Revelation 14:9-11).

“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:41,42).

‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched’ (Mark 9:44).

Does the thought of impending judgment give us reason to fear? After all, we are not perfect! We have not kept the commandments of God, as we ought. We all fall short of the glory of God. Is Christ going to judge us as well? Do we have anything to fear?

To this we may say “No!” providing that we are found in Christ. If we cling to

Christ in faith, and seek the forgiveness of sins through His blood, then the sins that we have committed will be blotted out, erased. God will no more bring them to remembrance.

We who belong to Christ have nothing to fear on the day of Christ’s return. For believers **have been** judged already. We were judged in Christ. *“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...” (John 5:24).*

Rather than receive punishment at Christ’s coming, we will receive a reward. God will reward our good works by granting us eternal life on a restored earth where we will enjoy heavenly bliss in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ. *“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43)*



Questions:

1. What is the third “step” of Christ’s exaltation?
2. What does Rev 20:4-6 tell us? Is the number given in this text to be taken literally, or is the number to be interpreted symbolically? If so, what is the meaning of that number?
3. Has Christ already ascended to the throne, and does He already rule as King? Has the thousand- year kingdom (millennium) already begun? If so, when did it begin? If not, when will it begin?
4. What two things are shown to us by the fact that Christ sits at the right hand of the Father?
5. Has the Father relinquished His throne, to leave Christ to rule alone?
6. What distinction do we make regarding the authority that Christ received and the realm over which He rules?
7. With what purpose in mind did the Father make Christ the King of creation? How long will Christ remain the King of creation?
8. What two benefits do we receive from Christ’s enthronement?
9. What are some of the gifts that Christ has given to the early church that are not given to the church today? Is the church today poorer than the early church? What are some of the gifts that Christ gives to the church today?
10. Christ grants us protection from and victory over four enemies. Which are they? Why is this protection needed? What does this protection give us?
11. At times it does not appear that we have a very just King, for we suffer much evil at the hands of our enemies, yet they seem to go unpunished. What else do we confess concerning our King that assures us that justice will be rendered?
12. How does Scripture describe the judgment that comes upon the ungodly?
13. Should the thought of judgment make true believers afraid? Why or why not? What will they receive at Christ’s coming?

LORD'S DAY 20

53. Q. What do you believe concerning the Holy Spirit?

A. First,
He is, together with the Father and the Son,
true and eternal God. ¹
Second,
He is also given to me, ²
to make me by true faith
share in Christ and all His benefits, ³
to comfort me, ⁴
and to remain with me forever. ⁵

1. **Genesis 1:1,2** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Matthew 28:19 "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.

Acts 5:3,4 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴ "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

2. **1 Corinthians 6:19** Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

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.

Galatians 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

Ephesians 1:13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

3. **Galatians 3:14** ...that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

1 Peter 1:2 ...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

4. **John 15:26** But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.

Acts 9:31 Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

5. **John 14:16,17** 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.

1 Peter 4:14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

We have completed the first two parts of the Apostles' Creed which deal with the work of God the Father and with the work of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Now in the third and last part of the Apostles' Creed we will deal with the work of God the Holy Spirit.

In this Lord's Day the Catechism does two things, it answers two questions:

"Who is the Holy Spirit?" and "What does the Holy Spirit do?"

Who is the Holy Spirit?

You should notice that we say "Who?" and not "What?" For the Holy Spirit is a Person and not just a power as some claim. In saying that the Holy Spirit is a person, we do not thereby deny that He has power. Indeed, the Spirit is a powerful Person.

Furthermore, the Catechism teaches us that the Holy Spirit is true and eternal God. We confess that He has the same divine nature as the Father and the Son. He has the same rank, the same honour. He, too, is eternal, without beginning and end. That the Holy Spirit is true God can be shown from the Scriptures in four ways:

1. By the **divine names** which are attributed to Him:

- 2 Peter 1:21 - *“holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”*
- 2 Timothy 3: 16 - *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”* (Compare these two texts with each other. In one place, we read that the men who wrote the Scriptures were moved by the Holy Spirit, and in another that these men were inspired by God. The conclusion from these two texts is that the Spirit is God.)
- Acts 5:3-4 *“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’* (Lying to the Holy Spirit is equated with lying to God.)

2. By the **divine attributes** which are ascribed to Him:

- 1 Corinthians 2: 10-11 - *“But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit **searches all things**, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.”* (The Spirit is here described as being *omniscient* - all knowing, which is only true of God.)

- 1 Cor 3:16 - *“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”* (A temple is where God dwells. Paul says the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Thus we conclude that the Holy Spirit is God.)
- Isaiah 40: 13 - *“Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him?”*
- Romans 11:34 - *For who has known the mind of the LORD? or who has become His counselor?”* (Rom. 11:34 is Paul’s quotation of Is.40: 13. Paul identifies “the Spirit of the Lord” and “the LORD.”)

3. By the **divine works** which He performs:

- Acts 20:28 - *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”* (The Holy Spirit appoints men as office-bearers in the church.)
- 1 Corinthians 12:11 - *“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”* (The Holy Spirit decides who will receive His gifts, and in what measure.)

4. By the **divine honours** paid to Him:

- Matthew 12:32 - *“Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.”* (The Holy Spirit receives no less honour than the Son).
- 1 Peter 4:14 - *“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.”*

These are only some of the texts which show us that the Holy Spirit is not just an

impersonal power, but a powerful Person, who is above all true God.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The second thing which the Catechism describes is the work of the Holy Spirit. In Q. & A. 24, we saw from the division of the Apostles' Creed that the work of the Holy Spirit is the work of sanctification. We also mentioned in our discussion of that Lord's Day that although the main work of the Spirit is the work of sanctification, He was also involved in the work of creation, as will become clear from the following:

Creation

- **The Spirit was instrumental in the creation of the world:**

Genesis 1:2 *The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

Psalms 104:30 *You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth.*

- **The Spirit gave beauty and form to the world:**

Job 26:13 *By His Spirit He adorned the heavens; His hand pierced the fleeing serpent.*

- **The Spirit upholds creation:**

Job 34:14,15 *If He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.*

Redemption

The Holy Spirit assisted Christ in fulfilling His role as Redeemer whereby He obtained our redemption (acquisition of redemption). The Holy Spirit also makes us share in the merits of Christ by working faith and spiritual renewal (application of redemption). This work of the Spirit can be seen in the following:

A. Acquiring Redemption

- **The Spirit was involved in the conception of Christ:**

Luke 1:35 *And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."*

- **The Spirit was involved in the maturing of Christ:**

Isaiah 11:1,2 *There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*

Luke 2:40 *And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.*

Luke 2:52 *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

- **The Spirit equipped Christ to fulfil His office:**

Matthew 3:16 *When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.*

- **The Spirit enabled Christ to withstand temptation:**

Luke 4:1,2 *Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil.*

- **The Spirit enabled Christ to preach with great wisdom and boldness:**

Luke 4:14-19 *Then Jesus returned in the power of the **Spirit** to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He **taught** in*

*their synagogues, being glorified by all. So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The **Spirit** of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to **preach** the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

- **The Spirit enabled Christ to perform miracles:**

Matthew 12:28 *"But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."*

- **The Spirit strengthened Christ to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin:**

Hebrews 9:14 *...how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

B. Applying Redemption

- **The Spirit inspired Scripture:**

2 Samuel 23:2 *The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue.*

1 Corinthians 7:40 *But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment; and I think I also have the Spirit of God.*

2 Peter 1:21 *... for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Timothy 3:16 *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable*

for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...

- **The Spirit gives power to those who preach:**

Acts 1:8 *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

1 Corinthians 2:4 *And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.*

- **The Spirit gives understanding to those who hear the preaching:**

1 Corinthians 2:12-14 *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

- **The Spirit convicts men of sin which leads to repentance:**

John 16:7-11 *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."*

- **The Spirit pours love for God into our hearts:**

Romans 5:5 *Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has*

been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Ezekiel 11:19 *"Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh.*

- **The Spirit's work enables us to confess Christ as our Lord and Saviour:**

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

- **The Spirit causes us to walk in obedience:**

Ezekiel 36:27 *"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them".*

Philippians 2:13... *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

- **The Spirit causes us to produce good fruit:**

Galatians 5:22,23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*

- **The Spirit causes us to persevere to the end:**

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

Ephesians 1:13,14 *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

Sanctification

The chief work of the Holy Spirit is the work of "**sanctification**". The fundamental meaning of sanctification is: "*to make holy*". It refers to **the process by which the old nature is put to death, and the new nature is made alive**. It is the process whereby we are renewed more and more after the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as it pleases the Holy Spirit to use the means (or agency) of the reproductive organs to bring forth natural life, and just as the Spirit uses the means (or agency) of food and drink to sustain life, so the Spirit uses means to bring forth and sustain spiritual life. He uses the gospel and the sacraments. James wrote, "*Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth,*" (James 1:18). The Word of God is the seed of regeneration (1 Peter 1:23,25).

In Scripture there is a very serious warning not to sin against the Spirit of God. In Scripture there are different degrees of sin against the Holy Spirit. When one sins, he **grieves** the Spirit of God (cf. Ephesians 4:30). If one continues to live in sin and does not repent, he **resists** the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 7:51). If one refuses to repent even after many exhortations, he **quenches** the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:19).

Christ said, *...he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation*" (Mark 3:29). In the context, we read that the scribes blasphemed (spoke evil) of the Spirit's work. They knowingly and deliberately said that the good work that Christ performed through the Spirit was the work of the devil. Thereby they hardened their hearts and rejected the saving grace performed by Christ through the Spirit.

When a man hardens his heart and rejects the work of the Holy Spirit, there remains no means of forgiveness. He has rejected the means that God has given for bringing him to repentance. The Holy Spirit convicts him of sin, but if he

refuses to acknowledge his sin and repent from it, and if he hardens himself against the renewing work of the Spirit, there remains no other means to bring man to repentance.

Sin against the Holy Spirit might be compared to a man whose house is quickly being swallowed up by floodwaters. The man climbs to the top of the house and there he sits. A rescue boat comes along and the man is exhorted to jump in, but he refuses to leave his housetop, for he loves his house. Other boats follow, but the man dismisses each with increasing anger, telling his would-be rescuers to

leave him alone. After a period of time, the boats cease coming and eventually the man drowns.

The Holy Spirit is He who convicts us of sin and softens our hardened hearts. However, if we harden our hearts and reject the work of the Spirit by refusing to repent despite His many exhortations, then the Holy Spirit will blind our eyes and make our ears dull, and harden our hearts still further so that repentance becomes impossible (cf. John 12:40; Hebrews 6:4-6).



Questions:

1. Into how many parts is the Apostles' Creed divided? What is dealt with in each part?
2. Is the Holy Spirit a person or a power?
3. What can you say about the nature of the Holy Spirit?
4. In what four ways does Scripture prove that the Holy Spirit is true God? Illustrate this from Scripture. Quote (in full) two texts for each of these ways and explain how they prove the divinity of the Spirit.
5. What else does the Catechism deal with besides the divinity of the Holy Spirit?
6. What three-fold task did/does the Holy Spirit perform in the matter of creation?
7. We distinguish between Christ's work of *acquiring* our redemption and His work of *applying* our redemption. Explain what these mean.
8. What seven things did the Holy Spirit do to assist Christ in His work of acquiring our redemption?
9. What nine things does the Holy Spirit do to assist Christ in His work of applying our redemption.
10. What is the chief work of the Holy Spirit? Explain what that means.
11. What means does the Holy Spirit use in order to bring forth new life in us?
12. What does Scripture say about the degrees of sin against the Holy Spirit?
13. What does it mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit? Why is this unforgivable?

LORD'S DAY 21

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

54. Q. What do you believe
Concerning the *holy catholic Christian church*?

A. I believe that the Son of God,¹
out of the whole human race,²
from the beginning of the world to its end,³
gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself,⁴
by His Spirit and Word,⁵
in the unity of the true faith,⁶
a church chosen to everlasting life.⁷
And I believe that I am⁸
and forever shall remain
a living member of it.⁹

1. **John 10:11** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Ephesians 4:11-13 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...

Colossians 1:18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

2. **Genesis 26:4** And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed....

Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation..."

3. **Isaiah 59:21** "As for Me," says the LORD, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore."

1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

4. **Psalms 129:1-5** Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth," let Israel now say; ² "Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me. ³ The plowers plowed

on my back; they made their furrows long." ⁴ The LORD is righteous; He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked. ⁵ Let all those who hate Zion be put to shame and turned back.

Matthew 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

John 10:28-30 "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. ³⁰ I and My Father are one."

5. **Romans 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Romans 10:14-17 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" ¹⁷ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Ephesians 5:26 ...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word...

Acts 2:42-47 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having

favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Ephesians 4:1-6 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

7. **Romans 8:29** For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Ephesians 1:3-14 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, ⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, ¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth- in Him. ¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also,

having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

8. **1 John 3:14** We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

1 John 3:19-21 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. ²⁰ For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

9. **Psalm 23:6** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

John 10:27,28 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand"

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, ⁵ that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, ⁶ even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, ⁷ so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.



In the Apostles' Creed we confess the following: "I believe a holy catholic Christian church." Let us look at each of these words separately.

The first word that describes the church is the word "holy." "**Holy**" means *to be set apart, consecrated to God*. When we say that the church is holy, we mean that God has set apart His people to be a distinct people on this earth. They are distinguished from unbelievers and people who live in sin. They receive the sign and seal of God's ownership (baptism). Out of

thankfulness for this privilege of being members of Christ's holy church, we are to be holy in all our conduct, that is, we are to set ourselves apart from sin and evil.

The second word that describes the church is the word "catholic." The church of Rome claims that she is the "catholic" church, and sometimes we distinguish Catholics and Reformed. Yet that is not a good distinction. For the Reformed Church is the catholic church, whereas the Roman Church is not catholic.

What does “catholic” mean, and why do we call ourselves the “catholic church?” **“Catholic”** means **“universal, encompassing the whole.”** In what sense is it universal? What does it encompass?

The church of Christ is “catholic” or “universal” in three respects.

1. **geographical** - it encompasses the whole human race. The church is not limited to Israel, the Netherlands or America. The church is gathered from all peoples, tongues and races.

2. **temporal** - it encompasses the whole of time. The church exists from the beginning of time to the end thereof. There is never a time when the church fails to exist.

3. **doctrinal** - it encompasses the whole truth. Christ gathers this church in the unity of the true faith. The church of Christ hears the voice of the Good Shepherd, but does not listen to the voice of any other. One of the marks of the true church (which are found in Art 29 of the Belgic Confession) is that the Word of God is faithfully preached. This means that the church believes all the truth and only the truth. It rejects all things contrary to the Word of God.

The third word that describes the church is the word **“Christian.”** This word was not added into the Creed until the time of the Reformation. It is for this reason that not all churches which confess the Apostles’ Creed, have this word to describe the Church. This word “Christian” shows the basis upon which the church is built. Christ is the cornerstone and foundation of the church. The existence of the church rests upon His gracious work.

The last word to be defined is the word **“church”** itself. This word is taken from the Greek word *KURIAKOS* which means

“belonging to the Lord.” It is from this Greek word that the word *church* is derived in various languages - *kirk kerk, kirche, church*).

From the Catechism we learn that the church is universal, uniform and unified.

The Church is Universal

Since we are discussing the doctrine of the church, we would do well to listen to a definition of what the church is. We confess in Art 27 of the Belgic Confession that the church *“is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.”*

The author of these words said elsewhere, *“There is only one church, which is the gathering of all the elect who were from the beginning of time and will be to the end thereof.”*¹

Olevianus wrote, *“There is one universal church, just as there is one Head of the church, namely, Jesus Christ, and because all believers from Adam to the end of the world are His members and are one body through the Holy Spirit.”*²

Ursinus spoke about *“an invisible universal church which is the assembly of all the elect through the ages.”*³

Concerning the church Calvin wrote, *“All the elect are so united in Christ that as they are dependent upon one Head, so they grow into one body, joined and knit together as are the limbs of a body.”*⁴

In all these quotations you see one common feature: the connection between God’s sovereign decree of election and the universal church. And that is a connection that the Reformers based on the Scriptures. They refer us to John 10:

¹ Guido de Brès, *Le Baston de la Foy Chrestienne* as quoted by C. Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer*, Drukkerij Barendrecht, 1956, p.91.

² Casper Olevianus, *De Vaste Grond*, De Vuurtoren, Urk, 1980, p. 148.

³ Zacharius Ursinus, *The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co. n.d., p. 287.

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Westminster Press, 1960, vol. 2, p. 1014.

14, 16, where we read, “*I am the good Shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd.*” Christ speaks about “My” sheep. These are the elect, which the Father has given Him. Christ brings all the elect together into one fold.

God’s decree of election does not automatically make the elect, members of Christ’s church. Covenant children, whose parents belong to the church, also belong to the church and are members of it by birth.⁵ They are received into the church and grafted into it by way of baptism.⁶ Adults who join the church become members of it when they make confession of faith and are baptised.

As a result, we cannot say that all the elect are already members of Christ’s church. We must not view the church of Christ in a static way, as if it is complete and unchanging. We must realise that Christ’s work of church gathering is not yet complete. It is a process that occurs through the ages and will become complete only at the end of the ages. Only then does the Church Universal reach its fullness and perfection. Only at the end of the ages will all the elect be gathered in. It is important to realise that the Universal Church is not yet what it will be at the close of the age. The church is *being* gathered.

That the church is being gathered comes out clearly in what Christ says in John 11:52: Christ “*would die for the nation [of Israel], and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.*”

Knowing this fact allows us to speak about the Universal Church in two ways. We may speak about the Universal Church as it now exists. And we may speak about the church as it will exist at the end of the age, when Christ returns.

It is the latter view that the Reformers had in mind when they described the Universal Church. They spoke of the church as it will be, the gathering of all the elect through all the ages.

It is good to pay attention to this time distinction, for some have confused the future with the present.

Some believe that all the elect belong to the church now already. And since faith is the fruit of election, some have said that all believers belong to the church now already, as it exists today. They realise, however, that all true believers do not belong to a true church. There are believers who are members of false churches. Yet they say that they are members of Christ’s church. Which church? Certainly not any true visible church on earth! Therefore they invent a church, an invisible church. A true believer, they say, who is a member of a false visible church is still a member of the invisible church.

Scripture never speaks about an invisible church. In the land of the living there is only one church now, and that is the Universal Church, which is visible in many localities and which all display the three marks of the true church (cf. Art 29, Belgic Confession)

It is not in harmony with either Scripture or confession to say, then, that all the elect, i.e. all true believers are already members of the church. Christ spoke in another way. He said, “*Other sheep have I that are not of this fold. Them also I must bring in.*” (John 10:16) The fold is not yet complete.

Why is it not complete? For a number of reasons. In the first place, all the elect have not yet been born. Many names that God has written in His book of life have not yet come into existence. They will come to life, and they will join the church. Yet we cannot speak about those belonging to the church who do not yet exist.

⁵ Heid. Cat. Q/A 74 & Question #1 in the Form for Baptism.

⁶ Bel. Conf. Art 34 and Heid. Cat. Q/A74).

Furthermore, the Universal Church is not yet complete because there are some who have not yet heard or responded to the call of the gospel. Some of the elect have not yet come to faith.

Still further, there are some elect who have come to faith, but who live in disobedience to Christ's call. They resist Christ's church-gathering work. For whatever reason, they refuse to separate themselves from the false church. Perhaps they have not understood the truth well enough. Perhaps there are certain consequences to joining the church that they are not ready to accept. Perhaps a marriage would be threatened; perhaps a job would be lost. Through weakness of faith, some true believers resist Christ's church-gathering work. I think of Nicodemus, who did not approach Christ openly for fear of the Jews. It would appear from Scripture that he did not join the group of disciples until after Christ died. Only then did he openly declare his sentiments for Christ.

Those believers who refuse to join themselves to the true church cannot rightly be said to belong to the Universal Church. They ought to be exhorted, for they act contrary to the ordinance of God.

Will those be condemned who failed to join Christ's church on earth, though they were joined to Christ by faith? No. In this life there is much weakness and shortcoming amongst all believers. This is also true in the area of Christ's church gathering work. At the time of their death, Christ will take these true believers to Himself. That, too, is a part of Christ's church gathering work. Although in this life they resisted Christ's church gathering work, their sinful resistance is ended at death, and they become members of the Universal Church by being added to the assembly of all believers in heaven.

There is another reason why the Universal Church here on earth is not perfect yet. In the church hypocrites are mixed with true believers. In this life their hypocrisy might go undetected. Yet when they pass through the portal of death, they will

not be admitted into the assembly of the saints in heaven. Their hypocrisy will be exposed, and they will be judged for their unbelief.

Furthermore, the Universal Church is imperfect because the sanctification of the believers is not yet complete. The church of Christ is made up of men who are still beset with great weaknesses.

It should be clear that the Universal Church as it is today, is not what it shall be when Christ returns. Then it will be complete. Then all the elect will belong to it, and only the elect. It is this Universal Church in all perfection and completion, which the Reformers had in mind when they spoke as they did. This is the church as God sees it.

The Church is Uniform

The Catechism says that the church is *united in the true faith*. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul says that there is one church. This is the Universal Church. Then Paul goes on to say that there is one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.

There is one Spirit, one faith. Paul says this in the context of exhorting the Ephesians to unity in doctrine and conduct. We believe that the Spirit speaks to the churches through the preaching of the Word. "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*" (Revelation 2:29).

Where there is a plurality of people, there is often a plurality of thoughts. One thinks this, and another that. One would follow a certain course, while another would follow a different course. Yet there is one Spirit Who speaks to the church. There is one Spirit Who guides the church in all the truth. And there is one Spirit Who has inspired the Scriptures. The one Spirit speaks a uniform word to the churches today. Wherever the Spirit leads men, they proclaim one and the same message. The truth is uniform. There is one faith.

This uniformity of the gospel message induced the Reformers to acknowledge

the pure preaching of God's Word as the first mark of the Universal Church on earth now. The church of all ages has been and continues to be led by the one and the same gospel.

So Paul could say, *"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed."*

The same must be said concerning the sacraments. There is only one baptism, says Paul. By extension, we could say that there is only one Lord's Supper. Wherever the Spirit leads men to administer the sacraments, it will be done uniformly. Oh, some minor difference may appear. One will dip his hand three times into the baptismal font, while the other does it once. One may baptise with immersion and another with sprinkling. Such minor differences in the administration will also appear in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Spirit does not dictate these finer points. However, the Spirit guides men in the interpretation of the sacraments, and in determining who will be allowed to receive the sacraments. Thus the true church will be recognised by the mark of the pure administration of the sacraments.

What is true for the preaching and the sacraments is also true for the exercising of church discipline. In the Scriptures, the Spirit has dictated the manner in which church discipline is to be exercised. The Universal Church has always followed and continues to follow that form faithfully. Thus the true church will be recognised by the mark of the faithful exercising of discipline.

The Universal Church has one form, the form laid down in the Word of God. The church has one form because there is one norm, the Scriptures. It has one form, because it has one Head, Jesus Christ, and one Spirit to lead it.

The church that deviates from the norm of God's Word with respect to preaching, sacraments or church discipline ceases to possess the true form of the church. It becomes false.

We stress the fact that the church is *uniform* because there are some who teach that the church is *pluriform*, that is, the church comes in all shapes, colours and sizes, all of which form a part of the true church. The doctrine of pluriformity teaches that the Baptist Church, the Church of Christ, the Assemblies of God, the Reformed Church and the Free Reformed Church are all forms of the true church. So long as a church holds to the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, it cannot be called false. All these churches possess a measure of the truth. The most that can be said is that one is more pure than another. This doctrine of pluriformity has bred an attitude of unholy toleration. It is sadly ironic that the one thing that is not tolerated in Christianity today is intolerance.

To this we reply that there is one Lord Jesus Christ, one Spirit, one faith, one baptism. The church has one norm - the Holy Scriptures. Therefore it has one form. Throughout the ages, the church has possessed this one form, which is evident in the three marks.

The Church is United

The uniformity which the church enjoys with respect to the preaching, the sacraments and discipline, is the basis for the unity of the Universal Church. Even though the church is being gathered from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, so that it meets in many local congregations, and even though the one may know nothing of the other, they are bound together in unity of faith. This is the unity of which our confession speaks in Art 27 Belgic Confession. *"The holy church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. However, it is joined and*

united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith."

The Universal Church that embraces the one faith is joined and united by the power of that faith. Where there is uniformity in the preaching of the gospel, in the administration of the sacraments, and in the exercising of church discipline, there is unity. Two local congregations which are a world apart geographically, who know nothing of each other and do not experience the joy of fellowship, are united if they both possess the marks of the true church.

When they do cross each other's paths, they recognise each other and embrace each other, giving expression to the unity of faith which they enjoy. The recognition of this unity is not always immediate. It usually takes some time to examine one another, to see whether they both possess the marks of the true church.

Only when the three marks can be recognised in each other can these churches come to the conclusion that they are one. For the unity of these churches depends upon this uniformity in preaching, sacraments and discipline. We can only speak of unity of two churches when it has been determined that both possess the marks of the true church. It is wrong to speak about unity or lack of unity before we have come to a conclusion whether such churches possess the three marks of the church. To say that there is unity is to admit that they are a true church. To say that there is no unity is to acknowledge that they are a false church. We should not speak about unity until we have come to a conclusion as to whether or not there is uniformity with respect to the three marks.

Where two churches have found uniformity in the marks, and live in close proximity, it is the Lord's command that they give visible expression to the unity of faith that they have. Customs or tradition may not stand in the way of such a unity. Whether one sings with the accompaniment of an organ or not, and whether one sings the Psalms according

to the Genevan tunes or to some other suitable tune, are things which must not stand in the way of such unity. It is important for the church of Christ not to show division to the community in which they live.

Furthermore, it is the duty of all assemblies, which call themselves "*church*", but which do not maintain the uniformity of the true church, to bring themselves into harmony with the norm. Contrary to the opinion of some, the divisiveness in Christianity is not a pleasant situation, which allows people to choose a church as they would ice cream, choosing any flavour they want. The divisiveness in Christianity is a ploy of the evil one to make the gospel ineffective in the world.

In His High Priestly prayer, Christ prayed, "*I do not pray for them [the apostles] alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that the world may believe that You sent Me.*" For Christ, this unity was an important factor in bringing the world to faith. He knew that the world would scoff when they saw how the Bible is interpreted in so many different ways. Is the Bible really the truth? Is Jesus really the Saviour of the world? However, there are so few who agree on what the truth really is." This leads some to deny the truth of the Scriptures.

The church of Christ must echo the prayer of Christ: 'Father, our desire is that all those who truly believe the gospel may be one, so that the world may believe that You are truly the Redeemer.' The church must endeavour to be faithful instruments of the Holy Spirit who works that unity. Through the opening of Scripture, they must endeavour to exhort other assemblies to obedience to that norm.

In the answer of this Lord's Day we confess that the church-gathering work is the work of the Son of God. He began this work prior to His incarnation (coming in the flesh) and now continues this work as

the ascended Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Head of the church, and to him has been given all power and authority in heaven and on earth with which to gather His church. He gathers His church through the working of the Holy Spirit and through the Word, the Scriptures. We can even speak more concretely. The Son of God calls men to proclaim the Scriptures, men who are endowed with the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit uses this humble proclamation as His tool for the building up of faith in the hearts of the believers.

It is also through the Spirit and the Word that the Son of God defends and preserves His church. Paul calls faith a “shield” by which we can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. (cf. Ephesians 6:16) The Word of God is a sharp sword that the Spirit uses to defend and preserve us. Even Christ, when He was tempted in the wilderness by Satan, used Scripture to ward off the attack of the evil one. Thus one cannot stress enough the need for a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. Without this knowledge, we are weak and an easy prey for the evil one, being more susceptible to falling.

The last part of the answer concerning the church deals with the membership. There we confess that we are and forever shall remain living members of this church. Forever is a long time and we

sound pretty sure of our membership. Does this mean that we are so sure of ourselves? Not at all! We know that we are weak and prone to fall. Yet when we confess this, we confess our assurance in God, that He will not let go of us, but will always hold onto those whom He has elected. He will finish perfectly what He has begun to undertake for us. This gives us great comfort and consolation. Nothing will separate us from the love of God. How rich is God's grace to us!

Notice that the Catechism speaks of “*living*” membership in the church. This implies that there are also dead members. They are the ones who do not truly believe, nor do they really love God. Although they attend church and perhaps perform other works, be it by way of custom or superstition, thinking that membership in the church or outward obedience will permit them to escape God's wrath and win His favour. Yet our Lord has clearly taught us that not all who say, “*Lord, Lord*” will be received into His eternal kingdom. On the Day of Judgment, the dead branches will be cut off and cast into condemnation. Thus it is of the greatest importance to be “*living*” members, spiritually alive and active in the congregation of our Lord.



Questions:

1. What do we mean when we confess the church to be “holy?”
2. What does the word “catholic” mean? In what three respects is the church catholic?
3. When was the word “Christian” inserted into the creed, and why? Do all churches have this word in their version of the Apostles' Creed?
4. From what is the word “church” derived? What does the word “church” mean?
5. What common feature do the Reformers display when speaking about the catholic or universal church?
6. What does John 10:16 say?
7. Are all the elect automatically members of Christ's church by way of their election? What makes them members?
8. How should we not view the church of Christ?
9. In what two ways or from what two perspectives may we speak about the universal church? In which way do the Reformers speak of it in the quotations given?

10. Does Scripture support the concept of an invisible church? Why do some people choose to speak about it?
11. Are all the elect (or all believers) members of Christ's church now already? Give three reasons why (not).
12. For what two reasons is the church not perfect yet?
13. What are the three marks of the church?
14. Will all true churches teach the same doctrine and proclaim the same message? Why (not)?
15. Will all true churches teach about and administer the sacraments in the same way? Why (not)?
16. Will all true churches exercise Christian discipline in the same manner? Why (not)?
17. Do your answers to the questions above teach uniformity or pluriformity in the church of Christ?
18. What attitude does the doctrine of pluriformity breed in the church?
19. What is the basis for the unity of the church?
20. What must be determined before we may speak about unity of faith with other churches?
21. If churches are uniform in their preaching, in the administration of the sacraments and in church discipline, and if they live in close proximity to each other, what should they do?
22. How does Christ gather the church?
23. How does Christ defend the church?
24. How can we be sure that we shall forever remain living members of the church?
25. Why does the Catechism stress the need to be living members of the church?



THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

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

A. First,
that believers, all and everyone,
as members of Christ
have communion with Him
and share in all His treasures and gifts.¹
Second,
that everyone is duty-bound
to use his gifts
readily and cheerfully
for the benefit and well-being
of the other members.²

1. **Romans 8:32** He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

1 Corinthians 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

1 Corinthians 12:12,13 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

1 John 1:3 ...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

2. **Romans 12:4-8** For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; ⁷ or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 12:20-27 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. ²³ And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, ²⁴ but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, ²⁵ that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

1 Corinthians 13:1-7 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. ⁴ Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Philippians 2:4-8 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 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.

We are still busy with the work of the third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. One of the gifts that Christ gives to the church through the Holy Spirit, is the gift of the communion of saints.

The first thing that we must do is define some words. Who are the **saints**? According to the church of Rome, saints are very pious Christians who have something most extraordinary. They have lived a very holy life, or they have done some very noble deeds in their life. They are elevated above the rest of the believers and assist other believers in salvation. They are prayed to and depended upon for assistance by the believers.

However, God's word declares that all those who are included into the covenant are saints. In 1 Corinthians 7:14, we read that children born of believing parents, are holy. Thus all covenant children are saints. Paul addresses some of his letters "to the saints in..." (cf. Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians and Philippians.)

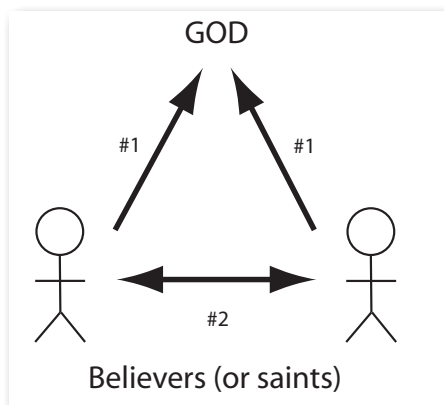
The second word that must be defined is the word '**communion**.' Sometimes this word is used for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The word '**communion**' really means '**fellowship, sharing, a close relationship**.' We will see later that there is communion in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, but this communion is not limited to that celebration.

When we speak about the communion of saints, we speak about that fellowship which the saints have. With whom do the saints have this fellowship? The answer is twofold:

1. **The saints have communion with Christ.** We might refer to this as **vertical communion**. (Vertical means up and down ⬆). Christ is the Head, and we are the body. The Spirit who dwells in Christ is also the Spirit who dwells within you. Through the Spirit, who works faith into your heart, you share in all the benefits of Christ. You have these benefits in common. For example, Christ's righteousness is not only His righteousness. By faith, His

righteousness becomes yours as well. His perfect holiness is your perfect holiness before the Father. You share in the gifts that Christ your Head earned through His obedience and death.

2. **The saints have communion with each other.** We might refer to this as **horizontal communion** (horizontal means side by side ⇔) The Spirit that dwells in Christ is the Spirit which dwells in you. Yet not only does the Holy Spirit dwell in you, it also dwells in me. That means we too, have something in common. Just as you share in Christ's righteousness, I do too. I share in Christ's holiness, even as you do. And that makes us have something in common. And our common heritage leads to the formation of a fellowship between the saints. The saints have communion with one another.



The saints must not remain by themselves, but they are to seek each other's company. We said that the saints have something in common.

They together, through faith, share in Christ's benefits. However, that does not mean that all the saints have the same gifts. While we have many gifts in common, it is also true that we each have some special gifts. One has a greater measure of wisdom, another a greater measure of patience, another a greater measure of knowledge, while another has a greater measure of compassion. We are not exactly the same. Not every one is an eye. Not everyone is an ear. Not everyone is a mouth. Yet we are all given different talents and gifts. We are called to use these to build one another up in the holy faith. We are to assist each other. Together we make up one body. We must not separate ourselves from the body, for what good would an eye be if it were taken out of the body?

We wrote earlier, concerning the church, that because of sin, not all the saints are members of Christ's church. There may be believers who are members of a false church. Now, if that person happens to be our neighbour, there will be a degree of communion between you and him. Yet your communion with him will not be a complete communion. For whatever it is which prevents him from joining the true church, also prevents you from enjoying that complete communion. And since the Lord's Supper is the greatest expression of our communion, both with the Lord and with one another, we will not celebrate this Supper with those with whom we do not enjoy complete communion.



Questions

1. Who are the saints:
 - a. according to the church of Rome?
 - b. according to the Scriptures?
2. What does the word "*communion*" mean? To what does it sometimes refer?
3. With whom do the saints have communion?
4. What does it mean to have communion with Christ?
5. Why should the saints not remain by themselves?
6. Can we have communion with other believers who do not belong to the church of Christ?

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

56. Q. What do you believe
Concerning *the forgiveness of sins*?

A. I believe that God,
because of Christ's satisfaction,
will no more remember
my sins,¹
nor my sinful nature,
against which I have to struggle
all my life,²
but will graciously grant me
the righteousness of Christ,
that I may never come into condemnation.³

1. **Psalm 103:3,4,10,12** ...Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, ...
¹⁰ He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. ¹² As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Micah 7:18,19 Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 2:2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

2. **Romans 7:21-25** I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

3. **John 3:17,18** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. ¹⁸ He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

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.

Romans 8:1,2 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

The second gift which the Holy Spirit gives to the church is the gift of the forgiveness of sins.

How does God forgive our sins? When we forgive, it means that we let it go without asking for payment in return. If someone did something wrong to us, then if we forgive, that usually means that we

do not demand vengeance. We free that person of guilt.

Does God forgive in this way? Does He forgive in the sense of not demanding payment for sin? Earlier in the Catechism (cf. LD 4, Q/A 10) we learned that God cannot allow this sin to go unpunished. If we think that forgiveness means that

God will overlook our sins, then we are wrong. God demands payment.

When we confess that God forgives us our sins, then we mean that God will not demand payment from us. God demands payment, but He satisfies His justice in Jesus Christ, who makes payment for us. Our guilt cannot be erased except through the blood of our Saviour.

God no longer requires our blood, but accepts the payment which Christ made for us. This is what is meant by the phrase, "*He will no more remember our sins.*" He will no more bring them to mind with a view to demanding payment. He puts our sins behind Him. Although every sin which we commit is recorded in God's book, yet under our name there is a clean slate, for the blood of Christ erases sin. God will not bring our sins to remembrance.

In Micah 7:19, we read a most comforting passage. God "*will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*" Today we have the technology to recover some things that have sunk to the bottom of the sea. But that was utterly impossible in the days when Micah wrote these words. If something was cast into the sea, it was gone for ever. So are our sins gone forever, if we confess in faith the grace of God's forgiveness in Christ.

There is more to God's grace than just the forgiveness of sins. There is also the

forgiveness of the weakness that still remains in me during this life. God no longer sees my shortcomings. He looks at me through the perfect obedience of Christ. Under my name is written, "*Perfect obedience to God's law.*" In God's record books, I have completed all of God's commandments perfectly. In God's eyes, I am righteous.

The Lord does not only forgive me my sins and weaknesses; He also forgives my sinful nature. There is a difference. He does not only forgive me *for what I've done*, but he forgives me *for what I am*. A good, kindhearted person can make a mistake, and that can be forgiven. However, our nature is corrupt. We are by nature hard-hearted. Yet God also forgives our sinful nature.

This forgiveness is not given indiscriminately to everyone. It is given only to believers, who through the Spirit are convicted of their sins, who are truly sorry for having offended God by them, and who repent of their sin and fight against it with all their might, and finally, who in faith cling to God's grace in the cross of Christ. This is worthy of note. Only he can find comfort in the forgiveness of sins who has confessed that he has sinned against God. Apart from this confession of guilt, and repentance, and faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice, there is no forgiveness.



Questions:

1. When we forgive sins, should we demand payment for satisfaction?
2. When God forgives sin, does He demand payment for satisfaction? Why (not)?
3. What does Micah 7:19 say? What does this imply?
4. What else does God forgive besides our sins? How does God regard me?
5. What further thing does God forgive besides my weaknesses and shortcomings?
6. Do we receive forgiveness simply by asking for it with our mouth? If not, what other requirements are there?

LORD'S DAY 22

57. Q. What comfort does
the resurrection of the body offer you?

A. Not only shall my soul
After this life
Immediately be taken up
to Christ, my Head,¹
but also this my flesh,
raised by the power of Christ,
shall be reunited with my soul
and made like Christ's glorious body.²

1. **Luke 16:22** So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.

Luke 23:43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

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.

2. **Job 19:25,26** For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; ²⁶ And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God,

1 Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

1 Corinthians 15:42-46 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is

raised in incorruption. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

1 Corinthians 15:54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

Philippians 3:21 ...who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

58. Q. What comfort do you receive
from the article about
the life everlasting?

A. Since I now already
feel in my heart
the beginning of eternal joy,¹
I shall after this life
possess perfect blessedness,
such as no eye has seen,
nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man conceived -
a blessedness in which to praise God forever.²

1. **John 17:3** And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Romans 14:17 ... for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:2,3 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, ³ if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.

2. **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.

1 Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Death is something which frightens us because it is so alien to God's intention for creation. God never created man to die. Death is a result of man's fall into sin and God's just judgment upon sin.

Yet we have seen sometime ago (cf. Lord's Day 16) that our death is no longer a judgment of God against us. Our death is not a payment for sin. Rather, our death puts an end to sin and is an entrance into eternal life. Christ, by taking our judgment upon Himself, has taken the sting out of death. It remains an enemy, but a conquered enemy. We know that death cannot hold onto us. Christ has broken death's grip.

As a result of Christ's work, we are able to profess our faith in the resurrection of the body, and in life everlasting. There are many questions that arise concerning what happens at death, and there are many wrong ideas. The idea that all life ceases at death is wrong. For Christ said, *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."* (John 11:25). That does not deny that believers will die the physical death. That is not what Christ was saying. Christ only said that at death, life continues. For although our bodies perish and return into dust, from which they were made, yet our souls shall live. Immediately at death, our soul ascends to be with Christ. Christ promised this to the thief who was crucified beside Him: *"Today you shall be with me in Paradise."*

The idea that the soul sleeps at death is also wrong. Death is often referred to as sleep, but that is only a manner of speaking about death. Christ said to His disciples, *"Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."* His disciples took Christ literally, but John corrects this when he writes, *However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that he was speaking about taking rest in sleep* (John 11:11f.). Even when Scripture speaks of death as sleep, there is the statement that we live with Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 5:10 we read, *...that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.* If

we are alive, we shall live with Christ. Yet even if we die we shall live with Him.

There are some texts that appear to teach that there is no conscious existence after death. In Ecclesiastes 9:5,10 we read, *"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going."* Yet one does injustice to this text if he does not realise that the preacher views all things from the vantagepoint of this present life. That comes out clearly in vs. 6, *Also their love, their hatred and their envy have now perished. Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun.* The phrase *under the sun* refers to this present life, to life on this side of the grave. The author is not speaking about what happens on the other side of the grave. He only remarks that for those who die, their life on earth comes to an end. That is the meaning also of vs. 10. Christ spoke in a similar way in John 9:4, *I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.* The day refers to life, and the night refers to death. Christ had to do the tasks God assigned for this life prior to His death. Christ would not have the opportunity to do the things after His death that is assigned for this life. Such is the meaning also of the Preacher. In this life we are to do the work and enjoy the blessings that belong to this life.

There are places in Scripture that show that the saints are very much alive and conscious in heaven. In the Revelation to John, we read about the souls of the martyrs, who pray, *"How long, Lord Jesus?"* (Revelation 6:10) It is also said that the saints reign with Christ in heaven. (Revelation 20:4). Moreover, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, both he who is in heaven and he who is in hell are very conscious of their condition.

Perhaps the most convincing of all are those texts wherein Paul says that he would rather be away from the body and

present with Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:21-24 cf. also Ecclesiastes 12:7). From this clear testimony, Paul envisions the possibility and reality of life outside of the body or life in the spirit in the presence of Christ. Paul makes a confession of the communion that he hopes to enjoy with Christ after death and not merely an unconscious sleep in Christ's presence!

Christ also promised the thief on the cross that he would enjoy immediate communion with Christ when He said, "*Today you will be with Me in Paradise*" (Luke 23:43). He also promised His disciples that He was going to prepare a place in His Father's house, so that they might be where He is (cf. John 14:1f.).

Very little is said about the condition of life for the ungodly during this time between death and the resurrection. We have only the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. (Luke 6:19ff.). In this parable we read that the rich man was in torment. We must realise that this is a parable, which means that not all the details are necessarily to be taken literally. Neither is it important for us to know the answer to this. Nevertheless, if one is permitted to make an assumption, then it would be that the ungodly will consciously experience suffering and torment as a foretaste of the judgment that awaits them after the resurrection.

At the resurrection, there is a reunion of body and soul. The body we receive at the resurrection is a glorified body, a body redeemed from the curse of corruption to which all flesh is subjected in this life. In this life the body is beset with illness, disease and deformities. Yet the body which is raised is a glorified body. The seed that is sown is not the same as the plant that grows from it. The body that is laid in the grave is not the body that is raised. It is a glorious body, free from all consequences of sin.

At the resurrection, our soul is joined with our body. In this glorified state, we live eternally with our God. There is often a mistaken notion as to where we will spend

eternity. Often one comes across the idea that we will live in heaven forever and ever. Yet that is not true. Those who die in Christ dwell with Him in heaven until He comes again to judge the living and the dead. Scripture declares that when Christ comes, He will renew the earth. The curse will be lifted from creation, and it will be like Paradise restored (cf. Romans 8:21, Revelation 21:1). On this renewed earth, man will live. The glorified body which we receive at that time is a physical body, one that is suitable for life on earth, just as it was in the first days of creation before the fall into sin.

Scripture teaches that even the unbelievers and ungodly will be raised from the dead. Yet their resurrection will be to judgment (cf. John 5:28,29). They will receive back their bodies, and they will "*be punished with the most severe, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul*" (cf. Q & A 11).

Those, however, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will receive everlasting life. When the Catechism speaks of everlasting life, it shows us that the nature of that life will not be totally different from what we experience now. For we who believe in Christ, and who have been renewed through His Spirit, already experience the beginning of eternal joy.

The Catechism speaks of eternal "*joy*" and not simply of eternal "*life*". By choosing to speak of joy, the Catechism describes the nature of eternal life, namely, that it will be a life of endless joy and bliss. Already we experience the joy of our salvation. For now already we experience life, real life, both spiritual and physical life.

We should look for a moment at what we mean when we speak about life. What is life? Often we relate life to the physical realm. If our heart beats, we say that we are alive. However, life is much more than that. To be truly alive is to have fellowship with God. "*This is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*" (John 17:3).

Life is defined as communion or fellowship with God. Death is defined as just the opposite, as separation from God. Paul describes eternal death as “*everlasting destruction from the **presence** of the Lord and from the glory of His power*” (2 Thessalonians. 1:9).

We begin to experience the joys of eternal life already here and now. We have

communion with the Father through Jesus Christ. It is not yet the perfect communion that it shall be once all sin and evil is removed. We already experience the joy of having fellowship with God. That is life, real life according to the Scriptures.

The following diagram illustrates the history of our salvation in Christ.

Paradise	Man was spiritually alive and physically alive
Fall into sin	Man died spiritually, and was subject to physical death too.
Rebirth or regeneration	Man is made spiritually alive. He is subject to physical death, but promised the resurrection of the body.
Death	Man remains spiritually alive, and his soul goes to be with Christ in heaven. Yet his body dies and goes to the grave.
Resurrection	Man, who is spiritually alive, is reunited with His body that is also made alive.
Eternal life	Man is spiritually alive and physically alive.



Questions:

1. Is death still an enemy for us? Why (not)?
2. Does all life cease for believers at death?
3. Does the soul sleep in the period between death and the resurrection? What does Scripture say on this matter?
4. How must we interpret the words of Ecclesiastes 9:5,10 “*For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.*”
5. Show from Scripture that the souls of those who have died are very much alive and conscious?
6. Which state did the apostle Paul consider better: being at home in the body and away from the Lord, or separated from the body and at home with Christ? What does this tell us about the life between death and the resurrection?
7. What happens to the ungodly in the time between death and the resurrection?
8. What happens to our body and soul at the resurrection? With what kind of body are we raised?
9. After the resurrection, where will believers live? Will it be the same as it is now?
10. What happens to the ungodly at the time of the resurrection?
11. Why does the Catechism speak about everlasting *joy* rather than everlasting *life*?
12. How does Scripture define eternal life? How does it describe eternal death?

Our Justification

LORD'S DAY 23

59. Q. But what does it help you now that you believe all this?
- A. In Christ I am righteous before God and heir to life everlasting.¹

1 **Habakkuk 2:4** Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.

John 3:36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is

revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Romans 5:1,2 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

60. Q. How are you righteous before God?
- A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.¹
Although my conscience accuses me
That I have grievously sinned
Against all God's commandments,
Have never kept any of them,²
And am still inclined to all evil,³
yet God, without any merit of my own,⁴
out of mere grace,⁵
imputes to me
the perfect satisfaction,
righteousness, and holiness of Christ.⁶
He grants these to me
as if I had never had nor committed
any sin,
and as if I myself had accomplished
all the obedience
which Christ has rendered for me,⁷
if only I accept this gift
with a believing heart.⁸

1. **Romans 3:21-28** But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.²⁷ Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Galatians 2:16 ...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by

the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Ephesians 2:8,9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Philippians 3:8-11 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

2. **Romans 3:9,10** What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

- ¹⁰ As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;
3. **Romans 7:23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.
 4. **Deuteronomy 9:6** Therefore understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.
- Ezekiel 36:22** Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went.
- Titus 3:4,5** But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...
5. **Romans 3:24** ...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
- Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...
6. **Romans 4:3-5** For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." ⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness...
 6. **2 Corinthians 5:17-19** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. ¹⁸ Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.
- 1 John 2:1,2** 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 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.
7. **Romans 4:24,25** ...but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.
- 2 Corinthians 5:21** For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
8. **John 3:18** "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
- Acts 16:30,31** And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."
- Romans 3:22** ...even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference...

61. Q.	Why do you say that you are righteous only by faith?
A.	Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, for only the satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God. ¹ I can receive this righteousness and make it my own by faith only. ²

- 1 **1 Corinthians 1:30,31** But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; ³¹ that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."
- 1 **1 Corinthians 2:2** For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
2. **Romans 10:10** For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
- 1 **John 5:10-12** He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. 11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Have you ever studied a subject which seems very impractical, a subject that you think you'll never need in your life? I recall having such thoughts in my physics class where we worked with vectors, and in my mathematics class where we worked with logarithms.

With Lord's Day 23 we have come to the end of the Apostles' Creed. This Creed is a statement of the faith which proceeds out of the mouth of the church, and which echoes the doctrine contained in the Word of God. And this is taught to the covenant youth. Now our beloved Catechism does not want you to ever think that what it teaches is impractical or irrelevant. Thus the Catechism repeatedly asks the questions which you, the student, might be thinking. It asks the question, "*What does it benefit you...*" or as the question is asked in this Lord's Day, "*What does it help you...?*"

Having completed its explanation of the Apostles' Creed, the Catechism now asks that question: "What does it help you that you believe all this?" The answer is short and simple. The knowledge of our God and of His redemptive work in Jesus Christ is essential for our salvation. For by faith we are justified. And those who are justified are made heirs of eternal life. That makes faith very important!

We should define *justification*. To be *just* means to be law-abiding, free from guilt of any crime. We could define justification simply as *the legal declaration of God whereby we are declared free from all guilt and pronounced law-abiding citizens of God's kingdom*. He who is justified is declared "*not guilty, and righteous (perfectly obedient to the law of God)*."

This Lord's Day describes this process of making one righteous before God. Before we speak about this work of Christ in justifying us, we should first consider the three-fold effect of sin that corresponds to Christ's three-fold work of justification.

A. The Three-Fold Effect of Sin

1. **Sins of commission** - We have done what God has forbidden, namely, transgressed His laws. Thus the Catechism reads: "*My conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God's commandments.*"
2. **Sins of omission** - We have not done what God demands, namely, render perfect obedience to His laws. Thus the Catechism reads: "*My conscience accuses me that I have never kept any of God's commandments.*"
3. **An unholy nature** - As a result of our disobedience, we have lost the excellent qualities and virtues with which we were created. We have become darkened in our understanding, corrupt in our desires and rebellious in our will. Thus the Catechism reads: "*My conscience accuses me that I am still inclined to all evil.*"

In order to receive eternal life, we must be justified. Before we can be justified, God demands three things.

B. The Three-Fold Demand of God

1. God is a faithful Judge who demands **satisfaction** for sin committed against His most High majesty. This satisfaction requires extreme punishment of body and soul.
2. God also requires that sins of omission be satisfied by rendering **righteousness** (perfect obedience) to God's law.
3. A worldly judge does not concern himself with what lives in the heart of a man. He is only concerned with outward actions. Yet God judges not only what we have done, but also what we are. He judges not only our deeds, but also our nature. To be received into God's favour, our nature must be **sanctified**, that is, made pure and holy again.

We could never render what is required, for the greatness of our sin deserves the greatest payment: eternal death.

Neither could we render satisfaction for sins of omission, nor the obedience that God demands must be perfect, whereas we of ourselves can do nothing good. Even when the Spirit of God regenerates us, our best works are defiled with sin. Furthermore, we do not have the ability to restore our nature to its former purity and holiness. Our justification lies outside of ourselves.

In His grace, God has given us Christ as our Mediator who justifies us. His work of justification corresponds to the effects of our fall into sin.

C. The Three-Fold Gift of Christ

1. Christ's satisfaction: Christ took upon Himself the guilt we incurred through the sins we committed. He has suffered the punishment of death for us, so that we might not have to die the eternal death. This payment of Christ perfectly satisfies the wrath of God. Thus the Catechism reads: *"Although my conscience accuses me that I have transgressed all God commandments...yet God ... imputes to me the perfect satisfaction of Christ."*

2. Christ's righteousness: Christ also rendered perfect obedience (righteousness) to God's law for us, in our place. Thus the Catechism reads: *"Although my conscience accuses me ... that I have never kept any of God's commandments ... yet God imputes to me ... the righteousness (the perfect obedience) of Christ."*

There is a danger that we only stress the forgiveness of sins through the satisfaction of Christ's death, and forget about the righteousness which we receive from Christ. When a minister asks his catechism students what Christ has done for them, they reply that He forgives their sins. Yet the Catechism correctly teaches that God also demands perfect obedience to His law. These sins of omission must be satisfied as well. There is

no salvation without that perfect obedience (righteousness).

3. Christ's holiness: We learned in Lord's Day 14 that Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit. By way of this miraculous birth, He escaped the inheritance of a corrupt nature. Christ was born pure and innocent, perfectly holy, and He remained that way throughout His life. This holiness of Christ is now imputed to us. Just as snow can cover much dirt and filth, so Christ's holiness covers our inward uncleanness. Thus the Catechism reads: *"Although my conscience accuses me... that I am still inclined to all sin ... yet God imputes to me the holiness of Christ."*

This work of Christ has a most marvellous effect upon our legal standing before the Lord. It changes the way that God looks at us.

D. The Three-Fold Way God Regards Us

God looks at us through Jesus Christ. We stand behind Christ, as it were. By faith, He becomes our Representative before God. By looking at us through Christ, God sees in us righteousness and holiness.

Because of Christ's work:

1. God sees no sins of commission in me. *God grants me the perfect satisfaction of Christ... as if I had never committed any sin.*
2. God sees no sins of omission in me. *God grants me the righteousness of Christ ... as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me.*
3. God sees no unholiness in me. *Christ is our Mediator, and with His innocence and perfect holiness covers, in the sight of God my sin in which I was conceived and born (Q & A 36).*

These three gifts: Christ's satisfaction, righteousness and holiness are the three gifts by which we are justified.

A. What God required of us	B. The Three-fold effect of sin	C. The Three-fold gift of Christ	D. The three-fold way God regards us
A1. Not to transgress any of God's commandments.	B1. We incurred guilt through sins of commission by transgressing all of God's commandments.	C1. He paid for all my transgressions. (Christ's satisfaction)	D1. As if I had never sinned against God.
A2. To fulfil all God's commandments.	B2. We incurred guilt through sins of omission by failing to keep God's commandments.	C2. He fulfilled all the obedience which God required of me. (Christ's righteousness)	D2. As if I had fulfilled all the requirements of God's law.
A3. To remain pure and holy.	B3. We became totally depraved, and possess an unholy, impure nature.	C3. He covers my corrupt nature with His holiness. (Christ's holiness)	D3. As if I possess a pure and holy nature.

Study the table right above and commit it to memory. If it is still unclear, refer again to the section below where it is explained more fully.

Not all men are justified by Christ, but only those who believe. Therefore it is important that we believe what we have confessed in the Apostles' Creed. Faith is the hand of the soul that embraces Christ as Saviour, and takes from Him the gifts of grace that He offers us. Only those are justified who stretch out the hand of faith.

There is a need to stress the role of faith in our justification. For there is in Christianity a system of doctrine (called Arminianism) which views faith as a work of man which has taken the place of obedience to God's commandments as the way to salvation. The Arminians claim that righteousness is no longer necessary for salvation. They believe that the Father has lowered the demand. Instead of perfect obedience (righteousness) to His commandments, God only requires faith. Compare the two systems of doctrine in the table shown right.

The Arminian doctrine is contrary to the Scriptures. God has not reduced the demand. To enter into the kingdom of God, one must be righteous. One must possess perfect obedience to God's law. We confess that we cannot render that perfect obedience. But we also confess

that Christ has rendered that perfect obedience for us who believe in Him. To all those who go to Christ in faith, He offers the one hundred dollars which we need — the one hundred dollars which He as true man earned through His obedience to God's law while He walked on earth.

Faith does not replace the demand of perfect obedience to God's law. Faith is the hand of the soul that reaches out and accepts the perfect obedience of Christ. Faith itself does not make us righteous. Christ's satisfaction, righteousness and

ARMINIAN	REFORMED
In Paradise God demanded perfect obedience	In Paradise God demanded perfect obedience
After the fall man could no longer render the perfect obedience that God requires. But man can still do a little good , such as believe in God.	After the fall man could no longer render the perfect obedience that God requires. Man can do no good , not even believe in God.
Christ came to reduce God's demand and make the payment for salvation within our reach. This reduced payment for salvation is faith .	Christ came to fulfil God's demands for us and make the payment for salvation that we could not pay. The full payment for salvation is righteousness .

holiness makes us righteous. Faith is not a substitute payment. Faith is an instrument with which we accept from Christ the perfect obedience that He rendered for us.

As far as this faith is concerned, Scripture teaches us that it is a gift that God gives to those whom He has chosen. It is not the product of man's own ability (cf. Eph 2:8).



Questions:

1. Why is it important that we accept in faith all that we have learned from the explanation of the Apostles' Creed?
2. What is justification? Of how many parts does justification consist? To what do these parts correspond?
3. Describe the three-fold demand of God.
4. Describe the three-fold effect of our fall into sin,
5. Describe the three-fold gift of Christ by which we are justified.
6. Describe the three-fold way in which God now regards us.
7. How does one come to share in the gifts of Christ?
8. The Arminians say that God has reduced the demand for eternal life. From what to what? How do the Arminians regard faith?
9. According to Scripture, does God still require perfect obedience (righteousness) from us in order to enter His eternal kingdom? From whom and how can we receive this righteousness? From where does faith come?

LORD'S DAY 24

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|--------|--|
| 62. Q. | But why can our good works not be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of it? |
| A. | Because the righteousness
Which can stand before God's judgment
Must be absolutely perfect
and in complete agreement
with the law of God, ¹
whereas even our best works in this life
are all imperfect and defiled with sin. ² |

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| 1. Deuteronomy 27:26 'Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

Galatians 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." | 2. Isaiah 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. |
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| 63. Q. | But do our good works earn nothing, even though God promises to reward them in this life and the next? ¹ |
| A. | This reward is not earned; it is a gift of grace. ² |

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| 1. Matthew 5:12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you..."

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. | all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

2 Timothy 4:7,8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. |
|--|---|
2. **Luke 17:10** "So likewise you, when you have done

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 64. Q. | Does this teaching not make people careless and wicked? |
| A. | No.
It is impossible
that those grafted into Christ
by true faith should not bring forth
fruits of thankfulness. ¹ |

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Matthew 7:18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

Luke 6:43-45 For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴ For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ A good man out of the good | treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. |
|--|--|

In the previous Lord's Day we learned that we are saved by the work of Christ. He not only forgives us all our sins, but He has also rendered perfect obedience as our Representative. The result is that God looks at us as though we have never sinned, and as if we had obeyed God's law perfectly, without ever having transgressed even one of God's commandments. We also learned that the only way that we can partake in Christ's redeeming work is by faith. Not that faith itself makes us righteous, as though faith was some sort of good work which replaces obedience to the law. No, faith is as much a gift as is the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ.

Now the Catechism wants to ward off another thought, namely, that we are saved because of our good works.

The church of Rome taught that man was not totally depraved. They taught that man still had some good left in him, and by that good he was still capable of performing good works. Rome also taught that these good works were a necessary contribution towards salvation. To be sure, they acknowledged man's weakness and sin. They also acknowledged the need for the grace of the forgiveness of sins which comes through faith. Yet at the same time they taught that salvation depended upon the good works of men. It is this error which the Catechism wishes to refute in the first place.

Rome: Faith + Good Works = Salvation.

The first thing that we should notice in this Lord's Day is that the Catechism accepts the idea that we can do good works. That is quite amazing, considering that the Catechism said earlier that we *are inclined to all evil and incapable of doing any good* (cf. Lord's Day 2). Is there a contradiction in our confession? Do we actually agree with the church of Rome? Is man only partially depraved? How can we explain this?

The answer is that God makes us able to do good works again. By nature we can

do nothing good. However, through the Holy Spirit working in us, we are able to do good works. We have already seen that the Holy Spirit works faith into our hearts. That is the first gift that we receive from God. Through faith, we also receive other gifts, such as the forgiveness of sins and righteousness (Lord's Day 23). In addition to these gifts, we also receive the gift of renewal - the renewal of our hearts. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, our old, hard and corrupt heart is replaced by a new, pliable and pure heart, a heart that is filled with a love for God and His commandments, a heart that wants to please God by walking according to His laws. We receive a heart transplant, so that once again we are made willing and able to do good works.

The amazing thing about good works is that they too are a gift from God. When we do something good, we might be inclined to pat ourselves on the back and give ourselves credit for this. Yet we deserve no credit. The good works that we perform are actually the work of God the Holy Spirit within us. In Ephesians 2:10, we read that God prepared beforehand the good works which we do. That means that from eternity God planned that we should do the good that we do. Even before we do something good, God had it written in His book. He planned it. He sent His Holy Spirit to make us willing and able to the good that we do. Paul writes in Philippians 2:13 "*for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*" You understand, therefore, that the good works that we do are not really our own works. They are the works that the Holy Spirit works in us. Good works are the fruit of the indwelling Spirit of God.

This work of the Spirit is the result of the saving work of Christ. Christ earned salvation for us, and in doing so, He earned the right to renew us and enable us to do good works again. Since we are saved by Christ, we are once again able to do good works.

Having said this, you will understand that Rome had turned things around. Rome

says that good works lead to salvation. Yet it is just the opposite: salvation leads to good works. Salvation is not the result of good works, but good works are the result of salvation.

Rome:

good works lead to salvation

Reformed:

salvation leads to good works

For this reason, our good works cannot merit us anything. We cannot claim a reward from God because of the good works we do. If we tried, God would turn around and say, *You have that all wrong. I do not have to thank and reward you for your good works. You have to thank Me for them. For it is I who have made you willing and able to do them.*

Another reason why our good works cannot merit us any reward is because the good works we do are imperfect. Even though the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, there is another power at work in us as well, the power of sin. Although we have been given a new nature, remnants of the old nature cling to us as well. And because of these remnants of the old nature, everything we do is imperfect. Isaiah wrote, *"But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away"* (Isaiah 64:6). God still regards our works as good, but they are not perfect. And only those works that are perfect receive a reward from God. God demands **one hundred percent** before any one can merit anything.

However, does not Scripture say that those who do good works will receive a reward? Yes. In Psalm 19:11 we read, *In keeping God's law, there is great reward.* In Revelation 22:12 we read, *"I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."* Scripture indeed says that God will reward the good works that we do. Yet as the Catechism rightly explains, *this reward is of grace.* That is, we do

not deserve the reward. For grace is "undeserved favour." We do not earn God's favour by the works that we do. God is pleased to crown His own works in us with a reward. That is the way that Art 24 of our Belgic Confession speaks.

Perhaps an example will illustrate this. A father would like his car washed. He asks his son to do it and promises to pay him five dollars. The son agrees. There is only one problem. The son's arms are both completely paralysed. He cannot lift them or move them. He could never earn those five dollars. Yet it is his father's desire that he does earn that reward. Therefore the father takes hold of his son's arms, and places a washing glove on his hand. He dips his son's hand into the pail of water and then rubs the side of the car. He does this again and again until the whole car is washed. The job is not done as well as it could have been, and there are a few streaks here and there. Yet the father rewards his son by giving him the five dollars promised. The son has not earned it. Yet it was the father's will to give it though it was really undeserved. So it is with God and us. He enables us to do good works. They are not our works, nor are they perfect. Thus they do not deserve a reward. Yet it pleases God to reward them nonetheless.

Yet if we are saved by grace alone, and if our good works do not contribute to our salvation, why should anyone bother to do good works? If we are saved in virtue of Christ's obedience to God's law, why should we still keep God's commandments? This is the question which the church of Rome asked. They felt that if salvation was given freely, apart from good works, then people would become careless and worldly (profane). For them, the only incentive to do good works was the goal of salvation. They taught that men could only earn salvation by works. They tried to frighten people into obeying God.

Yet the Reformers spoke from Scripture and said that it would be impossible for those who are saved by grace not to bear fruits of thankfulness. Why? Because salvation does not only consist

of the forgiveness of sins, or justification. Salvation also consists of sanctification. We are freed from the guilt of sin as well as from the power and tyranny of sin. Those who are washed by the blood of Christ are also washed with the Spirit of Christ. By this Holy Spirit, those who are saved also receive a new heart that seeks to show thankfulness to God by way of obedience. Those who are justified (declared 'Not Guilty') are also sanctified (given a new heart which desires to please God. (cf. James 2:14-16, Titus 2:14, John 15:5). Therefore Christ said, *"Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit."* (Matthew 7:17,18).

Think also of the text we quoted from Philippians 2:13 *"for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."* God works a desire in the redeemed to do what pleases Him. He makes them willing. Consider also Romans 8:14, *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.* God leads His sons in obedience and faithfulness. The words of John say the same: No one who lives in him keeps on

sinning (cf.1 John 3:6 NIV). Again we say it is impossible for the redeemed not to do good works.

What incentive do we have, then, to do good works? We have at least four good reasons. In the first place, we glorify God when we do good works, for then we reflect His goodness and that is something that we want to do. Since God has been so good to us, we love Him and we want to show our thankfulness to Him and to give Him honour and praise. We can do that by doing good works. In the second place, the good we do attracts others, and by our good works we can win our neighbour for Christ. In the third place, we obtain for ourselves a good reward, for God is pleased to crown our good works with rewards in this life and in the life to come. In the fourth place, we receive assurance of God's grace of salvation when we see ourselves bearing the fruits of salvation. (We will discuss this more fully in Lord's Day 32).

Look at the diagram below, which shows us from Lord's Day 23 and 24, the gifts that we receive from Christ.

<p>1. For by grace you have been saved through FAITH; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).</p> <p>FAITH, a gift of God</p>	<p>2. God is the source of your life in Christ, who God made our ... RIGHTEOUSNESS (1 Corinthians 1:30).</p> <p>RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ</p> <p>FAITH, a gift of God</p>
<p>3. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for GOOD WORKS, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).</p> <p>GOOD WORKS prepared by God</p> <p>RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ</p> <p>FAITH, a gift of God</p>	<p>4. By keeping the ordinances of God there is great reward (Psalm 19:11).</p> <p>REWARD through grace</p> <p>GOOD WORKS prepared by God</p> <p>RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ</p> <p>FAITH, a gift of God</p>



Questions:

1. What does the church of Rome teach about the ability of man to do good works?
2. According to the church of Rome, what role do good works play in the salvation of man?
3. Since we by nature are inclined to all evil and incapable of doing any good works, why does the Catechism speak about us doing good works?
4. What do texts such as Ephesians 2:10 and Philippians 2:13 teach us about good works?
5. Before any work can merit (be worthy of) a reward, what is required of that work?
6. Can our good works merit (earn, be worthy of) a reward? Why (not)? Give two reasons.
7. If our good works do not merit anything, will they be rewarded? If so, on what basis?
8. If good works do not contribute anything to our salvation, will we still do good works? Why (not)?
9. What incentives are there for doing good works?

LORD'S DAY 25

65. Q. Since then faith alone makes us share in Christ and all His benefits, where does this faith come from?

A. From the Holy Spirit,¹ who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel^{1,2} and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments.³

1. **John 3:5** Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

1 Corinthians 2:10-14 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. ¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

2. **Romans 10:17** So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1 Peter 1:23-25 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, ²⁴ because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, ²⁵ But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

3. **Matthew 28:19-20** 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.

1 Corinthians 10:16 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?

66. Q. What are the sacraments?

A. The sacraments are holy, visible signs and seals. They were instituted by God so that by their use He might the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel.¹ And this is the promise: that God graciously grants us forgiveness of sins and everlasting life because of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.²

1. **Genesis 17:11** and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Romans 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,

2. **Matthew 26:27-28** Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you." ²⁸ "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of

Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Hebrews 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

67. Q. Are both the Word and the sacraments then intended to focus our faith on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?

A. Yes, indeed. The Holy Spirit teaches us in the gospel and assures us by the sacraments that our entire salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.¹

1. **Romans 6:3** Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

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

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

1. **Matthew 28:19-20** 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.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was

betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.



Earlier, in Lord's Day 7, the question was asked, "*Are all men saved in Christ as they perished in Adam?*" The Catechism answered, "*No, only those are saved who by a true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all His benefits.*" Thus not all men are saved. Only those who believe are saved. Only believers receive these gifts or benefits which Christ has earned through His suffering and death.

Lord's Day 25 picks up again this theme of faith. In light of the fact that faith is so very important, we want to know the source thereof. "*Where does this faith come from?*" If we can only receive the benefits of Christ through faith, where do we get this faith?

Man would like to think that faith comes from his own heart. Scripture teaches us, however, that it does not. In the previous

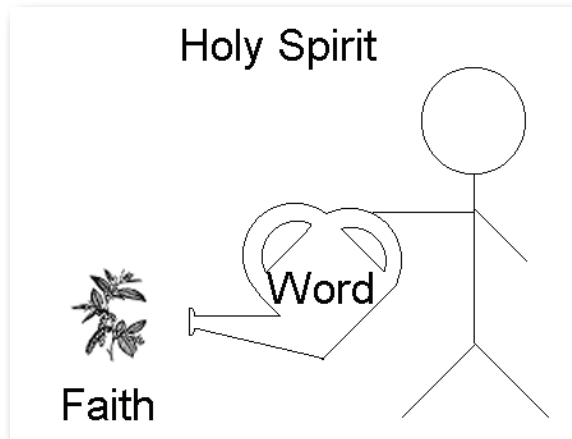
Lord's Day we read the words of Paul: "For by grace you have been saved through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is **the gift of God**" (Ephesians 2:8f). He wrote something similar in Philippians 1:29, "For to you **it has been granted ... to believe in Him...**" In 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul wrote "I planted (the seed of the gospel), Apollos watered, **but God gave the increase.** God alone causes the seed of the gospel

instrument or means is the preaching of the gospel. The words of Paul are unmistakable: "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? ... So then **faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**" (Romans 10:14-17).

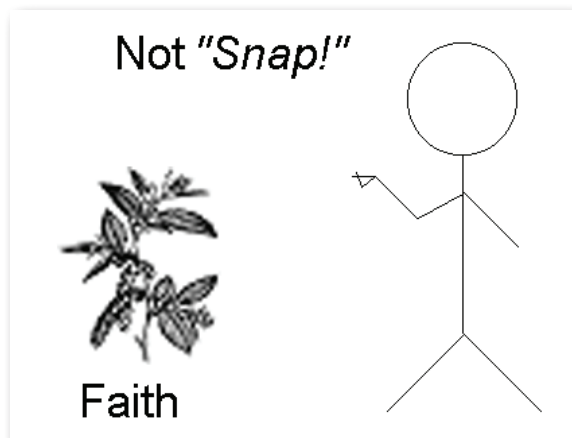
We could use as example the way that God makes plants grow. God is all-powerful. He could cause mature plants to instantly "pop" out of the ground. But He chooses to have plants grow from seeds, which require water to germinate and to grow. In the same way, the Holy Spirit could simply "snap" His finger, so to speak, and mature faith could be worked in man immediately. The Holy Spirit is powerful enough to do so, but He chooses to use an instrument in working faith. He uses the instrument of the gospel. The Holy Spirit works faith through the preaching of God's Word.

The Bible is sometimes called the "tool" of the Holy Spirit. The church is sometimes called the "workshop" of the Holy Spirit, for we hear the proclamation of God's Word in church. As we sit in the pew listening attentively to the sermon preached by one of God's servants, the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts.

We must never despise the preaching because of the weakness of men who preach God's Word. Neither should we esteem any preacher, as though it is his wisdom and eloquence that makes the preaching effective. The preaching is effective because of the Holy Spirit who accompanies the preaching and is pleased to use this means to work faith. Paul said to the Corinthians, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. ...I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).



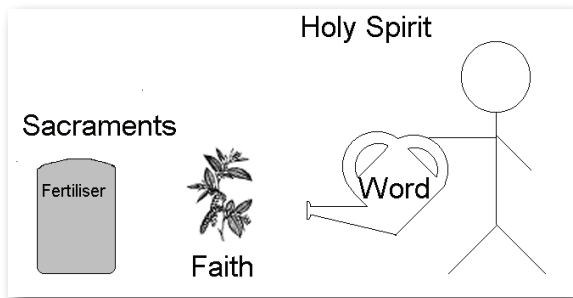
The Holy Spirit uses the instrument of the gospel to work faith.



to germinate and grow. Elsewhere in the same letter Paul wrote, "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Thus the Scriptures are clear: faith comes from God. To be more specific, faith comes from God the Holy Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit work faith in our hearts? This is a great mystery which no man can explain. But one thing is clear: the Holy Spirit uses a certain *instrument or means* to work this faith in man. This

Now faith is living. Just as a seed after it germinates needs water in order to live, so also faith needs the ongoing preaching of the gospel. We need to listen to the gospel, not just *until* we come to faith, but also *after* we come to faith. We need to nourish our faith by feeding with the preaching of God's Word.



The sacraments must be used together with the preaching of the gospel, just as fertiliser must be used together with water.

Because of the weakness of our faith and our slowness to believe what we hear with our ears, God has given us something to strengthen our faith. He has given us the sacraments in addition to the Word. The sacraments do not do exactly the same as the preaching of the Word does. Perhaps an example would describe the relationship of the Word and the sacraments.

The sacraments could be compared to fertiliser. Fertiliser, we know, gives extra nutrition to help a plant grow stronger. But fertiliser does not work all by itself. If you put fertiliser on a dry seed, the seed will not germinate. A seed will only germinate when it is given water.

In like manner, faith will not germinate through the sacraments by themselves. If someone only saw the Lord's Supper being celebrated, but never heard from the Bible what the symbols in the Lord's Supper mean, he would not know what was happening at the table. He would think that people were eating a meal. He would not know what the bread or the wine symbolised. He must learn from the Bible what they mean. He must learn all about the work of Christ from the Scriptures. The sacraments must be used with the

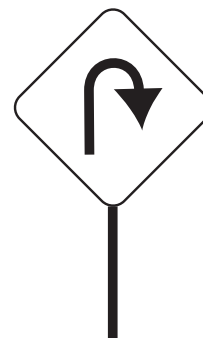
preaching of the gospel, just like fertiliser must be used with water.

Thus we say that faith is **worked** by the preaching of God's Word. And faith is **strengthened** by the use of the sacraments (and by the continued preaching of God's Word).

Because of this difference between the Word and the sacraments, the preaching is absolutely necessary for salvation. The sacraments, however, are not absolutely necessary. A plant can live without fertiliser, but it could never live without water. In like manner, faith can live without the sacraments, but not without the Word. But even though the sacraments are not absolutely necessary, we should not minimise their importance. God has given them for the strengthening of our faith, and they are effective. In obedience to God we must use them for that purpose, with the intent of strengthening our faith.

What are the sacraments? Let us look more closely at the words with which the Catechism defines the sacraments. The sacraments are:

- **HOLY** - The sacraments are set apart by God for a special purpose.
- **VISIBLE** - The sacraments are to be seen. They are directed to our eyes. Sometimes we say that the sermon is the *invisible* preaching, while the sacraments are the *visible* preaching of God's Word.
- **SIGNS** - There is a saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. As we drive down the road, we often see many signs which the Main Roads Department puts up. What are they there for? They



are there to **teach** us something. A sign like the one you see here teaches the driver, "*Caution! The road ahead makes a sharp hairpin curve to the right.*" In this case, one little picture takes the place of at least ten words. So also in the sacraments there is a great message contained in the simple ceremony of the sacraments.

- **SEALS** - A seal is used to prove that something is real. It **assures** us of something. In the olden days, the edicts or proclamations of a king were *sealed*. The king would write down his declaration, close it and then drip hot wax on it. While the wax was still soft, he would press his unique signet ring into the wax. That would leave a unique impression which proved that this edict was really the king's.

Today seals are still used. On my wall are the degrees which I received from the university and college where I studied. On each of them, there is a seal. No one else is allowed to use the symbol on that seal. It is registered with the government. The seal on these papers assures whoever reads them that they are real.

The sacraments are seals. They assure us that the promises which God makes

in the Bible concerning our salvation in Christ, are true. The promises of God are real. We can depend on them. We can and must believe them.

How many sacraments are there? Rome teaches that there are seven: baptism, confirmation (comparable to profession of faith, except that children are confirmed at a much younger age), penance (confessing one's sins to the priest), mass (or Lord's Supper), holy orders (priesthood), marriage, and the last rites (administered to those who are dying). Scripture teaches, however, that God has only instituted two sacraments, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism and Lord's Supper correspond to circumcision and the Passover of the old covenant. Because Christ shed His blood once for all, making complete atonement for sin, there was to be no more shedding of blood. Thus the Lord instituted new signs which required no shedding of blood. Now we only have symbols which point to Christ's blood.



Questions:

1. Why are we so concerned about the source of faith (where faith comes from)?
2. Where does faith come from? How is faith worked in our hearts? What does Romans 10:17 say? Couldn't the Holy Spirit cause faith to immediately live in our hearts without the use of instruments?
3. What may we call the church with respect to the working of faith? Why?
4. Does the coming to faith or the strengthening of faith depend upon very eloquent or gifted speakers? What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5?
5. Why do we need to hear the gospel even after we come to faith?
6. Why did God give us the sacraments in addition to the preaching of the Word?
7. What do the sacraments do with respect to faith? What will the sacraments *not* do with respect to faith? Why not?
8. Which is more necessary, the preaching of the gospel or the administration of the sacraments? Does this mean that we can neglect the one that is less necessary? Why (not)?
9. Why are the sacraments called "*holy*"? Why are they called "*visible*" signs? What do the sacraments do as *signs*? What do the sacraments do as *seals*? What do they seal?
10. How many sacraments are there according to the church of Rome? How many are there according to Scripture?
11. To what do the two sacraments correspond in the old dispensation? Why were they changed in the new?

Holy Baptism

LORD'S DAY 26

69. Q. How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?

A. In this way:
Christ instituted this outward washing ¹
and with it gave the promise that,
as surely as water washes away
the dirt from the body,
so certainly His blood and Spirit
wash away the impurity of my soul,
that is, all my sins. ²

1. **Matthew 28:19** 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,

2. **Matthew 3:11** I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Mark 16:16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

John 1:33 I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Romans 6:3-4 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

1 Peter 3:21 There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

70. Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?

A. To be washed with Christ's blood means to receive forgiveness of sins from God, through grace, because of Christ's blood, poured out for us in His sacrifice on the cross. ¹
To be washed with His Spirit means to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and lead a holy and blameless life. ²

1. **1 Peter 1:2** elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

Revelation 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

Revelation 7:14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Ezekiel 36:25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

Zechariah 13:1 In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.

Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

Hebrews 12:24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

2. **John 3:5-8** Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Romans 6:4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

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.

71. Q. Where has Christ promised that He will wash us with His blood and Spirit as surely as we are washed with the water of baptism?
- A. In the institution of baptism, where He says: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19). *He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned* (Mark 16:16).
- This promise is repeated where Scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins (Titus 3:5; Acts 22:16).



Before we proceed with the matter of baptism, let us first turn to the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision, to learn what God symbolised to His people in the old covenant.

When man fell into sin, the fountain of life was closed. Sin acted like a lid which stopped the fountain from flowing. As a result of sin, man no longer deserved the blessings of life, but only the curse of death. Christ came to take away our sin, so that the fountain of life might flow for us once again. Through the shedding of His blood, we are blessed with new life—eternal life.

Circumcision portrayed this gospel message. Circumcision was a minor operation whereby the foreskin which covered the penis was cut off. The penis is the fountain from which new life flows. The foreskin symbolised sin which blocked the fountain of life. By the removal of the foreskin, which required the shedding of blood, God symbolically declared that sin was removed, and the fountain of life was opened for man again.

After Christ offered the perfect sacrifice for sin, God put an end to the sacrifices and symbols that required the shedding of blood. Therefore circumcision was replaced with baptism.

The Jews of Christ's day were familiar with the ritual of baptism. They baptised Gentiles who embraced the faith of Judaism. This baptism was likely based upon the Old Testament Levitical laws which demanded washing for the removal of impurity. The proselytes, as the converts to Judaism were called, received baptism as a symbol that they were washed of their uncleanness and made holy to God.

John the Baptist also baptised many in the waters of the Jordan River. His baptism is called the baptism of repentance, for he called the people to turn from their sins. As a sign that they would begin a new and holy life, they were baptised, signifying the cleansing from their old sinful way of life.

Christ took this rite of baptism which was very familiar to the people, and made it into a sacrament.

The word “*baptism*” is taken directly from the Greek language. The word in Greek means “*to dip*”. The baptism of John was a baptism of immersion, whether completely or in part. This also appears to be the manner in which the apostles baptised, for Paul refers to baptism as the burial with Christ into death (symbolised by immersion into the water) and the rising with Christ to a new life (symbolised by rising out of the water - cf. Romans 6:1ff.). Often water is a symbol of death in the Old Testament.

Although the New Testament only records instances of baptism by immersion, the early Christian church began to baptise by sprinkling as well. Perhaps this was done for the sake of little children, or for the sake of convenience when sufficient water for immersion baptism was not available. Was any truth really lost in sprinkling rather than with immersion? We do not think so. Ezekiel already prophesied that in the new covenant the Lord would *sprinkle* the hearts of His people and make them clean (cf. Ezek 36:25f.).

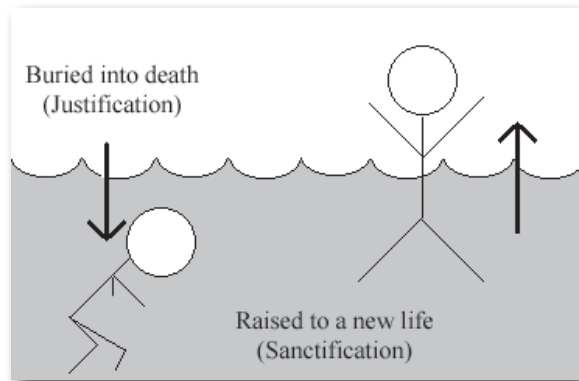
Although both modes of baptism are acceptable, baptism by immersion portrays more graphically the two-fold promise of baptism. This two-fold promise corresponds to the two-fold effect which sin had upon man:

1. Through sin, man became **guilty** of disobedience. He became worthy of eternal condemnation.
2. Through sin, man also became **corrupt**, depraved. His good nature was lost, and he became inclined to all evil. This corruption is not external but internal, a corruption of the heart, mind and will.

This corresponds to the two-fold promise of baptism:

1. We are **washed with Christ's blood** from the **guilt** of our sin. (which process we call **justification**). The Scripture teaches us that we are justified when we believe in Christ and seek the forgiveness of sins in Him.

2. We are **washed with Christ's Spirit**, and cleansed of our **corruption** (which process we call **sanctification**). The Catechism also calls this process the repentance or conversion of man (cf. LD 33). Other Scriptural names given to this process are regeneration, rebirth and renewal. This washing with the Holy Spirit was already prophesied by Ezekiel (cf. 36:25,27). Through the Spirit, Christ cleanses our hearts from the corruption that permeates it, so that once again we take delight in God's commandments. He pours His Spirit into our hearts so that once again we come to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and with all our strength (cf. Romans 5:5).



The two-fold promise of baptism.

It is important to realise that baptism is only a symbol. The Catechism mentions this clearly in Q 69 (which shows us that we should memorise the questions of the Catechism just as much as the answers!) The catechism does **not** ask, “*How does baptism benefit you?*” **Baptism in itself does not benefit us anything.** If we are to receive any benefit from this sacrament, it must be from Christ, whose work is portrayed in this sacrament. Thus the question which is asked is, “*How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?*” Any real benefit comes not from baptism itself, but from that to which baptism points. Baptism benefits us only inasmuch as it underlines what Scripture says concerning the work of our Lord.

Having said this, we have explained why we are baptised into the name of the Son and the Spirit. The Son promises to redeem us from the guilt of our sin. The Spirit promises to redeem us from the pollution of our sin. But why are we baptised into the name of the Father? What does the Father promise us? As a result of the work of the Son and Spirit, God the Father promises to adopt us as His children. He promises to care for us as a father, and make all things work for our salvation. He also makes us His heirs, so that we inherit the glory of His eternal kingdom.

From what has been said above, it should be clear that in baptism, it is God who is speaking. God reminds us and assures us in baptism of the promises that He has made with us in the covenant of grace. The Catechism teaches us this when it says "*Christ instituted baptism, and with it gave the promise...*" In baptism, God is speaking to man. We stress this, because there are those who would turn this the other way around, and make man speak in baptism. According to some, baptism is a declaration of man's faith rather than a declaration of God's promise.

TRUE	FALSE
<p>In baptism, God signifies and seals His promise...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇩</p> <p style="text-align: right;">...to man</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">...to God</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇧</p> <p>In baptism, man professes His faith...</p>

Furthermore, it must be clear to us that in baptism God does not seal what is in a child. God does not say in baptism that there is a seed of faith in the child or the seed of regeneration. **Baptism seals to us the promises** which God has made with us - promises which must be accepted with faith.

At the turn of the twentieth century, there were some in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands who taught that baptism sealed the faith or regeneration of the child.

TRUE	FALSE
<p>God seals the PROMISE OF REGENERATION to the child.</p>	<p>God seals the REGENERATION of the child.</p>

Since not all covenant children come to faith or are regenerated, how could children receive this seal of their regeneration? The answer was given that we should presume that the child is regenerated. If later in life it becomes evident that the child was not regenerated, then his baptism was not a true baptism. The baptised child who was never converted, never received the promises of God. His baptism was empty. God never spoke in it. This doctrine received the name of *Presumptive Regeneration*. The church was freed from this error in the Liberation of 1944.

The promises of baptism are real to every child of believing parents that receives the sign and seal. The promise is real, but it must be accepted in faith. Therefore a child of believing parents who does not come to faith has received the promise of God, but does not receive **what** God promises.

We come here to the limits of our understanding. We cannot fathom the relationship between the need for God to give faith and the need for man to believe.

<p>God must fulfil His promise before we can come to faith</p>
<p>We must come to faith before God will fulfil His promise.</p>

Every attempt to rationalise this in our mind leads to doctrinal error. We must simply concede our inability to fathom the mystery, and accept it in child-like faith.

Questions:

1. What was the Old Testament sacrament that corresponded to baptism? What message did it portray?
2. Why was the old sign replaced with baptism?
3. Before baptism became a sacrament, the Jews administered it. To whom, and why?
4. John the Baptist also baptised. Whom and why?
5. What does the 'word' baptism mean in the Greek language? Did John the Baptist baptise by sprinkling or by immersion? What about the apostles?
6. What does water often symbolise in the Old Testament? To what does Paul (in Romans 6) relate the immersion by baptism into water? To what does Paul relate the rising out of the water?
7. In the Bible, do we read of baptism by sprinkling? Who began this practice and why? Is any truth lost in sprinkling rather than with immersion?
8. Which method of baptism displays more graphically the two-fold promise of baptism—sprinkling or immersion? Why?
9. What is the two-fold effect which sin had upon man? What is the two-fold promise of baptism?
10. Define justification.
11. Define sanctification. Give some other names for sanctification.
12. Do we receive any benefit from baptism itself? What does benefit us?
13. What does the Father promise us in baptism? What does the Son promise us? What does the Holy Spirit promise us?
14. Who is speaking in baptism—God or man? Do all people agree with this? What do others say?
15. Does baptism seal what is in the child (such as the seed of regeneration)? What does baptism seal?
16. Are the promises of God real to every child of believing parents, or only to those children who come to faith? What must we possess before we receive what God promises in baptism?

LORD'S DAY 27

72. Q. Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins?

A. No, only the blood of Jesus Christ
and the Holy Spirit
cleans us from all sins.¹

1. **Matthew 3:11** I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

1 Peter 3:21 There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal

of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

73. Q. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins?

A. God speaks in this way for a good reason.
He wants to teach us
that the blood and Spirit of Christ
remove our sins
just as water takes away
dirt from the body.¹
But, even more important,
He wants to assure us
by this divine pledge and sign
that we are
as truly cleansed from our sins spiritually
as we are bodily washed with water.²

1. **1 Corinthians 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Revelation 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

Revelation 7:14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

2. **Mark 16:16** He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Romans 6:3-4 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

74. Q. Should infants, too, be baptized?

A. Yes.

Infants as well as adults

belong to God's covenant and congregation.¹

Through Christ's blood

the redemption from sin

and the Holy Spirit, who works faith,

are promised to them

no less than to adults.²

Therefore, by baptism, as sign of the covenant,

they must be grafted into the Christian church

and distinguished from the children of unbelievers.³

This was done in the old covenant by circumcision,⁴

in place of which baptism was instituted

in the new covenant.⁵

1. **Genesis 17:7** And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

Matthew 19:14 But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

2. **Psalms 22:10** I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God.

Isaiah 44:1-3 Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen. ² Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you: "Fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. ³ For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring;"

Acts 2:38-39 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Acts 16:31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

3. **Acts 10:47** Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?

1 Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

4. **Genesis 17:9-14** And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰ "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; ¹¹ "and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. ¹² "He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. ¹³ "He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ "And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

5. **Colossians 2:11-13** 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. ¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,

In the previous Lord's Day, we paid particular attention to the wording of Q. 69. We stressed the fact that the Catechism does not ask, "*How does your baptism benefit you?*" but it asks, "*How does baptism signify and seal to you that Christ's sacrifice benefits you?*" Baptism

itself cannot save us. Baptism can only point us to Christ, who can save us by virtue of His obedience unto death on the cross. This matter is taken up in this Lord's Day, wherein we learn what baptism does and what baptism does not do.

The Catechism first tells us what baptism does **not** do. The church of Rome teaches that when baptism is administered, sins are actually and immediately forgiven. The moment that the water touches a person's forehead, his sin is removed. Rome teaches that without baptism there is no forgiveness of sins.

The Catechism denies the teaching of Rome. Baptism does not wash away sin. Only Christ's blood can wash away sin. What does baptism do then? Baptism strengthens our faith by teaching us about, and assuring us of, the promise that God will forgive us our sins if we ask this of Him in faith. By faith we are grafted into Christ and share in the forgiveness of sins which He obtained with His blood.

Rome teaches that baptism leads **directly** to the forgiveness of sins (Baptism ⇒ forgiveness of sins).

The Reformed teach that baptism leads **indirectly** to the same (Baptism ⇒ strengthening of faith ⇒ forgiveness of sins).

In baptism we receive the sign and seal of the promise, but with the promise comes the demand to believe. Only those who fulfil this demand receive what is promised. Only those who believe share in the forgiveness of sins.

We should be clear on this matter. All those who belong to the covenant receive the promise. But not all who receive the promise receive what is promised because they do not accept it in faith.

Baptism might be compared to a cheque. If I write you a cheque for \$100, I have promised that amount to you. I have an arrangement with the bank which allows you to take that promise to them, and they will give you the said amount from my account. But if you do not cash it, you do not receive that \$100.

Baptism is similar. God gives the promise of the forgiveness of sins, but you must cash in your baptism, so to speak. Through prayer you must take this promise to God, as it were, and in faith ask Him for what He has promised.

In defence of Rome someone might argue that Scripture calls baptism the washing away of sins. It does not say that it is the **promise** of the washing away of sins. Scripture says **it is** the washing away of sins! Why does Scripture say it like that?

Let us go back to our example of the cheque for \$100. If I gave you a cheque for that amount, you would probably go home and tell your parents that the minister gave you \$100. That is the way we speak. Actually, all that I gave you was a piece of paper containing the promise of \$100, for that is what a cheque is - a promissory note. But if you trust me, then you will not see much difference between the cheque and the real thing.

In the sacrament of baptism, God gives us the promise of forgiveness and renewal. And in order to impress upon His faithfulness and trustworthiness, He says that He gives us the real thing. As far as God is concerned His promise is very real—so real that He identifies the promise and what is promised. This language should remove all doubt about the certainty of God's promise.

But, if what is promised is only received through faith, we might wonder whether baptism is of any real value to the infant.

The Catechism says that "*by the use of the sacraments, God more fully declares and seals to us the promise of the gospel!*" (cf. Q&A 66). In order for baptism to be of any benefit to us, it must be **used**. That does not simply mean that baptism has to be administered. No, we use baptism each time we concentrate upon its meaning. To use baptism, then, a child must be old enough to understand what is being taught to us. Until he is able to understand, baptism does not benefit him.

This doesn't mean that the baptism of the child is useless until then. By no means! In the first place, the baptism of the infant benefits the parents. In the second place, it benefits the whole congregation who see the sacrament administered to the child. Others benefit immediately from the baptism of the child, but the child itself must grow old enough to understand before

his baptism can be of any use to him. For only when he is old enough to understand can the sacrament teach and assure him of the saving work of Christ. Only when he is mature enough to understand can he use his baptism.

Because baptism is only of benefit to those who understand what is portrayed in it, the parents (or guardians) of the child must promise to instruct the child in the faith before baptism may be administered. If this promise of instruction is not made, then the child cannot receive baptism. Baptism is of no value to a child unless he/she is taught about the work of Christ.



Why baptise infants then? Why not wait until they are a little older and are able to understand? God demands that children be baptised in their infancy for two reasons:

1. First, in order to give comfort to the mother and father of the child. The parents are comforted by the fact that the God of the covenant claims this child as His own.
2. In the second place, God wishes to teach us that He is the first One in our lives. Lest we should ever say that we chose God, God comes to us while we are new-born babies, to prove that it is He who chose us first. Lest we should ever say that God loved us because we first loved Him. God comes to us long before we even know He exists, much less love Him. God is first. God takes the initiative in salvation. When God established His covenant with us, we contributed nothing. The establishment of the covenant is one-sided.

Are all children included in the covenant? All the children of believers are included, but not the children of unbelievers. For God declared to Abraham, *"I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you"* (Genesis 17:7). The promise was repeated in Acts 2:39: *"For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."*

Here we see the wisdom of God in choosing to work His salvation primarily through the covenant. God doesn't just work with individuals. Oh, sometimes He does that. But God has chosen to work primarily through the covenant. And no wonder. If men are to believe in God and in Jesus Christ, they must know about God. They must learn the Scriptures. Now God says to Christian parents, *"I give the promise to you and to your children"* (cf Acts 2:39). At the same time God demands that these Christian parents bring up their children to know God and to love Him. God uses parents, who have the authority over their children, to raise these children in the Christian faith.

There are some, however, who say that baptism should not be administered to children. They misunderstand the purpose of the sacrament. They believe that in baptism man speaks to God. They believe that man makes a promise to God and then receives baptism. But as we saw in LD 26, it is God who is sealing the promise in the sacrament of baptism.

TRUE	FALSE
<p>In baptism, God signifies and seals His promise...</p> <p></p> <p>...to man</p>	<p>...to God</p> <p></p> <p>In baptism, man professes His faith...</p>

God gives the promise to the little child. As the child grows older, the parents are to instruct him in the faith and to teach him that God requires him to respond by accepting these promises in faith.

Can we prove that children should be baptised? Baptists will point out to us that there is not one instance of children being baptised. We admit that we do not read specifically of any child being baptised, while we do read of many adults being baptised after they believe. But Scripture gives us a **number of grounds to baptise children**.

1. The first ground for the baptism of children is the unity of the covenant in the old and new dispensations. At the ascension of Christ the church entered into a new dispensation. But covenant of grace remains the same in both dispensations. The promise is the same, and the demand is the same. The covenant is made with the same people as well. As we have seen from the quotation from Acts 2:39, the covenant in the new dispensation is made with believers and their children, just as it was in the old dispensation.

Furthermore, the New Testament sacrament of baptism corresponds to the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision. In the New Testament, inclusion in the covenant is signified by a non-bloody sign, for Christ's perfect sacrifice has put an end to the shedding of blood. But though the sign changes, the covenant remains unchanged, and the participants in the covenant remain the same. Just as children were circumcised in the old dispensation, so children are baptised in the new dispensation.

2. That children should be baptised is also clear from an incident which happened while Christ was on earth. Mothers brought their little children to Christ that He might bless them. The disciples thought that Christ was too busy to be bothered with little children. But Christ told the disciples not to prevent the children from coming. *"Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 19:13). The kingdom of heaven belongs just as much to children as to adults. Should they, then, not receive the sign and seal of their inclusion?

The fact that we do not expressly read of children being baptised in the New Testament does not pose a problem. In the first place, children were always included in the old covenant. There is no need to stress a matter which has always been well understood. Only when something changes is there a need to stress the change.

Furthermore, we should realise that with the dawning of the new dispensation, God began new covenant lines. Many of the Jews failed to accept the promise of God, so God brought the promise to the Gentiles. Naturally, when God brings the gospel to those who have not known Him, He brings it to adults who can understand it. But as soon as they believe, they are baptised along with their children. For the promise is made with believers and their children. Thus we read in the New Testament of **households** being baptised when the head of the family comes to faith (cf. Acts 16:15,33, 18:8, 1 Corinthians 1:16). Were there no children in at least one of these four households? We cannot say with certainty. But the baptism of households is in line with the command that God gave to Abraham to circumcise all those who were in his house, which included children (cf. Genesis 17:12-13). This is also in line with Acts 2:39 *"For the promise is to you and to your children."*

You have been baptised. That means that God has given you rich and wonderful promises! As you sit under the preaching, you hear these promises proclaimed. God demands that you must acknowledge these promises in faith. When the elders of the church are convinced that you know the contents of these promises, and that your faith is genuine, they will allow you to make public profession of faith, which gives you permission to partake of the second sacrament, the Lord's Supper.



Questions:

1. Can baptism itself save us? What can it do?
2. According to the church of Rome, how are sins forgiven? Is this correct? What washes away our sin?
3. What does baptism do? What does faith do?
4. Do all those who belong to the covenant receive the promise? Do all those who belong to the covenant receive what is promised? Why (not)?
5. To what could we compare the promise of baptism? Explain the comparison fully.
6. Why does Scripture actually say that baptism *is* the washing away of sins, and not the *promise* of the washing away of sins? What effect should this language have upon us?
7. Is baptism of any real benefit for the infant at the time he is baptised? Why not? When will it benefit him?
8. What does it mean to “*use*” our baptism?
9. Who benefits immediately from the baptism of an infant?
10. Since baptism is only of benefit to those who understand what it portrays, what must the parents of the children promise before baptism is administered?
11. What will a person learn from the fact that he was baptised when he was just a new-born infant?
12. Which children belong to the covenant of grace? Prove it from Scripture.
13. Prove from Scripture that children belong to the covenant and should therefore receive the sign and seal of the covenant.
14. We do not specifically read about children being baptised, but what do we read about in Acts 16:15,33; 18:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:16?
15. What does God require of the children of the covenant? When are children permitted to partake of the second sacrament (the Lord's Supper)?

The Lord's Supper

LORD'S DAY 28

75. Q. How does the Lord's Supper signify and seal to you that you share in Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and in all His gifts?

A. In this way:
 Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread and drink of this cup in remembrance of Him.
 With this command He gave these promises:¹
 First,
 as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup given to me, so surely was His body offered for me and His blood poured out for me on the cross.
 Second,
 as surely as I receive from the hand of the minister and taste with my mouth the bread and the cup of the Lord as sure signs of Christ's body and blood, so surely does He Himself nourish and refresh my soul to everlasting life with His crucified body and shed blood.

1 **Matthew 26:26-28** And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ²⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

Mark 14:22-24 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ²³ Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many."

Luke 22:19-20 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This

is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁰ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

76. Q. What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink His shed blood?

A. First,
 to accept with a believing heart all the suffering and the death of Christ, and so receive forgiveness of sins and life eternal.¹

Second,
to be united more and more to His sacred body
through the Holy Spirit,
who lives both in Christ and in us.²
Therefore, although Christ is in heaven³
and we are on earth,
yet we are flesh of His flesh
and bone of His bones,⁴
and we forever live and are governed
by one Spirit,
as the members of our body
are by one soul.⁵

1. **John 6:35** And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger; and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

John 6:40 And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:50-54 "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." ⁵² The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" ⁵³ Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

2. **John 6:55-56** For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

3. **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."

Acts 3:21 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.

1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

4. **1 Corinthians 6:15** Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!

1 Corinthians 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

Ephesians 5:29-30 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

1 John 4:13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

5. **John 6:56-58** He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.

John 15:1-6 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

Ephesians 4:15-16 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head; Christ; ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

1 John 3:24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

77. Q. Where has Christ promised
that He will nourish and refresh believers
with His body and blood
as surely as
they eat of this broken bread
and drink of this cup?
- A. In the institution of the Lord's Supper:
*The Lord Jesus on the night when He was
betrayed
took bread, and when He had given thanks,
He broke it and said,
"This is my body which is for you.
Do this in remembrance of Me."
In the same way also the cup after supper,
saying,
"This cup is the new covenant in My blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of Me."
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the
cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death
until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).*
This promise is repeated by Paul where he says:
*The cup of blessing which we bless,
is it not a participation
in the blood of Christ?
The bread which we break,
is it not a participation
in the body of Christ?
Because there is one bread,
we who are many are one body,
for we all partake of the one bread
(1 Corinthians 10:16,17).*



The second sacrament which Christ has instituted for His church is the sacrament of Holy Supper. It corresponds to the Old Testament sacrifice of the Passover. The Passover was instituted by God on the night of Israel's redemption out of Egypt. When God's wrath against sin descended upon Egypt, the Israelites were spared through the blood of the lamb which was sprinkled on the doorposts of their homes. Seeing that blood, the Destroying Angel passed over their houses and did not destroy their first born. The lamb pointed to Jesus Christ who would become our representative and offer His life for the redemption of us all.

Besides the lamb, there were two other elements to the Passover to which we should pay attention. The first is the command to eat bitter herbs. This was to serve as a reminder of Israel's bitter suffering while enslaved to Pharaoh. More generally, the bitter herbs portrayed the misery in life due to sin.

The last element of the Passover to which we pay attention is the command to remove all leaven from their homes. Leaven was a symbol of corruption, of evil and malice (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:8). As the redeemed of the LORD they were taught that they were to live in holiness and faithfulness, out of thankfulness for their redemption.

In these three elements of the Passover—the slaughter of the lamb, the eating of bitter herbs and the removal of leaven—the people of Israel were taught much the same as we are taught in the Catechism. These three elements correspond to the three parts of the Catechism, and also to the three parts of self-examination which is required of those who partake of the Lord's Supper. Consider the chart below.

In order to show that His death was the fulfilment of the Passover, Christ instituted the Lord's Supper in the midst of the Passover meal, He Himself being the *Paschal (Passover) Lamb* (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7).

By offering the perfect sacrifice by the shedding of His blood, Christ put an end to all sacrificial shedding of blood. Therefore Christ instituted a non-bloody sign to replace the Passover. The lamb and its blood is now replaced with bread and wine.

The first question which the Catechism asks concerning Holy Supper is similar to that which was asked concerning baptism, "*How does the Lord's Supper signify and seal to you that you share in Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and in all His gifts?*"

The Lord's Supper does two things:

1. The Lord's Supper **teaches** us about the merits which Christ obtained through His death.
2. More importantly, the Lord's Supper **assures** us of our participation in these

merits. This knowledge and assurance is conveyed, not by words as in the preaching, but by symbols. In the Lord's Supper there are many symbols (cf. the chart at the end of this lesson).

What are the benefits of Christ's sacrifice? They are the same as we learned in Lord's Day 26 concerning the two-fold promise of baptism:

1. Justification (whereby our **guilt** is removed).
2. Sanctification (whereby our **corruption** is removed).

In the Lord's Supper, the promises are the same.

Eating the bread and drinking the wine is symbolic of eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ. But what does that mean? Let it be clear that we eat the body of Christ and drink His blood, not with our mouths, but with our hearts. This eating and drinking is a spiritual exercise. ***To eat Christ's body and drink His blood means that I accept with a believing heart that Christ died for me and made full payment for my sins.*** And when I accept Christ's death with a believing heart, I actually receive the forgiveness of sins. By spiritually eating and drinking Christ's body and blood, that is, by accepting Christ's suffering and death in faith, I am **justified**. God the Judge declares me "Not guilty!"

PASSOVER	CATECHISM	SELF-EXAMINATION
Eating bitter herbs, symbolising the bitter life of Israel in Egypt.	How great our sins and misery are. LD 1-4	Let everyone consider his sins and accursedness
Slaughtering the lamb, which symbolised the blood of Christ.	How we are delivered from our sins and misery (through Christ). LD 5-31	Let everyone consider whether he believes ... that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.
Removal of the leaven, which symbolised the cleansing of their lives of all corruption.	How we are to show ourselves thankful for this deliverance. LD 32-52	Let everyone examine his conscience whether it is his sincere desire to show true thankfulness....

But I am not only justified. When I eat the body and drink the blood of Christ by faith, I am also **sanctified**. I, who by nature am dead in sin, am given new life. I am reborn, regenerated.

When we eat Christ's body and drink His blood in faith, Christ enters into us. When Christ dwells in us, then we are made spiritually alive. Christ said *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him"* (John 6:53,56). Christ dwells in those who eat His body and drink His blood in faith. His presence gives us life. Thus Paul says elsewhere, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"* (Galatians 2:20).

As a result of Christ dwelling in us, a spiritual transformation occurs. We become like He is. We begin to have the mind of Christ because the Holy Spirit who lives in Christ lives in us also. We begin to do the

things that Christ does. We are conformed or transformed into His image. We share His life. We become flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone. Because Christ comes to dwell in us, we come to have the same godly nature as Christ (2 Peter 1:4).

All this is a part of our sanctification, our renewal, our rebirth. At the table of our Lord, we are reassured that we partake in this transforming power through the Holy Spirit who is promised to us in the Lord's supper.

We do not leave the table the same person as the one who came to the table - not if we have participated in faith. We may not feel so much more alive. We may not consciously feel the effects of that transforming power. But does a child feel that he has grown after eating a meal? It is a very slow and gradual process, so slow that we cannot perceive it. But we may believe it. The Holy Supper is a means whereby God imparts His grace to us.

SYMBOL	MEANING
Bread and wine	symbolise the body and blood of Christ
Bread and wine	are forms of nourishment which sustain temporal life. In this way the Lord's supper teaches and assures us that Christ's sacrifice is the source and sustenance of eternal life.
Wine	is often used in the celebration of a joyous event. So also the use of wine symbolises the abundant joy of the marriage feast of the Lamb, and of which we now already have a foretaste.
Breaking of bread and pouring of wine	symbolise the crucifixion of Christ. We are reminded and assured that Christ's life was broken and His blood poured out for our redemption.
Minister hands the bread and cup	symbolises the offer of salvation. Just as surely as the minister, as Christ's representative offers the bread and the cup, so surely Christ offers us the merits acquired by His sacrifice.
Taking the bread and the cup from the hand of the minister	symbolises our acceptance of, or our faith in, Christ's offer of grace.
Eating and drinking	symbolises our unity with Christ. When we eat food, it becomes a part of us. Our body breaks food down to proteins, carbohydrates and minerals, which are absorbed by our body and become one with it. So surely do we become one with Christ when we eat and drink His body and blood.
Sitting with others at the table	symbolises our unity with one another. Just as many grapes are pressed to make one wine, and many grains are baked to make one bread, so we who are many are one body, being members of one another (cf. Romans 12:5).

Questions:

1. What is the second sacrament which Christ has given to the church? What is the Old Testament sacrifice that corresponds to it?
2. What did the Passover remember? To whom did the Passover lamb point?
3. Describe two other elements of the Passover and what they signified?
4. To what do these three elements of the Passover correspond? To what else do they correspond?
5. How do we know that the Lord's Supper is the fulfilment of the Passover?
6. Why did Christ put an end to the Passover and institute the Lord's Supper?
7. What two things does the Lord's Supper do for us?
8. What two things does the Lord promise us in Holy Supper?
9. What is justification? How does eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ lead to my justification?
10. What is sanctification? How does eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ lead to my sanctification?
11. Should we who eat and drink at the Lord's table feel that we have grown in faith by eating this meal? What must we do? Why?
12. Memorise the various symbols of the Lord's Supper.

LORD'S DAY 29

78. Q. Are then the bread and wine
changed into the real body and blood of Christ?

A. No.
Just as the water of baptism
is not changed into the blood of Christ
and is not the washing away of sins itself
but is simply God's sign and pledge,¹
so also the bread in the Lord's Supper
does not become the body of Christ itself,²
although it is called Christ's body³
in keeping with the nature and usage of
sacraments.⁴

1. **Ephesians 5:26** that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

Titus 3:5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

2. **Matthew 26:26-29** And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."²⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."²⁸ "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."²⁹ "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

3. **1 Corinthians 10:16-17** 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?¹⁷ For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

1 Corinthians 11:26-28 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.²⁷ Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body

and blood of the Lord.²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

4. **Genesis 17:10-11** This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;¹¹ and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

Exodus 12:11 And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover.

Exodus 12:13 Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

1 Corinthians 10:3-4 all ate the same spiritual food,⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

1 Peter 3:21 There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

79. Q. Why then does Christ call the bread His body
and the cup His blood,
or the new covenant in His blood,
and why does Paul speak of a participation
in the body and blood of Christ?

A. Christ speaks in this way for a good reason:
He wants to teach us by His supper
that as bread and wine sustain us
in this temporal life,
so His crucified body and shed blood
are true food and drink for our souls
to eternal life.¹
But, even more important,

He wants to assure us by this visible sign and pledge,
 first,
 that through the working of the Holy Spirit
 we share in His true body and blood
 as surely as we receive with our mouth
 these holy signs in remembrance of Him,²
 and, second,
 that all His suffering and obedience
 are as certainly ours
 as if we personally
 had suffered and paid for our sins.³

1. **John 6:51** I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.

John 6:55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.

2. **1 Corinthians 10:16-17** 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? ¹⁷ For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

3. **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.



When we spoke about baptism, the question was asked, “*Does baptism really wash away sin?*” To this we answered, “No.” Now, as we speak about the Lord’s Supper, a similar question is asked: “*Does the bread become the body of Christ, and the wine His blood?*”

The church of Rome answers, “Yes.” They teach that the bread is transformed into the body of Christ, and the wine is transformed into the blood of Christ. The wafers (which they use to prevent any crumbs falling to the floor) and the wine are ordinary enough. A bakery makes the wafers, and a winery makes the wine. But they are said to change into Christ’s body and blood.

According to Rome, this happens when the priest repeats the words of Christ, “*This is My body*”¹ and “*This is My blood.*” They believe that the moment these words are

spoken, the bread and wine become the real body and blood of Christ. This is called **TRANSUBSTANTIATION** (*trans* means across, and *substance* is *what a thing consists of*. The ending *-ation* refers to a process. Thus literally transubstantiation is the process whereby the substance of bread crosses over to become the substance of Christ’s body.)

At the time of the Reformation the Lutherans did not completely rid themselves of this idea. They believed that when Christ ascended into heaven, His human body became a **spiritual body**, which was not limited to one place as our bodies are. They taught that Christ’s body became **omnipresent** (present every-where). Thus they understand the words, “*This is My body*” to mean that Christ is present in and all around the bread, although

1. The Church of Rome continued to conduct its worship services in Latin even though it was not the language of the common people. In Latin the words “This is My body” are “Hoc est meum corpus.” In the ears of the people who did not understand Latin, it sounded like “hocus pocus” from which this latter saying originates.

the bread remains bread. This is called **consubstantiation**. (*Con* means *with*, and substance is what a thing consists of. The ending *-ation* refers to a process. Thus consubstantiation is the process whereby Christ's body comes to be with the bread, in it and around it.)

The Reformed simply took the words of Christ, "*This is My body*" and "*This is My blood*" as a metaphor. (A metaphor is a comparison without using the words *like* or *as*.) Christ used metaphors more often. He said, "*I am the door*" (John 10:7), and "*I am the vine*" (John 15:1). We do not interpret these literally as if Christ is a literal door with hinges and a handle. Neither is He a literal vine with leaves and fruit growing on Him. That is absurd! By using the metaphor of a door Christ simply meant that only through Him could we gain access to the Father. By using the metaphor of the vine, Christ simply meant that we can bear good fruit only when we are grafted into Him by faith. By using the metaphor of the body and blood, Christ simply meant to say, "*This bread is **like** My body*" and "*This bread **represents** My body*."

Why did Christ speak in this way? Why didn't He simply say, "*This bread is like My body*"? Or to put it in technical terms, why didn't Christ use a simile (a comparison using the words *like* or *as*)? I would refer you to Lord's Day 27, where a similar question was asked concerning baptism, which the Scripture calls *the washing away of sin*.

The Catechism points out that this way of speaking is in keeping with the nature and usage of the sacraments. As a sign a sacrament is intended to teach, and as a seal it is intended to assure. Concerning the aspect of teaching, our Lord could just as well have said "*This bread is like My body*." By saying this, He would point out that He is the true food and drink to eternal life. That is, His suffering and death can give eternal life, just as bread and wine can sustain our physical life.

Concerning the aspect of assurance, however, our Lord wisely chose to say

"*This is My body*" rather than "*This is like My body*." Technically speaking, a simile may be more accurate, but a metaphor is more powerful. If I wished to assure an artist that the portrait which I asked him to paint of my father is a true reflection, then I could better use a metaphor than a simile. To say, "*That looks like my father*" is not nearly as strong as saying "*That's my father!*" The latter gives the impression of complete identification. Christ called the bread His body in order to assure us that as surely as we partake of this bread, so surely do we partake of His body and blood, through which our sins have been forgiven.

Connected to the Roman error of *transubstantiation* is the error which Rome teaches concerning the way in which we come to share in the benefits of Christ's death. Rome teaches that the benefits of Christ's death are inseparably bound to the transformed bread and wine. Whoever eats the transformed bread and wine actually and automatically shares in the benefits of Christ's death. Rome teaches that a man lays hold of God's grace with his hands and makes it his own by eating and drinking with his mouth.

The Reformed refuted the thought that the grace of God is automatically given through the sacraments. Sitting at the Lord's table and participating in the bread and wine does not automatically mean that we participate in the grace of Christ. The sacraments do not automatically make us partakers of Christ's benefits. We receive God's grace, not with the hands of the body but with the hand of the soul, which is faith. We must accept God's grace with a believing heart. Only by faith do we share in the benefits of Christ's sacrifice.

At the same time we want to stress that the benefit which we receive from using the sacraments, is real. The sacraments, along with the Word of God, are called **means of grace**. The Bible teaches us that God's grace is given to those who have faith. But where does this faith come from? We dealt with this already in Lord's Day 25, where we learned that faith comes "*from the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts through*

the preaching of the gospel and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments." The Word and the sacraments bring us to faith, and faith makes us partakers of grace.

It should be clear that the sacrament is not an automatic instrument, but neither is it a useless one. The Lord's Supper is an instrument of God the Holy Spirit. Sometimes one can hear another say, "*I don't get much out of the Lord's Supper. I'd rather listen to a good sermon*". But we must not underestimate the working of the Holy Spirit. How much one's faith has been strengthened from the celebration of the Lord's Supper is hard to measure. For the working of the Holy Spirit is not always perceptible. But we must remember that Christ has commanded us to use these sacraments, and believe that through its proper use we will be strengthened in faith.

This leads us to discuss briefly what it means to use the Lord's Supper. To use this sacrament does not mean simply that we sit at the table and eat and drink. We use this sacrament when we remember its purpose.

If we sit at the Lord's table without paying attention to what is portrayed in all the symbols contained therein, then we may have eaten the bread and drunk the wine, but we have not really used the sacrament. Our mind must be actively tuned to what is portrayed. Even the youth who have not made profession of faith, and who do not actually sit at the table can use this sacrament when they tune their mind to the message that is conveyed in the symbols.

Furthermore, to use this sacrament we must participate with faith, believing all that is promised therein. If we sit at the table without believing in the promise that is conveyed in this sacrament, then we have not used the sacrament. Rather, we have abused it.

If we use the sacrament rightly, faith is strengthened, and through faith we share in the benefits of Christ's death.



Questions:

1. What does the church of Rome teach concerning the bread and the wine of Holy Supper?
2. When does this occur? What is this called?
3. What did the Lutherans say happened to the body of Christ after His ascension? Where do they believe the body of Christ exists (dwells)?
4. What do the Lutherans confess concerning Christ's body and blood with respect to the bread and wine of Holy Supper? What is this called?
5. Should we interpret Christ's words, "*This is My body*" literally? If not, how should we interpret them?
6. What is a metaphor? What other metaphors did Christ use in His preaching?
7. By using this metaphor, what did Christ mean to say?
8. What is a simile? In what way is a metaphor more powerful than a simile when speaking about the sacraments?
9. According to the church of Rome, what happens when someone eats the transformed bread and wine of Holy Supper?
10. How does Scripture teach us that we become partakers of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice?
11. If the Lord's Supper does not automatically make us partakers of the benefits of Christ, is it then a useless sacrament? Why or why not?
12. What two things are necessary in order to use the sacrament rightly?

LORD'S DAY 30

80. Q. What difference is there between the Lord's Supper and the papal mass?
- A. The Lord's supper testifies to us,
first,
that we have complete forgiveness of all our sins
through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ,
which He Himself accomplished on the cross
once for all;¹
and, second,
that through the Holy Spirit
we are grafted into Christ,²
who with His true body is now in heaven
at the right hand of the Father,³
and this is where He wants to be worshipped.⁴
But the mass teaches,
first,
that the living and the dead
do not have forgiveness of sins
through the suffering of Christ
unless He is still offered for them daily
by the priests;
and, second,
that Christ is bodily present
in the form of bread and wine,
and there is to be worshipped.
Therefore the mass is basically
nothing but a denial
of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ,
and an accursed idolatry.

1. **Matthew 26:28** For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

John 19:30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit."

Hebrews 7:27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Hebrews 9:12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:25-26 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another; ²⁶He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Hebrews 10:10-18 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But

this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. ¹⁴For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. ¹⁵But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, ¹⁶"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," ¹⁷then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." ¹⁸Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

2. **1 Corinthians 6:17** But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 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? ¹⁷For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

3. **John 20:17** Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"

Acts 7:55-56 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Hebrews 1:3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Hebrews 8:1 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

4. **John 4:21-24** Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the

Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

81. Q. Who are to come to the table of the Lord?
- A. Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life. But hypocrites and those who do not repent eat and drink judgment upon themselves.¹

1. **1 Corinthians 10:19-22** What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? ²⁰ Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. ²² Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

1 Corinthians 11:26-32 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. ²⁷ Therefore whoever

eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰ For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

82. Q. Are those also to be admitted to the Lord's supper who by their confession and life show that they are unbelieving and ungodly?
- A. No, for then the covenant of God would be profaned and His wrath kindled against the whole congregation.¹ Therefore, according to the command of Christ and His apostles, the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such persons by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, until they amend their lives.

1. **Psalm 50:16** But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth,"

Isaiah 1:11-17 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. ¹² When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? ¹³ Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies; I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. ¹⁴ Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. ¹⁶ Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. ¹⁹ For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. ²⁰ Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the

Lord's Supper. ²¹ For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. ²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

²⁵ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. ²⁷ Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰ For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. ³³ Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. ³⁴ But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.



In this Lord's Day we speak in the first place about the differences which exist between the Lord's Supper and the papal mass. The church of Rome does not speak about Lord's Supper, but about mass. The word "mass" comes from the Latin word "missa" which means "dismissed." The priest would say this when the sermon was over and when the Lord's Supper was about to be celebrated. At the end of the sermon those who could not participate were expected to leave. Thus the Lord's Supper became known as mass. The reference to *papal* mass implies that the wrong teachings regarding mass have been derived, not from Scripture but from *popes* and councils which have wrongly interpreted this sacrament.

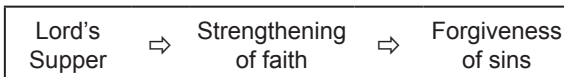
There are three main differences between the Lord's Supper and the papal mass.

1. The first difference concerns the sacrifice of Christ. Scripture teaches that Christ died *once*, and that His perfect sacrifice is sufficient to forgive the sins of the whole world throughout all ages. Scripture says, "*He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. ... So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many*" (Hebrews 9:26). And elsewhere, "*But this man (Christ), after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand of God*" (Hebrews 10:12). There is no repetition of Christ's sacrifice.

Rome, however teaches that the mass is actually a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ. In every celebration of the mass, Christ is crucified anew.

To deny the single sacrifice of Christ, as Rome does, and to teach that Christ is repeatedly put to death, is nothing less than a denial of the infinite value of Christ's death, as if His sacrifice once offered was insufficient payment for sin.

2. The second difference concerns the way in which we share in the benefits of Christ. We believe that we share in the benefits of Christ through faith, and not simply through participation in the sacraments. The purpose of the sacraments is not to dispense the benefits of Christ, but to strengthen faith, through which we share in Christ's benefits. Scripture teaches the following order:



Rome, however, has left out the element of faith, and believes that mere participation in the sacraments makes one share in the benefits of Christ. Every one who eats the bread and drinks the wine automatically shares in the forgiveness of sins. They put forward this order:



3. The third difference between the Roman mass and the Lord's Supper concerns the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Rome teaches that Christ is physically present in the transformed bread and wine of mass, in which ceremony He is sacrificed daily. This is in effect a denial of the ascension of Christ.

Scripture teaches us that, according to His human nature, Christ is in heaven at His Father's right hand. *"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand of God"* (Hebrews 10:12). Christ is no longer physically present on earth. Neither is He physically present at the Lord's table. Christ, according to His human nature, is in heaven (cf. LD 19). Therefore, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we hear the minister say,

"We must not cling with our hearts to the outward symbols of bread and wine, but lift our hearts on high in heaven, where Christ, our advocate is, seated at the right hand of His heavenly Father."

But Christ's divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit are present with us at all times, also at the Lord's table. Thus Christ is not physically present at the Lord's table, but He is spiritually present.

The Catechism calls the Roman mass an accursed idolatry. One of the main characteristics of idol worship is the means by which men expect to win the favour and obtain the blessings of their gods. They expect to do this by performing physical rituals. The teaching of Rome concerning mass is very similar. Rome teaches that God's grace is contained in the tokens of bread and wine, and that God's grace can be obtained through the physical means of eating and drinking. Thus the fathers rightly call the Roman mass an accursed idolatry.

God has revealed that we can only obtain His grace and blessing by way of a spiritual disposition, namely, through faith and love.

WHO CAN COME TO THE TABLE?

According to Scripture, a person must examine himself before he participates in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:28). What must a person seek for and find in himself?

The Catechism describes the three dispositions which are required of those who would come to the table. These three dispositions are also found in the Catechism's description of true repentance and conversion (cf. LD 33). Consider the chart on the next day.

What the Catechism teaches us is that the Lord's Supper is intended only for those who are truly converted to God and who have truly repented of their sins. Or to use other words, the Lord's Supper is intended only for true believers.

	LORD'S DAY 30 Who may come to the table?	LORD'S DAY 33 What is the true repentance or conversion of man?
1.	Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins,	It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that they have offended God by their sin.
2.	and yet trust that these are forgiven them ...by the suffering and death of Christ,	It is a heartfelt joy in God through Christ
3.	and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life.	It is to more and more hate sin and flee from it. It is a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

MAY CHILDREN COME TO THE LORD'S TABLE?

(Paedocommunion)

Should children participate in the Lord's Supper? There are a number of reasons which argue in favour of children participating at the Lord's table, but also some reasons which argue against it.

1. Children were permitted to participate in the corresponding sacrament of the Old Testament, namely, the Passover. Just as children were circumcised in the Old Testament, so children are baptised in the New Testament. Should it not be the same with the second sacrament? Since children were permitted to participate in the Passover, should they not be permitted to participate in the Lord's Supper?

We should realise, however, that there is a difference between the Passover and the Lord's Supper. While the Passover looked forward to the perfect sacrifice of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7), its focus was first and foremost upon the deliverance from a physical enemy, namely, Pharaoh, king of Egypt. All the Israelites of that generation and of subsequent generations enjoyed this redemption from Egypt without

discrimination, whether their hearts were right before God or not.

The Lord's Supper, however, is a feast which reflects upon our deliverance from a spiritual enemy, namely, sin and Satan. In order to share in this spiritual redemption, true faith and conversion is required.

2. A second argument which is put forward in favour of allowing children to attend the Holy Supper is that children have received the same promises as adults. They are promised the forgiveness of sins, righteousness and eternal life just as well as adults (cf. LD 27). Coupled with this argument is the fact that the sacraments do not confirm what lives in the heart of man; they confirm the promises of God.

It is true that the children of believers receive the promises just as well as their parents. It is precisely for this reason that they are baptised as a sign and seal of the promises in which they share. But while they are given the promises in baptism, they do not automatically receive *what* is promised. They receive the benefits of Christ promised in baptism and Lord's supper only by faith. And this faith is required of those who would sit at the Lord's table. This becomes evident from the following portions of Scripture:

- a. Paul wrote: "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup **you proclaim** the death of the Lord until He comes*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Calvin wrote concerning this text: *This knowledge (that Christ's death truly atones for sin) should stir us up to a confession in respect of praise, so as to declare before men what we feel inwardly before God. If therefore you would celebrate the supper aright, you must bear in mind that a profession of your faith is required from you.*² In celebrating this sacrament, we testify to men that we believe that the death of Christ is the one perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

2. John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, Baker Book House, 1979, Vol 1, pg. 384.

From this we learn that the sacrament of Lord's Supper is different from baptism. In baptism, no faith is required of the child before he is baptised. In baptism, only God speaks. But in the Lord's Supper, man does speak. By his participation he proclaims the death of the Lord as the atoning sacrifice for his sins.

We cannot, therefore, simply equate the two sacraments. We cannot say that because children partake of the one sacrament, they should also partake of the second, for a profession of faith is required of those who celebrate the Lord's Supper.

- b. Scripture demands that the participants must celebrate Holy Supper "*in remembrance of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 11:24). This requires a knowledge of who Christ is and what He has done.
- c. Scripture demands that those who eat and drink must *discern the body*, (1 Corinthians 11:29). That means that the participants must be able to understand that the bread and the wine, of which they partake, are symbols of something precious and holy. They must not think that they are simply eating a common meal. They must understand what this meal signifies, namely, the precious sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Participants are to eat the bread and drink the wine with a reverent and understanding heart.
- d. Still further, the Scripture demands that those who eat and drink must first *examine themselves*, (1 Corinthians 11:28). As the form for the Lord's Supper describes it, this self-examination consists of three parts: confessing our sins and misery, believing God's promised grace of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, and living in thankful obedience to God's commandments. Children must be taught to examine themselves properly, which is the purpose of catechism classes. This is evident

from the fact that the three parts of self-examination correspond to the three parts of the Catechism (see the chart at the end of this lesson).

FENCING THE LORD'S TABLE

The matter of participating in the Lord's Supper does not only require that we examine ourselves. The consistory is also given a task in supervising the attendance of the table. This is called fencing the table.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul chastised the congregation in Corinth for tolerating sin in their midst. He commanded the congregation to apply church discipline, even to the extent of handing the sinner over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, which refers to excommunication. It is not the matter of church discipline as such that draws our attention now, but the last words of vs 11. There Paul instructed the Corinthians not to eat with such an immoral man, as they were doing.

To what meal did Paul refer when he forbade them to "*eat with such a man?*" There are at least three possibilities. He could have referred to the ordinary meal at home. If this is what Paul meant, then the Corinthians were not to invite such a person into their home for dinner. A second possibility is that Paul referred to the *Love Feast*, the communal meal which the congregation was accustomed to eating together on the Lord's day. Or there is a third possibility. Paul may have referred to the Lord's Supper which was celebrated in the midst of the *Love Feast*. We read of this in chapter 11.

Paul probably refers to the second (the *Love Feast*), and then by extension to the third (the Lord's Supper). By his actions, the sinner proved that he was unworthy to be numbered among the saints, therefore he had no right to join in the *Love Feast*. How much more does this apply to the Lord's Supper that was celebrated in the midst of this *Love Feast*! By his sin, he proved that he was not in Christ, nor was Christ in him. Since he had no communion with Christ, he was not permitted to participate

in the Lord's Supper which signifies this communion with Christ.

Inasmuch as this is spoken of in the context of church discipline, we learn that the office-bearers of the church of Corinth were to apply church discipline upon this sinner and to exclude him from the Lord's Supper.

Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that if a man eats unworthily, the wrath of God is kindled against him, for he profanes the table of the Lord. Not only is the wrath of God kindled against the one who eats in an unworthy manner; His wrath is kindled against all those who do not prevent the profaning of the sacrament to the best of their ability.

Where in Scripture do we find support for the idea that God's wrath burns against the whole congregation if an unbelieving or ungodly man participates in the Lord's Supper? As mentioned already, the church of Corinth celebrated the Lord's Supper during the celebration of the *Love Feast*. From 1 Corinthians 11 we learn that the rich among them showed no care for the poor. The rich were apparently able to come together sooner than the poor, and the rich began to eat their meal without waiting for the poor to join them. The result was that the rich ate and drank with excess while the poor went away hungry.

Despite their sin, they dared to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the poor. In this way they ate the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. As a result of this sinful celebration, some members of the congregation had become sick. In fact some had even died. That was no coincidence. Paul saw that this was a direct result of their sinful celebration of the Lord's Supper. God was showing His displeasure towards the congregation.

Furthermore, we read in Jude vs. 12 and 2 Peter 2:13 that the *Love Feast* was defiled when unbelieving and ungodly participated therein. Jude wrote that ungodly men had crept into the congregation and turned God's grace into a license to sin. They said that they could do whatever they wanted because God would forgive them. These

men, he said, were *spots in their Love Feast*. Peter said something similar. He spoke about false teachers who advocated certain sins. Of them he said, "*They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their deceptions while they feast with you.*" Undoubtedly the reference is to the *Love Feast* wherein the Lord's Supper was celebrated.

To understand what Jude and Peter wrote, we must appreciate their choice of words. The reference to *spots* and *blemishes* is a clear reference to the impurity which defiled certain animals and made them unacceptable sacrifices to the Lord (cf. Leviticus 1:3,10). This allusion is clear from Peter's earlier reference (cf. 1 Peter 1:19) to Christ being the sacrifice who was like a lamb without blemish and without spot. What Peter and Jude imply is that the participation of godless men in the *Love Feast* - which included the Lord's Supper - put a spot or blemish on the whole celebration. The whole *Love Feast* - Lord's Supper and all - was no more acceptable to God than a blemished sacrifice in the Old Testament.

Furthermore, the Old Testament clearly taught that the sins of individuals is communicated to those who keep company with these sinners. In Leviticus 5, we read that if a person sinned in the matter of swearing an oath falsely, and if someone heard it but did nothing to prevent or correct the dishonouring of God's name, he would share in the guilt of the one who swore falsely.

The Lord also wanted to show this sin-by-association in the many laws which declared that those who came into contact with any unclean thing became unclean themselves. Although this ceremonial law is no longer applicable in the new dispensation, its truth is still applicable. Those who knowingly permit an ungodly man to participate in the Lord's Supper defiles this feast.

Listening to the Scriptures, we conclude that God's wrath burns not only against those who are themselves guilty of sin, but also against those who knowingly allow

an ungodly man to participate in the Holy Supper.

The holiness of the Lord's table and the well-being of the congregation demands that, in addition to self-examination, the consistory must also exercise supervision over the participants at the Holy Supper. Participation in the Lord's Supper is not a matter entirely left up to the individual, but comes under the supervision of the elders.

The question arises how the consistory ought to judge those who come to the table. The Catechism serves us well again when it emphasises that the consistory is to judge the participants on two areas, namely, on their *confession* and on their *conduct*. They must prove to be faithful in *what they believe*, and they must prove to be faithful in *the way they live*.

Now we know that God alone searches the heart. Yet the Lord has taught us that we can judge whether the tree is good by the fruit that it bears. One of these fruits is a good confession (Matthew 12:34). It is necessary to examine those who would participate in the Lord's Supper, and judge their profession of faith, for not all faith is true faith. Not everyone who claims to have faith necessarily believes all that God requires of us in His Word (cf. LD 7).

Furthermore, not all those who confess their faith live in accordance with their confession. The Lord taught us that there will be some who call out, "*Lord, Lord*" but they do not do the things which Christ commands (cf. Luke 6:46). Thus in addition to examining their faith, it is necessary to examine their conduct. This is the second fruit by which the tree may be known. For a good tree does not bring forth bad fruit, neither does a bad tree bring forth good fruit.

In order for the consistory to judge the conduct of participants, they must have supervision over their walk of life. They must be able to see the godly fruits which the participants bear. Thus normally those who participate in the Lord's Supper are the members of the congregation who

are under the supervision of the office-bearers.

But what about guests who are not under the supervision of the office-bearers of the congregation where the Lord's Supper is celebrated? Should they be allowed to participate?

It is important that when dealing with guests we uphold the same standards as for members of the congregation. This means that the office-bearers should have evidence that the guests are godly both in their profession of faith and in their walk of life.

The faith of a guest can be learned by way of examination. A thorough examination may be rather difficult at times. On the other hand, a short examination will reveal a superficial attitude with respect to the essentials of the faith.

It is much more difficult, if not impossible, to obtain evidence of the godly conduct of a guest. And this evidence of a godly walk is important. For as stated already, Scripture teaches us to judge a person by the fruit that he bears, and not simply by the words that he speaks.

In order to obtain this evidence of godly conduct, we have established the good practice of demanding attestations from guests who wish to participate. An attestation is a letter which testifies to a person's soundness in doctrine and conduct.

Naturally, if we do not recognise a church as faithful, we will not accept their attestation either. For an attestation is only as reliable as the church that issues it. Therefore we have established the practice of only accepting attestations from churches whom we have recognised as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If the consistory cannot obtain evidence of a person's soundness in doctrine and conduct, they must not admit him to the Lord's table. Does the consistory thereby judge that person to be an unbeliever and ungodly, as is sometimes claimed? Not at all. Rather, the opposite is true. If the consistory cannot obtain the evidence it

needs, then consistory makes no judgment at all. Let there be no mistake about this. They **must** judge them. But if the evidence is lacking, the consistory is not able to make a judgment. It could well be that he belongs with us. It could well be that he will sit at the marriage feast of the Lamb with us. But the consistory is unable to make the judgment which it is obliged to make. Because they cannot judge him, they cannot admit him to the table.

Unfortunately not all agree with what we have written. Thus there are different practices, as listed below.

1. OPEN COMMUNION - All believers (regardless to which church they belong) who desire to participate in the Lord's Supper may do so without being examined by the consistory of the church. At the open table, no one judges the participant except the person himself. A total stranger can participate in the Lord's Supper.

2. RESTRICTED COMMUNION - Not everyone can attend the table. All the members of the church who have professed their faith may attend. Guests from other churches must first appear before the consistory (or members of it). He must make a profession of faith before they receive admission to the

table. At the restricted table the elders grant admission only on the basis of a good verbal profession of faith.

3. CLOSE COMMUNION - Only the members of the church who have professed their faith may attend the Lord's table, and those members who come from sister churches with an attestation from their consistory attesting to their faith and conduct. At the close table elders grant admission only when there is evidence that the participants are of sound doctrine and godly conduct.

We believe that close communion is the best means of safeguarding the purity of the table, and complies with the Scriptural and confessional demand that those who are admitted must be judged sound in doctrine and conduct.

The following diagram shows that before one can rightly examine himself, he must know his Catechism. To state this another way: we go to Catechism to learn how to examine ourselves rightly. The Catechism is intended to prepare God's covenant children to take their place at the Lord's table. When they are able to examine themselves rightly they are also able to participate in the Lord's table in a worthy manner.

Division of the Catechism (LD 1)	Form for the Profession of Faith	Who may come to the Lord's table? (LD 30)	Self-Examination (Lord's Supper Form)
First, how great my sins and misery are.	Do you truly detest yourself before God because of your sins?	Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins.	Let everyone consider his sins and accursedness, so that detesting himself, may humble himself before God.
Second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery.	Do you acknowledge God's covenant promises, which have been signified and sealed to you in your baptism? Do you seek your life outside of yourself in Jesus Christ?	Those who trust their sins are forgiven them by the suffering and death of Christ.	Let everyone search his hearts to see whether he also believes the sure promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him.
Third, how I am to be thankful for such deliverance.	Do you declare that you love the Lord God and that it is your sincere desire to serve Him according to His Word?	Those who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their lives.	Let everyone examine his conscience whether it is his sincere desire to show true thankfulness to God with his entire life.

Questions:

1. What does the church of Rome call the Lord's Supper? Where does that name come from?
2. What does the first difference between the Lord's Supper and the papal mass concern? What is so serious about the teaching of Rome?
3. What is the second difference between the Lord's Supper and the papal mass?
4. What is the third difference between the Lord's Supper and the papal mass?
5. What does the minister say before celebrating the Lord's Supper, and why?
6. What is one of the main characteristics of idol worship? Why is the papal mass called a "*cursed idolatry*"?
7. By what way alone can we receive God's grace and the blessings of Christ?
8. What are the three dispositions (attitudes) necessary before one can come to the Lord's table?
9. Where else can these three dispositions be found? What does this say about those who can participate in the Lord's Supper?
10. What is the first thought that argues in favour of children participating in the Lord's Supper?
11. Upon what did the Passover focus first and foremost? Who shared in this redemption?
12. Upon what does the Lord's Supper focus first and foremost? What is required in order to share in this redemption?
13. What is the second reason put forward to argue in favour of children participating in the Lord's Supper? Is there any truth in this argument?
14. In what way is the sacrament of baptism different from the sacrament of Lord's Supper?
15. It is evident from Scripture that faith is required of those who participate in the Lord's Supper. Explain what is required when Paul writes:
 - a. "*For as often as you eat this bread you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*"
 - b. "*Do this in remembrance of Me [Christ]?*"
 - c. "*...discerning the body.*"
 - d. "*Let a man examine himself...*"
16. Of how many parts does self-examination consist? What are they?
17. Besides examining ourselves, who else must examine the participants? What does Paul say at the end of 1 Cor 5:11? To what type of eating does Paul refer?
18. Should those who live in sin be permitted to attend the Lord's table? Why or why not?
19. What would happen to the congregation if it knowingly permitted an ungodly man to attend the Lord's Supper? Prove this from Paul's letter to the Corinthians.
20. How did Peter and Jude speak about ungodly men who participated in the *Love Feast*? To what do these words refer?
21. On which two criteria should consistory judge those who come to the table? Why is a confession of faith not sufficient?
22. On what basis do we admit guests from churches with whom we entered into a federation?
23. If a consistory does not admit a stranger to the table, do they judge him to be an unbeliever and ungodly?
24. What is open communion? Who judges the participants?
25. What is restricted communion? Who judges the participants? On what basis?
26. What is close communion? Who judges the participants? On what basis?
27. According to which type of communion can the holiness of the table be best guarded? Why?

LORD'S DAY 31

83. Q. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

A. The preaching of the holy gospel
and church discipline.
By these two the kingdom of heaven
is opened to believers
and closed to unbelievers.¹

1. **Matthew 16:19** And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

John 20:21-23 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I

also send you." ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

84. Q. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and closed by the preaching of the gospel?

A. According to the command of Christ, the kingdom of heaven is opened when it is proclaimed and publicly testified to each and every believer that God has really forgiven all their sins for the sake of Christ's merits, as often as they by true faith accept the promise of the gospel. The kingdom of heaven is closed when it is proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them as long as they do not repent. According to this testimony of the gospel, God will judge both in this life and in the life to come.¹

1. **Matthew 16:19** And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

John 3:31-36 He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. ³³ He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. ³⁴ For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the

Spirit by measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. ³⁶ He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

John 20:21-23 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

85.	Q.	How is the kingdom of heaven closed and opened by church discipline?
	A.	<p>According to the command of Christ, people who call themselves Christians but show themselves to be un-christian in doctrine or life are first repeatedly admonished in a brotherly manner.</p> <p>If they do not give up their errors or wickedness, they are reported to the church, that is, to the elders.</p> <p>If they do not heed also their admonitions, they are forbidden the use of the sacraments, and they are excluded by the elders from the Christian congregation, and by God Himself from the kingdom of Christ.¹</p> <p>They are again received as members of Christ and of the church when they promise and show real amendment.²</p>

1. **Matthew 18:15-20** Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

1 Corinthians 5:3-5, 11-13 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. ¹¹ But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person. ¹² For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? ¹³ But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

2. **Luke 15:20-24** And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son." ²² But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. ²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." And they began to be merry.

2 Corinthians 2:6-11 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, ⁷ so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. ⁸ Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. ⁹ For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. ¹⁰ Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, ¹¹ lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

In this Lord's Day, we speak about the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The first question that we have to answer is, "*What is the kingdom of heaven?*" A kingdom is the realm over which a king or a queen rules. When we speak about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, we refer to that realm over which God our heavenly King rules.

In the beginning, all of creation was included in the kingdom of God. He ruled over all the forces of nature, as well as over the hearts of all men. But when man rebelled against God in Paradise, God expelled man from His kingdom. With the fall into sin, another kingdom was established on earth, ruled by the prince of darkness. He is called the ruler of this world (cf. John 12:31). He rules the hearts of fallen man.

Christ was sent into this world to transfer us from the kingdom of Satan back to the kingdom of God (cf. Colossians 1:13). Through His obedience unto death, Christ obtained the key to God's kingdom (cf. Revelation 1:18, 3:7). This "*key*" to God's kingdom refers to the power and the authority which Christ received from God to open the kingdom of heaven to those whom the Father had given Christ.

Christ has, in turn, given the church the keys of the kingdom, that is, the power and authority to open and close the kingdom of heaven. There are two keys, namely, the preaching of the gospel and church discipline.

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

The kingdom of God is only opened to those who possess righteousness, that is, perfect obedience to the law of God. It is on account of disobedience that man was expelled from the kingdom of God in Paradise, and it is only on the basis of perfect obedience that the gates of the kingdom of heaven are opened to man again. Now fallen man, because of his depravity, cannot render this perfect obedience (righteousness) that God requires. But God has given Christ to be our Representative. He has rendered perfect obedience to God's law for us. He

offers His righteousness to us, which we must accept in faith. Only through faith can we receive this righteousness.

But man cannot believe of himself. Faith is a gift of God that must be given to man. Man's heart must be renewed so that he confesses his sins and seeks his salvation in Jesus Christ. Without this faith, no one receives the righteousness of Christ. Without this faith, no one can enter into the kingdom of God.

In order to work this faith into the hearts of man, Christ gave to the church the key of the preaching of the gospel. This refers both to the **audible word** as it is proclaimed from the pulpit, as well as the **visible word** as it is portrayed in the sacraments. Through the preaching of the gospel, faith is worked and strengthened. And through faith, we receive the righteousness of Christ which alone unlocks the gates of heaven to man (cf. Psalm 118:19,20).

The preaching is very powerful. In the prophecy of Isaiah (55:10f) we read that the Word of God never returns empty, but that it always accomplishes that for which it was sent. This is true for the Word of God that came directly from His mouth, as at the time of creation ("*Let there be...*" and there was). This is also true for the Word of God as it is proclaimed through the mouth of God's servants.

The power of the preaching lies not in man himself, but in the Spirit of God who is pleased to use the preaching as His instrument. Paul says that although he preached the Word in weakness, it was nevertheless with power - not with human power lest any man should boast, but with the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:3-5). As we have seen in Lord's Day 25, the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel as His instrument or tool to work faith. Thus the power to open and close the kingdom of God does not lie ultimately with the preacher. The power to admit citizens to the kingdom of God belongs to the Holy Spirit. The Church is nothing more than the workshop of the Holy Spirit, and the preaching is nothing more than His tool.

Church discipline

The second key of the kingdom is church discipline. Church discipline is not very different from the preaching of the Word. Actually, church discipline is a form of directed preaching, revealing to specific individuals what the Word of God says about specific heresies or sin, and exhorting them to believe and repent.

Church discipline does not begin with the elders, as is often supposed. It actually begins with the members of the congregation, and they remain involved with discipline as it runs its full course. It follows these steps:

1. **If someone sees his brother sin, he must admonish him.** He is not to go directly to the elders or to the minister. Neither is he to talk about the sin to others. He himself must go and speak to the one who sinned. If the sinner repents, then nothing more should be said or done. The matter has been resolved, and for the sake of the man's reputation, the one who witnessed the wrong must remain silent about it.
2. If, however, the brother refuses to heed this brotherly admonition, and expresses no sorrow and promises no change of conduct, then the one who witnessed his sin **must take one or two others** with him in order that together they may exhort him, and be witnesses of his response (cf. Matthew 18:15,16).
3. If the brother still refuses to repent, the **matter is to be brought to the elders.** It is only at this point that the consistory can become involved. It can only become involved on the evidence of two or three witnesses. The consistory then must exhort the sinner, reminding the sinner of the authority with which they have been invested as ambassadors of Christ (cf. Matthew 18:17).
4. If the admonition of the elders does not meet with immediate repentance, the sinner is **withheld from the sacraments.** The congregation is not informed at this stage. This is called "silent censure." This period of time

gives the opportunity to the office-bearers to continue their admonitions.

To be withheld from the Lord's table is very significant. We have seen in the past that our participation in the Lord's supper is a sure sign that as certainly as we eat the bread and drink from the cup, so certainly do we partake in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. But the reverse is also true. If we are not allowed to sit at the Lord's table, then that is a sure sign that we do not share in the benefits of Christ.

5. If after numerous exhortations there is no repentance, then the **first announcement is made to the congregation.** They are informed that a brother of the congregation (no name is mentioned) is guilty of a certain sin. The congregation is urged to pray that the Lord might bring that brother to repentance.
6. If after further exhortations the man persists in his sin, the elders are to proceed to the **second announcement** of church discipline. Prior to doing this, however, they are to receive the consent of Classis, which hears both the sin and the efforts undertaken by the consistory to bring this man to repentance. If Classis is satisfied that the man's actions are indeed contrary to God's Word, and that the elders have properly and sufficiently exhorted the sinner, they give their consent to the elders to proceed with the second step. With the second step **the name of the sinner is revealed to the congregation,** and they are encouraged both to pray for, and speak to, the brother.
7. If these subsequent exhortations fail to bring the fruit of repentance, then the **third step** is taken in which **the date of excommunication is set.** The sinner is informed that if he persists in his sin to the end, then on the day assigned, the form for excommunication will be read. Excommunication means that one is cut off from fellowship with the church, and even more serious, that one is cut

off from fellowship with Christ and has no place in His glorious kingdom.

Church discipline is very serious. It is not simply a matter of words spoken by men. Neither does it concern only the judgment of men. If the church rightly excommunicates someone, then he is also excluded by God from the kingdom of light, and cast back into the kingdom of darkness.

This seems as though the church has been given a great deal of authority. It has! Christ said, *"Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:19).

The authority which Christ has given to the church can be distinguished between 1. *legislation* and 2. *judgment*.

1. Authority to legislate—In Matthew 16:18 (quoted above) the words *bind* and *loose* mean *forbid* or *permit*. Whatever the elders permit, God permits. And whatever the elders forbid, God forbids. The consistory is given the authority to guide the flock and establish what doctrine and conduct are acceptable and unacceptable. Of course, this is not left up to their own will and whim. They themselves must be governed by Scripture and by the Spirit of God. On the basis of the Word of God, and only on that basis, they may regulate or legislate the doctrine and conduct approved by God.

2. Authority to judge — The elders are also given the authority to judge. In John 20:23 Christ said to the disciples and thus to the church, *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, and if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* Again we stipulate that the elders must judge according to God's Word, and not by their own fancy. When the elders judge faithfully, God upholds that judgment. The judgment pronounced by Christ's faithful ambassadors in the present, will be upheld by God on the day of judgment. God stands fully behind His faithful office-bearers.

We must still speak briefly about the **purpose of church discipline**. There

are three reasons why church discipline must be faithfully exercised:

1. In the first place, there is concern for the **honour of God's name**. If sin was tolerated, that would reflect poorly upon God. It would appear that God tolerates sin. But when sin is disciplined, then the church upholds God's name by making it evident to all that God hates sin, for He is a righteous and holy God.
2. There is also a **concern for the brother** who has committed sin. If the one who has fallen into sin continues to live in sin and hardens himself in it, then he stands condemned before God. In order that the member might repent, the church disciplines him. It is done out of love, so that the brother might repent and be saved.
3. There is also a concern for the **purity of the church**. Sin is like cancer. It spreads throughout the whole body if it is not removed. If a brother is permitted to live in sin without discipline, then others will think that such sin is permitted by God. Sin will spread, and soon many more will be defiled. Sin must be removed before it infects the whole body.

In some instances church discipline leads to a hardening in heart. Some try to avoid the process of church discipline by withdrawing from the Church. In doing so, they not only rob themselves of the means of grace; they also break the vow they made when they professed their faith—the vow to submit to the discipline of the church. By breaking this vow, they incur still greater guilt before God.

In many instances those who are disciplined are brought to repentance. Sometimes this happens before discipline has run its full course. Sometimes they are brought to repentance many years later. As long as they live there is opportunity for repentance and forgiveness. For our merciful God has established an eternal covenant with us, and His promised grace continues to be offered to His covenant children as long as they live.

When there is repentance after excommunication, the consistory announces to the congregation the name of the brother, giving the congregation opportunity to lodge any lawful objections which it might have regarding the readmission of the brother. If there are no objections, the form for *Readmission* (p. 615 Book of Praise) is read.

These are the two keys of the kingdom which Christ has given to His church. It is good for a moment to pay attention to the important position which the church has been given. Our confession of faith declares, "*Outside of the church, there is no salvation*" (Art. 28 Belgic Confession). This means that the church alone has the keys of the kingdom. Only through the preaching and through the use of the sacraments does the Holy Spirit work faith and repentance into the hearts of men. Only through the preaching and church discipline is the kingdom of heaven opened and closed. There are no other means by

which man can enter the kingdom of God except those means which are given to the church.

Furthermore, we confess in Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession that the true church is the church which faithfully uses the keys of the kingdom. If the keys are not used faithfully, they are ineffective in opening and closing the kingdom. The church that fails to use the keys faithfully ceases to be a true church.

What a responsible and important role the church plays in the application of the salvation which we have in Christ. How important it is to belong to a true and faithful church of our Lord. And how important it is to pray for those who must handle the keys of the kingdom.



The First Key of the Kingdom—The Preaching of the Gospel

AUDIBLE
via the pulpit

VISIBLE
via the sacraments,
especially Holy Supper



Proclaiming to the congregation in general...

...the promise of God's mercy and salvation to those who believe and repent...

...and...

...the warning of God's wrath and condemnation to those who are unbelieving and unrepentant.

The members apply the preaching to themselves. This leads to one of three responses:

1. Their hearts are opened to God's grace. They believe and repent. The kingdom of heaven is opened to them.

2. Their hearts are closed to God's grace. They continue in unbelief and sin. The kingdom of God is closed to them.

3. Their hearts are closed to the gospel, but as hypocrites they pretend to believe and repent.

The members examine themselves before partaking of the Lord's Supper.

This leads to a three-fold response:

1. They participate from the table of the Lord. The participation assures them that they have a part in the kingdom of God.

2. They abstain from the table of the Lord. Their abstinence testifies that they have no part in the kingdom of God.

3. They participate as hypocrites, and eat and drink judgment upon themselves.

The Second Key of the Kingdom—Church Discipline

AUDIBLE
via personal interaction

VISIBLE
via the sacraments,
especially Holy Supper



Admonishing and exhorting individual members of the congregation who are known to be unfaithful in doctrine or conduct.

The consistory with divine authority audibly declares to them that God's wrath and condemnation abides on them so long as they do not believe and/or repent...

OR

...consistory assures them of God's mercy and salvation if they repent and show real amendment.

...and...

The consistory with divine authority withholds them from the use of the sacraments, thereby declaring that they have no part in the kingdom of God as long as they do not believe and/or repent...

OR

...consistory allows them to participate in the Lord's Supper, thereby assuring them of God's mercy and salvation

If the sinner stubbornly hardens himself in his unbelief and sin, then the church is obliged to proceed with excommunication from the church, which involves two things:

1. No spiritual care and supervision of the office-bearers.

2. No communion or fellowship with members of the church.

Questions:

1. What is the kingdom of God?
2. What was all included in the kingdom of God at creation? What happened with the fall into sin? Who rules this kingdom?
3. Why was Christ sent into this world? What has Christ obtained? What does this refer to?
4. To whom has Christ given the keys? What are these keys?
5. What must we possess in order to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven? Can we render this ourselves? From whom do we receive this? How do we receive this?
6. Can man believe of himself? Who must work this faith in man? Through what is faith worked?
7. We can distinguish between two types of preaching. Which are they?
8. What does Isaiah 55:11 say? What does this imply?
9. Wherein does the power of the preaching **not** lie? Wherein does it lie? What does 1 Corinthians 2:3-5 say?
10. With whom does the power to open and close the kingdom lie?
11. Is church discipline really different from preaching? What actually is church discipline?
12. With whom does church discipline begin?
13. What must you do if you see your brother sin? If he repents, what must you do? Why?
14. If you have admonished your brother who has sinned, but he does not repent of his sin, what must you do?
15. What must the consistory do if the sinner refuses to repent when they first admonish him? What is this called? What is so significant about this step of discipline?
16. If the sinner refuses to repent after being withheld from the Lord's Supper, what must the consistory do? What must the congregation do?
17. Prior to proceeding to the second announcement of church discipline, what must the consistory do? Why is this needed? In addition to praying, what is the congregation encouraged to do?
18. What is meant by excommunication?
19. Is church discipline only the judgment of **men**? What did Christ say in Matthew 16:19?
20. To what authority did Christ refer when He said, "*Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matthew 16:19)? What does this mean? What restriction is placed upon the office-bearers?
21. To what authority did Christ refer when He said, "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained*" (John 20:23)? What does this mean? What restriction is placed upon the office-bearers?
22. What is the first reason for church discipline? Why is this important?
23. What is the second reason for church discipline? Out of what is this discipline exercised?
24. What is the third reason for church discipline? Why is it important?
25. Does church discipline always lead to repentance?
26. If someone has been excommunicated, is there still opportunity for repentance?
27. What does the Belgic Confession (Art. 28) mean when it says "*Outside of the church there is no salvation*"?
28. How can we tell whether a church is a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ?
29. Since the church plays such an important role in our salvation, what two important things must we do?

The Third Part

OUR THANKFULNESS

LORD'S DAY 32

86. Q. Since we have been delivered
from our misery
by grace alone through Christ,
without any merit of our own,
why must we yet do good works?

A. Because Christ,
having redeemed us by His blood,
also renews us by His Holy Spirit
to be His image,
so that with our whole life
we may show ourselves thankful to God
for His benefits,¹
and He may be praised by us.²
Further, that we ourselves
may be assured of our faith
by its fruits,³
and that by our godly walk of life
we may win our neighbours for Christ.⁴

1. **Romans 6:13** 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.

Romans 12:1-2 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.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

1 Peter 2:5-10 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.⁶ Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."⁷ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,"⁸ and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.⁹ But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

2. **Matthew 5:16** Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

3. **Matthew 7:17-18** Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

Galatians 5:22-24 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.²⁴ And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

2 Peter 1:10-11 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;¹¹ for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

4. **Matthew 5:14-16** You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Romans 14:17-19 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.¹⁹ Therefore let us pursue the

things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

1 Peter 2:12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

1 Peter 3:1-2 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, ² when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.

87. Q. Can those be saved who do not turn to God from their ungrateful and impenitent walk of life?

A. By no means. Scripture says that no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, greedy person, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or the like shall inherit the kingdom of God.¹

1. **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you

beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:5-6 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.



With this Lord's Day we begin the third section of the Catechism which deals with our thankfulness. We will deal with two things in this last section, namely, the **Ten Commandments** and the **Lord's Prayer**. From these two things we learn that the way whereby we show our thankfulness to God is through the things we do and the things we say. Our thankfulness concerns our **walk** and our **talk**.

Before the Catechism begins to explain what God requires of us in the Ten Commandments, it emphasises the reason why we keep the commandments. We do not keep God's law in order **to be saved**. No, we keep His law because we **have been**

saved. Our obedience is not the basis for our salvation. We learned in Lord's Day 23 that we are saved on the basis of Christ's obedience which He rendered for us in our place. This can be seen from Question 86, which reads, "*Since we **have been delivered...***" and also from the answer, "*Because Christ, **having delivered us...***"

The reason why the Catechism stresses this so strongly is because of the heresy of Rome. Rome taught that good works earn salvation. But that is altogether wrong! Good works do not earn salvation. We learned that already in Lord's Day 24. Our good works earn us nothing because they are imperfect, while God's justice demands perfection. That is why we must rely

upon Christ's obedience (righteousness). He alone obeyed God's commandments perfectly. It is on the basis of Christ's righteousness that we are saved (cf. LD 23).

The question which is asked, then, is a very logical one. If Christ has completely paid for our salvation without us contributing any merits of our own, why must we still do good works? If our good works earn us nothing, and if everything we need for salvation is freely given to us from Christ, why bother doing good works? Why not do those sinful things that we by nature like to do?

Indeed, Rome said that if our salvation is obtained apart from our good works, then there is no longer any incentive to do good works. The doctrine that salvation is by faith alone would lead to careless and wicked living.

The church of Rome did not correctly understand what it means to be saved. To be saved does not simply mean that we are released from the **punishment of sin** and the judgment of hell. That surely is included! In Lord's Day 26 of these notes, we learned that our salvation consists of two things: the cleansing of our **guilt** through the blood of Christ (our justification), and our cleansing from the **pollution of sin**, our depravity. Our corruption or depravity is removed through the renewing work of the Holy Spirit (our sanctification).

Christ does not leave His redeemed to wallow in the filth of sin. He does not leave them miserable creatures who bear the image of the evil one. He makes them new creatures. He restores them in the image of God. They are made new again so that they can produce good fruits to the honour and glory of God. This is what the Catechism means when it says that those whom Christ redeems by His blood, He also renews by His Spirit. Those whom Christ justifies He also sanctifies so that they will produce good works. Paul wrote in Titus 2:14 "[Christ] gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Indeed, the ultimate goal of our redemption is the production of good works. In Ephesians 2:8-10 Paul wrote, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, **not of works**, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*" Notice how Paul says that we have been saved, not **because** of good works but **for** good works. Good works are not the **basis** of our salvation, but the **goal** of our salvation. This, then, is the first reason why we do good works, because we have been saved for this very purpose.

The Catechism mentions still four other reasons.

1. Good works show thankfulness.

When giving the law to Israel, the LORD taught His people that they must show love and thankfulness to God for His grace by keeping His commandments, which means the same as doing good works. In the second commandment God promised to show "...*mercy to thousands, to those who love [Him] and keep [His] commandments*" (Exodus 20:6). Christ said the same, "*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.*" (John 14:21 cf. also 14:15, 15:10).

2. **Good works praise God.** If the good works which we do were our own accomplishment, we would receive the praise for doing them. But they are not, therefore we do not receive the glory. The good works which we do are works that God has prepared for us to walk in (cf. Ephesians 2:10). It is God the Holy Spirit who is at work in us both to will and to work for God's good pleasure (cf. Philippians 2:13). Therefore we glorify God for the good that we can do.

Furthermore, when we do good works we bear the image of God. For those works are regarded as good which reflect God. When we show faithfulness, kindness, mercy in our daily work, we reflect the image of God. Thus God is glorified by others through the good

works which we do. Christ said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16). However, God's name is abused by our evil when we fail to live in accordance with God's commandments. Paul said, *"You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written"* (Romans 2:23-24).

3. Good works assure us of our faith.

How do we know that we are delivered? We do not hear a voice from heaven or so. We hear of God's grace in the Bible, and His grace is confirmed in the sacraments. But still sometimes we doubt. How can we be sure? Scripture says that a tree may be known by its fruits (cf. Matthew 7:16-18). If we produce good works, then that can only mean that God has renewed us. For we know that we ourselves could never bear these fruits (John 15:4-5). The fact that we bear good fruit means that we have been grafted into Christ, the vine. In Him, we who were dead branches are made alive. From Him we receive the ability to bear good fruit.

4. Good works may serve to win our neighbour for Christ.

This is related to the second purpose. The good works which we do reflect that goodness of God. When we render good works, our neighbours see that there is something different about us, something which they respect and admire. We become a living testimony of the gospel, or as Christ says, we become lights on a hill (cf. Matthew 5:14-16). Some who see the light of the gospel reflected in the way we live may be drawn to the light, which is Jesus Christ.

In the second question of this LD, the Catechism asks *"Can those be saved who do not turn to God from their ungrateful and impenitent walk of life?"* What the Catechism is asking is, *"If we have been saved without doing any good works, can we say that good works are not necessary?"* The

answer of the Catechism is a resounding **"No!"** Good works are not necessary **for** salvation, but they are a necessary **fruit of** salvation.

Does God redeem us from the guilt of our sin, and not redeem us from the corruption of sin? Does God justify, and not sanctify? Can we be in Christ, and not have Christ in us? To each of these the answer is **"No!"** Those who are delivered from the guilt of sin are also delivered from the corruption of sin. Those who are justified are also sanctified. Those who by faith are grafted into Christ will find that Christ comes to dwell in them.

Those whom God redeems He also renews, so that they will certainly and unfailingly bear good fruit. There can be no faith without fruit, for faith is living.

Now, if there is no fruit, there is no faith. And if there is no faith, there is no salvation. Therefore Scripture says, *"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."* (Matthew 7:19) *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father in heaven"* (Matthew 7:21). Also read the parable in Luke 13:6-9 of the owner of the vineyard and the non-productive vine, or the description of those who are admitted into the new Jerusalem (Revelation 22:14-15, cf. Ephesians 5:5).

No man is saved because of good works, but no man is saved without good works.



Questions:

1. With what does this third and last section of the Catechism deal? What two things are dealt with in this third section of the Catechism? What does this show us about the way we show our thankfulness?
2. What is a wrong motive for keeping the commandments of God? What is the basis for our salvation?
3. What did Rome teach with respect to good works? Why is this wrong?
4. From what two things are we released when we are saved by Christ? Will we ever be delivered from the one and not from the other? Why not?
5. According to Paul, for what purpose did Christ redeem us (cf. Titus 2:14 and Ephesians 2:10)?
6. Fill in the blanks: We are not saved _____ good works, but _____ good works. Good works are not the _____ of our salvation, but rather, they are the _____ of our salvation.
7. For what four reasons do we do good works?
8. What did Christ say in John 14:21? What, then, motivates us to do good works?
9. When we do good works, who should receive the glory for them? Why?
10. How do our good works glorify God?
11. How do good works assure us of our faith?
12. How can our good works win our neighbour for Christ?
13. Fill in the blanks: Good works are not necessary _____ salvation, but they are a necessary _____ of salvation. Explain what this means.
14. Fill in the blanks: No man is saved _____ good works; but no man is saved _____ good works.
15. What did Christ say in Matthew 7:19? Retell the parable of Luke 13:6-9.

LORD'S DAY 33

87. Q. What is the true repentance or conversion of man?

A. It is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new.¹

1. **Romans 6:1-11** What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ 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.

1 Corinthians 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you

truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Ephesians 4:22-24 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, ²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Colossians 3:5-10 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. ⁸ But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰ and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

89. Q. What is the dying of the old nature?

A. It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it.¹

1. **Psalm 51:3-4** For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight; That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart; These, O God, You will not despise.

Joel 2:12-13 "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." ¹³ So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the

LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.

Romans 8:12-13 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors; not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

90. Q. What is the coming to life of the new nature?
- A. It is a heartfelt joy in God through Christ,¹ and a love and delight to live according to the will of God I in all good works.²

1. **Psalm 51:8** Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice.

Psalm 51:12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

2. **Romans 6:10-11** 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.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

91. Q. But what are good works?
- A. Only those which are done out of true faith,¹ in accordance with the law of God,² and to His glory,³ and not those based on our own opinion or on precepts of men.⁴

1. **John 15:5** I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Romans 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

2. **Leviticus 18:4** 'You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God.

1 Samuel 15:22 Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

3. **1 Corinthians 10:31** Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

4. **Deuteronomy 12:32** Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

Isaiah 29:13 Therefore the LORD said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,"

Ezekiel 20:18-19 But I said to their children in the wilderness, "Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols. ¹⁹ I am the LORD your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them;"

Matthew 15:7-9 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ⁸ "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. ⁹ And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

In the previous Lord's Day, we saw that we who are redeemed by the blood of Christ are also renewed by the Holy Spirit so that we can do good works. The Holy Spirit works within us, turning us to God and away from sin.

This "*turning to God and away from sin*" is called **conversion** or **repentance**. As in the English, the original languages of both the Old and New Testament also use two words. One indicates an inward change of heart, while the other indicates an outward change in conduct. From this we learn that repentance means more than merely saying "*I'm sorry.*" It also means breaking with sin.

Conversion or repentance does not arise out of man himself. It is not man who turns to God on his own. Man is dead in sin. When man fell into sin, his heart became totally corrupt. He is unable to turn back to God. Of himself he would never seek God (cf. Romans 3:11). There are none who can come to Christ unless they are drawn by the Father (cf. John 6:44). No one can confess Jesus is Christ except through the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3). Just as the Ethiopian cannot change his skin or the leopard its spots, neither can we change our evil nature and do good (cf. Jeremiah 13:23). Conversion or repentance is a gift of God. He turns us. He changes us. He gives us a new heart. Conversion or repentance is the result of being regenerated by the Spirit of God.

For this reason we do not appreciate the emphasis which is sometimes placed upon **our** acceptance of Christ as Saviour, as if this is our accomplishment. We do well to remember the words of our Lord, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you...*" (John 15:16), and the words of John, "*We love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19).

The Catechism speaks about **the** conversion or repentance of man. This indicates that there is but **one** conversion and repentance. We can speak about the one conversion of man because it is the work of God. And whatever God begins, He also continues and finally completes. He will not leave His

work unfinished. Neither will He let His work be frustrated or come to nought.

That we speak about one conversion does not mean that conversion is simply a thing of the past, a one time act. Conversion or repentance is a **process**, a life-long process. We are *being* converted. We repent *daily*. The Catechism teaches us this with the use of the participles (-ing words): conversion is "*the **dying** of the old nature*" and "*the **coming** to life of the new nature.*" Only after this life do we enjoy the completion of conversion. Only then will we be able to live totally free from sin.

That the Holy Spirit begins to work in us does not mean that we are left without any responsibility. Indeed, we must work out our salvation (Philippians 2:12). We cannot do that of ourselves. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is at work in us. We must not resist the work of the Holy Spirit but allow Him to further His regenerating work in us, and pray ardently for this.

It is a sad fact, but we do not always allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we resist His work and we fall into sin. This happens daily in our lives, with the result that all our works are defiled with sin. Because of this we must repent daily. Every day again we must confess our sin and ask for forgiveness. We must turn from our sin and pray for strength to resist temptation. Thus we see that while we speak about **the** true conversion, we refer to it not as a one-time act, but as a process.

In this process of conversion there is also **progress**. Scripture often speaks about growing in spiritual maturity, in faith and in faithfulness. This, too, is reflected in the Catechism when we read about hating sin and fleeing from sin "**more and more,**" and when Scripture speaks about the growth of love for God and our neighbour (cf. Philippians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 4:1, 10). Just as in marriage love for the other grows stronger with the passing years, so also in the covenant of grace our love for God and for our neighbour grows stronger. If our love for God increases, that means that our hatred for sin also

increases. We want to please God, and we shun and flee from everything that would displease Him.

Although we cannot arrive at perfection in this life, and though even the holiest men have but a small beginning of this new obedience, yet with Paul we say that we press on to make perfection our own (cf. Philippians 3:12). Those who are truly converted never have the attitude, *"I've arrived! I've made it!"* We are never satisfied with the state that we are in. We are not content with the way that we live our lives. We don't say, *"Well, I know that I'm not perfect, but then nobody is. So I suppose everything's all right with the way that I live."* That is not the way the truly converted will talk. As long as they see any shortcoming in their lives (and they will see this!) they will hate this imperfection, and strive for flawless obedience.

How does the Holy Spirit work this conversion? It is not different from the working of faith. In Lord's Day 25 we learned that the Holy Spirit uses instruments in working and strengthening faith, namely, the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments. In like manner, the conversion or repentance of man is worked through these same instruments.

In various charismatic "churches" we hear of instantaneous and rather dramatic conversions. We approach this with a measure of caution. For while the Holy Spirit is able to do anything, we learn from the Scriptures that faith is worked through the preaching of the gospel. While we do not doubt that the Spirit is capable of performing instant conversions, yet we maintain the scriptural viewpoint that a knowledge of Scripture is essential (Romans 10:14-17).

Furthermore, while Scripture displays some dramatic conversions, such as Saul on the way to Damascus, and the Philippian jailer, nowhere do we read that these are the norm for the Christian. We should not lose sight that the Spirit worked then in ways that He does not work now. Think only of the many miracles performed, and

the exceeding rapid growth of the Church after Pentecost.

Still further to this, we should not lose sight of the covenant, to which the children of believers belong. From their youth they are trained in the knowledge of the Lord. Already in their youngest years they display child-like faith in what their parents teach them, a faith that grows stronger as these children grow in knowledge and maturity. They experience nothing dramatic. They cannot rightly recall the day that the Holy Spirit began to work faith in them, and did not even perceive its steady growth in them.

While faith may be worked quickly and dramatically in some, it is often worked slowly and quietly among the covenant youth. It is not important *when* we were converted. What is important is *that* we are converted.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, those who are truly converted will produce good works. And it is only the converted who can do good works. The unconverted cannot. You might question this. Is it not true that even the unconverted and unbelieving often do good deeds? When you visit a hospital, you will find unbelieving people volunteering their time to help in the care of the sick. You will find unconverted people giving large donations to charitable organisations. You will find unconverted people who will not use foul language and who live very *clean* lives. Are these not good works?

No, they are not. Why not? Because there is something lacking in their deeds. For a work to be considered "*good*" by God, there are three requirements:

1. The **SOURCE** of good works. "*Without faith it is impossible to please [God]*" Hebrews 11:6). With these words we learn that God does not only consider the outward actions of man, but also the motivation for his actions. Do we not do the same? Two men might both buy flowers for their wives. But if the heart of one man is not right towards his wife, and if he does not love her or trust her, the outward action of giving flowers will

hardly be acceptable to her. Both men have done the same, but the source of their actions differed. And the source of our actions is important to us.

So it is with God also. Though a believer and an unbeliever outwardly do the same act, there is a great difference in the source of their action. There is a great difference in their hearts. The child of God does it out of faith in God. He believes that God requires this of Him, and that this pleases God. He does it out of love for God, and out of thanksgiving to God. This makes all the difference to God when judging the deeds we do, whether they are good or evil.

2. The **NORM** for good works. Good works must be done according to God's law. That is the *norm* or *standard*. God's law determines or regulates what is good and what is evil.

Many people today speak about love as the norm that determines what is good or evil. This is called *situation ethics*. Take, for example, a young woman who is about to die because of some wasting disease. She becomes increasingly helpless. Some would argue that out of love for that person we should allow her to die in dignity. We should allow her to receive a lethal injection so that she dies immediately without having to suffer any more. To use a phrase often applied to animals: we should put her out of her misery as we do animals which have been seriously injured.

But God's law teaches us that no one can give or take life except God alone. To put the woman to death by an injection may be given a nice name (euthanasia), but God calls it murder. Love towards fellow man is not the norm that determines what is good and lawful. Neither is man the one who determines right and wrong. God is the Law-giver. He determines right and wrong. He dictates in His Word what is good and acceptable.

Let it be understood that the law is not opposed to love. Indeed, love is

the fulfilling of the law. But let us remember that the first and greatest commandment is that we love the Lord our God. This love must be shown by keeping God's commandments (John 14:15). Our love for God and our obedience to His law determines what we do out of love for our neighbour.

The **PURPOSE** of good works. Good works must have the aim to glorify God. Whatever man does for self-glory or self-honour or for self-gain is not good in the eyes of God. Only those works are deemed good which have the glory of God as their aim and purpose. If we seek glory for ourselves in doing them, then Christ says that we have our reward already from men, and we will not be rewarded again by God (Matt 6:1). But if we seek to please God alone, then God will regard these works as good, and He will reward them.



Questions:

1. What is conversion or repentance? What do the two words in the original languages teach us about conversion and repentance?
2. From where does conversion *not* arise? Why?
3. From where does conversion arise? What do John 15:16 and 1 John 4:19 say respectively?
4. How many conversions will a man experience in his life? Why?
5. Is conversion something that only happens once in the past? How does the Catechism teach us this?
6. If conversion is a work of God, does that leave us without any responsibility? If not, what must we do?
7. Are those who are converted free from sin? What must we do daily, then?
8. What do we mean when we say that there is progress in conversion? How does the Catechism teach us this?
9. Will we ever be able to reach perfection in this life? What must we confess about our obedience?
10. Will the converted ever be satisfied with the state that they are in? What will the converted do with respect to their remaining imperfection?
11. How does the Holy Spirit work this conversion?
12. What should be our attitude towards instantaneous conversions? What Scriptural viewpoint should we maintain?
13. Do we read of any dramatic conversions in Scripture? Should we accept them as the norm (that is, as being normal) for us today?
14. How is conversion often worked among the covenant youth?
15. What is not important about conversion? What is important?
16. What will the converted produce? Does it appear that the unconverted produce the same? Why are they not what they appear to be?
17. What must be the source of good works if they are to truly be considered good in the eyes of God? What does Hebrews 11:6 say?
18. What does the word "*norm*" mean? What must be the norm for good works? What cannot be the norm? Give an example of how the ungodly sometimes apply the wrong norm to do what they think is good? What does John 14:15 say?
19. What must be the purpose of good works? What does Matthew 6:1 say? What does this teach us?

The Ten Words LORD'S DAY 34

92. Q. What is the law of the LORD?

- A. God spoke all these words, saying:
 I am the LORD your God,
 who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
 out of the house of bondage.
1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
 2. You shall not make for yourself a graven image,
 or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,
 or that is in the earth beneath,
 or that is in the water under the earth;
 you shall not bow down to them or serve them;
 for I the LORD your God am a jealous God,
 visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children
 to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me,
 but showing steadfast love to thousands of
 those who love Me and keep My commandments.
 3. You shall not take the Name of the LORD
 your God in vain;
 for the LORD will not hold him guiltless
 who takes His Name in vain.
 4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
 Six days you shall labour, and do all your work;
 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God;
 in it you shall not do any work,
 you, or your son, or your daughter,
 your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle,
 or the sojourner who is within your gates;
 for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth,
 the sea, and all that is in them,
 and rested the seventh day;
 therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath
 day and hallowed it.
 5. Honour your father and your mother,
*that your days may be long
 in the land which the LORD your God gives you.*
 6. *You shall not kill.*
 7. *You shall not commit adultery.*
 8. *You shall not steal.*
 9. *You shall not bear false witness against
 your neighbour.*
 10. *You shall not covet your neighbour's
 house;
 you shall not covet your neighbour's
 wife,
 or his manservant, or his maidservant,
 or his ox, or his ass,
 or anything that is your neighbour's.¹*

1. Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

93. Q. How are these commandments divided?

A. Into two parts.
The first
teaches us how to live in relation to God;
the second,
what duties we owe our neighbour.¹

1. **Matthew 22:37-40** Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”³⁸ This is the first and great commandment.³⁹ And the second

is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

94. Q. What does the LORD require in the first commandment?

A. That for the sake of my very salvation
I avoid and flee
all idolatry,¹ witchcraft, superstition,²
and prayer to saints or to other creatures.³ Further,
that I rightly come to know
the only true God,⁴
trust in Him alone,⁵
submit to Him
with all humility⁶ and patience,⁷
expect all good from Him only,⁸
and love,⁹ fear,¹⁰ and honour Him¹¹
with all my heart.
In short,
that I forsake all creatures
rather than do the least thing
against His will.¹²

1. **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 10:5-14 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.⁶ Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.⁷ And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” ...¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. ...¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

2. **Leviticus 19:31** Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 18:9-12 When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations.¹⁰ There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,¹¹ or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.¹² For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you.

3. **Matthew 4:10** Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”

Revelation 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Revelation 22:8-9 Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.⁹ Then he said to me,

- “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”
4. **John 17:3** And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
 5. **Jeremiah 17:5** Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD.”
Jeremiah 17:7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD.
 6. **1 Peter 5:5-6** Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” ⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,
 7. **Romans 5:3-4** And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope.
1 Corinthians 10:10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.
Philippians 2:14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,
Colossians 1:11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;
Hebrews 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:
 8. **Psalm 104:27-28** These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. ²⁸ What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good.
Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.
James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.
 9. **Deuteronomy 6:5** You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (cf. Matthew 22:37)
 10. **Deuteronomy 6:2** that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.
Psalms 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.
Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.
1 Peter 1:17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;
 11. **Deuteronomy 6:13** You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name (cf. Mt 4:10).
Deuteronomy 10:20 You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name.
 12. **Matthew 5:29-30** If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.
Matthew 10:37-39 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸ And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.
- Acts 5:29** But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

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|-----|----|---|
| 95. | Q. | What is idolatry? |
| | A. | Idolatry is having or inventing something in which to put our trust instead of, or in addition to, the only true God who has revealed Himself in His Word. ¹ |

1. **1 Chronicles 16:26** For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

Galatians 4:8-9 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.⁹ But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?

Ephesians 5:5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Philippians 3:19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who set their mind on earthly things.



We confessed in Lord's Day 33 that God regards only those works good which are done according to the norm of God's law. From this statement follows the question: *What is the law of God?*

In the Hebrew Bible, the first five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) are together called "*the law*" (Torah). This is the law in its broader sense, and it is in this sense that the Belgic Confession uses it in Article 25. The laws in the five books of Moses are divided into three types:³

1. Civil laws
2. Ceremonial laws
3. Covenantal laws

1. In the Old Testament, there were **civil laws** that were used in governing the people. For example, there were laws for restoring that which was stolen. There were laws for criminals, etc. Although these can and should be used as a guideline for us in the New Testament, we cannot apply them directly. For in the Old Testament Israel was a theocratic nation, which means that both the church and the state were identical. The church leaders were also the civil leaders. In the New Testament, however, church and state are separate.

2. In the Old Testament, there were also **ceremonial laws** that involved matters of worship. There were laws regarding holy days, sacrifices, cleanness and uncleanness. These also are no longer in force because they were intended to direct people's attention to the coming

Christ. However, Christ has come and the "shadows" have passed away. We should still study them and learn from them, for they give us a better understanding of Who Christ is and what He has done.

3. In the Old Testament, there were also **covenantal laws**. They are laws which apply for life in the covenant. These laws are summarised in the Ten Commandments as we find them in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and they are worked out further in Scripture. These laws do not pass away. They remain in force always. Just as God's covenant with man is eternal, so these covenant laws will apply eternally. They are the standard by which we must govern our daily life at all times. And when we examine our lives in the light of these commandments, we realise that we fall grievously short of that obedience which Christ requires of us.

When we speak of *the law* in this Lord's Day, we are referring not to the civil law, nor to the ceremonial law, but to the covenantal law, the Ten Commandments which form the pattern for our Christian walk of life.

The covenantal laws differ from the civil and the ceremonial laws in that the covenant laws are **creation ordinances**. This means that they were instituted at the time of creation. From the very beginning man was required to serve God only and in the manner which God set forth. Man was created to glorify God's name. Man was to rest on the Sabbath day. Adam had to obey God, and Adam's children would have had to obey their parents. There was to be no

3. These were discussed already in Lord's Day 2, but are repeated here for completeness.

killing, no unfaithfulness, and no stealing. All that is required in God's covenant law was required of man at creation, which is what we mean when we refer to the covenant laws as creation ordinances.

Because the Ten Commandments are creation ordinances, they have always and will always be in force. There has never been, nor will there be a time when these laws are not binding upon man. On the new earth these laws will be written perfectly on the hearts of everyone, and everyone will always keep all of them perfectly.

We should understand that the Ten Commandments are actually a reflection of God's being, His virtues and His actions.

1. We may not have any other gods before Yahweh for the simple fact that there is no other god besides Him.
2. Because God is altogether different from anything in creation, He forbids us to make creaturely images of Him.
3. Because He is great and glorious, He demands that we praise and glorify His Name.
4. Because God rested on the Sabbath, we are to do the same.
5. God is sovereign and appoints men in authority over us. Therefore we must submit to these men as to God.
6. Because God is love (1 John 4:8), we are commanded to love one another.

In like manner we could go through all the commandments. The Ten Commandments reflect God.

Now we are called to reflect God. We are appointed as His image-bearers. The way in which we reflect God is by walking in accordance with God's law.

In God's plan of redemption the law receives a two-fold purpose. This two-fold purpose is reflected in the fact that the Catechism mentions the law in the first section of the Catechism which deals with our sin and misery, and again in the third section which deals with our thankfulness. This shows the two purposes of the law:

1. ***The law convicts us of our sin and brings us to Christ.*** Our corruption

or depravity is so deep that we are not even aware of it. We do not know about our sins or our sinful nature unless God reveals it to us. He does this by means of the law. The law serves as a mirror. When we look into it, we see how dirty we have become because of our sin. Thus in Lord's Day 2, we read, "*From where do you know your sin and misery? From the law of God.*" Only when we look in the mirror of God's law and see how dirty we are will we see the need for cleansing with the blood of Jesus Christ, and with His Spirit. Thus the law of God also serves to bring us to Christ.

2. ***The law teaches us how to live in thankfulness.*** The law of God also serves as a pattern for the Christian walk of life. Those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ will also be recreated in God's image through the Spirit of Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18, Colossians 3:10). We have discussed this already when we spoke of the covenantal law. Those who have been restored in the covenant of grace must now work out their salvation (cf. Philippians 2:12). They must live a life of love and thankfulness to God. And Christ says that if a man loves Him, then he will keep His commandments (John 14:15,23).

It is sometimes thought that the law no longer has any purpose in the life of the New Testament Christian. The law of God is thought to belong to the Old Testament, and thus its use is outdated. In place of the law has come love. This is not true. Love was demanded in the Old Testament just as much as in the New Testament (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). Likewise, obedience to the law is still required in the New Testament just as it was in the Old Testament (cf. Matthew 5:19).

Neither should we make a false distinction between the law as the means to salvation in the old dispensation, and faith (or grace) as the means to salvation in the new. Scripture clearly shows us that Abraham did not earn his salvation through the law. He was saved by grace through faith (cf. Romans 4:9-16). Both in the Old and the

New Testament salvation comes only by grace through faith.

But what do statements like Deuteronomy 30:16 mean? "... *I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.*" It sounds as though obedience earns salvation. Let us keep in mind, however, what stands at the very beginning of the Ten Commandments. There we read the statement, "*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*" **God first gives salvation, and then comes with the commandments.** If we live according to these commands, then we will be kept in our salvation. If we obey, we will keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude vs 20) and in the love of Jesus Christ (John 15:10). But if we refuse to obey we will not be blessed, but cursed!

We are saved by grace, and yet God demands obedience to His law. But doesn't Paul say that we are under grace, and not under the law? (cf. Romans 6:14) Doesn't Paul teach us that we are freed from the law? (cf. Galatians 5:1) What Paul means is that we are freed from the law as a means to salvation. He does not mean that we are freed from the law as a means of showing love to God and living a sanctified life.

In both letters Paul had to fight against those who thought they could earn their salvation through their obedience to the law. Paul said they could not. If they wished to be saved through the law, then they would need to render perfect obedience, which they could not do. Man cannot render such obedience as would earn him salvation. But he should not despair. For in the covenant of grace God has provided us with a Mediator who has taken our place, and rendered the obedience which God's law requires but which no man could render.

We who by true faith accept Christ as our Saviour receive the perfect obedience (righteousness) of Christ as our own (cf.

LD 23). We are granted eternal life on the basis of Christ's perfect work and not on the basis of our works of the law. Thus we are freed from the law as a means to salvation. But we are still bound to the law as the norm by which we show thankfulness to God and live sanctified lives.

Thus we conclude that in the Old Testament men were saved only through faith. Both law and grace stood side by side in the Old Testament. It is the same in the New Testament; the law and grace stand side by side.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Having discussed the purpose of the Ten Commandments, we now may turn to an explanation of the commandments themselves. The first commandment is, "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*"

When the commandment speaks about "*other gods*," it does not thereby imply that there really are other gods. Sometimes the Bible speaks about "*gods*," but only because men declare them to be such. Scripture clearly shows us that what men call gods, are really no gods at all. Though men make gods of wood, stone or silver, they exist only in the minds of those who believe in them. (cf. Isaiah 44:9ff.) This is idolatry.

The literal transgression against this commandment is not so common any more, at least not in the nations where this writer has lived and lives, such as Canada, America and Australia. And neither is there much temptation for us to transgress this commandment literally. While there may be some Asians who worship *Budda*, or Moslems who worship *Allah*, I don't think that many of us would be inclined to go after these false gods. But that does not mean that transgression against this commandment is minimal. To the contrary, sin against this commandment is common, even among us as Reformed people. To understand this, we need to understand what idolatry is. *Idolatry is having something or someone else in which to place our trust besides God.*

What does it mean to *trust*? Many different definitions could be given for this word.

For our purposes we will define trust as *reliance*. To **trust** someone is to **rely** on him, to **depend** on him. Now it should be evident to us that men place their trust, their reliance, their dependence upon many things. ***Whatever things man relies upon and in which he trusts are modern gods.***

One very common form of idolatry is placing our trust in money. Take the example which Scripture gives of the rich fool (cf. Luke 12:16-21). He gathered in so much that he had to build new barns. Once these were full he thought that his future was secure. He relied upon his earthly goods. He depended upon his money. But then he died. He could not take his money with him. And even if he could, his money would have done him no good.

Depending upon money (or Mammon, as this god is called) is still very common. People think that as long as they have a good, secure job with a good pension, then their future is wrapped up tight. Then they think they are secure. Lotteries have also become very popular. The desire to win a large sum of money has as basis the desire for security. Men rely on money. That is idolatry.

Another example of idolatry is the matter of insurance. To have insurance is a matter of good stewardship. But we must not place our trust in our insurance policies. If any Christian falls for that weakness, it would be better for him not to have it. Let him learn to place his trust in the Lord.

The Catechism also speaks about witchcraft. We might think that witchcraft is something that belongs to the 17th and 18th century. But statistics show that witchcraft is becoming ever more popular again. There are those who call themselves "*white witches*." They believe that there are powers in the universe which can be harnessed and controlled by means of magical potions and phrases. They use these potions and phrases in order to govern their well-being and their destiny.

There are also those who practice "*black magic*", which is an alliance with the powers of Satan. Combined with this is the worship

of the devil. Those who seek to control such powers themselves are controlled by Satan. Instead of mastering these powers, these powers master them.

The Catechism speaks about superstition. This is the belief that certain objects or numbers or actions have power that can bring us good fortune or ill fortune. There is the belief that a rabbit's foot or a four-leafed clover will bring good luck. There is a belief that the formation of the stars can affect us for good or ill. There is the belief that a broken mirror, or a black cat, or the number 13 bring ill fortune. Thus many fear Friday the 13th, and many apartment buildings lack a 13th floor.

The Catechism also mentions the prayers to saints. In the church of Rome, the thought was propagated that various saints have received power over various areas of life. There was a saint to give travelling mercies (Saint Christopher). There was a patron saint of children (Saint Nicholas). There was a patron saint of lovers (Saint Valentine). You would pray to these saints when you needed help in the area over which they had received power. But the Bible teaches us that we are to seek help in no other name than God through Jesus Christ.

The first commandment says that we are to trust wholly in God and in no other. We must depend completely and only upon Him. We must expect all good from Him alone.

There are a number of things which we must know before we can really trust God.

1. **God's omnipotence.** Unless we believe that God has complete power, we cannot have complete trust in him. We must believe that He is able to do anything that He wants to do. We must believe that nothing is impossible with Him.
2. **God's love.** If we have any doubts about God's love for us, we will not fully trust Him. For we do not trust one who hates us. We do not trust our enemies. We trust our friends who love us. Now God has revealed His great love for us in His Son. Surely if God has given us such a

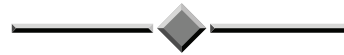
great gift as His only begotten and well-beloved Son, He will surely give us all that we need (Romans 8:32).

3. God's faithfulness. There are times when we must experience sorrow and pain. That might come through illness, poverty, persecution, or death. In all these things we must believe that God is still our faithful Father. He has not forgotten us, neither has He forsaken His promises to us. In all tribulation we must believe that God is working for our good and our salvation (Romans 8:28).

4. God's wisdom. The Catechism says we must submit to Him. In times of difficulties, we must not rebel against God. We must not fight against Him. We must not act so proudly as though we understand better than He what is good for us. For we are very limited in our

understanding. We often wonder what good can come from difficult situations. But we may be assured that good will come. In this too, we must not complain, but show patience, waiting for God's time for good to come. I think Psalm 131 shows beautifully that child-like trust which we must have:

LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever.



Questions:

1. What does the term "law" refer to in the Hebrew Bible? What three types of laws are there in this part of the Hebrew Bible?
2. What does the term "law" mean in this Lord's Day? What do these laws form?
3. How do the civil and ceremonial laws differ from the covenantal laws? Explain your answer thoroughly with examples.
4. When were the covenantal laws first instituted? How long will they be in force?
5. What do the covenantal laws reflect? Give some examples.
6. Who are we to reflect? How are we to do this?
7. What is the first purpose of the law? How does it fulfil this purpose?
8. What is the second purpose of the law?
9. How is this two-fold purpose of the law shown in the Catechism?
10. Is it correct to say that in the Old Testament God demanded obedience to the law, while in the New Testament God demands love? Explain why or why not.
11. Is it correct to say that the law was the means to salvation in the Old Testament, while faith is the means to salvation in the New Testament? Explain why or why not.
12. What did God say just before giving the Ten Commandments? What does this imply?
13. What does Paul mean when he says (cf. Romans 6:14 & Galatians 5:1) that we are not under the law or that we are free from the law? In what sense are we free from the law? In what sense are we still bound to the law?

First Commandment

14. When the commandment forbids us to have "*other gods*," does it imply that there are other gods? Why does it speak about other gods, then?
15. Is literal transgression against this commandment still common in our nation? Why (not)?
16. What is idolatry? What does it mean to trust?
17. What are our modern gods? Give an example of a common form of idolatry in society today. What name do we give this god?
18. What do those who call themselves "white witches" believe?
19. What do those who practice "black magic" want to do? What really happens?
20. What is superstition? Give some examples.
21. What did Rome teach concerning the saints?
22. What four things must we know about God before we can really trust Him? Explain why this knowledge is necessary for trust.

LORD'S DAY 35

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

A. We are not to make an image of God in any way,¹ nor to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in His Word.²

1. **Deuteronomy 4:15-19** Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, ¹⁶ lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷ the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸ the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth. ¹⁹ And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.

Isaiah 40:18-25 To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? ¹⁹ The workman molds an image, the goldsmith overspreads it with gold, and the silversmith casts silver chains. ²⁰ Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot; he seeks for himself a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter. ²¹ Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²² It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. ²³ He brings the prince to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless. ²⁴ Scarcely shall they be planted, scarcely shall they be sown, scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, when He will also blow on them, and they will wither, and the whirlwind will take them away like stubble. ²⁵ To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal? says the Holy One.

Acts 17:29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

Romans 1:23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Leviticus 10:1-7 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. ² So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. ³ And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.'" "So Aaron held his peace. ⁴ And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp." ⁵ So they went near and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had said. ⁶ And Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people. But let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD has kindled. ⁷ "You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

Deuteronomy 12:30 take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise."

1 Samuel 15:22-23 Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king."

Matthew 15:9 And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

John 4:23-24 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

97. Q. May we then not make any image at all?
- A. God cannot and may not be visibly portrayed in any way. Creatures may be portrayed, but God forbids us to make or have any images of them in order to worship them or to serve God through them.¹

1. **Exodus 34:13-14** But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images ¹⁴ (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God),

Exodus 34:17 You shall make no molded gods for yourselves.

Numbers 33:52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places;

2 Kings 18:4-5 He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. ⁵ He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him.

Isaiah 40:25 "To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One.

98. Q. But may images not be tolerated in the churches as "books for the laity"?
- A. No, for we should not be wiser than God. He wants His people to be taught not by means of dumb images ¹ but by the living preaching of His Word.²

1. **Jeremiah 10:8** But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish; A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine.

Habakkuk 2:18-20 What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, the molded image, a teacher of lies, that the maker of its mold should trust in it, to make mute idols? ¹⁹ Woe to him who says to wood, 'Awake!' To silent stone, 'Arise! It shall teach!' Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, yet in it there is no breath at all. ²⁰ But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.

2. **Romans 10:14-15** How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a

preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;

Reading the first and the second commandments, you might ask what difference exists between them, for they appear to deal with the same thing. The first commandment reads, "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*" The second reads, "*You shall not make a graven image of any likeness...*"

Even though they appear to be the same, they deal with two different subjects. The first commandment deals with the matter of having something or someone besides God in which or whom to place our trust. The second commandment deals with the way we worship the only true God whom we trust. We could put it this way:

1st commandment: **whom** we worship

2nd commandment: **how** we worship Him

As an example of transgression against the second commandment, think of the time when the people of Israel made a golden calf. They had no intention of worshipping a different God. They intended to worship Yahweh who brought them out of Egypt. They did not sin against the first commandment, but rather, against the second. They wanted to worship Yahweh by means of a visible image.

Basic to this second commandment is the temptation for man to make for himself some kind of representation of God. Man desires to see with his eyes what he worships with his heart. Yet God says, "*You shall not make any kind of image of Me.*"

Why not? There are at least three reasons:

1. In the first place, God cannot be visibly portrayed. God is spirit (cf. John 4:24). It is impossible to make a physical representation of a spiritual being.
2. In the second place, any representation we might make of God would be a creaturely representation. Man is not able to conceive of anything except what he has seen in creation. We have all seen pictures of Martians or other outer-space creatures. Though they look different, they are really composed of things that are found on earth. A Martian will have some appendage with which to move, whether feet, wings or wheels. He will have some appendage to hold things and organs with which to see and hear. It is impossible for man to think of something which he has not seen on earth. Whatever man draws, he draws from that which he sees in creation.

If we were to make an image of God, we would be using creaturely characteristics to portray the Creator. If we portray God by things of this earth, then we bring God down from His glorious position to our own level and make Him

in our own likeness (cf. Romans 1:23). That is an insult to God's greatness and does injustice to God's greatness and uniqueness (cf. Psalm 106:20). Therefore God cannot be visibly portrayed.

3. In the third place, pagans made images of their gods as a means to manipulate (to control) their gods. They believed that they could channel the power of their gods into their lives by making and having images of their gods. Their view of images could be compared to our use of extension cords. When a power outlet is too far away from us, we use an extension cord to bring the power to us. So the pagans believed that an image was a channel through which the power of their distant gods could be channelled to them when and where they needed it.

Israel once adopted similar pagan thoughts and committed idolatry with the ark of the covenant. In 1 Samuel 4, we read that the Israelites fought against the Philistines, but they were defeated. They decided to bring the ark of the covenant with them into the second battle. (The ark of the covenant was a symbol of the presence of God who sat enthroned on the mercy seat of the ark). By bringing the ark into battle, they thought that they could force God to be in their midst and thereby win the battle. It is this manipulation that God forbids in the second commandment. Man must never suppose that he can control God.

The negative aspect of this commandment **forbids man *to make* images of God**. But the positive aspect of this commandment **demand man *to be* the image of God**. When God created man He created man in His own image (cf. LD 3). This means that man was given in measure some of the qualities of God. For example, man was created holy and righteous. Man was also created with wisdom and knowledge of God, of himself and of creation. These *static* qualities we have are to be used in the *dynamic* reflection of God in daily life. Man was created *after* (*static*) God's image

in order that he might *bear (dynamic)* God's image in everything that he did.

This bearing of God's image was and remains the **original worship**⁴ that God requires of man. This deserves some emphasis. In Paradise, the worship of God did not consist of going to church, reading the Bible or listening to a sermon. There were no churches and there was no Bible, and there was no need for anyone to preach to man about God for he knew God intimately. The original manner of worship consisted of reflecting God's image by doing the things that God would do in the way that He would do it.

Since the fall into sin, man is not able of himself to bear God's image. For this reason God instituted **formal worship** which consists of reading and preaching the Word of God, of praying to God with word and song. God instituted formal worship as a means to promote original worship.

Formal worship takes place in three different forms:⁵

1. congregational worship
2. family worship
3. personal worship

We would like to take some time to discuss the worship of God in church. The 'events' which take place in the church service, such as the singing, the reading, the prayers, the sermon, are referred to as **liturgy**. Different churches will have different liturgies. The Bible does not prescribe a definite order of worship as we find it in the Book of Praise. (pg. 581ff.) Yet the pattern which we follow is very Scriptural.

The liturgy which we follow may be called "**covenantal liturgy**." In a covenant, there are two parties who interact with each other. Similarly there are two parties who interact with each other in the church

service. There is God, and there is the congregation.

This covenantal liturgy is based upon the temple worship of the old dispensation. The priest acted as a sort of "go-between" or mediator. He either offered a sacrifice to God on behalf of the people, or he blessed the people on behalf of God. He either prayed to God on behalf of the people, or he read to them from the law of God, and thus spoke on God's behalf. (See *Diagram A* at the end of this lesson.)

The church service in the new dispensation is patterned after the temple service in the old dispensation. The minister (or the elder) who leads the service is only a "spokesman" for one of the two parties. He speaks either on God's behalf or on behalf of the congregation. For example, when the minister prays, he speaks on our behalf to God. When he reads the Ten Commandments, he speaks on God's behalf to us.

If the church service is to remain covenantal, the minister should not speak to the congregation as an individual person or on behalf of consistory. Neither should there be a dialogue between the minister and the congregation. If the people speak, they must only address God. If the minister speaks, he must either speak on behalf of the congregation or on behalf of God.⁶

There are some parts in the church service where the minister is not needed as a "spokesman" (see *Diagram C* below). If the congregation is able to address God itself in an orderly manner, then there is no need for the minister to be its spokesman.

Some questions that are frequently asked follow:

1. *What should we think about the minister speaking to the congregation on a personal level, for example, by extending greetings or words of welcome from the pulpit?* We have patterned our church

4. cf. J. van Bruggen, Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism, Inheritance Publications, 1991, pg. 224, who uses the distinction True and Formal worship.

5. Ibid.

6. Some announcements during the church service are necessary, such as when and what song to sing, when to take the offerings and what they are for, when to pray and for what to pray. These announcements should remain brief and simple.

service after the temple service, which was covenantal. It is a meeting of God with His people, where God speaks to them, and they speak to God. It seems best, then, for the minister to omit such personal greetings to the congregation, and to let the service begin with a greeting or salutation from God (eg. *"Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"*).

2. *Concerning the announcements, does the minister speak to the congregation on God's behalf, or does he speak to God on behalf of the congregation?*

Neither! The announcements are spoken on behalf of the consistory. It is for this reason that the announcements are best read **before** the church service begins, that is, before the salutation from the Lord, or at the end of the church service, that is, **after** the blessing of the Lord. Or perhaps still better would be to have these announcements written in the bulletin or liturgy sheet.

3. *Should others besides the minister participate in leading the church service?* While we enjoy variation, the emphasis must always be placed on **what is said**, not on **who says it**. We do not come to church to be entertained. There is sufficient room for variation from one service to the next. We have 150 Psalms to sing from, and 65 Hymns. We also have the 66 books of Holy Scripture which provide countless windows through which to view the age-old gospel from various angles.

On the other hand, elders were appointed to read the Scriptures in the church service years ago. There can be no principle objection to reintroducing this custom into the churches. One thing should be clear, however: change should only occur for the greater edification of the congregation.

4. *Should we allow choirs to sing during the church service?* We mentioned already that the church service is a meeting between God and His people. Whenever the congregation can address God in an orderly manner without the

need for a spokesman or mediator, it should be entitled and encouraged to do so. Since the whole congregation is able to sing, this privilege should never be taken away from it. The congregation should itself respond to God's Word or blessing in joyful song. Choirs are a beautiful way to praise God's Name, but there are more than 160 hours left in each week to do so.

5. *Why does an elder shake the minister's hand?* This custom seems to have arisen in the Netherlands at a time when the government forced consistories to allow ministers on to the pulpit whom the consistory did not approve. When these ministers entered the pulpit, they would not receive a handshake from the consistory. However, ministers who were approved received the hand of the consistory, indicating approval to the congregation.

In what way would this serve the congregation? It may well have been a warning to the congregation. If a minister did not receive the approval of the consistory, the congregation would be warned to listen more critically to what was being said, and test it more closely on Scripture.

Although we do not live in the same historical setting, the custom has lived on. Today, it is usually taken to mean that the man who enters the pulpit has received the authority to preach from the consistory who must watch over the proclamation of God's Word. It is difficult to explain the handshake at the end of the service. Since we do not live in the same historical setting, some churches have discontinued the handshake.

Diagram A

Temple Service in the Old Dispensation

Holy of Holies GOD	Holy Place PRIESTS	Outer Court CONGREGATION
	← ←	Prayer
The Law of God	→ →	
	← ←	Sacrifices
Blessing	→ →	

Diagram B

Church Service in the New Dispensation

GOD	MINISTERS	CONGREGATION
The Law of God	→ →	
	← ←	Prayer
Preaching	→ →	
	← ←	Confession (if read)
Blessing	→ →	

Diagram C

GOD	CONGREGATION
	← Singing
	← Offering of Gifts
	← Confession (if sung)

Questions:

1. What is the difference between the first and second commandment?
2. Give an illustration of a transgression of the second commandment.
3. What is the first reason God forbids us to make a representation of Him? What does John 4:24 say?
4. What is the second reason God forbids us to make a representation of Him?
5. Why did pagans use images of their gods in worship? Did Israel ever adopt this pagan thought? If so, when?
6. What is the negative aspect of the second commandment? What is the positive aspect?
7. What does it mean that man was created in the image of God? Why did God create man with these “static” qualities?
8. How could we describe the “original worship” that God required of man?
9. What is “formal worship”? Why was it instituted?
10. List the three different forms of “formal worship.”
11. What is “*liturgy*”? What do we mean by “*covenantal liturgy*”? Upon what is covenantal liturgy based?
12. What is the role of the minister (or elder) who leads the church service? What should he not do during the church service? How should the service begin?

13. When making announcements (such as home-visits, meeting dates, etc) does the minister speak to the congregation on God's behalf, or does he speak to God on behalf of the congregation? Where are the announcements best placed?
14. May others participate in leading the worship service besides the minister?
15. Should choirs sing during the church service?
16. Why does an elder shake the minister's hand? Is the handshake a necessary part of the church service?

LORD'S DAY 36

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|-----|----|--|
| 99. | Q. | What is required in the third commandment? |
| | A. | <p>We are not to blaspheme or to abuse the Name of God by cursing,¹ perjury,² or unnecessary oaths,³ nor to share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders.⁴</p> <p>Rather, we must use the holy Name of God only with fear and reverence,⁵ so that we may rightly confess Him,⁶ call upon Him,⁷ and praise Him in all our words and works.⁸</p> |

1. **Leviticus 24:10-17** Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought each other in the camp. ¹¹ And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed; and so they brought him to Moses. (His mother's name was Shelomith the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.) ¹² Then they put him in custody, that the mind of the LORD might be shown to them. ¹³ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁴ "Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. ¹⁵ "Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. ¹⁶ 'And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death. ¹⁷ 'Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death.
2. **Leviticus 19:12** And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.
3. **Matthew 5:37** But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No." For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.
4. **Leviticus 5:1** If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter; if he does not tell it, he bears guilt.

Proverbs 29:24 Whoever is a partner with a thief hates his own life; He swears to tell the truth, but reveals nothing.
5. **Psalms 99:1-5** The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; let the earth be moved! ² The LORD is great in Zion, and He is high above all the peoples. ³ Let them

praise Your great and awesome name; He is holy. ⁴ The King's strength also loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. ⁵ Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His footstool; He is holy.

Isaiah 45:23 I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.

Jeremiah 4:2 And you shall swear, 'The LORD lives,' in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory."

6. **Matthew 10:32-33** Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Romans 10:9-10 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

7. **Psalms 50:14-15** Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. ¹⁵ Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

1 Timothy 2:8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;

8. **Romans 2:24** For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

1 Timothy 6:1 Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.

100. Q. Is the blaspheming of God's Name by swearing and cursing such a grievous sin that God is angry also with those who do not prevent and forbid it as much as they can?
- A. Certainly,¹ for no sin is greater or provokes God's wrath more than the blaspheming of His Name. That is why He commanded it to be punished with death.²

1. **Leviticus 5:1** If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter; if he does not tell it, he bears guilt.

2. **Leviticus 24:16** And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death.



Why does God do the things that He does? What motivates God to action? One thing, and one thing alone - **the glory of His Name!**

When God created the world, He did so in order that man might glorify His Name for creation's majesty and beauty. And so man does. "*O LORD our LORD how excellent is Your Name in all the earth*" (Psalm 8:1). "*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork*" (Psalm 19:1).

Why did God elect some fallen men to salvation? "*That He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2:7). Why did God reprobate others and leave them in their sin and condemnation? In order "*to show His wrath and to make His power known*" (cf. Romans 9:22-23).

Why does God forgive us our iniquity? "*For Your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great*" (Psalm 25:11).

Why does God grant us the guidance of the Holy Spirit? "*For Your name's sake, lead me and guide me*" (cf. Psalm 31:3).

God's dealings with His people are all motivated by the glory of His Name (cf. Exodus 9:16, 1 Samuel 12:22, Psalm 106:8, Isaiah 48:11, Ezekiel 36:22). Because God

does everything for the glory of His Name, He commands that we must do everything with the same goal in mind. Our greatest goal in life must be to glorify God.

As with all the commandments, there is both the negative and the positive side. We are not to abuse God's Name. Just the opposite, we are to glorify His Name. Following the Catechism, let us deal first with the negative aspect of this commandment.

The commandment says that *we shall not take the Name of the LORD in vain*. Someone might say, "*What's in a name?*" Very much! Boys and girls will sometimes tease their friends by writing their friend's initials in a heart together with the initials of a girl or boy who was not very popular. That is sure to arouse anger! For a person is identified with his initials or by his name.

That is also true with the Name of God. God is identified with His Name. To abuse God's Name is to abuse God. To treat God's Name as though it was not sacred or special is the same thing as treating God as though He were not holy and greatly to be distinguished in honour.

What does it mean to use God's Name in vain? The word "*vain*" means "*to be empty, deceiving, worthless.*" What God

forbids, then, is that we ever use His Name as though it were an empty expression.

The Catechism speaks about **blasphemy**, which is using God's Name in an irreverent or contemptible manner, or to speak about God in a disparaging manner. The ungodly are often guilty of this sin, for they use God's Name as if it were an exclamation mark (!), in order to punctuate their speech. It is not uncommon to hear the ungodly say "O God!" when they are surprised or startled, and to say "Jesus Christ!" when they are angry. They are not using God's Name with fear and reverence.

We as Christians must never use God's Name in that manner. Neither should we use an expression which is very similar, such as "Gee whiz!" (which is a slight alteration of *Jesus*), or "Oh gad!" (which is derived from the expression, *Oh God!*) We should avoid using descriptions of God, such as Holy, as is used in such expressions as "Holy Smoke!" or "Holy cow!" or even "Hokey Pete!" In using such expressions, we come just shy of actually abusing God's Name. Using such expressions makes it appear as though we would like to say the real words behind it, but don't quite dare. Such phrases are not fitting for us as Christians.

Besides such blasphemy or abuse of God's Name, the Catechism mentions **cursing**. To curse is to invoke God to do evil to another. "Go to hell" or "God damn you" are examples of cursing, wherein we call upon God to condemn someone to hell. The LORD is displeased with such cursing, for it does not give glory to Him. God has revealed Himself as a God of mercy and grace. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). We are to reflect God's mercy and grace in all our dealings with our neighbour and to do good even to our enemies.

The Catechism also speaks about **perjury**. A man who has sworn an oath in court and then proceeds to lie, is guilty of perjury. Another means of abusing God's Name is by swearing unnecessary oaths. The Jews

of Christ's day were guilty of this. The Lord rebuked them for this (cf. Matthew 5:33ff.), telling them not to swear at all, but simply to let their *yes* be *yes* and their *no* be *no*. We will deal with this further in the next Lord's Day.

Besides the **conscious abuse** of God's Name (which we spoke of above) there can also be an **unconscious abuse** of God's Name. If we bow our heads to pray, but pray without really thinking, or pray without praying from the heart, then we have used God's Name in vain. We have heaped up empty phrases without real meaning and commitment. The same can happen when we pay little attention to the portion of Scripture that we are reading. In these ways we as Christians can become guilty of using the Lord's Name in vain.

The Catechism mentions yet another way that we can be guilty of sinning against this commandment. We can become guilty of taking God's Name in vain simply by being **silent bystanders**. If we hear someone use God's Name in vain, then we are duty bound to uphold God's honour. If a young man heard another speak ill of his father, he would surely make a suitable comment to uphold the honour and reputation of his father. He would not allow his father's name to be dragged through the mud. So it must be with the children of God. We too must uphold the Name of our God when others use His Name in vain. If we do not, then we become guilty of this sin.

There is still another way that God's Name can be blasphemed by us. That is when we **cause others to blaspheme** the Name of God because of what they hear us say or see us do. In His grace, God calls us by His Name. We are baptised into God's Name. We are called God's children. We are called Christians. We bear that Name everywhere we go and in everything we do. When we go to work, or to school, or out for some fun and recreation, we bear God's Name.

Now it is possible, and sad to say is often the case, that in our actions we as Christians cause God's Name to be blasphemed. In his letter to the Romans (2:24), Paul wrote to those who claimed to be God's people,

*"The Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles **because of you**"* (cf. Isaiah 52:5, Ezekiel 36:22).

If we sell a car which we advertised to be in good condition when we knew that the car was ready for the scrap yard, then God's Name is blasphemed. For don't children reflect their parents who instruct them? If God's children are underhanded, what does this say about God?

If the children of a Christian school do something in the neighbourhood which the community disapproves, then they give others reason to blaspheme God's Name. If we go to work, and are lazy and waste time for which we are paid, then we give others reason to blaspheme God's Name. If we go out for some fun, and then get drunk, then we give others reason to blaspheme God's Name.

We bear God's Name everywhere we go, and we bear His Name in everything we do. Our actions should be such that our neighbour gives praise to God. We should do good so that God's Name is glorified through us!

Since it is so easy to abuse God's name, perhaps it would be better not to use God's name at all! That is what the Jews thought. To prevent abuse of God's Name, they refused to utter His Name, "*Yahweh*".⁷ But that is not what the Lord commands here. There is a saying, "*Use God's Name, but not in vain.*" We may and must use God's Name. That is the **positive demand** of this commandment.

The Catechism teaches us that we must use the Name of God with **fear and reverence**. The reference to fear does not mean that we should be afraid to *use* God's Name, but we should certainly be afraid to *abuse* it. We should remember the latter

part of this commandment which reads, "*for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain.*"

Further, we are to use it with reverence. We are to use God's Name with a sense of awe, with a sense that we are dealing with something worthy of much honour and respect.

We are called to **confess** God's Name uprightly. We are to do this in Church, as we do each Sunday when the Creed is recited. But our confession must go beyond ourselves in Church. Christ said that we are to confess Him before all men, and woe to us if we do not! If we refuse to confess Christ before men, He will refuse to confess us before the Father (cf. Matthew 10:32f).

Notice also that the Catechism says that we are to confess His Name **uprightly**. There are many sects who confess their faith in God. But they do not confess God uprightly. Instead, they propagate their own ideas concerning God which are a lie. God has no pleasure in such unfaithful confessions.

This requirement of confessing God before men is coupled with praising God. Confession is directed towards men, while praise is directed to God. The Catechism mentions that this praise is to be given in the form of words and works. We are to praise God through our prayers and singing. (This shows us that our prayers should not only consist of petitions, but also of praise!) And we are to praise God in all the things that we do. If we love God and are truly thankful for what He does for us, we will walk in obedience to His commandments, and thereby glorify Him.

7. The Old Testament Scriptures were originally written without vowels. The Name "Yahweh" simply read "Y H W H". Whenever a Jew would come upon this Name, he would read the name "Adonay" instead, which means Lord. Later, when vowels were added to the Old Testament Scriptures to make it easier for future generations to read, the Jews did not put the actual vowels under YHWH. Since they were accustomed to reading "Adonay" instead of "Yahweh", they decided to insert the vowels of the name "Adonay" into the consonants of the Name "YHWH". This gave the new name "Ya-Ho-WaH". Since the sounds and letters of the Hebrew do not correspond exactly like our sounds and letters, this was written as JeHo-VaH. It is due to this practice of the Jews in the past that some churches today read God's Name as "Jehovah". We use the Name "Yah-weh", since we believe this is closest to the actual Hebrew Name of God.

In most Bible translations, the Name YHWH is rendered as LORD (all uppercase letters), whereas the other Name of God "Adonay" is rendered as Lord.

Questions

1. What motivates God to do the things that He does? What should be our motivation in doing the things we do?
2. What is in a name? What does this mean with respect to God's Name?
3. What does *vain* mean? What does it mean to use God's Name in vain?
4. What is blasphemy? Give two examples.
5. Besides using God's Name in vain, what else must we avoid? Why?
6. What is cursing? Why does cursing displease the Lord?
7. What is perjury? What other abuse of oaths must we avoid?
8. Besides conscious abuse of God's Name, what other type of abuse must we avoid? Give some examples of this.
9. What is a silent bystander? What must we do if we hear others blaspheme the Name of God?
10. Explain how we can cause others to blaspheme God's Name. How must we act?
11. Would it be better not to use God's Name at all rather than risk blaspheming His Name? Who thought this? Were they correct?
12. What is meant when we say that we must use God's Name with fear? Why?
13. What is meant when we say that we must use God's Name with reverence?
14. When and where do we confess God's Name? What warning did Christ give us in this matter?
15. Why does the Catechism say that we must confess God's Name uprightly?
16. What else must we do besides confess God's Name? How do we do this?

LORD'S DAY 37

101. Q. But may we swear an oath by the Name of God in a godly manner?

A. Yes, when the government demands it of its subjects, or when necessity requires it, in order to maintain and promote fidelity and truth, to God's glory and for our neighbour's good. Such oath-taking is based on God's Word ¹ and was therefore rightly used by saints in the Old and the New Testament.²

1. **Deuteronomy 6:13** You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name.

Deuteronomy 10:20 You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name.

Jeremiah 4:1-2 "If you will return, O Israel," says the LORD, "Return to Me; and if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, then you shall not be moved. ² And you shall swear, 'The LORD lives,' in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory."

Hebrews 6:16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.

2. **Genesis 21:24** And Abraham said, "I will swear."

Genesis 31:53 "The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.

Joshua 9:15 So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.

1 Samuel 24:22 So David swore to Saul. And Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

1 Kings 1:29-30 And the king took an oath and said, "As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life from every distress, ³⁰ 'just as I swore to you by the LORD God of Israel, saying, 'Assuredly Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,' so I certainly will do this day.'"

Romans 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,

2 Corinthians 1:23 Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.

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

A. No.
A lawful oath is a calling upon God, who alone knows the heart, to bear witness to the truth, and to punish me if I swear falsely.¹
No creature is worthy of such honour.²

1. **Romans 9:1** I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,

2 Corinthians 1:23 Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.

2. **Matthew 5:34-37** But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵ nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Nor shall you swear by your head, because you

cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No." For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Matthew 23:16-22 Woe to you, blind guides, who say, "Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it." ¹⁷ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? ¹⁸ And, "Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it." ¹⁹ Fools and

blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? ²⁰ "Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. ²¹ He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. ²² And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him

who sits on it.

James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.



In Lord's Day 37, we deal with the matter of the oath. What is an oath? "A lawful oath," says the Catechism, "is a calling upon God to bear witness to the truth and to punish me if I swear falsely." This definition is very close to 1 Kings 8:31. "When anyone ... comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this temple, then hear in heaven, and act, and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked, bringing his way on his head, and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness."

One might wonder why a whole Lord's Day is dedicated to this topic. The answer lies in the historical setting of the Catechism. During the time of the Reformation, the Anabaptists declared that the oath was forbidden. They based this upon the words of Christ: "But I say to you, do not swear at all" (Matthew 5:34) and on the words of the apostle James, "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your 'Yes,' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No,' lest you fall into judgment" (James 5:12).

The Catechism, however, refutes this error of the Anabaptists in Q&A 101. It is lawful to swear an oath. This is evident from the fact that it was used rightly by the saints in the Old and the New Testament.

- Abraham swore to Abimelech (Genesis 21:23).
- Jacob swore to Laban (Genesis 21:53).
- Joshua and the leaders of Israel swore an oath with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:15).
- The Lord commanded Israel that they were to swear oaths in His Name: "You shall fear the LORD your God and serve

Him, and shall take oaths in His name (Deuteronomy 6:13).

- David swore to Saul (1 Samuel 24:22).
- Swearing oaths before God was expected in the administration of justice (cf. 1 Kings 8:31).

If there is any doubt remaining concerning the lawful use of the oath, then reference can be made to God who also used the oath when seeking to confirm the promise made with Abraham (cf. Genesis 22:16, Hebrews 6:13). God also swore an oath to David (cf. Psalm 110:4).

How, then, do we understand the words of Christ and James who both said, "Do not swear at all" (cf. Matthew 5:34, James 5:12)? Both Christ and James spoke out against the use of frivolous oaths which were used to confirm promises, but which were soon broken. When someone abuses something sacred, he loses the right to use it.

There was also another error concerning the oath in the time of the Reformation. Oaths were sworn in the name of saints. The saints were called upon rather than God to witness to the truth. This is the error which is refuted in Q&A 102.

The saints cannot serve as witnesses or as judges. They could not serve as witnesses because they cannot see what occurs in secret, neither can they know the thoughts which lie hidden in the depth of man's heart. God alone knows the secrets of a man's heart. "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" (Jeremiah 23:24). "Would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart" (Psalm 44:21; cf. also

2 Chronicles 6:30; Psalm 139:23; Jeremiah 12:3; Matthew 6:4,6,18; Acts 15:8).

When we swear by the Name of the LORD, we honour Him in two ways:

1. In the first place we acknowledge that God is the God of truth. God is ever faithful, and He hates the lie (cf. Zechariah 8:17). When we use His name to confirm the truth, we acknowledge God's truthfulness and faithfulness.
2. In the second place we acknowledge that God is the *omniscient witness*, who sees all and knows all. We also acknowledge Him as the *omnipotent, all-powerful Judge* of heaven and earth, before whom all men are tried, and by whom men are punished if they swear falsely.

Swearing an oath has **two purposes**:

1. In the first place, **an oath should stimulate men to speak the truth.** When an oath is sworn in the Name of the Lord, God is invoked as the final Judge. He is not like earthly judges, who are unable to look into a man's heart and determine whether he tells the truth. He is not like earthly judges, who sometimes err in their judgment, and may declare a guilty man innocent. God is not like earthly judges who may be forced to allow a man to go free because of insufficient evidence to convict, even though a "gut feeling" tells him that a man is guilty. An earthly judge has limitations, and men may try to evade the truth. But calling upon God should stimulate men to speak the truth, for God is both all-knowing and all-powerful. He is able to judge and to punish where earthly judges are beset with limitations. Furthermore, He will punish with greater wrath those who invoke Him as judge, yet proceed to give false testimony.
2. In the second place, **an oath serves to confirm what we say to others.** It is a fearful thing to swear by the Name of the LORD and then to lie. To do so is to bring God's wrath upon oneself. Thus if someone hears us swear an oath, he

may be more sure that what we say is the truth.

It stands to reason that the oath will hardly serve its intended purpose if those who swear by God's Name do not believe in Him. Nevertheless, it is good if our secular law courts demand the swearing of an oath, for a denial of God does not negate the fact that He truly does see in secret, and will punish those who give false testimony. Even though a man may deny God, yet he increases his condemnation if he swears by God's Name and then commits perjury.

The question then arises as to when an oath should be sworn. The Catechism begins by saying that oaths may be sworn when this is demanded by a judge (or magistrate), or when some other government official requires this. This is the most frequent use of the oath. In court, you are asked to swear an oath with one hand raised (and perhaps another hand upon the Bible). With this oath, you promise to tell the truth, invoking God to punish you if you swear falsely by telling a lie.

The Catechism also acknowledges that there may be other times when oaths are necessary. There may be times when our words will not be received except by means of an oath. If something very important is at stake, we may swear an oath and thereby ask God to bear witness to the truth. An oath may also be necessary when we make a very important promise. Then the oath will confirm the promise which we have made. When we make profession of our faith we make a promise before God and many witnesses. When we marry, we do the same. When we enter into an office in the church (minister, elder or deacon) we also make a promise *before God and His holy church*. These oaths of promise are called *vows*.

Oaths should not really be necessary. They are only necessary because man's nature has become corrupt through sin and because man loves the lie more than the truth.

He who uses the oath the most is often the one who is known to lie frequently. If your friend is accustomed to speaking the truth,

you have no reason to doubt him. But if he always twists the truth, and lies or breaks his promises, he will need to use oaths more and more because you trust him less and less. It is the liar who most often must say, "*I swear...!*"

Through the grace of God we are recreated as new creatures after God's image. As God is true and faithful, our speech should

be characterised by truth and faithfulness. It follows, then, that Christians should seldom need to use the oath. Our "Yes" or "No" should have the same character as an oath. We should always speak the truth before all men.



Questions

1. What is an oath?
2. Who taught that all oaths are forbidden? On what Scriptural basis did they teach this?
3. How is it evident to us that it is lawful to swear an oath? Give three of the most clear examples which prove that it is lawful to swear an oath.
4. How do we interpret the words of Matthew 5:34 and James 5:12, "*Do not swear at all*"?
5. What other error existed in the time of the Reformation concerning the oath? Why was this wrong?
6. In what two ways do we honour God when we swear by His Name?
7. What are the two purposes in swearing an oath?
8. Will an oath serve its intended person if the one who swears it does not believe in God? Should we still use it? Why (not)?
9. When is the oath chiefly used? At what other occasions is it used? What name do we give an oath of promise?
10. Why are oaths necessary? Who needs to use the oath most often? Should we as Christians need to use an oath very often?

LORD'S DAY 38

103. Q. What does God require in the fourth commandment?

A. First,
that the ministry of the gospel and the schools
be maintained ¹
and that, especially on the day of rest,
I diligently attend the church of God ²
to hear God's Word,³
to use the sacraments,⁴
to call publicly upon the LORD,⁵
and to give Christian offerings for the poor.⁶
Second,
that all the days of my life
I rest from my evil works,
let the LORD work in me through His Holy
Spirit,
and so begin in this life
the eternal sabbath.⁷

1. **Deuteronomy 6:4-9** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:20-25 When your son asks you in time to come, saying, "What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?" ²¹ then you shall say to your son: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; ²² and the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. ²³ Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. ²⁴ And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. ²⁵ "Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these." commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.'

1 Corinthians 9:13-14 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? ¹⁴ Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

2 Timothy 3:13-17 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you;

2. **Deuteronomy 12:5-12** But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. ⁶ There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. ⁷ And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. ⁸ You shall not at all do as we are doing here today; every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; ⁹ for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁰ But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, ¹¹ then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your

hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD. ¹² And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you.

Psalms 40:9-10 I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness IN the great assembly; indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O LORD, You Yourself know. ¹⁰ I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly.

Psalms 68:26 Bless God in the congregations, the Lord, from the fountain of Israel.

Acts 2:42-47 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

3. **Romans 10:14-17** How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" ¹⁷ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1 Corinthians 14:26-33 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. ³⁰ But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. ³² And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. ³³ For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

1 Timothy 4:13 Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

4. **1 Corinthians 11:23-24** For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

5. **1 Corinthians 11:23-24** For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

6. **Psalms 50:14** Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.

1 Corinthians 16:2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

2 Corinthians 8 and 9

7. **Isaiah 66:23** "And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD.

Hebrews 4:9-11 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. ¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

At one time many calendars that were printed had some dates which were printed in red, whereas all the others were in black. The *red* dates were special days, often holidays. Originally the word *holiday* meant a *holy-day*, a special day when all work would stop and Christians went to church to commemorate

some important event in salvation history, such as Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day and Pentecost. On these calendars there was at least one *red* day every week. This weekly *holy-day* is called Sunday.

There is a tendency to put more emphasis upon the special days such as Christmas or

Good Friday because they only come once a year. But really the sabbath is the most important of all. It is so important that we celebrate it, not just once, but 52 times per year!

The name *Sunday* is derived from Latin *dies solis*, “the day of the sun”, the name of a pagan Roman holiday. The Romans worshiped the sun, as did the ancient Greeks who worshiped Helios and Apollo. We would much rather call this day the *Lord's day*, as we find it in Revelation 1:10.

The wording of the fourth commandment says that we must honour the *seventh* day. Yet we celebrate the Lord's day on *the first* day of the week. Although we do not find an express command to change the sabbath from the seventh day to the first day, this change is recorded in the Scriptures.

- Christ rose on the first day of the week (cf. John 20:1)
- Christ appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week (cf. John 20:19-26) when they were gathered in the upper room where they had earlier celebrated the Passover with Christ.
- Christ poured out His Spirit on Pentecost, which was also the first day of the week.
- The believers held their worship services on the first day of the week (cf. Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:1,2).

In light of this, the early Christian church considered the first day of the week to be the *Lord's day*. Sunday was officially consecrated to the service of God by the first Christian emperor, Constantine (c. AD 274-337).

Already in Paradise God set apart one day as a sabbath. We read of that in Genesis 2:2-3: “*And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work....*” (To hallow means to set something apart for a special purpose.)

What are we to understand by the words “*God rested*”? For us, rest is required in order to refresh and recharge ourselves who have become weary from work or play. But our omnipotent God was not exhausted by all His work. Our God never slumbers nor sleeps. To *rest* simply means that God came to an end of His creative work. *Rest* means a cessation from labour. God could now enter into the joy of His completed work.

We could compare God's rest to a man who has worked for a number of days on a certain project. Then comes the day when he has completed it. He is very happy with his workmanship. He pours himself a cup of coffee, pulls up a chair and sits for a while admiring his handiwork. He enters into the joy of his completed work. So God, having finished His creative work, entered into the joy of His completed work.

Man was to follow God's example in this. God placed man on the earth to keep and cultivate the garden. God had hidden great potential in creation. There were many things which man could discover and develop. To this end, God commanded man to work six days to fulfil his cultural mandate. But like God, man was to cease from his labour on seventh day. God gave man a day on which to sit back, reflect, admire and enjoy God's handiwork, as well as the work which he himself was able to accomplish.

When man fell into sin he no longer deserved to live in the joy of God's completed work. Because of his sin man was expelled from that glorious Garden of Eden, and was sentenced to an existence in a cursed creation where all his toil would produce only thorns and thistles. Fallen man was expelled from God's rest.

After the fall into sin the fourth commandment took on added dimensions. God promised that He would graciously forgive sin and redeem man from its power. God promised that He would graciously remove the curse which lay upon both man and this world. Thus one day Paradise will be restored in all its beauty and holiness. God's chosen people will be admitted into

God's rest. They will enter into the joy of God's completed work of recreation. This is the eternal sabbath, which our weekly sabbath foreshadows.

God typified man's readmittance into His rest with the entrance of Israel into Canaan, a land which dimly reflected the glory of Eden. Canaan was only a type of the rest that awaits the final and glorious coming of Christ. When Christ returns creation will be restored to its former glory.

Thus, prior to the fall into sin, the sabbath had only one purpose, namely, to give man time to reflect, admire and enjoy God's **creative work**. After the fall the sabbath was given another purpose: to give man time to reflect, admire and rejoice in God's **re-creative** work which He accomplishes through Christ Jesus.

This two-fold purpose of the sabbath is reflected in the two different "versions" of the fourth commandment. Exodus 20 mentions the creative work of God as the ground for keeping the sabbath, while Deuteronomy 5 mentions God's re-creative work as the ground for keeping the sabbath. (The redemption from slavery and misery in Egypt foreshadowed the redemption from the dominion and misery of sin.)

In Exodus 20 the purpose of the sabbath is to remember God's creative work .	In Deuteronomy 5 the purpose of the sabbath is to remember God's re-creative work .
<i>For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.</i>	<i>And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.</i>

The reason for keeping the sabbath indicates that the sabbath is a festive day, a day of celebration, a day on which to reflect upon and give thanks to God for His two-fold work. Too often the joy of this

day was lost, and God's people looked upon it as a restriction, as a constraint which prevented them from pursuing their own desires (cf. Isaiah 58:13, Amos 8:5ff.).

Questions are often asked whether we are allowed to do certain things on the Lord's day or not, such as cycling, playing soccer, swimming and the like. If we ask these questions (which we all do), we approach the Lord's day from the wrong angle. If we remember that it is the **Lord's** day, then we will ask, "*What things can we do to remember the work of our LORD?*"

We said earlier that one purpose of the sabbath is to reflect upon the creative work of God. A nice stroll through the park or along the beach or some other part of God's creation serves to remind us of God's creative handiwork. There is one thing we should keep in mind, however. Our enjoyment of God's creation should never be so intense that it demands our full attention, so that we fail to reflect upon the Creator while enjoying His creation.

We should also realise that we can only see the wonders of our Creator's work through the eyes of faith. This faith is worked in us through the preaching of the gospel.

Furthermore, the preaching of the gospel will itself describe the wonder's of God's creative work. In Scripture we hear of the power of God manifested in creation in times past. In Scripture we hear of God's providence in control of nature. Thus we can reflect upon God's creative work also in the preaching of the gospel.

In order to honour the second purpose for the sabbath (to reflect upon God's re-creative work) we are to diligently attend the church of God. For it is through the preaching that God's re-creative work is proclaimed to us.

We do not go to church only to remember the re-creative work which God has done. We also go to church because it is there that God causes his re-creative work to progress in us. We should realise that God's re-creative work in us is not yet complete. Our old sinful nature is being put to death daily, and we are still being renewed

more and more in God's image through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. It is through the preaching of the gospel that the Spirit causes His re-creative work in us to progress.

By nature, most of us enjoy the outdoors more than sitting in church. If you give children a choice, they would rather stroll through the park than listen to a sermon. We should never allow our natural inclinations to dominate us, nor fulfil the first purpose of the sabbath at the expense of the second purpose. As we read in Scripture, we must not neglect to come together on the Lord's day (cf. Hebrews 10:25).

The Catechism emphasises the importance of the preaching of God's Word when it mentions first that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained. The preaching of the gospel must be maintained. That means in the first place that the consistory and the congregation must see to it that the gospel is preached.

To this end, men must be trained and set apart for this work. As Reformed people who stress the importance of solid, scriptural preaching, we provide ministers with such support that they are able to devote their full time and attention to the work of ministering the Word. We also establish theological colleges where our young men can be adequately trained for this work. (The "schools" of which the Catechism speaks originally referred to the theological colleges where men are trained to proclaim the gospel, since Christian day schools were unknown at that time.)

In order to maintain the ministry of the gospel and the schools, God commands that we contribute our *'first fruits'* to Him (cf. Exodus 23:19) By speaking of these contributions as *"first fruits"* the Lord taught His people that it was of first importance to maintain the ministry of the Word. This matter was to be given priority above all else. This is still true today. First we give to the Lord, and then we purchase our groceries and pay our mortgage. We never need to worry that we will not have enough, for Christ promised, *"Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things*

[which you need such as food and clothing] will be given to you" (cf. Matthew 6:23-33).

Besides the church there are other kingdom causes which need our support and should receive a high priority, such as Christian day schools for our children, care for the aged and frail, or those who are mentally or physically handicapped.

The Catechism also stresses the requirement of assembling together on the Lord's day. It mentions some of the things which should take place in the church service. In the first place, we come to hear God's Word. The preaching of God's Word is important, for the Spirit uses the preaching as the instrument through which faith is worked (cf. LD 25, Romans 10:14,17). There is, therefore, no way that we can be saved except through the hearing of God's Word.

Even after we come to faith we need to go to church. For our faith is not as strong as it ought to be. The words which Christ applied to His disciples applies to us as well. We are people of *"little faith"* (cf. Matthew 6:30, 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). Through the preaching of the gospel and the use of the sacraments our faith is strengthened.

The Catechism also mentions that we assemble together for prayer. We pray individually at home or as a family, but we also come together as congregation to pray communally. We praise God in songs of prayer, extolling His greatness and His goodness. We also lay the needs of the congregation before the throne of God.

When we assemble together, we bring our offerings for the poor. In this we follow the example set down by Paul, who encouraged the congregation of Corinth to take offerings on the Lord's day for the needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:2).

The question is sometimes asked, *"How often do we have to come together?"* Some people do not really like to go to church. They would rather spend the day on the beach in the summer, or on the ski-hills in the winter, or doing odd jobs around the home. They will quickly point out that

nowhere does Scripture tell us that we must go to church twice on the Lord's day. But when we ask the question, "*How often do we have to go to Church on Sunday?*" we start from the wrong point. For it is not how many times we *have* to go to church, but how many times we *may* go to church.

If we go to church because we have to, then we might as well not go at all. The Lord has no pleasure in those who trample into His house with heavy hearts (cf. Isaiah 1:12). He desires that we serve Him from a thankful heart, not by compulsion (cf. Psalm 50). Going to church should be a joy, a desire. Think of Psalm 84 and 122, where the psalmist says that he was glad to go to the house of the LORD. He would rather spend one day in the courts of the LORD than a thousand days outside.

Besides the *weekly sabbath* about which we have been speaking, the Catechism speaks of a *daily sabbath*. We mentioned already that Israel was to keep the sabbath day in commemoration of their rest which they received when they were freed from bondage to Pharaoh and from the misery of Egypt. This foreshadowed our redemption through Christ, by which we are given rest

from the tyranny of the devil and from the slavery of sin. Now this *rest* which we receive through Christ is to be enjoyed every day of our lives. Every day again we are to rest from our evil works. Everyday we are to let the Holy Spirit work in us so that more and more we might be set free from the sin which still clings to us.

In addition to the daily sabbath there is also the *eternal sabbath*. In this life we labour with a nature that is imperfect, and we groan in a creation which still lies under the curse of sin. We are not completely free from sin and misery in this life. We do not enjoy perfect rest yet. That is still something that we await. When Christ returns He will usher in this glorious rest. We shall be changed, together with the creation. The corruptible will become incorruptible, and all that is imperfect will become perfect. Then we will enjoy perfect rest from sin and misery. Then we will have entered into the promised land of rest which still awaits us (cf. Hebrews 4:8-11).



Questions

1. Which is the most important "*holy day*" in the year? How is that made evident?
2. From where is the name *Sunday* derived? Is there a better name for this day?
3. The fourth commandment says that the *seventh* day is the day of rest, but we rest on the *first* day of the week. Defend our practice on the basis of Scripture.
4. What does it mean that God "hallowed" the sabbath day? When did God hallow it?
5. With what could we compare God's rest on the first sabbath day? What does it mean, then, that God rested?
6. What task was man to accomplish in creation? Why did God give man the day of rest?
7. What effect did sin have upon man's enjoyment of the sabbath? What effect does grace have upon man's enjoyment of the sabbath?
8. How did God typify man's readmittance into His rest to the people of Israel?
9. After the fall into sin, the sabbath gained a second purpose. Explain both the original as well as the added purpose of the sabbath. Where do we read of these two purposes?
10. What should we remember about the sabbath when asking ourselves what we may or may not do?
11. How may we reflect upon God's creative work on the sabbath? What should we keep in mind in this respect?
12. What do we need in order to see the wonders of God's creative work? Where does this come from?
13. Besides creation itself, where can we reflect upon God's creative work? Explain in what way this is done.
14. The second purpose of the sabbath can best be fulfilled by attending church. Why?
15. Is God's re-creative work in us finished already? Describe what is happening? Why is it important, then, that we go to church faithfully?

16. What does it mean that the ministry of the gospel must be maintained? When the Catechism speaks of maintaining the *schools*, what is meant?
17. In order to maintain the ministry and the schools, what are we required to do? How did the Lord teach His people that maintaining the ministry was of first importance? Must the ministry of the gospel still have priority on our budget today? Will we ever come short on the other things that we need if we give priority to maintaining the ministry?
18. Why is the preaching so important? Do we only need to sit under the preaching until we come to faith?
19. What are some of the other things we do in the church service?
20. What is wrong with asking, "*How many times do we have to go to church?*"
21. Besides the weekly sabbath, we also must keep a daily sabbath and look forward to an eternal sabbath. What do we rest from on the weekly sabbath? What do we rest from on the daily sabbath? What do we rest from in the eternal sabbath?

LORD'S DAY 39

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|------|----|---|
| 104. | Q. | What does God require in the fifth commandment? |
| | A. | <p>That I show all honour, love, and faithfulness to my father and mother and to all those in authority over me, submit myself with due obedience to their good instruction and discipline,¹ and also have patience with their weaknesses and shortcomings,² since it is God's will to govern us by their hand.³</p> |

1. **Exodus 21:17** And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

Proverbs 1:8 My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother;

Proverbs 4:1 Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding;

Romans 13:1-2 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Ephesians 5:21-22 submitting to one another in the fear of God. ²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Ephesians 6:1-9 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: ³ that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." ⁴ And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. ⁵ Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. ⁹ And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Colossians 3:18-25 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²² Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. ²³ And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,

²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

Colossians 4:1 Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

2. **Proverbs 20:20** Whoever curses his father or his mother, His lamp will be put out in deep darkness.

Proverbs 23:22 Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old.

1 Peter 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

3. **Matthew 22:21** They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Romans 13:1-8 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴ For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. ⁵ Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷ Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. ⁸ Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Ephesians 6:1-9 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: ³ "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." ⁴ And you,

fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. ⁵ Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. ⁹ And you,

masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Colossians 3:18-21 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.



With the fifth commandment we begin to deal with the second part of the law of God. In Lord's Day 34 we learned that the law of God is divided into two parts: Commandments 1-4 "*teach us how we are to live in relation to God;*" Commandments 5-10 "*teach us what duties we owe our neighbour.*"

When we deal with the commandments, we should be aware that they deal with more than just the matter which is literally mentioned in the commandment. The Lord has taken one aspect from a whole sphere (usually the most basic aspect of that sphere) and makes that one aspect represent the whole sphere. I refer to this as the *umbrella effect*.

Authority

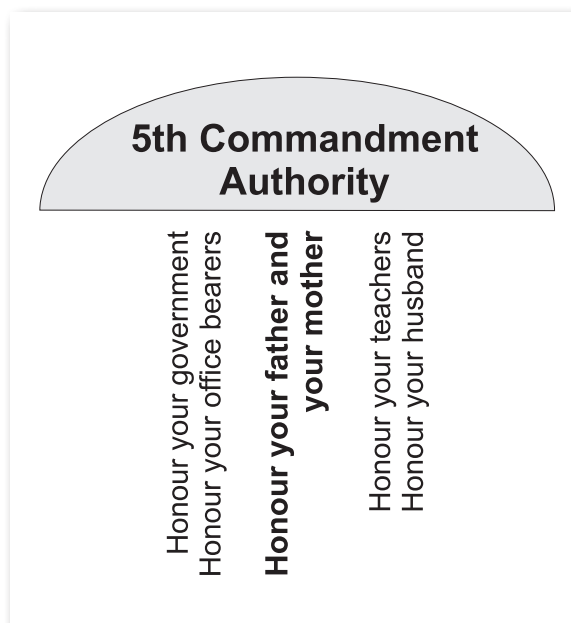
In the fifth commandment we deal with the whole sphere of **authority**. Of all authority given to men, that of parents is the most basic, for the simple reason that the family unit is the most fundamental unit of society. Thus the Lord has formulated this fifth commandment by referring to the authority of parents over their children (cf. Ephesians 6:1-2). But this commandment deals with more "institutions" than just the family. It also deals with the authority of a husband over his wife in marriage (cf. Ephesians 5:22/ Colossians 3:18); with the authority of government over its citizens (cf. Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-14); with the authority of elders over the congregation (cf. Hebrews 13:7, 1 Timothy 5:17).

We should also realise that this commandment speaks not only to those who are **under authority**, but also to those who are **in authority**.

Before proceeding, we will define what we understand by authority. **Authority is the right to command or to rule.** We emphasise the word *right*. Someone might have the *power* to enforce obedience, but that does not mean that he has the *right* to enforce obedience.

God alone has **absolute authority**, that is, He alone has unconditional, unrestricted, unqualified authority. He rules as supreme sovereign over every sphere of creation; and He answers to no-one but Himself.

Parents, husbands, government, elders, etc, all have **derived authority**. Their authority is not theirs naturally, but it is derived from God who gives it to them and



who holds them accountable for how they exercise it. *"For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God"* (Romans 13:1).

Derived authority is limited in two respects.

1. In the first place the sphere of their authority is limited. A father and mother have authority only over their own children, not over the children of other parents. A government has authority only over its own citizens, not over the citizens of other nations. The elders of a church have authority only over their own congregation.
2. Derived authority is also limited in that those who hold it are themselves governed by the law of God. They may not demand of their subjects anything that is contrary to the law of God. Neither may their subjects obey such authority if it conflicts with the law of God. The subjects must refuse submission in such cases, as the Scripture teaches us. *"Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men'"* (Acts 5:29).

The reason why God has given men authority is two-fold:

1. to promote the service of God through obedience to God's commandments.
2. to promote the well-being and govern the lives of their subjects.

In light of this two-fold reason we find that the nature of authority is **never self-seeking but serving**. We find much abuse of authority in the world. Many use it to advance their own honour (cf. Matthew 23:4) or their own power and riches. But Christ has taught us that authority should never be **self-seeking**, but **self-sacrificing**. *"Jesus called [His disciples] to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant'"* (Matthew 20:25,26).

To fulfil this commandment a number of things are required of subjects: They are to honour those in authority over them. (To honour means to esteem or to regard someone highly.) They are to show love and faithfulness to them. They are to submit to them.

Each of these requirements stems from the position which those in authority have received. They are servants of God (cf. Romans 13:4). Whatever you would do to God you must do to them as God's representatives. That is clear from Paul's words in Ephesians 6:5-7 who equates service to those in authority *"as [service] to Christ"* and *"as [service] to the Lord."*

This honour, love, faithfulness and submission is to be rendered happily, *"with sincerity of heart, as to Christ ... not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart"* (Ephesians 6:6).

God also requires us to show patience towards the weaknesses and shortcomings of those in authority over us. We should realise that it is not easy to exercise authority. Rather than complain and grumble, we could better spend our energy in prayer, asking God to give those in authority greater wisdom. Indeed, prayer for those in authority is regarded by Paul as a first priority (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1,2).

The rebellion of Adam in Paradise constituted sin against this commandment. Satan seduced man with *"self-determination"* when he said, *"You will be like God, knowing good and evil."* And that happened. Since the fall into sin man no longer accepts God's judgment as to what is good and what is evil; he now acts on the basis of his own judgment. In this sense man has become a god unto himself. He decides for himself what is good and what is evil. He decides for himself what he will do and what he will not do.

As a result of the fall into sin man is inclined to rebel against God's authority - also that authority which God delegates to men. Scripture teaches that as the end of the world draws nearer, men will become disobedient to parents (cf. 2 Timothy 3:2)

and to all who are in authority. We see this anti-authoritarian spirit increasing in our day.

The other side of the coin is also true. As a result of sin, men who have received authority are inclined to abuse it. And as we draw closer to the close of this world, those who have received authority will be increasingly abusive. (cf. 2 Timothy 3:2). Instead of serving those who are under them, they will use their authority in order to be served. They will use their authority for their own advantage.

We must confess our sin in this respect. We have disobeyed God and still do not render that perfect obedience which God requires of us. This is true with respect to God and with respect to those whom God has appointed over us. Furthermore, we who have received authority do not always exercise it rightly.

Christ has come into the world to remove our sins committed against this commandment.

1. In the first place, Christ removes the **guilt of our sin**. This guilt lies in two areas:
 - a. Christ made atonement for our **sins of omission**. That is, He did what we failed to do. Throughout His life He rendered perfect obedience to His heavenly Father, as well as to his earthly parents and to all those in authority over Him. He also exercised His authority to serve those under Him. He did this with unselfish devotion. He did not cling to His rightful glory and honour, but humbled himself, taking the form of a servant (cf. Philippians 2:5-8). Thereby He fulfilled this commandment. All those who accept Jesus as Saviour receive His perfect obedience.
 - b. Christ also made satisfaction for our sins of **commission**, that is, those things we did that we should not have done. He paid for all the times when we failed to honour and obey God and those whom God put in authority over

us. He also paid for the times when we who have received authority abused it. Thereby He has made payment for all transgressions committed against this commandment. All those who accept Jesus as Saviour receive forgiveness of their sins.

2. In the second place, Christ also removes the **pollution of sin**. Christ has broken the power of sin in our lives, put to death that spirit of rebellion against authority and that spirit of abuse of authority. Through the regenerating power of the Spirit we learn to honour, love and submit ourselves more and more to those in authority over us. And through the Spirit we who receive authority learn how to exercise that authority correctly.

There is a great reward promised if we honour and obey those in authority over us. The commandment reads, "*that it may go well with you....*" This does not refer only to spiritual rewards. Because this commandment is so basic in our whole life, its rewards will be experienced in this life as well as the next.

Of all authority, that possessed by parents is the most basic and perhaps the most influential. The failure of parents to exercise their parental authority and to demand obedience from their children is the primary cause of much of society's ills.

Those who learn young to honour authority will find that they have a good disposition towards their teachers, and their education will be enhanced. But those who have not learned obedience will find themselves in strife with their teachers, and perhaps even expelled from school.

If children have already learned in their youth to honour authority, they will have a good disposition towards their employer when they enter the work force, and will prosper in their work. But if they have not learned obedience to those in authority, they will experience difficulties in submitting to the demands of their employer.

If children have already learned in their youth to honour authority, they possess a

healthy respect for their government and for the laws which they establish. These children will live as law-abiding citizens. But those who have not learned obedience in the home will transgress the laws of society and find themselves penalised or imprisoned.

Obedience learned in the home will be of great value throughout one's life. But those who have not learned this obedience will experience much misery in this life.

In addition to the physical rewards which are enjoyed in this life, there is also the spiritual reward as well. Just as earthly fathers and mothers reward their children who obey them, so our heavenly Father will reward those who obey earthly authorities. For remember what we said earlier: He who obeys earthly authorities is actually obeying God who has given these men their authority.

Discipline/Punishment

Earthly authorities have not only received the right to rule, but also the right to enforce their rule by means of *discipline* and *punishment*. We distinguish between discipline and punishment. In practice these two overlap, which makes it difficult at times to distinguish them.

To discipline means to teach someone to submit. (In the word *discipline* we find the word *disciple*, which refers to a student, someone who is being taught). The aim of discipline is *teach obedience or subjection* (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27). The basis for discipline is *love* (cf. Proverbs 13:24;).

To punish means to give someone his due penalty for doing wrong. The aim and the basis for punishment is *justice*.

Discipline should not be viewed negatively—neither by the one who administers it, nor by the one who receives it. The reference to the letter to the Hebrews above should make that evident (cf. Hebrews 12:5-8). He who loves is he who disciplines!

Sadly, discipline has met with general disfavour in society. Discipline is regarded as a retardant to the natural character of a child. Basic to this thought is the view

that children are pure and innocent. But Scripture teaches us something different. Our children are conceived and born in sin and are inclined to all evil. "*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him*" (Proverbs 22:15).

Discipline is not merely an option; it is a command! "*Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell*" (Proverbs 23:13).

Modern society also finds corporal (physical) discipline barbaric. Children should never be physically punished. But man's wisdom is foolishness. The wise men of old, who were inspired by the Spirit of God, understood that the "rod" is necessary at times. Consider the quotations from Proverbs given above. Remember also how God used corporal discipline in the Old Testament in order to correct His wayward people (cf. 2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 89:32). Contrary to modern wisdom, corporal discipline is not outdated. It should still be administered today. But let him who is in authority administer discipline in love, and not in anger.



Questions

1. Into how many parts is the law divided? What do these two parts deal with?
2. What do we mean by the umbrella affect of each commandment?
3. With what general sphere are we dealing in the fifth commandment? What other "institutions" besides the family are included under this commandment?
4. Of which two "parties" does this commandment speak?
5. Define authority. Does someone who has the power to enforce obedience necessarily possess the authority to do so? What should we emphasise, then, in our definition of authority?
6. What is absolute authority, and who possesses it? What is derived authority, and who possesses it?
7. In what two ways is derived authority limited?
8. For what two reasons does God give men authority? What do these two reasons teach us about the nature of authority?
9. What does it mean to honour those in authority? What else is required of subjects?
10. What position do those in authority have? Show this from Scripture.
11. What attitude should we have towards the weakness and shortcomings of those in authority? What should we do for them?
12. What does Paul tell us will happen as we draw closer to the end of this world with respect to a) those who are under authority, and b) those who are in authority?
13. Our sin against this commandment consists of sins of omission and sins of commission. Describe these. How has Christ made satisfaction for these sins?
14. Besides the guilt of sin, what else does Christ remove? How does this affect those under authority? Those in authority?
15. What is the promise added to this commandment? Give some examples how obedience to those in authority will be blessed in this life already.
16. Define what it means to discipline someone. What is the aim of discipline? What does 1 Corinthians 9:27 say? What is the basis for discipline? What does Proverbs 13:24 say?
17. Define what it means to punish someone? What is the aim and the basis of punishment?
18. How does modern society regard discipline in general? What do Proverbs 22:15 and 23:13 say on this matter?
19. What is corporal discipline? What is the view of modern society regarding it? What does Scripture teach us. In what 'spirit' must such discipline be administered?

LORD'S DAY 40

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

A. I am not to dishonour, hate, injure, or kill my neighbour by thoughts, words, or gestures, and much less by deeds, whether personally or through another,¹ rather, I am to put away all desire of revenge.² Moreover, I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself.³ Therefore, also, the government bears the sword to prevent murder.⁴

1. **Genesis 9:6** Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

Leviticus 19:17-18 You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Matthew 5:21-22 You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' ²² But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

Matthew 26:52 But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

2. **Proverbs 25:21-22** If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; ²² for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the LORD will reward you.

Matthew 18:35 So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

Romans 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

Ephesians 4:26 Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

3. **Matthew 4:7** Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

Matthew 26:52 But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

Romans 13:11-14 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

4. **Genesis 9:6** Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.

Exodus 21:14 But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.

Romans 13:4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

106. Q. But does this commandment speak only of killing?

A. By forbidding murder God teaches us that He hates the root of murder, such as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge,¹ and that He regards all these as murder.²

1. **Proverbs 14:30** A sound heart is life to the body, But envy is rottenness to the bones.

Romans 1:29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit,

evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,

Romans 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

James 1:20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

1 John 2:9-11 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. ¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

2. **1 John 3:15** Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

107. Q. Is it enough, then,
that we do not kill our neighbour
in any such way?

A. No.
When God condemns envy, hatred, and anger,
He commands us
to love our neighbour as ourselves,¹
to show patience, peace, gentleness,
mercy, and friendliness towards him,²
to protect him from harm as much as we can,
and to do good even to our enemies.³

1. **Matthew 7:12** Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 22:39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

2. **Matthew 5:5** Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

Luke 6:36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

Galatians 6:1-2 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Ephesians 4:2 with all lowliness and gentleness,

with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;

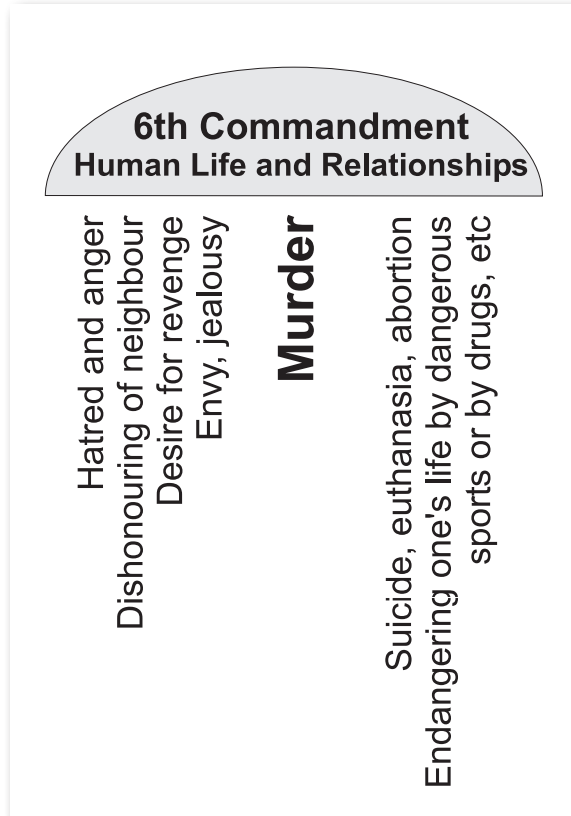
3. **Exodus 23:4-5** If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. ⁵ If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.

Matthew 5:44-45 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Romans 12:20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."



The sixth commandment deals with the sphere of *human life and relations*. As with the previous commandment, we find that much more falls under the umbrella of the sixth commandment than just the matter of murder, as the diagram illustrates.



We normally distinguish between two dimensions of life: the **physical** and the **spiritual**. The physical dimension of life refers to the life of the body (the beating of the heart, the sending of electrical impulses from the brain). The spiritual dimension of life refers to the life of the soul or spirit (a man's thoughts and desires).

With the creation of physical and spiritual dimensions of life came also the creation of **relational** dimension of life, which refers to the life that we have in relation to God and to fellowman. When God created man, He created a relationship between Himself and man. When God created Eve, He created another relationship — that of husband and wife. When God gave Adam and Eve a child, He created yet another relationship - that of parents and children. When God gave Adam and Eve a second

child, still another relationship was created — that of brotherhood. We could continue in this line for quite a while, but let this suffice to show that with the creation of *physical and spiritual* life came also the creation of *relational* life. The first two were given to enable the third.

Jesus spoke of this relational dimension of life when He described eternal life as knowing God, which means knowing God in an intimate relationship as a husband knows his wife (cf. John 17:3). Paul also spoke of this relational dimension when he described eternal death as endless exclusion from the presence of God (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9).

In this sixth commandment, the relational dimension of life is central. God prohibits everything which threatens the relationship between God and man, and the relationship between man and fellowman.

The Sixth Commandment and Man's Relationship to God

At creation God placed man in a very special relationship with Himself. He made man His representative or ambassador on earth. Man had to rule creation on God's behalf, and in his ruling he had to display the holiness of God. Man was required to act as God would act; to think as God would think; and to speak as God would speak. To this end God created man in His own image.

From this we learn that man's life is inseparably connected to his noble office. His life is not his own. He has received life from God with a view to this office, and he must not do anything that would disenable him to fulfil this office.

He may not participate in any "sport" which involves a high risk of serious injury or death. He must also avoid the abuse of substances such as alcohol, drugs, tobacco or food which threaten life.

Neither may man take his own life at any time. At times a man may become weary of life because of the troubles and disappointments that he experiences. He loses the desire to live. He commits **suicide**. Another

contracts a disease that will ultimately kill him. Rather than suffer the pain of the disease and the indignation of becoming weak and helpless, he takes his own life or he requests another to assist him. This is called *euthanasia*.

By taking his own life he resigns from his noble office. He terminates his relationship to God as God's representative or ambassador on earth. But he has no right to terminate this relationship. He has no right to quit his office. Contrary to what he supposes, his life is not his own to do with as he wills. He is to serve faithfully in his office until God releases him from it, even though he may experience setbacks or disappointments, sickness or pain. After all, God, who appoints him to this noble office and forms this special relationship with him, also governs all aspects of his life, so that these hardships do not come by chance. These hardships become a means whereby God tests him in his office; they are not an excuse for him to abandon his office. He may and must believe that God, who lays these burdens upon him, will also provide him with the strength to bear these burdens.

There have been times in the history of the church when faithfulness to God required men to allow their lives to be taken. These are the martyrs, who permitted their bodies to be torn apart by beasts, or sawn in two by men, or burned on the stake. The martyrs understood that physical life must always be subservient to our relationship to God.

Besides taking care of his own life, every one must also take care that he does not endanger the life of his neighbour. For like himself, his neighbour has been given the same noble position as God's ambassador. He must not harm or injure his neighbour in any way, much less kill him. He must not do anything that would prevent his neighbour from fulfilling His divinely given task.

It is a serious thing to injure or kill a man. For whoever attacks man attacks God, in whose likeness man was made. We might use the example of an ambassador

who represents his country in a foreign land. Take a powerful nation such as the United States, for example, which has ambassadors in many foreign lands. It would be a very serious crime to harm one of America's ambassadors. Any attack on him would amount to an attack upon the USA. We can well imagine a punitive act would follow. In like manner, any attack upon God's ambassador is an attack upon God.

God demands that murder be punished with capital punishment, that is, with death. *"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man"* (Genesis 9:6). This does not mean that friends or family of the victim may take vengeance upon a murderer. God has appointed rulers or governments to execute justice. He has given them the sword in order *"to execute wrath on him who practices evil"* (cf. Romans 13:3,4).

It is sadly ironic that modern man regards the death sentence as barbaric. Yet in these same nations abortion is extensively practiced, and in some nations even legalised. The innocent are slaughtered and murderers live. Surely such nations invoke upon themselves the severe wrath of God!

In the text quoted from Genesis 9:6, we learn that God demands that murder be punished with death because God created man in his image. The noble office of man demands that the highest penalty be placed upon murder.

In our modern society, this distinct character of man as God's image bearer is no longer acknowledged, for man no longer believes in creation. The theory of evolution has done much to destroy the honour of and respect for humanity. Man is placed on the same line as all other creatures. Oh, to be sure, man is the most advanced of animal life. In the terms of evolution man has developed the most. But in reality man is nothing more than a glorified ape. When the relationship between God and man is no longer recognised, the physical life of man will not be regarded highly.

We hear of *homicide* (man killing man); *genocide* (man destroying a race of people, as Adolph Hitler endeavoured with the Jews); *infanticide* (man killing babies after birth); *abortion* (killing babies prior to birth).

So far we have spoken about the sixth commandment as it pertains to man in the relationship which he has with God. But the sixth commandment also has much to say about our relations with fellowman.

The Sixth Commandment and Man's Relationship to Fellowman

We said earlier that when God created man, He created relationships with fellow man. God created these relationships so that man might have communion with each other and assist each other in the course of life. We must seek our neighbour's well-being at all times. We are our "*brother's keeper*." In this sixth commandment God forbids all that would threaten the fulfilment of this relationship.

Because of our fall into sin, our spiritual nature has become corrupt. This corruption of man's spiritual nature destroys our relational life with fellowman.

In the first place, man has become extremely self-centred. He seeks only His own good, and not his neighbour's. This sinful attitude leads to envy. ***Envy is a resentment towards, or dislike of, someone who has what we want.*** Those who envy another are not prepared to work for the well-being of his neighbour.

If that envy is permitted to grow it will lead to murder. Think of Ahab who resented the fact that Naboth possessed a beautiful vineyard which he wanted. Ahab's envy induced Jezebel to murder Naboth in order to obtain what Ahab desired (cf. 1 Kings 21). Or think of how the Jewish leaders envied the popularity of Christ, which ultimately led them to crucify Him (cf. Matthew 27:18),

Fallen man also displays an unforgiving disposition. He is inclined at all times to seek ***revenge***, to repay in equal or greater measure what he received. By nature man

is not interested in fostering his neighbour's good, but seeks to do him harm. In extreme situations, this desire for revenge leads to murder. But Paul said, "*Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.'*" (Romans 12:19,20).

The heart of fallen man has also become filled with ***hatred*** for his neighbour. ***Hatred is the desire to break off all relations with another.*** When a man hates someone, he wants nothing to do with him. He tells him to "*Get lost!*" If that hatred is strong enough he will seek to break that relationship with him in a very physical and permanent manner by murder. Thus there is the closest relationship between hatred and murder.

- Hated is the ***desire*** to break all communion, all relations with another.
- Murder is the ***act*** of breaking all communion, all relations with another.

God forbids the disruption of relations. He commands that we foster these relations, in order that we might promote our neighbour's well-being wherever we can and may. Ultimately, God commands that we love our neighbour. It is good if we define love. For love does not mean that we necessarily have very warm feelings of affection. That warm feeling is a fruit of love, but is not always present. ***Love is the desire to foster a relationship with another and thereby grant our help and assistance to him.***

Not all hatred is forbidden. Scripture speaks about a ***holy hatred*** (cf. Psalm 139:19-22). Like God we are to hate those who have heard about God, and who have tasted His goodness and grace, but who nevertheless turn against God in hatred and deliberate disobedience and who oppose God and oppress His people. These we are to hate with a holy hatred. Bear in mind, however, that our hatred must be based in their hatred of God. Our hatred must not be personal. We must not hate

others because they hate us or have hurt us. We are called to love **our** enemies, but we are called to hate those who show themselves to be enemies of **God**.

The Redeeming Work of Christ

By nature man cannot fulfil this commandment. Since his fall into sin the spiritual dimension of man's life has been destroyed. And with the destruction of the spiritual dimension of life came also the destruction of the relational dimension of life. When man's heart became corrupt, his attitude towards God and his neighbour also became corrupt. Man came to hate God and fellow-man.

If it were possible, man would seek to destroy God. Since that is not possible, man does whatever he can to destroy God's honour and reputation. He does what he can to destroy God's work. He does what he can to destroy God's people. This hatred of fallen man became most evident in those who stood before the palace of Pontius Pilate and demanded that God's incarnate Son be crucified.

The fall into sin affected man's relationship towards fellow-man. The very first child born on earth turned against his younger brother and killed him out of hatred and envy. Since that time there has been endless bloodshed.

Christ has come in order to make atonement for our sins against this commandment. We can divide Christ's three-fold work as follows:

1. Christ removes the **guilt** of our sin against this commandment. This removal of our guilt can be divided as follows:
 - a. Christ made atonement for our sins of **omission** (the obedience that we failed to render).
 - (i) As far as His relationship with God was concerned, He dedicated His whole life as a faithful ambassador of God. Though He encountered untold troubles and deep disappointments, He did not take His life, as

undoubtedly many others would have in a similar situation.

- (ii) As far as His relationship with fellow-man was concerned, He honoured the life of others. Never did He wound or kill. Rather, He healed the sick and restored life to those who died. Greater love could not have been shown, for He gave His life for His friends (cf. John 15:13).

By His obedience to this commandment, Christ has rendered what we cannot render, thereby making atonement for our sins of omission.

- b. Christ made atonement for our sins of **commission** (the disobedience which we rendered). In body and soul He bore the wrath of God and the hatred of man.
2. Christ also removes from us the **corruption** of sin. Christ works in our hearts through the Holy Spirit and renews us so that we are able to honour this commandment.

Through the Spirit we acknowledge the relationship between God and us, and honour the physical life which God has given us as His ambassadors. We desire to foster relationships with one another, even with those who wrong us, and desire to seek their well-being in any way we can.



Questions

1. With what sphere does the sixth commandment deal? List the other matters which are dealt with under the umbrella of this commandment.
2. Describe what we mean by the physical, spiritual and relational dimensions of life?
3. How did Jesus define eternal life? How did Paul describe eternal death?
4. What does God prohibit in the sixth commandment?
5. In what relationship to Himself did God place man in Paradise? What does God prohibit in the sixth commandment concerning this relationship?
6. In what ways could man harm or destroy his own physical life that would threaten his own relationship to God as God's ambassador or representative on earth?
7. What two names do we give the act of taking one's own life? Is there ever a time in life when we may take our own life? Why (not)?
8. Is there ever a time when our obedience to God might require us to give up our physical life?
9. Why is it such a serious offence to harm or injure one's neighbour?
10. How are governments to punish murder? On what Scriptural basis do you say this?
11. What has caused man to have such a low esteem for human life?
12. Define the following: a) homicide; b) genocide; c) infanticide; d) abortion.
13. Why did God create relationships between man and fellowman?
14. What is envy? How does this jeopardise our relational life with our neighbour? What can envy lead to? Give an example.
15. What is revenge? How does this jeopardise our relational life with our neighbour? What does Scripture require of us (cf. Romans 12:19,20)?
16. What is hatred? What can hatred lead to? What is the difference between these two?
17. What is love?
18. What is to be our attitude towards our enemies? What is to be our attitude towards God's enemies?
19. Describe the three aspects of Christ's atoning work concerning this commandment.

LORD'S DAY 41

108. Q. But does this commandment speak only of killing?

A. That all unchastity is cursed by God.¹
We must therefore detest it from the heart²
and live chaste and disciplined lives,
both within and outside of holy marriage.³

1. **Leviticus 18:30** Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God.

Ephesians 5:3-5 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;⁴ neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.⁵ For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

2. **Jude 1:22-23** And on some have compassion, making a distinction;²³ but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

3. **1 Corinthians 7:1-9** Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.² Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.³ Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body,

but the wife does.⁵ Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.⁶ But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.⁷ For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.⁸ But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;⁹ but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;⁴ that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,⁵ not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;⁶ that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.⁷ For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.⁸ Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

109. Q. Does God in this commandment forbid nothing more than adultery and similar shameful sins?

A. Since we, body and soul,
are temples of the Holy Spirit,
it is God's will
that we keep ourselves pure and holy.
Therefore He forbids all unchaste acts,
gestures, words, thoughts, desires,¹
and whatever may entice us to unchastity.²

1. **Matthew 5:27-29** You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not commit adultery."²⁸ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his

own body.¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?²⁰ For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

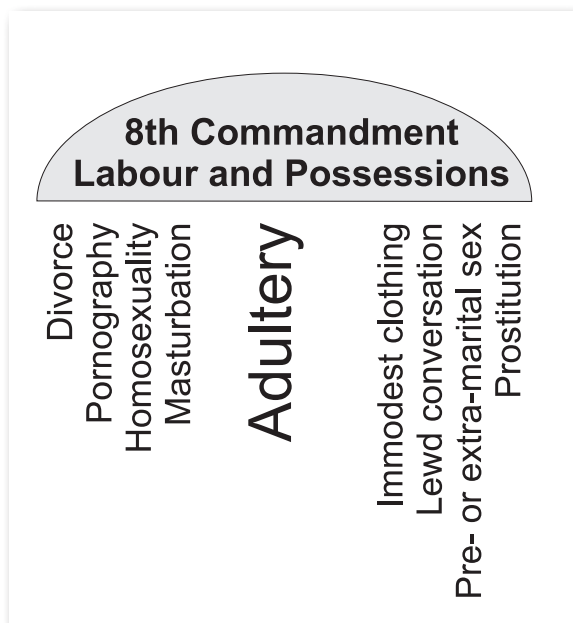
Ephesians 5:3-4 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;⁴ neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

2. **1 Corinthians 15:33** Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

Ephesians 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,



In the seventh commandment we deal with the sphere of marriage and sexuality. The Lord has summarised this sphere by taking the most serious breach of the marriage covenant, and allows it to represent all the other related topics in this sphere, as illustrated below:



God's original purpose for marriage and sexuality

The first thing that we should speak about is marriage. For every sin against the seventh commandment is basically a perversion of that which was intended for marriage.

The main purpose of marriage is that of mutual assistance. Marriage is designed to bring men and women together that they may help each other. That is clear from the creation account, where woman is called a "helper" for man. This help is not limited to the physical aspects of life, though this is included. Women do not marry simply to be provided with a home to live in, and clothes to wear, although a husband will

provide her with these things. Men do not marry simply to acquire a maid who will do the domestic duties in the home, although a woman will perform these duties for her husband (cf. Titus 2:4,5 "...admonish the young women ...to be homemakers").

As a team, husband and wife may work together in the fulfilment of the cultural mandate. They may offer each other physical, emotional and spiritual assistance in fulfilling the great and noble task which God has given them.

We have spoken about the great and noble task that God has given man which we call, the **cultural mandate**. We should describe this mandate. God said to man, "*Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth*" (Genesis 1:28).

After God created man, He said that it was not good for man to be alone. What was needed was not just another man, but a woman. In our day there is a trend to the identity of the two sexes. But God created two distinct sexes, giving each their own abilities and characters. From this it is clear that man was not complete by himself. Woman was a complement to man. Man found his completeness in woman.

God bound man and woman together in a covenant, which we call marriage. It was God's intention that together they form one unit, and as one unit they were to work for the fulfilment of the cultural mandate. Together they were to exercise dominion over this earth, cultivate it, develop it and subdue it.

As a sign that husband and wife complemented each other as one unit, and as a means of expressing the love which binds them together in marriage,

God created man and woman with sexual organs. It is important to recognise this first purpose of the sexual organs, for it is this first purpose that distinguishes man from beast. Animals also have sexual organs, but they have received them only for the purpose of reproduction. But man has received the sexual organs as a means of expressing love and unity in marriage. As such, sexual intercourse is a beautiful gift that God gives to husband and wife, for which they may thank God in prayer and never be ashamed of.

As mentioned, the sexual organs are at the same time the reproductive organs. By means of these organs man is able to fulfil the second purpose of marriage, which we call "*procreation*." God gave to Adam and Eve the command: "*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*" (Genesis 1:28).

It was God's wish that the earth should be filled with mankind. It is also God's will to have children born within the framework of marriage, so that they can be raised by both a father and a mother.

We mentioned already that men and women differ in their abilities and characters. This is true also in the sphere of raising children. A mother will find it hard, if not impossible, to fill the role of a father and to be a father-figure. Similarly, a father will find it hard to fill the role of a mother and to be a mother-figure. It is God's will that children are born within marriage, so that they may be raised, not just by two parents, but by a father and mother who have complementary gifts and abilities.

Man's dishonouring of marriage and sexuality

Since the fall into sin, man is incapable of honouring the holy institution of marriage. Instead, he abuses and perverts the beautiful things which God created for marriage.

We find that in society there is a disdain for marriage. Many are quite content to live "*common law*" or *de facto*," that is, to live together without being legally married. Among those who do marry there

is an increasing rate of **divorce**. God hates divorce (cf. Malachi 2:16). Scripture allows divorce only in two situations, namely, for adultery (cf. Matthew 5:32, 19:9) and for desertion of an unbelieving husband in the context described in 1 Corinthians 7:13-15.

There is also much perversion in the sphere of sexuality. In the context of marriage, sexuality is a beautiful means of expressing love and unity between husband and wife. But sinful man takes what God has made beautiful and makes it filthy. Let me relate a meaningful story to this effect which I heard from a minister when I was young.

A mother was working in her garden with her young son at her side. She fertilised the soil, turned it and watered it. At the end she remarked how rich the soil was. She returned to her house to look for her young son. She followed his tracks into the lounge and was horrified when she saw her carpet. She reprimanded her son saying, "*Look at the dirt on the carpet!*"

At one moment this mother spoke very favourably of the garden's **rich soil**. But when that soil was taken out of its proper place, it became **dirt**. So it is with sexual relations as well. In their proper place, that is, in marriage, sexual relations are a beautiful expression of the love and unity in marriage. But outside of marriage, sexual relations are dirty.

There are many ways by which sexuality has been corrupted by man. There are those who gratify their own sexual desires by self-manipulation, which is called **masturbation**. There are those who seek to gratify their sexual desires by paying another to participate in sexual relations with them, which is called **prostitution**. These acts are not motivated by love and unity of husband and wife. They are simply means of self-gratification, and a serious perversion of God's gift of sexuality.

Others engage in sexual relations outside of the bond of marriage on the pretext of love, as though love makes it acceptable. When this happens with those who are not married we call this **pre-marital sex** or

fornication. Even if their love for each other is genuine, and even if they plan to marry in the future, they sin when they take what belongs to husband and wife in the garden of marriage. In the old dispensation God commanded that if this occurred, the couple must marry (cf. Deuteronomy 22:28-29). Today the obligation to marry remains, providing that the other conditions pre-requisite for marriage are met, such as marrying in the Lord.

Some who are married engage in sexual relations with someone other than their spouse. This is called **adultery** or *extra-marital sex*. Adultery displays unfaithfulness to the covenant of marriage, and is abhorred by God. In the old dispensation adultery was punished with death (cf. Leviticus 20:10). Although adultery is no longer punished in this way, it remains a sin which is abhorred by God. Those who do not repent of this sin will be excluded from the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9).

There are other gross perversions of sexuality which God abhors, such as **homosexuality** or **sodomy** whereby men leave the natural use of the woman and commit what is shameful with men, or whereby women lie with women as with a man. This abomination was punished with death in the old dispensation, and remains an abomination in the eyes of God (cf. Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:27).

Another perversion in the eyes of God is **bestiality**, where men or women engage in sexual relations with an animal. This, too, was punished by death in the old dispensation (cf. Leviticus 18:23, 20:15), and remains an abomination in the eyes of God.

Related to this perversion is **pornography**, obscene or lewd literature, pictures or films which portray nudity and sexual engagement. God does not only forbid immoral acts; He also forbids all impure thoughts. Christ said, "*Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*" (Matthew 5:28).

The perversion of sexuality is also evident in **immodest clothing** and **nudity**. In Paradise there was no need to cover the body, for the mind and heart of man were pure. But for fallen man immodest clothing and nudity will arouse sinful thoughts and desires which are themselves sinful, and will often entice men and women to sinful acts.

There is yet one matter that must be discussed in relation to the dishonouring of marriage. This pertains to the second purpose of marriage, namely, being fruitful and multiplying. Couples are no longer willing to have large families. Often couples postpone conception and limit the number of children they receive. Some are motivated by financial reasons, knowing that children cost money. Some women wish to pursue a career rather than raise children. Other couples are afraid of over-population. Some wish to experience the joy of parenthood, but they do not wish to make too many sacrifices which must be made if families are large.

None of these reasons are legitimate. Neither financial concerns, nor freedom, nor careers, nor fears of over-population should induce us to disobey the command of the Lord.

The only legitimate consideration when establishing the size of a family is whether the parents (and especially the mother) are able to cope with and fulfil the demands of raising these children in the fear of the Lord.

The redemption in Christ

Scripture makes it clear that those who live in sin against this commandment will not enter the kingdom of heaven. "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, ... nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ... will inherit the kingdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 6:9,10).

Christ has come to redeem man from sin against this commandment, as with all the others. Through Him there is forgiveness

of all the sins committed in this sphere of marriage and sexuality (cf. John 8:3-11).

Through Christ there is also freedom from the pollution of sin in this sphere. As Paul writes, "*And such were some of you [fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites]. But you were **washed**, but you were **sanctified**, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Through the power of the Spirit we may again honour marriage and sexuality, albeit with shortcoming and weakness. And we must. Listen to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20:

¹⁸ Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

An Added Dimension to Marriage for the Redeemed

For the redeemed of the Lord, the two-fold purpose of marriage takes on added dimension. Not only is woman given as a helper for man with respect to the cultural mandate, but she is given to man as a spiritual helper as well. Marriage partners receive the added mandate to assist each other in spiritual matters as well. We could say that in marriage husband and wife are to assist each other in reaching the goal of the great wedding feast of the Lamb. They are to help each other live in covenant faithfulness to God. They are to exhort each other in times of weakness, comfort each other in times of distress, encourage each other in trials, and rejoice together in good. This has become a very important purpose of marriage.

That husband and wife are to help each other live in faithfulness to God affects the criterion we use in choosing a boyfriend or girlfriend. We do not just choose one who

is beautiful to look at, or one who excites us. Such are the criteria of many people today, but that cannot be ours. We must seek a spouse who will help us to fulfil our cultural mandate. We must choose a spouse who will assist us in the service of God. We must look for one who will help us to arrive at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Scripture is very clear about mixed marriages: "*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers*" We must marry "*in the Lord.*" (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-17; 1 Corinthians 7:39). That is, we must marry someone who, like ourselves, is a faithful Christian.

The command to marry "*in the Lord*" is also fundamental with respect to the raising of children. To raise children in the fear of the Lord is not an easy task. In the first place children of the covenant are inclined to evil. In the second place parents are inclined to sin, and often the example which they show is far from perfect. If parents are to serve as good and useful instruments of the Holy Spirit, they need to support each other and to encourage one another. To raise children in the fear of the Lord is difficult enough when both parents are faithful Christians. But if only one parent is faithful, it is much more difficult.

Furthermore, a "*mixed marriage*" (wherein a believer marries an unbeliever) will be a source of confusion for the children that are born in that marriage. For the good influence which the children receive from the faithful parent will be impaired by the bad influence of the unfaithful parent. The children will be confused when they see their parents both living according to different norms.

Thus, if we wish to raise children in the fear of the Lord, we must seek a marriage partner who will be able to assist us in this, and who will set a good example for the children.



Questions:

1. With what sphere does the seventh commandment deal?
2. What other related topics are covered by the seventh commandment?
3. What is main purpose of marriage? How is that made clear to us? In what ways can husband and wife fulfil this purpose?
4. What is the cultural mandate?
5. With respect to the different sexes, what trend do we find in society today? Is this correct? Why or why not?
6. Is man complete by himself? What did God say in Paradise?
7. Explain the first purpose for the sexual organs in man.
8. What is the second purpose of marriage? How does this relate to the second purpose for the sexual organs?
9. Why does God want children to be raised by both a father and a mother?
10. In what way does sinful man show his disdain for marriage?
11. In what way does sinful man show his disdain for sexuality? Define the following:
 - a. masturbation
 - b. prostitution
 - c. pre-marital sex or fornication
 - d. adultery
 - e. homosexuality or sodomy
 - f. bestiality
 - g. pornography
 - h. immodest clothing and nudity
12. How does sinful man show his disdain for the second purpose of marriage? What is the only legitimate consideration when establishing the size of a family?
13. Why is it so important that we live moral lives? What does Christ do in order to make it possible for us to live moral lives?
14. For the redeemed, marriage partners receive an added mandate. What is it?
15. How does added dimension affect the criterion we use in choosing a husband or a wife? What does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17?
16. With a view to raising children, why is it so important that we marry "*only in the Lord*" (that is, that we marry someone who is a faithful Christian)?

LORD'S DAY 42

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|------|----|--|
| 110. | Q. | What does God forbid in the eighth commandment? |
| | A. | <p>God forbids not only outright theft and robbery¹ but also such wicked schemes and devices as false weights and measures, deceptive merchandising, counterfeit money, and usury,² we must not defraud our neighbour in any way, whether by force or by show of right.³ In addition God forbids all greed⁴ and all abuse or squandering of His gifts.⁵</p> |

1. **Exodus 22:1** If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.

1 Corinthians 5:9-10 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.¹⁰ Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

2. **Deuteronomy 25:13-16** You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light.¹⁴ You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small.¹⁵ You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD your God is giving you.¹⁶ For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to the LORD your God.

Psalms 15:5 He who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

Proverbs 11:1 Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight.

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight.

Ezekiel 45:9-12 Thus says the Lord GOD: "Enough, O princes of Israel! Remove violence and plundering, execute justice and righteousness, and stop dispossessing My people," says the Lord GOD.¹⁰ "You shall have honest scales, an honest ephah, and an honest bath.¹¹ The ephah and the bath shall be of the same measure, so that the bath contains one-tenth of a homer, and the ephah one-tenth of a homer; their measure shall

be according to the homer.¹² The shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, and fifteen shekels shall be your mina."

Luke 6:35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

3. **Micah 6:9-11** The Lord's voice cries to the city; wisdom shall see your name: "Hear the Rod! Who has appointed it?"¹⁰ Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the short measure that is an abomination?¹¹ Shall I count pure those with the wicked scales, and with the bag of deceitful weights?

Luke 3:14 Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

James 5:1-6 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!² Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.³ Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.⁴ Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.⁵ You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.⁶ You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

4. **Luke 12:15** And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Ephesians 5:5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

5. **Proverbs 21:20** There is desirable treasure, and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it.

Proverbs 23:20-21 Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; ²¹ for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.

Luke 16:10-13 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. ¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous

mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

111. Q. What does God require of you in this commandment?
- A. I must promote my neighbour's good wherever I can and may, deal with him as I would like others to deal with me, and work faithfully so that I may be able to give to those in need. ¹

1. **Isaiah 58:5-10** Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? ⁶ Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am." If you take away the

yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰ if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.

Matthew 7:12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Galatians 6:9-10 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Ephesians 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.



When we deal with the eighth commandment we are dealing with the sphere of labour and our material possessions. These two matters are very closely related, for material possessions provide us with the means to work, and they also become the "*talents*" with which we must work (cf. Matthew 25:14-30).

As with the other commandments, the LORD lets the most serious sin in this sphere, which is stealing, stand for all the other related matters. Included under the eighth commandment are matters such as

8th Commandment Labour and Possessions

Laziness
Squandering
Materialism
Usury

Stealing

Merchandising
Tax evasion
Communism
Greed

stewardship, merchandising, communism, materialism, greed, payment of taxes, etc.

Let's first deal with the matter of labour and then go on to the matter of our stewardship over our material possessions.

Why work? - Society's view

Perhaps one of the most basic questions that we can ask when we wish to discuss work is the question, "*Why work?*" Society in general believes that we work in order to supply our needs. If you don't work, then how will you eat, or clothe yourself, or put a roof over your head?

There may be another incentive. It is quite evident that in our society men and women do much more work than is necessary to provide themselves with the bare essentials for life. They also work for the "*extras.*" They are not content with one set of clothing and they want more than just a basic tin shed or mud brick home. They want more than just the bare necessities. They want to enjoy some of the "*finer things of life.*"

One thing is clear: society does not view labour as an end in itself. They do not view labour as a goal, but only as a means to reach a goal. It is a necessary evil - necessary in order to acquire things that one needs or wants. This view, however, is not in harmony with Scripture, which we will consider.

Why work? - The view of Scripture

The answer that Scripture gives to the question, "*Why work?*" is quite different from the answer of society. One of the key passages concerning labour is 2 Thessalonians 3:10 where Paul says, "*If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*" These words do not only incite us to be faithful in our work, they also tell us something about the purpose of our labour.

First let me explain what Paul does not say. Often Paul is understood as though he said, "*If anyone wants to eat, let him work.*" But that is not what Paul said. In fact, that is just the opposite of what he says. If we

want to put Paul's words in a positive form, then we would read, "*If anyone is willing to work, let him eat.*" Food is intended only for those who are willing to work. The word order, that Paul used, shows that work is the goal or aim, and eating is the means to enable a person to fulfil that goal or reach that aim.

We do not work to eat,

but we eat to work.

This is not a trivial matter, nor are we just quibbling about words. We are dealing with the basic purpose of labour, and I dare say, with one of the primary purposes of our life. According to Paul, our labour is **not** just a means to supply material needs and wants. Labor is itself the end, the goal. The material possessions that we reap from our labour are intended to make continued work possible.

This is also evident from the creation mandate concerning labour. In Genesis 1:28-30 we read the following: "*Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food....'*"

Note the order of events. First God gave man a task of filling the earth, subduing it and having dominion over it. Then God spoke about the food that He had given to man. Food was given to man in order to make it possible for him to fulfil the task he was given.

Notice also that man did not have to work in order to eat. God gave man food before he even began to work. Again it is clear that man does not work to eat, but that man eats to work.

If there remains any doubt about this matter, then think of another passage of Scripture, the well known text of Matthew 6:25-33. There Christ says, *"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ... For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."*

Again we are shown that God has given us the mandate to work for the promotion of His kingdom. If we work to further God's kingdom, God will supply us with the things that we need. Let it be clear in our minds then: We do not work to eat, but we eat to work. Labour is not a means to an end; labour is an end in itself.

As Christians, we believe that God created us to work in His creation and for His kingdom. Fulfilling our creation mandate and promoting God's kingdom are goals for us. Therefore we do not try to do the least amount of work that we can do, but we do our utmost in the field of labour. We work diligently, and we put in a hard days work, seeking to fulfil one of God's purposes for our life.

Our Stewardship Over Material Possessions

In Matthew 25 we learn why God has given us material goods. Our earthly possessions are the material with which we work. They are the *"talents"* which God entrusts into our care as His stewards. With these we must work.

Notice that these material possessions are not ours. They belong to the Lord. We must never think that of all we receive the first (let us say) 10% belongs to God and the remaining 90% belongs to us. No, all of what we possess remains the possession of the Lord. The Lord demands that we give the first fruits to the Lord via the church. The remaining portion is what we are

called to work with and over which we are to exercise stewardship.

In Leviticus 25:23 we read that the inheritance which a man received could not be sold permanently. It always remained the possession, not of the man who sold it, but of the Lord who entrusted it into his care.

When the people of Israel dedicated their gifts for the building of the temple, David said: *"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and **of Your own** we have given You"* (1 Chronicles 29:14). David acknowledged that the people were only giving back to God what belongs to Him.

Sometimes the whole 90% of our earnings is needed to provide us with the necessities of life. If this is the case, we should not be ashamed. But often we receive more than we need. What are we to do with the extra? There are two extremes which we should avoid.

On the one hand, we need not be misers who spend our money only on what is absolutely necessary. God was not stingy when He created the world. Just the opposite, the garden was filled with an abundance of good things. If the Lord gives us abundance we may enjoy it, giving thanks to God.

On the other hand, we must not squander the extra that we earn on all sorts of frivolous things. While we may enjoy the abundance which God gives us, we must not find our joy or satisfaction, much less put our trust in these material things. Furthermore, we should remember that this earth is passing away with all the things on it. But the kingdom of God is eternal. Those who invest in the kingdom of God will reap a rich dividend in the life to come. They who contribute generously to the church and to kingdom causes will store up for themselves treasures in heaven. Think of these words of Christ: *"Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not*

fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys" (Luke 12:33).

Equality of wealth

It is clear that not everyone receives equal when it comes to material possessions. This inequality is opposed by the political philosophies of *communism* and of *socialism*. Both of these political philosophies hold the idea that there should be equality in material possessions.

Even a superficial reading of Matthew 25 makes it clear that Scripture does not teach equality. To the one servant the master entrusted five talents; to another two talents and to yet another one talent.

Often reference is made to Acts 4-5 as a argument for equality in material possessions, but wrongly so. That no-one said *"that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common"* (Acts 4:32) means that men did not selfishly cling to their possessions, but sold them for the benefit of all concerned. We should not lose sight of the fact that at the time there were exceptional needs in the congregation. In order to meet these needs, some who had invested their wealth in fields sold them and gave the proceeds to the apostles, who distributed the proceeds among the needy. This is not communism, but Christian charity in an extreme situation. Scripture does not demand equality in possessions in normal times, but it demands very generous charity when there are very great needs.

The fact that others have more than us should not bother us. We should not adopt the attitude of *"keeping up with the Jones."* We should not look with envy or greed at what the neighbour has received from the Lord, but be content with what we have received from the Lord God who gives to each one of His servants in perfect measure. In the end all those who work faithfully with what they are given, whether five talents or one, receive the same reward from the Lord. To both the Lord will say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord"* (Matthew 25:23).

Wrongful acquisition of material possessions

There are many ways in which man tries to acquire material possessions but which are condemned by God. The first and foremost of these is stealing.

What prompts a man to steal? There are a number of reasons.

1. A man might steal because he is too lazy to work. He wants to acquire possessions, but he doesn't want to work. But we have seen that if a man will not work, let him not eat (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:10).
2. Often those who steal are possessed by greed. They are not content with what they receive through their normal labours. They wish to become rich, and try to take "shortcuts." God condemns this greed and what it leads to. Even if we receive only the basics, we should learn to say with Paul, *"And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content"* (1 Timothy 6:8).
3. While many steal out of greed, it is also possible that someone steals out of need. Because of poverty a man might not be able to purchase what he needs for himself and his family. He steals in order to supply these needs.

In the eyes of man, stealing because of need does not seem as wrong as stealing because of laziness or greed, but it is because by it we display a lack of trust in our Father's providential care over us. In times of great need we ought to pray and trust that the Father will provide, even when we cannot imagine how.

When Israel wandered in the wilderness God gave them water out of the flinty rock, and He gave them bread from heaven. To steal out of need is to distrust God's willingness or His ability to provide us with our needs. To steal out of need is to take matters into one's own hands because of a lack of trust in God.

Although such things as **lotteries** and other forms of **gambling** are not stealing as such, they are also contrary to what

God has laid down in the commandment concerning labour and material possessions. God has commanded us to work, and has promised that He will provide us with the material possessions to make work possible. But those who gamble (or participate in lotteries) seek to obtain material possessions apart from labour. Those who participate in lotteries, and those who gamble, share the same motives as thieves. Either they are too lazy to work (and many who win lotteries immediately quit their jobs!), or they are ill-content with what God has given, and seek more in a way that God has not ordained.

Beside outright theft, the Catechism mentions “**wicked schemes and devices.**” There are ways in which you can “*pull the wool over someone’s eyes*” and make them believe they are getting their money’s worth, when really you have cheated them in some way. The Catechism mentions **false weights and measures.** In many businesses, transactions involve weights and measures. We purchase meat in weight (kilograms) and we purchase petrol in measure (litres). It would not be hard for a butcher to write a false weight on a tray of meat. Who would be the wiser? How many people have accurate weighing scales at home? And how many of those who do would take the time to weigh the meat? We conduct business with a measure of trust, and that trust is easily abused, and often is abused. Such abuse is another form of stealing.

Still another form of stealing is **deceptive merchandising.** This happens when merchants purposely mislead people by false advertising. They make people believe that they are getting something which they are not. For example, a store could advertise that a certain item was on sale, reduced by 30%. They say that the item was regularly \$100.00, but now has been reduced to \$70.00. But they have deceived the customer, for the regular price was only \$75.00. They have artificially inflated the regular price, and then reduced it to make it appear that the customer is saving much more than he really is. This is another form of stealing.

The Catechism also mentions **counterfeit** money, that is *fake* money. It looks very real, but it isn’t. It has no value. Those who use counterfeit money to purchase items actually steal what they pretend to purchase.

Reference is also made to **usury.** Usury is the lending of money at an extremely high or even unlawful rate of interest. There are always some people who are in desperate situations, and who fall into the hands of the vultures who “*eat up people like they eat bread*” (Psalm 14:4).

Trusting in Mammon

There is a prevailing attitude in society which regards material wealth as a form of security. One who has sufficient wealth needs never fear hunger or poverty. He will never be without clothing or a home. This makes money a “god” in whom men place their trust and confidence. Christ called this god *Mammon* (Matthew 6:24). *Mammon* comes from the same Hebrew word as *Amen* which means “*It is true and certain*” (cf. LD 52). But *mammon* is not *amen*. That is, *mammon* does not give security or certainty. Think of the story Christ told in Luke 12:16-21 about the rich fool. Though he had acquired much *security* in the material wealth he had accumulated, his life was still taken from him. Our security for the future lies in God the Almighty, the King of Creation and the Lord of Providence.

The Redeeming Work of Christ

In Christ we find the perfect man who fulfilled this commandment perfectly. As far as labour was concerned, was there ever a man who was so devoted to doing His Father’s work as Christ was? He preached and healed hour after hour, day after day. How often don’t we read that Christ was exhausted by His labour? These words of Christ echo His zeal for labour: “*I must work the works of Him who sent Me*” (John 9:4). And at the end of His life He said, “*I have finished the work which You have given Me to do*” (John 17:4).

As far as material possessions were concerned, Christ possessed little. Though He might have laid claim to greater possessions had He sought them from His followers, He did not. He hated the stealing which He saw happening amongst His own people, and even drove out the merchants and money-changers who had turned the house of God into a den of thieves.

As a punishment for sin, He was numbered with thieves, for as Mark tells us Christ was crucified between two robbers. *"With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And*

He was numbered with the transgressors'" (Mark 15:27,28).

Thus Christ fulfilled this commandment, and now offers to impute His righteousness to all of us who call upon Him in true faith. He also suffered the wrath of God, taking our sins against this commandment upon Himself.

Christ also sends His Spirit to renew us. He gives us a new outlook towards labour and material possessions. He works in us a new obedience so that we begin to keep also this commandment.

Questions:

1. With what sphere do we deal with in the eighth commandment? Which is the most serious sin in this sphere? What other matters are included?
2. According to society's view, why do we work? What is an additional incentive?
3. Does society view labour as an end in itself? If not, how does it view labour?
4. What does Paul say in 2 Thessalonians. 3:10? What can we conclude about work from these words? Which is true? *We work to eat, or: We eat to work.*
5. What two things become evident from Genesis 1:28-30 concerning food and labour? What other text teaches us the same?
6. How does the knowledge that we were created to work affect our ambition to work?
7. What do we learn from Matthew 25 regarding the purpose for which God gives us material possessions?
8. How much of what we possess belongs to us, and how much belongs to the Lord? Cite three texts which emphasise this clearly. (Relate the contents, and not just the chapter and verse!)
9. Do we have to give all we possess to the church? What must we do with the remaining portion?
10. What two extremes should we avoid if we are blessed with more material wealth than is absolutely necessary?
11. Should all people possess equal wealth and material goods? Which political philosophies says that they should? What does Scripture say? Which text makes this very clear?
12. Does Acts 4:32 (no one said *"that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common"*) support the political philosophy of communism? If not, explain this text.
13. Should we be bothered with the fact that some receive more material wealth or possessions than us? Why not?
14. Name three things which prompt men to steal. Which one seems less wrong than the others? Is it less wrong. Why?
15. What is wrong with participating in a lottery or with gambling?
16. Explain how one can steal by means of
 - a. false weights and measures
 - b. deceptive merchandising
 - c. counterfeit money
 - d. usury
17. How does society regard material wealth? What does this attitude make of material possessions? What name is given to it? Is material wealth what society thinks it is?
18. What was Christ's attitude to work? How does this become evident in Scripture?
19. What was Christ's attitude to stealing? How does this become evident in Scripture?
20. How does it become evident from Scripture that Christ was punished for our sins against this commandment?
21. Besides atoning for our sins against this commandment, what does Christ do?

LORD'S DAY 43

112. Q. What is required in the ninth commandment?
- A. I must not give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor condemn or join in condemning anyone rashly and unheard.¹
- Rather, I must avoid all lying and deceit as the devil's own works, under penalty of God's heavy wrath.²
- In court and everywhere else, I must love the truth,³ speak and confess it honestly, and do what I can to defend and promote my neighbour's honour and reputation⁴

1. **Psalm 15** LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? ² He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart; ³ He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; ⁴ In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change; ⁵ He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

Proverbs 19:5 A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape.

Proverbs 19:9 A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish.

Proverbs 21:28 A false witness shall perish, but the man who hears him will speak endlessly.

Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that you be not judged.

Luke 6:37 Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Romans 1:28-32 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, ³⁰ backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³² who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

2. **Leviticus 19:11-12** You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. ¹² And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.

Proverbs 13:5 A righteous man hates lying, But a wicked man is loathsome and comes to shame.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

3. **1 Corinthians 13:6** [love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.

4. **1 Peter 3:8-9** Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; ⁹ not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

In the ninth commandment we are dealing with the sphere of **communication**. Communication is a fundamental element of every relationship. Without it relationships are impossible. God created communication so that man could live in a very close relationship with Him. Through it God could impart a knowledge of Himself to man, and man could express love and gratitude to God. God also created communication as a means that man might establish relationships with fellow man.

The word *communication* has in it the word *commune* which is familiar to us. We speak of the *communion* of saints which happens when Christians *share* their talents and gifts and their thoughts with the other members of the congregation. We are also familiar with the word *communism*, which ideally means the people of a nation possess or *share* all the material possessions. Communication also has that root idea of sharing. **Communication is the sharing of thoughts and ideas.**

There are **two aspects** to communication:

1. **transmission** - the relaying of thoughts and ideas into the minds of others. This is accomplished by means of the transmitting organs: our mouth and hands.
2. **reception** - the implantation of thoughts and ideas into our mind.

This is accomplished by means of the receiving organs: our eyes and ears.

The most serious transgression in the sphere of communication is bearing false witness. But false witness is not the only matter dealt with in this commandment as the illustration shows.

Other matters which are included in the sphere of communication are gossip, slander, misquotation (twisting someone's words), and lying. Also included are the books or magazines which we should or should not read, the videos or movies we may or may not watch, etc.

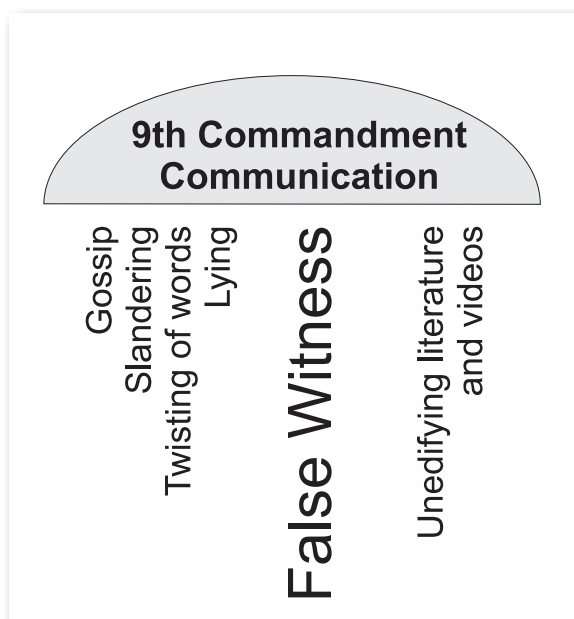
The Transmission of Ideas

This commandment is concerned with what we transmit, that is, with the ideas that we convey. Since thoughts and ideas are conveyed through the written or spoken word, God requires us to guard our mouth, lest we convey wrong ideas or unwholesome thoughts. Therefore the child of God prays: "*Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips*" (Psalm 141:3).

As we have seen with the other commandments, God has formulated this commandment in the negative, giving the worst expression of sin in this sphere to represent all other related sins. The commandment reads, "*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour ...*" False witness refers to the testimony which is given in a court of law. Scripture says "*by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established*" (Deuteronomy 19:15).

A reading of 1 Kings 21 will make it quite apparent how serious and how destructive false witness can be. Naboth was found guilty of blasphemy and stoned to death on the basis of the false witness borne by two base fellows hired by wicked Queen Jezebel. Here we see the power of the spoken word. It can kill! False witness can lead to grave injustice being committed against innocent people.

In this commandment God forbids the lie. We are called to love the truth, to speak



and confess it uprightly. That leads us to ask, *What is truth?* We all have ideas about what truth is. We might think of truth as what is real, what is factual. But truth is more than this. Truth is also what is reliable, faithful, constant and dependable. Because it is faithful and dependable, you can build upon it and not be disappointed.

We sometimes speak about a true friend. A true friend is one who sticks with us through thick and thin. He doesn't desert us when we go through difficult times. He is dependable, faithful. You can build a wholesome relationship upon a true friend.

In construction, carpenters use a tool called a square (a 'L shaped piece of iron). If this square is "true" then it forms a perfect 90 degree angle. If the square is *true*, you can build well with it. Then the walls of the house will be at a 90 degree angle to the floor and ceiling. Then you will get a square room.

In this sense Scripture speaks about God's Word as being true, and about God Himself as being truth (cf. Psalm 86:11; Psalm 119:30). That God's commandments are *true* means they are faithful, reliable and constant. You can build your life upon them and you will never be disappointed. The same applies for God. God is truth. He is faithful and dependable. You can rely upon Him. You can entrust your life into His keeping and you will never be disappointed.

Conversely, you cannot build on the lie, for the lie is unreliable, unfaithful. You cannot build a relationship with a person who continually lies. You can't depend on him for he doesn't keep his word. You can't trust him because he's not dependable.

You cannot build a house well with a square which is *false*. If you do you will end up with a house like this one.

You cannot build a life upon lies. Think of what happened in Paradise. The serpent told a lie and Adam and Eve believed it. They were about to build their life on the lie, but the lie proved to be the source of death.

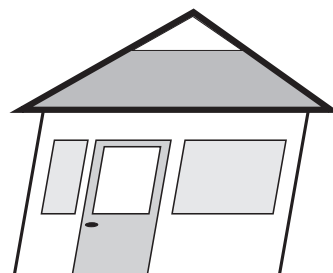
We conclude that ***the truth is a constructive power; and the lie is a destructive power.***

If we understand this, then we will also understand that we do not necessarily promote *the truth* when we only restrict ourselves to speaking what is factual. For example, if we were to broadcast the facts about some sin which our neighbour has committed, we would destroy our neighbour's reputation and standing in the community. We might try to defend ourselves by saying, "*I did not lie! He really did all those things I mentioned.*" We may have spoken the truth as far as facts are concerned, but we have used that truth to destroy, which is the purpose of the lie. We have abused the truth.

Another example of men using the truth in order to destroy is taken from World War II. The Nazis required people of occupied countries to disclose whether they were hiding any Jews, or whether they knew where any Jews were hiding. The Nazis would use these facts to destroy the Jews. Those who protected the Jews rightly withheld the truth, even using the lie to conceal the truth. In this they have acted correctly.

The truth is only to be used for edification, to build up; it must never be used to destroy. In Ephesians 4:25,29 Paul wrote: "*Therefore, **putting away lying**, let each one of you **speak truth** with his neighbour, for we are members of one another. ... Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary **edification**, that it may impart grace to the hearers*" (*edify means to build up*).

Another sin in the sphere of communication is the sin of misquoting someone, that is, twisting someone's words. When words or



statements are taken out of context they can mean something totally different than what they mean in the context in which they were spoken. We must be careful, then, not only to reproduce what a person literally says but also to reproduce what he means. We must not twist his words so that they say something different than what he intended to say.

Reception of Ideas

Earlier we mentioned that this commandment concerns not only the transmission but also the *reception* of thoughts and ideas. We must take heed to what we take in through our eyes and ears.

We must avoid all things which destroy the reputation of our neighbour. If we listen to gossip our opinion about another will be destroyed. If we pass on gossip we destroy our neighbour's opinion of another. The old saying is good: *If you cannot say something good about a person, don't say anything at all.* This is not an unqualified rule. When sin is involved and there is no repentance, Scripture requires that we are to *"tell it to the church"* (Matthew 18:17). But only after we have spoken to the person personally, or with witnesses (cf. Matthew 18:15,16). We must do our utmost to preserve the honour and reputation of our neighbour. If he continues to live in sin, however, we must set aside our concern for his reputation in order to save his life from everlasting ruin.

We must also avoid all forms of communication which impart sinful thoughts and ideas. Much of what is produced or published in the media conveys humanistic philosophies which are in conflict with the Scriptures. Much of what is produced or published is immoral. It portrays a perverted view of sexuality and encourages promiscuity.

We should also be aware that the power of communication is very great. Through communication an idea is implanted in the mind of the receiver. Once an idea is planted it is virtually impossible to remove. Once a thought or an idea is planted in our mind it must be weighed and tested, accepted or

rejected again and again. We might hear some gossip, for example, and immediately reject it as untrue. But you cannot erase that thought from your mind however hard you try. And so often we cannot prove or disprove the gossip which we hear. We automatically weigh and test every action which our neighbour does to see whether the gossip is true or false. And if we cannot disprove it, doubts and distrust form in our mind. Furthermore, if an idea is presented to our minds frequently enough, we begin to believe it.

The world knows the power of communication. Millions and millions of dollars are spent each year on advertising because it is a proven means of implanting thoughts and desires into the mind and heart of others.

The power of communication can be directed to good or to evil. We mentioned earlier that God created communication, and that He created it good. God continues to use it to propagate the truth. It is through the written Word that God communicates the truth to us in the Bible. It is also through the spoken word that this truth is proclaimed every Sunday. It is through the written word that wholesome thoughts are communicated to us through our Christian magazines and books.

There is a great need for wholesome communication. Through the implantation of good thoughts and ideas we build ourselves up in the most holy faith (cf. Jude vs 20). We fortify ourselves through the knowledge of the truth and are equipped by it to withstand the lies of the devil. Those who do not strengthen themselves by means of good communication leave themselves vulnerable to the evil one. It is because of a lack of knowledge that God's people are destroyed (cf. Hosea 4:6).

The devil is also aware of the great power of communication. It is the most powerful weapon in Satan's arsenal (Satan means deceiver). He is the liar and the father of lies (cf. John 8:44). He used corrupt communication in Paradise to implant a wrong idea into the mind and heart of Adam and Eve, and He continues to

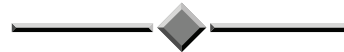
use corrupt communication to deceive man today. Knowing the great power of communication, and in order to propagate the lie, Satan largely dominates the various forms of media which exist. The destructive power which unwholesome communication has upon society life is astounding.

Christ came into this world in order to render that perfect obedience to this commandment which we could not render because of our depravity. He is the truth (cf. John 14:6). He also proclaimed the truth in this world deceived by the lie. All that issued forth from His mouth edified the hearer and imparted grace.

Because He spoke the truth and exposed the lie He was killed (cf. John 8:40). Though an unwholesome word never passed His lips, yet He was condemned for blasphemy (cf. Matthew 26:65), and those who judged him twisted the words which He had spoken (cf. Matthew 26:61). While He bore

God's wrath on the cross, those who passed by Him used God's gift of communication to injure the Christ. In all this Christ bore God's wrath against our sin against this commandment.

By His suffering and death Christ defeated the Deceiver and the Father of lies. By doing so, Christ obtained the right and the power to redeem His people who were enslaved to the power of sin and under the dominion of Satan. Through His death we have been set free from the lie and from falsehood. Insofar as Christ rules us by His Spirit, we believe the truth, love the truth and speak it uprightly.



Questions

1. What do we deal with in the ninth commandment? For what two-fold purpose did God create communication?
2. Define communication. Define the two aspects of communication.
3. What is the most serious transgression in the sphere of communication? What other matters are included under the umbrella of this commandment?
4. What is false witness? Give an example from Scripture which shows how serious and how destructive false witness can be.
5. Give a full definition of truth. (It is not only ____, but also ____).
6. What does Scripture mean when it says that God's commandments are true? What does it mean that God is truth?
7. What can you do with the truth that you cannot do with the lie? What can we conclude about the power of truth and the power of the lie?
8. May we freely broadcast all facts that we know are true? Why or why not? Give two examples.
9. Write out and memorise Ephesians 4:29.
10. What is meant by "twisting" someone's words? What must we be careful to do in this respect?
11. Concerning our neighbour, what must we be very careful not to destroy? When only may we tell others about the wrong that someone is doing or has done? Who must we tell? To whom must we speak first? Why?
12. Why is communication so powerful? How is it evident that the communication is so powerful?
13. God also uses communication. For what purpose?
14. Why is wholesome communication so important? What is written in Hosea 4:6 ?
15. What is Satan's most powerful weapon? What has Satan done to propagate the lie?
16. How has Christ fulfilled this commandment?
17. How has Christ made atonement for our sins against this commandment?
18. What else has Christ done for us?

LORD'S DAY 44

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

A. That not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any of God's commandments should ever arise in our heart.
Rather, we should always hate all sin with all our heart,
and delight in all righteousness.¹

1. **Psalm 19:7-14** The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. ¹³ Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great

transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; ²⁴ and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Romans 7:7-8 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." ⁸ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.

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

A. No.
In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience. ¹
Nevertheless, with earnest purpose they do begin to live not only according to some but to all the commandments of God.²

1. **Ecclesiastes 7:20** For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.

Romans 7:14-15 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

1 Corinthians 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

2. **Psalm 1:1-2** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful: ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Romans 7:22-25 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of

my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Philippians 3:12-16 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

112. Q. If in this life no one
can keep the ten commandments perfectly,
why does God have them
preached so strictly?

A. First,
so that throughout our life
we may more and more become aware of
our sinful nature,
and therefore seek more eagerly
the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ.¹
Second,
so that, while praying to God
for the grace of the Holy Spirit,
we may never stop striving
to be renewed more and more
after God's image,
until after this life we reach
the goal of perfection.²

1. **Psalm 32:5** I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

Romans 3:19-26 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

Romans 7:24-25 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

2. **1 Corinthians 9:24** Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

1 John 3:1-3 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.



The principle idea of the tenth commandment is the forbidding of **covetousness**. A dictionary would define covetousness as “**greatly desirous of something that belongs to another.**” The English word *covet* comes from the Latin *cupere* which means *to wish for, to desire*. The idea of *greatly* desiring something is not necessarily a part of this word. Neither is it a part of either of the two Hebrew words used in the two versions of the tenth commandment (cf. Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5). The one word means *to wish for, to desire* and the other word means *to delight in, to regard as precious*. Along this same line, the Catechism does not restrict *covetousness* to only great desires, but includes in this term “*even the slightest thought or desire.*”

The idea of coveting is not necessarily negative, though it is often regarded as such. It is often said, “*You may not covet*”. But that is not correct. Both of the Hebrew words for *covet* are used of God when He desired Mt. Zion for His dwelling (cf. Psalm 132:13,14). We could say that God *coveted* Zion for His dwelling.

It is not necessarily wrong for man to covet. God created man with this *desire*. For example, God made male and female in such a way that they were *desirable* to one another (cf. Genesis 3:16).

God does not forbid all covetousness. God only forbids us to covet things that are evil, things that He has forbidden. We must not take delight in sin.

God wants us to covet. God wants us to have desires. But these desires must be for what is good and holy. We are to covet obedience to God's law, or as the Catechism says, we are to delight in all righteousness. Psalm 119 is a good example of the right covetousness which God demands, especially as expressed in vs. 20: “*My soul is consumed with longing for thy ordinances at all times.*”

Notice how strongly the Catechism expresses this radical nature of this commandment. Concerning what is forbidden, the Catechism teaches us that not even the **slightest** thought contrary to

any of God's commandments should **ever** arise in our hearts. Concerning what is required in this commandment, we must **always** hate **all** sin with **all** our heart, and delight in **all** righteousness.

God is not pleased with half-hearted obedience. We must not have a lackadaisical (take it or leave it) attitude towards the service of God. We must not be lukewarm Christians (cf. Revelation 3:16). On the contrary, we must be radical in our service. The fire of enthusiasm and zeal for the service of God should burn brightly in us.

The question arises, however, “*Can those who are converted keep these commandments perfectly?*” Early in the Catechism (cf. LD 2) we learned that the natural, unconverted man cannot even begin to show God the perfect love and render the perfect obedience which God requires, for he is dead in sin. Compare the radical demand in this commandment with the radical depravity of man as described in Genesis 6:5, “*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*”

Considering the extent of man's depravity, we might wonder whether the question asked above is even remotely correct. Since man is so corrupt, how can the Catechism ask whether we can keep this **perfectly**? But the Catechism is not asking this question about the natural man. It is asking this question about the man who has been regenerated by the Spirit of God. Although by nature the natural man can do no good, those who are regenerated can do good (cf. LD 3). Thus the question is legitimate: “*Can those who are converted keep all these commandments?*”

Sadly enough, we must confess that we who have been converted have only a small beginning of this obedience. We cannot keep these commandments perfectly, for our conversion or our regeneration is not yet complete. Paul says, “*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected...*” (Philippians 3:12). John said, “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8).

James wrote, *"For we all stumble in many things.* (James 3:2)

Does this mean that there is no difference between the converted and the unconverted? Far from it! There is a great deal of difference. But the difference lies more in the heart than in the deed. We want to do right, but we cannot attain the goal of perfection that we want (cf. Romans 7:19). Of course, we do not wish to make it sound as if those who are converted do not produce any good fruits. That is not true. They do begin to live, not according to some, but according to all the commandments of God. But that beginning is very small. The converted do produce fruits of gratitude, but even the best of these fruits are defiled. In this sense, our works merit us nothing more than the works of the unconverted.

The greatest difference between the converted and the unconverted lies in their attitude towards God's law and sin. The unconverted have no desire to keep God's law, and feel no remorse over their sin. The converted, however, have a strong desire to keep God's law, and they are filled with remorse when each evening again they must confess that their deeds were imperfect.

But if we cannot keep these commandments, why does God continue to have them preached so strictly? Why doesn't God lower His demands?

We should realise that the law of God is a direct reflection of Himself. When man fulfils the law he bears the image of God. The first commandment *"You shall have no other gods before Me"* arose from the fact that there are no other gods besides Yahweh. The second commandment *"You shall not make for yourself a graven image ..."* arose from the fact that God cannot be visibly represented. The third commandment *"You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain"* arose from the great glory and majesty of God. So it is with all the commandments. God's law is a reflection of God Himself. God imposed His law upon man so that man might reflect His glory by keeping the law. Now God does not change, therefore the law which reflects

Him cannot change. Neither could God not lower the demands without denying Himself the rightful glory and honour that comes to Him when man reflects Him by fulfilling the law.

Rather than lower the demand, God has sent His Son to fulfil the law for us. Christ has rendered the perfect obedience which we could not render. We receive this obedience of Christ as our own if we accept it with a believing heart.

But if Christ has rendered obedience to the law, why do we still hear the law week after week? There are three reasons.

The preaching of the law incites us to pray for that which the gospel promises
What the law TEACHES us:	What the gospel PROMISES us:
1. that we have done so many things contrary to God's law.	1. that Christ made atonement for sins which believers have committed against God's law - (forgiveness of sins).
2. that we have never rendered obedience to even one of God's laws.	2. that Christ imputes His perfect obedience to God's law (righteousness) to believers.
3. that remnants of the old nature cling to us against our will and defile our thoughts and actions.	3. that the Holy Spirit puts to death the old nature and makes the new nature come more and more alive (sanctification).

1. Through the preaching of the law God teaches us that we cannot perform what is required of us for eternal life. Thereby **we are taught to seek the source of our life outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ.** God desires to have us remove all trust in our own ability and rely solely upon God's grace in Christ Jesus. Unless we realise that we are incapable of obeying God's law perfectly, we will never turn to Christ for His obedience.
2. Even though Christ has obeyed the law for us and thereby fulfilled all righteousness, **we are still required to keep the law out of thankfulness.**

Christ said, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments*" (John 14:15). Since we by nature do not know the perfect will of God, it pleases God to have His law proclaimed.

3. We said that the law reveals to us our shortcomings and sin. Because we love God and want to show Him our gratitude, we earnestly want to keep His commandments. The greater the knowledge of our shortcoming and sins, the more we will pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may be renewed

more and more after God's image, so that we might put off sin and live in all holiness.

From this we learn that the strict preaching of the law incites us to pray for what the gospel promises us in the gospel. Consider the chart below.



Questions

1. What is the principle idea contained in the tenth commandment? Define what this means.
2. Does the Catechism restrict covetousness to only great desires? What does the Catechism include?
3. Is coveting necessarily evil? How can you prove this?
4. What does God forbid us to covet? What does God require us to covet? What does Psalm 119:20 say?
5. With what terms does the Catechism show the radical nature of the tenth commandment a) as far as what is forbidden? b) as far as what is required? What does this teach us concerning our attitude towards the service of God?
6. Can those who are converted to God do good? Can they show God the perfect love and render the perfect obedience that He requires? If so, how? If not, why not?
7. Is there any difference between the unconverted and the converted as far as the good fruits which each bears? Wherein lies the greatest difference between the converted and the unconverted?
8. Since we cannot keep God's commandments, why doesn't God lower His demands?
9. What has God done rather than lower the demands of the law?
10. If Christ has rendered the law for us, why must we still hear the law proclaimed each week?
11. Since Christ has fulfilled the law for us, are we still required to obey the law? Why (not)?
12. What three things does the law reveal concerning ourselves? What does this revelation induce us to do? What three things does the gospel promise?

LORD'S DAY 45

116. Q. Why is prayer necessary for Christians?

A. Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us. ¹
Moreover, God will give His grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask Him for these gifts and thank Him for them. ²

1. **Psalm 50:14-15** Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. ¹⁵ Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

Psalm 116:12-19 What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? ¹³ I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. ¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people. ¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints. ¹⁶ O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. ¹⁷ I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. ¹⁸ I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people, ¹⁹ in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray

without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

2. **Matthew 7:7-8** Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Luke 11:9-13 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

117. Q. What belongs to a prayer which pleases God and is heard by Him?

A. First,
we must from the heart call upon the one true God only, who has revealed Himself in His Word, for all that He has commanded us to pray. ¹
Second,
we must thoroughly know our need and misery, so that we may humble ourselves before God. ²
Third,
we must rest on this firm foundation that, although we do not deserve it, God will certainly hear our prayer for the sake of Christ our Lord, as He has promised us in His Word. ³

1. **Psalm 145:18-20** The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. ¹⁹ He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. ²⁰ The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.

John 4:22-24 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit

and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Romans 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷ Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

1 John 5:14-15 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Revelation 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

2. **2 Chronicles 7:14** If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

2 Chronicles 20:12 O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.

Psalms 2:11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

Psalms 34:18 The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.

Psalms 62:8 Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

Isaiah 66:2 For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Revelation 4

3. **Daniel 9:17-19** Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. ¹⁸ O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

Matthew 7:8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

John 14:13-14 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

John 16:23 And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.

Romans 10:13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

James 1:6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

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

A. All the things we need for body and soul, ¹ as included in the prayer which Christ our Lord Himself taught us.

1. **Matthew 6:33** But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

119. Q. What is the Lord's Prayer?

A. *Our Father who 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 also have forgiven our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power
and the glory for ever. Amen*

1 Matthew 6:9-13 ; Luke 11:2-4



In this Lord's Day the Catechism begins its discourse on prayer. That it comes last in the Catechism does not imply that it is the least important. Prayer is very important, for it is a fundamental means whereby we enjoy communion with God.

Already in Lord's Day 43 we mentioned that God created the gift of communication in order to make possible communion (fellowship) between God and us. God communicates with us through the written word of Holy Scripture, and we communicate with God through the spoken word of prayer.

This communication from God's side is very important, for if God does not communicate with us, we would find it impossible to communicate with Him. This is true also of our relationships with our friends. If we write letters to friends overseas, but never receive letters from them in return, we will find that after a while the relationship fails. After a while we lose interest and we don't know what to write about. If a relationship is to flourish there must be communication from both sides. It is no different with us in our relationship to God. If the line of communication from God's side fails, then the line of communication from our side will fail as well.

God communicates to us through His Word and through the preaching of His Word. It is our duty to open and read Holy Scripture and to place ourselves under the preaching. If we do not bother to read Scripture, and if we do not bother to listen to Him when He speaks to us in the preaching, we will find it extremely difficult to pray. Conversely, the more we busy ourselves with the Word of God, the more we will find ourselves in prayer to God.

The Necessity for Prayer

The Catechism says that prayer is necessary because it is the most important part of the thankfulness that God requires of us. Does this mean that **words** are more important to God than **works**? We often think just the opposite. We say that words are cheap. Or we say that actions speak louder than words. It is one thing to **say** that you are thankful, but it is something else to **show** thankfulness. We might suppose, therefore, that keeping God's commandments should be the chief part of our thankfulness to God.

The Catechism maintains, however, that prayer is the chief part of our thankfulness to God. We should not make this a dilemma, as though words are more important than works. Both words and works are

an important means of expressing our thankfulness. As far as words are concerned, Christ said, *"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks"* (Matthew 12:34). Regarding works He said, *"If you love me, keep My commandments"* (John 14:15).

Yet the Catechism says that prayer is the chief part of our thankfulness. This is true for two reasons.

1. In the first place, ***the chief means by which we express our thankfulness is through the spoken word, by way of prayer and song.*** This is evident from the book of Psalms:

- Psalm 9:1 *I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works.*
- Psalm 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.*
- Psalm 28:7 *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him.*
- Psalm 57:7 *My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise.*
- Psalm 138:1 *I will praise You with my whole heart; before the gods I will sing praises to You.*

2. ***In the second place, prayer is the means whereby we receive the ability to do works of thankfulness.*** Of ourselves we are unable to do good works. Our inability to do good drives us to prayer. We ask God to give us His grace and Spirit and so enable us to do good works. Notice how many petitions of the Lord's Prayer are directed to doing good. We pray that God will rule us by His Word and Spirit so that we hallow His Name, work for the coming of His kingdom, and do His will at all times. Only through prayer do we receive the ability to keep God's commandments, and thereby show our love and gratitude

to God through works. Only those who pray are able to do good works.

When we speak about showing thankfulness to God by words and works, we should realise that God wants neither words nor works by themselves. For both words and works can be empty. As far as words are concerned, Christ said, *"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me"* (Matthew 15:8, cf. Isaiah 29:13). As far as works are concerned, God admitted that He found no fault with Israel as far as offering the required sacrifices were concerned. Yet God said, *"I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds...Offer to God thanksgiving"* (Psalm 50:9). God is only pleased with our words and works when they arise from a thankful and loving heart. For this reason the Catechism teaches us that we must call upon God *"from the heart."*

Prayer is not only needed to express our thankfulness to God, but also to express our dependence upon Him. God is glorified when we seek our needs from Him in prayer. For then we acknowledge that He is the God of providence. We do not lay our petitions before God in order to make Him aware of our needs, for *"your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him"* (Matthew 6:8). We lay our needs before God in acknowledgment that He is the fountain from which all blessings flow.

There are three things which we must know in order to pray a prayer which is pleasing to God:

1. Knowledge of God (who God is, and what He has promised).
2. Knowledge of self (who we are and what we need).
3. Knowledge of Christ (who Christ is and what He has done).

1. Knowledge of God

Before we can pray to God we must know Him. Paul says, *"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?"*

And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14).

Furthermore, we are required to pray with confidence. James wrote concerning prayer, *"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind"* (James 1:6). To have this confidence we need to know God, for we do not confide in someone who we do not know. We need to know about God's:

a. almighty power - Before we can ask God to provide us with our daily bread, we need to know that God is the almighty Creator and Sustainer of the world—the God of providence who makes the rain to fall, the sun to shine, the grass to grow, etc. Before we can ask God to heal us, we must believe that He is the God of life and death, health and sickness.

b. willingness - In order to pray with confidence we must be sure that God is willing to grant us what we ask of Him in prayer. We must come to know God as our Father through Jesus Christ who loves us and promises to provide us with all things we need.

For this reason the Catechism says *"that we must ...call upon the one true God only, who has revealed Himself in His Word."*

2. Knowledge of Self

In order to pray rightly we must know ourselves. We must know who we are and what we need. This knowledge of self falls under two categories:

1. We must know ourselves as **creatures** who are dependent upon God's **providential care**.

Man tends to be proud and haughty. He is inclined to believe that he is self-sufficient and that he is able to care for himself, that he does not need God. He relies upon his own strength and his own wisdom to provide himself with what is needed for life.

If we are to pray rightly, we need to know our dependence upon God. We

are but creatures. If God should withdraw His Spirit from us, we would return to dust. If God should close the heavens and withhold the rain, we would starve. We depend upon God to sustain us in life.

This knowledge of ourselves, as creatures dependent upon God, will set the right tone of **humility** in prayer.

2. We must know ourselves as **sinners** who are dependent upon God's **grace**. We must always remind ourselves that we have no right of access to the throne of God. Like Israel was forbidden to enter into the Holy of Holies, so we by nature are barred from approaching God in prayer. We have no right to stand before God, for He is holy and we are sinners.

This knowledge of self will also set the proper tone of **humility** which belongs to prayer. Like the sinner who prayed in the temple, who, *"standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven,"* (Luke 18:13) so we fold our hands in meekness and bow our heads when we pray in order to show our unworthiness to come into the presence of God.

In order to pray a prayer which is pleasing to God, we must also know what to pray for. Because of our corruption, it is possible for us to pray for things which displease God. James said, *"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures"* (James 4:3).

What are we to pray for? For all that we need for body and soul. We pray not just for our physical needs, but also our spiritual needs.

Our Physical Needs

Be aware that the emphasis falls upon the word *"needs"*. We do not pray for all the things we **want**, but for the things we **need**.

Our needs are not self-centred, but God-centred. We must not suppose that God exists to serve us to promote our happiness and our well-being. Rather, we are placed

on earth to serve God, to glorify Him and promote His kingdom. We must pray for all that we need that we may work fruitfully to fulfil these aims.

If our prayers are God-centred, we may be sure that God will provide us with all that we need, for He has promised this in His Word. Think of the well-known verses in the Sermon on the Mount: *"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6:31-33).

If we become ill, we do not pray for healing simply so that we can enjoy life longer. Rather, we pray for healing so that we might work fruitfully in God's kingdom. (This was the motive of Hezekiah's prayer for healing. He had not completed the *reformation* of Judah, and prayed that his life might be extended in order to further this work.) The same must be said concerning prosperity. We may not pray for prosperity so that we might bask in opulence, but we may pray for prosperity so that we might contribute to the work in God's kingdom.

Our Spiritual Needs

Besides the physical there are also the spiritual needs which we must bring before the Lord.

We as humans were created to live in communion or fellowship with God. Without this communion we cannot rightly speak of life. Christ once said, *"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"* (John 17:3). This *"knowing God"* is more than just knowing about God. It refers to knowing God in a very personal and intimate way. This friendship or fellowship is an essential part of life. Our joy and satisfaction in life arises from this close communion with God.

We know, however, that our sins have made a separation between God and us (cf.

Isaiah 59:2). Our greatest spiritual need, therefore, is the restoration of communion (fellowship) between God and us. Since our sin has two aspects (guilt and corruption), the restoration of communion with God requires the removal of both guilt and corruption. Both of these aspects should be included in our prayers.

1. For communion to be restored between God and us, the **guilt** of our sin must be removed. God separated Himself from us because of our guilt. God's wrath burned against us, and He excluded us from His glorious presence (which is Paul's definition of eternal death, cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9).

How desperately we need to receive the forgiveness of sins if we are to live in communion with God again. This prayer for forgiveness is the first great spiritual need that we must bring before God in prayer.

2. For communion to be restored between God and us, the **corruption** of our sin must be removed. As a result of our sin, our hearts became hard and corrupt. We no longer loved God, nor did we take delight in doing the good that God required. Rather, we hated God and delighted in sin.

How urgently we need to have our hearts cleansed of all hatred for God and all corrupt desires. This prayer for renewal of the heart is the second great spiritual need that we must bring before God in prayer.

3. The Knowledge of Christ

We have spoken earlier about God's power and about God's willingness to provide us with all that we need for body and soul. We must now focus our attention upon the work of Christ that makes God willing and able to provide us with what we need. Thus the third thing that we need to know in order to pray a God-pleasing prayer is the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

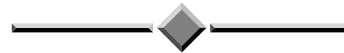
When man sinned, God had to close the fountain of His blessing. For God is a God both of truth and justice. In Paradise God

said that if man obeyed, he would receive God's blessings eternally. But if he sinned, he would bring upon himself an everlasting curse. Because God is true and just, He cannot give blessings of life to those who are guilty of sin.

In order to satisfy both the truth and the justice of God, Christ came into the world. He took our sins upon Himself and made atonement. He rendered the obedience which we should have rendered, and He suffered the curse for our disobedience which we should have suffered eternally. On the basis of Christ's merits, we may now approach the Father and ask for His blessings in Christ's name.

This knowledge of Christ's redeeming work is an important aspect to that confidence

which is essential in a prayer that pleases God. Although we know that we are unworthy to receive anything good from the Father, we may be sure that God will grant us all that we need, for Christ has promised, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you*" (John 16:23). It is for this reason that we often close our prayer by saying something like "*Answer us for Jesus' sake*" or "*All this we ask in Jesus' Name.*"



Questions:

1. What is needed to make communion (fellowship) possible between God and man? How does God communicate with us? How do we communicate with God?
2. What would cause us to lose interest in prayer, or make it difficult for us to pray?
3. Why is prayer necessary?
4. Is it more important to show thankfulness to God by words rather than by deeds? Explain why (not).
5. For what two reasons does the Catechism say that prayer is the chief part of our thankfulness to God?
6. God is not pleased with our words and works by themselves. What is required to make them pleasing to God? Show this from the Scriptures.
7. Besides thankfulness, what do we express in prayer? How does this glorify God?
8. What three things must we know in order to pray a prayer which is pleasing to God?
9. Why is this knowledge of God necessary for prayer? What did James write (cf. James 1:6)? What two things do we need to know about God?
10. What two things do we need to know about ourselves in order to pray properly? What tone does this set in our prayers? How does this become evident in our prayer-posture?
11. On what does the emphasis fall when we pray for our physical needs? Is this need self-centred? Of what may we be confident? Memorise Matthew 6:33.
12. What example from Scripture can you show of a prayer for physical needs that was God-centred?
13. May we pray for prosperity? If so, for what purpose?
14. How did Christ define eternal life? What does that mean? How did Paul define eternal death?
15. What two things must we ask God to remove from us in order to restore communion between God and us?
16. What is the third thing that we need to know in order to pray a prayer which is pleasing to God? What does this knowledge enable us to do? Is this important?

LORD'S DAY 46

120. Q. Why has Christ commanded us to address God as *Our Father*?

A. To awaken in us
at the very beginning of our prayer
that childlike reverence and trust
toward God
which should be basic to our prayer:
God has become our Father
through Christ
and will much less deny us
what we ask of Him in faith
than our fathers would
refuse us earthly things. ¹

1. **Matthew 7:9-11** Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ “Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Luke 11:11-13 If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

121. Q. Why is there added, *Who art in heaven*?

A. These words teach us
not to think of God's heavenly majesty
in an earthly manner, ¹
and to expect from His almighty power
all things we need
for body and soul. 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 17:24-25 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

Matthew 6:25-34 Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁸ So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the

lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹ and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” ³² For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Romans 8:31-32 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?



In order to teach His disciples to pray, Christ gave them an example of a prayer which pleases God. It is good that we realise this. The Lord's Prayer is a model. While it may be used as a prayer, we are not bound to only this prayer.

What is true for the prayer in general is also true for the address of prayer. In the Lord's Prayer, we are given a model of a proper address: "*Our Father in heaven.*" But we are not limited to this address. We may use others. In the book of Psalms we find various addresses:

- Psalm 28:1 *O LORD my Rock* (which expresses safety and protection)
- Psalm 80:1 *O Shepherd of Israel* (which alludes to God's guidance and care of His people).
- Psalm 84:1 *O LORD of hosts* (which speaks of God's power and strength as leader of the angelic army).
- Psalm 92:1 *O Most High* (which proclaims the greatness and glory of God).
- Psalm 123:1 *O You Who dwell in the heavens* (which suggests God's majesty and excellence).
- Psalm 145:1 *O King* (which points out God's dominion and authority).

Any of these addresses are pleasing to God. We are not limited to the one which the Lord taught us in His prayer. We should not make a false distinction as if the address of the Lord's prayer is more perfect than the addresses of David's and Asaph's prayers, for the prayers of David and Asaph were inspired by the same Spirit who dwells in Christ. Yet we focus upon the address which Christ taught because He gave us this address as a model, to teach us the right attitude of prayer.

When we write a letter, we begin with an address. This address sets the tone of the letter. If we write to a stranger, we might address our letter with "*Dear Sir/Madam.*" The tone of the letter will be business-like, impersonal. If we write to someone who has been given a high office or special position in the community, such as our

member of parliament, we would address our letter such as "*Honourable Mr. _____*" or "*Esteemed Sir.*" The tone of the letter would be one of humble respect. If we are writing to a close friend, we would address him/her by first name: "*Dear John*". The tone of the letter will be very intimate, personal. The address of the letter will tell us something about the relationship we have with the person we are addressing, and will set the tone of the letter.

So also the address of the Lord's Prayer tells us something about the relationship which we have to God and sets the tone of our prayer. Thus the address of prayer benefits God inasmuch as it glorifies God. But it also benefits us by putting us into the correct frame of mind. The Catechism teaches us that this address serves to awaken in us the child-like reverence and trust which is basic to prayer.

The original German text of the Catechism speaks about "*child-like fear*" while the Latin translation uses the word "*child-like reverence.*" The word *fear* brings out thoughts of dread or anxiety because of impending harm or danger. The word *reverence* makes us think about *awe*, *respect*, *honour*. Both elements are proper, for we read in Hebrews 12:28,29 "...serve God acceptably with **reverence** and **godly fear**. For our God is a consuming fire."

We are to fear God (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13, 1 Peter 2:17, Revelation 14:7). To be more correct, we are to fear lest we should in any way offend God and bring upon us His wrath. For it is the wrath of God that we fear, not God Himself. God is good and gracious, and all those who obey Him are blessed. But God is also holy, and His wrath burns against sin. We do not fear God Himself, but we fear lest we should arouse the anger of God. In Psalm 90:11 we read: "*Who knows the power of Your anger? For Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due You*" (NIV). "*For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.* (Deuteronomy 4:24). "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Hebrews 10:31).

This “*child-like fear*” is basic to prayer, for it is this “*fear*” that makes us reckon with our sins and our sinfulness. If children have never experienced the displeasure of their father for wrong-doing, they have little incentive to reckon with the wrong-doing. It doesn't bother them if they do wrong. They don't apologise for it. They don't change their ways. But if a child has experienced father's displeasure towards wrong-doing, and have felt father's hand come down heavily upon them when they have done wrong, then they come to have a child-like fear of father, and they begin to reckon with their sin. They will think twice before doing wrong. And if they do wrong, they will be quick to ask for father's forgiveness. In like manner, a child-like fear of God makes us think twice before doing wrong, and makes us quick to ask Father for forgiveness when we've done wrong.

It is this child-like fear of God's wrath which induces us to pray the fifth petition: “*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*” It is also this child-like fear of God which induces us to pray the sixth petition: “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*”

We are also to *revere* God. To revere God means to stand in awe of His infinite majesty, to glorify Him and cause Him to be glorified. He is our Father. By addressing God as Father, we are reminded that we are not addressing an equal. God is not our brother, but our Father. A father has authority, and therefore deserves and demands respect and honour. In like manner, God deserves and demands our respect and honour. Our reverence for God must exceed that which we give to our earthly fathers for God is our *heavenly* Father. His authority, majesty and glory cannot be compared with that of earthly parents. Our child-like reverence for God induces us to pray the first petition of the Lord's Prayer: “*Hallowed be Your Name.*”

We do not only show our reverence to God by speaking words as we do in prayer, but also by submitting ourselves to His authority. Just as children honour their parents by their obedience, so we honour

God by our obedience. It is this child-like reverence for God which induces us to pray the second petition: “*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*”

By addressing God as *our Father*, we also remind ourselves of the child-like trust which is basic to our prayers. By trust we mean *dependence, reliance*. We must place ourselves in the care of God, confidently expecting God to provide us with all that we need.

In order to do this we must know God's love for us. Those who hate us seek to destroy us, therefore we never trust our enemies. We must know that God cares about us, and that he seeks our well-being. And we do know of God's love, for it has been manifested in the giving of His only begotten Son. “*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32).

The address of the Lord's Prayer assures us that our relationship with God is a very intimate relationship of love. We are taught to pray, “*Abba, Father*” (cf. Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6). Literally, “*Abba*” is a form of endearment which could be translated as “*Dad*” or even “*Daddy*.” By this address we are assured that we are not addressing an impersonal deity, but a loving God.

In order to trust God we must also know of God's gracious promises. God has promised to provide us with all that we need for body and soul. However, we might doubt (which is the opposite of trust) that God will provide us with what we need because we have committed countless sins. Our conscience might say “*No, we will not receive God's blessings for we have sinned.*” But if we know of God's grace in Jesus Christ, we will overcome this doubt. For in Jesus Christ all the promises find their “*Yes!*” (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:20).

In order to trust in God we must also come to know God's power or His ability to provide us with all that He has promised. There is nothing too difficult for God. Once a man asked Christ if He could heal his son. The man said, “*If you can do anything ...have compassion on us and help us*”

(Mark 9:22-23). But Christ was insulted by the formulation of this request. We must not prefix our petitions to God with a statement of doubt: *"If you can ..."* for nothing is impossible with God (Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37).

It is this child-like trust in God which enables us to pray *"Give us this day our daily bread"* and to close our prayer with certainty by saying *"Amen - it will surely be!"*

What a privilege, given through grace, to address God as *"our Father."* Through our fall into sin we destroyed our relationship with God and no longer have the right to call him *"our Father."* Through our fall we became children of the devil. In John 8:41-44 Jesus said to the Pharisees, *"You do the deeds of your father."* Then they said to Him, *"We were not born of fornication; we have one Father; God."* Jesus said to them,

"If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. ... You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do" (cf. also 1 John 3:10).

By nature no one has the right to address God as Father. This is a privilege which is given only to those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. *"But as many as received [Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name"* (John 1:12). *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"* (1 John 3:1).



Questions:

1. Why has Christ given us the Lord's Prayer? Are we bound to only this prayer?
2. What are some other addresses of prayers found in the book of Psalms? Is the address of the Lord's prayer more perfect than these prayers? Explain why (not).
3. What does the address of prayer do? Who then benefits from the address of prayer?
4. What does the address of the prayer tell us about our relationship with God? What "tone" should we use when addressing God?
5. The original German text and the Latin translation use two different words to describe the tone of our prayer. Which are they? What do each of these words make us think about?
6. In what sense are we to fear God? What does this fear make us reckon with? What will this fear of God make us do? In which petitions do we see the effect of this *fear*?
7. What does it mean to revere God? What will this reverence of God make us do? In which petitions do we see the effect of this *reverence*?
8. Besides child-like fear and reverence, what other attitude does the address awaken in us? What does that mean?
9. Before we can have child-like trust in God, what three things must we know? How has each of these been manifest to us?
10. What does the term *"Abba"* tell us about our relationship with God?
11. In which parts of the Lord's Prayer do we see the effect of this child-like trust?
12. Through our fall into sin, who became our father? Do we, sinners, have the right to address God as our "Father?" To whom is this privilege given? What does 1 John 3:1 say?

LORD'S DAY 47

122. Q. What is the first petition?

A. *Hallowed be Thy Name.*
That is:
Grant us first of all
that we may rightly know Thee,¹
and sanctify, glorify, and praise Thee
in all Thy works,
in which shine forth
Thy almighty power,
wisdom, goodness, righteousness,
mercy, and truth.²
Grant us also
that we may so direct our whole life--
our thoughts, words, and actions--
that Thy Name is not blasphemed because of us
but always honoured and praised.³

1. **Jeremiah 9:23-24** Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; ²⁴ but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 31:33-34 "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Matthew 16:17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

2. **Exodus 34:5-8** Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷ keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." ⁸ So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.

Psalms 145 ... ¹⁵ The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. ¹⁶ You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living

thing. ¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. ¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. ¹⁹ He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them.

Jeremiah 32:16-20 Now when I had delivered the purchase deed to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD, saying: ¹⁷ "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You. ¹⁸ You show lovingkindness to thousands, and repay the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them; the Great, the Mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts. ¹⁹ You are great in counsel and mighty in work, for your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings. ²⁰ You have set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, to this day, and in Israel and among other men; and You have made Yourself a name, as it is this day."

Luke 1:46-55 And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. ⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. ⁵⁰ And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. ⁵² He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, ⁵⁵ as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever."

Luke 1:68-75 Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, ⁶⁹ And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, ⁷⁰ As He spoke by the

mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, ⁷¹ That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, ⁷² To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, ⁷³ The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴ To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, ⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past

finding out! ³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?” ³⁵ “Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?” ³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

3. **Psalm 115:1** Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth.

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.



The first petition of the Lord's prayer deals with the hallowing of God's Name. To hallow means **to set something apart from the ordinary or the common, and regard it as holy, as very unique or special.** Another synonym (a word that means the same) is *sanctify*. We can find the word “*hallow*” back in the word “*Halloween*,” which is the abbreviation of “*hallowed evening*.” To hallow God's Name, then, is to regard God's Name as extraordinarily special.

The way in which this petition is worded (“*Hallowed be Thy Name*”) leaves us with some questions. Who is the subject in this sentence? Who is to hallow God's Name? Are we asking **God** to hallow His Name? Or are we praying that **we** might hallow His Name? The Catechism does not leave us in suspense here. It teaches us that **we** are to sanctify God's Name.

This petition is a response to two things:

1. First of all, this petition is our response to the third commandment: “*You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain.*” We learned in Lord's Day 36 that though the commandments are written in the negative (*You shall not...*) there is a positive demand included (*You shall...*). God demands that we hallow His name. Thus we pray this first petition in response to the demand contained in the third commandment.
2. Secondly, this petition is our response to our inability to render what God requires. Back in Lord's Day 2 we

learned that because of our corrupt nature we are inclined to all sin. We are inclined by nature to blaspheme God's Name rather than hallow it. By nature, we cannot keep this commandment. Thus we turn to God in prayer, asking God for the power that will enable us to do what we cannot do by nature. When it comes down to the point, it is not really we who sanctify God's Name, but God who enables us to sanctify His Name.

How are we to hallow God's Name? The Catechism shows us that we are to hallow God's Name in two ways:

1. **We** hallow God's Name on account of what **God has done.**
2. We cause **others** to hallow God's Name on account of what **we do.**

We hallow God's name for what God has done

In order to praise God's Name for what He has done, we must first come to know God. This can be illustrated by an example. There are many in the world who admire nature. They take pictures and express wonder at its beauty but they do not praise God who made it. There is no exaltation of God's Name. Why not? Because they do not rightly know God, that is, they do not acknowledge God as Creator. (To know God does not merely mean that we know something about God, but it means that we **acknowledge** Him as God.) Since many do not acknowledge God as the Creator, they

do not praise Him for what He has done in creation. Thus the Catechism says that we must first come to know God before we can hallow His Name.

In order to come to know God, the Holy Spirit must illumine our minds and renew our hearts. The Holy Spirit must work faith in us before we can begin to praise God for the work that He has done.

We are to praise God in all His works. What works has God done? We may divide God's work into two main categories: **creation** and **re-creation**.

God's Work of Creation

When we see the majestic splendour of creation and the pristine beauty of nature, then we praise the Creator for His majesty and glory reflected in His work. This is what David did when he considered God's handiwork: *"O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens"* (Psalm 8:1). *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."* (Psalm 19:1).

When we consider the miraculous creative power of God, we break forth into song extolling God for His greatness and power, as the Psalmist did: *"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"* (Psalm 33:6-9).

When we consider how wisely God governs and maintains creation, we adore Him for His providential goodness." *Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. ...The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The*

LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them". (Psalm 145:3-4;15-19).

All too often we fail in this. We admire the beauty of creation, but we fail to bring our praise to God for it. We receive many good things from our Provider – food, clothing, shelter, health and strength, peace and prosperity – but we fail to give God thanks for them.

Thus in our prayer we ask that God may send us His Spirit, to open our eyes so that we see the Creator's hand behind nature, and to open our mouths to praise Him for His excellent work. We must pray that the Spirit may open our eyes so that we see His providential care, and to open our mouths to thank Him for it.

God's Work of Re-creation

In addition to praising God for His work in creation, we are also to praise Him for His work of **re-creation** which He accomplishes in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. We are to magnify His Name for the grace and mercy which He has shown to us in forgiving us our sins, for imputing to us the righteousness of Christ, and of making us heirs of eternal life. We are to magnify God's great Name for the work of regeneration, whereby He restores us in holiness so that we reflect His image again.

For this we again take our example from the book of Psalms: *"Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies"* (Psalm 103:1-4).

Before we can praise God for His work of re-creation, we must come to know our sin and misery, the redeeming work of Christ, and the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. Here again we state that the Holy Spirit must illumine our mind and open our hearts to receive this knowledge in

faith. Only then will our hearts be filled with gratitude and our mouths filled with praise, extolling the great mercy and love of God. Thus when we pray that God's Name may be hallowed, we are asking the Spirit to give us this knowledge.

The hallowing of God's Name, both for His creative and His re-creative work, should not be restricted to our private prayers, nor to our public worship in Church. We should glorify God's Name before all men. *"Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples* (Psalm 96:3). This task belongs to our prophetic office (cf. LD 12).

We cause others to hallow God's name for what we do

In addition to hallowing God's Name on account of what **God has done**, we are to cause **others** to hallow God's Name by what we do.

The actions of children usually reflect on their parents, for their parents are the ones who are to teach them how they must behave. The misbehaviour of children reflects poorly on their parents. People often blame parents for their children's poor behaviour. It is supposed, though often wrongly, that these naughty children have either learned bad behaviour from their parents, or at least that their parents tolerate such bad behaviour.

We are God's children, and our misbehaviour reflects poorly upon God our Father. When the ungodly see us do things which a child of God should not do, then we give them reason to blaspheme God's Name. If, for example, we speak falsely, that reflects poorly on our Father as though God doesn't really care whether we lie or not.

Paul said that God's Name was blasphemed often because of what God's people did. *"You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written"* (Romans 2:23-24).

Because our actions cast a reflection on God, we must ardently strive to do what is

good and acceptable in the sight of God and man. We must seek to honour the Name of God in word and in deed, so that those who see and hear us see a good and faithful reflection of God. We are to do justice. We are to show love, kindness, patience and mercy. We are to do good to all men. When we do these things, we will cause others to glorify God's Name. This is what Christ meant when He said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16).

If we are to conduct ourselves in such a way that those who see us hallow God's Name, we need the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us, for we of ourselves cannot live a life that would cause others to glorify God. Therefore we pray this petition: *"Grant that we may so direct our whole life - our thoughts, words and actions - that Thy Name is not blasphemed because of us but always honoured and praised."*

We may confidently expect that God will answer this petition, for He has promised us His Spirit who enables us to do good. In Ezekiel 36:27 we are promised, *"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."*



Questions:

1. What does "*hallow*" mean? What is another word (a synonym) for *hallow*?
2. In this petition, are we asking God to hallow His Name, or are we praying that we might hallow His Name?
3. In response to what two things do we offer this petition to God?
4. In which two ways are we to hallow God's Name?
5. What must we first come to know before we can glorify God for His work? How do we come to this knowledge?
6. Into what two categories can we divide God's work? Give some examples of things that we praise God for in the realm of creation.
7. Besides His work of creation, what do we praise God for? Give some examples of things that we praise God for in this realm.
8. Before we can praise God's work of re-creation, what must we know? How do we come to this knowledge?
9. Should we restrict the hallowing of God's Name to our personal, family or congregational worship? Where else must we hallow God's Name? To which office does this belong?
10. Besides hallowing God's Name ourselves, we must cause others to hallow God's Name by what we do. Explain how we manage to do just the opposite sometimes. What does Romans 2:24 say?
11. Explain how we can cause others to hallow God's Name. What does Matthew 5:16 say?
12. What do we need in order to be able to live a life that causes others to glorify God? On what basis can we be confident that God will grant us what we need?

LORD'S DAY 48

123. Q. What is the second petition?

A. *Thy kingdom come.*
That is:
So rule us by Thy Word and Spirit
that more and more we submit to Thee.¹
Preserve and increase Thy church.²
Destroy the works of the devil,
every power that raises itself against Thee,
and every conspiracy against Thy holy Word.³
Do all this
until the fulness of Thy kingdom comes,
wherein Thou shalt be all in all.⁴

1. **Psalm 119:5** Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalm 143:10 Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

2. **Psalm 51:18** Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem.

Psalm 122:6-9 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. ⁷ Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces." ⁸ For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace be within you." ⁹ Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good.

Matthew 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Acts 2:42-47 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

⁴⁶So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

3. **Romans 16:20** And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

1 John 3:8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

4. **Romans 8:22-23** For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

1 Corinthians 15:28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Revelation 22:17,20 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. ²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

In the second petition of the Lord's Prayer we pray for God's kingdom to come. A kingdom is the realm over which a king or queen rules, the sphere over which he exercises his dominion.

What exactly do we mean when we speak about the kingdom of God? Can we include the whole world in the kingdom of God?

Or is God's kingdom restricted only to the church?

God's Kingdom and the World

In the beginning God exercised His dominion over the whole world. God's law was the only law and God was the only ruler. Man was to submit himself to

God as King. Satan was there, but he had no subjects on earth, and thus he had no kingdom on earth.

Then man fell into sin. Man decided to obey Satan rather than God. As punishment, God handed man over to the tyranny of Satan. Man became a slave of sin and the devil, and could not free himself from Satan's power and dominion. With the fall into sin the world changed allegiance and became the kingdom of darkness, and Satan became the ruler of this world (cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11, Ephesians 2:2).

Although the world has fallen into sin, God has not relinquished (given up) His sovereign kingship. God remains king over all creation. He continues to rule over the realm of nature. We speak here of God's providence. Rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, health and sickness, earthquakes and hurricanes—God continues to rule over all these things. He continues to rule the animal kingdom as well. He commanded the locusts which swarmed over Egypt, the ravens that fed Elijah, the lions which did not kill Daniel. No creature can so much as move without His permission.

Furthermore, God continues to rule over the hearts of all men, even the ungodly. He ruled over Pharaoh. One moment, Pharaoh allowed Israel to go free, and the next he pursued them to recapture them. This was the work of God, who softened the heart of Pharaoh one moment, and then hardened it the next, (cf. Romans 9:17,18). King Cyrus of Persia was also God's servant. God put it into his heart to let Israel go free from captivity (cf. Ezra 1:1,2). From Proverbs 21:1 we learn that God continues to rule the hearts of our governors: *"The king's heart is like a stream of water in the hand of God; He turns it wherever He wills."* God rules over the hearts of all men so that they accomplish what He has planned. God even rules over Satan with the result that Satan can only do what God permits Him to do.

In all these different ways we see that in one sense God is still King of this fallen world. But fallen man no longer

acknowledges God as King. Fallen man refuses to willingly bow before Him and worship Him. Neither does fallen man willingly obey God's commandments. But man does willingly acknowledge Satan, and obeys Him. In this sense, Satan is the ruler of this world. He commands the hearts and minds of fallen man.

It was God's wish to re-establish His Kingdom on earth—a kingdom where men would acknowledge Him as King and submit to Him willingly. But before this could happen, atonement had to be made for man's sin and rebellion. Only those would be released from the tyranny of Satan and restored to God's kingdom whose sins were paid for.

In order to make this atonement, and to re-establish His kingdom, God sent our Lord Jesus Christ. God's kingdom was re-established on the foundation that Christ lay at Golgotha. God's kingdom was re-established at the cost of His only begotten Son.

In order that Christ might establish the kingdom of heaven, God has given Him all authority in heaven and on earth (cf. Matthew 28:18). He is *"the ruler over the kings of the earth"* (Revelation 1:5). He is Lord of all earthly lords, and He is King of all earthly kings (cf. Revelation 7:14). God has given Christ the kingship over all creation in order to enable Christ to gather and defend His church. Christ rules all events so that they promote the gathering of His church. He rules all forces, even those of darkness, so that they cannot thwart His church gathering work. Christ will continue to wield the sceptre over all creation until the day comes when all the elect have been gathered. Then Christ will return the kingship of the world to the Father (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

God's Kingdom and Believers

In His grace God has *"delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love"* (Colossians 1:13). We are now ruled by Christ rather than by Satan. Christ is now our Lord and

Master, not the devil. He rules us with His Word and Spirit.

There is a major difference between Christ's rule over the unbeliever and Christ's rule over the believer. Christ rules over unbelievers, although they do not acknowledge Him nor willingly serve Him or submit to Him. You might say that Christ subconsciously and powerfully directs their hearts to do His will. But for whatever reason they do it, it is not because they acknowledge Christ's authority, nor willingly submit to Him. Think of how God ruled Pharaoh, so that Pharaoh's actions fit God's plans perfectly. Christ's rule over believers is different, however. Believers willingly acknowledge Christ's authority, and they willingly submit to Him with all their hearts.

Now it is especially for this kingdom of God that we are taught to pray "*Thy kingdom come!*" But hasn't the kingdom come already? Scripture clearly teaches us that the kingdom of God **has come** (cf. Luke 17:21). In fact, the kingdom of God already existed in the old dispensation. Then it was identified with the nation of Israel. Israel was a theocratic nation, which means that it was a nation *ruled by God*. God was the king of Israel (cf. 1 Samuel 8:7, 12:12). In the New Testament, the kingdom of God is found wherever God rules - in the hearts of believers, in their homes and in the organisations which they establish.

But if the kingdom of God has come, why do we pray, "*Thy kingdom come*"? Because the kingdom of God has not yet come **in fullness**. This is true in three ways:

1. In the first place we, who have been made citizens of God's kingdom, do not yet fully submit to our king. We are still beset with sins and weaknesses. There remain remnants of our rebellious nature in us. Therefore we pray, "*So rule us by Thy Word and Spirit that more and more we submit to Thee.*"
2. Secondly, not all the elect have been brought into the kingdom yet. Therefore we pray, "*Preserve and increase Thy church.*"

3. In the third place, the kingdom of darkness has not yet been destroyed. It continues to occupy a place and to wield its power in this world. Therefore we pray, "*Destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against Thee.*"

We will discuss these three aspects of this petition in greater depth.

So Rule Us

There is an urgent need for God to rule us. By nature we are rebellious. By nature we refuse to bow the knee and acknowledge that God is King. We refuse to be ruled by Him. By nature Satan rules our hearts.

By God's grace in Christ, those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit have been set free from the dominion of Satan. Satan no longer rules us. Rather, we have Christ as Lord and King. Yet even we as believers are not always obedient to God's kingdom law. Remnants of our old nature cling to us against our will, which induce us to do what is against God's law.

For this reason we pray that Christ may rule our hearts more and more, so that we submit to Him with ever greater obedience.

Notice that Christ rules us by His Word and Spirit. These are the same instruments which God uses to work faith and conversion in our hearts. Through the Word we learn of the grace by which we have been delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of God. We also learn what is required of us as citizens of God's kingdom. It is through the working of the Spirit that we come to respond to our gracious inclusion with heartfelt obedience.

If we are genuine in our desire to have Christ rule our lives more and more, we will not only pray this petition. We will also be busy with the Word of God, through which the Spirit works in our heart, and through which Christ rules our heart.

Preserve and Increase Thy Church

The kingdom of God should not be equated with the church as if they are identical, for they are not. The kingdom is much broader than the church, although the church is included in the kingdom. In fact, the church is central in God's kingdom.

The **kingdom of God** can be defined as **that realm over which God is acknowledged as King**. Besides the church, the kingdom includes all other institutions which are ruled by Christ. Every home which is ruled by Christ is included in the kingdom. Every school which is ruled by Christ is included as well. All facilities which care for the elderly and the frail, or which care for the mentally or physically handicapped and which are established and maintained on the principles of Scripture are included in the kingdom. Every business which operates according to the norms of God's Word can be included as well. In general, every institution which acknowledges Christ as King and which submits to His Word is included in the kingdom of God.

Although the kingdom is much broader than the church, the Catechism only mentions the church. This is due to the fact that the church holds a primary place in the kingdom of God. This is true for a number of reasons:

1. Firstly, the church has an important place in God's kingdom because God has given the church the keys of the kingdom. By means of these keys the kingdom of God is opened and closed. By means of these keys men are admitted and expelled from the kingdom. By means of these keys, the kingdom of God increases in size. These keys are the preaching of the Word and church discipline (cf. LD 31). Through the preaching of the gospel, the Spirit brings many to acknowledge and submit to Christ as King.

Besides the preaching of the gospel in church, this petition involves the work of mission at home and abroad. For the kingdom of God is not only increased from within (believers and

their children). The kingdom is also increased through the addition of those outside the church. Thus this prayer for the increase of the kingdom includes the that the gospel may be brought to all peoples. For it is God's plan to "*make disciples of all nations*" (Matthew 28:19). This mission mandate has been given to the church.

The gospel does not only need to be preached in far away places by missionaries; it also needs to be preached in our own country. For there are many who have not really heard the gospel, and many of those who have heard of it have only a superficial understanding of it. All Christians have a task to share the gospel with their neighbours, for all Christians share in Christ's prophetic office. We all have the mandate to profess Christ before men in words and deeds in the hope of winning them for Christ. In this way the members of the church are actively involved in the increase of God's kingdom.

2. The church has an important place in God's kingdom because the church equips the citizens of God's kingdom with the armour which they need in order to fight against and overcome the devil. Without this armour, the citizens of God's kingdom would be left vulnerable to the attacks of the devil and would be destroyed. But through the church, the citizens are fitted with that necessary armour to fight the spiritual battle against sin and the devil (cf. Ephesians 6:11-17).
3. A third reason why the church has a primary place in the kingdom is because the citizens of God's kingdom come to know how they are to live as upright citizens through the proclamation of God's Word in church. They take what they hear in church and apply it to their daily lives. The church is like the hub of a wheel from which many spokes go out. Out of the church grows the Christian home, the Christian school, the old age home, the home for the handicapped and the political societies. In all these organisations and institutions the hub

and centre remains the church, which directs what we teach our children, how we care for our elderly, what should be our political “platform,” and so forth. When we pray for the coming of God’s kingdom, we pray for all these organisations which all have the purpose of promoting God’s kingdom in the hearts of the individuals and in the world in general.

Destroy the Works of the Devil

Satan is bitterly opposed to the increase of God’s kingdom. The reason is simple: the increase of God’s kingdom in this world necessarily means the decrease of Satan’s kingdom. For God gathers his kingdom out of the midst of this world of which Satan is ruler. Naturally, Satan is not pleased to see his kingdom diminish in size or numbers. Thus he does everything possible to destroy God’s kingdom. It is no wonder, then, that when we pray for the coming of the kingdom of God we also pray for the preservation of the church and the destruction of the works of the devil.

Satan’s works are many and devious. We can describe some of them:

1. He sows seeds of heresy in the church, thereby robbing the gospel of its power to work true faith. We have seen how important the preaching of the gospel is in the preservation and increase of God’s kingdom. Thus Satan strives to destroy this important instrument of the Spirit. Church history teaches us that Satan has been quite effective in this area. Time and again the Church of Christ became deformed by accepting heresy. For this reason we are taught to pray, *“Destroy every conspiracy against Thy Word.”* Thankfully, God answers the prayers of the saints and grants continual reformation to the church.
2. The devil also tempts the saints in the hope of making them fall into sin and luring them away from God. We will speak about this more fully when we come to the sixth petition—*“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (LD 52).”*

3. Satan also uses the tool of persecution in order to destroy God’s kingdom. He incites governments to hostility against the gospel and induces them to persecute those who preach it and believe it. For this reason we pray *“Destroy the works of the devil; every power that raises itself against Thee.”* We also pray that God may rule the hearts of our government officials in such a way that the church retains its freedom to proclaim the gospel without persecution.

Of this we may be sure: that God will hear this petition, and His kingdom will come in all its fullness and all its glory. This will occur when Christ returns on the clouds of heaven. Then the kingdom of darkness will be utterly destroyed, and all its citizens cast into everlasting condemnation. Only those will remain on this glorified earth who in this life acknowledge and submit to Christ as King. On the day of Christ’s return, God will become the all in all. That is, He shall be everything to everyone. All men will bow the knee to God and serve Him in all faithfulness.

Out of great longing for that day to come, the church eagerly prays this second petition, *“Thy kingdom come.”*



Questions:

1. What is a kingdom?
2. Who is the ruler of this world? Does this mean that God has relinquished (given up) His sovereign kingship over this world? What does He rule?
3. What had to happen before God could re-establish His kingdom on earth?
4. What has Christ received from the Father in order to establish His kingdom on earth? Over what does Christ rule? How long will Christ continue to rule this world?
5. Explain the difference between Christ's rule over the unbeliever and His rule over the believer.
6. Where do we see the kingdom of God in the old dispensation? Where do we find the kingdom of God in the new dispensation?
7. If the kingdom of God has already come, why do we still pray, "*Thy kingdom come*"?
8. In what three ways has the kingdom of God not fully come?
9. Are those who are regenerated still under the dominion and rule of Satan? Who is their king? Do they always obey their king? Why not? What does this make them ask God in prayer?
10. How does Christ rule us? If we are genuine in our prayer to have Christ rule us more and more, what must we do?
11. Is the kingdom of God to be equated with the church? Explain why or why not.
12. How can we define the kingdom of God? What institution is central to God's kingdom? Which other institutions are included in the kingdom?
13. What is the first reason why the church has such importance in the kingdom of God?
14. What are the keys of the kingdom? Besides the preaching of the gospel in church, where else must the gospel be preached? Whose task is this? What task do the members of the church have in promoting the kingdom of God? How do they do this?
15. What is the second reason why the church has such importance in the kingdom of God?
16. What is the third reason why the church has such importance in the kingdom of God? What is the relationship between the church and all other institutions in God's kingdom?
17. Why is Satan so bitterly opposed to the kingdom of God?
18. Describe three of Satan's devious works by which he hopes to destroy the kingdom of God.
19. What will happen when Christ returns on the clouds of heaven?

LORD'S DAY 49

124. Q. What is the third petition?

A. *Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*
That is:
Grant that we and all men
may deny our own will,
and without any murmuring
obey Thy will,
for it alone is good.¹
Grant also that everyone
may carry out the duties
of his office and calling²
as willingly and faithfully³
as the angels in heaven.

1. **Matthew 7:21** Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Matthew 16:24-26 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

Romans 12:1-2 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. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

2. **1 Corinthians 7:17-24** But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.
¹⁸ Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him

not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. ²⁰ Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. ²¹ Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. ²² For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴ Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

Ephesians 6:5-9 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. ⁹ And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

3. **Psalm 103:20-21** Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. ²¹ Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure.



In this Lord's Day we deal with the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, *"Thy will be done."* Scripture often speaks about the will of God. *"[God] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will"* (Ephesians 1:11). Of David and of his great son, Jesus Christ, it is said, *"I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart"* (Psalm 40:8; cf. Hebrews 10:7). From these two texts we see that the word *will* is used in two different ways:

1. The first (Ephesians 1:11) refers to **God's concealed will** according to which **God** acts. We can define this concealed will of God as ***"that will of God which He has not made known to man, a secret plan which determines what God will do."*** This concealed will of God deals with matters like God's plan of election, and God's plan of providence. We don't know what the future brings for God has not revealed it to us. But God knows, for He has planned all things from the beginning.

We often use the petition *"Thy will be done"* with respect to God's concealed will. We have our hopes and desires, but we realise that God may have something else planned. For example, we may suffer from a serious disease and we desire healing. We ask for healing in prayer, but realise that it might not be God's will for us to be healed. In the end we want God's will to be done, because God knows what is best for us. Thus we pray, *"Lord, please grant healing. But not my will, but Thy will be done."* It is good that we pray as described above. But we should realise that this petition does not refer to God's concealed will.

2. The second text (Psalm 40:8) refers to **God's revealed will**, according to which **we** must act (cf. Psalm 40:8 / Hebrews 10:7). We could define this revealed will of God as ***"that will of God which He has made known to man, a revealed plan which determines what we must do."*** This will of God deals with how we are to live our daily life. This will is revealed to us in Scripture, and summarised in the Ten

Commandments. It is to this revealed will of God that this petition refers.

If this petition deals with God's revealed will (His commandments), why do we ask God *"Thy will be done."* God is not the one who is supposed to do it; we are! Why do we pray to God? Why don't we simply do God's will? The reason we pray this petition to God is because there is a contrast between our natural will and God's will.

Because of his depraved nature, man takes delight in things that God hates. Christ said to the leaders of the Jews, *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do"* (John 8:44). Paul said that by nature *we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others"* (Ephesians 2:3). Through the fall into sin our will has become corrupt. Even more, our will has become enslaved to evil. As the apostle says, *"You were slaves of sin"* (cf. Romans 6:17). The result was that we became children of wrath, condemned to eternal punishment.

It is only through the grace of God in Jesus Christ that our will is set free from the dominion of sin. *"But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life"* (Romans 6:22).

Though we have been set free from the dominion of sin, remnants of the old nature still cling to us. As a result, we find that sinful desires still arise in our heart. We are still inclined to evil. Thus the contest between God's will and ours is not yet over. Throughout our life we will have to fight against our sinful inclinations. As the Catechism teaches us, we must deny our own will. We must sacrifice our sinful desires, and do what God desires. This sacrifice is not easy, which is why we bring this petition to God in prayer. We ask God to give us the ability to deny our own will and do His will.

The fall into sin not only affected our heart and will. Our mind also became darkened by ignorance. We lost the knowledge of

God and His will. As a result we can only know God's will if He reveals it to us.

How does God reveal His will? In the Old Testament there were four ways (cf. 1 Samuel 28:6):

1. by ***dreams***, such as to Abimelech (cf. Genesis 20:3); to Pharaoh (cf. Genesis 41:1); to Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 3:5); to Daniel (cf. Daniel 7:1); to Joseph (cf. Matthew 1:20). Also by ***visions***, such as to Samuel (cf. 1 Samuel 3:15); to Ananias (cf. Acts 9:10); to Peter (cf. Acts 11:5); John (cf. Revelation 1-22).
2. by the use of the ***Urim*** and ***Thummim***, two stones which the High Priest kept in the breast piece of his high priestly garment (cf. Exodus 28:30). By these two stones God guided His people and revealed His will (cf. Numbers 27:21).
3. through ***prophets***, whom He inspired through the Spirit so that they knew and spoke God's will to the people (cf. Jeremiah 35:15); also Agabus (cf. Acts 21:10).
4. through the ***Scriptures*** which God wrote (e.g. the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God) or which the prophets or apostles wrote through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16).

In the new dispensation the will of God is revealed to us solely through the Scriptures. We do not have prophets who are inspired any longer as the prophets of old were inspired, who received dreams and visions or spoke with God or with an angel. Neither do we have anything comparable to the Urim or Thummim. With the end of the apostolic era the will of God was fully revealed in the Scriptures, which becomes for us the only norm for daily life.

Man is not able to discern the will of God simply by reading the Bible. For man does not only suffer from ignorance of mind; his mind is impaired. Perhaps an example would explain this better. Our mind might be compared to a computer. As the result of the magnetic field caused by a lightning storm, a computer might lose all

its data, without the computer itself being damaged. In this case the computer could be reprogrammed simply by using the disks. But if the computer circuitry was blown by a power surge caused by lightning, then the computer itself has been damaged and needs to be repaired by a technician before it can process data again. If man's mind only suffered from a loss of memory, all he would need was a Bible. But as it is, man's mind has become impaired by sin. A Bible alone will not be sufficient to restore a proper understanding of the will of God. The mind itself must be restored by the Spirit of God. Thus, in addition to the Scriptures, man depends upon the Holy Spirit to discern what is the will of God. As Paul says, we must be "*transformed by the renewing of [our] mind that [we] may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*" (Romans 12:2). We must take up the prayer of the psalmist: "*Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness*" (Psalm 143:10).

When we say that God reveals His will to us in the Scriptures, we do not imply that Scripture gives us a detailed description of how to live our lives. Rather, Scripture gives us basic principles which we must apply to the specific situations of our lives. For example, Scripture does not command us to establish schools for our children. But what Scripture does teach us is that our children must be taught the doctrine of God's Holy Word, and all things in conformity with it. In our society education has become systematically regulated by the government. We honour both Scripture and our government by establishing Christian schools which meet government standards, and also honour the principle of instructing our children in the fear of the Lord.

Because the Word of God does not address each concrete situation of life, we find that there is some variance and diversity in applying the principles of Scripture. People will apply these principles in different ways.

The Catechism also speaks about our "*office and calling*." What do these mean? The

idea of **office** refers to **a special position or task that one receives from God**. As Christians, we share in the **office of all believers**, which is the three-fold office of prophet, priest and king. We will not deal with these here, since we have already described the duties of this office in Lord's Day 12. Within the church we have the **special offices** of ministers, elders and deacons.

Furthermore, the Catechism speaks about our "*calling*." Another word which means the same (a synonym) is "*vocation*" (from the Latin *vocare-to call*). This refers to the task that we have been given within God's kingdom, whether that be banker or baker, teacher or preacher.

By referring to our office and calling, the Catechism effectively highlights the need to do God's will in all aspects of our life. Doing God's will is not just a Sunday occurrence, but embraces our whole life. In church life and in every day life, on Sunday and on Monday through to Saturday we are to be guided by God's revealed will.

The Catechism describes the manner in which we must do God's will, namely, "*without murmuring*" and "*willingly*." We will only do God's will when our hearts are filled with love and thankfulness towards God for the grace which He has shown to us in Christ Jesus. That is clear from the summary of the law - "*You shall love the Lord your God ... and you shall love your neighbour as yourself*." Scripture teaches us that God has no pleasure in the obedience which we render if it is rendered grudgingly, or with complaints and murmuring (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:9; Psalm 50:7-14; Ephesians 6:6; 1 Peter 5:2). Only that obedience is acceptable to God which is done out of love and gratitude.

The Lord Jesus gave us His angels as an example to follow. Undoubtedly, Christ had Psalm 103 in mind when He composed this prayer. For in that psalm we read, "*Bless the LORD, you His angels, ... who do His word, heeding the voice of His word*" (v. 20). Our prayer is that we may display the same faithfulness as the angels as they serve God.

Lastly, it is necessary to speak about our **conscience**. Our conscience is that faculty which enables us to distinguish right from wrong. There is a saying: *Always let your conscience be your guide*. But that is not a Scriptural saying. By nature our conscience is corrupt. The natural man has lost all sense of right and wrong. Even we, who are regenerated by the Spirit of God, cannot simply rely upon our conscience in determining what is right and wrong because of the remnants of the old nature that still clings to us. We must always submit our conscience to the Scriptures. Ultimately we must be directed, not by what *we think or feel* is right, but by what *Scripture says* is right. Not our conscience, but Scripture must be our guide.



Questions:

1. In what two ways is the word "*will*" used in Scripture?
2. Define what we mean by the concealed will of God? What does God's concealed will deal with?
3. Does this petition "*Thy will be done*" refer to God's concealed will? Sometimes we use this petition with reference to God's concealed will. When we do, what do we mean by it?
4. What is God's revealed will? What does God's revealed will deal with? Where is God's will revealed?
5. Since we are the ones who are supposed to do God's revealed will, why do we pray "*Thy will be done*"? Why don't we just do it? What has Christ done for us with respect to our natural will?
6. Why is it necessary for God to reveal His will for us?
7. In what four ways did God reveal His will to His people in the old dispensation?
8. In what way does God reveal His will to us in the new dispensation?
9. Can we come to know the will of God simply by reading the Bible? What is needed in addition to the Scriptures? What does Paul say in Romans 12:2?
10. Does Scripture give us a detailed description of how to live our lives? What does it give? What is the result of this?
11. What does the Catechism mean by our "office." Which office do all Christians have? Which are the special offices?
12. What is meant by "*calling*"? What does the Catechism highlight by saying that we must faithfully carry out the duties of our office and calling?
13. In what manner must we do God's will? What is required before we will do God's will in an acceptable manner?
14. What example do we have in doing the will of God? What does Psalm 103:20 say?
15. What is our conscience? Is the saying, "*Always let your conscience be your guide*" a good saying? Why (not)?

LORD'S DAY 50

125. Q. What is the fourth petition?

A. *Give us this day our daily bread.*
That is:
Provide us with all our bodily needs¹
so that we may acknowledge
that Thou art the only fountain of all good,²
and that our care and labour,
and also Thy gifts,
cannot do us any good
without Thy blessing.³
Grant, therefore, that we may
withdraw our trust
from all creatures
and place it only in Thee.⁴

1. **Psalm 104:27-30** These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. ²⁸ What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good. ²⁹ You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. ³⁰ You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth.

Psalm 145:15-16 The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. ¹⁶ You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Matthew 6:25-34 Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁸ So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹ and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

2. **Acts 14:17** Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

Acts 17:25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift

is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

3. **Deuteronomy 8:3** So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

Psalm 37:16 A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked.

Psalm 127:1-2 Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain. ² It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

4. **Psalm 55:22** Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

Psalm 62

Psalm 146

Jeremiah 17:5-8 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. ⁶ For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. ⁷ Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. ⁸ For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit."

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

The Lord's Prayer could be divided into two parts just as the commandments are (cf. LD 34). The first three petitions we focus directly upon God, which is reflected in the word "*Thy*" (Hallowed by *Thy* Name, *Thy* kingdom come, *Thy* will be done...) In the last three petitions we focus upon ourselves, which is reflected in the word "*us*" (Give *us* this day our daily bread, Forgive *us* our debts ..., Lead *us* not into temptation ...).

Regarding these last three petitions, the prayer for our physical needs comes first. It is doubtful whether much significance can be placed upon this order. In the early Christian church it appears that some of the church fathers were embarrassed that the request for a physical gift (bread) should precede the request for spiritual gifts (forgiveness, deliverance from temptation). Thus they interpreted this petition spiritually, as though it referred to the "*bread from heaven*" which is Jesus Christ (cf. John 6:35: *Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.*). This continued to be the accepted interpretation for centuries, so that the Latin Vulgate translated this petition as a reference to *supersubstantial bread*, to the bread that is more than just bread, that is, to Jesus Christ.

This idea was not accepted by the Reformers, however. They understood the reference to bread as literal bread which is needed to sustain earthly life. It is good that they did, for we should never be embarrassed to ask God for the needs of our body, as though our physical needs are of lesser importance than our spiritual needs. God created us with body and soul, and wants us to glorify him in body and soul as we perform the duties which He assigned to us in this world. But we cannot perform the duties that God assigned us unless our bodies receive what is needful for life. If our bodily needs are not provided, then we die, and as the psalmist says, the dead cannot praise God. We need to live if we are to serve and glorify God. Therefore

we should not be embarrassed to ask God to provide us with the bread for our body, as though our physical needs are of lesser importance than our spiritual needs.

We may trust that God will not muzzle the ox while it is treading grain. That is, God will not deny His servants the things they need to do their work.⁸

In this petition we are taught to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" The reference to bread teaches us that we are to ask for **the things we need**. We should not ask for riches or luxury. Neither should we crave these things. With Paul we say, "*And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*" (1 Timothy 6:8). The prayer of Agur is a good example in this respect. Agur prayed, "*Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God*" (Proverbs 30:8,9).

The reference to *bread* is a reference not just to food, but to **all the necessities** for daily life. And not just for life itself. We pray for the things we need for maintaining and promoting the kingdom of God, such as sufficient funds to support the church and school, to do the work of mission, etc. If the needs in the kingdom are very great then we may pray for prosperity. Only we cannot expect God to provide us with abundance if our aim is selfish. As the apostle James said, "*You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures*" (James 4:3).

Before anyone will pray this petition, he must believe in God as the God of providence from whom all physical blessings flow. Basic to this petition is the confession "*that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, **food and drink**, health and sickness, riches and poverty come ... from [God's] fatherly hand*" (LD 10).

In this petition there is also a confession of trust. We do not ask for the things we need ten years ahead. We ask for the things that we need today. We ask for our *daily*

8. I would refer you to LD 42 where we spoke about the relationship between food and work quite extensively.)

bread, that is, for bread which is needful for today, not for tomorrow, nor for the year or the decade ahead. People often wish to accumulate money in a savings account or make investments as a form of security for the future. If God provides us with abundance we may put some aside for the future. That is good stewardship. But in prayer we ask only for the things which we need for today. This requires trust that God will continue to provide in the future.

We are taught to pray "*Give us ... our ... bread*" This hardly seems like a humble petition. Rather, it sounds as though we are demanding our rights. But nothing could be further from the truth. We acknowledge that we have no rights before God. We have sinned and we deserve death, not life. We deserve to die of hunger and thirst. We do not deserve so much as a crumb.

Why then do we pray "*Give us ... our ... bread*? That sounds rather bold! We pray this not because we deserve it, but because God has promised this to us. Our heavenly Father has promised to provide us with all that we need for body and soul. In this

petition we believe, and lay claim to, what God has promised us in His Word.

In doing so we acknowledge the work of Christ which makes it possible for us to receive God's blessings. For God's blessings can only be given to us because Christ has paid for our sins. He suffered in order that we might be blessed. This can be clearly seen at the beginning of Christ's ministry. After His baptism Christ was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There He would suffer, and in His sufferings He would be tempted. He would go forty days and forty nights without food. And being hungry He would be tempted by the devil to take what God had not given, even as Adam was tempted in Paradise. Christ suffered extreme hunger, yes, even death in order that we might receive life and all the things we need for it.



Questions:

1. What do the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer deal with? How is that evident? What do we focus upon in the last three petitions? How is that evident?
2. How did some of the early church fathers interpret the reference to "*bread*"? Did the Reformers accept this interpretation? Should we be embarrassed to ask God for this? Why (not)?
3. Why do we ask God for food?
4. What are we asking God for in this petition? What should we not crave or ask for? What does Paul say in 1 Timothy 6:8?
5. What other things do we pray for besides the necessities of life, such as food, clothing and shelter?
6. When may we pray for prosperity? What must our aim be for this prosperity?
7. What must a person believe in before He will offer this petition?
8. How does our trust become evident in this petition "*Give us this day our daily bread*"?
9. It hardly sounds humble to pray, "*Give us....*" Why do we pray in this manner?
10. Do we deserve God's blessings? What makes it possible for us to receive God's blessings? Where do we see this?

LORD'S DAY 51

126. Q. What is the fifth petition?

A. *And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*
That is:
For the sake of Christ's blood,
do not impute to us,
wretched sinners,
any of our transgressions,
nor the evil which still clings to us, ¹
as we also find this evidence of Thy grace in us
that we are fully determined
wholeheartedly to forgive our neighbour. ²

1. **Psalm 51:1-7** Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight; that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. ⁶ Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Psalm 143:2 Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no-one living is righteous.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

1 John 2:1-2 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 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

2. **Matthew 6:14-15** For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 18:21-35 Then Peter came to Him and

said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. ²³ Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. ²⁶ The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ²⁷ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ³⁰ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. ³¹ So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. ³² Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³ Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' ³⁴ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. ³⁵ So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Forgive us our debts ...

The Lord's Prayer is recorded twice in Scripture. It is recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 and again in Luke 11:2-4. There are differences in the prayer recorded by these two evangelists.

That there are variations does not disturb us, for there they were spoken by our Lord on two different occasions. The Lord first taught his disciples to pray in what is called "*The Sermon on the Mount*." Then later in His ministry His disciples asked Him again to teach them how to pray, even as John taught his disciples. For the greater part He repeated His earlier prayer, but there were some changes. Christ never intended this to be a *form prayer* which was to be prayed exactly as it was (though we may certainly use it as a prayer). It was a teaching model. Thus the changes do not disturb us. In fact, the differences in the prayer can highlight different ideas which can be beneficial.

In Matthew we read that Christ taught His disciples to pray: "*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*" But in Luke we read that Christ taught them to pray: "*Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.*"

One difference in this fifth petition is the tense of the verb (forgive). In Matthew we are taught to pray, "*as we also have forgiven,*" but in Luke we are taught to pray, "*as we ourselves also forgive.*" The one teaches us that forgiveness is not merely something that we should do sometime in the future, but that it is something which we must have done already. The second teaches us that forgiveness is not only something that we have done in the past, but that we continue to do in the present as well. We have forgiven and we continue to forgive.

A second difference is the word used in reference to our transgression. On one occasion Christ used the word "*debts*" ("*Forgive us our debts...*" Matthew 6:12) while on another occasion He used the word "*sins*" ("*Forgive us our sins...*"

Luke 11:4). There is a slight difference in meaning between these two words:

1. The word "*debts*" refers to what is still owing. It highlights the fact that we are unable to satisfy the demands of God. God demands perfection from us, but we are not able to render that perfection. He asks us to do many things but we fail to do them. Another word which we sometimes use *shortcomings*. We could also call these the *sins of omission* - failing to do what God has commanded.
2. The word "*sins*" refers to those deeds which we have done which God has expressly forbidden. We didn't merely fall short of doing what God wanted us to do. Rather, we have flagrantly done what God forbade us. We didn't only come short of the mark but we aimed at the wrong target. We could call these *sins of commission*.

In this petition we pray that God might not impute to us any of our sins of omission and any of our sins of commission. To *impute* means *to charge to someone's account, to hold someone responsible for something*. We pray that God might not charge us with any of our sins, nor hold us responsible for any of our transgressions.

The Catechism teaches us the extent of our sins when it describes us as *wretched sinners*. In using this term the Catechism does not deny the regeneration of man through the Spirit. Neither does it deny our ability to do good works. By calling us "*wretched sinners*," the Catechism teaches us how much corruption still clings to us and defiles even our best works.

The Catechism speaks not only about our sins but also our *sinful nature*. It speaks about the "*evil which still clings to us*." Those who are renewed through the Spirit are not completely set free from all corruption. Remnants of the old nature still cling to them. In this petition we also pray for the forgiveness of the sinful nature which we still possess. We ask God not to deal with us according to the uncleanness of our heart, or the ignorance of our mind, or the stubbornness of our will.

Included in this petition is a prayer for the removal of the evil which still clings to us. When we pray for the forgiveness of our sins we plead that God may not declare us guilty. We pray for **justification**. But at the same time we pray that God may remove the source of our sins, namely, the remnants of our evil nature. We pray for **sanctification**.

Why do we pray for the forgiveness of sins? Why do we seek to be justified? Earlier in the Catechism we learned that we seek the removal of our guilt lest we should be condemned (cf. Q&A 56). This condemnation means the exclusion from the presence of God (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9: *"These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"*). God has poured His love into our hearts so that we have come to love God. We wish to live with Him in close fellowship. But we know that He is a holy God in whose presence no sinner may come. He is so pure that He cannot tolerate sin. Either our sin is removed from us so that we may stand before Him, or we will be cast out of His presence. Thus we pray for our **justification**.

Because we have come to love God we want to do what pleases him. Sin is offensive to God. Just as obedience is a symbol of our love for God (cf. John 15:14), so our disobedience is a symbol of our lack of love, or stronger, our hatred for God. We do not want to grieve God by our sins. We don't want to offend Him. Thus we pray for our **sanctification** - that the evil remnants that cling to us may be removed.

We must plead upon God's grace when we ask Him to forgive us our sins. We could never claim any merit for such forgiveness. It could happen that a man has a very good work record. He is never late. He doesn't miss a day unless he is really sick, which has been very seldom. He works hard and his work is done well. If one day there is shortcoming in his work, he could plead for forgiveness on the basis of his good record, and almost expect it. But that is not the case with us. *"Our conscience accuses us that we have grievously sinned against all*

God's commandments, have never kept any of them" (Q&A 59). We could never make up for our sins in the future, for *we are still inclined to evil*, and our debt only increases daily. We must plead upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ. For this reason our Catechism teaches us to base our petition on the atoning sacrifice of Christ. *"For the sake of Christ's blood, do not impute to us ..."*

It is only because of Christ's atonement that God is able to forgive us our sins. For God is a just God. He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. We learned that back in Lord's Day 4. *"God's justice requires that sin committed against the most high majesty of God also be punished with the most severe, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul."* And in Lord's Day 5 we learned that *"we must make full payment either by ourselves or through another."*

We have already learned that we could never make that payment in such a way that we could be released from it. For us the punishment was eternal. God has graciously sent His beloved Son, who has made full payment for us, if we go to Him in prayer.

We must pray for forgiveness. Our sins are not automatically taken away through Christ's sacrifice. Daily we are required to confess before God our sins and shortcomings. Daily we must plead for forgiveness.

Furthermore, the Lord requires more than just the utterance of words before He forgives us our sins. It is not enough to simply say with the mouth, *"Please forgive all my sins."* God will only forgive the sins of those who have truly repented of them. We must grieve that we have offended God by our sin. We must hate our sin and turn away and flee from them.

We may be confident of the grace of God. For His grace and mercy outdistance the heavens. *"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us"* (Psalm 103:11,12).

We may also be confident that the atoning sacrifice is sufficient to pay for all our sins and for the sins of a thousand worlds. There is no sin which is too wicked that cannot be forgiven. There is no debt so great that cannot be paid. For the value of Christ's atoning sacrifice is infinite. For He was the Son of God. His divinity makes the value of His sacrifice immeasurably great. There is forgiveness for the most heinous sins which we have committed, as long as there is genuine sorrow that we have offended God.

...as we also forgive our debtors

God demands that we, who have received grace, must show grace towards our neighbour. This is just one of the many ways in which we are to bear the image of God in daily life. And there is the strongest warning: *"But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matthew 6:15). The brother of our Lord said something similar: *"For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy"* (James 2:13).

Notice that the Catechism teaches us that we must be **fully determined** to **wholeheartedly** forgive our neighbour. That means that we don't want to cherish hatred or enmity. We don't want a breach to continue in our relationship with others. We don't want to hold someone's offence against them. We must be peacemakers.

Sometimes our neighbour commits a very serious sin against us. Must we also forgive those serious sins? We must! The Lord showed this clearly in a parable in Matthew 18:21-35. Our neighbour's sins against us might be very great (as portrayed by the hundred denarii in the parable—a very large sum). But our sins against God are infinitely greater (as portrayed by the ten-thousand talents in the parable—a tremendously great sum). If God has forgiven us such great sins, we in turn must forgive the much lesser sins which our neighbour commits against us.

Now we are not dealing with a command in this Lord's Day. We are dealing with a

petition, a prayer. But the phrase which we are studying now is not really a petition. We are not asking God to enable us to forgive our neighbour. This petition is not: *"Forgive us our debts, and help us to forgive our debtors."* Forgiving our neighbour is not just something that we want to do; it is something that we have done and continue to do. *"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."*

What is the purpose of this phrase then? The word *"as"* (*"as we forgive our debtors"*) might lead us to believe that we are asking God to do for us what we have done to others, as if our forgiveness merits God's forgiveness. This becomes even stronger in the fifth petition recorded in Luke: *"Forgive us our debts, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us."* But this is not the case. We do not ask God to forgive us because we forgive others. Our forgiveness of others does not make us worthy of God's forgiveness. Our mercy to others is not the basis for God's mercy towards us.

What does this phrase mean then? The Catechism teaches us that this phrase gives us the evidence of God's forgiveness. We may be assured that God has forgiven us our sins, for the proof is in the fact that we forgive.

To appreciate this we must realise that only those who have experienced God's grace can show grace. Only those who have been forgiven by God are able to forgive their neighbour. Only those who have experienced God's mercy can show mercy.

In Lord's Day 32 we learned that when Christ redeems us from our sins through His blood, He also renews us through the Spirit to bear God's image. As a result of our renewal, we begin to show mercy even as God does. Just as God is forgiving, so we begin to forgive. The fact that we are willing to forgive, means that Christ has forgiven our sins through His blood and renewed us through His Spirit. The fact that we are willing to show mercy is proof that we have already received mercy from God.

Questions:

1. How often is the Lord's Prayer recorded in Scripture? Are these accounts identical? Why not?
2. Did Christ intend the Lord's Prayer to be a *form prayer* to be prayed exactly as it was? What was Christ's intention?
3. In the two accounts of the Lord's Prayer, what difference is there in the tense of the verb "*forgive*"? What do these highlight about forgiveness?
4. What is the second difference in this petition regarding our transgressions? What do each of these words highlight?
5. What does "*impute*" mean? What are we asking God in this petition?
6. How does the Catechism teach us the extent of our sins? Does this deny our regeneration? Does this deny that we are unable to do good works? What does it teach us?
7. Besides speaking about our sins, what else does the Catechism speak about? What does that mean?
8. What do we mean by *justification*? Besides praying for *justification*, what else do we pray for?
9. Why do we want to be justified before God?
10. Why do we want to be sanctified?
11. On what basis must we plead for the forgiveness of sins? On what basis may we not plead?
12. Are our sins automatically taken away through Christ's sacrifice? What must we do?
13. Is it enough to simply say with the mouth, "*Please forgive all my sins*"? What else is required before our sins are forgiven?
14. Can we be confident of God's grace of forgiveness? On what basis?
15. What makes Christ's atoning sacrifice of such great value? What comfort does this give us?
16. What does God demand of us who have received mercy? Why?
17. What does the Catechism mean when it says that we must be fully determined to wholeheartedly forgive our neighbour?
18. Must we forgive our neighbour all the sins which he commits against us, or only the lesser sins? Which parable makes this clear to us? How does it make this clear?
19. When we add the phrase *as we forgive our debtors*, are we implying that the mercy we show to our neighbour merits God's mercy towards us? Explain what this phrase means, then.

LORD'S DAY 52

127. Q. What is the sixth petition?

A. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*
That is:
In ourselves we are so weak
that we cannot stand even for a moment.¹
Moreover, our sworn enemies -
the devil ², the world ³, and our own flesh ⁴
do not cease to attack us.
Wilt Thou, therefore,
uphold and strengthen us
by the power of Thy Holy Spirit,
so that in this spiritual war ⁵
we may not go down to defeat,
but always firmly resist our enemies,
until we finally obtain
the complete victory. ⁶

1. **Psalm 103:14-16** For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. ¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. ¹⁶ For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

John 15:1-5 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

2. **2 Corinthians 11:14** And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

Ephesians 6:10-13 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

3. **John 15:18-21** If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

4. **Romans 7:23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

5. **Matthew 10:19-20** But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Mark 13:33 Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.

Romans 5:3-5 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

6. **1 Corinthians 10:13** No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

128. Q. How do you conclude your prayer?

A. *For Thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory, for ever.*
That is:
All this we ask of Thee
because, as our King,
 having power over all things,
 Thou art both willing and able
 to give us all that is good, ¹
and because not we
 but Thy holy Name,
 should so receive all glory
 for ever. ²

1. **Romans 10:11-13** For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³ For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

2 Peter 2:9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,

2. **Psalms 115:1** Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, BECAUSE of Your mercy, because of Your truth.

Jeremiah 33:8-9 I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me. ⁹ Then it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide for it.

John 14:13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

129. Q. What does the word *Amen* mean?

A. *Amen* means:
It is true and certain.
For God has much more certainly
heard my prayer
than I feel in my heart
that I desire this of Him. ¹

1. **Isaiah 65:24** It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.

2 Corinthians 1:20 For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.

2 Timothy 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

Each of the individual words of this petition is easy enough to understand. But the petition is not so easy to understand when we consider the combination of these words. The meaning of this petition has puzzled successive generations of Christians, and has different interpretations.

There are two parts to this last petition. "*Lead us not into temptation*" and "*Deliver*

us from the evil one." Many understand these two parts to be synonymous. The second part, they say, is merely a repetition of the first, or a clarification or explanation of the first. Thus they interpret the first in light of the second and deal with it as though it were only one petition. I doubt that this is correct. These are two petitions, related to each other, yet each having its own meaning, as I will endeavour to show.

Lead us not into temptation

We all understand what a temptation is. ***A temptation is a lure to do what is forbidden, an enticement to sin.***

What is not so clear is the meaning of the words, “*lead us.*” The subject of the phrase is the Father. The verb is active. That means that it is the Father who is acting. In the first part of this petition, the Father is portrayed as one who leads people into temptation.

Here we encounter some difficulty. For this phrase seems to imply that God tempts people. But we know Scripture well enough to realise that God does not tempt anyone. “*Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone*” (James 1:13).

There are various attempts to solve this problem. There are some who translate the word *temptation* into *test*. The New English Bible, for instance, translates this petition as: “*Do not bring us to the test.*”

Those who translate this petition in this way, appeal to the fact that in the original there is only one word for *tempt* and *test*. In one place, it is translated as *temptation*, while in another it is translated *test*. For example we read in John 6:5,6: “*Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to **test** him, for He Himself knew what He would do.*” Christ wanted to test Philip, to see whether he believed in His divine power.

Those who translate this petition as, “*Do not bring us to the test,*” also have this in their favour—that the test and the temptation are bound together. What I mean is that whenever God tests us in some matter, Satan is there and tempts us in that very same matter. Think only of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which stood in the Garden of Eden. God put that tree there to test Adam and Eve. God wanted to see whether they would be faithful. But God did not want them to sin. In fact, God warned them that they must

not eat of it, for if they did they would surely die.

Satan took that very same test and turned it into a temptation. He pointed out how delicious the fruit looked. He told them that they would not die. Rather, they would actually become like God, knowing good and evil. Thus Satan turned God’s test into a temptation. And so it is all through life. If God tests us with poverty to see whether we will trust Him, Satan will take that same test and tempt us to steal. If God tests us with prosperity, Satan will take that same test and tempt us to think that we are self-reliant and do not need God.

While there is something very appealing in this interpretation, there is one fact which prevents us from accepting it as correct. That is the fact that Scripture elsewhere tells us that the testing of our faith is good for us, and that we are to rejoice when we meet with fiery trials (cf. 1 Peter 4:12,13). Trials serve to test and refine our faith, as gold is refined in the furnace (cf. I Peter 1:6-7). It hardly seems correct, then, to ask God not to bring upon us these trials that serve for our benefit, and which we should receive with joy. It hardly seems correct, then, to read this petition as: “*Do not bring us to the test.*” We should retain the word *temptation*.

Some who retain the word *temptation* interpret this petition as a plea whereby we ask God to ***keep us from temptation.*** But this hardly seems correct. If it was God’s will that we should be kept from all temptation, then He would need to take us out of the world. For in this life we meet all kinds of stumbling blocks, all kinds of temptations. In Matthew 18:7 (NIV) we read: “*Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come...!*” Elsewhere Christ said, “*I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one*” (John 17:15). It does not seem correct, then, to interpret this petition as one whereby we ask the Father to spare us from all temptation.

Another explanation is that we ask the father to **preserve us in temptation**. They read this petition as if it read: "*Father, if it is Your will that we be tempted, please preserve us in this temptation.*" But that is not what this petition reads. We pray that the Lord may not lead us into temptation.

The words "*lead us*" are the critical words. In the original the word *lead* has the idea of carrying something and depositing it somewhere. We must take these words literally. We ask God not to deposit us into the sphere of temptation. We ask God not to carry us and hand us over to our enemies who will entice us and lure us to sin.

To understand these words we should return to the Old Testament. In the Old Testament God promised His people that if they were faithful, then the LORD would deliver Israel **from** the hands of their enemies (cf. Deuteronomy 21:10). But if His people were unfaithful, and if they sinned against God and aroused His wrath, God would deliver them **into** the hands of their enemies (cf. Leviticus 26:25, 1 Kings 8:46). That happened in the time of the exile. God gave His people into the power of the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

What God did physically to the nation of Israel He also does spiritually to His people. If God's people rebel against Him and harden their hearts, then God gives them over to the power of Satan.

King Ahab had constantly rebelled against God and refused to listen to the LORD's prophets. Thus God invited an evil spirit to tempt Ahab, so that Ahab might fall into the power of His enemy and allow the enemy to kill him. In 1 Kings 22:20-22 we read "*And the LORD said, 'Who will persuade (entice) Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, 'I will persuade (entice) him.' The LORD said to him, 'In what way?' So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the LORD said, 'You shall persuade (entice) him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.'*"

We find another example of this in 2 Samuel 24:1, "*Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved (incited) David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'*" In His wrath, God incited David against Israel. How did He do this? Through Satan. In the parallel passage (1 Chronicles 21:1) we read, "*Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.*" Because of Israel's sin, God led David into temptation by inviting Satan to tempt David.

There is also an incident in the New Testament which we should consider. In the church of Corinth there was a young man who was living in adultery with his father's wife (his step-mother). This man was arrogant of his sin and hardened his heart. Paul told the elders, "*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*" (1 Corinthians 5:4-5). Excommunication from the communion and supervision of the church is equated with delivering a person to Satan. In this instance God led this man into temptation.

There are times when instead of leading His people **out** of temptation, God actually leads them **into** it. Rather than deliver them **from** temptation, He deliberately leads them **into** temptation. This happens when God's anger is aroused because of the pride of His people, or because of their stubbornness in heeding His warnings. This also happens when His people flirt with sin instead of fleeing from it.

When God leads His people into temptation, He leaves them to their own power. They must stand alone. And because they are far weaker than the Tempter, their fall is certain. Thus God said to the evil spirit who was to tempt Ahab, "*You shall persuade (entice) him, and also prevail. Go out and do so*" (1 Kings 22:22).

This is the horrible situation which the Catechism envisions. The authors connect the Father leading us into temptation with

standing alone. And that thought makes us shudder! *Father, do not bring us into temptation, "for in ourselves we are so weak that we cannot stand even for a moment."* All our strength in fighting sin and resisting temptation is derived from God, and without the LORD's sustaining power we will surely fall. If the LORD should lead us into temptation, who is there who will enable us to resist it? If the LORD should lead us into temptation, then we will surely fall.

What we pray, then, in the first part of this petition is that we may never harden ourselves against God in stubborn pride, but always walk in humble faithfulness, that we may never flirt with sin, but always flee from it, lest our Father should ever deliver us into the power of the Tempter and we fall.

...But deliver us from the evil one.

In the first petition we pray that the occasion may never arise when the Father delivers us *into* the power of our enemy, the devil. In the second petition we pray that the opposite may happen. We pray that we may be delivered *from* the power of our enemy.

When we pray "*Deliver us from the evil one,*" we do not pray that we may be spared from all temptation. For as the Catechism teaches us, "*our sworn enemies—the devil, the world and our own flesh—never cease to attack us*" (Q&A 127). We are not asking to be excused from this war, so to speak. Rather, we are praying that we may be victorious in this war. We pray that the Holy Spirit may equip us with the whole armour of God so that we may withstand the wiles of the devil (cf. Ephesians 6:11). "*Wilt Thou, therefore, uphold and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit so that we may not go down to defeat, but always firmly resist our enemies.*"

We pray this petition because we know that we cannot withstand our enemies alone. We are weak and the power of our enemies is very great.

We realise and confess our unworthiness to receive an answer to this petition. For

when we sinned against God, we were rightfully placed under the tyranny of the devil. We were justly subjected to His power and made slaves of His will.

It is only because of the grace of God in Jesus Christ that God is able to answer this petition. In Luke 4:1-2 we read that Jesus Christ "*was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil.*" Christ was led into temptation, for He bore the curse that lay upon us. In every respect He was tempted as we are, but He remained faithful (cf. Hebrews 4:15). Though He was innocent of ever giving into temptation, He was nevertheless delivered into the hands of His enemies through whom He suffered and died (cf. Luke 24:7). He was innocently delivered into their hands, in order that we sinners might be delivered from their hands. It is only because of Christ's sacrifice that we have any hope of God hearing our prayer.

It is also through Jesus Christ that God answers this petition. Because of His sacrifice He has received all power in heaven and on earth. By this power Christ has broken the power of our three mortal enemies and set us free. He has destroyed and continues to destroy the works of the devil (cf. 1 John 3:8). He has overcome the world (cf. John 16:33). And through His Spirit He condemned sin in the flesh so that we might walk in newness of life (cf. Romans 8:3).

As a result of the work of our Saviour, we have this wonderful promise from God: "*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*" (1 Corinthians 10:13). As a result of this promise, we have no excuse if we give into temptation. We cannot excuse our sin because of the strength of our enemy, nor because of our own weakness and depravity, for God promises to provide the way of escape. If we give into temptation, it is because at that moment we did not cling to this promise in faith.

For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory

The Lord's Prayer is concluded with what is called a *doxology*, which means *words of praise*.⁶ These words praise God as the all-powerful and glorious king.

"Thine is the kingdom." God alone rules as the Sovereign King of all creation. Though there is another kingdom on earth, namely, the kingdom of darkness, it is God's kingdom which triumphs and endures for ever.

"Thine is the power." Though there are other powers in the world, they have received their power from God. As such, God's power is far greater than any other power, and without God's permission these powers can do nothing.

This doxology does not only give praise to God. It also expresses our **assurance** or **confidence** concerning the six petitions that have been offered in this prayer:

1. Through the doxology we express our assurance or confidence in God's **ability**. As the all-powerful King, God is able to grant us all that is good. Nothing of what we have asked in this prayer are too difficult for God (cf. Mark 9:23).
2. Through the doxology we express our assurance or confidence in God's **willingness** to answer our prayer. A good and faithful king will certainly seek the well-being of his subjects. This is even more true of God, who is a perfect king. We may be sure that our heavenly King is willing to provide the citizens of His kingdom with all that is necessary for body and soul, for this life and for the next, as we have asked in this prayer.

"Thine is the glory." God is glorified when we turn to Him for the things that we

need. For then we acknowledge Him as the powerful and benevolent Father who loves His children and will provide them with all they need. On the other hand, God is greatly dishonoured if His children fail to turn to Him for their needs. You could imagine God saying, *"Why didn't you come to Me and ask for the things you need? Did you doubt My love for you, as though I would withhold any good from you? Or did you doubt My ability to provide?"* When God's children bring their petitions to God, He is glorified before men. Thus we ask all these things from God so that His holy Name might receive all glory and honour.

Amen

Little children associate the word *Amen* with the end of a prayer. They don't know what it really means, but to them it means something like, *"The End."* When they hear this word they know that the prayer is finished. Often first impressions are lasting impressions and it is difficult to change this impression.

The word *Amen* is derived from a Hebrew word which refers to what is faithful and trustworthy, what is firm and sure. Christ often used this word when He said literally, *"Amen, Amen, I say to you..."* (cf. John 3:3,5,11; John 5:24,25,26).¹⁰ This meant that the statement which He made was trustworthy and true, and worthy of full acceptance.

At the end of our prayer, *Amen* means *"It is true and certain."* What is true and certain? That the kingdom and the power and the glory belong to God. By using the word *Amen*, we confirm with full assurance our faith in God's willingness and ability to grant us all that is good. We conclude our prayer with a word of confidence in God. As our all powerful and glorious King He will hear our prayer and provide.

9. Some ancient manuscripts do not contain this doxology. Because various English versions of the Bible rely more heavily on different manuscripts, there are some English versions which lack this doxology as well. It is found in a footnote in the Revised Standard Version and New International Version. The New American Standard Version has them in the text itself, but puts them in brackets. The King James Version and the New King James Version include it in the text, with a footnote indicating the absence of these words in some manuscripts.

10. This is translated "Most assuredly I say to you" (NKJV) or "I tell you the truth" (NIV) or "Truly, truly I say to you" (RSV, NASB).

This confidence or faith is required in prayer. James wrote, ***“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways”*** (James 1:6-8). Doubting is an insult to God. It is a denial, either of God’s ability or God’s willingness, to answer prayer. It is a denial either of God’s power, His love or His grace.

This confidence is bound up in Christ Jesus. For although we do not deserve anything for which we pray, yet God will hear and answer our prayer for Christ’s sake. Christ assured us of this when He said, *“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it”* (John 14:13,14). As Paul wrote, *“For all the promises of God in Him [Jesus] are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us”* (2 Corinthians 1:20).

It should be stated that our confidence in prayer depends also upon the content of our prayer. We cannot confidently expect God to grant us what He has not promised.

This must be stated in light of the *Faith Movement*, which propagates the idea that you may pray for whatever you wish and God will grant it to you, providing you pray with enough faith, enough confidence. Their motto is *“Name it - Claim it.”* You can ask God to give you a new car for each week of the year, and if you pray with enough faith, you will receive it. This is a false gospel, and their confidence is a false confidence. We may confidently expect all that, and only that, which God has ***promised*** in His Word, namely, what we need for body and soul.

The promises of God are beautifully summarised in the Form for Baptism. If you have received the sign and seal of the covenant, then reflect upon these promises which God has made with you.

When we are baptised into the Name of the Father, God the Father testifies and seals to us that he establishes an eternal covenant of grace with us. He

adopts us to be His children and heirs, and promises to provide us with all good and avert all evil or turn it to our benefit. When we are baptised into the Name of the Son, God the Son promises us that he washes us in His blood from all our sins and unites us with Him in His death and resurrection. Thus we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.

When we are baptised into the Name of the Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit assures us by this sacrament that He will dwell in us and make us living members of Christ, imparting to us what we have in Christ, namely, the cleansing from our sins and the daily renewal of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without blemish among the assembly of God’s elect in life eternal. (Book of Praise—Anglo-Genevan Psalter, Premier Printing, 1984, p. 584).

My prayer is that the Spirit of God may work this confidence of God’s promises in you, the covenant youth, so that you may voice your *“Amen”* before God and His church by making public profession of faith.



Questions:

1. How many parts are there to the last petition in the Lord's Prayer? Is the second part a mere repetition or clarification of the first part?
2. What is temptation?
3. What is the first part of this petition? What does this portray? With what words do we have difficulty? Why?
4. How does the New English Bible translate the first part of this petition? To what do they appeal? What else favours this translation? Explain what this means.
5. Why does it not seem correct to read this petition: "*Do not bring us to the test*"?
6. What do we mean if we ask God to keep us **from** all temptation? Is this what we ask God in this petition? Why (not)?
7. What do we mean if we ask God to preserve us **in** temptation? Is this what we ask God in this petition? Why (not)?
8. What do the words "*lead us*" mean in the original language of Scripture? Should we take these words literally here? What are we asking God, then?
9. Would God ever give his people into the power of the devil? Why?
10. In your own words, recount briefly the events of 1 Kings 22:20-22, and explain why this happened.
11. In your own words, tell how God led David into temptation.
12. When does God lead His people out of temptation? When does He lead them into temptation?
13. What happens when God leads His people into temptation? Why is it such a horrible thing to be led into temptation? If God leads us into temptation, what is sure to happen?
13. What is the difference between the first part and the second part of this petition?
14. When we pray "*Deliver us from the evil one,*" are we asking to be excused from this spiritual war? If not, what are we asking?
15. Why do we pray this petition?
16. According to Luke 4:1-2 who led Christ into temptation? Who tempted Him? Why was He led into temptation? What does Hebrews 4:15 teach us?
17. Though Christ never gave into temptation, what happened to Him? What comfort does this give us?
18. What has Christ received as a result of His sacrifice? What has He done with this power?
19. What wonderful promise do we read of in 1 Corinthians 10:13? What is the result of this promise? Why is it that we give into temptation?
20. With what do we close the Lord's Prayer? What does this mean?
21. What do we declare concerning God in this doxology?
22. What do we express through this doxology? In what two things?
23. What does the word *Amen* mean? What do we confirm by using it at the end of our prayer? Is this so important? Why?
24. What does the *Faith Movement* teach concerning prayer?
Can we be confident that God will provide us with everything that we ask of Him? What may we confidently expect from God?