

THE WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM

Q. 1. What is the chief and highest end of man?

A. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God,¹ and fully to enjoy Him for ever.²

Proofs

¹Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 10:31; ²Ps 73:24–28; Jn 17:21–23.

Comments

Like the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the Larger Catechism comprises three parts: The Prologue (Q. 1–5); What Man Ought to Believe Concerning God (Q. 6–90); and What the Scriptures Require as the Duty of Man (Q. 91–196).

Those who are familiar with the first question of the Shorter Catechism will no doubt notice that it is a condensation by way of removing an adjective (“highest”) and an adverb (“fully”) from this first question.

The Shorter Catechism asks: “What is the chief end of man?”, emphasising the main purpose for man's existence from the perspective of God's design. Here it is additionally noted that this same main purpose of our existence is also the most glorious and noble reason of our existence. A man may think of many reasons why he exists. Some wrongfully conclude that there is no real purpose in life for they exist only by chance (life evolved by chance, they say). Others, thinking more narrowly, conclude they exist for the good of society, for the continuance of their family name, etc. But the Word of God teaches us plainly, that man is created primarily for the glory of God: “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever” (Rom 11:36). And man can only find fulfilment and meaning in his life when he is conscious of being used of God to glorify Him.

To glorify God, of course, does not mean adding to God's glory, for He is already perfect. It means acknowledging His glory and greatness by our lives and manifesting His glory to other rational creatures. Yes, since God is sovereign, even the destruction of “the vessels of wrath” (Rom 9:22–23) does ultimately display His glory. But this is not what our Catechism is emphasising, it is emphasising, rather, what man ought to aim for in life, or, in other words, how man ought to make use of the life that God has given him. One who lives without any conscious effort of exalting God is ungratefully abusing his life, and incurring God's wrath and curse.

On the other hand, one who is consciously seeking to glorify God will also enjoy God and find God to be his chief happiness both in this life and in the life to come. Yes, in this life, no man can enjoy God fully because of indwelling corruption, but such as are glorifying Him in this life will fully enjoy Him one day; and conversely such as do not enjoy Him today will find heaven a torment were he to be brought to heaven (which is impossible).

But how to glorify and enjoy God? We must glorify and enjoy Him according to the means He has appointed. Firstly, as God has chosen to reveal Himself to us, our discovering who God truly is through His own Word glorifies Him and thrills our souls. Secondly, as God deserves our praises, so when we worship Him sincerely and gratefully, we glorify Him: “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me” (Ps 50:23a; cf. Heb 13:15). When we do so, we will at the same time enjoy Him just as we derive happiness when we bring joy and honour to one to whom we feel indebted. Thirdly, as God's greatness and glory is eclipsed by sin in this present world, we glorify God by showing “forth the praises of him who hath called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9b). This we do by lovingly living according to God's commandments, and by testifying to others by words and deeds of God's glory. Again, the child of God will derive happiness doing so because his God is magnified.

Q. 2. How doth it appear that there is a God?

A. The very light of nature in man, and the works of God, declare plainly that there is a God;¹ but His Word and Spirit only do sufficiently and effectually reveal Him unto men for their salvation.²

Proofs

¹Rom 1:19–20; Ps 19:1–3; Acts 17:28; ²1 Cor 2:9–10; 2 Tim 3:15–17; Isa 59:21.

Comments

There is a modern debate between Reformed theologians on how apologetics (the science and art of defending the Christian faith) must be conducted. One camp, known as the Presuppositionalists, traces essentially to the Westminster Theological Seminary theologian, Cornelius Van Til; the other camp, which maintains that theirs is the classical apologetics, has their most vocal spokesmen in John H. Gerstner and R.C. Sproul. Very briefly, it may be said that the classical apologist approaches the unregenerate man as an autonomous thinker (though darkened in his heart), and attempts to prove the existence of God, and so the Christian faith, by using philosophical arguments that centre around “the very light of nature in man, and the works of God.” He does so from “ground-zero,” the consciousness of self-existence. The Presuppositionalist, on the other hand, refuses to go to “ground-zero.” He presupposes the existence of God and the validity of the Christian faith, and that the unregenerate man is simply suppressing the knowledge of these truths. Therefore rather than attempting to prove the existence of God and Christianity, he challenges the presuppositions of the unbeliever to show their irrationality or inadequacy; and then demonstrates the Christian presuppositions to be the only correct and rational option.

These descriptions are, of course, generalisations, but we highlight them because proponents of both camps can often be passionately defensive of their views, and suppose that theirs is the only biblically consistent Reformed view. In such a situation, it would not be surprising to find proponents of both camps pointing to WLC 2 to support the antiquity or creedal validity of their approach.

However, if we study the statement objectively, we will realise that it does not lend itself to either approach. It does teach that natural revelation is sufficient to show that God exists. Therefore it is valid to speak of, for example, the Moral Argument—that man has a sense of morality which cannot be explained apart from the existence of God who created him in His own image (cf. Acts 17:22–23; Rom 2:12–16); or the Cosmological Argument—that the world could not possibly have come out of nothing (cf. Rom 1:19–20); or the Teleological Argument—that the beauty, order and design in nature cannot be explained apart from the existence of God (cf. Ps 19:1–2). However, our catechism does not say that the unregenerate can be convinced. In fact, it insists that without the Word and Spirit, the unregenerate man will never come to faith, because spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14).

Perhaps then, it is neither wise nor necessary to restrict ourselves to this or that method. We should rather bear in mind constantly what our catechism teaches us. When there is a necessity to appeal to the light of nature or the work of God, we must not hesitate to do so; but we must never rely solely on it, and we must never give the impression that atheism is not sin. Furthermore, recognising the fact that man by nature knows that God exists because he has the works of the Law written in his heart (Rom 2:14–15), we should have liberty to immediately refer to the Word of God as truth, and the existence of God as fact. In fact, we should give emphasis to the special revelation (the Scripture) of God because only the special revelation (rather than natural revelation) is sufficient for man’s salvation.

Q. 3. What is the Word of God?

A. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God,¹ and the only rule of faith and obedience.²

Proofs

¹ 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19–21; ² Eph 2:20; Rev 22:18–19; Isa 8:20;
Lk 16:29, 31; Gal 1:8–9; 2 Tim 3:15–16.

Comments

It is evident that God spoke in divers manners to the prophets in Old Testament times (Heb 1:1). He spoke audibly and directly (Ex 20:1; Num 12:8); He spoke through His angels (1 Kgs 19:5; etc.); He spoke through the pre-incarnate Christ (Ex 3:2; etc.); He spoke through dreams (Gen 20:3; 28:12); He spoke in visions (Num 24:4); He spoke to the prophets through the Spirit of Christ in them (1 Pet 1:11); He spoke to the people through the prophets (1 Chr 17:3; Isa 10:24; etc.); He spoke through signs and wonders (Neh 9:10); He spoke through types and shadows of the Old Testament sacrificial system (Heb 10:1).

In the general sense, all these special revelations of God may be regarded as the Word of God. However, as our Confession of Faith teaches us, it pleased God, “for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing” (WCF 1.1). In this way, God makes known to us “the certainty of the words of truth” (Prov 22:21), “for our learning” (Rom 15:4); and for our verification of truth (Isa 8:19–20). This inscripturated Word begun to be available in the Old Covenant alongside the other modes of revelation, and was already known as the Law of God or Word of God (see examples in Joshua 24:26; Proverbs 30:5; Mark 7:13).

Today (under the New Covenant), the “former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now ceased” (WCF 1.1), the term “Word of God” as it applies to God’s revelation can properly refer only to what has been handed down to us as the Holy Scriptures, namely the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. These 66 books constitute the Canon of Scripture, which we believe was closed with the passing away of the Apostles, so that nothing might be added to it (cf. Rev 22:18–19). These 66 books are, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16–17). They are “the only rule of faith and obedience,” for the Christian, and indeed for man.

On the other hand, the books commonly called Apocrypha, though written probably before the Lord Jesus was born, were never sanctioned by the Lord and His Apostles, evident themselves as being of no divine origin and therefore are not part of the Canon of Scripture (WCF 1.3; see also “Canonicity of the Bible” in PCC Bulletin, vol. 2, no. 39, dated 25 March 2001).

What about Creeds and Confessions? Do these constitute rule of faith and obedience? No; not in the absolute sense of the word. We must remember that these are only subordinate standards that are authoritative only in so far as they are consistent with the Word of God. We do, of course, believe that they are, so far as we can ascertain!

Q. 4. How doth it appear that the Scriptures are the Word of God?

A. The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty¹ and purity;² by the consent of all the parts,³ and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God;⁴ by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation;⁵ but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very Word of God.⁶

Proofs

¹ Hos 8:12; 1 Cor 2:6–7, 13; Ps 119:18, 129; ² Ps 12:6; 119:140; ³ Acts 10:43; 26:22; ⁴ Roms 3:19, 27; ⁵ Acts 18:28; Heb 4:12; Jas 1:18; Ps 19:7–9; Rom 15:4; Acts 20:32; ⁶ Jn 16:13–14; 1 Jn 2:20, 27; Jn 20:31.

Comments

It is important when we consider this catechism question, that we bear in mind what it is not asking. It is not asking: How can we prove that the Scriptures are the Word of God; much less, how can we convince an unbeliever that the Scriptures are the Word of God?

Notice that the fact that Scriptures are the Word of God is not questioned. This question is concerned with how it may be seen that Scriptures are the Word of God, or how our confidence that the Scriptures are the Word of God can be confirmed or strengthened.

There are essentially two parts to the answer. The first part has to do with objective observations which testify of the verity of Scripture; while the second part has to do with subjective testimony with regards to the witness of the Spirit. This second part is actually an acknowledgement,—on the one hand,—that that it is impossible for one to be fully persuaded that the Scriptures are the Word of God without the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart; while, on the hand, an affirmation that the child of God, being indwelt with the Holy Spirit, does not really need any rational arguments to be fully persuaded that the Scriptures are the Word of God. “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (1 Jn 2:20), says the Apostle John.

That notwithstanding, the three ways in which “the Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God,” in the first part of our answer, can be helpful to provide material strength to our faith concerning the divine origin of the Scriptures. The first thing that impresses us is the majesty and purity of the content of the Scripture. We need not elaborate on this point, for anyone reading the Scriptures with the aid of the Holy Spirit will not fail to notice the wondrous things contained in it (cf. Ps 119:18, 129). How lofty are the themes, how pure are the expressions! The second thing, which impresses us, is the consent of all the parts, that is to say, its consistency and the absence of contradictions, despite its being written over a long period of time by a number of writers, many of whom never met one another. The serious student of the Scriptures will not fail to notice how they all point to the Lord Jesus Christ. Amazingly, even the historical events experienced by the people of God, that were recorded before the Lord’s birth, point typologically to Him and His work. It is for this reason that the Lord Himself was able to show His disciples how “all the [Old Testament] Scriptures” speaks of Him (Lk 24:27, 44). But thirdly, consider how the Scriptures are often used of the Holy Spirit to cause real and permanent changes in the lives of men. Not only is it true that no other books, in the history of mankind, has a greater impact on society than the Scriptures, but the child of God can testify of how the Scripture convinces, converts, comforts and confirms him in the way of holiness.

Q. 5. What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.¹

Proofs

¹ 2 Timothy 1:13.

Comments

If the Scriptures is the Word of God, as we saw in the previous question, then it is obvious that what it teaches us must be what God wants us to learn; and if God is God, then what He wants us to learn must be of the utmost importance for us, and must serve His own glory most greatly.

What then does the Scripture teach us? A spirit-filled (1 Cor 2:14), discerning reader of the Scripture, will no doubt discover that it is not primarily a science textbook, though it does contain scientific observations ranging from the origin of the universe to the process cycle of water. Neither is the Bible a geography textbook, though it does contain geographic descriptions of numerous places, which appear in its narratives. But what about history? Is not the Bible a history textbook? Well, it is true that a large part of the Bible comprises historical narratives; and it is true that the Christian faith is to a large measure anchored upon actual events in history that is recorded for us in the Scripture. But the fact that only about half the Old Testament and half the New Testament contain historical narratives; plus the fact that in both Testaments, crucial histories are repeated from different perspectives, whereas large chunks of chronological periods appear to be simply glossed over; would indicate to us that history is not the principal purpose of the Scriptures.

After reading the Scriptures, and contemplating its content generally and particularly, we cannot escape the conclusion that our catechism is correct to assert that the Scriptures “principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” It reveals to us who God is, so that we may know how to “fear God” and how to “keep his commandments,” for “this is the whole duty of man” (Ecc 12:13).

Our Larger Catechism, being an exposition and summary of the Scriptures, is accordingly divided into two sections to reflect this twofold purpose of Scripture. After this introduction, Questions 6 to 90 will deal with what man ought to believe concerning God. Then from Questions 91 to 196, the duties that God requires of man is studied.

Q. 6. What do the Scriptures make known of God?

A. The Scriptures make known what God is,¹ the persons in the Godhead,² His decrees,³ and the execution of His decrees.⁴

Proofs

¹ Hebrews 11:6; ² 1 John 5:17; ³ Acts 15:14–15, 18; ⁴ Acts 4:27–28.

Comments

We saw last week, that WLC 5, in a way, gives the structure of the rest of the Catechism in that Questions 6–90 deal with what man is to believe concerning God, whereas Questions 91–196 deal with the duties that God requires of man. WLC 6, in a general way, is also another organising question. It informs us what we may expect to learn about God from the Scripture, and therefore what we may expect from the first division of this Catechism.

First, the Scripture teaches us about God, namely, about His uniqueness and existence (e.g., Heb 11:6) and His perfections. This is covered in Questions 7–8.

Secondly, the Scripture teaches concerning the triunity of God and therefore the persons in the Godhead. This is covered in Questions 9–11 of this Catechism. Further down the Catechism there are also questions pertaining to the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ. However, since the work of the Lord Jesus is very intricately tied to the doctrine of our salvation, it is fitting that the treatment of the subject be deferred.

Thirdly, the Scripture also teaches that God is a sovereign God who decreed all things from eternity past: “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18), says James. God Himself affirms that He declared “the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: . . . I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isa 46:10–11). Although little is said about God’s decrees in the Scriptures, the framers of our Catechism saw that all of God’s dealings with man must be the outworking of His decrees. Three questions, Questions 12–14, are therefore dedicated to discussing God’s decrees.

Finally, the Scripture also teaches us specifically how God executes His eternal decrees, or, in other words, how He deals with His creatures in time. This can be generally classified under (1) acts of creation, Questions 15–17; (2) acts of general providence, Questions 18–20; and (3) acts of redemption or special providence, Questions 21–90. It is instructive to note that this last section, which covers the doctrine of Christ and of salvation, would be dealt with most thoroughly because it is given central place in the Scriptures, and yet, in our present summary question, it is not given special mention, but lumped under: “the execution of [God’s] decrees.” Why is this so? It is so because the framers of our Catechism understood that the outworking of history is not so much about man as it is about God. Man exists for the glory of God. The redemption of man is about God’s sovereignty and grace.

Q. 7. What is God?

A. God is a Spirit,¹ in and of Himself infinite in being,² glory,³ blessedness,⁴ and perfection;⁵ all-sufficient,⁶ eternal,⁷ unchangeable,⁸ incomprehensible,⁹ everywhere present,¹⁰ almighty,¹¹ knowing all things,¹² most wise,¹³ most holy,¹⁴ most just,¹⁵ most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.¹⁶

Proofs

¹ Jn 4:24; ² Ex 3:14; Job 11:7-9; ³ Acts 7:2; ⁴ 1 Tim 6:15; ⁵ Mt 5:48; ⁶ Gen 17:1; ⁷ Ps 90:2; ⁸ Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17;
⁹ 1 Kgs 8:27; ¹⁰ Ps 139:1-13; ¹¹ Rev 4:8; ¹² Heb 4:13; Ps 147:5; ¹³ Rom 16:27; ¹⁴ Isa 6:3; Rev 15:4;
¹⁵ Deut 32:4; ¹⁶ Ex 34:6.

Comments

Most of our readers would be familiar with WSC 4, which remains one of the most beautiful and succinct statement on the doctrine of God. WLC 7, may not be as well-known and may not have the same beauty of expression as its shorter counterpart, but it is more comprehensive. We know of no better way to comment on it than to take it apart and to comment on it one phrase at a time:

(1) “God is a Spirit.” This phrase, taken from John 4:24 teaches us that God is not corporal like us, so he cannot be seen or touched with our physical bodies. At the resurrection, believers will see God in the Lord Jesus Christ in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells.

(2) God is “in and of himself...” That is to say God is not dependent on anything outside of himself for his existence (aseity of God). This was how God describe himself to Moses when He reveals himself as the “I AM” (Ex 3:14).

(3) God is “infinite in being.” That is to say that God is not limited in anyway in his being. Indeed He is not limited in all His ‘attributes’ which are listed in the following phrases. This is what Job’s friend Zophar is expressing when he says: “Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea” (Job 11:7-9). In other words, He is really beyond our finite imagination, and He can never be adequately described by finite tongues. This is why Solomon in speaking about God’s being says: “behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee” (2Chr 6:18). God is the Creator of all things, how can anything contain him or adequately describe Him?

(4) God is “in and of himself infinite in... glory.” God’s greatness or worth is beyond our imagination and knows no limit. None can add to his glory.

(5) God is “in and of himself infinite in... blessedness.” God is ever-blessed. Nothing can add or subtract from his blessedness.

(6) God is “in and of himself infinite in... perfection.” God is perfect. There is nothing lacking in Him in anyway. What God is, is the only real standard of perfection. Nothing can be added or subtracted from Him that will improve His perfection.

(7) God is “all-sufficient.” God does not really need anything outside of Himself. Everything that is created and brought to pass is for the manifestation of his glory for the sake of His creatures.

(8) God is “eternal.” He does not have any beginning or end. He is beyond time, for time is his creation. “from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.” (Ps 90:2) says Moses.

(9) God is “unchangeable.” Because God is perfect, he cannot change. He says: “For I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal 3:6). He does not change in His being and does not change His mind or purpose about anything. He is immutable.

(10) God is “incomprehensible.” Finite creatures can apprehend God based on His self-revelation, but we can never fully comprehend Him or describe Him adequately.

(11) God is “everywhere present.” God is omnipresent (Ps 139:5-12) unlike his creatures, whether corporal or spiritual.

(12) God is “almighty.” God is omnipotent. His has power to do whatever He wills and He is doing whatever He wills.

(13) God is all-knowing and therefore “knowing all things.” God knows all things including our thoughts and things that have not yet come to pass (Ps 139:1-4).

(14) God is “most wise.” His wisdom and understanding knows no bounds.

(15) God is “most holy.” He is transcendently holy and pure. Even the seraphim who were holy creatures created to serve Him have to cover their feet and their eyes before Him as they cry out to Him “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa 6:2-3). He is of “purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13).

(16) God is “most just.” Because God is holy, no evil will remain unpunished, and no righteousness will ever be wrongly punished.

(17) God is “most merciful and gracious.” Though God is just He shows mercy, grace and compassion to whom He will, and in His mercy He provides for their reconciliation to Him without transgressing His justice.

(18) God is “long-suffering.” As the term implies, this refers to how God does not punish sin immediately. He gives time for repentance. But for the reprobate, His patience is not without limit, for He will one day call all to judgement and will render unto all what is due.

(19) God is “abundant in goodness” (Ex 34:6). God is good towards all his creatures, but especially His elect. His goodness to his creatures including the reprobate is in terms of his providence for their life in this world, which ultimately serves ultimately to manifest His glory.

(20) God is “abundant in... truth.” All truth belongs to God. If anything is true, it is true because God has defined it to be true, and God’s truths does not contradict each other. Moreover, what God says will come to pass, will come to pass, therefore God’s being abundant in truth also imply His faithfulness.

Q 8. Are there more Gods than one?

A. There is but one only, the living and true God.¹

Proofs

¹ Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:4,6; Jer 10:10

Comments

It is a well-known fact that a large proportion of people in the world believe that there are more than one gods. This has been so for a long period in the history of mankind. In fact, many unbelieving palaeontological anthropologists believe that the first religions were polytheistic. They claim that the monotheism of Judaism (and later Christianity) was really a late development in the evolution of religion. But this speculation is flatly contradicted by the Scriptures which teaches us that man, created in the image of God, was originally monotheistic.

The idea that there could be more gods than one, really came about through sin darkened minds. The apostle Paul expresses this fact:

²⁰ For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: ²¹ Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, ²³: And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things (Rom 1:20-23)

Men, whose “foolish heart was darkened” refused to worship the invisible God, perhaps because His holiness and glory is vastly too great for their comfort. As such man began to invent their own gods. At first,—even up till the time of the New Testament,—man would associate the gods of their imagination with objects in nature (rocks, trees, sun, moon, etc), or make images to represent them.

This is why whenever the Scripture speaks about false gods, they are spoken of as idols of wood and stone. Consider, for example:

- “The LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens” (Ps 96:4-5)
- “We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (1 Cor 8:4)
- “how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;” (1 Thes 1:9b)

We must be careful, however, not to think that only worship that involve some kind of images are condemned in these verses, for all gods of man’s imagination are idols, whether or not man have sought to represented them. The idols of wood and stone simply serve to underline how impotent false gods are, for they are made by man, and they are dead. And indeed, as they represent but the figment of men’s imagination, they are actually nothing (cf. 1 Cor 8:4), though they that worship them would inadvertently be worshipping the devil, the father of all lies (1 Cor 10:20; Jn 8:44).

What about the religions of the world that claim to worship only one God, who is both living and true? Well, in so far as they deny God’s self-revelation that He is one in essence, but three in persons as we shall see in our next study, we have to declare that they are really worshipping not the living and true God, but a god of their imagination, however powerful they may make him to be. So then, neither Islam nor present day Judaism worships the God who is revealed in the Scriptures.

Q 9. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties.¹

Proofs

¹ 1 Jn 5:7; Mt 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Jn 10:30

Comments

Christians have often been vilified by unbelievers and Unitarians (such as the Jehovah Witnesses and Muslims) as believing in a contradiction. The is sadly, often some elements truth in their charge, for they would often ask professing Christians if they believe that $1+1+1 = 1$, and the answer in 9 out of 10 times would be “yes!” But if it is true that we believe that $1+1+1 = 1$, then we do believe in a contradiction, whether we call it a paradox or some other mystifying terms!

Thankfully, this is not what the Scriptures, or our Confession and Catechism teach. The Scripture does not teach that there are three Gods and yet one God. No, it teaches that there is only one God who is living, eternal and true (e.g., Deut 6:4). However, it also teaches us that there are three Persons in the Godhead—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is to say God is one in essence or being, but three in persons or subsistence. We do not hold that God is one in essence and three in essences at the same time, or one in person and three in persons at the same time (as Isaac Watts surmised heretically).

It is true, that the Scripture teaches that the Father is God (Isa 63:16; Mt 10:33; 11:27; 16:27; Lk 10:21 etc); the Son is God (Jn 1:2; Isa 9:6; Rom 9:5; 1 Tim 3:16 Phil 2:6; 1 Jn 5:20; etc.); the Holy Spirit is a God (Ps 139:7–9; Heb 9:14; etc.). It is true the Scripture teaches us that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are “the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” However, the Scripture also clearly teaches us that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, “distinguished by their personal properties.”

This plurality of Persons in the Godhead is hinted in the Old Testament with the use of the plural pronoun, e.g., “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26). But it is most clearly seen in the baptism of the Lord Jesus (Mt 3:16–17),—where we see the Son being baptised, the Holy Spirit descending and the Father speaking from heaven at about the same time. This is also seen in the recorded communications between the persons in the Godhead, such as the Lord’s prayer to His Father (John 17) and the Father’s declaration to His Son (Ps 110:1). From these passages we may quickly conclude that the Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit; the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

But the fact that this distinction does not imply that there are three Gods is clear not only from the frequent assertions that there is only one God, but also in the fact that the Lord Jesus commands us to baptise in “in the name [not names] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mt 28:19).

How to reconcile the apparently contradictory biblical data? I believe it is quite impossible apart from the ancient formulation of the Trinity: God is one in Essence and three in Persons: “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 Jn 5:7). When we view the Scriptural revelation about God’s being with this formulation in mind, we find that there is in fact no contraction at all! Instead we are left breathless as we behold how this truth reveals itself consistently throughout the inspired Scripture though none of the writers, with the possible exception of the apostle John, made any distinct declaration concerning the Trinity.

Q 10. What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead?

A. It is proper to the Father to beget the Son,¹ and to the Son to be begotten of the Father,² and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all eternity.³

Proofs

¹ Heb 1:5-6, 8; ² Jn 1:14, 18; ³ Jn 15:26; Gal 4:6

Comments

In our previous study, we saw that there are three persons in the Godhead, but these three are “one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties.”

What do the “personal properties” refer to? We see from WLC 10, that the framers of the catechism intend the expression to refer to the subsistential relationship between the persons in the Godhead in order to explain how there can be one essence but three persons. Or how it can be that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet the Father is not the Son and the Son not the Holy Spirit etc.

Essentially, what our catechism teaches us is that God the Father is not-begotten or proceeding, God the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and God the Spirit is eternally proceeding from the Father and the Holy Spirit.

This doctrine has a very ancient beginning and found expression in the confession of the Church as early as the council of Nicea (A.D. 325; as pertaining to the Son) and the council of Constantinople (A.D. 381; as pertaining to the Holy Spirit). The Nicene Creed which took its final form since the Council of Toledo (A.D. 589; which affirm a slight modification respecting the Holy Spirit), declares:

I believe in one God the Father Almighty;...

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all world, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, being one essence with the Father;...

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified...

It is to be admitted that this formulation may give the impression that the Son and the Holy Spirit does not have eternal self-existence. But if they do not have self-existence, how could they be equally and fully God?

For this reason, and for the opinion that the exegetical support for the doctrine is not unassailable, some modern systematic theologians such as Warfield, Boetner, Buswell and Reymond have called for the doctrine (of eternal generation and eternal procession) to be discarded.

It is said that John Calvin, during the time of the Reformation, was also opposed to the doctrine. However, it is far more likely that he was simply unwilling to join in the frivolous speculations arising from it. He says, for example:

What is the point of disputing whether the Father always begets? Indeed, it is foolish to imagine a continuous act of begetting, since it is clear that three persons have subsisted in God from eternity (ICR 1.14.29; note that our Creeds teaches that the Holy Spirit is eternally proceeding, but never speak of the Son as eternally being begotten).

And there appears to be places, where Calvin, zealous to guard the full deity of the Son the Son and the Spirit, and the unity of the divine essence, appears opposed the ancient formulations; and therefore has been raised as the authority for denouncing the ecumenical creeds.

I am personally persuaded that Calvin, rather than denying the creeds, affirmed them but corrected some misconceptions. Calvin made a distinction between the personality and the essence of each person of the Godhead. Simplistically speaking, he would not agree to a derivation of essence, but he would agree to a derivation of personality. He writes, for example: [continued...]

[WLC, continued...]

We confess that the Son since he is God, exists of himself, but not in respect of his Person; indeed, since he is the Son, we say that he exists from the Father. Thus his essence is without beginning; while the beginning of his person is God himself. Those orthodox writers who formerly spoke concerning the Trinity applied this name only to the persons, since it would have been not only an absurd error but even the sheerest impiety to embrace the essence in this distinction. (ICR 1.13.25).

I believe the judicious reader will agree that Calvin did not reject the old formulation as claimed.

But now, what is actually more important is: Does the Scripture teach the eternal generation of the son and the procession of the Holy Spirit. I believe so.

First, from the fact that the first person in the Godhead is designated the Father and the second is designated the Son in the Scripture, we see have the relationship of begetting implied.

Thus, Christ is called the “only begotten Son” (*monogenhv*“, *monogenês*) of the Father, e.g. John 1:18—“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (See also Jn 1:14). It is clear especially from John 1:18 (cf. Gal 4:4; Heb 1:1-3) that Christ did not become the Son of God, but has always been the Son of God, and remains the Son of God. That is Christ is the eternal Son of God, which implies that he is eternally begotten. Thus the Lord Himself says: “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (Jn 5:26). This verse, together with the fact that Christ is pre-existent (Jn 1:1) and the fact that the apostle Paul speaks of Christ as being the “firstborn of every creature” (Col 1:15), can only be satisfactorily resolved under the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. Of course, we must not draw too strong a parallel between eternal generation and natural human generation. The idea of eternal generation must be taken to be an anthropomorphic theological expression by which God would have us understand how Christ can be same in essence as the Father and yet has a different subsistence.

What about the Holy Spirit? In the first place, the word ‘Spirit’ (*j'w'r*, *ruah*, in the OT and *pneu`ma*, *pneuma*, in the NT) when used in a genitive construct with the nouns God or the Lord (Spirit of God, or Spirit of the Lord), suggest a breath proceeding from God or the Lord. In the second place, the Lord describes the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father” (Jn 15:26). The word *proceedeth* (*ejkjporeuomai*, *ekporeuomai*) is in the present middle indicative, indicating perpetual or continuing “action,” upon the subject (i.e. the Spirit) Himself. In the third place, the Holy Spirit, is known in the Scriptures as “Spirit of [God’s] Son” (Gal 4:6) and “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9, 1 Pet 1:11), which suggests that the Spirit does not only proceed from the Father, but also the Son.

Q 11. How doth it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father?

- A.** The Scriptures manifest that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names,¹ attributes,² works,³ and worship,⁴ as are proper to God only.

Proofs

¹ Isa 6:3, 5, 8; cf. Jn 12:41; Acts 28:25; 1 Jn 5:20; Acts 5:3-4, ² Jn 1:1; Isa 9:6; Jn 2:24-25; 1 Cor 2:10-11, ³ Col 1:16; Gen 1:2, ⁴ Mt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14

Comments

Although the term “Trinity” is not found in the Scriptures, the doctrine is implied and alluded to everywhere in the Old and New Testament. And moreover, it can be proven to be true to the absolute satisfaction of every honest and reverent mind. For, we can have no doubt from the Scriptures that:

- (1) There is only one living and true God.
- (2) That One known as the Father is God.
- (3) That One known as the Son is God.
- (4) That One known as the Holy Spirit is God.
- (5) That the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are distinct Persons.
- (6) That the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one in essence even without resorting to the first proposition.

Assuming the verity of propositions 1 and 2 (which hardly admit to any questioning or doubts), *WLC* 11 proceeds to show the verity of propositions 3 and 4, thereby showing that the Son and the Spirit are equal in power and glory with the Father. This is done by pointing that the Scripture ascribe to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, “such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only

Consider first a most remarkable proof that this is the case by comparing Scripture with Scripture. In Isaiah 6, where the prophet saw the LORD in the temple and heard the angels ascribing praise with the words “Holy, holy, holy,” we are told that the LORD spoke to him saying: “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not &c.”

Now, turning to the New Testament, we see John quoting the words spoken by the LORD (compare Jn 12:40 and Isa 6:10), and then affirming that Isaiah saw Christ and spoke of His glory (Jn 12:41). Then in Acts 28:15, we see the apostle Paul quoting the recorded words of the LORD (compare Acts 28:25-27 and Isa 6:9-10) as being the words of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, consider how the Lord taught the disciples to baptise “in the name [singular] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mt 28:19). As the concept of name in the Jewish mind and in biblical paradigm always involve reference to the essence, the Lord’s co-ordinating the Son and the Holy Ghost with the Father in a single name is an affirmation of their unity of essence.

Thirdly, consider how the apostle Paul pronouns a benediction in the name of the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14). This again indicates that they are equal in power and glory.

From these three indications alone, we can see that the Lord and His apostles clearly equate the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Father. But there is more.

The Son is clearly spoken of as God in the Scripture in at least 9 passages in the New Testament: Rom 1:3-4; 9:5; Tit 2:13; Col 1:15-20, 2:9; Phil 2:6-11; 1 Tim 1:15; 3:16 and 1 Jn 5:20. Consider for examples, Colossians 2:9, where Paul affirms that in Christ “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”; Titus 2:13, where he speaks of Christ as being “the great God and our Saviour”; Romans 9:5 where Christ is spoken of as “God blessed for ever”; and 1 John 5:20 where John speaks of Christ as being the “true God, and eternal life.”

These direct statements are confirmed in a plethora of verses that speak of Christ’s divine *attributes* such as His eternality (1Jn 1:2; Heb 1:2,3; Jn 17:5; Jn 1:1); omniscience (Jn 21:17; cf. Mt 16:8; Mt 22:18; Mk 2:8; Lk 5:22; Rev 2:18, 23); omnipresence (e.g. Matt 18:20; Matt 28:20); and omnipotence (e.g. Heb 1:3; Matt 28:18); as well as his *working* that which God alone can do such as creating and upholding the world (Col 1:16; Heb 1:2-3; etc); and receiving *worship* that is due to God alone (Jn 20:28; cf. Acts 10:25; Rev 22:8-9 etc).

Likewise, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as God. For example, Peter charged Ananias for lying to the Holy Ghost, and in the same breath told him that he was lying to God (Acts 5:3-4).

And similarly, many verse affirms the deity of the Holy Spirit by ascribing firstly, divine attributes to Him such as eternality (Heb 9:14); omnipresence (Ps 139:7-8); omniscience (1 Cor 2:10-11); and omnipotence (Lk 1:35a; 1 Cor 12:11); and secondly, divine works to him such as creation (Gen 1:2; Job 33:4); regeneration & sanctification (Tit 3:5); miracles (Matt 12:28); bestowing wisdom and illumination (1 Cor 2:10-16); inspiring the Scripture (2 Pet 1:21); and resurrection (Rom 8:11).

We have listed many proofs for the deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but we would not be exaggerating to say that there are just a sampling of the many passages we could summon to prove our case. The doctrine of the Trinity is an unassailable doctrine. God is Triune!

WLC 12. What are the decrees of God?

A. God's decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of His will,¹ whereby, from all eternity, He hath, for His own glory, unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time,² especially concerning angels and men.

Proofs

¹Eph 1:11; Rom 11:33; 9:14–15, 18; ²Eph 1:4, 11; Rom 9:22–23; Ps 33:11.

Comments

When we speak about the decrees of an earthly king, we are referring to the special directives of the king, which he wishes his subjects to carry out. These are properly distinguished from his laws and commandments, which are standing rules which for his subject's obedience. Nevertheless, these decrees may or may not be carried out, depending on many factors, such as whether his subjects love him and fear him, and whether he has the resources to carry out his wishes.

The decrees of God, like the decrees of the earthly king may be distinguished from His laws and commandments, though in Scriptures they are both known as the will of God in the Scriptures. The decrees of God, are however, very different from the decrees of the earthly king. God is sovereign and omnipotent. He created the world and He is bringing to pass,—by the word of His power,—all things that come to pass in the world (Heb 1:3). Therefore, what God plans or purposes to do will come to pass, or as God informs us through Isaiah: He is “declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 46:10).

Thus our catechism speaks of the decrees of God as the “counsel of His will” (cf. Eph 1:11)— “His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will” (*WSC* 7), or “the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of His will” (*WLC* 12). The word “counsel” actually mean “purpose” or “plan.” So the decrees of God refers the acts of God, by which he has from all eternity, unchangeably determined would happen in the world.

Yes, it appears from the Scriptures that the particular focus of the decrees of God concerns God's rational creatures, namely angels and men. Some angels and men are elected before the foundation of the world (Rom 8:29; Eph 1:3–4; 1 Tim 5:21); whereas others are reprobated (Rom 9:21–22; Jude 6). The elect are sovereignly brought unto everlasting fellowship with God, whereas the reprobate are sovereignly condemned to everlasting punishment for their sin.

But lest we think that the decrees of God are concerned only with our final destiny, let us realise that the decrees of God comprehend and determine all things and events of every kind—whether great or small, whether good or evil—that come to pass. Even things that appear to happen by chance have been decreed: “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Prov 16:33). So even disasters and the acts of the wicked are ordained of God: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil [i.e. disaster]: I the LORD do all these things” (Isa 45:7; cf. Amos 3:6b); “The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Prov 16:4).

This of course does not make God the author of sin. God's rational creature, i.e. angels and men act in accordance to their own heart's inclinations or desires. They are therefore the author of their own sins and responsible for their sins.

That notwithstanding, the decrees of God ensure that all things work out to God's own glory and the good of his elect. This is how it can be said “And we know that ALL things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28; cf. Gen 50:20). Even the reprobate ultimately become instruments of God's glory, for as the apostle Paul says: “What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,” (Rom 9:22–23)

Q 13. What hath God especially decreed concerning angels and men?

A. God, by an eternal and immutable decree, out of His mere love, for the praise of His glorious grace, to be manifested in due time, hath elected some angels to glory;¹ and in Christ, hath chosen some men to eternal life, and the means thereof;² and also, according to His sovereign power, and the unsearchable counsel of His own will, (whereby He extendeth or withholdeth favour as He pleaseth,) hath passed by and foreordained the rest to dishonour and wrath, to be for their sin inflicted, to the praise of the glory of His justice.³

Proofs

¹ 1 Tim 5:21, ² Eph 1:4-6; 2 Thes 2:13-14, ³ Rom 9:17-18, 21-22; Mt 11:25-26; 2 Tim 2:20; Jude 4; 1 Pet 2:8

Comments

We have already seen that in this world there are elect angels and men as well as reprobate angels and men; and we have seen that it is God who elected or reprobated “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4; cf. Mt 25:34). This means that ultimately in the God’s world, some of God’s rational creatures will be enjoying his everlasting blessings, whereas others will suffer his everlasting condemnation.

How do they each arrive at their respective final destinies? Our catechism, following the Scriptures, informs us that God did not merely mark out who is who because He foresaw their final destinies; nor did He mark them out and then left them to reach their destinies by themselves so that there is a possibility that some elect may be lost and some reprobate saved.

No, the elect and reprobate are not only marked out, but also brought to their final destinies by the sovereign power of God answering to His eternal decrees. But God’s power is manifested in their lives differently. Our Confession of Faith speaks of this difference in the words: “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death” (*WCF* 3.3). The elect are predestinated, while the reprobate are foreordained. The two terms though synonymous in some sense, helpfully highlights the fact that in the case of men, particularly, election involves sovereign (supernatural) intervention (such as regeneration); whereas reprobation, in general, involves leaving the individuals to the exercise of their free agency without any intervention.

This, of course does not mean that reprobation involves “bare permission.” No, all things are ordained of God and comes to pass by God sovereign power executing His own decree. And moreover, in some instances, such as in the case of Pharaoh, God hardens the heart of the individual (see Rom 9:17-18; cf. Mt 6:52).

The difference between the way God deals with His elect and the reprobate is moreover manifested in how God views them and how they glorify him. We may summarise the differences in the following table, which is derived or inferred from our Catechism:

Party	Elect	Reprobate
Providential dealing	Predestinated unto Life (Extension of favour including means of grace and regeneration)	Foreordained unto Death (Withholding of favour, and may include extraordinary hardening)
God’s View	Love / Delight / Mercy	Hatred / Wrath / Justice
How they glorify God	Praise of His glorious grace	Praise of His glorious justice
End	Glory / Eternal Life	Dishonour / Eternal Death

Q 14. How doth God execute His decrees?

A. God executeth His decrees in the works of creation and providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will.¹

Proofs

¹ Eph 1:11

Comments

God decrees concerning the universe were made in eternity past. There was never a time when He did not know that the universe would be and how it would be. But it was in the “fullness of time,” that God began to execute his decrees. Yes, as we mentioned before, unlike earthly kings, the God executes His own decrees. Only He can do so. In fact, at the beginning, only He existed to do so! Thus the apostle Paul reminds us that it is God himself “who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will... to the praise of His own glory” (Eph 1:11, 14).

God’s decrees are carried out in two phases. The first work is *creation*, which involves make all things of nothing in the space of 6 days. We will comment more about creation when we look at the next question. The second work, which really begun the moment the first objects in this universe came into existence, is providence. The word “providence” comes from the Latin word *providential*, which means “foresight or forethought.” We will say more about providence when we come to *WLC* 18; but for now we should note that providence does not refer to foreknowledge, but to God’s preservation and ordering of all things and motions in the universe from the moment of their existence.

Nevertheless, God’s creation and providence are in accordance to His “infallible foreknowledge.” That is to say: God knew exactly what He would do, and He did exactly what He decreed to do so that there is absolutely nothing which happens in this world that happens outside his foreknowledge. Or in other words, nothing surprises God. There is no such thing as chance or true accidents in God’s world. “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” says Solomon (Prov 16:33). In fact, God knows all things that will happen because He decreed all things that will happen!

Therefore, our catechism rightly states that God’s creation and providence are also in accordance to the “free and immutable counsel of His own will.” That is to say, nothing influences God in His decisions and works, and nothing can change His decisions or how He carries out His decrees. In other words, God does not change his mind! Not even prayer changes God’s mind, for even our prayers are known and decreed by Him (Ps 139:4)!

Nevertheless, we must pray, for prayer, as we shall see is one of the secondary means which God has ordained to use in the outworking of his providence.

But does that doctrine not destroy free will, in that if God has determined all things, then all men will of necessity choose what God has determined they would choose. Well, no, we must insist that necessity does not mean compulsion. Man is responsible because he chooses according to the inclinations of His own heart. He is not compelled to choose in any way, though the fallen man and angels will choose evil because of a fallen nature, whereas a regenerate man will may choose to do good, and a glorified man or an elect angel will always choose good. Nevertheless, however man chooses, the purpose of God will be carried out: “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Prov 19:21).

Q 15. What is the work of creation?

A. The work of creation is that wherein God did in the beginning, by the word of His power, make of nothing the world, and all things therein, for Himself, within the space of six days, and all very good.¹

Proofs

¹ Gen 1; Heb 11:3; Prov 16:4

Comments

How did our present universe come into existence? Dr RC Sproul in his book *Not a Chance* (Baker, 1994) reduced all the options ever forwarded by cosmologists and philosophers into 4. The first is the cosmos is an illusion; it does not exist. However this is a meaningless assertion, for if the cosmos does not exist, we will not be asking how it came into existence! Secondly, some say that the cosmos is self-existent and eternal. Those who hold to this theory suggest that the present universe came about through a big bang 17 billion years ago. But this theory cannot account for the existence of the condensed piece of material and energy that is said to have exploded. Where did the energy come from? What triggered the explosion? This theory goes against logic and the scientific demand that nothing can come out of nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*). The third theory is that the cosmos is self-created. But this again does not answer the question, for something must exist before it creates something else. The fourth option is the only one logical and valid, namely that the cosmos is created by an infinite and external God.

The Bible does not even allow any room to doubt this truth. It begins with the words: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen 1:1). These words affirm that God has always existed but indicates there was a ‘time’ when the heaven and the earth did not exist. Indeed, nothing existed but God, and time was not yet, for time began when God began to create. So we affirm of the writer of Hebrews: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb 11:3).

And God created by the “word of His power,” i.e. a simple nod that displays the greatness of his power. He created the world in 6 days. These are not 6 indefinite periods, but 6 literal days, for the references to the terms “evening and morning” (e.g. v. 5, 8, etc) as well as the ordinal first, second, third etc used to describe each day, makes it impossible exegetically to take these days other than as literal days. God could certainly have created all things in a split second, but for our sakes He created all things in 6 days and rested on the seventh (when He need not rest).

In the first day, the heaven and the earth, including all the angelic hosts (cf. Job 38:6-7) were created. Then light was created in order to make material things visible.

In the second day, the atmosphere surrounding the earth and such things as clouds were created.

In the third day, dry land was exposed from the sea, and the flora kingdom was created.

In the fourth day, God made the cosmic bodies such as stars, the sun and the moon. From that day on, light shone upon the earth through these sources.

In the fifth day, birds and fishes and all other creatures that live in water and in the sea were created.

Finally, on the sixth day, God made land animals, and then to cap his creation, he made man after his own image.

God’s creation was “all very good.” There were no defects. Everything was perfectly crafted for the purpose for which they were brought into existence. Sin had not yet entered into the world.

Q 16. How did God create angels?

A. God created all the angels¹ spirits,² immortal,³ holy,⁴ excelling in knowledge,⁵ mighty in power,⁶ to execute His commandments, and to praise His name,⁷ yet subject to change.⁸

Proofs

¹ Col 1:16, ² Ps 104:4, ³ Mt 22:30, ⁴ Mt 25:31, ⁵ 2 Sam 14:17; Mt 24:36,
⁶ 2 Thes 1:7, ⁷ Ps 103:20-21, ⁸ 2 Pet 2:4

Comments

The creation account in Genesis 1 does not mention angels explicitly. But we know they must have been created during those six days since God ceased from his work of creation on the seventh day. And there is no doubt that angels were included in the creation, for the apostle Paul says:

“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him” (Col 1:16).

Things that are invisible clearly refer to angels in their many orders. But on which day were the angels created? We believe it was on the first day, when God created the “heaven and the earth” (Gen 1:1). Apart from the fact that the creation of angels does not fit in anywhere else in the creation account, we have the declaration of the LORD the “morning stars” and the “sons of God” sang together and shouted for joy even as He laid the foundations of the earth (Job 38:4, 7). The angels had already begun exercising their vocation of praising God even before man came into existence!

What were the characteristics of angels when they were first created? Our catechism lists seven, namely:

1. As to their nature, they are spirits: the LORD “maketh his angels spirits” (Ps 104:4a). That is to say, angels does not have a body like man. They are finite spirits and therefore can only be at one place at one time, unlike God who is infinite and therefore omnipresent. Angels may be present at our public worship as observers or even participants without our being cognizant of their presence (cf. 1 Cor 11:10; 1 Tim 5:21). However, especially in Old Testament days, angels usually appeared to man in some visible human form, that are even able to eat like ordinary man (e.g. Gen 18:8). Perhaps these bodies are temporary vessels specially created by the Lord for His angels to perform the tasks they are sent to.
2. As to their life-expectancy, they are immortal. The Lord indirectly refers to this fact when He compares the resurrected lives of humans with that of angels: “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (Mt 22:30). The immortality of angels are, of course, of the same nature as the immortality of human souls, which is that they are not self-existent, but are created and sustained in existence by God’s power.
3. As to their moral character, they were created altogether holy, so that although some have fallen, all the rest are known as “holy angels” (Mt 25:31). Their holiness however is not intrinsic in themselves and they are not transcendent like God. That is to say, though they are perfectly without sin, their holiness is only a creature holiness, and therefore in the presence of the thrice holy God, they would still need shield their eyes (cf. Isa 6:2).
4. As to their mental capability and capacity, they excel in knowledge. This, at least may be inferred from words of the wise woman from Tekoah whom Joab sent to David, whose words we assume to be true: that having “the wisdom of an angel of God [is] to know all things that are in the earth” (2 Sam 14:20). Likewise when the Lord tells us that not even the angels of heaven know when He would return, He is implying that the angels know more than we do.
5. As to their physical and spiritual capability, they are “mighty in power.” This is why they are called “mighty angels” (2 Th 1:7); and are said to “excel in strength” (Ps 103:20). How powerful they are and what exactly they are capable of doing is beyond our knowledge, but they are certainly “greater in power and might” (2 Pet 2:11) than man.
6. As to their function or ultimate calling, they are created to “execute God’s commandments” and to “do His pleasure” (cf. Ps 103:20-21). Absolute obedience is such a characteristic of good or unfallen angels that the Lord teaches us to pray: “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). By this petition, our Shorter Catechism, “we pray, That God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven.”
7. Finally, we should note that when the angels were initially created, they were holy and yet subject to change. Some eventually fell and were confirmed in wickedness (Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4), whereas the rest were confirmed in a state of sinless righteousness.

Q 17. How did God create man?

4. After God had made all other creatures, He created man male and female;¹ formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground,² and the woman of the rib of the man,³ endued them with living, reasonable, and immortal souls;⁴ made them after His own image,⁵ in knowledge,⁶ righteousness, and holiness;⁷ having the law of God written in their hearts,⁸ and power to fulfil it,⁹ and dominion over the creatures,¹⁰ yet subject to fall.¹¹

Proofs

¹Gen 1:27; ²Gen 2:7; ³Gen 2:22; ⁴Gen 2:7; cf. Job 35:11; Eccl 12:7; Mt 10:28; Lk 23:43; ⁵Gen 1:27; ⁶Col 3:10; ⁷Eph 4:24; ⁸Rom 2:14–15; ⁹Eccl 7:29; ¹⁰Gen 1:28; ¹¹Gen 3:6; Eccl 7:29.

Comments

While angels were the first of God's rational creatures to be created, man was the last. He is, as it were, the crowning glory of God's creation. Yes, angels are ontologically more glorious and powerful, but man stands at the apex of God's creation, and the elect of mankind (versus the reprobate), is teleologically the centre of God's creation. That is to say, all creation, including the angels, appear in Scripture to revolve around God's redemption and glorification of God's "vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory" (Rom 9:23).

This fact is confirmed by the biblical data that speaks of the relationship between man and angels. The Psalmist declares: "thou hast made [man] a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Ps 8:5). The writer of Hebrews quotes this verse (Heb 2:7), but also says that angels are "all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb 1:14).

How did God create man? Our catechism summarises the Biblical teaching under numerous points, which we may look under 5 heads:

1. First, God created man male and female. This is obvious not only by observation but by the declaration of Scripture (Gen 1:27). When modern man tries to eradicate the distinction between the genders through any means, they are directly going against God's specific purpose of creating man, unlike angels, male and female.
2. Secondly, He formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7a). God could have made man as he made all the other creatures, but He chose to make us in such a special way, perhaps firstly, to remind us of our humble estate: We are but creatures of dust. But secondly, the special attention that God manifested in our creation shows us His special benevolence towards us.
3. Thirdly, He made the body of the woman of the rib of the man (Gen 2:22). Many have speculated on why God chose to use the rib of Adam and not another part of him, but that is beside the point. The reason why woman is created from man is to show that there is an ontological equality and yet a functional order between man and woman (1 Cor 11:8-9).
4. Fourthly, He endued them with living, reasonable, and immortal soul (cf. Gen 2:7b). That the soul of man is 'reasonable' refers to the rationality of man (not that the soul is "good enough" as some mistake the term to mean). And the soul is living and immortal in that it will never be annihilated—not that God cannot annihilate it, but that the Scripture shows us that He has determined that every soul brought into existence, will be maintained in existence to his praise and glory for all eternity.
5. Fifthly, and very importantly, God made them after His own image and likeness (Gen 1:26, 27). Note that these two terms are synonymous (contra Romanism). The image of God comprise two aspects, namely (1) the natural endowments such as rationality, affections, and moral discrimination (i.e. sense of right and wrong). These things are marred by the fall so that for example, we make errors in thinking, suffer depression and make wrong judgments. But (2) the image of God also consist in spiritual qualities, namely knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).

These were qualities present in Adam and Eve, but seriously damaged since the fall, and need to be restored by Christ. Of these three qualities, only original righteousness is completely lost. There is no inclination at all in the natural man to want to do good in the sight of the living and true God. On the other hand our original knowledge, though darkened by sin is still perceptible in the natural man. Man, for example, has the works of the law of God written in his hearts (Rom 2:14-15) so that by nature, he knows that there is a God and murder is wrong. Likewise, though man no longer has true holiness, he alone of all the rational visible creatures of God has a religious sense.

6. Sixthly, man originally had the power to fulfil the law of God written in his heart (he having original righteousness). And so he also had perfect dominion over the creatures (Gen 1:28)

7. But seventhly, man was created with a possibility of falling from the original condition. We will look at the fall in another lesson, but as we can see in the fifth point, the Fall has drastic impact on mankind.

Q 18. What are God's works of providence?

A. God's works of providence are His most holy,¹ wise,² and powerful preserving³ and governing⁴ all His creatures; ordering them, and all their actions,⁵ to His own glory.⁶

Proofs

¹ Ps 145:17, ² Ps 104:24; Isa 28:29, ³ Heb 1:3, ⁴ Ps 103:19, ⁵ Mt 10:29-31; Gen 45:7,
⁶ Rom 11:36; Isa 63:14

Comments

The word 'providence' come from the Latin *providentia* which means "foresight or forethought." But it does not speak of God's foreknowledge as the etymology of the term may suggest. Rather, it speaks about God bringing to pass all things in creation that he had determined by decree to bring to pass. That is to say, the work of creation answers to God's eternal decree to bring into existence (out of nothing) all things in this universe. Providence, on the other hand, answers to God's eternal decree by which He did "unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time" (WLC 12).

The Holy Scripture teaches us about God sovereign providence from various angles.

Firstly, it affirms that all things in this universe continue to exist (or have being) because they are upheld by God in Christ, "by the word of His power" (Heb 1:3).

Secondly, it affirms that all things live and move by God's power: "For in him [i.e. God] we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28a).

Thirdly, it declare that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). Obviously for *all* things to work for the good of those who love God, God must be in sovereign control over all things that happen in this world no matter how insignificant it may appear in our sight.

Fourthly, God's work of providence at the micro level is illustrated in numerous ways. For example, we are taught that not a sparrow will fall to the ground without the heavenly Father's 'permission' (Mt 10:29); and, in fact, not one of our hairs can grow or drop without His bringing it to pass, for even our hair are all numbered (Mt 10:30). Nothing happens by chance. Even such as appears to be random in our perception are purposefully brought about by God's providence, for as Solomon declares: "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Prov 16:33).

Fifthly and finally, the Scripture also illustrate God's providence at a macro level. For example, we are told that the patriarch Joseph was delivered into Egypt through the wicked acts of his brothers, in order that he might be instrumental in saving alive the fledging church under-age during a great famine that God was going to bring about (Gen 45:7). Indeed, even the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ was by God's providence, for we are told that He was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

Of course, as we have noted earlier, though the acts are ordained by God and brought to pass by His power, God cannot be regarded as the author of sin, as the actions are sinful only because they are taken by morally responsible free agents making choices according to their inclinations. Thus the Scripture asserts and our Catechism affirms that God providence is holy and wise. The Psalmist says: "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Ps 145:17). And likewise the prophet Isaiah declares that "the LORD of hosts,... is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working" (Is 28:29).

Q 19. What is God's providence towards the angels?

A. God by His providence permitted some of the angels, wilfully and irrecoverably, to fall into sin and damnation,¹ limiting and ordering that, and all their sins, to His own glory;² and established the rest in holiness and happiness,³ employing them all,⁴ at His pleasure, in the administrations of His power, mercy, and justice.⁵

Proofs

¹ Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4; Heb 2:16; Jn 8:44, ² Job 1:12; Mt 8:31, ³ 1 Tim 5:21; Mk 8:38; Heb 12:22,
⁴ Ps 104:4, ⁵ 2 Kgs 19:35; Heb 1:14

Comments

Angels are spirit being. It is clear from the Scriptures that there are elect angels and there are reprobate angels.

Reprobate angels are known as “demons” (dve, *shed*; ry[ic; , sàiy; daivmwn, *daimôn*) or in our translation as “devils” or “unclean spirits.” The chief of the demons is known as “the devil” (*diavbolo*”, *diabolos*, meaning “slanderer”) or “Satan,” (÷f; c; , *satan*; *Satana`*”, *satanas*,—meaning “Adversary”) as well as “Lucifer” (lleyhe, *heylel*,— meaning “light-bearer”) and “Beelzebub.” (*Beelzebouv1*, *beelzeboul*,—meaning “lord of the house”)

As all things were created “very good” (Gen 1:31), angels must have been originally good. However, some falling into sin, “kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation” (Jude 6a; 2 Pet 2:4a). These have God “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6b; 2 Pet 2:4b). “These chains,” says Thomas Manton, “are eternal chains, because the wicked angels stand guilty for ever, without hope of recovery or redemption” (*Jude*, 202).

Our Catechism makes no attempt to explain how angels, created good, could fall. It speaks of God permitting them to fall by His providence. But as we saw in our earlier studies, this permission is not a “bare permission” (*WCF* 5.4), for God did “from all eternity..., by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass” (*WCF* 3.1).

That is to say that even the fall of the angels would ultimately serve the glory of God. Thus our catechism declares that God limits and orders the fall of the angels and “all their sins,” “to His own glory.” This limitation of the power of Satan and his demons may be seen in the way that Satan was permitted and restricted by God in the former’s quest to afflict Job to expose his alleged hypocrisy (Job 1:12). It may also be seen in the demons request to the Lord Jesus to send them into a herd of swine rather than into the abyss (Lk 8:31-32).

This restriction has always been placed upon fallen angels, for as Manton suggests, the chains of Jude 6 also speak of “God’s power and providence, by which the angelic strength is bridled and overmastered, so as they cannot do what they would” (*ibid.*). Believers may take comfort in this fact.

But especially since the incarnation, and ascension of the Lord, the power of the Devil and his minions have been even more greatly curtailed. William Hendricksen, commenting on Revelation 20:103, puts it well:

...the binding of Satan and the fact that he is hurled into the abyss to remain there for a thousand years indicates that throughout this present gospel age the devil’s influence on earth is curtailed. He is unable to prevent the extension of the Church among the nations by means of an active missionary programme. During the entire period he is prevented from causing he nations—the world in general—to destroy the Church as a mighty, missionary institution. By means of the preaching of the Word as applied by the Holy Spirit, the elect, from all parts of the world, are brought from darkness into light (*More Than Conquerors*, 188-9).

So much for fallen angels.

There are, on the other hand, the “elect angels” (1Tim 5:21) or “holy angels” (Mk 8:38). These are the angels who by God’s decree and providence did not fall. We can be sure that the “cherubim” (Ezk 10:1-22), “seraphim” (i.e. “burning ones,” Isa 6:2), “living creatures” (Ezk 1:14-15, Rev 4:6-9), “heavenly host” (Lk 2:13), “watchers” (Dan 4:13, 17), and “morning stars” (Job 38:7) are all part of the elect angels. (Although “the Angel of the LORD” in the Old Testament, and possibly Michael the Archangel, refers to Christ himself rather than a created angel).

The Scripture does not tell us in so many word that they are “established... in holiness and happiness.” However, we can reasonably assume this to be the case by their being designated ‘elect’ and ‘holy.’ Daniel 7:10 suggests that more a hundred million of such angels exist in the world today.

These angels remain in obedient service to the Lord. They are not only God’s messengers or ambassadors as the term “angel” (Ja; l]m', *malak*, a[ggelo", *aggelos*) implies. They were created to be ministers unto God (Ps 104:4), and unto the “heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:14).

Quite obviously, their ministry towards God and towards believers are quite different. Towards God, they render constant praise and worship (Rev 4:8). And as God is pleased generally to have His plans carried out mediately through His creatures, His angels are surely kept busy, willingly and lovingly doing their assigned duties. Their ministry towards God, in other words, is that of worship and obedience.

On the other hand, the angels’ ministry towards man is that of help and succour.

They were often sent to bring divine announcements, revelations, interpretations and instructions to God’s people (e.g. Lk 2:9-12; Acts 8:26, etc). With the completion of the New Testament canon, and the effusion of the Holy Spirit, this role of the angels have ceased.

The angels were also involved in protecting, encouraging, strengthening and delivering God’s children (e.g. Ps 91:11; Acts 12:7; Acts 27:24; Heb 1:14; etc) while at the same time defeating God’s enemies (e.g. 2 Kgs 19:35). As we are still in a spiritual battle (Eph 6:12), we have reason to believe that the angels are still aiding the Church of Christ.

Angels are also present at our worship (1 Cor 11:10; 1Tim 5:21) and it appears that they are always present at the deathbed of the saints to succour and then to escort their spirit to the presence of the Lord (see Lk 16:22).

Although we do not see angels, and do not feel their presence, we know from Scriptures that they exist, and that the elect angels exist largely for the sake of the Church of Christ. We need not fear the fallen angels for their powers are not only curtailed, but we know that the elect angels will allow them to touch the elect children of God without God’s permission. As such, we thank God for the elect angels, and look forward to having conscious fellowship with them one day (cf. Heb 12:22).

The existence of angels, moreover, provides a contrasting backdrop for the children of God to understand how God views us and redeem to us. Angels were created individually, their reprobation and election are purely individualistic. On the other hand, man is created as a federation. Adam was our representative. When Adam fell, the human race fell. But Christ came to be the representative of the elect (Heb 1:16). The elect is

saved as one family in Christ. By extension, we see that God often deal with us as families. He saves households or families. He build his church through households (think of the church under age). This is why He ordains marriage and procreation for man but not for angels (Mt 22:30). This He did in order that he might “seek a godly seed” (Mal 2:15).

When we think about the angels, therefore, one thing that ought to be brought into our minds is the importance of the family unit that God has placed us in. We must remember our familiar duties,—of leadership, love, submission, obedience, godly training, etc,—because we are set in families that we may be “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet 3:7). This is why it is declared that the covenant of grace is unto us and to our children (Gen 17:7; Acts 2:39).

The angels are observing how we live our lives as the children of God (cf. 1 Cor 11:10). They are, as it were, leaning over the parapet of heaven straining to take a look at what God is doing in our lives (1 Pet 1:12). Having this great privilege of being redeemed with our loved who are related to us by flesh and blood, will we not seek to make full use of the opportunities given us?

Q 20. What was the providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created?

A. The providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created, was the placing him in paradise, appointing him to dress it, giving him liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth;¹ putting the creatures under his dominion,² and ordaining marriage for his help,³ affording him communion with Himself;⁴ instituting the Sabbath;⁵ entering into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience,⁶ of which the tree of life was a pledge;⁷ and forbidding to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.⁸

Proofs

¹Gen 2:8, 15–16; ²Gen 1:28; ³Gen 2:18; ⁴Gen 1:26–29; Gen 3:8; ⁵Gen 2:3;
⁶Gal 3:12; Rom 10:5; ⁷Gen 2:9; ⁸Gen 2:17.

Comments

While there is relatively not much we can say about God's providence toward angels, there is so much that need to be said about God's providence toward man that it is impossible to cover in one catechism question. The fact is, the whole Bible is a description of God's providence towards man.

WLC 20, take note, is not about God's whole providence toward man, but about His providence towards man "in the estate in which he was created." It is about God's provision and dealing with man prior to his Fall.

In this original estate, man was placed in a perfect environment known as the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8, 15). Our catechism calls it a "paradise" based on an allusion to it in Revelation 2:7, and we need have no doubt that it is an appropriate description of this pristine habitation.

Several instructions and ordinances were appointed for man in that estate:

- a. Firstly, he was appointed to "to dress it and to keep" (Gen 2:15) the garden. Adam in other words was given work to do. He was a gardener. Work is not a punishment for the Fall! It is a creation ordinance. The only difference between pre-Fall and post-Fall work is that the former must have been always pleasant and enjoyable, whereas the latter involves toil and pain (see Gen 3:17-19).
- b. Secondly, man was given the liberty and privilege of enjoying all the fruits that grow in the garden, save one (Gen 2:16-17). Adam was not created to be an ascetic!
- c. Thirdly, Adam was given dominion over all the creatures (Gen 1:28). He and his descendants,—not lions, elephants, whales, or even the T-Rex,—were to be kings in the earth. By inference, the earth and all its resources were assigned by God to man's stewardship. Man, of course, is answerable to God for how he exercise this charge.
- d. Fourthly, Eve was created for Adam as an help-meet, and marriage was instituted (Gen 2:18-25). Marriage is a creation ordinance and good in the sight of God. It is not merely a social or cultural phenomena, it is part of God's providence for man, so that when it is disdained, the fabric of society crumbles.
- e. Fifthly, man was given the privilege of communing with God (cf. Gen 1:26-29; Gen 3:8). Man's chief end includes enjoying God; he can find no real satisfaction in his soul unless he is able to enjoy fellowship with God.
- f. Sixthly, the Sabbath was instituted for man. The Sabbath was instituted by God both by divine example ("He rested on the seventh day"—Gen 2:2), and by a positive declaration ("God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it"—Gen 2:3). God, of course, need not have taken six days to create, but He did so, so that He might be seen as resting on the seventh day. He did this, obviously for man's sake (cf. Mk 2:27) that man may learn to rest from their labours according to the pattern He laid down. The Sabbath, then is a creation ordinance obligatory of all man. It is not given only to the Jews.

Seventhly and most importantly, God entered into a covenant of life with man wherein man may have enjoy life everlasting upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience. This covenant is also known as the covenant of works in distinction to the covenant of grace because whereas man may attain to life only by grace after the Fall, he might have life before the Fall, if he kept God's commandments perfectly.

The fact that God had entered into a covenant with Adam might not be immediately obvious from the Genesis account, be we know that there was such a covenant for two reasons: (1) Hosea 6:7 reads: "But they like *Adam* have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me" (marginal reading, emph. mine). The KJV main reading has "men" for "Adam." The Hebrew can be translated either way, but if it is translated as "like men", this verse would be a tautology: for how else could men transgress the covenant but as men? (2) The New Testament compares between Christ our covenant head with Adam (Rom 5:12-21) and even speak of Christ as the second Adam (1 Cor 15:45, 47).

We have not doubt that Christ, the second Adam came to fulfil the covenant of works on behalf of the church in order that we may have life according to the terms of the first of the covenant. In other words, Christ died to pay for our guilt as covenant (of works) breakers, and procured life for us by his positive obedience in which he accomplished what Adam failed to do.

When we so understand the covenant of works, we will understand why our catechism seems to put less emphasis on the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, than one might expect from reading Genesis 2 and 3. The fact is that what is really required is perfect, personal and perpetual obedience. The prohibition against eating the forbidden fruit is but a representative commandment. The fruit from the tree is probably harmless by itself. But the prohibition provides a pure test of obedience. A failure to obey this simple prohibition would be sufficient to demonstrate without a shadow of doubt that Adam had failed the covenant requirement of perfect and perpetual obedience. Therefore Adam was warned in no uncertain terms: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17).

What about the tree of life? The tree of life was a pledge to the everlasting life (Gen 3:22) that man could have if he had kept the covenant. This tree itself is not magical, but it probably had sacramental properties so that it might only be eaten by those who were enjoying everlasting life and conversely any who ate of it by faith might enjoy such a life.

Q 21. Did man continue in that estate wherein God at first created him?

A. Our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will, through the temptation of Satan, transgressed the commandment of God in eating the forbidden fruit; and thereby fell from the estate of innocency wherein they were created.¹

Proofs

¹Gen 3:6–8, 13; Eccl 7:29; 2 Cor 11:3.

Comments

Reformed theologians, following Augustine, customarily speak of man in fourfold States. Before the Fall, man was in a state of being able to sin (*posse peccare*); after the Fall he was unable not to sin (*non posse non peccare*); when he is regenerated by the Holy Spirit he become able not to sin (*posse non peccare*); and finally when he is glorified at death, he becomes unable to sin (*non posse peccare*).

The answer to our catechism question is referring our first parents' fall from the first state (the state wherein they were created), into the state of sin. Earlier, in *WLC* 17, we say that man was endowed with original righteousness, though he was subject to change.

The fact that he is subject to change is obvious from the fact that he fell. On the other hand, man's original righteousness is taught in the Scriptures in Ephesians 4:24 as well as Ecclesiastes 7:29—"Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Ecc 7:29).

Now, having original sin means that fallen man will always be inclined toward sin, so likewise, having original righteousness meant that man would by nature pursue after righteousness.

How then could man have been tempted by Satan to fall, when his heart was always inclined to righteousness? Well, this question will have to remain unanswered, though most Reformed theologians would insist that it was unbelief (that affects the heart), that caused Adam and Eve to fall under the temptation of Satan.

In any case, we must remember that Adam and Eve were not only under obligation not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They were under the Covenant of Works with an obligation to keep the entire Moral Law.

Although the sin of Adam and Eve by which they fell from the estate of innocency may be rightly denominated as the sin of eating the forbidden fruit, in actual fact, it is a complex aggregate of many sins rather than a simple breaking of one commandment.

Turretin expresses this fact well:

It is certain that we must not regard that fall as any particular sin, such as theft or adultery, but as a general apostasy and defection from God. It was a violation not only of the special positive law about not eating the forbidden fruit, but of the whole moral law included in it, and thus also of the obedience which man owed to God, his Creator (especially by reason of the covenant entered into with him). Thus here is, as it were, a complicated disease and a total aggregate of various acts, both internal and external, impinging against both tables of the laws. For as by unbelief and contempt of the divine word, ingratitude, pride and profanation of the divine name, he transgressed the first table, so he transgressed the second by want of affection (*astorgia*) towards his children, by homicide (precipitating himself and his children into death), by intemperance and gluttony, theft and appropriation of another's property (without his consent), unlawful love and deprave concupiscence (*IET*, T9, Q6.2).

It is for this reason that it is not entirely a fruitful exercise to debate on which was the first sin: Was it when Eve took the fruit? Or was it when she allowed herself to be beguiled by the serpent and so misrepresented God's word (Gen 3:2-3). Or was it Adam who first sinned by not taking the leadership and responding to the serpent when he was with Eve all along (Gen 3:6).

For the fact that the sin of eating the forbidden fruit was the central marker is the reason why the Scripture insists that Eve fell first (1 Tim 2:14; 2 Cor 11:3). But for the fact that Adam was the Covenant head of all mankind descending from him by natural generation, we see the Scripture and all theologians speaking about the consequence of Adam's transgression rather than Eve's transgression (1 Cor 15:22).

By our first parents' fall into sin, they lost their innocency (concerning sin) and their original righteousness. By Adam's fall, all mankind descending from him by natural generation are imputed with original and will face death.

Q 22. Did all mankind fall in that first transgression?

A. The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation,¹ sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression.²

Proofs

1 Acts 17:26; 2 Gen 2:16–17; Rom 5:12–20; 1 Cor 15:21–22.

Comments

Adam, as we saw in our exposition of *WLC* 20, was under a covenant of works or a covenant of life upon condition of personal, perfect and perpetual obedience of the Moral Law of God. But this covenant was not made with him as a private person. It was actually a covenant between God and all mankind. But as God had determined that all men (excluding the Lord Jesus Christ) would descend from Adam by natural generation (Acts 17:26), Adam was appointed as the representative or covenant head of all mankind in the covenant relationship. Although it was not in the eternal decree of God, it may be said from a speculative standpoint that had Adam kept the covenant all his descendants would have enjoyed life with him.

But Adam fell, and “all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him.”

That is to say, all mankind, descending from him became covenant breakers, guilty of transgressing the covenant of works, and therefore worthy of death.

The fact that Adam was in such a position as the covenant head is clear from Scripture, especially as it compares Adam with the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the covenant representative of the elect in the Covenant of Grace. The apostle Paul makes this comparison in two passages.

The first passage is in Roman 5:12-21. Verses 18-19 reads:

Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

The second passage, 1 Corinthians 15:21ff, speaks of Christ as the second Adam, bringing resurrection while the first Adam brought death:

“²¹ For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.... ⁴⁵ And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.... ⁴⁷ The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.” (1 Cor 15:21-22, 45, 47).

As our covenant head, Adam’s sin involved all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation. It is clear that all man descending from Adam by natural generation are on account of Adam’s guilt, born as guilty sinners (cf. Ps 51:5).

But how do we become sinners? What does our answer meant by saying that we “sinned in him”? What does the apostle Paul mean in says “all have sinned” (Rom 5:12)?

The answer, we agree with Thornwell, is twofold. In the first place, all men are immediately imputed with Adam’s guilt because Adam is our covenant representative. “We are first charged with Adam’s guilt and then as a legal consequence, are born with natures totally corrupt” (James H. Thornwell, *Works*, 1.347).

In the second place, it does also appear that there is also a sense in which all mankind were seminally present in Adam and therefore actually “sinned in him” rather than being simply guilty in him.

Thornwell was referring to this aspect when he says: “I confess the leaning of my own mind to some theory which should carry back our existence to the period of Adam’s existence” (*ibid.*, 349). This idea of seminal presence does not imply pre-existence of the soul. It has its basis in the Scriptural insistence that Levitical priests paid tithe to Melchizedek because Levi was in the loins of Abraham when he paid tithe to him (cf. Heb 7:5). But obviously, this does not imply that the grandchild of a robber is a robber because his grandfather robbed a bank. We speak of all mankind sinning in Adam because Adam was in the first place the chosen root and covenant head of the human race.

Thus, because of the special covenantal position that Adam that Adam held, all mankind descending from him by natural generation sinned in him and fell with him.

Why does our Confession emphasise the phrase “by natural generation”? This is emphasised because the Lord Jesus Christ was excluded from the guilt of Adam. Because of the principle of covenant representation and headship, which in the Scripture, is clearly accorded to the male head of family, the guilt of Adam is not imputed on the Lord, He being virgin-born. Likewise, the Lord Jesus was also not seminally present in the loins of Adam.

But Eve was a sinner as any other persons descending from Adam. How could the Lord be born through her without the natural corruption that infects every man? He was preserved from this corruption by the power of the Holy Spirit overshadowing her (see Lk 1:35).

Q 23. *Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?*

A. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.¹

Proofs

¹Rom 5:12; 3:23

Comments

We saw in WLC 22 that because Adam was their federal head, “all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression.”

But what is the result of that fall? Our present Q&A teaches us that all mankind fell into an estate of sin and misery.

This doctrine is clearly based on the Scriptures, for the apostle Paul teaches us:

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12).

As Adam fell into an estate of sin, all mankind descending from him by natural generation also fell into an estate of sin. And as “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), so all men became liable for death and all other miseries of this life.

As the details of what exactly is “sin” and “misery” will be dealt with in WLC 24-27, we will refrain from doing so.

Suffice to know for now that this fall affected all man descending from Adam by natural generation: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

All men, as such are conceived in sin (Ps 51:5). We do not become sinners by learning to sin and actually sinning. We sin because we are sinners from birth. We do not need to be taught how to sin! And therefore, no man in this world can at birth expect to escape misery and death. Misery and death is the lot of mankind because of sin. As such, no man in this world can escape misery and death by pedigree, wealth, technology or any such things. Only in Christ can anyone ultimately escape death and misery.

Q 24. What is sin?

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature.¹

Proofs

¹1 Jn 3:4; Gal 3:10, 12

Comments

Sin is not simply about doing things which society frowns upon. Yes, because man is made in the image of God, and has the work of the law written in his heart (Rom 2:14), he will by nature disapprove of the grosser sins. However, because of the Fall, man's heart is darkened and sinful, and therefore, man's judgement of what is sin is unreliable. Indeed much of what man approves is sinful in the absolute sense of the word. So, yes, murder and theft are sinful. Most people in the world would condemn these wicked acts. But doing business on the Lord's Day is also sin although most people in the world would not flutter an eye lid over it.

What then is sin? The apostle John teaches us categorically that "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 Jn 3:4b), or literally, "sin is lawlessness" (*hJ aJmartiva ejsti;n hJ ajnomiva*).

"Lawlessness", we must realise does not merely refer to debauchery or orgies or wicked deeds that will land a person in prison in most societies. No, to be lawless is to be doing, speaking or thinking without regards to the law of God. In other words, sin is failing to measure up to the demands of the law or breaking of the law's prohibition. Our Catechism puts it this way: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God."

The law of God is the boundary of moral habitation that God has set for man, or as our catechism suggests: it is "given as a rule to the reasonable [i.e. rational] creature." The law is to man what water is to fish. A fish in a tank may appear very restricted. If the fish were to jump out of the tank, it would be free from its watery bounds, but it would be dying and would die unless it is returned to the tank. So it is with man. God is our creator, and He has decreed that we are to live within a certain moral boundary.

This boundary is the law: "The man that doeth them shall live in them" (Gal 3:12).

Within this boundary, man has true freedom in his life. Thus James call the law, "the perfect law of liberty" (Jas 1:25). Outside of the boundary of the law is death, bondage and slavery (Eph 2:1; Jn 8:34; Rom 6:6, 17). In saving us, the Lord Jesus not only justifies us, but sets us free from this bondage and slavery. This is why He says: "the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32); and the apostle Paul affirms: "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom 6:18).

Christians are able not to sin. He has,— through the power of the resurrection and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit,—the ability to live in accordance to God's Word, and therefore find God's commandments to be not grievous (1Jn 5:3; cf. Eph 2:1-10).

Sin is lawlessness. It is important for us to know this definition. This is particular so today when there is rampant antinomianism. Many who profess to be Christians, do not know the commandments of God, or if they know they live in disregard to them. But listen to the warning of the Lord himself:

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt 7:21-23).

Need we add more than to say that 'iniquity' is literally 'lawlessness' (*ajnomiva*)?

Q 25. Wherein consisteth the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

A. The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin,¹ the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually;² which is commonly called Original Sin, and from which do proceed all actual transgressions.³

Proofs

¹Rom 5:12, 19; ²Rom 3:10–19; Eph 2:1–3; Rom 5:6; 8:7–8; Gen 6:5; ³Jas 1:14–15; Mt 15:19

Comments

We saw earlier that “the fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery” (*WLC* 23). The Q&A we are looking at presently describes what the estate of sin is or rather what the sinfulness of the fallen estate is.

This sinfulness of this estate, according to our answer has three parts: (1) The guilt of Adam's first sin which is *imputed* on all his posterity by natural generation; (2) The fallen and sinful nature of Adam which is *inherited* by all his posterity by natural generation; and (3) the actual transgressions that *proceed* from the Original Sin, which is described in the first two parts. For clarity, we may tabulate the answer this way:

I. Original Sin

- a. Imputed Guilt of Adam
- b. Inherited sin nature of Adam
 - i. want of original righteousness or lack of ability and desire to do good
 - ii. corruption of whole nature

II. Actual Sins.

“Original Sin”, is a theological term, which we must remember, does not refer to Adam's sin of eating the forbidden fruit. Rather, it refers to the effects of that first sin upon the people represented by Adam. And the effect has a legal as well as an actual personal aspect.

By the legal aspect, all of Adam's natural posterity are sinners in the sight of God even before any personal motion or contemplation of sin. As the elect are made legally righteous not for any acts or motions of righteousness on their part, but for the obedience of Christ, so all men are made legally guilty sinners on account of Adam's disobedience. This comparison is based on words of the apostle Paul, when he says: “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:19).

Likewise, by the personal aspect, Adam's natural posterity are all born with a sin nature. This sin nature has two parts:

First, and negatively, it lacks original righteousness. Adam was created with original righteousness, and therefore had an inclination to please God in all that he thought, said, and did. But this original righteousness was lost by the fall, and so all of Adam's natural descendants has no natural inclination to do good or to please God: “There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Rom 3:10-12).

Secondly, and positively, this inherited nature is wholly corrupted, so that everything that a natural descendant of Adam does is tainted with sin. He is “dead in sins and trespasses” says the apostle Paul (Eph 2:1). “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), and they are all “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph 2:3).

Because of this sin nature inherited from Adam, man is said to be totally or radically depraved, or as our catechism puts it: “he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually.”

In other words, he has no ability or inclination to do good in the sight of God, and indeed nothing he does can be good in the sight of God. All his ‘righteous’ deed are at best filthy rags in the sight of God (cf. Isa 64:6).

It is with this inability and sinful inclination in the heart, that every child (by natural generation) born in this world begins to manifest himself as a transgressor of God's holy laws the minute he begins to exercise his will, for as the Lord teaches us: “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Mt 15:19).

Q 26. How is original sin conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity?

A. Original sin is conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity by natural generation, so as all that proceed from them in that way are conceived and born in sin.¹

Proofs

¹Ps 51:5; Job 14:4; 15:14; Jn 3:6

Comments

We saw earlier that Original Sin comprises the imputed guilt of Adam's first transgression as well as a sin nature inherited from him. The direct emphasis of the present Q&A, is how this original sin came to be ours.

In a way, we have already answered this question in our commentary on WLC 22, when we explain what the answer mean by the fact that we "sinned in [Adam], and fell with him in that first transgression." We saw that we are sinners, i.e. have original sin, partly because Adam was our covenant representative, and partly because he was the common natural father of all mankind. As such all children born in this world are sinners the minute they are conceived in the womb of their mothers. This is what David means when he says: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps 51:5).

Human babies,—though appearing very adorable, harmless and innocent,—are naturally children of wrath and sinners by guilt and nature. They need not be taught to sin. They will naturally know how to sin on account of original sin. Sinful behaviour is not acquired by external influence, as some unbelieving sociologists may insist. No, sinful behaviour has its roots in original sin.

But what about the Lord Jesus? The Scripture affirms that He was tempted at all points like as we are and yet without sin (Heb 4:15). If He had sin, original or actual, He would be disqualified from being the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. But then the Scripture also affirms that he is fully human (Heb 2:14-16). If he is not fully human, how could he represent us? But if he is fully human, how is it that He is without original sin? This answer to this question is the indirect purpose of the present Q&A.

And again, we have in a way answered this question when we explained why WLC 22 use the phrase "by natural generation." We saw that the Lord Jesus did not have original sin because he was not a child of Adam by natural generation. He was not guilty in Adam because it is clear from various examples in the Scripture that God regards fathers rather than mothers as covenant representatives, and when He in any way imputes guilt down the generation, it is through the fathers (see for example Ex 20:5). As the Lord was conceived and born not by natural generation, but virginally, he was therefore not guilty in Adam.

But does not the Scripture say: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" (Job 14:4); and "What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" (Job 15:14).

Although the Lord was not conceived and born of natural generation, yet he was born of a sinful woman, how is it that he does not have a sin nature? It is so because He was preserved from this corruption by the power of the Holy Spirit overshadowing his earthly mother at his conception. This is what the angel said unto her: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Lk 1:35).

It is important for us to bear this last point in mind as we hear of rumours and speculations about human cloning. Though we do not believe it is possible fully to clone human beings and that it is a terribly wicked endeavour, we must assert that our catechism cannot be taken to teach that cloned babies are void of original sin because they are not conceived and born by natural generation.

Q 27. What misery did the fall bring upon mankind?

- A.** The fall brought upon mankind the loss of communion with God,¹ His displeasure and curse; so as we are by nature children of wrath,² bond slaves to Satan,³ and justly liable to all punishments in this world, and that which is to come.⁴

Proofs

¹Gen 3:8, 10, 24; ²Eph 2:2–3; ³2 Tim 2:26; ⁴Gen 2:17; Lam 3:39; Rom 6:23; Mt 25:41, 46; Jude 7

Comments

In *WLC* 23, we saw that “The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.” We studied what the estate of sin into which man fell was from *WLC* 24–26. In the present Q&A, we are concerned with the misery of the estate into which man fell.

In a word, all the miseries or sufferings that are known and experienced by man in this world are brought by the Fall. Because we are born in this world and live in this world all our lives, it is easy for us to fail to realise that the pains and sufferings were not part of the original creation of God and therefore are really unnatural intrusion and additions, which exists only because of the presence of sin. But if we pause for a moment to contemplate how heaven would be like, and compare that with our present situation, we will have a fairly good idea of what are the things that came about through the Fall. For example, we know that in heaven there would be no more deaths, pain, or tears, or sighing, or quarrels, or fears, or disappointments, or discouragements, or any such things. So we know that these things are part of the fallen world, or part of the estate of sin.

Our present Q&A, do not speak of these effects directly. It speaks rather of three things, which in fact are chief causes or sources of misery of man as they originate from the first sin. Because of indwelling sin, we do not naturally see these things or even think of them very much. Nevertheless, they are real, and are far more significant than the effects (such as quarrel, sorrow, and tears), which we dread. So, then Christians, ought to contemplate about these things and tremble at their horror, while being filled with gratitude that Christ has and is delivering us from them. Let’s consider these things.

Firstly, “the fall brought upon mankind the loss of communion with God.” This effect of the Fall was immediately apparent to Adam and Eve, for after they ate the forbidden fruit, they could no more enjoy God’s fellowship, but hid from him in guilt (Gen 3:8–10). This was the beginning of man’s alienation from God. All mankind became “enemies in your mind by wicked works” (Col 1:21), and “haters of God” (Rom 1:30; cf. Mt 6:24). But more significantly, we became God’s enemies (Rom 5:10), and “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph 2:3) and hateful in God’s sight on account of sin. We came under “His displeasure and curse.” This is graphically manifested in God’s expulsion of Adam and Even from the Garden of Eden, to which, He would not permit them to enter again (Gen 3:24). Though fallen man in ignorance and love of sin, do not naturally lament this lost of communion with God, Christian ought to grieve about it and realise that they have been made alive (Eph 2:1), the remnant of corruption will continue to hinder their communion with God. And this thought should stir them to strive after holiness.

Secondly, on account of the Fall, man by nature became “bond slaves to Satan.” We are entrap in the “snare of the devil” and “are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim 2:26). The Fall made men the children of wrath, who having original sin in place of original righteousness, are now by nature wholly inclined to serve the devil (Jn 8:44), rather than seeking good or righteousness (Rom 3:10–12). Again, while unregenerate would not care about this fact, believers ought to live with the conscious knowledge that when they sin or refuses to obey God’s Word, they are in some sense serving Satan as the unregenerate do habitually.

Finally, the Fall made all mankind “justly liable to all punishments in this world, and that which is to come.” We will be looking in detail at the punishment we face in these two realms, in the next two questions. But for now realise that all sorrows and pains in this life and the life to come traces to the Fall, when man first incurred death: spiritual, physical and eternal,—by eating of the forbidden fruit (Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23).

There are those who question the existence of God because of the presence of pain in this world, but the Bible teaches us that pain and sorrow exists as a punishment imposed by God upon man because of the Fall and, because of our continual rebellion against God. Yes, Christians have our sins paid for in Christ (as we shall see), but a remnant of corruption remains, for which we must face chastisement in this life, though we shall be made perfect in holiness upon our death, and will experience any more pain or sorrow. But such as remain outside Christ will experience eternal death or everlasting torment for their sins.

WLC 28. What are the punishments of sin in this world?

A. The punishments of sin in this world are either inward, as blindness of mind,¹ a reprobate sense,² strong delusions,³ hardness of heart,⁴ horror of conscience,⁵ and vile affections;⁶ or outward, as the curse of God upon the creatures for our sakes,⁷ and all other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments;⁸ together with death itself.⁹

Proofs

¹Eph 4:18; ²Rom 1:28; ³2 Thes 2:11; ⁴Rom 2:5; ⁵Isa 33:14; Gen 4:13; Mt 27:4;
⁶Rom 1:26; ⁷Gen 3:17; ⁸Deut 28:15–68; ⁹Rom 6:21, 23.

Comments

In *WLC 27*, we saw that the Fall makes mankind “justly liable to all punishments in this world, and that which is to come.” *WLC 28* expands on what the punishments of sin in this present world are, while *WLC 29* explores the punishments that are reserved for the world which is to come.

The punishments that mankind living in this present world face on account of sin can be classified under two categories: inward and outward.

The inward punishments would include:

- a. “Blindness of mind.” Because of the Fall, all mankind have their understanding darken and their hearts blinded to the truth (Eph 4:18). This is known as the noetic effect of sin. Although there can be brilliant scientist amongst fallen men, and even amongst the unregenerate, yet no man can fully understand all things even when the facts are presented. In particular, the natural man cannot understand spiritual things (1 Cor 2:14), or apply his mind for good (Col 1:21).
- b. “A reprobate sense.” The apostle Paul puts it this way: “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Rom 1:28). A reprobate mind or a reprobate sense speaks of attitudes, thoughts and judgements that do not find God’s approval. The common sense of the fallen man does not lead him to God but to sin.
- c. “Strong delusions.” Because the sinful fallen man loves not the truth that they might be saved (2 Thes 2:10), God punishes them by sending strong delusions so that they believe lies rather than truth (2 Thes 2:11). At first look this may seem very startling as it sounds like God intentionally deceiving them. But this must not be how this punishment is construed. Rather, it must be understood as referring to God allowing Satan to deceive them, and leaving them to think they have the truth, even as they reject God’s truth.
- d. “Hardness of heart.” Spiritual hardening or hardening of the heart (cf. Rom 2:5) is another inward punishment of sin in this world. God will show “mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom 9:18). Whenever a sinner rejects God’s truth or refuses to obey God’s commandment, his heart is hardened so that he finds it easier to ignore God’s Word than before.
- e. “Horror of conscience.” The conscience is the faculty of the soul by which man who is created in the image of God discerns between good and evil. It feels gives the soul pleasure when it does right, but pain when it does wrong. In this sense it is like God’s deputy in our soul to afflict temporary inward punishment when we sin against God. Thus a sinner is punished by God through his own conscience (cf. Isa 33:14; Mt 27:4).
- f. “Vile Affections.” Because the sinners rebel against God, God gives them over, or by the course of providence leads them, to vile affections or shameful lusts. We have an indication that such inclinations arise punitively not only from Paul’s testimony (Rom 1:26), but also from the fact that such they lead to most unnatural acts that are not even found normally amongst animals.

The outward punishments, on the other hand, would include:

- a. “The curse of God upon the creatures for our sakes.” The physical world is cursed because it was created as a dwelling place for man. Man by his sin lost the privilege of a perfect world to dwell in. He deserves instead the punishment of a harsh life in a cursed environment. This curse was pronounced by the LORD immediately after Adam fell: “Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life” (Gen 3:17). All things negative, all barrenness, all diseases and all disasters in the natural realm are a result of the Fall of man. Until the renovation of the whole world at the Last Day when the full number of the elect of Christ would have been redeemed and perfected, the whole creation would continue, as it were, to groan and travail for man’s sake (Rom 8:22-23).
- b. “All other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, estates, relations, and employ-ments” (cf. Dt 28:15-68). Not only is our environment affected. Everything that pertains to fallen man is affected. Our bodies are subject to diseases and decay. Our reputation is subjected to slander, ridicule and accusations. Our possessions are subject to theft, damages and lost. Our relationships are imperfect and often the cause of our greatest sorrows in this world. Our employments, and indeed, everything we do no longer bring us perfect satisfaction, but instead brings discouragement and frustrations.
- c. “Death.” This is the final punishment for sin in this life. The apostle Paul says: “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:21-23). Paul is, no doubt, referring not only to physical death, but also to spiritual and eternal death. Nevertheless, physical death is certainly included, and is the last and most feared of all the punishments for sin in this life. The writer of Hebrews tells that many in the world are subject to bondage all their life because the fear of death (Heb 2:15).

These are the punishment of sin in this world. All men, elect or reprobate, are liable to these punishment. However, we should note that since Christ Jesus was punished for the elect’s sake, the elect are no more being punished by these punishments. We ought rather to regard all pains and hardships which we experience in common with the reprobate as loving chastisement for our good. Indeed, we should realise, for example, that while physical death is a punishment for the reprobate while opens the door to eternal torment in hell, it is rather a door to heaven for the elect.

So then, though we mourn that sin has led to grievous sufferings in this world, our hearts should be filled with gratitude to God for the deliverance that we have in Christ.

WLC 29. What are the punishments of sin in the world to come?

A. The punishments of sin in the world to come, are everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell-fire for ever.¹

Proofs

¹2 Thes 1:9; Mk 9:43–44, 46, 48; Lk 16:24..

Comments

There was a time when the doctrine taught in this Q&A that unrepentant sinners will suffer eternal unremitting conscious punishment in hell which involves the torment of soul and body was accepted by all who call themselves Christians. Today this is no longer so. In fact, the doctrine is not only opposed by those who are professedly liberals, but even some who claim to be evangelical such as Clark Pinnock and John Stott oppose it at various points. The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England even issued a statement in 1996 declaring that:

Hell is not eternal torment, but final and irrevocable choosing of that which is opposed to God so completely and absolutely that the only end is total non-being (cited in Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* [Nelson, 1998], 1068).

The doctrine of eternal conscious punishment taught in our Catechism is, however, too deeply rooted in and firmly founded upon the Scriptures to be swept away by the wind of false doctrine (Eph 4:14).

Consider *first* of all that the punishment to come is everlasting or eternal. There are many today who charge that it is against God's character to punish sinners eternally. These will either teach that the soul of the reprobate will be annihilated immediately upon death, or they will be annihilated after a period of conscious punishment. But the Scripture speaks of the punishment in hell as an "everlasting destruction" (2 Thes 1:9). Someone may counter that the Greek translated 'everlasting' (*aijwvniw*) may also be rendered "age long," and does not mean "never ending." This is a dubious assertion. But it were true, then the elect of Christ would also not enjoy everlasting life, for the Lord says: "And these [i.e. the goats or the wicked] shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Mt 25:46). The words 'everlasting' and 'eternal' are the same word in the Greek (i.e. *aijwvniw*)

Secondly, consider that the punishment involves separation from the "comfortable presence of God." This is also taught in 2 Thessalonians 1:9,—“Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction *from the presence of the Lord*, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thes 1:9; emphasis mine). The apostle Paul must, of course, be referring to the comfortable presence of the Lord, for God is omnipresent: “If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there” (Ps 139:8). The fact is that the punishment in hell is not so much as being away from God's presence, as it is facing His wrath rather than His favour forever (cf. Jn 3:36; Rom 2:5).

Thirdly, the punishment in hell involves a torment of the soul and body. This is clear from the Lord's teaching that in hell the “worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mk 9:44, 48). Though many faithful commentators have spoken of the worms as referring to the gnawing of the conscience, the fire suggests a form of physical torment. This is especially since, we are told that at the last day, both the just and the unjust will be resurrected (Acts 24:15; Dan 12:2), and the unjust will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:12-14). This makes it clear that the torment in hell will be spiritual and physical.

This doctrine, moreover, is confirmed by the Lord when He says: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both *soul and body* in hell” (Mt 10:28; emphasis mine).

Fourthly, it is clear that the punishment in hell is a conscious punishment rather than a kind of soul sleep, for in the Lord's parable or account of the rich man and Lazarus, we are told that the rich man cried unto Abraham saying: “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” (Lk 16:24). Though this verse may not provide a very strong case for bodily punishment in hell (because it is clearly set at a time before the Last Day, since Dive's brother were still in the world), it does clearly show that the sinner is conscious and remembers about his own past.

This doctrine of eternal conscious punishment of the reprobate is an important core verity of the Christian Faith. To deny it is to deny the urgency of the Gospel. If what will happen to sinners is that they will be annihilated, the sinner may rightly say: let me enjoy myself today in all ways I can, for tomorrow I will cease existence.

Although the fear of punishment in hell must not be the only way in which a sinner is persuaded to flee to the Lord, it is clearly one of the biblical ways (cf. Lk 3:7-10). And experience shows us that there is a point in every believer's life, in which, the fear of damnation must have been a chief motivation in his pursuit of the Lord. Indeed, the contemplation of terror of punishment in hell is also a means of stirring our affection for the Lord Jesus Christ, for we know that as our substitute He suffered the equivalent (bodily and spiritual) torment that would be experienced by all the elect of God. Only as the God-Man was he able to sustain such a tremendous weight of God's wrath.

WLC 30. Doth God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

A. God doth not leave all men to perish in the estate of sin and misery,¹ into which they fell by the breach of the first covenant, commonly called the Covenant of Works;² but of His mere love and mercy delivereth His elect out of it, and bringeth them into an estate of salvation by the second covenant, commonly called the Covenant of Grace.³

Proofs

¹1 Thes. 5:9; ²Gal 3:10, 12; ³Tit 3:4–7; Gal 3:21; Rom 3:20–22

Comments

We have already been introduced to the Covenant of Life in *WLC* 20. It is, we saw a covenant which God made with all mankind represented by Adam, in which man may enjoy life everlasting upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience. Here, the same covenant is called the Covenant of Works to distinguish it from the Covenant of Grace wherein salvation is granted entirely by grace.

Because all men “transgressed the covenant [of works]” (Hos 6:7), in Adam, all men deserve to be left to perish in the estate of sin and misery (cf. Gal 3:10-12). But thanks be to God, He “hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes 5:9).

By the pronoun “us”, the apostle Paul obviously does not mean all mankind, for elsewhere he tells us that amongst men, there *are* “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” (Rom 9:22), that is to say that there *are* men “appointed to wrath.” Clearly, by “us” he is referring to the elect, or such as have been “chosen... in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him” (Eph 1:4).

As all men fell in Adam as our representative in the Covenant of Works, so we are granted life in Christ as our representative in the Covenant of Grace. We shall learn more about the covenant of grace in the questions following, but for now let us take note that our membership in this covenant is not by descent (as in the first covenant) or by merit (as if we have to qualify for it), but entirely by God mere love and mercy.

The apostle Paul tells us that we have been “in love, predestinated... unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:4-6). We are, in other words, elected not according to any merit in us, but according to the sovereign will and good pleasure of God. And we are beloved and granted life eternal on account of our being represented by Christ, the beloved son of God, who would live and die on our behalf. This also means that we do not become members of the covenant of grace because of our faith, but rather we have faith as a gift of God because we are elected to be members and beneficiaries of the Covenant of Grace.

But lest anyone complain that God is unfair in that He did not choose all to be saved, let us realise that His salvation is entirely by His grace and mercy. In fact, the apostle Paul was is answering the charge of unfairness in God when he says:

“Is there unrighteousness [or unfairness] with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom 9:14-16).

What Paul is essentially saying is that we all deserve God’s curse and wrath, and so there is no question of fairness. Fairness would demand justice upon all, but God in his grace and mercy chose to save some. How could anyone charge him for unfairness? Rather let every mouth be stopped, and let the child of God rather be filled with awe and wondrous gratitude that he should be included in Christ’s covenant at all.

WLC 31. With whom was the Covenant of Grace made?

The covenant of Grace was made with Christ as the second Adam,
and in Him with all the elect as His seed.¹

Proofs

¹Gal 3:16; Rom 5:15–21; Isa 53:10–11

Comments

While the covenant of Works was made by God with Adam representing all mankind descending from him by natural generation, the covenant of Grace was made with the Lord Jesus Christ, representing His elect.

The parties in the two covenants may be tabulated as follows:

	Divine		Human	
	Party	Representative	Representative	Party
Covenant of Works	<i>The Triune God</i>	God the Father	Adam	All Mankind descending from Adam
Covenant of Grace	<i>The Triune God</i>	God the Father	<i>Jesus Christ the God-Man</i>	<i>The Elect</i>

Our catechism calls the Lord Jesus Christ the second Adam not without reasons.

In the *first* place, the apostle Paul speaks of the Lord as the “last Adam”:

- “The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.... The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven” (1 Cor 15:45, 47).

In the second place Christ came to take the place of Adam as covenant representative to keep the covenant of Works and to pay for Adam’s transgression on behalf of those He would represent:

- “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22);
- “As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:18-19).

Notice how the apostle Paul speak of Christ representing “all” when it is obvious that He does not represent all mankind, for if He represents all mankind, then all would be saved.

The apostle speaks of Christ representing “all” because he has in mind how Christ represented all He came to save just as Adam represented all his descendants by natural generation. Indeed, the Scripture makes this comparison even sharper by calling those whom Christ represents “His seed” (or “his descendents”):

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his *seed*, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify *many*; for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:10-11; *italics mine*).

Who are these seed of Christ? They are the “many” of Isaiah 53:11. They are those whom the Father had given unto Christ (Jn 17:9). They are the sheep who would believe in the Lord (Jn 10:26). They are, in other words, the elect who have been chosen in Christ (Eph 1:4) and are therefore covenantally united to Him.

Take note that the covenant of Grace is not made with them individually as if faith is the meritorious condition of the covenant of Grace as sometimes taught. The covenant of Grace was made with Christ as our representative (cf. Gal 3:16), and the condition of the covenant is the same as that in the covenant of Works,—namely personal and perfect obedience to the law of God. Christ our representative fulfilled that condition. Faith is a gift procured by Christ for the elect (Eph 2:8) by which the elect is brought into lively union with him. Faith is not *strictly speaking* a condition of the covenant.

When was the covenant of Grace made? It was made in eternity, “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). This is why the Lord Jesus Christ is said to be “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8). The covenant of Grace was however revealed to man only after the Fall in the words of God: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15).

But Christ came only in the fullness of time (Eph 1:10; Gal 4:4). How then could the benefits of the covenant be enjoyed by anyone before the time? They could because the representative of the covenant is no ordinary man. He is the God-Man, who was eternally the Son of God, the second person of the Triune God, who is in very essence God. What God has determined to do, He will certainly do, and therefore it is in His sight as good as done.

WLC 32. How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant?

A. The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that He freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator,¹ and life and salvation by Him;² and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in Him,³ promiseth and giveth His Holy Spirit⁴ to all His elect, to work in them that faith,⁵ with all other saving graces;⁶ and to enable them unto all holy obedience,⁷ as the evidence of the truth of their faith⁸ and thankfulness to God,⁹ and as the way which He hath appointed them to salvation.¹⁰

Proofs

¹Gen 3:15; Isa 42:6; Jn 6:27; ²1 Jn 5:11–12; ³Jn 3:16; 1:12; ⁴Prov 1:23; ⁵2 Cor 4:13; ⁶Gal 5:22–23; ⁷Ezk 36:27; ⁸Jas 2:18, 22; ⁹2 Cor 5:14–15; ¹⁰Eph 2:10.

Comments

The Covenant of Grace is known as the second covenant in our catechism because it was manifested to man after man fell under the first covenant. But it is, as it relates to man in general, of a totally different nature from the first covenant. Yes, the condition of the covenant is the same in that the Covenant of Grace builds upon the Covenant of Works, and Christ came as the second Adam to fulfil what the first Adam failed to do. But under the first covenant all men descending from Adam by natural generation are automatically members of the covenant by descent, whereas membership in the second covenant is by God's sovereign election, which does not at all depend upon what the members (i.e. the elect) does or does not do. This alone makes the second covenant gracious.

But the graciousness of God towards the elect in this second covenant is further manifested in three ways.

First, God offers and provide a Mediator to the elect to reconcile them to Himself. Grace is unmerited favour. But the grace of God is more than that. The grace is God is His extension of favour and love to creatures who are not only undeserving of his favour, but in fact deserving His wrath and curse. The elect, as with all men descending from Adam by natural generation fell and sinned in Adam, and therefore are estranged from God and become His enemies. But God by His grace provides for their restoration, for by this Mediator, we who deserve God's wrath and curse, are instead given life eternal, free and abundant: "And this is the record," says the apostle John, "that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 Jn 5:11-12).

Secondly, God's grace is manifested in his promising and giving His Holy Spirit to all His elect. Note the words of our catechism carefully. What it is saying is that as God requires faith in the elect in order that they may enjoy the benefits procured by Christ, He gives the elect the Holy Spirit to work faith (as well as all other saving graces, such as repentance and sanctification, and other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit—Gal 5:22-23) in them.

Take note of this thought carefully. Because our enjoyment of the benefits of this second covenant requires faith on our part, faith is often said to be a condition of the covenant of grace. But strictly speaking faith is not the condition of the covenant. It is a gift procured by Christ our covenant head for the elect, by which the elect is brought into a lively union with Him, and therefore begin to enjoy the benefits of His mediatorship. It is, in other words, the *instrumental* condition (not of the covenant, strictly speaking), but of interest and union with Christ.

Thirdly, God's grace in the covenant is manifested in His enabling his elect to live a life of freedom, holiness and good works. All men by nature are bound to sin or lawlessness. God by his grace sets the elect free so that they are able to live in obedience to His "perfect law of liberty" (Jas 1:25). This, He does by changing in their heart by regeneration and the indwelling of the Spirit (Ezk 36:26-27).

This ability to live holy lives in turn gives us the blessed assurance that God has begun a good work in us and that our faith is real (Jas 2:18, 22). And this in turn, bestirs gratitude in our hearts so that the Christian life is lived in love rather than in fear, and in joy rather than in burden. Yes, the way of holiness and good works is the way to salvation, which God has appointed for the elect (Eph 2:10). But the elect in no way merit salvation by their good works, for even their good works proceed from God's Spirit (cf. *WCF* 16.5) as a manifestation of God's grace in the second covenant!

WLC 33. Was the Covenant of Grace always administered after one and the same manner?

A. The Covenant of Grace was not always administered after the same manner, but the administrations of it under the Old Testament were different from those under the New.¹

Proofs

¹2 Cor 3:6–9

Comments

There is a common error, known as Dispensationalism, which in its classic form posits a very sharp distinction between Old and New Testament to the point of suggesting that God has two people: the Jews and the Church, and that the way of salvation for these two groups of people are different. The Jews, they say are saved by observing the law, while Christians are saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a dangerous doctrine which amongst other things, often leads to blatant antinomianism, or a denial that Christians are obliged to keep the laws of God.

Our Catechism teaches us that although there is a distinction between the Old and New Testament, the way of salvation since the Fall is provided under the Covenant of Grace and remains the same across the testaments.

Under the Covenant of Works, abundant and eternal life was obtained by personal, perfect and perpetual keeping of the commandments of God. But with the Fall of Adam, all men fell with him and no one descending from him by natural generation is able to obtain life by the provisions under the Covenant of Works anymore. Yes, the Covenant of Works was not abrogated and therefore remained in force but no one could or have fulfilled its requirements except the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-Man. The Lord Jesus Christ as we saw earlier came not only to pay for the penalty due to us for being covenant breakers, but also to fulfil the covenant of works on behalf of His elect. Also, unbelievers continue to be condemned under the curse of the broken covenant though none can obtain life through it.

Eternal life since the Fall, is enjoyed by God's elect by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, our representative head in the covenant. This mode of salvation is the same whether the elect lived under the Old Testament or under the New Testament.

The only difference is that the covenant is administered differently under the two testaments. We will look at how it is administered under the two economies in more details in the next two questions; but for now we get a sense of the difference from the apostle Paul's comparison in 2 Corinthians 3:6-9. We may tabulate the differences in this way:

Old Economy	New Economy
Christ seen in Shadows	Christ seen in Substance
Letter of the Law given emphasis	Spirit of the Law is paramount
Death was pronounced	Life is Promised.
Ministry was that of condemnation	Ministry was that of righteousness and mercy
Unrighteousness of sinners falling short of God's holiness is recurring theme.	Righteousness or Justification of saints in Christ is recurring theme.

Now, we should note that the difference is not one of substance but of administration. For example, Christ is the object of faith in both economies, but while he was represented in animal sacrifices in the old economy, he is worshipped as one who has died and risen again in the new economy. So while the signs and seals of the covenant under the old economy involved blood, namely circumcision and the Passover, the signs and seals under the new covenant are bloodless, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper. Again, grace is the grand theme in both economies, but grace is shown largely through pointing out our unworthiness in the old economy, whereas under the new economy, the emphasis is on the greatness of Christ's sacrifice. Or again, though the covenant people of God must keep the commandments of God under both covenants, old covenant people were taught that such as fail to keep the law are condemned while new covenant people are taught that we must keep the law of God in gratitude and love.

WLC 34. How was the Covenant of Grace administered under the Old Testament?

A. The Covenant of Grace was administered under the Old Testament, by promises,¹ prophecies,² sacrifices,³ circumcision,⁴ the passover,⁵ and other types and ordinances, which did all fore-signify Christ then to come, and were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah,⁶ by whom they then had full remission of sin, and eternal salvation.⁷

Proofs

¹Rom 15:8; ²Acts 3:20, 24; ³Heb 10:1; ⁴Rom 4:11; ⁵1 Cor 5:7; ⁶Heb 8, 9, 10; 11:13; ⁷Gal 3:7–9, 14.

Comments

We saw in the previous question that since the Fall of Adam, God has related to His elect by way of the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace was differently administered under the Old Testament and the New Testament, but both administrations are centred upon Christ, the mediator of the covenant. That is to say, although Christ was not yet incarnate, he was the object of faith, and the Prophet, Priest and King of Old Testament saints. “Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision” (Rom 15:8), says the apostle Paul.

But how was Christ, His mediatorship and the benefits He would purchase by His substitutionary life and atonement taught and applied to the Old Covenant saints?

Firstly, He was revealed in promises and prophecies. He “was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers” (Rom 15:8), says Paul. The first promise of His mediatorship was given in Genesis 3:15. Since then there were innumerable prophecies and promises pointing to Him, for example: Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17; Deuteronomy 18:15; Job 19:25; Psalm 2, 22, 45, 110, 118, Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-5; 53; Jeremiah 33:15; Haggai 2:7; Zechariah 9:9-10; Malachi 3:1; etc, etc.

Secondly, the sacrifices also pointed to Christ as shadows of good things to come (Heb 10:1). By these sacrifices, the people were taught that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Heb 9:22), and as the blood of animals could not possibly take away sin (Heb 10:4), they were taught to look forward to and to place their trust in the Messiah who would lay down His life for them (Ps 40:6-7; Heb 10:7-8).

Thirdly, circumcision was given as a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith (Rom 4:11) as a means to reflect the divine will that the benefits of redemption comes only through union by faith with Christ, the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16, 29).

Fourthly, the Passover was instituted to teach the people that were it not for God’s provision of propitiation through the blood of Christ,—“Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,”— they would have to face the wrath of God (cf. Jn 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7; Rev 13:8).

Fifthly, the Old Covenant saints were also taught about Christ and various aspects of His work of redemption through types and symbols. J.G. Vos explains the distinction between types and symbols thus:

A type differs from a symbol in that a type is not arbitrarily used to denote something else; there is a real and more or less obvious similarity between the type and the antitype... (*The Westminster Larger Catechism Commentary* [P&R, 2002], 80).

For example, the rainbow was a symbol of God’s covenant promise of redemption in Christ while the oil used in anointing ceremonies was a symbol of anointing by the Spirit of Christ. On the other hand, Moses was a type of Christ in His prophetic office, Melchizedek was a type of Christ in His priestly office and King David was a type of Christ in his kingly office.

All these things “fore-signify Christ then to come.” This of course, does not mean that everything in the Old Covenant pointed directly to Christ. Many things pointed the people to their need of a Messiah. For example, as Vos explains (*ibid.*), in the Old Covenant leprosy was treated as a symbol for sin. Therefore the detail instructions concerning the management of leprosy (Lev 13, 14) really served to teach the Old Covenant people about the vileness and sinfulness of sin; and as such pointed the people to one who is perfectly pure, who is able to deliver them from sin.

Compared to what we have in the New Testament, the ordinances, types and symbols in the Old Testament were shadowy and in a sense incomplete. But these,—we must not doubt,—“were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah.” In God’s wisdom and providence, until the incarnation of Christ, the saints were being taught like children,—through pictures and abbreviated propositions (cf. Gal 3:24), rather than through full revelation, for which they were not yet ready to receive. The Old Testament ordinances, in other words, were specially adapted for the spiritual capacity of the Old Testament saints. But just as mature persons have very little need for pictures to understand truths, most of the Old Testament pictures in the form of the ordinances were done away when Christ had completed His work. And not only so, but when the Holy Spirit had been sent to illumine the hearts of the saints, new and fuller theological propositions were revealed to the Church through inspiration to the writers of the New Testament.

But were the Old Testament saints also fully saved from sin and wrath to come? Yes; certainly! Although the revelation was incomplete and the ordinances shadowy, it was Christ who saved! The Old Testament saints enjoyed the same benefits of redemption, as do the New Testament saints, or in the words of our catechism, they “then had full remission of sin” by Christ. Were it that the Old Testament saints did not enjoy the blessings of redemption as did New Testament saints, the words of the apostle Paul would make little sense:

¹³ Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

¹⁴ That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:13-14).

What does the phrase “blessing of Abraham” indicate but that the blessing was first enjoyed by the Old Testament saints?

This, of course, does not mean that they fully understood all the spiritual benefits that were being bestowed upon them, or had full assurance of having those benefits. The fact remains that they were living under type and shadows rather than antitypes and substance, and therefore did not see the clearly the fulfilment of the covenant promise, and in that sense “received not the promise” (Heb 11:39).

WLC 35. How is the Covenant of Grace administered under the New Testament?

A. Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same Covenant of Grace was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the Word,¹ and the administration of the sacraments of baptism² and the Lord's supper;³ in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fullness, evidence, and efficacy, to all nations.⁴

Proofs

¹Mk 16:15; ²Mt 28:19–20; ³1 Cor 11:23–25; ⁴2 Cor 3:6–18; Heb 8:6, 10–11; Mt 28:19

Comments

When we speak about the administration of the Covenant of Grace, we are talking about how Christ, the mediator of the covenant and the benefits of the covenant purchased by Him is administered or displayed and applied to members of the covenant.

This Covenant of Grace, though made in eternity was revealed to man and took effect immediately after the Fall. Under the Old Testament, it was administered in “promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the passover, and other types and ordinances, which did all fore-signify Christ then to come” (WLC 34).

The essence of the covenant remains the same under the New Testament. But Christ who is the substance or reality pointed to by the Old Testament shadows has come. Therefore the promises and prophecies have been, and are being fulfilled; the sacrifices and ordinances found their antitypes (fulfilment) and the bloody sacraments can no longer retain their forms (as the blood of Christ has been shed).

Under the Old Testament, the Covenant was administered through a complex of ordinances and rites, which appealed to senses of sight (e.g. watching the sacrifice of animals), of hearing (e.g. of trumpets and musical instruments), of taste (e.g. of bitter herbs) and of smell (e.g. of the perfume or anointing oil). The Old Testament saints were,—spiritually considered,—children, and God taught them in much the same way as we would teach children: by appealing to the senses. Under the New Testament, the saints have,—spiritually speaking,—grown up, and God appointed for them fewer, simpler, and more decidedly spiritual forms of worship. This change was spoken of by the Lord to the Samaritan woman:

“Believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:21, 23-24).

The New Testament administration of the Covenant of Grace (which is part of New Testament worship), may be reduced to three things: the preaching of the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Firstly, it is administered by preaching of the Word. Although the Word was preached even during Old Testament times, preaching was never given as much prominence as the other things that appealed to the senses. Our Lord moreover appointed preaching, as a means to gather and strengthen the elect sheep from all over the world. This is why the Lord charged His disciples: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15).

Secondly, the Covenant of Grace under the New Testament is also administered with baptism, which is the bloodless replacement of circumcision, as a sign and seal of the covenant by which particularly, the benefits of the covenant such as regeneration, and forgiveness of sin is exhibited and applied.

Thirdly, the Covenant of Grace is administered with the Lord Supper, which is the bloodless equivalent of the Passover. The Lord's Supper serves as a sign and seal of the covenant by which the death of Christ is exhibited and worthy receivers are by faith made partakers of benefits of the covenant that pertains to our sanctification.

These three means of administration of the covenant are, moreover, in a sense more effectual to the members of the covenant. Certainly the Old Testament ordinances were effectual to those who used them by faith in the Old Covenant, but the New Testament ordinances are more effectual because “grace and salvation are held forth in more fullness, evidence, and efficacy.”

This fact is highlighted by the writer to the Hebrews (quoting Jeremiah to support his assertion):

⁶ But now hath he [Christ] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.... ¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: ¹¹ And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest (Heb 8:6, 10-11).

While the Old Testament saints worshipped the LORD and experienced his blessings through the Messiah-Mediator, they knew Him and His work (which he would do) only in part and in a rather indistinct way. New Testament saints on the other hand, have the privilege of hindsight as well as more intricate theological explanations which were provided by the Holy Spirit through inspiration and illumination.

New Testament worshippers, as such, must never return to Old Testament forms of worship. To do so would be, not only to return to ‘childish’ ways, but to deny the Lord whom the Old Testament ordinances were pointing to, and to act as if He never came, and never rose as the Sun of Righteousness to displace all the old shadows. **W**

THE WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM

WLC 36. Who is the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace?

A. The only Mediator of the Covenant of Grace is the Lord Jesus Christ,¹ who, being the eternal Son of God, of one substance and equal with the Father,² in the fullness of time became man,³ and so was and continues to be God and man, in two entire distinct natures, and one person, for ever.⁴

Proofs

¹1 Tim 2:5; ²Jn 1:1, 14; 10:30; Phil 2:6; ³Gal 4:4; ⁴Lk 1:35; Rom 9:5; Col 2:9; Heb 7:24–25.

Comments

A mediator is one who stands between two parties, in order to make or restore peace and friendship. Adam was our representative in the Covenant of Works, but he was not quite our mediator. But with the Fall, man was estranged from God, and a mediator was needed that we may be restored to friendship with God. The terms and condition under which God now relates to man is known as the Covenant of Grace, and the mediator between God and us is the Lord Jesus Christ. So the apostle Paul declares: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Our catechism, based on this verse, rightly emphasises that Christ is the *only* Mediator of the Covenant of Grace. This verity immediately and unquestionably invalidates the Romish doctrine that Mary is a co-mediatrix (or co-mediator) and that believers can appeal to her and to departed saints to intercede for them before God.

Our catechism goes on to teach us several other important truths concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, we are taught that He is the eternal Son of God. He did not *become* the Son of God; He has always been the Son of God, and remains the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. This is clearly taught in John 1:18—“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (See also Jn 1:14). The Lord Jesus was, is and continues to be the “only begotten Son” (*monogenhv*) of the Father.

Secondly, we are taught that the Lord Jesus Christ is “one in substance and equal with the Father.” That is to say that although economically or functionally, He is subordinate to His Father in so far as His personhood is concerned, He is, in terms of His substance or being and existence, fully equal in power and glory with the Father. “I and my Father are one” (Jn 10:30), the Lord declares.

What this means is that the Lord Jesus Christ is fully and eternally, self-existent God, which is a doctrine that is denied in many circles today. J.G. Vos has a very insightful summary of this denial:

(a) The doctrine of the deity of Christ is denied by those who say that Christ is divine because all men are divine. If all men are divine, then for Christ to be divine is nothing out of the ordinary. (b) The doctrine of the deity of Christ is denied by those who, while calling Christ “the Son of God,” still refuse to say that He is of one substance and equal with the Father. Such people consider it a sin to worship Jesus Christ. (c) The doctrine of the deity of Christ is denied by those who accept his deity only as a “limiting concept”; that is when they speak of Christ as divine, or call him “the Son of God,” they do not mean that this is really the absolute truth about Christ; they only mean that Christ’s “deity” is a convenient label for classifying Christ for the time being; in calling Christ “God” they do not mean that he really and truly is God, but only that he is “God” for us human beings—that he may occupy the place of God in our human thinking at the present time. It is obvious that the idea of Christ as a “limiting concept” is something very different from the faith of orthodox historic Christianity in Christ’s deity (*The Westminster Larger Catechism: a Commentary*, [P&R, 2002], 86).

But *thirdly*, we are taught that the Lord Jesus Christ, “in the fullness of time became man, and so was and continues to be God and man” (see Gal 4:4). That is to say, the Lord Jesus Christ, was God from all eternity, but at an appointed time, He took on human nature so that from that point of time onwards, He was God and man “in two entire distinct natures, and one person, for ever.”

Take note of the very careful wordings of our catechism.

- First notice the term ‘entire.’ This means that the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ is the same as the human nature of all men. He did not only take on a human body but not a human soul. The human nature in its entirety comprises body and soul. The Lord Jesus Christ as we shall see in our next question, has a human body and a human soul. He is not, as commonly misunderstood, a divine Spirit combined with a human body.
- Secondly, note the term ‘distinct.’ This means that the human and divine natures of the Lord Jesus Christ are not mixed. He is fully God, having the fullness and glory of the Godhead at all times; and He is fully Man, having during his earthly sojourn all the limitations of human beings such as growing weary, and thirsty and hungry, and today after His ascension, having all the properties of a glorified, resurrected saint.
- Thirdly, note the phrase ‘one person’. This means that the Lord Jesus Christ was not two persons combined into one as taught by the Nestorians of the 5th Century. The Lord Jesus Christ has always been a divine person. In incarnation, He took on human nature, not a human person. Though He has two wills because He has two natures, He is one person. All He does He does as the God-Man, and as such His human will never contradicts His divine will. It is wrong therefore to speak of Christ in His incarnation loving someone in His human nature, but hating him in His divine nature.
- Fourthly, take note of the term ‘forever.’ This teaches us that the Lord Jesus Christ is still fully God and fully Man today. He did not cast away his human nature as some mistakenly think. Indeed, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that it is because the Lord Jesus Christ continues as a man, He continues to be our intercessor and mediator that He may save us to the uttermost (Heb 7:23-25). **W**

Orthodox View of the Person of Christ

(as given in the Creed of Chalcedon, A.D. 451)

a. Jesus Christ is *one* Person (contra Nestorians)

b. He has a *fully* divine nature (contra Ebionites, Arians, Eutychians, Monothelites) and a *fully* human nature (contra Docetists, Apollinarians, Eutychians, Monothelites), the 2 natures are *without confusion* (contra Eutychians), *without change*, *without division* (contra Nestorians), *without separation*.

c. He had *two* wills, one divine and the other human (contra Monothelites)

WLC 37. How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?

A. Christ the Son of God became man, by taking to Himself a true body, and a reasonable soul,¹ being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance, and born of her,² yet without sin.³

Proofs

¹Jn 1:14; Mt 26:38; ²Lk 1:27, 31, 35, 42; Gal 4:4; ³Heb 4:15; 7:26

Comments

We say in our comments on the previous Q & A that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the God-Man, was a divine person (the second person in the Godhead) who took on human nature to Himself. In *WLC 37*, we are brought to understand a little more of how that happened in time.

First, we are told that the “Christ the Son of God became man.” This must not be construed to mean that He emptied Himself of His divinity or somehow transformed Himself from God into man. God is immutable (Heb 6:18). Christ is fully God. There can be no change to His divinity.

Secondly, we note that Christ became man “by taking to Himself a true body, and a reasonable soul.” A human person is made up of a material body and an immaterial soul. Christ, being already a Person (the second Person of the Godhead), did not take to Himself a human person. He took upon himself, rather, the constituents of a person: a body and a soul. Therefore as the God-Man, He is a divine person who is fully God and fully Man at the same time. Our catechism speaks of a *true* body to indicate that it is not imaginary, or phantasmal. It is a body like ours with skin, flesh, bones and blood, all which are made of elements such as oxygen, hydrogen, calcium, carbon, sodium, iron, etc. Similarly, He has a *reasonable*, i.e. rational soul, and is able to remember, recall, think and reason like everyone of us. Indeed, having a body and soul like us, He was capable of feeling pain, tiredness, hunger, thirst, sorrow, anger, grief etc, like anyone of us.

But *thirdly*, we are taught that the Lord Jesus Christ was “conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance, and born of her.” That is to say, He did not have an earthly father. His human nature was conceived supernaturally in the womb of His earthly mother, who was yet a virgin, by the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:27, 31, 35). This not only fulfilled prophecy (Isa 7:14), but ensured that Christ was not imputed with the guilt of Adam (see our comments on *WLC 22*).

The virgin birth of Christ is one of the five fundamentals of the faith (the others being the deity of Christ; the reality of miracles; the corporal resurrection of Christ and the corporal return of Christ), which is denied by liberals who claim to be believers. These would claim that Joseph or someone else was the real father of Jesus. However, to deny the virgin birth would not only imply that Mary was an immoral person, but (1) deny the inerrancy of the Scripture which says Christ was born of a virgin; (2) deny the Lord’s freedom from Original Sin and therefore (3) deny the efficacy of His atonement. Belief in the veracity of the virgin birth is essential to saving faith!

Finally, related to the previous point is that the Lord Jesus, the God-Man was and is “without sin.” The angel Gabriel explained to Mary how she who was a sinner could bear the Saviour in the words:

“The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Lk 1:35)

While the fact that Mary was a virgin meant that the Lord who was conceived in her womb was not imputed with Adam’s guilt, the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit ensured that He did not inherit a sinful nature from her. Thus, He was called the “holy thing” at conception. And thus though He has a human nature capable of being touched with the feelings of our infirmity and being tempted in all points like as we are, yet He was without sin original or actual (Heb 4:15). **W**

WLC 38. Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be God?

4. It was requisite that the Mediator should be God, that He might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God, and the power of death;¹ give worth and efficacy to His sufferings, obedience, and intercession;² and to satisfy God's justice,³ procure His favour,⁴ purchase a peculiar people,⁵ give His Spirit to them,⁶ conquer all their enemies,⁷ and bring them to everlasting salvation.⁸

Proofs

¹Acts 2:24–25; Rom 1:4; cf. Rom 4:25; Heb 9:14; ²Acts 20:28; Heb 9:14; 7:25–28; ³Rom 3:24–26; ⁴Eph 1:6; Mt 3:17; ⁵Tit 2:13–14; ⁶Gal 4:6; ⁷Lk 1:68–69, 71, 74; ⁸Heb 5:8–9; 9:11–15.

Comments

The Word of God teaches us that “there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Why is there only one Mediator? Because only the Lord Jesus Christ qualifies to be the Mediator between God and Man, He being the God-Man, and is fully God and fully Man, being one person in two distinct natures forever. But why must this be so? Why must He be God? Why is the verity that Christ is God crucial to true Christianity? And why must He be man? Why is it important that His humanity be insisted upon? These are the questions that are addressed in the present and the next study.

First, God's wrath against sin is an infinite wrath. The psalmist is not exaggerating when he declares: “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps 130:3). No mere man can withstand the wrath of God against even the slightest sin such as an idle word (cf. Mt 12:36). The Mediator between God and man must bear the sin of the Church throughout the ages. Were He not God, His human nature would have been crushed under the wrath of God, for justice requires that He suffer infinite punishment in order to be a propitiation for His people. Were He not a divine Person, He would not be able to sustain the infinite wrath of God; and not only so, He would have to be holden under the power of death and suffer the wrath of God for all eternity (cf. Acts 2:24).

Secondly, the Mediator must be God in order to “give worth and efficacy to His sufferings, obedience, and intercession.” If he were a mere sinful man, like Moses, Abraham or David, his suffering would not even be sufficient to pay for his own sins, not to mention paying for the sins of others. Even supposing, as a mere man, he was kept from sin, original and actual, by the power of the Spirit of God, he would still not qualify to be a Mediator, for his righteousness would then only be sufficient for himself and his sufferings would only be sufficient to pay for the sin of one other person.

The Lord Jesus Christ qualifies to be the Mediator, because He is not only sinless Man, but infinite God. Only the blood of a divine man is sufficient to pay for the sin of the Church. The apostle Paul hints at this fact when he refers to the Church of God as that “which he [i.e. God] hath purchased with his [i.e. God's] own blood” (Acts 20:28).

Moreover, the fact that Christ is God also makes his intercession perfectly efficacious, whereas, it is impossible for mere man to know the will of God perfectly and therefore to intercede perfectly on behalf of the Church.

And *thirdly*, on the basis that the atonement, obedience and intercession of a *divine* mediator is alone efficacious for the Church, we learn that only if the Mediator is God can He “satisfy God's justice, procure His favour, purchase a peculiar people, give His Spirit to them, conquer all their enemies, and bring them to everlasting salvation.” If our mediator is not God, God's justice will be violated if we are reconciled on the basis of His work; God's favour could not be procured; His blood will not be sufficient to purchase a peculiar people; there will be no ground to send the Spirit of Christ; and we can have no hope of everlasting salvation.

In addition, moreover, to the reasons given in the Answer, we may surmise on two other reasons why the Mediator must be God. Firstly, the Mediator must be God, else we would have no representative in the “everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20). If Christ were a mere man, he did not exist until the fullness of time. Therefore he could not represent us in the counsel of the Godhead, and there would be no basis for our election and love in him....

Secondly, the Mediator must be God because we are debtors to God and when a creditor forgives a debt, he must necessarily bear the debt himself or there is no reconciliatory forgiveness. If our mediator were not God, then suppose his atonement was efficacious, he would be a third party paying for our sin, which would then imply that God's justice is satisfied, but there is no personal or reconciliatory forgiveness (cf. 2 Cor 5:18-19).

All these points together, makes it essential that our Mediator be fully God. Were he not God, there is no atonement, no justice, no reconciliation and no forgiveness, which things are essential to true Christianity. **W**

WLC 39. Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be man?

A. It was requisite that the Mediator should be man, that He might advance our nature,¹ perform obedience to the law,² suffer and make intercession for us in our nature,³ have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities;⁴ that we might receive the adoption of sons,⁵ and have comfort and access with boldness unto the throne of grace.⁶

Proofs

¹Heb 2:16; ²Gal 4:4; ³Heb 2:14; 7:24–25; ⁴Heb 4:15; ⁵Gal 4:5; ⁶Heb 4:16.

Comments

We have seen why it is necessary for our Mediator to be God. It remains now to be show why he must also be man. Our Answer gives 6 reasons:

Firstly, it is so “that He might advance our nature.” This simply means that he took on human nature in order that he may represent us and advance our cause. Even in ordinary human organisations, only members may properly act as representatives. Therefore, for Christ to represent us, he must be man, rather than say, angel (cf. Heb 2:16), or only God. The apostle Paul puts it this way: “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:21). Since sin and ruin came by man, righteousness and restoration must also come by man.

Secondly, He must be man to “perform obedience to the law.” God is the Law-Giver, It would be meaningless for Christ to obey the Law as God. Adam’s failure to perfectly obey the Law under the covenant of works brought the downfall of man. Christ came as the second Adam to fulfil the covenant of works on behalf of His elect (cf. Gal 4:4).

Thirdly, Christ must be man in order to “suffer.” God cannot suffer. God can have sympathy for our suffering, but as God He cannot sympathise with (or suffer with) our sufferings, for suffering implies limitations, while God is infinite. But our Mediator, in order to bear our iniquities (Isa 53:4-6,11), must suffer on our behalf. He therefore partook of flesh and blood with us “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14).

Fourthly, our Mediator must be man in order to “have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities” and “to make intercession for us in our nature.” As Mediator, He has to bring our cause before the throne of God. Unless he is able to feel something of our struggles, He cannot compassionately represent us. This is why the Scripture insists that true priests must be men (Hebrew 5:1-2). Thank God that the Lord Jesus Christ is man: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). And thank God he continues to be man even after His ascension, for as the apostle puts it: “this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:24-25).

Fifthly, our Mediator must be man, in order that “we might receive the adoption of sons.” The apostle Paul teaches us that Christ was “made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:4b-5). The distance between God and man is infinitely great, and it is made even greater by sin. Notice the steps that God has appointed to make us his children. First, Christ took on human nature; secondly, Christ lived and died for us; and thirdly, we are made to conform to the image of Christ “that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).

Sixthly, our Mediator must be man, so that we may “have comfort and access with boldness unto the throne of grace.”

This point is particularly related to the 4th point above. Because our Mediator was fully man and touched with all the feelings of our infirmities and was at all points tempted as we are, we have confidence to pour out our hearts at the throne of grace knowing that our Mediator understands us completely and is perfectly able to represent our case. To illustrate this point consider the relationship between a petitioner and his lawyer. Suppose the petitioner is a poor man struggling to eke out a living, and he is trying to make out a claim that is related to his poverty. Would he be comfortable having a lawyer who is living in opulence all his life represent him? Or would he be more confident having one who have struggled through poverty himself represent him? Thank God that our Mediator was perfectly man, for “though he was rich, yet for [our] sakes he became poor, that [we] through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor 8:9). **W**

WLC 40. Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be God and man in one person?

- A. It was requisite that the Mediator, who was to reconcile God and man, should Himself be both God and man, and this in one person, that the proper works of each nature might be accepted of God for us,¹ and relied on by us, as the works of the whole person.²

Proofs

¹Mt 1:21, 23; 3:17; Heb 9:14; ²1 Pet 2:6

Comments

We saw in *WLC* 36 that the Lord Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man “in two entire distinct natures, and one [divine] person, for ever.”

There was,—as we noted in our comments on *WLC* 36,—a heresy in the 5th Century, known as Nestorianism which essentially taught that Christ was not one person but really two distinct persons, one human and one divine co-joined together. Nestorianism correctly distinguished between the deity and humanity of Christ, but insist that there was no real union of God and humanity in one divine person. The Son of God and the Son of Man are distinct persons. Though only the physical body of the Son of Man was manifested, the voice of both were heard.

The Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431 pronounced Nestorianism a Christological heresy and excommunicated Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople, who allegedly taught it. The Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451 reaffirmed the decisions of the Council of Ephesus.

WLC 40 essentially answers the question as to why it is important to insist that Christ was one person, and that Nestorianism was wrong.

Scripturally, the fact that Christ was one person can be seen in 5 ways:

- *Firstly*, in the fact that the Scripture does not anywhere attribute any action, word, or attribute to Christ which suggests that He is other than a singular individual.
- *Secondly*, Scripture does not use the plural pronoun for Christ, unlike the reference to the Triune God.
- *Thirdly*, there are passages in which Christ is designated by a divine title while an attribute or action that properly belongs to His human nature is being describe. Thus we read of “the church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). God is spirit, the only way God may be said to shed blood is to have the divine nature united with the human nature in one person.
- *Fourthly*, there are passages in which the reverse is true, e.g.: “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (Jn 3:13). The title ‘Son of man’ seems to highlight the humanity of Christ, yet it is with this term that He is said to have descended from heaven.
- *Fifthly*, there are passages in which both divine and human attributes and actions are predicated to the same person, e.g.: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created...” (Col 1:14-16a); “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9).

The Answer to *WLC* 40 is no doubt founded on these scriptural bases, but is presented theologically on two points:

Firstly, we are told that our Mediator must himself be God and Man and in one person, so that “the proper works of each nature might be accepted of God for us.”

Consider for example that Christ must needs suffer, but as God, He could not experience suffering except through a human nature; and His human nature could not endure the degree of suffering required except it be sustained by a divine nature. Therefore Christ must be God and Man at the same time, and he must be one person because he must suffer and yet must suffer infinitely. Therefore the writer of Hebrews, speaks of “the blood of Christ” offered “through the eternal Spirit [i.e. Christ’s divine nature]” (Heb 9:14). The blood of Christ would be of little value in God’s sight except it was the blood of man who is also God.

Secondly, we are taught that Christ must be God and Man, so that He might be “relied on by us, as the works of the whole person.” Christ is our representative, He must be man but how can He mediate for us if He is not also God. Therefore in order that we might rely on Him, He must be one person who is both God and man. **W**

WLC 41. Why was our Mediator called Jesus?

A. Our Mediator was called Jesus, because He saveth His people from their sins.¹

Proofs

¹Mt 1:21

Comments

The name 'Jesus' is without doubt the greatest name ever given to man, for "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This name is the name of our Mediator, our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ.

About 700 years before the Lord Jesus Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah had prophesied his birth in the words: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa 7:14). This prophecy is referred to in the apostle Matthew's inspired account of the birth of the Lord, at which place we are also told that 'Immanuel' or 'Emmanuel' means 'God with us' (Mt 1:23).

It is therefore somewhat surprising that when the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, he told him to call the child whom Mary was carrying "Jesus" (Mt 1:21). There is no doubt that this was the will of God, and neither do we have any doubt that Immanuel and Jesus is the same person.

Why then was Jesus given another name other than the name that was prophesied? I believe the name 'Immanuel' was not intended as a name to address the Lord by. "and [she] shall call his name Immanuel" is a prophetic device to emphasise the fact that the virgin born child, will be no ordinary man, but will, in fact, be the God-Man, in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9).

The name Jesus on the other hand speaks of the purpose for the incarnation, and was intended by the Lord to be used by God's people to address their Saviour.

The name 'Jesus' is the anglicism of the Greek *Ἰησοῦς* ("Iêsous, pronounced Ee-ay-soose), which in turn is the Greek form of the Hebrew [יְהוֹשֻׁעַ] (pronounced Yeh-ho-shoo-ah), which is usually translated Joshua or Jehoshua. Joshua or Jehoshua means "Jehovah is salvation."

When the angel of the Lord announced that the name of the child would be 'Jesus,' he also gave the reason: "for he shall save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21).

This statement says a lot about the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, we see that people need to be saved or rescued from their sin. Because of sin, we are guilty and deserve the wrath and curse of God; and moreover, we are by nature dead in sin and trespasses, and therefore bounded to sin and Satan. We need to be saved from the punishment due to our sin and from our bondage to sin.

Secondly, we see that our salvation from sin must be accomplished in the way appointed by the Lord, namely by a redeemer. We cannot save ourselves by our own effort, nor may we be saved in any other way apart from Christ Jesus.

Thirdly, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ came to save sinners and not merely to make salvation possible. He did not come to satisfy some preconditions so that sinners may be offered salvation. He came to save them and all whom he came to save will be saved.

Fourthly, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ did not come to save the whole world, nor to attempt to do so. He came to save "his people." Who are his people? They are not the Jews, but those whom the Father has given unto Him, namely the elect throughout the ages (cf. Jn 17:9, 11).

WLC 42. Why was our Mediator called Christ?

A. Our Mediator was called Christ, because he was anointed with the Holy Ghost above measure;¹ and so set apart, and fully furnished with all authority and ability,² to execute the offices of prophet,³ priest,⁴ and king of His Church,⁵ in the estate both of His humiliation and exaltation.

Proofs

¹Jn 3:34; Ps 45:7; ²Jn 6:27; Mt 28:18–20; ³Acts 3:21–22; Lk 4:18, 21; ⁴Heb 5:5–7; 4:14–15; ⁵Ps 2:6; Mt 21:5; Isa 9:6–7; Phil 2:8–11

Comments

Unlike ‘Jesus’, ‘Christ’ is not a name. It is certainly not the Lord’s surname as some ignorant persons may assume. It is rather a title. This is why in the Scriptures, the definite article is often used with ‘Christ’, such as in Matthew 16:16, where Simon Peter confessed to the Lord: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

The title ‘Christ’ is the anglicised form of the Greek *Cristov*” (pronounced khris-tos), which means ‘Anointed One.’ The Hebrew for ‘Anointed One’ (such as in Ps 2:2 and 18:25) is the word *j'yvim*; (pronounced ma-shee-akh), which is also translated “Messiah” (Dan 9:25-26). So ‘Christ’ is in fact the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew ‘Messiah.’ When we talk about the Old Testament saints looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, we are talking about how they were looking forward to the coming of Christ. Indeed, in numerous places where the AV has *j'yvim*; rendered as “Anointed One,” it would not be wrong to translate it as “Christ.” So Psalm 2:2 can read:

“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his *Christ*” (Ps 2:2).

But why is our Mediator called the Anointed One? He is so called “because he was anointed with the Holy Ghost above measure; and so set apart, and fully furnished with all authority and ability.” In the Old Testament times, anointing with oil was the means by which prophets, priests and kings (e.g. 1 Kgs 19:16; Ex 28:41; 1Sam 16:13) were set apart and appointed to their respective offices. There was nothing magical in the anointing oil. It was a symbol of the Holy Spirit who would come upon them the wisdom and abilities, as well as the divine authority necessary for the duties, which God has appointed them to. Thus we read in 1 Samuel 16:13 that once Samuel anointed David, “the Spirit of the LORD came upon David.”

The Lord Jesus was not anointed with oil. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit without the oily symbol. The Old Testament offices, were types of the office of Christ, although they were also of functional use for the duration of the Old Testament. So the anointing oil was also typical, though functional. The Old Testament anointing of prophet, priests and kings has its fulfilment or antitype in the anointing of Christ by the Holy Spirit, which was *manifested* when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him at His baptism (Mt 3:16).

Now, we say ‘manifested’ because we must bear in mind carefully that it was *not* only at that moment that the Holy Spirit anointed our Saviour. The Lord Jesus Christ is the God-Man, and as such, He is constantly in perfect union with Father and the Holy Spirit. It is really by this union that the Lord is anointed by the Spirit above measure (cf. Jn 3:34). Our Confession of Faith acknowledges this verity in *WCF* 8.3, which reads:

The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure, having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge...

The anointing of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove at the Lord’s baptism was really a kind of visible ratification, for our sakes (cf. Jn 12:30), much like the way that water baptism is a visible ratification of our Spirit baptism in regeneration.

Nevertheless, the fact that the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One has come, is why the Church no longer have the offices of prophets, priests or king. Other officers, namely elders (including ministers) and deacons have been instituted by the Lord for the care of the church, but these are not continuation of the Old Testament officers, and must not be confounded with them. Bear in mind that the Old Testament officers, which were of typical nature. The Prophet, Priest and King of the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ.

So our catechism teaches us that Christ was anointed “to execute the offices of prophet, priest, and king of His Church.”

He executed these offices, *firstly*, in the estate of His humiliation, namely, during His earthly existence from the time of His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary, to His birth in a lowly condition, to His life of subjection under His parents, to His public ministry (after His baptism and anointing), to His sufferings at the Cross, to His death, and finally to His burial.

Christ executed the threefold office, *secondly*, in His estate of exaltation too. That is to say, Christ was and is our Prophet, Priest and King in His rising from the dead on the third day, in His ascension to His Father, in His intercession on our behalf at the throne of God, and finally in His coming again at the Last Day to receive His Church and to judge the world.

WLC 43. How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?

A. Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in His revealing to the Church,¹ in all ages, by His Spirit and Word,² in divers ways of administration,³ the whole will of God,⁴ in all things concerning their edification and salvation.⁵

Proofs

¹Jn 1:18; ²1 Pet 1:10–12; ³Heb 1:1–2; ⁴Jn 15:15; ⁵Acts 20:32; Eph 4:11–13; Jn 20:31

Comments

Many of us think of a prophet as being a person who foretells the future. This is because many Old Testament prophets did indeed, under the inspiration of God, predict what would happen in the future, and many of us know the prophets largely by the predictions that they made.

A prophet in the full biblical sense, however, is more than one who speaks about the future. He is, rather, the mouthpiece or spokesman of God. And more often than not, the message that God appoints to His prophets to speak unto His people is not predictions about the future, but proclamations and instructions that relate to the present as well as the eternal life of the people. A prophet, in other words, is more a forth-teller, than a fore-teller.

The Lord Jesus Christ was a Prophet in this full biblical sense. This is not to say that He did not in His earthly ministry, foretell the future, for He did. For example, He spoke about the coming devastation of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and His prophecies were fulfilled to the letter. But Christ did far, far more as a prophet of God. In fact, He was the prophet par excellence, for He alone has seen God, has the mind of God, and is able to declare God as God Himself (Jn 1:18).

His prophetic office was announced through Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18–19—

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

This prophecy has to do with the incarnation of Christ as the God-Man. But we must realise that His ministry as a prophet was carried out “in all ages,” and not just during the time He walked upon the earth, when He spoke to the people directly.

As the Prophet of God unto His Church, Christ revealed unto the Church, in all ages “the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation.” He himself told His disciples: “All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (Jn 15:15b). What is the purpose of His revelation to His Church? It is that they might be edified, or built up unto spiritual maturity (cf. Eph 4:13–14), and that they might enjoy eternal life in His name (cf. Jn 20:31).

But how did Christ execute His work of revealing the will of God to His Church? He does so by “His Spirit and Word, in diverse ways of administration.”

When the Scripture speaks of “the Spirit of Christ” (1 Pet 1:11), we must think of Him as the Holy Spirit; and likewise the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, for Holy Spirit is sent not only by the Father (Jn 14:26), but by the Son (Jn 16:7). And He is sent in the name of Christ (Jn 14:6), and the content of His ministry of truth is said to come from Christ (Jn 16:13–14). So when our catechism teaches us that Christ executes His prophetic office by His Spirit, what it is saying is that He executes it by the Holy Spirit’s ministry of revelation (1 Pet 1:10–12), inspiration (2 Pet 1:21), reminder (Jn 14:26) and illumination (1 Cor 2:9–12).

Christ also executes His office by way of His Word. His Word was brought to His people by the supernatural revelation of truth in the mind of His prophets, by dreams, by visions, by extraordinary providence (see Heb 1:1–2), by the proclamations of His prophets and priests in the Old Covenant and by apostle and ministers in the New Covenant (Eph 4:11ff). But most of all, Christ execute His prophetic office by giving us the written Word and the ability to understand it by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

It is no wonder that the Lord Jesus Christ is called “the Word” (Jn 1:1).

WLC 44. How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?

A. Christ executeth the office of a priest, in His once offering Himself a sacrifice without spot to God,¹ to be a reconciliation for the sins of His people;² and in making continual intercession for them.³

Proofs

¹Heb 9:14, 28; ²Heb 2:17; ³Heb 7:25

Comments

The Lord Jesus Christ is not only Prophet *par excellence*; He is our Great High Priest. As Prophet, He is God's representative in speaking to men; but as Priest, He is men's representative in approaching God.

As the Great High Priest of His Church, the Lord Jesus Christ represents every of His elect children by "offering Himself a [substitutionary] sacrifice without spot to God" and "making continual intercession for them" before God (Heb 5:1; 8:3; 7:25).

We must realise that the Lord's priestly ministry did not only begin at the incarnation. He was the Great High Priest already in the Old Covenant, though his office was ratified and manifested only in the incarnation. We may say that during the Old Covenant, the Lord exercised His office in anticipation of His redemptive work at the incarnation; and moreover, His priestly work was known, administered and taught to the people through the office and functions of the Aaronic priesthood. Indeed, the entire order of priests and the ceremonial system were shadows of heavenly realities in Christ (Heb 8:1-5; 10:1-4) and typical of the Lord's priestly office, which was clearly manifested only when He took on human flesh.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that the fulfilment of His priestly office was one of the chief reasons why Christ took on the nature of man rather than of angels, for only as man can He represent us as a merciful high priest (Heb 2:16-17).

But how could the Lord Jesus be a priest when He descended from Judah rather than Levi? The answer lies in the fact that He was anointed a priest in the order of Melchizedek with an oath (Heb 5:6; 7:15-17; cf. Ps 110:4). By design, the Melchizedek priesthood is already a higher priesthood than the Aaronic Priesthood since Abraham who is the ancestor of Levi gave tithes to Melchizedek (see Heb 7:1-10). But more than that, Jesus' priestly ministry is far superior to the ministry of the Aaronic Priests.

Firstly, He need not offer any sacrifice for Himself since He is without sin, though He was in all points tempted like as we are (Heb 4:15; 7:27).

Secondly, rather than offering animal sacrifices which are but shadow and types which cannot take away sins (Heb 4:10), our Great High Priest offered Himself, the antitype which all the OT sacrifices were pointing to (Heb 9:14, 28; Col 2:17). In doing so, He not only propitiated the wrath of God by vicariously taking the punishment for sin that is due us upon Himself, but reconciles us to God (Heb 2:17; Eph 2:16).

Thirdly, unlike the Aaronic priests, Christ our Great High Priest continues ever to make intercession for us (Heb 7:24-25; 12:24,25). Moreover, He does not intercede for us on earth as the Aaronic Priest would have, rather, He is exalted to the right hand of God the Father, and He intercedes for us there (Rom 8:34). What does He intercede for? As our advocate, He pleads with God that on account of the merit of His death our sins may be pardoned; our consciences quieted and our souls preserved: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). As our mediator, Christ beautifies our prayers by removing all impurities and sin, and then presenting them to the Father pleads that such as made in His name and in the will of God may be answered: "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14), He says.

WLC 45. How doth Christ execute the office of a king?

A. Christ executeth the office of a king, in calling out of the world a people to Himself,¹ and giving them officers,² laws,³ and censures, by which He visibly governs them;⁴ in bestowing saving grace upon His elect,⁵ rewarding their obedience,⁶ and correcting them for their sins,⁷ preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings,⁸ restraining and overcoming all their enemies,⁹ and powerfully ordering all things for His own glory,¹⁰ and their good;¹¹ and also in taking vengeance on the rest, who know not God, and obey not the gospel.¹²

Proofs

¹Acts 15:14–16; Isa 55:4–5; Gen 49:10; Ps 110:3; ²Eph 4:11–12; 1 Cor 12:28; ³Isa 33:22; ⁴Mt 18:17–18; 1 Cor 5:4–5; ⁵Acts 5:31; ⁶Rev 22:12; 2:10; ⁷Rev 3:19; ⁸Isa 63:9; ⁹1 Cor 15:25; Ps 110:1–2; ¹⁰Rom 14:10–11; ¹¹Rom 8:28; ¹²Th 1:8–9; Ps 2:8–9

Comments

The Lord Jesus Christ is not only the Great Prophet and the Great High Priest, He is also the King of kings.

A king is the ruler of a kingdom. Christ is such a king. His kingship was early prophesied in the OT, when Jacob blessed Judah by saying:

“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen 49:10).

Shiloh refers to the one to whom tribute belongs, i.e. an ultimate king. This prophesy was made a little more specific by Nathan the prophet in his delivery of God’s promise to David:

“And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever” (2 Sam 7:12–13).

Although this prophecy appears to refer directly to Solomon (cf. 1 Chr 28:6), it actually refers to him only as a type of Christ, for the New Testament tells us it refers to Christ (Heb 1:5b).

Under the ministry of the writing prophets the prophecy of the coming king became more and more distinct. For example, Jeremiah calls Him “a righteous Branch” and “The LORD Our Righteousness” (Jer 23:5–6; cf. Acts 13:23). Isaiah is even more specific. He not only calls Him the Branch and Root of Jesse (Isa 11:1ff, 10; cf. Rom 15:12); but makes it clear that He is God, and to dwell amongst men, He would be born of a virgin (cf. Isa 9:6–7; 7:14).

All these prophecies were fulfilled in the incarnation and the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ unto the right hand of the throne of God. Although there is a future universal manifestation of His kingship, Christ has already begun His kingly rule. He is already sitting on the throne. His kingly rule does not await a future Millennium as Dispensationalists claim. The kingly rule that Dispensationalists have in mind would end in a kind of failure, with massive rebellion after the so-called Millennium. But our Catechism teaches us that Christ is ruling today, and He executes His office in three realms: (1) The Visible Church; (2) The Invisible Church; and (3) The World.

It is particularly for the sake of the Invisible Church or His elect that Christ is exercising or will exercise His rule over the other two realms (cf. Eph 3:10–11). But it is important to understand how He executes His kingship in all three realms.

In the realm of the Visible Church, Christ executes His kingship in: (1) “in calling out of the world a people to Himself” to constitute His Visible Church; (2) in “giving them officers,” namely elders and deacons to rule over them; and (3) in giving them “laws, and censures, by which He visibly governs them,” that is to say in establishing church government and discipline.

In the realm of the Invisible Church, Christ executes His kingship: (1) in bestowing saving grace upon His elect” by His Spirit working in their heart and lives that they may cheerfully yield Him the obedience He requires; (2) by “rewarding their obedience” now by His providence and at the Judgement Day by an eternal blessing; (3) by “correcting them for their sins” by providential discipline and the voice of conscience; and (4) by “preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings,” so that they will never be overwhelmed by trials or their own corruptions.

Finally, in the realm of the world, Christ exercises His kingship: (1) by “restraining and overcoming all [the] enemies [of his elect],” so that nothing can separate them from His love; (2) by “powerfully ordering all things for His own glory, and [His elect’s] good”; and (3) by “taking vengeance on the rest, who know not God, and obey not the gospel.” This vengeance will partly be carried out by Christ’s providential power today, but the day of His wrath will be the Last Day when Christ will finally put down all who oppose His Church and Him, including Satan and the World (1 Cor 15:25; Ps 110).

WLC 46. What was the estate of Christ's humiliation?

A. The estate of Christ's humiliation was that low condition, wherein He for our sakes, emptying Himself of His glory, took upon Him the form of a servant, in His conception and birth, life, death, and after His death, until His resurrection.¹

Proofs

¹Phil 2:6–8; Lk 1:31; 2 Cor 8:9; Acts 2:24

Comments

In *WLC* 42, we saw that the Lord Jesus Christ executed the office of His mediatorship “in the estate both of His humiliation and exaltation.” In *WLC* 46-50 we shall be studying Christ's humiliation while in *WLC* 51-56, we shall be studying his exaltation.

When we talk about “Christ's humiliation,” we are talking about how Christ, who is very God himself, humbled himself and for a time suffered in a “low condition” for our redemption. The apostle Paul was referring to this gracious and loving condescension of our Saviour when he says:

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor 8:9).

We may think of the humiliation of Christ in 5 steps, viz.: (1) His emptying himself; (2) His lowly birth; (3) His life of obedience; (4) His vicarious death; and (5) His burial.

First, consider his emptying himself. The apostle Paul speaks of this significant act of humiliation when he tells us that Christ “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant...” (Phil 2:6-7).

The words “made himself of no reputation” may also be translated: “emptied himself.” But what did he empty himself of? Many heretical ideas have been offered for this question, including that he emptied himself of his deity or of the independent use of his divine attributes. But these theories fly in the face of many verses in the New Testament that speaks of the full deity of Christ Jesus in his incarnation (e.g. Mk 2:7; Lk 5:21; Col 2:9; etc). It is evident rather, that Christ only emptied himself of the form of God or his glorious and majestic appearance, as well as his enjoyment of heavenly glory (cf. Jn 17:5). Of course, this does not mean that there was any change in Christ, as he is unchangeable. When Paul says that he emptied himself of the form of God, he is referring to how his deity is veiled in human flesh so that he appeared for the duration of his incarnation as man to men and angels.

Secondly, Christ humbled himself in his lowly birth. Christ is the eternal Son of God, the Prince of Peace and the King of kings, and yet he humbled himself not only to be born, but to be born of a lowly virgin (cf. Lk 1:48) in a smelly stable (cf. Lk 2:7), rather than of a majestic princess in a stately palace.

Thirdly, Christ humbled himself in his life in that though he is the Law-Giver, the Upholder of all things, and the Owner of all things, he (1) Subjected himself to the Law (cf. Gal 4:4); (2) Endured the contradictions, reproaches, and indignities of wicked men and angels (Mt 4:1; Matt 10:25; Heb 12:3); and (3) Underwent the sinless infirmities of the flesh, such as weariness, hunger, thirst, pain and the like, in regard to his body; and grief and sorrow in regard to his soul (cf. Jn 4:6; Matt 4:2; Isa 53:3).

Fourthly, Christ humbled himself in his death (1) by condescending to suffer all the sorrows and humiliation leading up to his unjust sentence, including betrayal and physical abuse (cf. Mt 26, 27); (2) by condescending to die through a cruel and disgraceful torture (Phil 2:8); and (3) by enduring not only excruciating bodily pain, but the wrath of God due for the elect's sin in his soul (Mt 27:46).

Finally, Christ humbled himself in permitting his body to be buried and in continuing under the power of death until the third day when he was raised from the dead (Mt 27:59-60).

WLC 47. How did Christ humble Himself in His conception and birth?

A. Christ humbled Himself in His conception and birth, in that, being from all eternity the Son of God, in the bosom of the Father, He was pleased in the fullness of time to become the son of man, made of a woman of low estate, and to be born of her; with divers circumstances of more than ordinary abasement.¹

Proofs

¹Jn 1:14, 18; Gal 4:4; Lk 2:7

Comments

We have seen how Christ was “from all eternity the Son of God, in the bosom of the Father” (cf. Jn 1:1, 18). As the second Person of the Triune Godhead, He is equal in power and glory with the Father, and enjoyed heavenly glory from all eternity.

But in the fullness of time, that is at the time appointed by God, Christ condescended to “become the son of man” by taking on human flesh. Our catechism teaches us that “He was pleased” to do so, indicating that He came willingly, and under no compulsion at all.

Could Christ have taken on human flesh by taking on a temporary body like the way He did in His pre-incarnational appearances (e.g. Gen 18:2)? Or by creating out of nothing a full grown body? Well, conceivably that is possible, but in that case Christ would not truly be the son of man. He would have a similar nature to man, but not be of the same nature. Man’s nature is different from that of angels. Angels were created individually, but not man. God has made man “of one blood” (Acts 17:26). Man must share the same nature by way of propagation. The only way that Christ can be a true man is to be conceived in the womb and born as man.

Therefore, Christ humbled Himself to take on human flesh in this way.

And not only so, but He condescended to be “made of a woman *of low estate*, and to be born of her.” Mary’s poverty can be seen by how she could only afford a pair of turtledoves for her purification after giving birth to the Lord (cf. Lk 2:24).

Furthermore, the circumstance of the Lord’s birth was particularly humbling, for by the providence of God, Mary and Joseph had to leave their home in Nazareth to go to Bethlehem to be registered for the census of Ceasar Augustus (Lk 2:1-4). But because there was no room in the inn in Bethlehem, they had to stay in an animal stall. Mary gave birth to our Lord in this humbling condition, and laid him on a manger (Lk 2:7).

Why did the Lord of glory have to suffer all these? No doubt that the grace, love and compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ for us poor miserable sinners, may be the more sharply brought out to us. For says the apostle Paul:

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (2Cor 8:9).

If Christ humbled Himself for us, how can any of us remain proud?

WLC 48. How did Christ humble Himself in His life?

A. Christ humbled Himself in His life, by subjecting Himself to the law,¹ which He perfectly fulfilled;² and by conflicting with the indignities of the world,³ temptations of Satan,⁴ and infirmities in His flesh, whether common to the nature of man, or particularly accompanying that His low condition.⁵

Proofs

¹Gal 4:4; ²Mt 5:17; Rom 5:19; ³Ps 22:6; Heb 12:2-3; ⁴Mt 4:1-12; Lk 4:13; ⁵Heb 2:17-18; 4:15; Isa 52:13-14

Comments

In our previous study, we saw how “Christ humbled Himself in His conception and birth.” But His humiliation did not end there. He humbled Himself also in His life in four areas:

First, although as God He was the Law-Giver and therefore above the Law, He subjected Himself to live under the Law. He did so in order to fulfil the covenant of works on the behalf of His Church as her covenant representative. As such, He kept His own Law, particularly, the ceremonial and moral laws perfectly. (The civil law was no longer in force as Israel had come under Roman power). During His entire earthly life from infancy to His crucifixion, the Lord did not break any of the Law’s commandments nor did He fail to fully perform any of the duties required.

Secondly, Christ suffered the “indignities of the world.” Our catechism speaks of our Lord experiencing ‘conflict’ because the indignities of the world such as reproaches, shame, ridicule against Him (Ps 22:6; Heb 12:6) is so contrary to His nature of perfect holiness, righteousness and justice, and the perfect peace, order and reverence of heaven where He came.

Thirdly, Christ endured the “temptations of Satan.” This was especially so at the beginning of His ministry (Mt 4:1-12; Lk 4:1-13) when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness. This was a humiliation to our Saviour because it was an insult to His holy character and majesty to be tempted by a creature who is wicked, deceitful and in rebellion against God’s authority.

Fourthly, Christ suffered the “infirmities in His flesh” both as common to man, and as particular to the “low condition” that He was in. He suffered, for example, pain, sorrow, weariness, hunger, thirst and poverty. Our Lord Himself spoke of His poverty when He said: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Lk 9:58). He was so poor that at the time of His death, His only possession was what He was wearing on His back. And even that was confiscated by the soldiers.

We must constantly bear in mind that Christ our Lord suffered all these out of love for us. Were it not for us, He would not have left heaven’s glory, and He would not have to suffer the terrible humiliation that came upon Him. Oh let our hearts be filled with deep gratitude and love towards Him as we contemplate on what He has condescended to suffer for us. And let us also not be discouraged and begin to murmur at our trials which we experience for Christ’s sake. Let us look to Him who is the author and finisher of our faith knowing He endured much more for our sakes than we can ever imagine.

WLC 49. How did Christ humble Himself in His death?

A. Christ humbled Himself in His death, in that having been betrayed by Judas,¹ forsaken by His disciples,² scorned and rejected by the world,³ condemned by Pilate, and tormented by His persecutors;⁴ having also conflicted with the terrors of death, and the powers of darkness, felt and borne the weight of God's wrath,⁵ He laid down His life an offering for sin,⁶ enduring the painful, shameful, and cursed death of the cross.⁷

Proofs

¹Mt 27:4; ²Mt 26:56; ³Isa 53:2-3; ⁴Mt 27:26-50; Jn 19:34; ⁵Lk 22:44; Mt 27:46;
⁶Isa 53:10; ⁷Phil 2:8; Heb 12:2; Gal 3:13

Comments

The Lord did not only humble Himself in His birth and earthly life, He humbled Himself in the events leading up to His death too.

First, He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, who was one of His twelve chosen disciples and a familiar friend (Mt 27:4; Ps 41:9; Ps 55:12-14).

Secondly, He was forsaken by the rest of the disciples (Mt 26:56). This must have been particularly humbling for the Lord, for these were His faithful disciples who had hitherto professed their allegiance and friendship to Him to the point of laying down their lives (see Mt 26:35).

Thirdly, the Lord was scorned and rejected by the world (Isa 53:2-3). Indeed, not only by the world, but by His own people: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (Jn 1:11). This surely was very humbling for the Lord for He made all men, and even called out a visible people unto Himself. But He was despised by all men, including His own.

Fourthly, the Lord humbled Himself in submitting Himself to be unjustly condemned by Pilate and tormented by His persecutors (Mt 27:26-50; Jn 19:34). This is particularly humbling for the fact that Pilate, as a civil governor was ordained of God to be a minister for good, and "a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom 13:1, 4). But Pilate went against both natural justice and civil justice to condemn the Lord to death.

Fifthly, Christ "conflicted with the terrors of death, and the powers of darkness" as He neared the time of His death. This was especially so in the garden of Gethsemane, when He prayed earnestly according to a desire that if it were possible, He could be spared the terrors of the Cross. He was in such agony that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Lk 22:44). "Abba, Father," He cried, "all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk 14:36).

Sixthly, and most significantly, the Lord "felt and borne the weight of God's wrath." This was something He must have felt throughout His earthly life for He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows (Isa 53:4), but He must have felt it particularly in the three hours of darkness as He hung on the cross. At the end of the three hours, the Lord cried out with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (Mt 27:46). The Lord Jesus is God Himself, but He was bearing the sin of the elect upon Himself, and suffering the infinite wrath of God for our sin. He was in a sense forsaken by God, so that for the first time in His earthly sojourn, He called out unto His Father as 'God' and not as 'Father.' What great humiliation this must have been for our Lord: God forsaken by God on account of sin not His own.

So, *seventhly*, the Lord humbled Himself in that He "laid down His life an offering for sin." The Lord did not die naturally of sickness, accident or old age; nor did He die in glory like a soldier defending His country or a martyr for a worthy cause; nor did He die simply as a victim of injustice and oppression. He died an inglorious criminal's death,—as a sin offering not for His own sin, but for the sin of His elect.

For this purpose, He suffered the pain and shame of a cursed death on a cross. It was a particularly painful death not only because of the psychological torment that He went through as He bore our guilt, but because it was a very prolonged death through slow blood-loss, dehydration and exhaustion.

And it was a shameful death, for only the worst criminals, slaves and dogs were executed that way.

And not only so, but it was a cursed death for the Word of God has already declared: "he that is hanged is accursed of God" (Deut 21:23). In condescending to lay down His life on the cross, "Christ... redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal 3:13).

But as we contemplate on the death on the cross, we must not imagine that the Lord went to the cross and died as a helpless victim. Far from it, for even as He went to the Cross, He was upholding all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3). This is why the Lord Himself affirmed:

"I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (Jn 10:17-18).

This fact is confirmed in the account of His crucifixion, for we read in Matthew's account: "Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost" (Mt 27:50). The word "yielded up" (*ajfivhmi*), literally means "send away" or "dismiss." Similarly, in the Gospel of John, we read: "He bowed the head and gave up the ghost" (Jn 19:30). The word translated "gave up" (*paradivdwm*) can also be rendered "delivered" or "hand-over." In other words, the Lord did not simply die of blood-loss, dehydration or exhaustion, He voluntary gave up His soul. This is why later when Joseph of Arithmathaea went to ask Pilate for the Lord's body, Pilate " marvelled if he were already dead," i.e. he was surprised that the Lord could already be dead.

Of course, the Lord did not give up the ghost to cut short His suffering, although He would certainly have suffered sufficiently. He gave up the ghost voluntarily in order to demonstrate His power and also in fulfilment of the Scriptures that as the Passover lamb of God, not one of His bones should be broken (Jn 19:36; cf. Num 9:12). For we read that because the next day would be the Sabbath, the Jews asked for the bodies of the criminals to be taken down; but in order to do so they had to be put to death, which in the case of those being crucified would mean breaking their legs to induce death by asphyxiation. This was what they did to the two thieves for they remained alive when the soldiers came to check on them (Jn 19:32).

WLC 50. Wherein consisted Christ's humiliation after His death?

A. Christ's humiliation after His death consisted in His being buried,¹ and continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day;² which hath been otherwise expressed in these words, *He descended into hell*.

Proofs

¹1 Cor 15:3–4; ²Ps 16:10; cf. Acts 2:24–27, 31; Rom 6:9; Mt 12:40

Comments

We have seen how the Lord humbled Himself in the events leading up to His death. But His humiliation was not yet completed. He humbled Himself in death in two ways yet.

First, He humbled Himself by condescending that His body be buried. The Lord, we must remember, is fully God and fully man. As man, He has an immortal soul and a mortal body. At His death, His soul would no doubt have returned to heaven as He told the penitent thief: "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43). His body, on the other hand, was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah that: "he made his grave... with the rich in his death" (Isa 53:9).

Secondly, Christ humbled Himself in "continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day." Because "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), it is essential that the Lord suffered both physical and the equivalent of spiritual death (which He experienced in the 3 hours of darkness and the resultant cry of dereliction).

With the Lord's giving up the ghost in His physical death, His sacrifice was completed and accepted. This was why "the veil of the temple was rent in twain" (Mt 27:51; cf. Heb 10:19–20).

But since His sacrifice was completed, there was no need for Him to remain any longer in the grave than for it to be known that He truly died, and for the fulfilment of His prophecy that He would be raised from the dead on the third day. His humiliation of remaining under the power of death until the third day, is therefore, for our sakes, rather than something that is required by strict justice.

Now, our catechism speaks of how the Lord's burial "hath been otherwise expressed in these words, *He descended into hell*." This is with reference to the rather controversial phrase in the *Apostle's Creed*, which was probably added only in A.D. 650 (see Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2, [Baker, reprinted 1993], 52).

The *Heidelberg Catechism*, answering Question 44: "Why is there added, *He descended into hell*?" says:

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

Our Catechism holds to a different view. Johannes G. Vos explains well:

This expression has been understood in various ways. Some hold that Christ literally descended into hell, not the hell of the devil and the wicked angels, but a place where the Old Testament saints were thought to be waiting. There, they say, he preached to those spirits and opened the way for them to enter heaven. This interpretation, which is held by the Roman Catholic Church and by some Protestants, is unsound and is based on a misunderstanding (wrong interpretation) of 1 Peter 3:18–20. Some Protestants hold that the words "He descended into hell" refer to Christ's suffering on the cross, that is, that he descended into hell, not as a place, but as an experience of suffering.

While this idea is doctrinally sound, it is historically unwarranted because the word translated "hell" in the Apostles' Creed is not Gehenna (the place of punishment) but Hades (the realm of death). Our catechism teaches that the words "He descended into hell" refer to Christ's being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time, the word hell being understood as "the realm of the power of death."

So, then while it is right for us to think that the Lord suffered the pains of hell on our behalf while He hung on the cross of Calvary, we must not confuse this thought with what is expressed in the Apostle's Creed.

WLC 51. What was the estate of Christ's exaltation?

A. The estate of Christ's exaltation comprehendeth His resurrection,¹ ascension,² sitting at the right hand of the Father,³ and His coming again to judge the world.⁴

Proofs

¹1 Cor 15:4; ²Mk 16:19; ³Eph 1:20; ⁴Acts 1:11; 17:31

Comments

We saw earlier that Christ executed his mediatorial "offices of prophet, priest, and king of His Church, in the estate both of His humiliation and exaltation" (*WLC* 42). And we have seen how He suffered in the estate of humiliation in *WLC* 46-50. From *WLC* 51 to 56, we shall be studying the glory and work of the Lord in His exaltation.

The exaltation of Christ comprises four events.

The first two events, namely, His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven happened in the past. They occurred on the third day after He died (1 Cor 15:4) and forty days after He rose from the dead (Acts 1:3), respectively.

The third event, namely, His "sitting at the right hand of the Father," describes the Lord's position and work since the time He ascended into heaven (Mk 16:19). His work at the right hand of the throne of God, as ascended Saviour continues today (Heb 7:24-25).

However, the last and final event, namely, "His coming again to judge the world" remains future (Acts 1:11, 17:11). ***W***

A. Christ was exalted in His resurrection, in that, not having seen corruption in death (of which it was not possible for Him to be held¹), and having the very same body in which He suffered, with the essential properties thereof² (but without mortality, and other infirmities belonging to this life), really united to His soul,³ He rose again from the dead the third day by His own power;⁴ whereby He declared Himself to be the Son of God,⁵ to have satisfied divine justice,⁶ to have vanquished death, and him that had the power of it,⁷ and to be Lord of quick and dead:⁸ all which He did as a public person,⁹ the head of His Church,¹⁰ for their justification,¹¹ quickening in grace,¹² support against enemies,¹³ and to assure them of their resurrection from the dead at the last day.¹⁴

Proofs

¹Acts 2:24, 27; ²Lk 24:39; ³Rom 6:9; Rev 1:18; ⁴Jn 10:18; ⁵Rom 1:4; ⁶Rom 8:34; ⁷Heb 2:14; ⁸Rom 14:9; ⁹1 Cor 15:21–22; ¹⁰Eph 1:20, 22–23; Col 1:18; ¹¹Rom 4:25; ¹²Eph 2:1, 5–6; Col 2:12; ¹³1 Cor 15:25–27; ¹⁴1 Cor 15:20

Comments

We saw, in our last study, that the exaltation of Christ comprises four steps, the first being His resurrection.

Our present answer presents the doctrine of Christ's resurrection in 3 parts. The first part describes its *nature*, the second part lists the truths that are demonstrated by it, while the third part presents its *benefits*.

Five things may be said about the nature of Christ's resurrection:

Firstly, we must realise that Christ's body did not see decay or decomposition when he died and laid in the grave. This was so because He is the Son of God, the "Holy One" (Acts 2:24; 27). Though He was Son of God, He had to suffer the process of death because He was bearing the sin of His elect; but now that their sin has been completely paid for, it would be impossible and improper that He should suffer the corruptions associated with death. (Believers must still die and it is proper for us to suffer corruption though our sins are paid for because we are not the "Holy One").

Secondly, Christ rose with "the very same body in which He suffered, with the essential properties thereof" (cf. Lk 24:39). That is to say, the body in which the Lord rose bore the same basic characteristics, which identified it as the body that died and was laid in the grave. In other words, His body was not re-created, as some claimed.

Thirdly, the resurrected body of the Lord is "without mortality, and other infirmities belonging to this life." That is, although the Lord was raised with the selfsame body, He was no longer subjected to death or the bodily limitations of this present life. This contrasts with, for example, the resurrected body of Lazarus whom the Lord raised from the dead. Lazarus' body was returned to the qualities that it had before he died. He continued to be subjected to pains, illness, death and other bodily limitations common to man.

Fourthly, the resurrection of the Lord involved His human soul, which had entered paradise at the point of his death, being reunited with his body.

Fifthly and finally, Christ's resurrection occurred on the third day by His own power. We had already considered why He did not rise immediately, consider now that He was raised from the dead by His own power (Jn 2:19–21; 10:18) and not by the power of another.

This leads us to the second part of the answer, which concerns four truths that are asserted in Christ's resurrection:

The *first* is that Christ by His resurrection decidedly "declared Himself to be the Son of God" (cf. Rom 1:4). How does His resurrection have this effect when the resurrection of Lazarus does not? The reason is that Christ raised Himself by His own power; and this is significant because we are told in other parts of the Scripture that God raised Him from the dead (Acts 4:10; 5:30; 13:34; etc); that the Father raised Him from the dead (Rom 6:4; Gal 1:1; etc); and that the Spirit raised Him from the dead (1 Pet 3:18). By whose power, then, was the Lord raised from the dead? The Scripture cannot be broken (Jn 10:35). The power of the Son is the same as the power of the Father, and the power of the Spirit. It is the power of God! There are three Persons in the Godhead, who are the same in substance, equal in power and glory. Here is a tremendous proof that the Lord Jesus Christ is fully God as He is fully Man; and is truly the Son of God.

Secondly, His resurrection from the dead confirms unambiguously that His suffering and death has "satisfied divine justice" in regard to the sin of His people. Since death is the wages of sin, He would have to remain dead as long as He has not completed paying the penalty due to our sin. But since He rose from the dead, we know that He has fully paid for our sins.

Thirdly, by His resurrection from the dead, Christ demonstrated powerfully to us that He has "vanquished death, and him that had the power of it." By rising from the dead, Christ assures us that death has lost its sting and that the grave has lost its victory. Satan can no longer keep us under bondage to the fear of death (Heb 2:14), and believers need not doubt that as Christ rose from the dead, we who are united to Him will also one day be raised.

Fourthly, by His resurrection, Christ proved Himself "to be Lord of quick and dead." The apostle Paul puts it this way: "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Rom 14:9). That is to say, that by His resurrection, the Lord shows that His "authority... over His people is not confined to this world, but extends beyond the grave" (Hodge).

Christ rose from the dead and declared the truth that we listed not as a private individual but "as a public person," being the "head of His Church" (Eph 1:20, 22–23; Col 1:18). Thus the benefits of His resurrection extend to His Church. Our answer teaches us that there are, particularly, four benefits.

Firstly, He rose for our justification (see Rom 4:25). This is so because: (1) If He remained in the grave, it would be evident that He is not what He claimed to be, and therefore faith in Him would be meaningless, and therefore justification would not be effected; (2) Only a living Saviour can intercede and mediate for us to ensure that the benefits of His sacrifice is applied to us, and God has appointed that all such benefits must be given via a Mediator. Thus if Christ rose not from the dead, we would never be declared righteous though Christ has paid for the penalty of our sins.

Likewise, *secondly*, Christ rose from the dead, for our "quickening in grace." We have been "quickened... together with Christ" (Eph 2:5), says Paul. The power that raised us and continues to sanctify us is the "power of the resurrection" (Phil 3:10). We have the redemptive benefit of regeneration applied to us for Christ rose from the dead and on account of His mediation, God is supplying all our need "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19).

Thirdly, the knowledge that Christ rose from the dead "supports us against all our enemies." Paul refers to this fact in 1 Corinthians 15:25–27.

The point is that we face many enemies against our purpose of glorifying and enjoying God in this present life. The enemies are in the unseen world, in our corruption and in death. The fact, therefore, that Christ triumphed over all His enemies in His resurrection is a tremendous encouragement to us that we shall one day also triumph over all our enemies.

Likewise, *fourthly*, the fact of Christ's resurrection assures us of our resurrection from the dead at the last day. If Christ who is the head of the Church rose from the dead as our representative, will we not be raised also from the dead, seeing we are united to him covenantally and by His Spirit? **W**

WLC 53. How was Christ exalted in His ascension?

A. Christ was exalted in His ascension, in that having after His resurrection often appeared unto and conversed with His apostles, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,¹ and giving them commission to preach the gospel to all nations,² forty days after His resurrection, He, in our nature, and as our head,³ triumphing over enemies,⁴ visibly went up into the highest heavens, there to receive gifts for men,⁵ to raise up our affections thither,⁶ and to prepare a place for us,⁷ where Himself is, and shall continue till His second coming at the end of the world.⁸

Proofs

¹Acts 1:2–3; ²Mt 28:19–20; ³Heb 6:20; ⁴Eph 4:8; ⁵Acts 1:9–11; Eph 4:10; Ps 68:18; ⁶Col 3:1–2; ⁷Jn 14:3; ⁸Acts 3:21

Comments

Ascension is the Lord's second step in His exaltation. Seven things may be said in regard to His ascension.

Firstly, as regards to the *timing* of His ascension, the Scripture teaches us that it occurred forty days after His resurrection. During these forty days, the Lord appeared to the disciples on numerous occasions, speaking to them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:2-3) and charging them to preach the gospel to all nations (Mt 28:19-20).

Secondly, as regards to the *nature* of His ascension, we know that He ascended in our nature and as our covenant head. The writer of Hebrews insists that: (1) Christ took on human nature in order that He might be our great high priest (2:17); (2) He ascended to heaven as our high priest (6:20); and (3) He has "an unchangeable priesthood" for our sakes as He continues forever in our nature in heaven (7:24).

Thirdly, as regards to **His** *victory*, the Lord in His ascension triumph over enemies. Our catechism has Ephesians 4:8 as proof for this proposition: "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive...". The leading of captivity captive speaks metaphorically of how those who were hitherto subjects of Satan and enemies of God are now 'captured' and become willing slaves of God. But along with the metaphor of war, the captivity of captive involves victory. Christ triumphed over His enemies who under the leadership of Satan, hated Him, and crucified Him, in that, despite all their efforts He ascended into heaven to be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords.

Fourthly, in terms of *appearance*, the Scripture teaches us that He ascended visibly, for we are told that the disciples beheld as He ascended (Acts 1:9-10). The fact that He ascended visibly is important, for the angels, which spoke to the disciples after the Lord went out of sight said:

Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11).

The Jehovah's Witness' teaching that Christ returned in the spirit and invisibly in 1874, 1914 or 1918, simply does not square with Scripture.

Fifthly, in terms of *benefits*, we are told that in ascending to heaven, (1) He gave gifts to men (Ps 68:18, Eph 4:8). This refers to the giving of the gifts **of the** Holy Spirit "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:10-12); and (2) He "raise up our affections thither." In this regard, the apostle Paul exhorts:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-2).

Sixthly, in terms of *purpose*, one of the purposes which the Lord gave His disciples to comfort them just before He went to the cross was that He was going to prepare a place for us. He says:

"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. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (Jn 14:2-3).

Finally, in terms of *duration*, we know from the Scripture that Christ is ascended and seated at the right hand of the throne of God, and He will be there until the end of the world or "the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21) when He shall come as King and Judge over all. **W**

WLC 54. How is Christ exalted in His sitting at the right hand of God?

A. Christ is exalted in His sitting at the right hand of God, in that as God-man He is advanced to the highest favour with God the Father,¹ with all fullness of joy,² glory,³ and power over all things in heaven and earth;⁴ and doth gather and defend His Church, and subdue their enemies; furnisheth His ministers and people with gifts and graces,⁵ and maketh intercession for them.⁶

Proofs

¹ Phil 2:9; ² Acts 2:28; cf. Ps 16:11; ³ Jn 17:5; ⁴ Eph 1:22; 1 Pet 3:22; ⁵ Eph 4:10–12; Ps 110:1; ⁶ Rom 8:34

Comments

The Scripture speaks about the ascended Christ being seated at the right hand of God in many places (e.g. Mk 16:19; Acts 2:33, 5:31; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 10:12). This does not mean that the Lord Jesus is literally sitting on a throne at the right hand side of God. God is a spirit. He has no body and He is omnipresent. Therefore, there is no such place as a literal right hand side of God! Therefore, when the Scripture speaks of Christ being exalted to the right of God, we must understand it as a metaphorical expression describing the fact that “as God-man [Christ] is advanced to the highest favour with God the Father.”

Notice the careful language of our catechism. As the second person of the Trinity, Christ is equal in substance and equal in power and glory with the Father from all eternity. But as the God-Man,—whose human nature is finite and has a beginning,—He was exalted by the Father to the highest place in heaven next to himself (Phil 2:9). He was exalted to this position as a reward for his obedience, suffering and death according to the terms of the covenant of grace (Phil 2:8-11).

In this position as the God-Man, He enjoys the fullness of joy (Acts 2:28; cf. Ps 16:11), the glory that the Son of God enjoyed with His Father from all eternity (Jn 17:5) and exercises authority and power over all things in heaven and earth (Eph 1:22; Mt 28:18; 1 Pet 3:22).

Christ the God-Man is already in this position, and He will be in this position as the Sovereign, holding ‘the reins of universal dominion’ (Charles Hodge; see also Heb 1:2), until “he hath put all enemies under his feet” (1 Cor 15:25; cf. Ps 110:1). At that time, says the apostle Paul:

“...shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

This is not to say that Christ will cease to be King, for as the angel Gabriel declared: “He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Lk 1:33). Christ the God-Man will forever be the head of His redeemed people (Jacob), but when the last enemy, death, is destroyed (1 Cor 15:26), He shall hand over the reign of universal providence and dominion to the Father.

In the meantime, as the King of kings, He is gathering and defending His people, and subduing all their enemies. And as the Great Prophet of His people (Ps 110:1), He endows His ministers and people with gifts and graces (Eph 4:10-14). And as their Great High Priest, He is making continual intercession for them (Rom 8:34).

Thank God that He who has our nature and was tempted at all points like as we are is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Thank God that all power has been given unto Him. All praise to Christ our Prophet, Priest and King. With Him at the rein of universal dominion, we cannot but have confident assurance that all things will work together not only for the glory of God, but for the good of His church and of all those who love him. **W**

WLC 55. How doth Christ make intercession?

A. Christ maketh intercession, by His appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven,¹ in the merit of His obedience and sacrifice on earth,² declaring His will to have it applied to all believers;³ answering all accusations against them,⁴ and procuring for them quiet of conscience, notwithstanding daily failings,⁵ access with boldness to the throne of grace,⁶ and acceptance of their persons⁷ and services.⁸

Proofs

¹Heb 9:12, 24; ²Heb 1:3; ³Jn 3:16; 17:9, 20, 24; ⁴Rom 8:33-34; ⁵Rom 5:1-2; 1 Jn 2:1-2; ⁶Heb 4:16; ⁷Eph 1:6; ⁸1 Pet 2:5

Comments

We saw in our last study that Christ, our Great High Priest is seated (figuratively) at the right hand side of the throne of God, making continual intercession for us (Rom 8:34). In our present study, we see how the Lord does so.

Firstly, in terms of *natural* qualification, Christ our Lord is suited to be our representative before the Father because He shares our human nature fully and was in His earthly **sojourn** tempted at all points like as we are (Heb 4:15-16). And He will not cease to be our intercessor as He will abide forever in His human nature. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way:

“But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:24-25).

Secondly, in terms of *meritorious* qualification, Christ qualifies to intercede for us on account of His “obedience and sacrifice on earth” on our behalf. By His sacrifice in payment for our sin, He reconciled us to God and won the right to be our intercessor (Heb 1:3); and by His obedience, He purchased the reward of everlasting life for us on the basis of the Covenant of Works.

Thirdly, in terms of *petitions* on our behalf, the Lord is “declaring His will to have [the benefits purchased by His obedience and sacrifice] applied to all believers.” He says in His high priestly prayer (which is a reflection of His intercession at the right hand of the Majesty on High):

“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine... Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me...” (Jn 17:9, 24; cf. v. 20)

Fourthly, in terms of *defence*, Christ is our advocate “answering all accusations against [us].” These accusations come from Satan “the accuser of the brethren” (Rev 12:10). Satan is no doubt charging us constantly of being unworthy of God’s blessings and favour because of our sins. But Christ our Lord appealing to His vicarious atonement and obedience destroys all **Satan’s** arguments:

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:33-34).

Fifthly, in terms of *benefits*, Christ our Lord by His intercession procures at least 4 things for us, for:

(1) We have “quiet of conscience, notwithstanding daily failings.” Although we fail daily and are conscious of our failings, we can have peace with God through the assurance that Christ not only paid for all our sin, but also is interceding for us (see Rom 5:1-2; 1 Jn 2:1-2). As the apostle Paul puts it: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1).

(2) We have “access with boldness to the throne of grace.” Because our Mediator was tempted at all points like as we are, and yet without sin (Heb 4:15), we can be assured of a sympathetic hearing and presentation unto the Father of all our prayers, which are offered in His name. That is to say we not only have boldness in accessing the throne of grace because we know in our minds that the righteousness of Christ covers us; but we have boldness in our hearts because we know our Mediator understands us experimentally.

(3) Because of Christ’s intercession, we are actually accepted in Him, for the Father never fail to do the will of His Son (Eph 1:6).

(4) And finally, it is also on the account of Christ’s intercession, that we can have any assurance that our worship and good works may be acceptable to the Father. Were it not for Christ, even our righteousness are as filthy rags in the sight of God (Isa 64:6). None of our good works are really good in that sense, for they are all imperfect and marred with sin. All that we do can be acceptable to God who is infinitely holy only through Christ our Lord. The apostle Peter affirms that our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable because they are presented to the Father through Christ our Lord:

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). **W**

WLC 56. How is Christ to be exalted in His coming again to judge the world?

A. Christ is to be exalted in His coming again to judge the world, in that He, who was unjustly judged and condemned by wicked men,¹ shall come again at the last day in great power,² and in the full manifestation of His own glory, and of His Father's, with all His holy angels,³ with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God,⁴ to judge the world in righteousness.⁵

Proofs

¹Acts 3:14–15; ²Mt 24:30; ³Lk 9:26; Mt 25:31; ⁴1 Thes 4:16; ⁵Acts 17:31

Comments

Christ's exaltation **began** with His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God; but it will culminate in His coming again to judge the world.

This glorious reappearance of our Lord as Judge and King is set against a dark background of His being unfairly judged by the wicked men of the world. While the world gave Him no justice, but wickedly condemned Him to death; the Lord would execute perfect justice by which He would righteously condemn the wicked world and bring an end to it together with all its injustices and rebellions against God (see Acts 17:31).

Four other things, among many others, may be said of Christ's coming again.

Firstly, He will come at the Last Day. The Scripture distinguishes between the 'last day' and the 'last days'. The 'last days' refer to the period between the incarnation of the Lord and His second coming (see Heb 1:2; Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1; Acts 2:17; 2 Tim 3:1; 2 Pet 3:3). On the other hand, the 'last day' refer to the day on which Christ will return, at which there will also be a general resurrection and a **public** judgment with Christ presiding as the Judge (Jn 6:39-40, 44; 11:24; 12:48; Acts 17:31; cf. *WLC* 87). From that last day onwards, the world with its progress and decline as we know it today would cease.

Secondly, in contrast to the great humiliation and weakness through which the Lord first took on human flesh, He will come with 'great power' (see Mt 24:30), "and in the full manifestation of His own glory, and of His Father's" (Lk 9:26; Mt 25:31). We can only imagine what it means for the Lord to come with great power and glory, but it would certainly imply that unlike the case in His first coming, the Lord would not be limited in anyway. His power and greatness would not be hidden as before, and He would not be subject to ordinary providence common to man. All the inhabitants of the earth and heaven will see Him in His splendour, and will have no doubt concerning His greatness and power.

Thirdly, the Lord will appear "with all His holy angels" (see again Lk 9:26; Mt 25:31). The fact that Christ will come with the holy angels is itself also a manifestation of His great glory. Angels are spirit beings. But it is very probable that at that last day, they will appear visibly in human sight like when the myriad of angels appeared to the shepherds in Bethlehem at the times of the Lord's birth (Lk 2:13). The fact that the Lord would appear with His heavenly host would be a great confirmation of His status as the King of kings and Lord of lords, so that every knee will bow and every tongue confesses that He is Lord.

Fourthly, the Scripture teaches us that the Lord will come with "a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God" (1 Thes 4:16). What is the significance of this great noise at the coming of the Lord? Calvin explains:

As therefore a commander, with the sound of a trumpet, summons his army to battle, so Christ, by his far sounding proclamation, which will be heard throughout the whole world, will summon all the dead. Moses tells us, (Ex 19:16), what loud and terrible sounds were uttered on occasion of the promulgation of the law. Far different will be the commotion *then*, when not one people merely, but the whole world will be summoned to the tribunal of God. Nor will the living only be convoked, but even the dead will be called forth from their graves. Nay more, a commandment must be given to dry bones and dust that, resuming their former appearance and reunited to the spirit, they come forth straightway as living men into the presence of Christ (*comm. on 1 Cor 15:52*).

As the trumpet sounded at the proclamation of the Law at mount Sinai, so the trumpet would be sounded again as the world is summoned to the tribunal of God to be judged according to His Law. And who would be sitting at the throne and **judgment** seat, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the world,—i.e. all men who ever lived from the foundation of the world to the last day,—with perfect righteousness. **W**

WLC 57. What benefits hath Christ procured by His mediation?

A. Christ, by His mediation, hath procured redemption,¹
with all other benefits of the covenant of grace.²

Proofs

¹Heb 9:12; ²2 Cor 1:20

Comments

We have seen how Christ is our Mediator, or more specifically, our Prophet, Priest and King both in the estate of humiliation and exaltation. He stood between His Church and God as a representative of God for our sakes, and a representative of the Church before God.

But why? To what purpose did Christ serve as our Mediator? What did Christ accomplish on behalf of His Church by His mediation? Or, as our catechism, what benefits or what good did Christ procure or secure for us by His mediation?

This question will be dealt with in detail over the next thirty questions or so (until *WLC* 88 or *WLC* 90, depending on how you look at it), but here, the short answer is that Christ “procured redemption, with all other benefits of the covenant of grace.”

The astute student of the Catechism will at first find this answer to be somewhat tautologous. What is the difference between ‘redemption’ and ‘benefits of the covenant of grace’? Are they not the same?

Well, in the broad sense of the word, ‘redemption’ encompasses all the benefits of the covenant of grace, but in the narrower sense of the word, ‘redemption’ is part of the benefits of the covenant of grace.

Our catechism is using the word in the narrow sense, which in Scripture refers to the payment of a ransom price to recover something. More specifically, it refers to Christ rescuing elect sinners from sin and death by dying on the Cross on their behalf. That is, He paid for their sin to turn the wrath of God from them, by taking God’s wrath due to them upon Himself. Thus, the apostle Peter encourages us:

“...ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet 1:18-19).

Elsewhere in Scripture, however, the word ‘redemption’ is used particularly to refer to the resurrection of the body (Rom 8:23; Eph 1:14). This is so because that is the final instalment of the benefits of redemption. Our personal redemption in other words begins at our initial conversion, but is completed only when our bodies are raised at the Last Day (When you see this to be the case, you will realise that the expansion of this question stretches to *WLC* 90).

What are the other benefits of the covenant of grace, apart from our ransom from sin and death? Our Shorter Catechism gives us a good summary. It comprises “justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them” (*WSC* 32), including “assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end” (*WSC* 36). All these will be expounded in the following questions.

WLC 58. How do we come to be made partakers of the benefits which Christ hath procured?

A. We are made partakers of the benefits which Christ hath procured, by the application of them unto us,¹ which is the work especially of God the Holy Ghost.²

Proofs

¹Jn 1:11–12; ²Tit 3:5–6

Comments

Our salvation or enjoyment of the benefits of the Covenant of Grace is a work of the Triune God. God the Father decreed our salvation from before the foundation of the world. God the Son, in the fullness of time procured the benefits of the covenant for us through His perfect life of obedience and through His vicarious death on the cross as our covenant representative. But it remains for God the Spirit to apply the benefits purchased into the hearts of individual believers. In short, the Father *decreed* our redemption; the Lord Jesus Christ *procured* redemption for us; and the Holy Spirit *applies* redemption to us.

Were it not for the work of the Holy Spirit, we will never enjoy the benefits procured by Christ because we are by nature dead in sin and trespasses. True, God has ordained that the benefits must be received by faith alone, but we are, by nature, unable even to exercise the faith necessary to receive Christ and the benefits He has purchased, for as the Lord says:

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God....Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3,5)

Only when the Holy Spirit has worked a work of regeneration or effectual calling (see *WLC* 67), will we be able to see and enter the kingdom of God by faith or to enjoy the benefits purchased by Christ.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit does not only regenerate us, but He continues to sanctify us by working grace in us and by the means which are divinely appointed for our growth in grace. Thus the apostle Paul urges us:

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).

Notice how Paul is essentially saying that while we have the responsibility to work out our salvation by using the means, it is God, or particularly, the Holy Spirit who works in us and does good to our souls according to His good pleasure. This, then, is the Reformed doctrine *contra* Romish doctrine in regards to the means. Rome teaches that the sacraments are effectual in themselves (*ex opere operato*). The Reformed church, on the other hand, teaches that it is the Holy Spirit who applies grace in the heart of those who use the means by faith.

WLC 59. Who are made partakers of Redemption through Christ?

A. Redemption is certainly applied, and effectually communicated, to all those for whom Christ hath purchased it;¹ who are in time by the Holy Ghost enabled to believe in Christ according to the gospel.²

Proofs

¹Eph 1:13–14; Jn 6:37, 39; 10:15–16; ²Eph 2:8; 2 Cor 4:13

Comments

The doctrine of ‘Limited Atonement’ is not a very popular one in evangelical churches today. But it is a biblical doctrine. God has elected only a fixed number of people to be saved. These are known as the elect, and Christ Jesus suffered and died in order to purchase these and these alone (Jn 10:15). It is in this sense, the atonement is limited. It is limited not in its power and efficacy but in its extent. And neither is it limited in that there are only a few who are the elect. No, at the last day it will be evident that the elect comprises: “A great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (Rev 7:9). But it is true that the elect comprises a minority of all people in every generation.

The present question is, however, not so much on the extent of the atonement, but on the extent of the application of the atonement. And here we see that only those whom Christ purchased, i.e. the elect, will have the benefits of Redemption applied and communicated to them. Thus the Lord Jesus says:

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out....No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (Jn 6:37, 44)

This doctrine contrasts sharply with the Arminian teaching that Christ died to make salvation possible for all men without exception, and that the Holy Spirit tries all men who hear the Gospel to salvation, though the co-operation of the sinner is required if he is to be saved.

Our catechism leaves no room for human co-operation. Redemption is applied to us by the Holy Spirit to the elect (see *WLC* 58). And this application is certain and effectual. None whom Christ Jesus purchased will be lost (Jn 6:39). This is the doctrine taught in the fourth point in the five points of Calvinism, namely, ‘Irresistible Grace’. The grace work of the Holy Spirit in applying redemption cannot be resisted by the sinner, contrary to the teaching of Arminius or Wesley.

Yes, faith is the instrument by which the sinner will receive the benefits of redemption (see *WLC* 72), but faith is a gift of God, as the apostle Paul says:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” (Eph 2:8; cf. 2 Cor 4:13)

And this faith is a gift of God in that the Holy Spirit enables us to believe by raising us from spiritual death (Eph 2:1) and giving us a new heart (Ezk 11:19) that believes the Gospel and finds Christ altogether lovely and irresistible.

WLC 60. Can they who have never heard the gospel, and so know not Jesus Christ, nor believe in Him, be saved by their living according to the light of nature?

A. They who, having never heard the gospel,¹ know not Jesus Christ,² and believe not in Him, cannot be saved,³ be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature,⁴ or the laws of that religion which they profess;⁵ neither is there salvation in any other, but in Christ alone,⁶ who is the Saviour only of His body the Church.⁷

Proofs

¹Rom 10:14; ²Thes 1:8–9; Eph 2:12; Jn 1:10–12; ³Jn 8:24; Mk 16:16; ⁴1 Cor 1:20–24; ⁵Jn 4:22; Rom 9:31–32; Phil 3:4–9; ⁶Acts 4:12; ⁷Eph 5:23

Comments

Those of us who have any exposure to the Gospel will quickly realise that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved. But as soon as we received this doctrine we are confronted with a perplexing question: “What about those who have never heard the Gospel?” or “What would happen to the innocent pagans who die before having a chance to hear the Gospel?” (see **NTIAGQ** in *PCC Bulletin*, vol. 2, n. 37, dated 11 Mar 2001).

If we have understood the catechism up to this point, we would know the answer to both questions, and we would also know that the second question carries with it an erroneous assumption. But this is how the question will confront us whether someone else directs it to us or it arises out of our thoughts, for we would naturally think that it is not fair that someone who have not heard of the way of salvation should be condemned. For this reason, many professing Christians will either assume intuitively or would even try to defend the idea that those who have never heard the Gospel will be judged according to their lives and sincerity and can find salvation in that way. Even such widely respected ‘evangelists’ as Billy Graham are known to promote this view. Christianity in their view is a good and convenient way to be saved, but it is not the only way. But this is a horrible twisting of the truth, and indeed a damnable heresy (see 2 Pet 2:1).

No, no, let God be true, but every man a liar. Even if we do not believe in the doctrine of total depravity and election or are unable to work out the implication of the doctrine, we cannot mistake the clear teaching of the Scripture concerning those who have not heard,—unless we choose to deny the truth.

The Lord himself says: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6); “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (Jn 8:24); and “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (Jn 3:36). So the apostle Peter declares: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

There can be no doubt that only those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ can be saved. And so the apostle Paul asks rhetorically: “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom 10:14). No one,—no matter how wise, religious or conscientious according to the light or nature or the religious principles of man’s imagination,—can come to a saving knowledge of the Lord except through the Gospel preached:

“²⁰ Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹ For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. ²² For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: ²³ But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; ²⁴ But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:20–24).

Now, we must realise that those who are not saved will perish in eternal damnation.

But what about the question of fairness?

Well, *first* of all, none of us deserve to be saved. All who are the children of Adam by natural generation sinned in Adam and fell with him. As a race, we are all guilty in Adam in God’s sight. And not only so, but we “all have sinned [individually], and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). We therefore, deserve eternal death, for the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). There is no such thing as an ‘innocent pagan’.

And *secondly*, when God condemns those who have never heard the Gospel, He condemns them not for their unbelief in Christ, of whom they have not heard, but for their sins:

“For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law” (Rom 2:12).

But what about infants dying in infancy and adults who may have heard the Gospel, but whose mental **abilities** do not allow them to understand, not to mention believe in the Gospel?

Well, we believe our Confession of Faith, is correct when it teaches us:

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word (*WCF* 10.3).

The testimony of Scripture is clear. God is perfectly just in condemning those whom He wills not to save. And none who have not heard the Gospel may be saved; therefore “to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious, and to be detested” (*WCF* 10.4).

But what ought to be our response to this doctrine, but to pray that the God of the harvest will send more labourers into the harvest field, or to pray that God will send ourselves. **W**

WLC 61. Are all they saved who hear the gospel, and live in the church?

A. All that hear the gospel, and live in the visible church, are not saved; but they only who are true members of the church invisible.¹

Proofs

¹Jn 12:38–40; Rom 9:6; Mt 22:14; 7:21; Rom 11:7

Comments

In the previous Q&A we saw that all who never heard the gospel or known the Lord Jesus Christ could be saved. But what about those who have been sitting under a Gospel ministry? Will all be saved? This is the concern of the current question;—and the answer is that not all will be saved. Not everyone who is part of the visible church will be saved, though every member of the church invisible will be.

We shall be examining in greater details what are the visible and invisible church. But for now, think of the church invisible as comprising the elect of God; whereas the church visible as comprising all who have made profession of faith in Christ and their children. Membership in the church invisible is by election, and *ratified* by Spirit baptism; whereas membership in the church visible is by providence and profession, and *ratified* by water baptism. The church invisible has no visible manifestation whereas the church visible is manifested in denominations and local assemblies of Christians around the world.

While it may appear ideal that the visible church should comprise only members of the invisible church, we know from Scripture and experience that this is not possible.

The Lord Jesus himself often spoke of the church in this present world as having wheat and tare, good and bad fishes, sheep and goats, good soil and bad soil, etc. And He declares:

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mt 7:21).

Likewise the apostle Paul exclaims: “They are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom 9:6).

The fact is that as Judas was among the apostles and Simon Magus was among those who were baptised in the Samaritan Pentecost, so there will always be those who do not have genuine faith in Christ in the visible church in this world.

These false professors have a form of godliness (2 Tim 3:5), and may appear outwardly to be Christians in their conduct and profession; but they do not possess the spiritual power that comes with a regenerate heart and a real union with Christ.

These are of all men most miserable, for they are either pretending to be disciples of Christ when they are not (Jude 12-13), or they are misled into thinking that they are saved when they are not (see Mt 7:21). But either way, if they come under a faithful Gospel ministry and remain unconverted, they would, in some ways, be worse off than those who have never heard the Gospel (cf. 2 Pet 2:21). Jonathan Edwards is surely right when he says: “Sinners in Zion will have by far the lowest place in hell” (*Works* 2.201b).

Now, if this is the case, what ought we to do?

First of all, every member of the visible church ought really to examine himself to see if he is in the faith (2 Cor 13:5); and seek earnestly and honestly to attain unto full assurance that he has a genuine relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ....

We should realise that although it is impossible for us to see the hearts of one another to determine with absolute certainty as to whether we are truly saved, it is possible for us individually to attain unto an infallible assurance of grace in our own hearts (*WCF* 18.2).

Secondly, it is important that there be constant reminder from the pulpit that membership in the visible church does not save. This is especially so as it is extremely easy for members of the visible church to grow complacent and presumptuous in regard to their spiritual states, seeing that they are received into baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are addressed as brethren by the church and given opportunities to ‘serve the Lord.’

But *thirdly*, in view of this second point, it is important for a local congregation to admit into membership only those who have a *credible profession of faith* in so far as adults are concerned. A credible profession of faith would involve a verbal demonstration of knowledge and faith in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity (commensurate with the mental capacity of the applicant), as well as a demeanour and life (as far as known) that does not contradict the profession of faith. Thus, for example, the church should not admit into membership a man who is living with a woman who is not his wife, no matter how brilliant and loving he may appear to be.

But, it may be asked: If only members of the invisible church will be saved, why do we not restrict membership in the church only to those who can prove themselves to be born again? To this it must be answered that first of all, that the Scriptures does not make the test of regeneration a condition for baptism. In the book of Acts, those who professed faith and repentance were baptised. In the second place, it is impossible to know another person’s heart absolutely. Only God knows our hearts absolutely. For this reason, Johannes G. Vos is surely right when he says:

It is no duty of ministers and elders to try to examine people’s hearts to see if they really are born again. Membership in the visible church is based on a *credible profession of faith and obedience*, not on *demonstration of regeneration*. The acceptance of an applicant for membership is based on *presumption*, not on *proof*. He does not have to *prove* that he is converted. It is *presumed* that he knows what he is talking about and is telling the truth when he makes a profession of faith, unless there is clear evidence which makes such a presumption impossible (comm. on *WLC* 61; emphasis his). **W**

WLC 62. What is the visible church?

A. The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion,¹ and of their children.²

Proofs

¹ 1 Cor 1:2; 12:13; Rom 15:9–12; Rev 7:9; Ps 2:8; 22:27–31; 45:17; Mt 28:19–20; Isa 59:21;

² 1 Cor 7:14; Acts 2:39; Rom 11:16; Gen 17:7

Comments

The English word ‘church’ probably evolved from the Scottish word ‘kirk’, which in turn is derived from the Greek *kuriakov* (*kuriakos*), meaning ‘of the Lord.’ This word may originally refer to buildings that were dedicated to the Lord’s use. However, the word ‘church’ as used in our English Bible translates the Greek *ekklēsia* (*ekklēsia*) which in 115 times out of 118 refers to an assembly of people who have been called out of the world to be the Lord’s people.

Studying the Scriptures, we see that the church must be understood in two senses, namely visible and invisible. The church invisible comprises of those who are elect in Christ. It is invisible because we cannot tell who are the elect by observation. On the other hand, the visible church comprises professing believers and their children.

Now, we often think of individual congregations as visible churches. However, we should realise that there is really only one visible church (sometimes known as the Visible Church Universal) comprising “all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children.” This Church is represented as an Olive Tree in Romans 11 by the apostle Paul. Using this analogy, local congregations or denominations may be spoken of as branches of the visible church.

No one denomination or congregation may claim to be *the* Visible Church. However, we should note that not every congregation or denomination that calls itself Christian, is really a true branch of the Visible Church. The apostle Paul speaks of the unbelieving Jews as having been broken off from the olive tree (Rom 11:17) and warns that those who have been grafted into the tree but persist not in the goodness of God will also be cut off (v. 22). We may infer therefore that entire congregations and denominations may also be broken off, or have their candlestick removed (Rev 2:5).

A true branch of the Visible Church according to the general Reformed consensus will bear three marks: (1) Faithful preaching of the Word of God; (2) Faithful administration of the Sacrament; and (3) Faithful exercise of church discipline. Thus a congregation or denomination that teaches heresies or ceases to exercise church discipline will disqualify itself as being a true branch of the church of Christ.

But how does a person become a member of the Visible Church? Our catechism teaches us that he becomes a member by professing faith in Christ and upholding the doctrines of the Christian faith. However, such as profess faith genuinely will seek baptism, which is the badge or ratification of membership in the visible church (see *WLC* 165).

Now, our catechism also teaches us that children of such as are members of the Visible Church are automatically members of the Visible Church (see 1 Cor 7:14; Acts 2:39; Rom 11:16). Therefore children of believers also ought to be baptised.

We should carefully note that one who is baptised is officially a member of the Visible Church, but is not necessarily a member of the Church Invisible. Nevertheless, the church should regard and address every baptised person as a Christian or a member of the covenant community.

But what if a baptised person (whether he was baptised as an adult or as a child) eventually renounces the faith or falls into scandalous sin from which he would not repent? Well, such a person should be cut off, or excommunicated by the church (Rom 11:22; cf. 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Jn 2:19), and regarded as a “heathen man and a publican” (Mt 18:17).

And what about a member of the church who was baptised as an infant and grows up in the church believing in the Lord? Does he have to join the church afresh? No, he is already a member of the church, though he should now confess his faith publicly and seek to be admitted to the Lord’s Table.

WLC 63. What are the special privileges of the visible church?

- A.** The visible church hath the privilege of being under God's special care and government;¹ of being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies;² and of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation,³ and offers of grace by Christ to all the members of it in the ministry of the gospel, testifying, that whosoever believes in Him shall be saved,⁴ and excluding none that will come unto Him.⁵

Proofs

¹Isa 4:5–6; 1 Tim 4:10; ²Ps 115; Isa 31:4–5; Zech 12:2–4, 8–9; ³Acts 2:39, 42; ⁴Ps 147:19–20; Rom 9:4; Eph 4:11–12; Mk 16:15–16; ⁵Jn 6:37

Comments

We saw in our last study that “The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion and of their children” (WLC 62). We also saw that water-baptism is the ratification or badge of membership in the Church Visible just as spirit baptism or regeneration is the ratification of membership in the Church Invisible. Technically, this means that so long as a person verbally professes faith, he *may* be regarded as a believer. However, verbal profession of faith is an extremely subjective exercise: for how do we gauge if a person's profession is sufficiently credible in terms of, say, content and earnestness? For this reason, adults who are baptised by the church must not only profess faith, but also exhibit obedience to Christ (see WLC 166). But obedience to Christ will include desiring to be baptised, and to be a member of a local branch of the Visible Church. Thus, for all intents and purposes, we may think of the visible church as being comprised mainly of the baptised members of the true branches of the Visible Church. This means that in general any who profess faith but have no intention of being members of a true church of Christ cannot be regarded as part of the visible church,—though catechumens, committed adherents (i.e. faithful visitors) and unbaptised children in a true church may be charitably regarded as such though they may not enjoy all the privileges available to the visible church.

This background is essential in understanding what our present Answer refers to as being privileges of the visible church—for these privileges are entirely available only to baptised members of a true church or denomination.

We may think of the privileges of the visible church under four heads.

Firstly, the visible church enjoys the special providence of God. Our Answer speaks of “God's special care and government,” which indicates that God who is bringing all things to pass by His sovereign power, is particularly seeing to the welfare and safety of his Church by ‘orchestrating’ all circumstances and acts of men to work together for her benefit.

Secondly, and as a corollary to the first privilege, the Church is “being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies.” This means that at all times in the history of the world until the Last Day, there will be a visible church in this world, which is represented by faithful congregations of Christ. Our Lord promised this when He says: “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). And the evidence of this being fulfilled may be seen in the way the Lord brought the Church through various periods of persecution, external and internal attacks upon the church. The persecutions existed in Old Testament days when Ahab and Jezebel sought to extinguish true religion from the land; but God preserved a faithful remnant of seven thousand who would not bow their knees to Baal. This persecution continued during the ministry of the Lord and the days of the apostles. The Church was persecuted by unbelieving Jews until AD. 70, and also by the Roman until AD. 313. Many were displaced in those days, but as Luke puts it: “they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4), and so establishing faithful believers everywhere. And yes, many were martyred in the days following, but as Tertullian puts it, the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church. The church was not extinguished but strengthened through persecution!

Indeed, the Lord continued to preserve His church through the Middle Ages when Romish and Orthodox formalism and sacerdotalism nearly choked the church, for there was always a remnant of true believers (such as the Waldenses in the 13th century). And not only so, but God raised up the Reformers in the 16th century to extricate the true church out of dead Rome that she might again flourish in the world.

And is not the Lord still preserving the church today? Has He not prevented the proliferation of Communism, which would be a direct threat to the existence of His church? Has He not made the world realise the danger of allowing fundamental Islamic states (which would threaten the existence of true branches of the church of Christ) to flourish anywhere? And has He not also raised up faithful publishers and writers to excite the faithful members of the church to return to the old paths in the face of false and new-fangled doctrine that is being promoted everywhere today?

Thirdly, the members of the visible church enjoy the fellowship or communion of fellow saints. Left to himself or herself a Christian can easily fall into temptation and sin. But “Two are better than one” (Ecc 4:9) and “a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecc 4:12), therefore God appoints that Christians should be gathered into congregations (constituting the visible church) in order that they may support and encourage one another. To this end the word of God teaches us that every member of the Church has obligations towards other members in the Church. We have the obligation to love one another (1 Jn 3:11, 23); to speak the truth to one another in love (Eph 4:15); to edify one another (1 Thes 5:11); to receive one another (Rom 15:7); to admonish one another (Rom 15:14; Col 3:13); to be patient towards one another (1 Thes 5:14); to lay down our lives for one another (1 Jn 3:16); to help those having material needs (1 Jn 3:17); to provoke one another unto love and to good works (Heb 10:24); to exhort one another daily (Heb 3:13); to encourage one another pertaining to attendance at worship (Heb 10:25); to confess our faults one to another, and pray one for another (Jas 5:16); to prefer one another in honour (Rom 12:10); to forbear judging one another (Rom 14:13); to serve one another (Gal 5:13); to bear one another's burden (Gal 6:2); to forbear one another (Eph 4:2; Col 3:6); to be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another (Eph 4:32). Now, as we have such duties to one another, we also enjoy the blessings of fellowship resulting from the exercise of these duties by one another.

Fourthly, the members of the visible church have the privilege of the ordinary means of salvation, which include the administration of the sacraments, pastoral oversight and church discipline, but most of all the preaching of the Gospel. Now, since the preaching of the Gospel is the primary means appointed by God for our salvation (1 Cor 1:21; Rom 10:17), and preaching is an ordinance of the God for the visible church, the opportunity to hear the preaching of the Gospel regularly is one of the most important benefits of the visible church. It is a special privilege that cannot be experienced to the same degree by those who are outside the visible church. **W**

WLC 64. What is the invisible church?

A. The invisible church is the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the head.¹

Proofs

¹Eph 1:10, 22–23; Jn 10:16; 11:52

Comments

We have seen that the Scripture speaks of not only a visible church, but of an invisible church. We saw that the visible church comprises “all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children” (WLC 62). Here we see that the invisible church comprises of the whole number of the elect of Christ (see Eph 1:10, 22–23),—whether they are already in heaven (Heb 12:23), or they are believers here on earth (Heb 12:22), or they are yet to believe (cf. Jn 10:16; 11:52; Acts 18:9–10), or they are yet to be born (cf. Jn 17:20).

Unlike the visible church, the number of members in the invisible church is fixed from all eternity and remains fixed throughout the history of redemption unto all eternity.

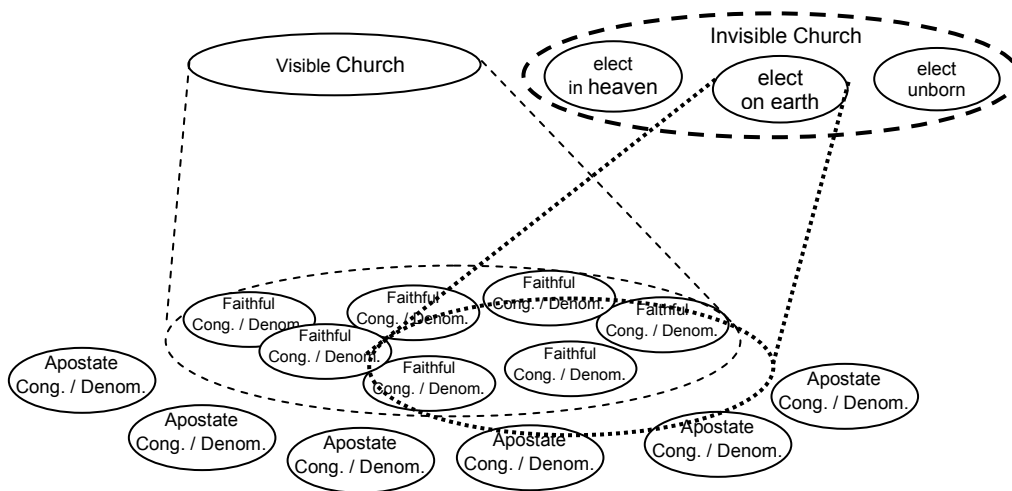
This whole number, when it is finally gathered together under Christ in heaven at the Last Day shall be “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (Rev 7:9–10).

Not only would this number come from all nations and races, it will come from times throughout redemptive history. It includes the saints of Old Testament days such as Abel, Seth, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Samson, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Job, Ezra, etc, etc. And I am confident; it includes also many of our children yet unborn. What a glorious day it will be when the whole church, which is invisible, appears visibly before the throne of Christ as His sheep (Mt 25:31–34)!

But today, the church invisible is invisible because there is no way for anyone to be absolutely sure who **the members in** her **are**. Yes, since membership in the church invisible is ratified by regeneration or spirit-baptism (just as membership in the visible church is ratified by water-baptism), there are some marks, which indicate the probability that a person belongs to the church invisible. But no one can judge absolutely on these marks as God alone can see our hearts. Therefore, we must not regard a person as being a Christian or not a Christian by whether we think he or she is a member of the church invisible. Rather, we must regard all who bear the sign and seal of the covenant as Christians. A person’s baptism is God’s warrant for us to relate to him or her as a brother or sister in the covenant.

Now, of course, it is possible that a baptised member in the visible church may not be a member in the invisible church. Simon Magus was an example. And it is also possible, under some extraordinary circumstances, to be a member of the invisible church, but never a ratified (baptism) member of the visible church. The thief on the cross may be cited as an example though it is possible he might have been a circumcised member of the church under the Old Covenant. In any case, elect infants dying in infancy before they are baptised, would surely fall under this situation.

But despite this ‘decoupling’ of the visible church from the invisible church, there is a very important relationship between them, as ordinarily, members of the invisible church must pass through membership in the visible church. The relationship between visible church and the invisible church may be graphically represented thus:



WLC 65. What special benefits do the members of the invisible church enjoy by Christ?

A. The members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with Him in grace and glory.¹

Proofs

¹Jn 17:21; Eph 2:5–6; Jn 17:24

Comments

As the visible church has ‘special privileges’ not enjoyed by people in the world (*WLC* 63), so the invisible church has ‘special benefits’ that not everyone in the visible church enjoys.

These benefits will be described and developed in great details from *WLC* 66 to 90, and therefore we shall not say much here, except to say that they are all on account of our relationship with Christ which may be described as a union and communion with Him.

And moreover, we should notice that these benefits would not only be enjoyed when we are in glory in heaven. They are benefits that all true believers have already begun actually to enjoy in the state of grace. The Christian life is not imaginary or merely a description of future hope. It involves real benefits and experiences in which the Christian can honestly identify with the apostle Paul’s exuberance when he says:

“⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, ⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) ⁶ And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: ⁷ That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4-7). **W**

WLC 66. What is that union which the elect have with Christ?

A. The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace,¹ whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband;² which is done in their effectual calling.³

Proofs

¹Eph 1:22; 2:6–8; ²1 Cor 6:17; Jn 10:28; Eph 5:23, 30; ³1 Pet 5:10; 1 Cor 1:9

Comments

The fact that there is a body known as the Church Invisible which comprises the elect of Christ, should lead us to conclude that in God's mind, the church is beloved and united with Christ from all eternity. This is the basis of the apostle Paul's declaration that the election and predestination of the church is founded in Christ, or in God's love for Christ according to a covenant bond (Eph 1:3-11).

But since we did not actually exist before the foundation of the world, this union may be regarded as potential rather than actual. Therefore, there is necessity, in the fullness of time, for this union to be realised (or ratified). This is what the apostle Paul is referring to when he says,—after detailing our elective union with Christ:

“¹³ In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:13-14).

This union with Christ in time is also the subject of our current Q & A.

It is a work of God's grace (i.e. undeserved by us), which is done at our effectual calling. We will study what is effectual calling in our next question, but for now realise that effectual calling involves a work of the Holy Spirit in our souls.

Through this work of the Spirit, we are “spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband.”

We are said to be “spiritually and mystically” united to Christ in that we are not materially or physically united to Him. We are the body of Christ, but only in the spiritual sense, not in the sense that Christ is actually constituted of us or that our natures are intermingled with His nature. No, we are spiritually and mystically united to him in that His Spirit dwells in us (in a metaphorical sense which involves His claiming us to be His and working in us, not in the literal sense as if we can carry about the Holy Spirit, as some wrongly imagine). This is what Paul is saying in Roman 8:9-10—

“⁹ But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. ¹⁰ And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom 8:9-10).

This union, though spiritual therefore invisible, and mystical or mysterious, is not imaginary or theoretical. It is real or actual. It is a reality in the spiritual realm, which though unseen do affect our lives in many ways and must be wholeheartedly confessed by the Church. And it is also an inseparable or permanent union, for it is a union that is brought about sovereignly by Christ without any contribution on our part.

This union describes our special relationship with Christ and is painted in Scripture with several metaphors, two of which are referred to in our catechism.

Firstly, we are the body of which Christ is the head (Col 1:18; Eph 5:30). This speaks of His authority over us and also how closely we are united to Him. Thus, for example, what is done to us as a Church is said to be done to Christ (e.g. Rom 8:17; Col 1:24); and what God did for Christ becomes an assurance to us that He would do the same to us. For just as Christ rose from the dead, we are spiritually resurrected and will one day be bodily resurrected from the dead.

Secondly, Christ is spoken of as our husband. This speaks of the fact that our union with Christ is characterised by a joyous bond of love. Christ loves, protects, and provides for the Church as His beloved wife, and the church ought to lovingly submit to Him and serve Him as her beloved husband (Eph 5:23-25). **W**

WLC 67. What is effectual calling?

A. Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace,¹ whereby (out of His free and special love to His elect, and from nothing in them moving Him thereunto²) He doth, in His accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by His Word and Spirit;³ savingly enlightening their minds,⁴ renewing and powerfully determining their wills,⁵ so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer His call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.⁶

Proofs

¹Jn 5:25; Eph 1:18–20; 2 Tim 1:8–9; ²Tit 3:4–5; Eph 2:4–5, 7–9; Rom 9:11; ³2 Cor 5:20; cf. 2 Cor 6:1–2; Jn 6:44; 2 Thes 2:13–14; ⁴Acts 26:18; 1 Cor 2:10, 12; ⁵Ezk 11:19; 36:26–27; Jn 6:45; ⁶Eph 2:5; Phil 2:13; Deut 30:6.

Comments

We know by experience that not everyone who hears the preaching of the Gospel finds salvation in Christ no matter how persuasive the sermon may be.

This fact of experience is confirmed in the Scriptures, which teaches us that the call of the Gospel is of two sorts, namely,—an external call and an internal or effectual call.

The external call is referred to by the Lord in the words: “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Mt 22:14). This call, which is issued to all without distinction, is issued in the preaching of the Gospel and is effectively the command to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Not all who hear the Gospel will obey this summon.

The internal or effectual call, on the other hand, is taught in passages such as Romans 8:30, where we all taught that all who are called effectually, will be justified. This effectual call is given only to the elect (see 2 Tim 1:9; cf. 2 Th 2:13–14); and it is given according to ‘[God’s] free and special love to His elect, and from nothing in them moving Him thereunto’ (cf. Tit 3:4–5; Eph 2:4–5, 7–9; Rom 9:11). That is to say, it is given out of God’s good pleasure, and not because He foresaw that they would repent and believe, as the Arminians claim.

Like the external call, it is usually issued when the Word is preached, but unlike the external call, it is not so much a command to sinners, as it is a direct “work of God’s almighty power and grace” in the hearts of elect sinners. For this reason, it is ‘irresistible’ (cf. ‘Irresistible Grace’ of TULIP).

And for the same reason, the effectual call is sometimes known as ‘regeneration’ or the ‘new-birth’, although our Confession and Catechism, has, I believe, more correctly, included regeneration as a part of the effectual call rather than being equivalent to it (since the effectual call is not only about a change of nature as is regeneration, but about a response to the Word of God).

By what means is the effectual call effected? Our catechism teaches us that it is effected ‘by [God’s] Word and Spirit.’ The Holy Spirit is always the efficient cause or power in the effectual call, for it is He who regenerates (cf. Jn 3:3, 5, 8). Except in extraordinary circumstances (such as in the case of elect infants dying in infancy), the Holy Spirit always employs the external Word as the instrument or means of calling (cf. 1 Thes 1:5). The Word and the Spirit always operate together so that the power of the preaching is not derived from the piety or eloquence of the preacher. Thus the apostle Paul testifies to the Corinthians: “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4).

How is the effectual call effected in the heart of the elect? The Holy Spirit effects it by ‘savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills.’ The Scripture speaks of this work of the Spirit using a number of metaphors. For example the prophet Ezekiel speaks about God replacing our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh (Ezek 11:19; 36:26); and the apostle Paul speaks of our being raised from spiritual death (Eph 2:1, 5); and the Lord Himself speaks about spiritual eyes and ears (e.g. Mt 13:16). These metaphors emphasise the fact that in our regeneration and effectual calling, God illumines our understanding and changes our inclinations so that we are not only made sensible to the danger that attends our soul, but see the loveliness of Christ, and the grace of God in Him. It is in this way that God is said to renew and powerfully determine our wills. That is, since our will is determined by our inclinations, God’s working in our hearts to make Christ irresistible to us, essentially renews and determines our wills so that we are made to choose Christ.

What then is the effect of the effectual call, but that elect sinners who are hitherto dead in sin and trespasses, are ‘made willing and able freely to answer His call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.’ No violence is done to the will. Robert Shaw explains this most beautifully:

While the Spirit effectually draws sinners to Christ, He deals with them in a way agreeable to their rational nature, “so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.” The liberty of the will is not invaded, for that would destroy its very nature; but its obstinacy is overcome, its perverseness taken away, and the whole soul powerfully, yet sweetly, attracted to the Saviour. The compliance of the soul is voluntary, while the energy of the Spirit is efficient and almighty: “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.”—Ps 110:3.

When does the effectual calling occur? It occurs in “God’s accepted time.” In the Parable of the Vineyard (Mt 20:1–16), some are called early—like John the Baptist, some at the third hour, some at the sixth, some at the ninth and the rest at the eleventh hour—like the penitent thief on the cross.

We may also add that there is also a difference in the manner in which the Lord calls. Some are sweetly and gently drawn to the Saviour over a period of time, so that they can scarcely say with confidence when the change in heart began (e.g. many children who were catechised from young). Others experienced dramatic conversion under powerful preaching (e.g. the Philippian Jailer). Still others underwent a time of terror and burden of guilt under the Law before they find relief in the Gospel (e.g. the apostle Paul). **W**

WLC 68. Are the elect only effectually called?

A. All the elect, and they only, are effectually called;¹ although others may be, and often are, outwardly called by the ministry of the Word,² and have some common operations of the Spirit;³ who, for their wilful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ.⁴

Proofs

¹Acts 13:48; ²Mt 22:14; ³Mt 7:22; 13:20–21; Heb 6:4–6; ⁴Jn 12:38–40; Acts 28:25–27; Jn 6:64–65; Ps 81:11–12

Comments

We have already seen that the call of the Gospel is of two sorts, which may be roughly designated external call and internal call. The internal call is an ‘effectual call’; whereas the external call is a command to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is not always obeyed. Indeed, the external call is obeyed only when there is also an internal call,—in which the heart is sovereignly renovated by the Holy Spirit.

We have also seen that the effectual call is only issued to the elect (Acts 13:48). But what about the non-elect or reprobates? We know as a fact that many of them would hear the preaching of the Gospel and experience the outward call: “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Mt 22:14). Can these come to salvation, although they may not experience the effectual call? In other words, is the effectual call absolutely necessary, or are there some exceptions by which, say, some philanthropists or ‘moral persons’ may find salvation by their ‘good’ works?

Our catechism affirms the negative. No one who is not elect will ever be saved because he will never come to Christ which is the only way of salvation.

Nevertheless, the Scripture teaches us that a reprobate may not only hear the outward call, but may actually experience some “common operations of the Spirit.”

The writer of Hebrews, for example, speaks of “those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost” (Heb 6:4), who nevertheless falls away. These could not be the elect, for it cannot be impossible to renew the elect unto repentance (v. 5).

But what are these “common operations of the Spirit”? Our catechism does not clarify, but from the verses in the Scripture that speaks of those who appeared to be converted and yet were not, we see that common operations of the Holy Spirit often result in: (1) Conviction of sin (Acts 24:25; 2 Cor 7:10); (2) Intellectual illumination to biblical truths (Acts 26:28; Heb 6:4a); (3) Outward reformation of life (Acts 8:9-13, 21); (4) Temporary religious excitement (Mt 13:20); (5) Zealous labours in the church (1 Cor 13:3).

The result of the common operations of the Holy Spirit is that there are professing believers who appear to be regenerated who are not. Sometimes, these fall away on account of persecution or the cares of the world, even though they appear to be very zealous initially. Our Lord speaks of these in His Parable of the Sower and the Soil:

“But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Mt 13:20-21).

But more poignant than that, there are those who live lawless lives but are up to the very end, deluded in regard to their salvation. Our Lord alludes to these when He says:

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” (Mt 7:22)

Because of this possibility, it behoves all believers to honestly examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5), to repent of our sins and to pray for the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:14, Jn 4:10), and for assurance of salvation.

But if a man is reprobate and therefore does not enjoy the effectual call, does it mean that he is not responsible for his continued unbelief? No, for their continuing in the state of nature is because of “their wilful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them.” In other words, grace is presented in preaching of the Word, but those who remain unconverted are unconverted because they knowing the truth, refuse to believe the truth. And since our salvation is entirely by God’s grace, God is not obligated to change the heart of anyone. Thus it is said that those who enjoy only the common operations of the Holy Spirit are “being justly left in their unbelief” and will never truly come to Jesus Christ. **W**

WLC 69. What is the communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ?

A. The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of His mediation, in their justification,¹ adoption,² sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with Him.³

Proofs

¹Rom 8:30; ²Eph 1:5; ³1Cor 1:30

Comments

We saw, earlier that “the members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with him in grace and glory” (*WLC* 65); then in the last question what is meant by *union* with Christ. Union with Christ has to do with our being one with Christ. We are brought into spiritual and mystical union with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit in our effectual calling.

This union with Christ paves the way for the members of the invisible church to enjoy communion or fellowship with Christ, which communion also manifests our union with Christ.

We may roughly illustrate this thought by thinking of a marriage between a husband and his wife. The marriage is the union, but the communion,—which also confirms that they are truly married,—is their undying faithfulness and love to each other, the issue of children, their growing to be more and more like each other, the home they built together, etc. The illustration of course breaks down when we consider the fact that in our communion with Christ, He ultimately receives nothing from us that is of benefit to Him, whereas in Christ, we “blessed... with all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3). This is why our answer speaks of our ‘partaking’ of what Christ procured through His mediation for us, rather than our ‘sharing’ with Him our life. Our communion with Christ is in a sense one-sided.

Our communion with Christ will be explained in details from *WLC* 70-81, but here is an introductory summary.

We shall leave the detailed discussions for later, but it is instructive for us to consider the phrase “virtue of His mediation” in this summary.

Firstly, consider the word ‘mediation.’ This word indicates to us we really deserve God’s wrath, and that apart from Christ we are alienated from Him. As our Mediator, Christ reconciled to God and secured for us the spiritual blessings that constitute our communion with Him.

But *secondly*, consider the word ‘virtue’. What does ‘virtue’ mean? Our Shorter Catechism in the parallel question asks: “What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?” (*WSC* 32). The word ‘virtue’ then would include the idea of benefits, or good things that Christ has procured for us. But ‘virtue’ says a bit more than ‘benefit’, for it indicates that the mediation of Christ is efficacious and powerful, and therefore will accomplish what it was intended to accomplish. This mediatorial work is completed historically, but the application of the benefits purchased through it is still not completed. The outpouring of the benefits of Christ’s mediation is continuing today and will continue forever. **W**

WLC 70. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners,¹ in which He pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in His sight;² not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them,³ but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them,⁴ and received by faith alone.⁵

Proofs

¹Rom 3:22, 24–25; 4:5; ²2 Cor 5:19, 21; Rom 3:22, 24–25, 27–28; ³Tit 3:5, 7; Eph 1:7;

⁴Rom 5:17–19; 4:6–8; ⁵Acts 10:43; Gal 2:16; Phil 3:9

Comments

The doctrine of justification holds the most important place in Christian life and faith. Martin Luther declared it the *articulus standis vel cadentis ecclesiae*—the article on which the Church stands or fall. It was the key issue that led to the Reformation. It is the touchstone that distinguishes true Christianity from false Christianity.

Several things may be noted from the brief summary of the doctrine given in our answer.

Firstly, the *author* of justification is God Himself, not the Church, or anyone else, great or small. And the justified contributes nothing whatsoever to it. It is not based upon “any thing... done by them”.

Secondly, as to the *price*, justification is entirely gratuitous, “of God's free grace unto sinners”. We do not deserve it at all. In fact, we deserve His condemnation. Thus the apostle Paul declares that we are: “justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). This means that we are justified not by our own works or righteousness, “otherwise grace is no more grace” (Rom 11:6).

Thirdly, in regard to the *nature* of justification: It is an *act* of God rather than a *work* of God (as in sanctification; see WLC 75). It is a judicial declaration on God's part as the Justifier, and is not a change of nature on the part of the justified. Thus our Catechism declares that justification is “not for any thing wrought in them”. A Christian is *simul justus et peccator*—simultaneously just and sinner (Luther). Thus, Paul declares that God “justifieth the ungodly” (Rom 4:5).

Fourthly, as regards to its *substance*, in Justification, God “pardoneth all [the] sins [of the sinners], [and] accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in His sight”. Justification is the opposite of condemnation (Rom 5:16; cf. Rom 8:33, 34). Justification is a *declaratory* act of God by which God makes it known that we are just in His sight and would not be dealt with after our sins.

Fifthly, the *ground* of justification is “the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ.” Christ, as the second Adam, kept the covenant of works on our behalf by obeying the moral law of God perfectly. Then He died to pay our debt due to our own sin and to our guilt as children of Adam. These merits procured by Christ “imputed to [us]” in our justification. We are pardoned of our sins because of Christ's “full satisfaction” in His propitiatory sacrifice. We are accepted and accounted as righteous in God's sight on account of Christ's “perfect obedience” as our covenant head.

The *means* or instrumental cause of justification is faith. The merits purchased by Christ are “received by faith alone” by those who are justified. Faith is the *alone* instrument of a sinner's justification.

When the Scripture speaks of the elect being “justified by faith” (Rom 3:28; 5:1) or “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17; Hab 2:4), it does not mean that faith is the *meritorious* cause of justification. The meritorious cause or the ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ. Believers are justified by faith and through faith but never on the account of faith. This must be carefully understood as it is one of the most common errors even among Christians who claim to be Calvinistic today. Our Catechism is careful to add the qualifier *alone*. Faith is the *alone* instrument of justification. This refutes the Romish doctrine that we are justified by faith and works together. When James says that “by works a man is justified and not by faith only” he is not speaking of “justified” in the technical sense of the word, but in the sense of “proved to be true” (Lk 7:35). James is saying that good works prove that a Christian is for real. **W**

WLC 71. How is justification an act of God's free grace?

A. Although Christ, by His obedience and death, did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in the behalf of them that are justified;¹ yet in as much as God accepteth the satisfaction from a surety, which He might have demanded of them, and did provide this surety, His own only Son,² imputing His righteousness to them,³ and requiring nothing of them for their justification but faith,⁴ which also is His gift,⁵ their justification is to them of free grace.⁶

Proofs

¹Rom 5:8–10, 19; ²1 Tim 2:5–6; Heb 10:10; Mt 20:28; Dan 9:24, 26; Isa 53:4–6, 10–12; Heb 7:22; Rom 8:32; 1 Pet 1:18–19; ³2 Cor 5:21; ⁴Rom 3:24–25; ⁵Eph 2:8; ⁶Eph 1:7

Comments

The renowned Reformed theologian, Dr R.C. Sproul, once shocked his congregation by telling them that “our justification is entirely by works...” Before the gasps died down, however, he explained: “...by the works of Christ alone!”

Dr Sproul is right. We are justified solely on account of what Christ has done. The benefits of our justification were entirely purchased by Christ—through His life of perfect obedience and His substitutionary death on the Cross.

But if our justification is purchased with a price, how can it be said to be “of God's free grace”? This is the first problem that this question of our catechism seeks to explain.

The second problem is that if faith,—which is believing,—is required for our justification, then again, how can it be said to be an act of God's free grace?

The answer to the first problem is that though our justification costs a great price (1Cor 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet 1:18-19) to Christ our Surety (or Substitutionary-Guarantor), it costs us nothing. In fact, our Surety is provided by God Himself; and He did willingly out of His own good pleasure die to pay for the debt we owe God. Now, His payment is more than sufficient for us so that we can add nothing to it. And what's more, God sovereignly (i.e. without our contribution) imputes or credits to us the righteousness of Christ which was obtained by a sinlessly perfect life,—in order that we may have eternal life. Surely, then it is proper to speak of justification as an act of God's free grace.

The answer to the second problem is like unto the first, namely that faith is a gift of God (Eph 2:8). Faith is indeed believing on our part. But it is not something that we generate from our own hearts. God must change our hearts to enable us to believe. This change of heart happens at our regeneration (Eph 2:1, John 3:3). Apart from this work of grace, we can have no faith. Therefore, it is a fact that we contributed nothing at all to our justification.

Our justification is entirely an act of God's free grace. **W**

WLC 72. What is justifying faith?

4. Justifying faith is a saving grace,¹ wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit² and Word of God,³ whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition,⁴ not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel,⁵ but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and His righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin,⁶ and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.⁷

Proofs

¹Heb 10:39; ²2 Cor 4:13; Eph 1:17–19; ³Rom 10:14, 17; ⁴Acts 2:37; 16:30; Jn 16:8–9; Rom 5:6; Eph 2:1; Acts 4:12; ⁵Eph 1:13; ⁶Jn 1:12; Acts 16:31, 10:43; ⁷Phil 3:9; Acts 15:11.

Comments

We saw in our previous lesson that faith is the hand by which we receive the grace of justification. This is why it is called ‘justifying faith’ or ‘saving faith’ (*WCF* 14). In this question, we shall study in greater detail what is this faith.

What is faith? Faith is believing. To have saving faith is to “believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:39). This is as much as what many modern evangelicals will say about faith. But the fact that the New Testament alone speaks about faith almost 250 times would indicate to us there is a lot more we can say about faith. This is why our catechism gives such an elaborate answer!

First, in regard to the *nature* of faith, we see that it is a ‘saving grace,’ which is given to us as part of our salvation. It is, in other words, a free gift of God (Eph 2:8). It is not something that the Christian can generate from his own heart, or it would be a work (cf. Rom 11:6).

Secondly, the *source* of this faith is the Holy Spirit. He is for this reason called the “Spirit of faith” (2 Cor 4:13).

Thirdly, as regards the *genesis* of this faith, it is wrought in the heart of the elect sinner by the Spirit, in conjunction with the ministry or instrumentality of the Word. Thus Paul says: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17; cf. Acts 16:14). And elsewhere he describes the creation of faith in heart as the enlightening of our eyes of understanding, through the mighty power of God (Eph 1:18–19). This happens at our regeneration (Eph 2:1, John 3:3).

Fourthly, as to the *convictions* that leads to faith, it is the sinner’s realisation that he is guilty of damnation and eternal death before God, and that he is powerless to save himself. One who is not convinced that he cannot do anything to save himself out of his lost condition will not come to true saving faith. Where does this conviction come from? It comes through hearing the preaching of God’s word; and through the common operation of God’s Spirit at such times (see Acts 2:37; Heb 6:4). Convictions, as such, must be distinguished from faith. It is possible to have conviction without saving faith. But at the same time it should be noted that it is possible for those who claim to have faith but no conviction, to be, in fact, entertaining a spurious faith.

Fifthly, the *content* of faith is “the word of truth” or the “the gospel of [our] salvation” in Christ (Eph 1:13). This is why faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17). Practically, it means that it is meaningless and useless for anyone to pray that God would increase his faith if he refuses to make use of the means of grace that God has appointed for him.

Sixthly, the *object* of our faith is “Christ and His righteousness.” Having justifying faith involves believe in Christ and His work of redemption. It is meaningless for anyone to claim to have faith while refusing to believe in the Christ of the Scriptures and in the substitutionary nature of His redemptive work.

Finally, as far as the *act* of faith is concern, it involves (1) knowing the facts of the Gospel (*notitia*); (2) assenting to the truth of the promise of the Gospel (*assensus*); and (3) receiving and resting upon Christ (*fiducia*). Faith in other words, embraces Christ and believes that He lived and died for him so that God would not only pardon his sins, but receive him as righteous for Christ’s sake. **W**

WLC 73. How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?

4. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it,¹ nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification;² but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and His righteousness.³

Proofs

¹Gal 3:11; Rom 3:28; ²Rom 4:5; cf. Rom 10:10; ³Jn 1:12; Phil 3:9; Gal 2:16

Comments

Many modern believers studying our Larger Catechism will wonder at why so many questions are devoted to the doctrine of justification and justifying faith. The answer is not only that the believers in the days of the Westminster Assembly probably thought more deeply about spiritual things, but also that it was the core issue that divided the Protestant Church from Roman Catholicism (which true Protestants do not regard as being Christians). The reason why many today are ready to embrace Roman Catholics as brothers in the faith is surely due in part to the failure of understanding the issues that divide the two bodies.

This question seeks to clarify one such issue—namely, the position of faith in justification. The fundamental error of Rome and indeed of many modern evangelicals is to confuse justification with what God does in us (sanctification).

All evangelicals will agree that we are ‘justified by faith.’ Rome agrees with that too. They may even agree that faith is a gift of God. However, what Rome and many evangelicals mean is that faith is an evangelical righteousness. That is to say, faith is accepted in place of works for righteousness. They cite Romans 5:1 that Abraham’s “faith is counted for righteousness.” “This means that God accepts his faith and therefore count him righteous on the merits of his faith,” they say.

But that cannot be the right interpretation of the text, for it would make faith a work of the sinner. But Paul says, “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt” (Rom 4:4). “But it is grace-work rather than law-work,” they counter. Whatever kind of work it may be, is it not work nevertheless if it is to merit salvation? And if it is a work, how can it be good enough when all our righteousness are as filthy rags in the sight of God (Isa 64:6)?

What Paul is saying rather, is that Abraham believed Christ and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is counted righteous. The righteousness by which we are justified is not our own but Christ’s. Elsewhere he says:

“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of [i.e. in] Christ, *the righteousness which is of God by faith*” (Phil 3:9; *italics mine*)

If that is not clear enough, the apostle John declares:

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (Jn 1:12).

Faith is but “an instrument by which [the believer] receiveth and applieth Christ and His righteousness” to himself. Believers are justified by faith and through faith but never on account of faith.

This debate must be carefully understood as it is one of the most common errors even among Christians who claim to be Calvinistic today. Robert Haldane is surely right when he says:

“Nothing, then, can be a greater corruption of the truth than to represent faith itself as accepted instead of righteousness, or to be the righteousness that saves the sinner. Faith is not righteousness. Righteousness is fulfilling of the law” (Commentary on Romans, BOT, 163).

The error of Rome is to confuse the inherent or infused righteousness of the regenerate with the imputed righteousness of the Redeemer. The merits of Christ, according to Rome, were for the procuring of the ‘grace of faith’ by which we are made righteous. For them, God’s righteousness in Christ is not the sole and all-sufficient ground for our justification. Faith, suffering and obedience on the part of the believer are necessary for justification. This is why they will not agree to justification by grace through faith *alone*.

This is why we must never give up the little word ‘alone.’ If we are justified on the merit of our own faith, we are doomed, and we can have no assurance of salvation. **W**

WLC 74. What is adoption?

- A.** Adoption is an act of the free grace of God,¹ in and for His only Son Jesus Christ,² whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of His children,³ have His name put upon them,⁴ the Spirit of His Son given to them,⁵ are under His fatherly care and dispensations,⁶ admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.⁷

Proofs

¹1 Jn 3:1; ²Eph 1:5; Gal 4:4–5; ³Jn 1:12; ⁴2 Cor 6:18; Rev 3:12; ⁵Gal 4:6; ⁶Ps 103:13; Prov 14:26; Mt 6:32; ⁷Heb 6:12; Rom 8:17

Comments

Adoption denotes the taking of a child who is a stranger into a family, and treating him as a member of it. This is what God does for us, except that we were not merely strangers and foreigners of the household of God (Eph 2:19), but we were by nature children of wrath (Eph 2:3)! This is the reason for the joyful exultation of the apostle John as he contemplates on the goodness of God towards us:

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 Jn 3:1a; cf. 2 Cor 6:18; Rev 3:12).

How does God make us His children? He does so in two distinguishable acts. First, He regenerates us so that we may be conformed to the image of His only begotten Son (Jas 1:18). This is also the act by which He gives us faith by which we may receive the grace of justification. Then upon our being reconciled to Him in our justification, He formally adopts us by sealing us with His Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; cf. v. 5). The sealing happens in conjunction with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

It is this second act,—which is an act of ratification,—that is formally called ‘adoption’ in our Standards. Adoption by this definition follows logically after justification, though they occur in the same time in our experience.

As the adoptive children of God, we are given the right to all the privileges of the sons of God. Our Catechism summarises these privileges in terms of “[God’s] fatherly care and dispensations, [admittance] to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, [being] made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.” We may enumerate the privileges more specifically thus:

1. God’s fatherly audience and response to prayers. The Lord Himself teaches us:

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Mt 7: 11; cf. 1 Jn 5:14-15; Eph 3:12).

2. Inward assurance that we are the children of God, and therefore can be sure of His fatherly love and care. The apostle Paul says:

“...ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” (Rom 8:15-16).

3. God’s fatherly pity in trials— “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him” (Ps 103:13).

4. God’s fatherly protection through temporal and spiritual evils—“In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge” (Prov 14:26; cf. Ps 121:7).

5. God’s fatherly provision for our spiritual and temporal needs—“your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things” (Matt 6:32b; cf. Ps 34:10).

6. God’s fatherly chastisement when we stray—“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb 12:6).

7. A sure title to the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven—“And if children then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17; cf. Heb 6:12; 1 Pet 1:3-5).

Thank God that we are not only reconciled to Him (through our justification), but made His children, recipients of the princely benefits that He has prepared for us as joint-heirs of His only begotten Son. May the Lord grant us help that we may live for Him as obedient and grateful sons and daughters (see 2 Cor 6:14-18). **W**

WLC 75. What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God hath, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of His Spirit¹ applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them,² renewed in their whole man after the image of God;³ having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts,⁴ and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened,⁵ as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life.⁶

Proofs

¹Eph 1:4; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Thes 2:13; ²Rom 6:4–6; ³Eph 4:23–24; ⁴Acts 11:18; 1 Jn 3:9;
⁵Jude 20; Heb 6:11–12; Eph 3:16–19; Col 1:10–11; ⁶Rom 6:4, 6, 14; Gal 5:24

Comments

While justification and adoption are said to be *acts* of God's free grace (see WLC 70, 74), sanctification is a *work* of God's grace. This is because sanctification unlike justification and adoption is a continuous and gradual operation of God the Spirit in the soul of the justified sinner. It is a work that begins at our regeneration and continues throughout our lifetime.

This is what the apostle Paul is referring to when he tells us that we are chosen “to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit” (2 Thes 2:13). A Christian is said to be saved when he is justified, but there is sense in which his salvation is future, for it pleased God to leave a remnant of corruption in us, which He will only remove at our glorification at the end of this life's journey. Nevertheless, God does not leave us in the state of corruption with which we enter His kingdom. Having given us a new birth, He continues to cause us to grow as new creatures so that we die more and more unto sin, and live more and more in actual holiness. It is God's will that we “should be holy” (Eph 1:4) as He is holy (1 Pet 1:15-16). We are, in other words, not just given a new status (in justification and adoption), but little by little, day by day, we are being freed from the remnant of our love for sin. Our habits and inclination are being made more and more to conform unto God's even in this life so that we are said to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

Our Catechism teaches us several important truths about this work of sanctification.

We have already mentioned, *firstly* that it is a process of cultivating holiness; and *secondly* that it is wrought in the heart of the elect by the Holy Spirit.

But *thirdly*, the basis of our sanctification is the death and resurrection of Christ: “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit 2:14). By Christ's death, the penalty due to our sins is removed so that we need not be punished for them by spiritual death or the effects of sin, which include further sin (cf. Rom 1:24, 26, 28). And by Christ's resurrection, we who are united to Him are guaranteed the operation of the same resurrection power in this life in our sanctification and in the last day at our resurrection. If Christ the head experienced this power on our behalf, how could the Church, His body not have a share of it?

Fourthly, the scope of our sanctification is “the whole man.” That is to say it does not only touch one or two aspects of our soul, but every aspect of it, including our intellect, and will, and we may add: emotions and inclinations.

Fifthly, the pattern or ideal according to which the Holy Spirit carries out His work of sanctifying us is the “image of God.” Man was created in this image, but was defaced by the fall, though not completely obliterated. In sanctification, we are being renewed in the whole man after the image of God. And this image is characterised chiefly by true knowledge, righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:23; Col 3:10).

Sixthly, and finally, as to the relationship between sanctification and other graces in our order of salvation, we are taught that sanctification adds nothing, but causes the other graces already planted in us,—such as repentance and faith,—to be “stirred up, increased, and strengthened.” **W**

WLC 76. What is repentance unto life?

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace,¹ wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit² and Word of God,³ whereby out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger,⁴ but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins,⁵ and upon the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent,⁶ he so grieves for⁷ and hates his sins,⁸ as that he turns from them all to God,⁹ purposing and endeavouring constantly to walk with Him in all the ways of new obedience.¹⁰

Proofs

¹2 Tim 2:25; ²Zech 12:10; ³Acts 11:18, 20–21; ⁴Ezk 18:28, 30, 32; Lk 15:17–18; Hos 2:6–7;
⁵Ezk 36:31; Isa 30:22; ⁶Joel 2:12–13; ⁷Jer 31:18–19; ⁸2 Cor 7:11; ⁹Acts 26:18; Ezk 14:6; 1 Kgs 8:47–48;
¹⁰Ps 119:6, 59, 128; Lk 1:6; 2 Kgs 23:25

Comments

There are two subtle errors with regard to the doctrine of salvation that must be addressed before we even begin to look at what our catechism teaches. These have arisen in recent times and are quite pervasive, so that unless we first point them out, our present study would be quite confusing. The two errors are related.

The first is a denial of the importance of repentance in our salvation. This is taught by some Dispensationalists, which says that “faith alone saves,” therefore to speak of the necessity of repentance is to speak about salvation by works. Those who teach this doctrine say that repentance is good, and is a part of spiritual Christians, but there are carnal Christians who will nevertheless get to heaven though they are without repentance. This is a false doctrine that has caused a whole generation of lawless and half-hearted professing Christians who are confident that they will ‘get to heaven.’

The second error is promoted largely by Dispensational and Arminian parachurch members in their evangelistic efforts. This error teaches that faith and repentance are required for our justification, but says nothing of their role *after* justification. For these, faith (and repentance, if they talk about it at all) are pre-requisites for ‘crossing the line’ into the kingdom of God. Once you cross the line, you are saved; and once saved always saved, and therefore you are safe!

These are pernicious errors. Our Catechism and Confession teaches a much fuller and doctrinally correct doctrine of faith and repentance. In particular, we are taught that both faith and repentance are exercises or responses of the regenerate soul that begins at regeneration and continues throughout our pilgrim walk even after our justification.

This is why in our previous question we are taught that sanctification is in a sense the germination and growth of the “seed of repentance” that is planted at regeneration.

We must bear this in mind if we are going to appreciate what our catechism teaches concerning the doctrine of repentance. Furthermore, we should also bear in mind the difference between faith and repentance. Faith involves believing and trusting in Christ for salvation (see *WLC* 72). Repentance, on the other hand, is about a change of mind concerning sin and a turning from it and living in the way of Christ.

There is false repentance such as the repentance of Judas Iscariot (Mt 27:3; cf. 2 Cor 7:10), and true repentance. True repentance is inextricably joined to faith. Our catechism calls it “repentance unto life” because it is inseparably connected with our enjoyment of eternal life.

Without faith, what appears to be repentance is really a subjective and emotional conviction that one has done wrong, but without a proper view of what is right!

Repentance, like faith is an exercise of the living soul. However, our catechism calls it a ‘saving grace’ because it is entirely gratuitous. Like faith, it is a free gift of God. This is clear from the declaration in Acts 11:18 that “God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (cf. Jer 31:18–19). Like faith, it is wrought in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Zec 12:10) through the instrumentality of the Word preached (Mk 1:15; 2:17).

Repentance may be described under three heads.

a. *First*, the ‘sight and sense’ of repentance. Repentance flows from the heart. It begins with: (1) A sight and sense of “the danger” of remaining in sin; (2) a realisation and conviction of the “filthiness and odiousness of his sin,” in the sight of God; and (3) “apprehension of God’s mercy in Christ to such as are penitent.” The penitent are simply those who repent.

b. *Secondly*, the negative acts of repentance are: (1) grief and shame (Jer 31:18) for his sins; (2) hatred or indignation (2 Cor 7:11) for his sins; and (3) a turning away from or renunciation of his sins.

c. *Thirdly*, the positive acts of repentance are: (1) A turning to God with a full conviction that it is safe and right to walk in His ways; and (2) a purposing and endeavouring constantly to walk with God according to the ways He requires of us in His Law.

Repentance is a lifelong exercise of the soul. Faithful preaching of the Word of God includes both Law and Gospel preaching. The Law drives us to the Gospel and shuts us up to Christ, the Gospel frees us from the bondage of sin or lawlessness, and encourages us to keep the Law. So the Law shuts us up to Christ, Christ leads us to the Law, the Law shuts us up to Christ, etc. **W**

WLC 77. Wherein do justification and sanctification differ?

A. Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification,¹ yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ;² in sanctification His Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof;³ in the former, sin is pardoned;⁴ in the other, it is subdued:⁵ the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation;⁶ the other is neither equal in all,⁷ nor in this life perfect in any,⁸ but growing up to perfection.⁹

Proofs

¹1 Cor 6:11; 1:30; ²Rom 4:6, 8; ³Ezk 36:27; ⁴Rom 3:24–25; ⁵Rom 6:6, 14; ⁶Rom 8:33–34;
⁷1 Jn 2:12–14; Heb 5:12–14; ⁸1 Jn 1:8, 10; ⁹2 Cor 7:1; Phil 3:12–14

Comments

We have seen what is justification (*WLC 70*) and what is sanctification (*WLC 75*). We saw also that justification and sanctification will always go hand in hand (see notes on *WLC 75*). They are as we see in this question “inseparably joined” together. One who is justified by faith must have faith. One who has faith must be regenerate. And if he is regenerate, he must grow in sanctification. Or to put it in another way: if a man claims to be justified but knows no sanctification, he could not possibly be truly justified, for his faith could not be a true faith, for “faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:26). Likewise a man who neither believes that Christ died for him nor is resting upon Christ for his salvation is not justified. Such a man may claim sanctification, but the truth is that he simply cannot be truly experiencing sanctification. This is so because it is in Christ that we obtain our heavenly inheritance (see Eph 1:11). Only such as believe in Christ for their salvation will experience the “exceeding greatness of his power” (Eph 1:19).

Everyone who is justified will be sanctified; and everyone who is sanctified must first be justified. That is a fact we must not forget. But we must equally not forget that justification and sanctification are very different.

In particular, five differences are highlighted in this question.

First, justification is a judicial declarative act in which the righteousness of Christ is imputed or credited to the sinner so that he is accounted as righteous in God’s sight. On the other hand, sanctification involves an actual work of grace of God’s spirit in the heart of the sinner so that he is enabled to live righteously and also to grow in holiness.

Secondly, in justification, sin is pardoned because its penalty has been paid for by Christ; while in sanctification, the sinful inclinations or corruptions remaining in the justified saint is subdued by the Spirit of Christ.

Thirdly, justification is a single act that is completed in a moment, while sanctification is a progressive work that lasts a whole lifetime. In justification, the sinner is declared perfectly righteous in the sight of God. In sanctification, the sinner is made more and more inclined to righteousness in his soul. Therefore, we may say that justification makes us *equally* righteous (with the righteousness of Christ), while we enjoy different levels of personal sanctification.

	Justification	Sanctification
Nature	Relative change of status in God's sight	Real change in the whole man
Matter	Righteousness of Christ Imputed	Inherent righteousness Imparted
Form	A judicial declaration on God's part	Actual work on the soul by the Spirit of God
Duration	Punctiliar, at once	Progressive, over a life time
Result	Title to heaven	Meetness for heaven

We may summarise the differences according to the table above.

But there are two corollaries that we must take careful note of.

First, we must realise that we are accepted before God on account of our justification rather than our sanctification. This is an important doctrine, for unless we understand that, we can have no assurance of God’s love or reconciliation with Him. It is because Rome mixes justification with sanctification, that they not only deny that a believer can have full assurance of salvation, but also that good works are meritoriously necessary for salvation. Protestantism maintains that good works is an evidence of salvation, Rome teaches that you must do good to be saved. The difference is subtle, but it makes one serve the Lord legalistically, while the other serves the Lord out of love and gratitude.

Secondly, we must realise that while it pleases God that we cannot be perfect in personal holiness in this life, yet, it is our duty to make use of the means that we may grow up to perfection. Sanctification is a work of God’s Spirit, but He generally works to sanctify us with the appointed means such as reading and hearing of scripture, the sacraments and prayer. Such as would not make use of the means cannot expect sanctification. Such as would make use of the means are made more and more meet for heaven. And more and more they have their hearts enlarged that they have greater and greater capacity to enjoy the blessings of heaven. In heaven, every cup will be full on account of justification, but our cups will be of different capacities depending on our sanctification. **W**

WLC 78. Whence ariseth the imperfection of sanctification in believers?

A. The imperfection of sanctification in believers ariseth from the remnants of sin abiding in every part of them, and the perpetual lustings of the flesh against the Spirit; whereby they are often foiled with temptations, and fall into many sins,¹ are hindered in all their spiritual services,² and their best works are imperfect and defiled in the sight of God.³

Proofs

¹Rom 7:18, 23; Mk 14:66–72; Gal 2:11–12; ²Heb 12:1; ³Isa 64:6; Ex 28:38

Comments

In our previous question, we learn that sanctification is “[not] in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.” This truth reflects the teaching of the apostle Paul in Philippians 2:12b-13—“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). There are some preachers who insist that all Christians are saved once and for all, and it is Romish to speak of our salvation as being a process. But this is exactly what the apostle Paul is saying. The fact is the term salvation is really a rather vague term, which is used in Scripture and theology in numerous senses. There is indeed a sense in which we are already saved; but there is also a sense in which we are being saved, and will be saved. We are already saved in that we are justified; but we are being saved in that we are being sanctified; and we will be saved in that we will be glorified.

Our sanctification is as much a part of our salvation as our justification. And our sanctification is a lifelong process that remains imperfect throughout this life until it is perfected at our death.

This imperfection comes about because it pleases God to leave a remnant of corruption remaining in us. God, being sovereign could, of course, have made us perfectly sanctified at our justification. But He has not ordained it to be so. We do not know the reason, though some of us may attempt to speculate the rationale. But one thing we know is that God is perfectly wise, and He has ordained it to be so.

Our catechism speaks of this remaining corruption as “the remnants of sin.” The Scripture, on the other hand, uses metaphors such as ‘flesh’ (Rom 7:18; Gal 5:17); ‘old man’ (Rom 6:6); ‘stony heart’ (Ezk 36:26), etc.

Because of the ambiguity of these metaphors, numerous errors in regard to sanctification have arisen. For example, there are those who think that since the Scripture sometimes contrast between flesh and spirit (e.g. John 3:6) to speak of the body and the soul, that the apostle Paul must necessarily be saying that the human body is *the* problem in our sanctification (see Gal 5:17 and Rom 7:18). But this is not the case. Rather, the term ‘flesh’ in the context of the doctrine of sanctification generally refers to the remnant of corruption in the whole nature of man comprising body and soul.

Similarly, the term ‘old man’ (Rom 6:6) and ‘new man’ (Eph 4:24) has given rise to the error that a regenerate man has two natures,—one newly implanted, and one old nature,—which are constantly at war with one another. Once again, this is not true. There is only one nature in us, but there are, as our catechism puts it, “remnants of sin abiding in every part of [us or of our nature].”

Because of this remnant of sin, our “best works are imperfect and defiled in the sight of God” (cf. Isa 64:6). Those who speak of the regenerate having two natures say that the new man has no sin, while the old man is always sinning. But then, whose work is it that is defiled? Is it the old man’s or new man’s? The fact is that we have one nature that is not yet perfected, not two natures.

Now, it is because of these “remnants of sin,” that there are “perpetual lustings of the flesh against the Spirit.” There is a constant war in our inner man. An unconverted man is at peace with sin, but at war with God. A converted man, on the other hand, is at peace with God, but at war with sin. (If you are at peace with sin or have no struggle with sin, you are either still dead in trespasses and sin, or you are severely backslidden). It is this war with sin that our catechism is referring to. We are fighting with the help of the Spirit of Christ. But sometimes God allows the remnant of corruption to rear its ugly head and to have victory so that we fall into temptation and sin.

And not only so, even when we do not fall into overt sin, this remnant of corruption does constantly hinder our “spiritual services” so that for example we get discouraged or weary, or we begin to lack zeal in our worship and service for the Lord; or our love for the Lord and His church may wax cold, and we may even go through the motion when using the means of grace. Every true believer will know this struggle very well.

But thank God that because Christ was crucified for us, our “our old man is crucified with him” (Rom 6:6) so that God does not hold our sin against us. And not only so but the Spirit of Christ is working in us “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13), that we daily die unto sin and are prepared more and more for our eternal home. **W**

WLC 79. May not true believers, by reason of their imperfections, and the many temptations and sin they are overtaken with, fall away from the state of grace?

A. True believers, by reason of the unchangeable love of God,¹ and His decree and covenant to give them perseverance,² their inseparable union with Christ,³ His continual intercession for them,⁴ and the Spirit and seed of God abiding in them,⁵ can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace,⁶ but are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.⁷

Proofs

¹Jer 31:3; ²2 Tim 2:19; Heb 13:20–21; 2 Sam 23:5; ³1 Cor 1:8–9; ⁴Heb 7:25; Lk 22:32;
⁵1 Jn 3:9; 2:27; ⁶Jer 32:40; Jn 10:28; ⁷1 Pet 1:5

Comments

This question deals with the final point of the 5-points of Calvinism (TULIP), namely “Perseverance of the saints.” Because it speaks of how God preserves the saints through their life of sanctification, some prefer to speak of “Preservation of the saints.” But there is good reason to retain the traditional terms because it emphasises that the child of God is maintained as a saint (i.e. holy one) throughout his life. God does not preserve sinners and hypocrites in the state of grace. No; rather as our question emphasises, it is “*true* believers” that He preserves. He preserves them by “[giving] them perseverance” in the faith!

True believers are preserved in the state of grace. They can neither totally nor finally fall away from this state. They are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. The words ‘totally’ and ‘finally’ suggest that a true believer may partially and temporarily fall from grace, but it will not be a total departure, nor will it happen that a true believer should fall and remain in that fallen state until the day he meets the Lord.

What is it to be preserved in the state of grace? It is the opposite of falling away from the state of grace. What is it to fall from the state of grace? Take note that it is not so much to be denied the status of grace (e.g. justification) as to cease to live the life of grace.

To fall from grace is to deny Christ. Peter denied Christ, but he repented. It is also to cease to love Christ and therefore living contrary to His commandments. Because of the remnant of corruption remaining in us, we have a bent to backsliding (Hos 11:7), and therefore we may all fall into lawlessness. But this fall will neither be total nor final. Indeed, it is unlikely that any true believer will backslide to a point of being worse than the heathen. But if it does happen, a true believer will quickly repent and return to the state of grace in obedience to God’s Word. He will neither fall completely nor finally from the state of grace. The Lord Himself says:

“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (Jn 10:28).

Apart from this verse, how do we know this doctrine to be true? Our catechism proves it to be true by listing biblical 6 reasons: (1) the unchanging love of God; (2) God’s decree and covenant to give them perseverance; (3) their inseparable union with Christ; (4) Christ’s continual intercession for them; (5) the Spirit of God abiding in them and (6) the seed of God abiding in them.

In the *first* place, the LORD himself speaks of His love for His people as “an everlasting love” (Jer 31:3). If it is an everlasting love, it is an undying and unchanging love. It is a love which cannot be severed by anything in creation. The apostle Paul speaks of the strength of this love in Romans 8:35-39, by listing 16 things which cannot “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 39). Paul makes sure that we know that these 16 things are not exhaustive, for he concludes the list with, “nor any other creature.” That is to say, nothing that is created can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, not even ourselves, or our will.

In the *second* place, true believers are elected unto salvation by an eternal decree (Eph 1:4-5; 2 Tim 2:19) and are represented by Christ in an “everlasting covenant” (2 Sam 23:5; Heb 13:20-21) with God. Since our election and membership in the covenant is not conditioned on anything on our part, but is founded on the good pleasure of God Almighty who is sovereign to save, we have no reason to doubt that we shall be preserved in Christ unto eternity.

In the *third* place, the Scripture teaches that we are united to Christ. “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” And He “shall... confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:9, 8). The Lord Himself prays for those “which shall believe” on Him (Jn 17:20):

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” (Jn 17:21-23).

If believers are to be one with Christ as Christ is one with His Father, how can they ever be separated from Him?

In the *fourth* place, true believers will persevere in the faith because of Christ’s continual intercession for them (Heb 7:25). As He prayed for Peter that his “faith fail not” (Lk 22:32), so He prays for all true believers that their faith fail not. Now, as the Father will certainly hear the petitions of His Son (cf. Mt 3:17), we can have no doubt that true believers will neither totally nor finally fail in their faith.

In the *fifth* place, true believers will persevere because the Spirit of God abides in them (1 Jn 2:27). Our Lord teaches us that the Holy Spirit cannot dwell in the heart of unbelievers but will dwell in the heart of believers forever (see Jn 14:16-17; cf. Rom 8:9). Given this promise, a believer cannot fall away from the faith, for not only will the Spirit support his faith, but He cannot contradict the words of Christ and fail to dwell forever in the heart of a believer once he is regenerate.

Likewise, *sixthly*, true believers persevere because the “seed of God” abides in them (1 Jn 3:9). This seed of God refers to the new nature, which nature, says the apostle Peter, is “incorruptible” and “liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:23). This being the case, it is impossible that the believer should fall out of grace and cease to believe finally or totally. It is, after all, by the new nature that the believer believes.

Will a true believer ever fall out of grace totally and finally? Anyone who is convinced that the Scripture cannot be broken will be convinced that it will not happen. **W**

WLC 80. Can true believers be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace,
and that they shall persevere therein unto salvation?

A. Such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavour to walk in all good conscience before Him,¹ may, without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded upon the truth of God's promises, and by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made,² and bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God,³
be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace,
and shall persevere therein unto salvation.⁴

Proofs

¹1 Jn 2:3; ²1 Cor 2:12; 1 Jn 3:14, 18–19, 21, 24; 4:13, 16; Heb 6:11–12; ³Rom 8:16; ⁴1 Jn 5:13

Comments

This question deals with a subject that is seldom a concern of professing Christians today. It has to do with whether we are for real as Christians. Or more particularly, it has to do with whether we can know for sure, i.e. 'infallibly' if we are for real.

If my experience is anything to go by, most professing Christians, in this day of shallow religiosity, fall into one of three camps.

One camp would simply shrug their shoulders, and say, "So what? " But this callous attitude is dangerous. If they were as callous about their physical health, as they were about their spiritual health, they would not live long.

The second camp is found mostly amongst (American) fundamentalists or those influenced by dispensational easy-believism. These believe that they are saved so long as they put up their hands or walk down the aisle when the altar call is given, or when they sign the decision card and pray the sinner's prayer. And then they are taught never to doubt their salvation! Once saved always saved!

No, we do not doubt the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints! But we do have severe doubt that all those who are deemed converted through these means are truly converted.

The third camp, on the other hand, is found amongst those who have been influenced by Roman Catholicism or a works-righteousness theology akin to the Romish idea. One in this camp would simply say: "It is impossible for me to know for sure if I am saved in this life. I will do as much good works as I can, and I hope God will be merciful to me."

This last camp sounds very pious. But it goes against the Scripture and is in fact a demonstration of false humility that betrays a denial of God's faithfulness.

The fact is that infallible assurance of salvation is attainable, important and scriptural.

This does not mean that infallible assurance can be obtained in any way. In particular, legalists assume that they are saved simply because they are doing a lot of good works; formalists assume that they are alright because they are baptized or a member of a sound church; emotionalist assume that they are for real just because they *feel* in their hearts that they are born again; and then there are those who claim some supernatural experience or extraordinary experience. But all these are basing their assurance on shifting sand!

Only "such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavour to walk in all good conscience before Him" may have assurance of salvation. And their assurance must be built upon three solid grounds.

The **first** and primary ground is the "truth of God's promises" to believers. This is the basis of our assurance. Without God's promise, we can have no assurance that we will be saved. But the Word of God gives us many such promises, for example, the Lord Jesus says "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life...." (Jn 3:36); "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (Jn 6:37b).

Therefore, the first place I must look to obtain infallible assurance of salvation is the promises of God. I must believe God's promises. If I do not, I cannot in the first place be saved, not to mention have assurance of my salvation. But how do I know I believe correctly or that my faith is genuine, after all, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer 17:9). There is therefore a need for the two secondary grounds that by a threefold cord we might be left without doubt that God has indeed begun a work in our heart.

The **second** ground has to do with the evidence of "those graces to which the promises of life are made," namely a change and new life. The apostle Paul teaches us that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17). We are granted assurance of faith when the Spirit of Christ enables us to discern changes in our hearts, which came about not by our own will or nature, but by a special working of God in our heart.

But we must again remember that this ground cannot stand alone. It must be corroborated by the other two grounds for it to be a valid basis for assurance.

The **third** ground has to do with the testimony of the Spirit of Christ in our heart. Our catechism speaks of the Spirit "bearing witness with [our] spirits that [we] are the children of God." It is one thing to know about God and quite another thing to know God (c.f. 1 Jn 2:3). The Holy Spirit indwelling in our hearts enables us to know God (cf. 1 Jn 3:24b). The apostle Paul puts it this way:

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom 8:15-16).

That is to say that the Holy Spirit causes us to know that we belong to God. How does He do that? He does it in the same way as He works faith, love and hope in us. And He works this assurance in conjunction with the application of the other two grounds of assurance in our heart.

Thank God that by His enabling and provision, we can know we are for real!

But the question may be asked: "Is it possible for us to be mistaken about the genuineness of our assurance?" The answer is yes. However, we need not be, for the Scripture also indicates what true assurance will produce in the saint, compared to false assurance. A.A. Hodge in his commentary on *WCF* 18.2 provides us a set of tests based on these indications:

(1) True assurance begets unfeigned humility; false assurance begets spiritual pride. (1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 6:14.) (2) The true leads to increased diligence in the practice of holiness; the false leads to sloth and self-indulgence. (Ps. 51:12,13,19.) (3) The true leads to candid self-examination and to a desire to be searched and corrected by God; the false leads to a disposition to be satisfied with appearance and to

avoid accurate investigation. (Ps. 139:23,24.) (4) The true leads to constant aspirations after more intimate fellowship with God. (1 John 3:2,3.).

Do you have infallible assurance of salvation? Is it genuine? **W**

WLC 81. Are all true believers at all times assured of their present being in the estate of grace, and that they shall be saved?

- A.** Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of faith,¹ true believers may wait long before they obtain it;² and, after the enjoyment thereof, may have it weakened and intermitted, through manifold distempers, sins, temptations, and desertions;³ yet are they never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God, as keeps them from sinking into utter despair.⁴

Proofs

¹Eph 1:13; ²Isa 50:10; Ps 88; ³Ps 77:1–12; Song 5:2–3, 6; Ps 51:8, 12; 31:22; 22:1;
⁴1 Jn 3:9; Job 13:15; Ps 73:15, 23; Isa 54:7–10

Comments

We saw in our last study that it is possible and indeed desirable for a Christian to have an infallible assurance of grace and salvation. In the present study, we are dealing with the question of whether this assurance is something which every *true* believer will enjoy at all times. And the short answer is, ‘no’. It is possible for a believer to have genuine faith, but not be assured of his own salvation in his own heart.

This is so because “assurance of grace and salvation” is not “of the essence of faith.” A man may have been healed from cancer. All the scans and tests show that there are no more cancer cells remaining. But he may not be convinced in his heart that he has really been healed. He may continue to live in fear like a cancer patient. Likewise assurance of salvation may be said to be not of the being of faith, but of the well-being of faith.

Many who experience a sudden and dramatic conversion such as Paul, Augustine and Calvin have deep assurance of salvation from the time of their conversion. But many if not most other believers do not enjoy such assurances. Many “true believers may wait long before they obtain it.”

Some profess faith, but experience lingering doubts in their heart as to whether they are for real. They have no doubt as to the truth of God’s word (or they could not be saved), but they wonder if they have believed rightly or whether God has begun a work of grace in their heart.

Others may be regenerate but dare not speak confidently about their salvation, nor feel any assurance that they are indeed saved, because they were taught that if they were for real, they would have had a dramatic conversion experience!

Likewise, covenant children who have been brought up as believing children may be regenerate and profess allegiance to Christ and yet not possess a full certainty of their salvation in their own minds, because they did not experience a dramatic change in their thinking since infancy.

Moreover, those who have begun to enjoy an infallible assurance of salvation, may have their assurance “weakened and intermitted.” This can happen through various causes, such as: (1) “manifold distempers” or afflictions of the body and soul including spiritual depression; (2) “falling into some special sin, which woundeth the conscience, and grieveth the Spirit” (*WCF* 18.4); (3) “some sudden or vehement temptation” (*ibid.*); and (4) “desertions” wherein God withdraws “the light of His countenance, and suffers even such as fear Him to walk in darkness, and to have no light” for a season (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, because the Holy Spirit indwells all true believers and is ever keeping them from sinking unto utter despair, they will never be left utterly without a consciousness of God’s presence and favour.

Be as that is the case, it is the responsibility of every true believer to seek to obtain a full and definite assurance of their salvation, and when they have obtained it, to strive to maintain a strong and clear assurance by diligent use of the means of grace and prayer. **W**

WLC 82. What is the communion in glory
which the members of the invisible church have with Christ?

A. The communion in glory which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is
in this life,¹ immediately after death,² and at last perfected
at the resurrection and day of judgment.³

Proofs

¹2 Cor 3:18; ²Lk 23:43; ³1 Thes 4:17

Comments

In question 65, we saw that “The members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with Him in grace and glory.” Questions 66-68 is about union with Christ, where Questions 69-81 is about ‘communion in grace.’ Now, from the present question till question 90, we shall be looking at ‘communion in glory.’ In fact, this question is really a summary or introduction to the detailed elaborations in the next 8 questions.

But what is the difference between ‘com-munion in grace’ and ‘communion in glory’?

The terms grace and glory is used in numerous different ways in the Scripture, but in our Confession and Catechisms, the two terms are often used in conjunction to distinguish between the present earthly life and the heavenly life to come. So ‘communion in grace’ refers to the blessings of salvation which we receive in this life on the basis of our union with Christ; while ‘communion in glory’ refers to the blessings which we shall receive from Christ in the life to come.

But take note that this does not mean that ‘communion in glory’ will be enjoyed only when we die. Rather, the Scripture and therefore our Catechism indicate that we will receive the blessings in stages.

First, we enjoy “in this life the first fruit of glory with Christ” (*WLC* 83). For example, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as an earnest of our eternal inheritance (Eph 1:13-14) we have begun to enjoy a special sense of God’s love and peace of conscience.

Secondly, immediately after death, “[our] souls are... made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where [we shall] behold the face of God in light and glory” (*WLC* 86).

But our final and full enjoyment of communion in Christ will be at the resurrection and day of judgement when we shall receive “the full redemption of [our] bodies” (*WLC* 86) and “shall be set on [Christ’s] right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted” (*WLC* 90).

W

WLC 83. What is the communion in glory with Christ which the members of the invisible church enjoy in this life?

A. The members of the invisible church have communicated to them in this life the first-fruits of glory with Christ, as they are members of Him their head, and so in Him are interested in that glory which He is fully possessed of;¹ and as an earnest thereof, enjoy the sense of God's love,² peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, and hope of glory;³ as, on the contrary, sense of God's revenging wrath, horror of conscience, and a fearful expectation of judgment, are to the wicked the beginning of their torments which they shall endure after death.⁴

Proofs

¹Eph 2:5–6; ²Rom 5:5; cf. 2 Cor 1:22; ³Rom 5:1–2; 14:17; ⁴Gen 4:13; Mt 27:4; Heb 10:27; Rom 2:9; Mk 9:44

Comments

We saw in our previous question that 'communion in glory' refers to the blessings, which members of the invisible church shall receive from Christ in the life to come. However, we also noted that we do not have to wait till we die to enjoy those blessings. The fact is that union with Christ and thus eternal life begins in this life, and therefore even in this life we can enjoy a foretaste of the blessings that awaits us. This is what the apostle Paul is suggesting when he says:

“Even when we were dead in sins, [*God*] hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:5-6).

Our catechism refers to this foretaste as the 'first-fruits of glory with Christ' which are 'communicated' (i.e. bestowed) to the members of the invisible church in this life. These members are said to be 'interested' in the *glory* which Christ, their Head, is "fully possessed of." This does not mean that they are curious about it or eager to learn about it, but simply that they are entitled to a share of it. To have an interest in an inheritance is to have a claim or a share of the inheritance. Our inheritance in Christ is, in a word, heavenly glory.

Today, we are unable to receive this inheritance fully for two reasons: First, God has determined that a remnant of corruption should still remain in us while we are in this world (1 Jn 1:8); and secondly, our present body cannot accommodate this glory (1 Cor 15:40; 50).

However, it pleases God to give us an 'earnest' or a guaranteeing-deposit of the inheritance that awaits us. This is given to us chiefly through the Holy Spirit, who is sent to indwell us, as "the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:14). By the Holy Spirit, we enjoy a conscious sense of God's love, peace of conscience, joy and hope of glory to come (cf. Rom 5:5).

Because of the remnant of corruption, we do not enjoy these things constantly in this life, just as we may not enjoy full assurance at all times. But when we do enjoy them, the experience can be described as 'heaven on earth.' This is the blessed experience of the children of God.

On the other hand, it pleases God that the wicked and unbelieving should also have a foretaste of the things to come. But for them it is curses rather than blessings. Their experience may take the form of a foretaste of "God's revenging wrath, horror of conscience, and a fearful expectation of judgment." They may experience these things under the preaching of the Word of God, or when the civil law catches up with their crime, or when providence brings them to their knees. But many experience these horrors especially when they feel the approach of death. These horrors are not experienced by all unbelievers equally. But when they do experience it, it is like hell on earth for them. **W**

WLC 84. Shall All Men Die?

- A.** Death being threatened as the wages of sin,^a it is appointed unto all men once to die;^b for that all have sinned.^c

Proofs

^a Rom. 6:23. ^b Heb. 9:27. ^c Rom. 5:12.

Comments

The Scripture speaks of death in numerous ways. It speaks of physical death, spiritual death and eternal death. Our present study deals with physical death.

All men must die because all men are sinners, is the general rule that the Scripture and our catechism teaches.

Man was created in the image of God to have eternal fellowship with God in his whole being, which includes body and soul. But God appointed death as a punishment for sin (Rom 6:23).

Therefore when Adam fell, Adam had to die. Likewise, all men descending from him by natural generation, fell with him and sinned with him, and therefore must experience death. The apostle Paul puts it this way:

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12).

Death,—at least death for mankind,—in other words, entered the world because of sin. Death is therefore not a natural and necessary process as atheists and evolutionists would have us believe. The Scripture describes death as “the last enemy” (1 Cor 15:26).

One day the last enemy shall be destroyed. But it will not be science and medicine that will destroy it—because death does not merely include natural causes be they sickness, accident or old age. Death has a spiritual cause, namely the righteous judgement of God upon sin.

Therefore God alone can destroy death.

God has already hinted in the Old Testament that He would do so, for there are two notable exceptions to the rule of death in the history of man, namely Enoch and Elijah (see Gen 5:24; 2 Kgs 2:11). God can remove death from His children.

But how does God remove death from His children, when He appointed death as the punishment for sin? If God simply overlooked death, would He not violate His own justice?

2

The answer lies in the fact that Christ Jesus died on our behalf. Christ alone was born without original sin, and lived a perfectly blameless and sinless life. For this reason, death has no claim upon Him. But He was born that He might redeem His people from sin (Ps 40:6-8; Isa 53:4-5). Therefore He died to pay for the penalty due to our sin.

In the goodness and justice of God, Christ’s sacrifice was deemed sufficient and accepted by the Father. He therefore rose from the dead. He had conquered death.

Today believers will still die, for death is a consequence of sin. Death, however, is no longer a punishment for sin, for the believer. His sin has been already been paid for. The believer, therefore, will be raised at the Last Day, as Christ was raised. For the same reason, believers who are alive at the Last Day will be translated to glory without death (see 1 Cor 25:52-52; 1 Thes 4:16-17). But today, by the wisdom of God, death will remain as the means by which we are translated to glory. **W**

WLC 85. Death, being the wages of sin, why are not the righteous delivered from death, seeing all their sins are forgiven in Christ?

A. The righteous shall be delivered from death itself at the last day, and even in death are delivered from the sting and curse of it;¹ so that, although they die, yet it is out of God's love,² to free them perfectly from sin and misery,³ and to make them capable of further communion with Christ in glory, which they then enter upon.⁴

Proofs

¹1 Cor 15:26, 55–57; Heb 2:15; ²Isa 57:1–2; 2 Kgs 22:20; ³Rev 14:13; Eph 5:27; ⁴Lk 23:43; Phil 1:23

Comments

We saw in our last study that though believers still die, death is no longer a punishment for sin. Their sin has already been paid for. God will not require them to pay for their sins again, for that would be injustice.

But today believers will still die. The Scripture does not state why this must be so. It states it as a fact that all must die. Our catechism, therefore, does not answer why we must still die. We can only say that death is a consequence of sin, and it is in the wisdom of God that we should expect to die. Although we may not fully understand why, we must believe that God has good reasons to retain death in our experience; and we must believe that ultimately the experience of dying and death is for our good.

The Scripture, however, does teach us several truths about the death of the righteous that encourages us to face death with confidence and not to fear it the way that the world fears it (Heb 2:15).

First of all, we are taught that we will be delivered from death at the last day. As Christ rose from the dead, so we who are united with Him will rise at the last day, to die no more (1 Cor 15:20, 52). Death would finally be destroyed (1 Cor 15:26).

Secondly, it is clear that the sting and curse of death has been removed from the righteous (1 Cor 15:55-57). Death can be a joyous experience for the believer because he is not dying for his sin. He is not being punished for it.

Indeed, *thirdly*, the righteous should realise that his death is an expression of God's love or a reward for His saints. This is so because God, through death, free His saints from the sin and misery of this present world. Isaiah puts it beautifully when he says:

“... the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness” (Isa 57:1-2).

The book of Revelation, likewise speaks about the death of the righteous as a blessing:

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Re 14:13).

But *finally*, the death of the righteous is a means by which we may enjoy further and fuller fellowship with Christ our Lord. What a glorious experience that will be! It is no wonder the apostle Paul exclaims:

“For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Php 1:23).

Thank God for the experience of death for the righteous. It is painful when we have to go through it. It is painful when a loved one departs from us. But we must never forget what death is for those who belong to Christ. Therefore we must say with David:

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Ps 23:4). **W**

WLC 86. What is the communion in glory with Christ,
which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death?

A. The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness,¹ and received into the highest heavens,² where they behold the face of God in light and glory,³ waiting for the full redemption of their bodies,⁴ which even in death continue united to Christ,⁵ and rest in their graves as in their beds,⁶ till at the last day they be again united to their souls.⁷ Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, till the resurrection and judgment of the great day.⁸

Proofs

¹Heb 12:23; ²2 Cor 5:1, 6, 8; Phil 1:23; cf. Acts 3:21; Eph 4:10; ³1 Jn 3:2; 1 Cor 13:12; ⁴Rom 8:23; Ps 16:9;
⁵1 Thes 4:14; ⁶Isa 57:2; ⁷Job 19:26–27; ⁸Lk 16:23–24; Acts 1:25; Jude 6–7

Comments

In *WLC* 82, that the communion in glory which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is (1) in this life, (2) immediately after death, and (3) at the Last Day. Our present study deals with the second point.

Death for the righteous is, as we saw in the previous study, a means by which we may enjoy further and fuller fellowship with Christ our Lord. This is so because three things happen immediately upon our death.

Firstly, our souls are made perfect in holiness (see Heb 12:23). That is to say, the corruption of our nature is removed, and we are made not only sinless, but also unable to sin. In this life we are just by imputation of the righteousness of Christ; in the life to come (beginning with death) we are made just by impartation of righteousness of Christ.

Secondly, we are received into the highest heavens. This is clearly taught by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, where he confidently asserts that “whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord” (v. 6) and “to be absent from the body” is “to be present with the Lord” (v. 8). The doctrine of ‘soul sleep’ such as taught by the Seventh Day Adventist Church is no doubt wrong, for Paul speaks about a conscious presence with the Lord (cf. Lk 16:19–31; Lk 23:39–43). Neither is the Romish doctrine of Purgatory biblical. No, God’s Word is emphatic that believers upon their death enter the highest heavens where we shall consciously enjoy the love of God to an extent that we are presently not capable of experiencing.

Thirdly, having been received into the highest heavens, we shall enjoy the privilege of beholding the face of God in light and glory. This does not mean that we shall see God with our natural eyes, for we will first enter heaven in our soul apart from our bodies. But we can have no doubt that we will see God in Christ when we enter into the highest heavens (cf. 1 Jn 3:2; Jn 14:9).

But this state of glorious communion with God is still not the final and fullest enjoyment of Him that we are capable of and destined to enjoy. For there will be a full redemption of our bodies. For though our soul enters the highest heavens, our body will remain yet in the present physical world. That body, being a part of us, is also united with Christ—for He laid down His life to redeem us, not just to redeem our soul. God according to His wisdom allows the body to die and to decay for a time. But one day, the same body will be raised, and we shall then enjoy God in Christ in body and soul forever and ever. The patriarch Job expressed this truth graphically when he says:

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me” (Job 19:25–27).

In a drastic contrast to this great privilege that the righteous will experience, the souls of the wicked are cast into hell immediately upon death. There they will “remain in torments and utter darkness” until the great day of resurrection and judgement. At that Last Day, when the righteous will be resurrected with a body adapted to enjoyment in heaven, the wicked will also be raised, but with a body of perpetual corruption that is adapted for suffering in hell. **W**

WLC 87. What are we to believe concerning the resurrection?

A. We are to believe, that at the last day there shall be a general resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust:¹ when they that are then found alive shall in a moment be changed; and the self-same bodies of the dead which were laid in the grave, being then again united to their souls for ever, shall be raised up by the power of Christ.² The bodies of the just, by the Spirit of Christ, and by virtue of His resurrection as their head, shall be raised in power, spiritual, incorruptible, and made like to His glorious body;³ and the bodies of the wicked shall be raised up in dishonour by Him, as an offended judge.⁴

Proofs

¹Acts 24:15; ²1 Cor 15:51–53; 1 Th 4:15–17; Jn 5:28–29; ³1 Cor 15:21–23, 42–44; Phil 3:21; ⁴Jn 5:27–29; Mt 25:33

Comments

We saw that the communion in glory, which members of the invisible church have with Christ, is (1) in this life, (2) immediately after death, and (3) at the Last Day (*WLC* 82). The present question deals with the third point. It relates to what we will experience at the Last Day. The Last Day is the last of the last days, which is the period between the birth of Christ and the second coming of Christ. The Last Day is the Day when Christ will return.

In that day, there will be a general resurrection. We call it a general resurrection because everyone, whether just or unjust, will be resurrected (Acts 2:24)!

There are many today who believe that the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust will be separated by a thousand years. They base their conclusion on a literal reading of Revelation 20, from which they surmise that the just will be raised at the Second Coming, but the unjust will be raised at the end of a thousand years known as the Millennium. But this interpretation fails to consider that : (1) the book of Revelation is a symbolic book; and (2) Nowhere else in the New Testament are we given the impression that there will be two separate resurrections. It is far more likely that the first resurrection in Revelation 20:4 refers to regeneration or spiritual resurrection rather than bodily resurrection (cf. Jn 5:24; Eph 2:5-6; Col 2:12-13; 1 Jn 3:14, esp. compare Jn 5:24-25 with Jn 5:26-29).

In any case, our catechism holds that there is only one general resurrection; it will occur at the Last Day.

On that day, all who are already dead would be raised to life, that is, their bodies will be re-constituted and their souls united to their bodies again. But there will be a major difference between the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust.

The just (i.e. those justified in Christ), would be raised by the power of Christ. By virtue of the fact that they are united to Christ,—who was himself raised as the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18),—they “shall be raised in power, spiritual, incorruptible, and made like to His glorious body” (1 Cor 15:21-23, 42-44). This body is adapted to a heavenly existence and would enable us to enjoy God and heaven more fully than when we were without the body in heaven.

The unjust (i.e. the reprobate), on the other hand would be raised “in dishonour by [Christ], as an offended judge.” The Scripture does not tell us what this body will be like, but we can be quite sure that it would be inglorious and adapted to feel pain and perpetual corruption.

Such will be the general resurrection of the just and the unjust.

But at that Last Day, there will be some, both just and unjust, who would still be alive on earth. These will have their bodies transformed according to whether they are just or unjust without their having to taste death. **W**

WLC 88. What shall immediately follow after the resurrection?

A. Immediately after the resurrection shall follow the general and final judgment of angels and men;¹ the day and hour whereof no man knoweth, that all may watch and pray, and be ever ready for the coming of the Lord.²

Proofs

¹2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6–7, 14–15; Mt 25:46; ²Mt 24:36, 42, 44; Lk 21:35–36

Comments

We saw in our previous question that there will be a general resurrection of both the just and unjust. What happens after that?

The Scripture teaches us, and our present question affirms, that immediately after that will be a general and final judgement.

Some, namely the premillennialists, believe that as there will be two resurrections separated by a thousand years, so there will be two judgements separated by a thousand years. The first judgement, they say, is the Bema Seat Judgement, which is a judgement of reward for believers; whereas the second judgement is the Great White Throne Judgement, which is a judgement about whether one goes to heaven or hell. This separation not only produces some rather difficult problems (such as what happens to converts during the supposed Millennium?), but also fails to do justice to the teachings of Scripture. For example, the Lord himself says:

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (Jn 5:28-29).

Notice firstly, that the Lord speaks of the resurrection occurring at ‘the hour’, which suggests that the righteous and the wicked will be raised at the same time. Notice secondly, that the wicked will be raised “unto the resurrection of damnation.” The word ‘damnation’ may equally be translated as ‘judgment’, for it is the same word (*krivsi*). Our translators use the word ‘damnation’ to suggest that the wicked will be condemned through judgement. This passage therefore suggests that not only would the just and unjust be raised at the same occasion, but that the judgement will follow immediately after the resurrection.

This is also confirmed by our Lord’s parable of the Sheep and Goat, which pictures a day at which the people of all nations shall be gathered before the Lord to be judged (Mt 25:31-32). When the judgement is completed, “[the wicked] shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Mt 25:46).

The Day of Judgment will therefore be a day of universal judgement. Indeed, our catechism speaks also of the judgement of angles in that day. This is taught in Jude 6-7. In that day all injustices will be righted, and all sins left unpunished will be punished while all rewards there is to be awarded would be awarded. It will be a day of finality that would usher in an eternity of perfect justice.

When will that day come? No one knows. God has chosen not to reveal when that day will be to His creatures. “Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Mt 24:36) says our Lord.

This clearly teaches us that we should not try to speculate when the Lord is coming back. We must not try to calculate from the Scriptures, for it is impossible; neither should we look at the signs of time nor suggest that the Lord will return during our lifetime. We really do not know. The Lord suggests that He will return anytime. We must take His word seriously, but we must never assign a probability to whether He will come in this generation or in the next generation. It is enough that we should be prepared always to meet Him whether He comes back in our lifetime, or we go to Him when our present life ends.

Thus the Lord teaches us:

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Mt 24:42; cf. Mk 13:33, 35, 37; Lk 21:36).

If there is one word that we must bear in mind in view of the returning King, it is “Watch!” (see also Mk 13:37). No, we are not to watch for the signs. We are rather to watch ourselves! We are to be prepared to meet the Lord! *W*

WLC 89. What shall be done to the wicked at the day of judgment?

A. At the day of judgment, the wicked shall be set on Christ's left hand,¹ and, upon clear evidence, and full conviction of their own consciences,² shall have the fearful but just sentence of condemnation pronounced against them;³ and thereupon shall be cast out from the favourable presence of God, and the glorious fellowship with Christ, His saints, and all His holy angels, into hell, to be punished with unspeakable torments, both of body and soul, with the devil and His angels for ever.⁴

Proofs

¹Mt 25:33; ²Rom 2:15–16; ³Mt 25:41–43; ⁴Lk 16:26; 2 Th 1:8–9

Comments

At the Last Day of this present age, the Lord Jesus Christ will return as King and Judge over the world. In that day, there will be a general resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. This would be followed immediately by a general judgment.

Our present question deals with the judgment and condemnation of the wicked while the next question will be about the judgment and vindication of the righteous.

Although it is impossible for us to fully comprehend exactly what will take place at the judgment, we have sufficient information in the Scripture for us to build a very consistent picture of what would happen.

In the first place, in the Lord's Parable of the Sheep and Goat (Mt 25:31–46), we are told that the wicked (or goats) will be separated from believers (or sheep). The wicked will stand on the left hand while the righteous (namely all who are justified in Christ) will be on the right.

The wicked will then have their judgment read out. The picture painted in the parable is that of the wicked being judged as a whole, but we can be sure that there is no injustice or unfairness to anyone. Indeed, the book of Revelation tells us that when the books are opened, "every man" would be judged "according to their works" (Rev 20:12). The wicked who know God's written Law (professing believers) will be judged according to His written Law; while those who do not know the written Law will be judged according to the requirements of the Law written in their hearts (Rom 2:12–14). In this way, each of the wicked will be shown 'clear evidence' of their sins against God and brought to 'full conviction of their own consciences' (cf. Rom 2:15–16). No one will in that day protest that they have been unfairly treated. All will confess that Christ the Judge is perfectly just, seeing nothing is hid from Him.

When this is done, a sentence of condemnation will be pronounced against them. They will be condemned to "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41). This statement of our Lord teaches us that the punishment for the wicked will be for all eternity.

There are many however who would object to this doctrine of eternal punishment for the wicked. They say it is contrary to the goodness of God and the spirit of Christ to teach such a doctrine.

So some teach that all man will eventually be saved and enjoy eternal life with God; while others teach that the wicked will only suffer in hell for a while, and then will be completely annihilated so that they cease conscious existence altogether.

But these heresies cannot hold in the face of divine revelation.

- In the first place, God's goodness include His perfect justice. If He were not to deal justly with the wicked but overlook their sins, despite their rebellion against Him, He would not be good. In any case, the goodness of God must never be defined by human feelings but by the Scriptures.
- In the second place, our Lord Jesus Himself more than anyone else in the canonical history, warned against the danger of falling into everlasting hell. It is He who teaches us that the wicked will be condemned to "outer darkness" (Mt 8:12; Mt 22:13; Mt 25:30); where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 8:12; Mt 22:13; Mt 24:51; Mt 25:30; Lk 13:28) where "the worm dieth not" (Mk 9:44, 46, 48); and "the fire is not quenched" (Mk 9:44, 46, 48; cf. Mk 9:43; Mt 3:12; Lk 3:17). If anything is against the spirit of Christ, it is to downplay the horror and awesomeness of hell.
- In the third place, against those who teach annihilation, the Scripture asserts that as the righteous shall go "into life eternal," the wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Mt 25:46). The words 'eternal' and 'everlasting' are the same in the Greek (*aijwvniō*). If the Lord does not mean to teach punishment that will never cease, He would also be teaching that the righteous would not remain in heaven forever.

The doctrine of everlasting punishment is a Biblical one. It may not be a very comforting doctrine for believers, but it is certainly one of the doctrines by which the Lord moves us to flee from sin and to find rest in Him. Johannes H. Vos, puts it most beautifully in his commentary on this question:

[The fear of hell] is not the highest motive [for believing on Christ Jesus as our Saviour], for we are taught in 1 John 4:18 that the mature Christian, which is "made perfect in love," is beyond the need of being influenced by the motive of fear. But certainly Jesus inculcated the fear of hell (Mt 10:28; Lk 12:5). We may conclude, therefore, that although it is true that "perfect love casteth out fear," yet those who have not reached that high point of Christian experience, and have not yet attained full assurance or certainty of their own salvation, ought to be influenced by the lower motive of fear of eternal ruin, and "flee from the wrath to come" by repenting of sin, believing on Christ for salvation, and diligently using the means of grace (the Word, the sacraments, and prayer). **W**

WLC 90. What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgment?

A. At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds,¹ shall be set on His right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted,² shall join with Him in the judging of reprobate angels and men,³ and shall be received into heaven,⁴ where they shall be fully and forever freed from all sin and misery;⁵ filled with inconceivable joys,⁶ made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels,⁷ but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity.⁸ And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the resurrection and day of judgment.

Proofs

¹1 Th 4:17; ²Mt 25:33; 10:32; ³1 Cor 6:2–3; ⁴Mt 25:34, 46; ⁵Eph 5:27; Rev 14:13; ⁶Ps 16:11;
⁷Heb 12:22–23; ⁸1 Jn 3:2; 1 Cor 13:12; 1 Th 4:17–18.

Comments

We have seen how the Day of Judgment coincides with the Last Day of this present age and order. From that day onwards, the creation will be completely renovated and believers will find themselves interacting with it in ways that have not been possible before because of the dominion of natural laws over them.

One of the first indications that this would happen is that the righteous will be caught up (contrary to the laws of gravity) unto Christ in the clouds. The apostle Paul describes this event thus:

“¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ¹⁷ Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Th 4:16–17).

Dispensational Premillennialists claim that what the apostle Paul is here describing is a secret rapture (the shout of the archangel and the trump of God notwithstanding). They assert that verse 17 shows that the saints caught up will remain in heaven until the end of the so-called ‘Seven Years of Tribulation.’ But this would be to read too much into the passage, for word rendered ‘meet’ (Grk. *ajpavnthsi*”) occurs only four times and describes a going out to meet someone important to accompany him for the rest of his journey to a destination (see Mt 25:1, 6; Acts 28:15–16). The saints will be caught up to meet the Lord and will be part of the heavenly host that will accompany Him on His descent to the earth (see Rev 19:14; Jude 14–15).

This event, known as the *parousia*, will be followed by the general judgment; at which time one of the first acts of Christ our Lord would be to set His saints on His right hand and openly acknowledge and acquit them of their sins. They would be acquitted on the basis of what Christ has done for them.

These will then join the Lord in judging the reprobate angels and men. This does not mean that they will take part in the judicial process or that they will mete out sentences. Rather, it means that they will sit with Him and declare their assent as Christ, the Judge, pronounces His sentence on the reprobate and the wicked angels. This dramatic scene would be a very apposite conclusion to the era of redemption; for all through redemptive history, God’s people has been troubled, oppressed, persecuted, ridiculed by Satan and his cohorts as well as the reprobate. It is very fitting, therefore, that having been vindicated by the Lord they love; they sit with Him and join Him as He judges His and their enemies.

When that is done, they shall be received into heaven “where they shall be fully and forever freed from all sin and misery.” They would have already been made perfect in holiness when they were raised to meet the Lord (1 Cor 15:52; Eph 5:27), but now they will be completely free from all interaction and influence of sin and misery (Rev 14:13; 21:8, 27).

The saints now perfected both in body and soul will experience joy inexpressible. They would not only be perfectly holy and happy, but they will enjoy the fellowship of saints and angels who are also perfectly holy and happy (cf. Heb 12:22–23). And not only so, but they will enjoy the immediate vision of the Triune God. This simply means that we shall ‘see’ God without the need of secondary means—such as the written word, or providence or nature. This does not, of course, mean that God has a bodily form that we can see. God is a Spirit. Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-Man, God cannot be seen through bodily eyes. But we shall ‘see’ God not only with our bodily eyes (which would no doubt see Christ—Job 19:25–26). We shall ‘see’ Him in a way that we cannot comprehend today.

And then for all eternity, they shall bear fruit unto God by enjoying and glorifying Him forever and ever. Heaven will not be a place of idleness, but a place of joyful worship, fellowship and learning. This is the rest of the saints. This is what the saints are longing for. We are not hoping for a time of inactivity. That would not be true rest. True rest is found in joyful activity. Today, activity tires us out because sin has brought misery into the world. But in eternity in heaven, the activities centred upon God will be our chief delight. We shall have no desire nor need to ‘recuperate’ or ‘recharge’ for we will not need to. “There will be no night there” (Rev 21:25). *W*

WLC 91. What is the duty which God requireth of man?

A. The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to His revealed will.¹

Proofs

¹Rom 12:1–2; Mic 6:8; 1 Sam 15:22.

Comments

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* has two main divisions (apart from the prologue, which comprises the first 5 questions). The first division, from question 6 to 90, deals with what man is to believe concerning God. In this division we saw: Who God is (*WLC* 6-11); God's decrees and the execution of His decrees (*WLC* 12-20); The Covenant of Works and the Fall of man (*WLC* 21-29); The Covenant of Grace and the works of Christ (*WLC* 30-57); The work of the Holy Spirit in salvation (*WLC* 58-68); The benefits of salvation in this life (*WLC* 69-83); and The benefits of salvation after this life (*WLC* 84-90).

WLC 91 marks the beginning of the second division which as a whole deals with what duty God requires of man. In this division, we will see: An exposition of the Moral Law of God (*WLC* 91-148); A reminder of the penalty of the Law and the impossibility of perfect obedience to it (*WLC* 149-152); and An explanation of what is required of all who are saved, or an exposition of the means of grace (*WLC* 153-196).

This second division, in other words, is about how Christians, and indeed, all men, ought to live in this world. We include 'all men' because all men are moral creatures of God, created in His image, and therefore have the responsibility to live in the way that He, as Creator, requires. Christians, of all men in the world, are given the privilege of knowing God and what He requires of us, as well as enabled to live in a way that pleases God. Christians also have higher motivation to live for God, for He has redeemed us from sin and death. But that does not, in any way, diminish the responsibility of non-Christians in the world to love and serve God.

There will be many who will question this duty. Atheists and other secular humanists will assert that the highest duty of man is the betterment of humankind. But while this is, no doubt, a noble aim, it is in fact a subtle form of idolatry. No, we are not saying that it is idolatry to seek the good of mankind, but it is idolatry if the betterment of mankind is sought without any regards to the glory of God! But is not seeking the good of society the best way of bringing glory to God? Well, not necessarily so, for in the first place anything that is done without the primary aim of honouring God is dishonourable to our Creator; and secondly, we cannot glorify God except in the way that He has appointed us in His revealed will.

What is the revealed will of God? It is, today, equivalent to the instructions in the written Word of God, the Bible. Before the New Testament canon was completed, there were times when God revealed His will through prophetic and extraordinary revelation. But today, we must not seek God's will anywhere but from the Bible. The apostle Paul says:

“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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

The scripture provides us with sufficient instruction on how to serve and love God. And our catechism in the following questions will provide us with an excellent summary covering almost every single aspect of our Christian life?

What about the areas not covered in the Word of God? How do we know the will of God in these areas? Well, there are really very few areas in our lives for which the Scriptures does not give instructions or principles. This will become quite clear as we study the exposition of the Ten Commandments in the questions following.

But one thing should be borne in mind: Knowing God's will is not an esoteric exercise as many modern Christians make it to be. God's will may be broadly categorised into two types: His revealed will and His secret will. The secret will of God refers to God's decree. The revealed will of God refers to what He has given us in His Word. Moses teaches us under divine inspiration:

“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut 29:29).

In other words, we may not seek to please God on the basis of His secret will. We should rather live solely on the basis of God's revealed will, which is also the duty God requires of us.

How then shall we do if there is a decision we have to make for which we are not well aware of any direct instructions or principles from the Word of God? Well, we may, indeed, ask the Lord for guidance by prayer. But unless we are familiar with the very Word of God, we must never assume that so long as we have peace in the heart, it must be the will of God. No, for that peace may be a false peace based on ignorance. We should rather seek to know God's will through the Word of God. This may be obtained by reading the Scriptures; by asking a minister or elder or any brethren who are familiar with the Word; or by reading a reliable book on the subject.

The sad fact is that this can often be a frustrating and long-drawn process so that we are often tempted to make a quick decision without any proper biblical basis.

How to prevent such situations from occurring? One of the best ways is to acquaint ourselves thoroughly with the Word. And what better way is there to do so than to study the second section of our catechism? **W**

WLC 92. What did God at first reveal unto man as the rule of his obedience?

A. The rule of obedience revealed to Adam in the estate of innocence, and to all mankind in him, besides a special command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was the moral law.¹

Proofs

¹Gen 1:26–27; Rom 2:14–15; 10:5; Gen 2:17

Comments

Adam, our first father, was created in an ‘estate of innocence’ (c.f. *WLC* 17, 20). In this state, Adam knew neither sin nor evil. His heart was righteous and he was inclined to righteousness, though it was possible for him to fall from this original condition.

It was in this estate that God as Creator revealed to Adam a rule of obedience unto Him. This rule of obedience is made known to us in two parts, viz., the Moral Law and a special command.

The special command was revealed to Adam verbally. It was a command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 1:26-27). This command is often spoken of as forming the condition for the covenant of works. However, it must be noted that Adam was not only obliged not to eat of the forbidden fruit. The command was but a summary and representative of Adam’s moral obligations toward God. As a rational creature of God, he was duty bound to love God and to serve him. The command not to eat of the forbidden fruit embodies this duty in a distinct and concrete manner and therefore provides, as it were, a test of whether Adam would love the Lord with his whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

The Moral Law of God, on the other hand, is God’s natural revelation to man on how exactly he is to love and serve Him in whether or not any other specific command is given. The Moral Law as we shall see, would be epitomised in the Ten Commandments and revealed verbally at Mount Sinai. But even before that time, it was already given. It was given as part of man’s moral nature, man having been created in the image of God. This is what the apostle Paul is referring to when he says that the works (or requirements) of the law are written in the hearts of all men including those who have never heard of the law (Rom 2:14-15).

Indeed, if man had not fallen into sin, he would have understood God’s Moral Law clearly and obeyed it wholeheartedly. That is to say: if man had not fallen into sin, the Moral Law would not need to be published verbally. But the Fall darkened the understanding of man so that his knowledge and appreciation of the Moral Law became distorted and indistinct.

It was for this reason that a special revelation of the Law became necessary. For apart from the light of the Scriptures, fallen man will inevitably “[changed] the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Rom 1:25).

This fact is easily verified by the fact that there are so many religions in the world. Man created in the image of God has the works of God’s moral law written in his nature; and therefore man unlike animals has a sense of divinity and the knowledge of the existence of God. He knows that he must serve God. If he does not, His conscience afflicts him.

However sin has darkened the fallen man’s mind so that He does not recognise nor acknowledge the Living and True God. Instead, to pacify his conscience, he makes idols,—whether of wood and stone or of his imagination. He bows down to the idols and worships them, thinking that he has observed the moral law of God. **W**

WLC 93. What is the moral law?

A. The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding everyone to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body,¹ and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man:² promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.³

Proofs

¹Dt 5:1–3, 31, 33; Lk 10:26–27; Gal 3:10; 1 Th 5:23; ²Lk 1:75; Acts 24:16; ³Rom 10:5; Gal 3:10, 12

Comments

We saw in our previous study that the Moral Law was revealed unto Adam in his state of innocence, as a rule of obedience. We saw how the Moral Law taught Adam how he should serve and love God. We have, however, not defined what is the Moral Law.

The Moral Law is, *firstly*, the “declaration of the will of God to mankind.” The Scriptures speak of God’s will in two ways. The first refers to His eternal decrees (cf. Eph 1:11; Isa 46:9-10), which is not revealed to men except when it is brought to pass through God’s work of providence. The second refers to God’s standard and expectation for His rational creatures in terms of their behaviour. The Moral Law is essentially an expression of this standard and expectation.

Secondly, the Moral Law directs and binds everyone to a personal, perfect and perpetual conformity and obedience to itself. The Moral Law, in other words, is an absolute standard of morality for mankind. It requires personal conformity and obedience of all men. No man is excepted nor can anyone excuse himself. It is a universal rule. It also requires perfect conformity and obedience. Its standard does not change to suit circumstances nor does it have respect of persons. And neither can it be fulfilled in such a way that will release anyone from obligations to it. That is, it is a standard that requires perpetual conformity and obedience.

Thirdly, the Moral Law concerns the “frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body.” It does not only concern the soul; nor does it only concern the outward man. It concerns the whole man. And it addresses not only the duties of man in terms of thoughts, words and deeds, but also the frame and disposition of man. In other words, it provides us a standard not only to measure our deeds, but our attitudes and inclinations.

Fourthly, the Moral Law concerns the “performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man.” That is, it concerns the duties of man in terms of thoughts, words and deeds. But what is the difference between duties of holiness and duties of righteousness. In the strict sense of the word, duties of holiness are duties that pertain to formal acts of worship such as prayer, reading and hearing of the Word and the singing of Psalms. On the other hand, duties of righteousness refer to moral duties particularly in relation to man such as doing good towards one another and speaking the truth in love.

Fifthly, the Moral Law promises life upon the fulfilling, and threatens death upon the breach of it. The apostle Paul says “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them” (Rom 10:5; cf. Gal 3:10-12). That is to say such as would keep the Moral Law perfectly will be rewarded with life and conversely, such as would break the Moral Law will be punished with death. This was true with Adam before the Fall, and it remained true after the Fall. However, since the Fall, no mere man was able to keep the Moral Law perfectly, for all man descending from Adam by natural generation are born with Original Sin. Christ alone fulfilled the demands of the Law. He did so as the covenant head of the Church, so that the Church, being united to Him by election, regeneration and faith enjoy eternal life in Him. **W**

WLC 94. Is there any use of the moral law to man since the fall?

- A.** Although no man, since the fall, can attain to righteousness and life by the moral law;¹
yet there is great use thereof, as well common to all men, as peculiar either to
the unregenerate, or the regenerate.²

Proofs

¹Rom 8:3; Gal 2:16; ²1 Tim 1:8

Comments

Because our Confession and Catechism put a lot of emphasis on the Law of God, it is sometimes alleged that it encourages legalism or salvation works. This charge is, however, totally unfounded. Our subordinate standards emphasise the Law because the Scripture, our infallible Standard, emphasises it. However, as the Scripture declares, “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight” (Rom 3:20), so our subordinate standards affirm the same: “since the fall, can [no man] attain to righteousness and life by the moral law.” Our creed does not promote legalism as charged. But neither does it fall into antinomianism. The moral law is of great use in this life and must not be neglected.

In particular, the moral law has three areas of use:

- Firstly, it is of use to all men, regenerate or unregenerate, in order to reveal the “holy nature and will of God.” We may call this the *theological* use of the Law. This use will be explained in *WLC* 95.
- Secondly, the moral law is of peculiar use to the unregenerate to “drive them to Christ.” This will be explained in *WLC* 96 and may be called the *pedagogical* use of the Law.
- Thirdly, the law is of special use to the regenerate as “the rule of their obedience.” This may be known as the *moral* use of the law and will be explained in *WLC* 97. **W**

WLC 95. Of what use is the moral law to all men?

A. The moral law is of use to all men, to inform them of the holy nature and will of God,¹ and of their duty, binding them to walk accordingly;² to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives;³ to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery,⁴ and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ,⁵ and of the perfection of His obedience.⁶

Proofs

¹Lev 11:44–45; Lev 20:7–8; Rom 7:12; ²Mic 6:8; Jas 2:10–11; ³Ps 19:11–12; Rom 3:20; 7:7;
⁴Rom 3:9, 23; ⁵Gal 3:21–22; ⁶Rom 10:4

Comments

We saw in our previous question that the moral law has three main uses, viz.: (1) *Theological*, as it relates to all men; (2) *Pedagogical*, as it relates particularly to the unregenerate; and (3) *Moral* as it relates particularly to the regenerate.

The present question deals with the first use. We can understand this use under five parts.

- *First*, it is of use to all men,—regenerate or unregenerate,— “to inform them... of their duty, binding them to walk accordingly.” God is our Creator. We are His creatures made in His own image. He has, therefore, the sovereign right to bind us to obedience unto Himself. The moral law is basically a set of propositional imperatives which informs us of what God requires of us.
- As such, *secondly*, the moral law is also of use, indirectly, to all men “to inform them of the holy nature and will of God.” As such, it provides us with a portrait of God’s holy nature, for He says: “ye shall be holy for I am holy” (Lev 11:44), and in the same connection, informs us that to be holy we must keep His statutes and do them (cf. Lev 20:7).
- *Thirdly*, the moral law of use to all fallen men, “to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives.” Fallen man is a proud and self-righteous race. Were it not for the law, we would think ourselves to be right and pure, for we are blind to our own sins. The law, as such, serves as a mirror (cf. Jas 1:23) to show us how far short we fall of God’s standard (Rom 3:23) and how impossible it is for us to meet His standard. Regenerate persons are enabled to keep the Law, but because of the remnant of corruption remaining in them, they know that they are unable to keep it perfectly.
- As such, *fourthly*, the law is of use to all men “to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery, and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ.” Why did God purpose to use the Law to show us our sinfulness and helplessness? It is to show us our hopelessness without Christ. Were it not for the law, we know not that we fall short of God’s glory and we know not that we need Christ. The law is like an electrocardiograph. Without it, the man who is suffering from a heart disease is not convinced that he needs a surgeon and an operation on his heart.

But *finally*, the law shows all men, “the perfection of [Christ’s] obedience.” That is to say, the law not only humbles us, but also makes it clear that Christ alone kept it perfectly so that only in Him can we obtain righteousness and eternal life. The apostle Paul says: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom 10:3). The ‘end’ or purpose for which the law was ordained is ‘life’ (Rom 7:10). However, because we are fallen sinners, the law brings us death instead. But as we see from the Scriptures “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom 8:4) who are in Christ, we are made to see that Christ alone kept the law perfectly. All praise and honour to Him. *W*

WLC 96. What particular use is there of the moral law to unregenerate men?

A. The moral law is of use to unregenerate men, to awaken their consciences to flee from wrath to come,¹ and to drive them to Christ;² or, upon their continuance in the estate and way of sin, to leave them inexcusable,³ and under the curse thereof.⁴

Proofs

¹ 1 Tim 1:9–10; ² Gal 3:24; ³ Rom 1:20; cf. Rom 2:15; ⁴ Gal 3:10

Comments

The moral law has three main uses, viz.: (1) *Theological*, as it relates to all men; (2) *Pedagogical*, as it relates particularly to the unregenerate; and (3) *Moral* as it relates particularly to the regenerate. The present question deals with the second use, namely, to unregenerate men.

‘Unregenerate men’ or ‘natural men’, refer to persons who are not born again, and therefore living according to ‘the flesh’ (cf. Rom 8:8). Men are “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph 2:3) and “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). Christ’s elect are translated out of this state when they are born again, but the reprobate will remain in this state forever.

In this state, the conscience of man is still functioning, though it is so weak and defective that it may be said to be asleep. We say that it is functioning because firstly, the ‘work of the law’ is written in his heart (Rom 2:15); and secondly, he can still have pangs of conscience when he commits what society would regard as grosser sins, especially those for which they know might get them into trouble in this life (cf. Prov 28:1). However, we say his conscience is asleep because he would “hold [down] the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18b). In other words, because his mind is darkened and his conscience has not been quickened by the Spirit of God, he would easily suppress the truth and snuff out the voice of his conscience.

For this reason, though the natural man has sufficiently knowledge of God and His moral law to leave him without excuse (Rom 1:19-21), he will not go to God for salvation.

The first use of the law for the unregenerate is therefore to “to awaken their consciences to flee from wrath to come, and to drive them to Christ.” The apostle Paul says: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24).

Note that the law itself does not enable the unregenerate to please God. The apostle Paul says: “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). Neither does the law in any way enable the unregenerate to earn their own salvation, for as Paul also says: “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). While the Law may instruct the unregenerate on what God requires of them, they can never fulfil the law, for their heart is corrupt; and therefore all that they do are done with sinful motives and therefore sinful in God’s sight.

Note, moreover, that the law does not by itself drive the unregenerate to Christ. Many hear the preaching of the law but remain complacent and harden. However, when the knowledge of the moral law is accompanied by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, the unregenerate is made to see how far short they fall of the glory God and to fear the wrath of God against them. When this happens, then with the preaching of the Gospel, they are driven to Christ for salvation (cf. Acts 16:14).

From this we see that Gospel preaching must go hand in hand with the preaching of the Law. Unless the unregenerate is made to see how he has transgressed against God, he would not understand his need for salvation and the Gospel would be meaningless to him.

But what about the case of the reprobate? These may obtain a fuller knowledge of the Law through hearing or reading of it. But without the supernatural work of the Spirit in their heart, their conviction will be shallow and transient so that they do not flee to Christ for salvation. How then would the moral law be of use to them? The answer is not so much that it would make them better citizens on earth, though it sometimes happen. The answer is rather that they are left inexcusable and under the curse of the Law. The apostle Paul puts it this way: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10).

The preaching of the Law, like the preaching of the Gospel, is like a double-edged sword. It will always accomplish its purpose. For the elect it cuts from sin, for the reprobate, it cuts from Christ. It confirms for the elect his helplessness to save himself that he may flee to Christ; it confirms for the reprobate his inexcusableness for not fleeing to Christ. *W*

A. Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works,¹ so as thereby they are neither justified² nor condemned;³ yet, besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to show them how much they are bound to Christ for His fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good;⁴ and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness,⁵ and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience.⁶

Proofs

¹Rom 6:14; 7:4, 6; Gal 4:4-5; ²Rom 3:20; ³Gal 5:23; Rom 8:1; ⁴Rom 7:24-25; Gal 3:13-14; Rom 8:3-4;
⁵Lk 1:68-69, 74-75; Col 1:12-14; ⁶Rom 7:22; 12:2; Tit 2:11-14

Comments

The moral law has three main uses, viz.: (1) *Theological*, as it relates to all men; (2) *Pedagogical*, as it relates particularly to the unregenerate; and (3) *Moral* as it relates particularly to the regenerate. The present question deals with the third use, namely, to the regenerate.

The 'regenerate' are those who have been 'born again' (Jn 3:3), spiritually quickened (Eph 2:1) or 'made alive' (1 Cor 15:22). These believe in Christ and therefore have been "delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works." That is to say, they cannot obtain life or be right with God by keeping the law (which is legalism); nor will they be condemned for failing to keep them. Of course, such as are regenerate will seek to keep the law because they have a new nature. Such as do not find it in themselves to want to keep the law prove themselves to be unregenerate (by their antinomianism). But the point is: though the regenerate seek to keep the law, they will fail, but they will not be condemned for their failures because Christ has already paid for their sin.

Nevertheless, the law remains useful to the regenerate. We have seen how it is useful to all men, regenerate and unregenerate, in 5 ways, viz. (1) To inform about what duty God requires of man; (2) To inform about the holy nature and will of God; (3) To convict sin; (4) To humble man that he may see his need of Christ; and (5) To show the perfect obedience of Christ (see WLC 95). But it is also especially useful to the regenerate in 3 ways.

First, it is of use to "show them how much they are bound to Christ for His fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good." While the unregenerate man imagines that he is good enough and worthy of life (Rom 7:7), the regenerate has his eyes opened. He realises that he cannot keep the law perfectly no matter how he tries. Therefore the law slays him (Rom 7:11). And having a renewed conscience, he would have been crushed by the law, were it not for the knowledge that Christ has endured the curse of the law and fulfilled it on his behalf. This is what the apostle Paul is expressing when he says:

“²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this 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” (Rom 7:24-25).

Secondly, and consequently, it is of use to the regenerate "to provoke them to more thankfulness." It was this gratitude of deliverance from the scourge of the law, which evoked the cry of Paul: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:25). The more a Christian grows in grace, the more he sees his sinfulness and realises his inability to please God. The more he sees his wretchedness, the more he is filled with appreciation and thankfulness to Christ for suffering on his behalf.

Finally, the law is of use to the regenerate "to provoke" the regenerate "to express [their gratitude to the Lord] in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience." Gratitude unto the Lord must be expressed not only in prayer and praise. It must be expressed by grateful and loving obedience to God's law. This is what the apostle Paul is teaching us when he says:

“¹¹ For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹² Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³ Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit 2:11-14).

There are some who teach that Christians are under grace and not under the law, and therefore, the law of God cannot be a 'rule of obedience.' But this is to misunderstand the Word of God. The regenerate is indeed not under the law as a covenant of works (see above), but this in no way implies that the law no longer applies to them as a rule and standard for their life. The apostle John teaches that all men, including the regenerate will sin (1 Jn 1:8) and he also teaches us that sin is lawlessness (1 Jn 3:4). Therefore when the regenerate fails to conform to the law or transgresses the law, he sins against God. The regenerate will hate sin for God is holy. He will therefore out of love and gratitude to God strive to obey the law of God for fear of displeasing God. No, he does not fear God's punishment for he knows that God will not punish him for Christ has been punished for him. Rather, he fears displeasing God because of his reverence and love for God. **W**

WLC 98. Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?

A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments, which were delivered by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai, and written by Him in two tables of stone;¹ and are recorded in the twentieth chapter of Exodus. The four first commandments containing our duty to God, and the other six our duty to man.²

Proofs

¹Deut 10:4; Ex 34:1–4; ²Mt 22:37–40

Comments

We saw in *WLC 93*, that “the moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind.” No where in the Scriptures does the word ‘moral law’ appear. But a study of the Scripture, but of the Old and New Testaments, lead us to the special character of the set of laws recorded in Exodus 20:1-17 and repeated with slight modifications in Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

This set of law is known as “the words of the covenant, the ten commandments” (Ex 34:28). We believe this is a summary of the Moral Law.

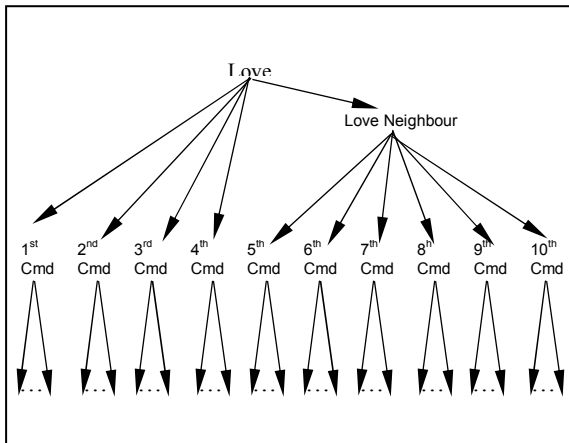
This set of commandments was “delivered by the by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai” (cf. Ex 20:1, 19) in the midst of “thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking” (Ex 20:18). All the other laws of God were given by God’s inspiration to Moses and the prophets, but the Ten Commandments alone were spoken by audibly in the hearing of the people. And not only so: All the other laws of God were inscribed using the pens of men, but the Ten Commandments were personally inscribed by God on tables of stone—twice (Ex 34:1). Also, the Ten Commandments alone, of all the laws of God, were placed in the Ark of the Covenant (1Kgs 8:9).

Now, when we examine the Ten Commandments, we see that all other laws in the Scripture can be reduced to one or more of the Ten Commandments. And moreover, when the Lord Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment in the Law, He answered:

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”³⁸ This is the first and great commandment.³⁹ And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mt 22:37-40).

Our Lord was probably paraphrasing Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. But what does he mean by “on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”?

When we examine the content of the Ten Commandment, we discover what he means, for the Ten Commandments can be divided into two sets of commandments, “the four first commandments containing our duty to God, and the other six our duty to man.”



When our Lord speaks of loving God with all our heart, soul and mind, he is no doubt reducing the whole moral law into one summary commandment. This commandment may be immediately expanded into the first four commandments. When our Lord speaks of our duty to love our neighbours as ourselves, he is no doubt summarising the last six commandments. The last six commandments, we should realise, are subservient to the first four commandments, for the command to love our neighbours can be reduce to a command to love God. Indeed, ultimately our duty to love our neighbours is our duty towards God. That is to say, “our moral responsibility to God is the basis of our duties towards our fellow man” (Vos). This is why our Lord teaches us that the “first and great commandment” is to love God, and that while the command to love our neighbour is “like unto it,” it is second unto the command to love God.

This of course, does not mean that any of the commandments are unimportant. James teaches us that if we break the least of the commandments, we break the whole law (Jas 2:10-11). This if we covet our neighbours property, we do not love God as we should. Our neighbour’s property has becomes as a god unto us, and we become guilty of idolatry which is a breaking of the first commandment (Col 3:5). **W**

WLC 99. What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the Ten Commandments?

A. For the right understanding of the Ten Commandments, these rules are to be observed: (1) That the law is perfect, and bindeth everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience for ever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.¹ (2) That it is spiritual, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures.² (3) That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments.³ (4) That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden;⁴ and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded;⁵ so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included;⁶ and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.⁷ (5). That what God forbids, is at no time to be done;⁸ what He commands, is always our duty;⁹ and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.¹⁰ (6). That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto.¹¹ (7). That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.¹² (8). That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them;¹³ and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them.¹⁴

Proofs

¹Ps 19:7; Jas 2:10; Mt 5:21–22; ²Rom 7:14; Deut 6:5; cf. Mt 22:37–39; 5:21–22, 27–28, 33–34, 37–39, 43–44; ³Col 3:5; Amos 8:5; Prov 1:19; 1 Tim 6:10; ⁴Isa 58:13; Deut 6:13; cf. Mt 4:9–10; 15:4–6; ⁵Mt 5:21–24; Eph 4:28; ⁶Ex 20:12; Prov 30:17; ⁷Jer 18:7–8; Ex 20:7; cf. Ps 15:1, 4–5; 24:4–5; ⁸Job 13:7–8; Rom 3:8; Job 36:21; Heb 11:25; ⁹Deut 4:8–9; ¹⁰Mt 12:7; ¹¹Mt 5:21–22, 27–28; 15:4–6; Heb 10:24–25; 1 Th 5:22; Jude 23; Gal 5:26; Col 3:21; ¹²Ex 20:10; Lev 19:17; Gen 18:19; Josh 24:15; Deut 6:6–7; ¹³2 Cor 1:24; ¹⁴1 Tim 5:22; Eph 5:11.

Comments

We are entering into an exposition of the Ten Commandments that is perhaps the most thorough, accurate, biblical and practical to be found in any creedal statement in the Christian Church since the days of the apostles. The present question sets forth the principles on which the exposition is founded, while at the same time instructing us how we should view the Ten Commandments.

There are, we are taught, eight rules we must observe for the right understanding of the Ten Commandments. Since the eight rules are given so succinctly, there is no need for a detailed explanation. We shall, as such, summarise and simplify them, though the summary may not in fact be more useful than the actual statements of our catechism.

First, the Ten Commandments must be viewed as perfect and requiring perfect, uncompromised obedience by all men without exception.

Secondly, the Ten Commandments, unlike civil codes, concerns not only outward behaviour, but the whole man including the understanding, the will and the affection. As such, it rules over not only our deeds, but our gestures, words, and thoughts.

Thirdly, the commandments in it must not be viewed as separate and distinct from each other. Thus covetousness is also idolatry, and therefore a breaking of the 19th Commandment, and also of the 1st Commandment (Col 3:5). Likewise failing to worship God on the Sabbath is a breaking of the 4th Commandment as well as the 8th Commandment.

Fourthly, when a command enjoins a duty, the contrary omission is forbidden; and when a command forbids an omission, the contrary duty is commanded. Thus, the 6th commandment not only forbids murder, but enjoins preservation of life; and likewise the 5th commandment not only enjoins honouring of one's parents, but forbid any dishonouring of them. In like-manner where "a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included" and vice versa. Thus, the promise of long life to encourage to the 5th Commandment is a warning that those who refuse to keep this commandment may face premature death.

Fifthly, while it is sin to do anything that is forbidden at anytime, it is not necessarily sin when a duty is not done at a particular moment. It is always our duty to honour our parents, but it is no sin if I am not thinking of my parents or doing anything to honour them while say, I am listening to a sermon.

Sixthly, the commandments must be viewed as apodictic rather than casuistic. That is to say, they must be interpreted as broadly as possible. Thus the 5th commandment is not only about honouring parents, but about honouring all authorities over us; as well as about how to relate to our subordinates.

Seventhly, we have a duty to ensure that those within our sphere of influence keep the commandments too. Thus, the 4th Commandment require parents to ensure that their children keep the Sabbath holy.

Eighthly, we have a duty to help others keep the commandments that are enjoined them. Thus a father must not provoke his children to wrath but nurture them in the fear and admonition of the Lord in order that they may be better encouraged to honour him. **W**

WLC 100. What special things are we to consider in the Ten Commandments?

- A.** We are to consider, in the Ten Commandments, the Preface, the substance of the commandments themselves, and several reasons annexed to some of them,
the more to enforce them.

Comments

The Lord Jesus says in His great Sermon on the Mount:

¹⁷ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. ¹⁸ For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Mt 5:17-18).

A jot (or Jod or Yodh) is the smallest of the Hebrew alphabet (י). It is such a small letter that it may appear as mere quotation mark to an untrained eye! A tittle is the little extension on the letter Beth (ב) that distinguishes it from the letter Kaph (כ). The difference is so subtle that many new students of Hebrew can hardly tell the two letters apart!

What our Lord, is therefore saying is that every statement, every word and every letter in the Law of God has been given deliberately or purposely under the inspiration of God. God is not capricious. Neither is He unnecessarily verbose. There is a strict economy with His words. Not a word is unnecessarily spoken.

Therefore, when God spoke the Decalogue, every phrase and word is important. We must not think that only the ten sets of imperatives are important. The preface to the whole Decalogue as well as the reasons annexed to some of the commands are also important.

The Preface of the Decalogue is in the words:

“I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Ex 20:2).

These words are pregnant with meaning and instructive as our next question will show.

The annexes to the commands, on the other hand, are words such as “for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God &c.” These annexes are spoken “the more to enforce” the commands to which they are annexed. In other words, they serve to further encourage obedience and discourage violations. We shall look at each of the annexes when we examine the substance of the Ten Commandments. **W**

WLC 101. What is the Preface to the Ten Commandments?

A. The Preface to the Ten Commandments is contained in these words, *I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*¹ Wherein God manifesteth his sovereignty, as being JEHOVAH, the eternal, immutable, and almighty God;² having His being in and of Himself,³ and giving being to all His words⁴ and works;⁵ and that He is a God in covenant, as with Israel of old, so with all His people;⁶ who, as He brought them out of their bondage in Egypt, so He delivereth us from our spiritual thralldom;⁷ and that therefore we are bound to take Him for our God alone, and to keep all His commandments.⁸

Proofs

¹Ex 20:2; ²Isa 44:6; ³Ex 3:14; ⁴Ex 6:3; ⁵Acts 17:24, 28; ⁶Gen 17:7; cf. Rom 3:29; ⁷Lk 1:74–75;
⁸1 Pet 1:15–18; Lev 18:30; 19:37

Comments

The preface of the Ten Commandments is in the words: *“I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”* (Ex 20:2). It is a mistake to think that it is unimportant, or worst to think that it indicates that the Ten Commandments are only given to the Jews of old. The fact that the preface is important cannot be denied. It was the first words heard by our fathers gathered at Mount Sinai when they were assembled to receive the Ten Commandments. It would, no doubt, have been inscribed by the finger of God on the tablets of stone too.

The words of this preface speak of three things.

First, it reminds us who the Law-Giver is. He is “the LORD,” i.e., He is ‘Jehovah.’ This is the name with which God introduced Himself when Moses asked Him how he should introduce Him to the Israelites. “God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Ex 34:14). ‘Jehovah’ means ‘HE IS,’ which speaks of God’s self-existence. Therefore when God introduced Himself as ‘Jehovah’ in the preface of the Ten Commandments, He is in effect declaring “His sovereignty, as being JEHOVAH, the eternal, immutable, and almighty God; having His being in and of Himself, and giving being to all His words and works.” God alone is uncreated and exists in and of Himself. All other beings are created by Him and exist in Him and are held in existence by His sovereign power (Acts 17:24, 28; Heb 1:3). As our Creator and Sustainer, He has the absolute right to command us how we ought to live and to demand obedience. As creatures made in His image, we have a moral obligation to obey Him without any reservations.

But the name Jehovah not only points to God’s self-existence (aseity) and immutability, it points also to the covenant relationship that He has established with His people. We know this because immediately after God introduced Himself as the “I AM” to Moses, He says:

“Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Ex 34:15).

Therefore, *secondly*, the preface of the Ten Commandments reminds us of our covenant relationship with God and makes it clear to us that the Ten Commandments summarizes our covenant responsibility towards Him.

This is why the Ten Commandments are explicitly called “the words of the covenant” (Ex 34:28). While all men, everywhere and at all times are obliged to keep the Ten Commandments, God has chosen to verbally reiterate His commandments only to His covenant people. Today, the covenant people of God are predominantly Gentile, but God’s covenant has not changed, nor has His covenant word lost its authority.

Thirdly, in speaking of redemption from Egypt, the preface reminds us that as God brought Israel of old “out of their bondage in Egypt, so He delivereth us from our spiritual thralldom.” Thus, it is an error to think that since the preface speaks of redemption from Egypt, only the Jews were obliged to keep the Ten Commandments. Rather, it is designed to stir our hearts to remember our own redemption from spiritual Egypt and spiritual bondage, and therefore encourages us to “to take Him for our God alone” and “to keep all His commandments” with love and gratitude towards Him. **W**

WLC 102. What is the sum of the four commandments which contain our duty to God?

- A.** The sum of the four commandments containing our duty to God, is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind.¹

Proofs

¹Lk 10:27

Comments

We saw in *WLC 98* that the Ten Commandments may be divided into two tables. The first table comprising the four commandments prescribes our duty towards God, whereas the second table prescribes our duty towards man. The present question has to do with the first table.

It is interesting to note that the words of our answer (cf. Lk 10:27) are taken from the lips of a lawyer (an expert in the law) who was trying to test the Lord (Lk 10:25). However, our Lord, no doubt, approved of his answer (v. 28). Indeed, He had Himself summarised the Law in the same words, when He said:

“The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: ³⁰ And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. ³¹ And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mk 12:29-31).

There is little doubt that both the Lord and the lawyer were summarising the Ten Commandments (see diagram at our comments on *WLC 98*).

The first four commandments, therefore, teaches us of our duty to love the Lord our God with our whole being, and in every element, sphere, and relationships in our lives. How do we love Him? We must love Him by honouring and obeying Him absolutely and unconditionally as our Creator and Redeemer.

We must, as such, never compartmentalise our lives,—as what is commonly done,— such that our social life, business life, political life, recreational life and educational life are distinct from our religious life. A man who says, “business is business, religion is religion” is an irreligious man who fears not the Lord. A teacher whose relationship with God does not affect her instruction on chemistry or biology is in that regard serving as an irreligious person.

The consistent Christian seeks to glorify God in all that he does. Therefore, there is no area in his life where the principles of religion or of God’s law do not apply. He seeks to honour and obey God in all spheres of his life, be it in his employment, business, education, recreation, vacations and relationships. God is all in all in his life. **W**

WLC 103. Which is the First Commandment?

A. The First Commandment is, *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*¹

Proofs

¹Ex 20:3

Comments

It may be surprising to many of us: but although all in the Judeo-Christian tradition would agree that there are Ten Commandments (Ex 34:28), not all are agreed on which are the commandments.

There is a popular Jewish tradition which regards Exodus 20:2—"I am the LORD thy God, &c" as the 1st commandment; and the 2nd commandment as being found in verses 3-6. This is known as the Talmudic Tradition. The Roman Catholic and Lutheran tradition, following Augustine (therefore known as the Augustinian tradition), on the other hand, see verses 3-6 as the 1st commandment, and verse 17 as containing the 9th and 10th commandments. In their view, the 9th commandment is: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house," and the 10th is: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, &c."

The position adopted by our Catechism is the standard Protestant view. It was presented by the Jewish historian Philo as naturally evident from the Scriptures (*The Decalogue*, §14-16); and it was reiterated by Origen in his homily on the Ten Commandments, and re-established by Calvin (and so known as the Calvinistic or Philonic tradition).

This, we believe, is the correct interpretation of Exodus 20:1-17. It is the view, we believe, that an unbiased reader of the commandments will arrive at. Verses 1-2 contain the LORD's preface to the Ten Commandments. Verse 3 contains the 1st commandment; and verses 4-6 contain the 2nd commandment.

The Jewish tradition that Exodus 20:2 is the 1st commandment makes the 1st commandment a declaration rather than a command. As for the Augustinian or Romish tradition, apart from the fact that the division of Exodus 20:17 into two commandments is most unnatural, it is probable that the lumping in of verses 3 to 6 into the 1st commandment was motivated by a corrupt tradition which allowed the use of images in Christian worship.

It would do well for us to take heed to God's commandments as they were given and intended by the LORD, rather than imposing our own understanding and practices on them. In this way, we shall see that the 1st commandment has to do with the proper *object* of worship; the 2nd has to do with the proper *manner* of worship; the 3rd has to do with the proper *attitude* of worship and the 4th has to do with the especial *day* of worship. **W**

WLC 104. What are the duties required in the First Commandment?

A. The duties required in the First Commandment are, [1] the knowing and acknowledging of God to be the only true God, and our God;¹ and [2] to worship and glorify Him accordingly,² by thinking,³ meditating,⁴ remembering,⁵ highly esteeming,⁶ honouring,⁷ adoring,⁸ choosing,⁹ loving,¹⁰ desiring,¹¹ fearing of Him;¹² [3] believing Him;¹³ trusting,¹⁴ hoping,¹⁵ delighting,¹⁶ rejoicing in Him;¹⁷ [4] being zealous for Him;¹⁸ [5] calling upon Him, giving all praise and thanks,¹⁹ and [6] yielding all obedience and submission to Him with the whole man;²⁰ being careful in all things to please Him,²¹ and sorrowful when in any thing He is offended;²² and [7] walking humbly with Him.²³

Proofs

¹1 Chr 28:9; Deut 26:17; Isa 43:10; Jer 14:22; ²Ps 95:6–7; Mt 4:10; Ps 29:2; ³Mal 3:16; ⁴Ps 63:6; ⁵Eccl 12:1; ⁶Ps 71:19; ⁷Mal. 1:6; ⁸Isa 45:23; ⁹Josh 24:15, 22; ¹⁰Deut 6:5; ¹¹Ps 73:25; ¹²Isa 8:13; ¹³Ex 14:31; ¹⁴Isa 26:4; ¹⁵Ps 130:7; ¹⁶Ps 37:4; ¹⁷Ps 32:11; ¹⁸Rom 12:11; Num 25:11; ¹⁹Phil 4:6; ²⁰Jer 7:23; Jas 4:7; ²¹1 Jn 3:22; ²²Jer 31:18; Ps 119:136; ²³Mic 6:8.

Comments

The 1st Commandment, as we saw is: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3). This command, as with all the other commandments, requires an obedient voluntary response of our will and not just a mental assent. Our catechism, therefore, rightly speaks of the *duties* required in the commandments. What are the duties required in the 1st Commandment?

Our answer lists almost thirty distinguishable acts of the will for our compliance! These duties,—which are prescribed in the Scriptures,—may be divided into seven groups as indicated by the brackets above.

Firstly, we must know and acknowledge “God to be the only true God, and our God.” Christianity, the religion of the Bible, is not only monotheistic, it is exclusive and personal. We believe that there is only one living and true God, namely Jehovah, the Triune God, who has revealed Himself specifically in the Holy Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament. All other so-called ‘gods’ of the religions of this world (including the religions that uphold only parts and perversions of the Scriptures such as Islam and Judaism) are idols of human imagination. The 1st commandment requires that I wholeheartedly affirm this truth and confess this alone living and true God as *my* God.

Secondly, since this living and true God is our God, we must “worship and glorify Him accordingly.” How do we worship and glorify Him? By “by thinking, meditating, remembering, highly esteeming, honouring, adoring, choosing, loving, desiring, fearing of Him.” In other words, my thoughts, attitude and affections must be centred on Him who is high and exalted. The knowledge and fear of Him must affect all aspects of my heart and mind at all times.

Likewise, *thirdly*, we must believe Him, trust Him, hope in Him, delight in Him and rejoice in Him. In other words, He must be my object of faith, hope and joy. I must believe in Him more than in anyone else. I must hope in Him knowing that He is hovering in control of the future; and I must find my chief delight in this life and the life to come in Him.

Fourthly, we must be “zealous for Him.” If God is my God, then I can no more be neutral, half-hearted or complacent in all that I do, think and say in His name and for His sake. I must rather be “fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Rom 12:11).

Fifthly, we must call upon Him, giving all praise and thanks. In other words, I pray unto Him privately and publicly. I must seek His blessing, praise Him for who He is and thank Him for all that He has done, is doing and will do on my behalf and the behalf of His people.

Sixthly, we must “[yield] all obedience and submission to Him with the whole man; being careful in all things to please Him, and sorrowful when in any thing He is offended.” In other words, He will be my Lord and King. I must not only obey Him gratefully and lovingly; I will study to hate what He hates and love what He loves. I must seek to live a life that brings delight to Him.

Finally, I must walk humbly with Him. The Prophet Micah says:

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic 6:8)

I must therefore acknowledge that He is my Creator and Redeemer, whereas I am a creature of dust not worthy of the least of His benefits. I must live before His face with a consciousness of His greatness and my nothingness. **W**

A. The sins forbidden in the First Commandment, are, [1] Atheism, in denying or not having a God;¹ [2] Idolatry, in having or worshipping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God;² [3] the not having and avouching Him for God, and our God;³ [4] the omission or neglect of any thing due to Him, required in this commandment;⁴ [5] ignorance,⁵ forgetfulness,⁶ misapprehensions,⁷ false opinions,⁸ unworthy and wicked thoughts of Him;⁹ [6] bold and curious searching into His secrets;¹⁰ [7] all profaneness,¹¹ hatred of God;¹² [8] self-love,¹³ self-seeking,¹⁴ and all other inordinate and immoderate setting of our mind, will, or affections upon other things, and taking them off from Him in whole or in part;¹⁵ [9] vain credulity,¹⁶ unbelief,¹⁷ heresy,¹⁸ misbelief,¹⁹ distrust,²⁰ despair,²¹ incorrigibility,²² and insensibility under judgments,²³ hardness of heart,²⁴ pride,²⁵ presumption,²⁶ carnal security,²⁷ tempting of God;²⁸ [10] using unlawful means,²⁹ and trusting in unlawful means;³⁰ [11] carnal delights and joys;³¹ [12] corrupt, blind, and indiscreet zeal;³² [13] lukewarmness,³³ and deadness in the things of God;³⁴ [14] estranging ourselves, and apostatising from God;³⁵ [15] praying, or giving any religious worship, to saints, angels, or any other creatures;³⁶ [16] all compacts and consulting with the devil,³⁷ and hearkening to his suggestions;³⁸ [17] making men the lords of our faith and conscience;³⁹ [18] slighting and despising God and His commands;⁴⁰ [19] resisting and grieving of His Spirit;⁴¹ [20] discontent and impatience at His dispensations, charging Him foolishly for the evils He inflicts on us;⁴² [21] and ascribing the praise of any good we either are, have, or can do, to fortune,⁴³ idols,⁴⁴ ourselves,⁴⁶ or any other creature.⁴⁶

Proofs

¹Ps 14:1; Eph 2:12; ²Jer 2:27–28; cf. 1 Thes 1:9; ³Ps 81:11; ⁴Isa 43:22–24; ⁵Jer 4:22; Hos 4:1, 6; ⁶Jer 2:32; ⁷Acts 17:23, 29; ⁸Isa 40:18; ⁹Ps 50:21; ¹⁰Deut 29:29; ¹¹Tit 1:16; Heb 12:16; ¹²Rom 1:30; ¹³2 Tim 3:2; ¹⁴Phil 2:21; ¹⁵1 Jn 2:15–16; 1 Sam 2:29; Col 3:2, 5; ¹⁶1 Jn 4:1; ¹⁷Heb 3:12; ¹⁸Gal 5:20; Tit 3:10; ¹⁹Acts 26:9; ²⁰Ps 78:22; ²¹Gen 4:13; ²²Jer 5:3; ²³Isa 42:25; ²⁴Rom 2:5; ²⁵Jer 13:15; ²⁶Ps 19:13; ²⁷Zeph 1:12; ²⁸Mt 4:7; ²⁹Rom 3:8; ³⁰Jer 17:5; ³¹2 Tim 3:4; ³²Gal 4:17; Jn 16:2; Rom 10:2; Lk 9:54–55; ³³Rev 3:16; ³⁴Rev 3:1; ³⁵Ezk 14:5; Isa 1:4–5; ³⁶Rom 10:13–14; Hos 4:12; Acts 10:25–26; Rev 19:10; Mt 4:10; Col 2:18; Rom 1:25; ³⁷Lev 20:6; 1 Sam 28:7, 11; cf. 1 Chr 10:13–14; ³⁸Acts 5:3; ³⁹2 Cor 1:24; Mt 23:9; ⁴⁰Deut 32:15; 2 Sam 12:9; Prov 13:13; ⁴¹Acts 7:51; Eph 4:30; ⁴²Ps 73:2–3, 13–15, 22; Job 1:22; ⁴³1 Sam 6:7–9; ⁴⁴Dan 5:23; ⁴⁵Deut 8:17; Dan 4:30; ⁴⁶Hab 1:16.

Comments

We saw in the previous answer almost thirty acts of the will, which the 1st Commandment requires of us. In this follow-up question, we see more than fifty acts of sin, which are forbidden by the same Commandment! Like the list of duties required, this list of sins forbidden is culled from everywhere in the Scriptures. But the great disparity between the number of duties required and the number of sins forbidden is surely an indication of the great propensity of fallen man to rebel against God.

What then are the sins forbidden in the 1st Commandment? The answer indicates twenty-one groups of offences.

- *First*, atheism is forbidden. Atheism may involve not believing in the existence of God or living as if God does not exist.
- Secondly*, idolatry is forbidden. Note that it is a common error to speak of idolatry as being forbidden in the 2nd Commandment rather than the 1st Commandment. The 2nd Commandment is about the worship of the living and true God. Anyone who worships idols breaks the 1st Commandment and not just the 2nd Commandment. Indeed, we must realise that idolatry is not about the worship of idols. It is about the worship of any god of man's imagination. There is only one Living and True God. All other so-called 'gods' are idols.
- *Thirdly*, it is a sin to fail to own the Living and True God as our God. One may admit that there is only one Living and True God, but still break the 1st Commandment by not serving Him. Such is the sin of the devil.
- *Fourthly*, it is a violation of 1st Commandment to omit or neglect any of the duties required by this Commandment as it is already presented in the previous question (WLC 104).
- *Fifthly*, all wrong thinking concerning the being and work of God is a violation of this Commandment. Thus, one who refuses to believe in the doctrine of the Trinity or the Sovereignty of God is breaking the 1st Commandment.
- *Sixthly*, if God is God, it is a great offence to pry into things about Him which He has chosen not to reveal unto us (Dt 29:29).
- *Seventhly*, profaneness or any disregard of the holiness of God, and any hatred of Him or acts that demonstrate disregard for Him as God is forbidden in this Commandment.
- *Eighthly*, I-dolatry is forbidden. That is, this Commandment forbids all forms of selfishness or of regarding oneself as of having more importance than God. This is a common and subtle violation of this Commandment.
- *Ninthly*, all pride and want of humble submission before God violates the 1st Commandment. This may include, as our answer indicates: "vain credulity, unbelief, heresy, misbelief, distrust, despair, incorrigible-ness, and insensibility under judgments, hardness of heart, pride, presumption, carnal security, tempting of God."
- *Tenthly*, if God is our God, and God holds supreme standard of what is right and what is wrong, then to place our hope or to depend on anything that is contrary to His revealed will would be to deny Him, and therefore to break the 1st Commandment.
- In the *eleventh* place, "carnal delights and joys" are also forbidden in the 1st Commandment. This does not mean that all bodily pleasures are forbidden, but that any derivation of pleasure that leaves out God or tends to dampen our love of God is sinful. The apostle Paul condemns those who are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2Tim 3:4).
- *Twelfth*, any zeal that is not according to true knowledge of God is forbidden.
- *Thirteenth*, any "lukewarmness and deadness in the things of God" is also a violation of the 1st Commandment; for if we acknowledge Him to be our God, how can we be less than zealous toward everything pertaining to His worship and service.
- *Fourteenth*, any departure from God, whether it be apostasy or attitude of estrangement from Him is forbidden in the 1st Commandment.
- *Fifteenth*, the 1st Commandment forbids the "praying, or giving any religious worship, to saints, angels, or any other creatures." Whether or not they are styled as intermediaries or intercessor makes no difference, for if God is our God and He has commanded us to seek Him alone it is a great offence, upon any pretence, to appeal to or worship anyone other than Him alone.
- *Sixteenth*, all dealings with the devil, be it imaginary or real, direct or indirect (e.g. necromancy, feng shui) be it in games or séances or otherwise are abominable violations of the 1st Commandment.

- *Seventeenth*, as God alone is the revealer of Truth and the Lord of our conscience, it is a violation of the 1st Commandment to make “men the lords of our faith and conscience.” We must never submit to a man’s doctrine unless it is founded on the Word of God.
- *Eighteenth*, if God is God, any slight or despising of any of His commandments is a gross violation of the 1st Commandment.
- *Nineteenth*, God the Holy Spirit ministers to us through the preached Word and also through exciting our conscience with the Word we have heard. To resist and grieve the Holy Spirit by disregard to His ministry is therefore a violation of the 1st Commandment.
- *Twentieth*, as it is God who sovereignly decreeds all things and brings all things to pass by His providence, it is a great dishonour to Him and therefore a breaking of the 1st Commandment to feel or exhibit any “discontent and impatience at His dispensations” or to charge Him “foolishly for the evils He inflicts on us.”
- *Finally*, it is also a violation of the 1st Commandment to attribute any good that “we either are, have, or can do” to anything other than God Himself. We must never consider ourselves ‘lucky’ nor ‘thank our lucky stars’ as some say. Neither should we attribute success to our own wisdom or strength without acknowledging God’s providence. And neither should we neglect prayer and place our confidence in science and medicine as if they have the power to heal us of our diseases without God’s sovereign providence. **W**

WLC 106. What are we specially taught by these words “*before me*”
in the First Commandment?

A. These words “*before me*” or before my face, in the First Commandment, teach us, that God, who seeth all things, taketh special notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God: that so it may be an argument to dissuade from it, and to aggravate it as a most impudent provocation:¹ as also to persuade us to do as in His sight, whatever we do in His service.²

Proofs

¹Ezk 8:5–6; Ps 44:20–21; ²1 Chr 28:9

Comments

The First Commandment reads: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3). The words rendered “before me” in Exodus 20:3 (עַל־פָּנָי; אֵל [']) literally means “before my face”. This is obviously a figure of speech since God is a spirit and does not have a face. However, this figure of speech is particularly helpful to excite our conscience and to remind us how we ought to live. I cannot live independently, privately and selfishly as if I am accountable to no one else but myself for my actions, for God is everywhere, sees all things, including my heart and takes interest in all that I do, say or think. Since, I am accountable to God, and He sees all that I do, I must live *Coram Deo* (before the face of God). I must live with the fear of God in my heart. I must fear to displease or dishonour Him,—in the way that a child who loves his father will fear to displease and dishonour him,—at all times. I must do all things “as in His sight,” in whatever I do, but especially when I am doing anything in His service or in His name.

Moreover, as the words “before me” or “before my face” were used by our LORD to augment the 1st Commandment, I should especially be mindful of it in all that I do, and be strongly dissuaded from all offences associated with it. This must be so because the words “before God” in the 1st Commandment indicates that God “taketh special notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God” so that a breaking of it amounts to “a most impudent provocation.” This is the case for all men because all men,—believers and unbelievers, — are created in the image of God and are therefore accountable to Him. But this is especially so for believers who profess Him to be their God.

Yes, it is possible to be a Christian and yet break the 1st Commandment. We break the 1st Commandment, for example, when we give vent to our anger when the weather frustrates our plans. It is a breaking of the 1st Commandment because God is He who ordains and orders the weather. Likewise we break the 1st commandment when take up a job knowing full-well that it will require us to compromise our Christian testimony or to labour unnecessarily on the Lord’s Day.

As Christians, therefore, we must remind ourselves to live *Coram Deo*, lovingly and cheerfully. **W**

WLC 107. Which is the Second Commandment?

A. The Second Commandment is, *Thou shalt not make unto thee any 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. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*¹

Proofs

1Ex 20:4–6

Comments

We noted in our commentary on *WLC* 103, that the 1st commandment has to do with the proper *object* of worship; whereas the 2nd has to do with the proper *manner* of worship. Therefore, it is an error to speak of idolatry proper (i.e. all worship involving idols and images) as being condemned only in the 2nd commandment rather than the first. But this is a subtle error of modern evangelicalism and fundamentalism. The error of Rome is to combine the 1st and 2nd commandments into one so that there appears to be no explicit commandment on how God ought to be worship. So it is said that whatever is not forbidden is allowed in the worship of God. So images are allowed in the worship (or they say, ‘service’) of God because Exodus 20:4-6 is (according to them) part of the 1st commandment and forbids the use of images to worship *other gods* only.

Modern evangelicalism and fundamentalism agrees that Exodus 20:4-6 is the 2nd Commandment. But because it regards this commandment as forbidding idolatry proper only, it tends to fail to see that this commandment is not just about the use of images, but is, in fact, about how the Living and True God ought to be worship. That is to say: Though the 2nd Commandment refers to the use of images, it refers to it only by way of a concrete example of how the worship of God is commonly violated. It is commonly, (indeed almost universally) assumed that God may be better worship if there is a visual representation of Him. God is saying that is wrong. He is saying that by the 2nd Commandment that we may not worship Him according to the manner, which we imagine to be helpful or right. We must worship Him only according to His own appointment. Whatever mode of worship which is not sanctioned in His Word is idolatrous (in the wider sense of the word) and sinful.

This principle of worship is known as the *Reformed Regulative Principle of Worship*. *WCF* 21.1 states this principle: “But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.”

How do we know that this is the right interpretation of this commandment?

First, this was the way that God first applied the 2nd Commandment after He gave it to Moses. In Exodus 20:22-23, the LORD reiterated the 2nd Commandment:

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold.”

Then straightaway, no doubt as a further application of this commandment, the LORD gave specific instructions to Moses on how the altar of sacrifice should be built (Ex 20:22-26)! Moses was not to take his initiative to build the altar according to what he thought best or according to the culture of the time.

Secondly, this mode of interpreting the 2nd Commandment is in accordance to the 6th Rule for the right understanding of the Ten Commandments: “That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto” (*WLC* 99). **W**

WLC 108. What are the duties required in the Second Commandment?

A. The duties required in the Second Commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in His Word;¹ particularly [1] prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ;² [2] the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word;³ [3] the administration and receiving of the sacraments;⁴ [4] church government and discipline;⁵ [5] the ministry and maintenance thereof;⁶ [6] religious fasting;⁷ [7] swearing by the name of God,⁸ and [8] vowing unto Him;⁹ as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship;¹⁰ and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.¹¹

Proofs

¹Deut 32:46–47; Mt 28:20; Acts 2:42; 1 Tim 6:13–14; ²Phil 4:6; Eph 5:20; ³Deut 17:18–19; Acts 15:21; 2 Tim 4:2; Jas 1:21–22; Acts 10:33; ⁴Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23–30; ⁵Mt 18:15–17; 16:19; 1 Cor 5; 12:28; ⁶Eph 4:11–12; 1 Tim 5:17–18; 1 Cor 9:7–15; ⁷Joel 2:12–13; 1 Cor 7:5; ⁸Deut 6:13; ⁹Isa 19:21; 76:11; ¹⁰Acts 17:16–17; Ps 16:4; ¹¹Deut 7:5; Isa 30:22.

Comments

The 2nd Commandment has to do with the proper *manner* of worship. It is not only about the use of images, for all worship that is not in accordance to biblical prescription is idolatrous worship whether or not images are used. The duties required in the 2nd Commandment, therefore, pertain to the practice and defence of biblical worship.

What is biblical worship as opposed to idolatrous worship? We may roughly define biblical worship as a formal activity of fellowship between God and His children in which,—other than attending circumstances (such as pertaining to physical arrangement, location and time),—all distinguishable elements (such as prayer, preaching, singing of psalms, and the administration of sacrament), are warranted by the Scriptures. Conversely, a worship event in which there are distinguishable elements which find no warrant in the Scripture (such as flag waving, clap-offering, candle light procession, puppet show, guitar rendition, piano introduction, etc) must be regarded as unbiblical and idolatrous worship.

With that in mind, our catechism teaches us that the 2nd Commandment requires, in particular: Firstly, our “receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in His Word.” And secondly, our “disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship.”

Notice that answer refers not only to elements of religious worship but to “religious worship and ordinances.” This broad characterisation explains the seemingly imprecise list of seven categories of ordinances highlighted, viz.:

- (1) “Prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ”
- (2) “Reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word”
- (3) “The administration and receiving of the sacraments”
- (4) “Church government and discipline”
- (5) “The ministry and maintenance thereof”
- (6) “Religious fasting”
- (7) “Swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto Him.”

Notice that “church government and discipline” and “the ministry and maintenance thereof” are not really worship elements. However, they are included here because of their close connection to the worship of the church.

For example, ordination of elders and certain acts of church discipline may be included in a worship service. It is debatable, however, whether the framers of our catechism intended to include collection of offerings as part of religious worship by including “the ministry and maintenance thereof” in the list. It is more likely that it is included as it is legitimate for the call to provide for the material needs of ministers to be made during worship (Notice how 1 Cor 16:1 is not included in the proof-text as we might expect if the authors of the catechism believe that the collection should be included as an element of religious worship).

Whatever the case may be, we should realise that the categories are, for some reason, not as exhaustive as what is given in the Confession of Faith (see *WCF* 21.4-5). In particular, the Confession includes: “singing of psalm” which is clearly a legitimate element of worship (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19; Jas 5:13), but is omitted here.

So then, the 2nd Commandment requires us to worship God using these biblical worship elements and ordinances. At the same time it would also require us to reject false worship; and indeed where our position and calling in church and society allows, to remove all monuments of idolatry or to reform the worship of the church so that it is conducted in the biblical way. **W**

A. The sins forbidden in the Second Commandment are, [1] all devising,¹ counseling,² commanding,³ using,⁴ and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God Himself;⁵ [2] tolerating a false religion;⁶ [3] the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever;⁷ [4] all worshipping of it,⁸ or God in it or by it;⁹ [5] the making of any representation of feigned deities,¹⁰ and all worship of them, or service belonging to them;¹¹ [6] all superstitious devices,¹² corrupting the worship of God,¹³ adding to it, or taking from it,¹⁴ whether invented and taken up of ourselves,¹⁵ or received by tradition from others,¹⁶ though under the title of antiquity,¹⁷ custom,¹⁸ devotion,¹⁹ good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever;²⁰ [7] Simony;²¹ [8] sacrilege;²² [9] all neglect,²³ contempt,²⁴ hindering,²⁵ and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed.²⁶

Proofs

¹Num 15:39; ²Deut 13:6–8; ³Hos 5:11; Mic 6:16; ⁴1 Kgs 11:33; 12:33; ⁵Deut 12:30–32; ⁶Deut 13:6–12; Zech 13:2–3; Rev 2:2, 14–15, 20; 17:12, 16–17; ⁷Deut 4:15–19; Acts 17:29; Rom 1:21–23, 25; ⁸Dan 3:18; Gal 4:8; ⁹Ex 32:5; ¹⁰Ex 32:8; ¹¹1 Kgs 18:26, 28; Isa 65:11; ¹²Acts 17:22; Col 2:21–23; ¹³Mal 1:7–8, 14; ¹⁴Deut 4:2; ¹⁵Ps 106:39; ¹⁶Mt 15:9; ¹⁷1 Pet 1:18; ¹⁸Jer 44:17; ¹⁹Isa 65:3–5; Gal 1:13–14; ²⁰1 Sam 13:11–12; 15:21; ²¹Acts 8:18; ²²Rom 2:22; Mal 3:8; ²³Ex 4:24–26; ²⁴Mt 22:5; Mal 1:7, 13; ²⁵Mt 23:13; ²⁶Acts 13:44–45; 1 Th 2:15–16.

Comments

The 2nd Commandment, as we saw earlier, is not only about making of idols and images. Rather, it is about the acceptable manner of worship of the living and true God. Thus it does not only forbid crafting of idols of wood and stone, and bowing down to them in worship. It forbids the abuse of true worship and abominates all forms and elements of religious worship “not instituted by God Himself” in His Word.

Our answer summarises the deeds forbidden under nine categories.

First, it forbids “all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God Himself.” That is, it forbids any positive attitude and relationship towards worship not appointed by God Himself. When a minister, for example, introduces an unbiblical song into a worship service, he breaks the 2nd Commandment by leading the congregation to use what God has not sanctioned for use in His worship, and the congregation break the same commandment by using the song.

Secondly, the 2nd Commandment forbids “tolerating a false religion.” Take careful note this does not mean at all that Christians should persecute those who hold or practice false religion. Neither does it mean that we should follow what Jenny Geddes did on 23 July 1637 when she flung her prayer stool at the preacher in St Giles’ Cathedral, Edinburgh, who was trying to read from an idolatrous prayer book introduced by Archbishop Laud. But it does mean that we should not sit idly and do nothing when false religion is being introduced into the church whether by the leaders or by members (cf. Deut 13:6–11).

Thirdly, the 2nd Commandment explicitly forbids “the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever” (cf. Ex 20:4). This means that Michelangelo broke the 2nd Commandment when he painted “The creation of Adam,” in 1511. Believer ought not to use that picture, however famous it may be....

And not only so, but the use of pictures of Christ is also forbidden in the 2nd Commandment, and so is any attempt to imagine how He looks like or to picture him in the mind.

Some may argue that the artistic or educational use of pictures of God is not forbidden in the 2nd Commandment since they are not used for worship, but the fact remains that they are religious pictures and they tend to promote mental idolatry even if they are not intended originally for worship. Therefore all pictorial representations of God are rightly forbidden under the 2nd Commandment.

But what about pictures of man and animals? What about photographs? Exodus 20:4 seem to forbid their use when it says: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Ex 20:4). A proper understanding of the commandment however shows that this is not the case. Our catechism, as such, rightly points out that what is forbidden is not their use *per se*, but their use to represent God.

Fourthly, the 2nd Commandment forbids, “all worshipping of [images] or God in it or by [them].” This is related to, and augments, the previous prohibition. Note that not only is the worshipping of the images forbidden, but the worshipping of God in or by the images is also forbidden. This was the sin of the golden calf. The golden calf was intended to represent Jehovah! This is also the sin of Roman Catholicism.

Fifthly, the 2nd Commandment forbids, “the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them.” In other words, all religious activity surrounding false gods is forbidden.

Sixthly, the 2nd Commandment forbids, “all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever.” That is, all religious activities and things which find no warrant in the Scripture are forbidden. Thus the idea of house-blessing, of using a flower to sprinkle water in baptism, of kneeling for the Lord’s Supper, of choir introduction or any such things are forbidden by the 2nd Commandment.

Seventhly, “Simony” is forbidden. Simony, named after Simon Magus who tried to purchase spiritual powers from Peter (Acts 8:18), is the sin of buying and selling of ecclesiastical preferment or offices. This is was a common problem in the church up till the time of the Reformation, and it is probably still a problem in certain circles, especially where there are liturgical or honorary positions to be filled. But a more subtle form of Simony involves the use of religion for monetary gain (1 Tim 6:5) and conversely the use of money for personal religious gains. For example, it is Simony and a breaking of the 2nd Commandment for a minister to seek payment for solemnising a marriage; and so it is Simony for a man to try to bribe his minister with a large gift so that he would give his blessing for him to marry his unbelieving partner.

Eighthly, “Sacrilege” is forbidden by the 2nd Commandment. Sacrilege is the sin of robbing God (Mal 3:8). This may involve robbing Him of His honour (i.e. blasphemy), or of His tithes, or of His right to His ordinances. Thus, it is sacrilegious and a breaking of the 2nd Commandment to stage a Christmas performance in a shopping centre.

Finally, the 2nd Commandment forbids, “all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed.” There was a time when biblical worship was the norm in the churches. Today most churches would strongly oppose for example,

the unaccompanied and exclusive singing of psalms. There is contempt for God's psalms in many circles; and many would oppose the Reformed regulative principle of worship as being too rigid. But the framers of our catechism saw that it is not only a duty for the church to return to the old paths, but it is a breaking of the 2nd Commandment to oppose or hinder such a reformation. **W**

WLC 110. What are the reasons annexed to the Second Commandment,
the more to enforce it?

A. The reasons annexed to the Second Commandment, the more to enforce it, contained in these words, *For I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments;*¹ are, besides God's sovereignty over us, and propriety in us,² His fervent zeal for His own worship,³ and His revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom;⁴ accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate Him, and threatening to punish them unto divers generations;⁵ and esteeming the observers of it such as love Him and keep His commandments, and promising mercy to them unto many generations.⁶

Proofs

¹Ex 20:5-6; ²Ps 45:11; Rev 15:3-4; ³Ex 34:13-14;
⁴1 Cor 10:20-22; Jer 7:18-20; Ezk 16:26-27; Deut 32:16-20;
⁵Hos 2:2-4; ⁶Deut 5:29

Comments

God spoke the Ten Commandments in the hearing of His people. There is an apparent order in the giving of the commandments, which becomes clear especially when we come to the second table, for we naturally understand that murder is worse than adultery, which is worse than stealing, which is worse than coveting. But it is also apparent that there is a different degree of emphasis in the giving of each of the commandments. In particular, it is quite obvious that God took much greater pains to explain and emphasise the 2nd and the 4th Commandments. It may not be immediately clear why God does not emphasise the 1st Commandment more than these two commandments, but once we realise that the 1st Commandment distinguishes God's people from the rest of the world, and how God's people is easily tempted to break the 2nd and 4th Commandments, we can easily deduce why God in His wisdom had chosen to emphasise and clarify them in such a way. For, is it not true that even today, the two commandments that is most neglected, if not opposed in visible Christendom are these two commandments? After all, how many churches today would still worship according to the biblical principle of worship that whatever is not sanctioned is forbidden; and how many churches today believe that Christians must still diligently keep Sabbath?

With this in mind, let us consider the annex to the 2nd Commandment which not only give it emphasis, but serves 'the more to enforce it.'

What does the annex teach us?

Firstly, God, in emphasising, "I [am] the LORD thy God," reminds us of His "sovereignty over us, and propriety in us." In other words, He is reminding us that He is our King and has a right to require our obedience in all things, including the manner He should be worshipped.

Secondly, in highlighting that He is "a jealous God," He is reminding us of "His fervent zeal for His own worship" and that He regards "all false worship, as... spiritual whoredom." This is a fact which cannot be overemphasised, seeing that in the history of the Church, both under the Old and New Covenant, God's people have time and again challenged His sovereignty by inventing ways of worship which they imagine they could use to worship God better.

Thirdly, in emphasising that He will, as a Jealous God, visit the iniquity of the offenders of this commandment, He is reminding us of "His revengeful indignation against all false worship." God, under the Old Covenant demonstrated His wrath against false worship on a number of occasions, such as when He struck down Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire which God had commanded not (Lev 10:1-2). But what about in the New Testament? Since God is the same yesterday and today, though the mode of worship has changed, we must believe that He is still angry against false worship. His long-suffering must never be taken by His people as license to do what they like. The writer of Hebrews, citing Deuteronomy 4:24 which was obviously spoken in the context of the 2nd Commandment (see Dt 4:23-24), puts it well when he says:

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve [or worship] God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29).

Fourthly, in asserting that He would visit "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation," He is "threatening to punish the breakers of the commandment unto divers generations." How does this square with the prophet Ezekiel's pronouncement that "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father..." (Ezk 18:20)? The agreement is cogently explained by Calvin in his commentary on the 2nd Commandment:

But when God declares that He will cast back the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of the children, He does not mean that He will take vengeance on poor wretches who have never deserved anything of the sort; but that He is at liberty to punish the crimes of the fathers upon their children and descendants, with the proviso that they too may be justly punished, as being the imitators of their fathers. If any should object, that this is nothing more than to repay every one according to his works, we must remember that, — whenever God blinds the children of the ungodly, casts them into a state of reprobation, (*conjecit in sesum reprobum*), and smites them with a spirit of madness or folly, so that they give themselves up to foul desires, and hasten to their final destruction, — in this way the iniquity of the fathers is visited on their children.

Breakers of this Commandment, in other words, ought to bear in mind how their sin will become occasion for their children to break this commandment for numerous generations. This fact has been attested over and over again in the History of the Church both under the Old and the New Covenant.

Fifthly, in calling the breakers of this commandment "them that hate [Him]," it is clear how seriously He views the breaking of this commandment. Those who would not worship God according to His own appointment hate not just His worship, but God Himself!

Sixthly, and conversely, in reminding us in the context of the 2nd Commandment that those who love Him, keep His commandments, He is indicating His esteem and commendation for those who would worship Him in according to His appointment without polluting it with their own inventions and inclinations.

Seventhly, in promising to show mercy to thousands of them that keep His commandments, He is encouraging us to keep His worship pure by pouring out His blessing for many generations as long as they remain faithful to Him. His blessing would, of course, include His providential dealings with us and our children so that the truth will be maintained from generation to generation.

WLC 111. Which is the Third Commandment?

A. The Third Commandment is, *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*¹

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:7

Comments

As the 1st Commandment has to do with the Lordship of God, and the 2nd has to do with the worship of God, so the 3rd has to do with His Name and the fourth His Day.

In terms of length the 3rd Commandment is not the longest of the Ten Commandments. Unlike the 2nd and 4th Commandment, its breach is also not clearly visible in the church, though it is increasingly visible in the world.

It is increasingly visible in the world because there is an increasing hatred for God and all that pertains to God even as man becomes more and more self-sufficient and the world and its pleasures becomes more and more attractive. So we see how it has become fashionable amongst young people influenced by Hollywood to use the names of God and the place of God's dwelling as swear words.

What about the church? Apart from the occasional callous, "Oh my God," many think that they are keeping the 3rd Commandment. So it appears that this is not a difficult commandment to keep. But the fact is,—as we shall see,—this commandment is not only about verbalising the name of God in an irreverent way. It is also about our attitude in worship and our use of anything that pertains to God and godliness.

Indeed, the areas of our lives touched by this commandment is so wide, that many think nothing of, and may even be ignorant of breaking this commandment. This is perhaps the reason why God lets it known in no uncertain terms that He will not hold the breakers of this commandment guiltless. **W**

WLC 112. What is required in the Third Commandment?

A. The Third Commandment requires, that the name of God, His titles, attributes,¹ ordinances,² the Word,³ sacraments,⁴ prayer,⁵ oaths,⁶ vows,⁷ lots,⁸ His works,⁹ and whatsoever else there is whereby He makes Himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought,¹⁰ meditation,¹¹ word,¹² and writing;¹³ by an holy profession,¹⁴ and answerable conversation,¹⁵ to the glory of God,¹⁶ and the good of ourselves,¹⁷ and others.¹⁸

Proofs

¹Mt 6:9; Deut 28:58; Ps 29:2; 68:4; Rev 15:3–4; ²Mal 1:14; Eccl 5:1; ³Ps 138:2; ⁴1 Cor 11:24–25, 28–29; ⁵1 Tim 2:8; ⁶Jer 4:2; ⁷Eccl 5:2, 4–6; ⁸Acts 1:24, 26; ⁹Job 36:24; ¹⁰Mal. 3:16; ¹¹Ps 8:1, 3–4, 9; ¹²Col 3:17; Ps 105:2, 5; ¹³Ps 102:18; ¹⁴1 Pet 3:15; Mic 4:5; ¹⁵Phil 1:27; ¹⁶1 Cor 10:31; ¹⁷Jer 32:39; ¹⁸1 Pet 2:12

Comments

The 3rd commandment has to do with the name of God: “*Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain*, etc.” But we must remember that when the Scriptures refer to the name of God, it does not always refer to terms which we use to refer to Him, such as God, Jehovah (LORD) or derivative names such as ‘El Elyon,’ or ‘Jehovah Jireh.’ It refers instead to “God’s self-revelation in its manifold fullness” (Vos). John D. Davis puts it most succinctly:

Name is often used in Hebrew in the sense of revealed character and essence. God swears by his great name to carry out his purpose (Jer 44:26), that is, he swears by his attested power to accomplish his word. The name of God which is excellent in all the earth (Ps 8:1), is that expression of his being which is exhibited in creation and redemption.... To know the name of God is to witness the manifestation of those attributes and apprehend that character which the name denotes (Ex. 6:3, with 7; 1 Kgs 8:43; Ps 91:14; Isa 52:6; 64:2; Jer 16:21)” (In *A Dictionary of the Bible*, cited by Johannes G. Vos in his commentary of the *WLC*).

That settled, it is easy for us to understand why our catechism teaches us that the 3rd commandment is not only about the right use of the “name of God,” but “His titles, attributes, ordinances, the Word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, His works, and whatsoever else there is whereby He makes Himself known.”

How should all these be used? They should be used “holily and reverently used in thought, meditation, word, and writing; by an holy profession, and answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves, and others.”

That is:

- Firstly, our *attitude* must be holy and reverent when we must use of anything whereby God makes Himself known.
- Secondly, in terms of *activity*, the 3rd commandment covers not just our speech, but our thoughts, meditations and writing. We must, for example, be holy and reverent when we write anything about God. Making jokes out of God’s word or work is simply contrary to the 3rd commandment.
- Thirdly, in terms of *extent*, both our *profession* (i.e. our worship and religious testimony) and *conversation* (i.e. our life style) must reflect a fear of God that manifest itself in the careful use of God’s name or anything whereby He makes Himself known.

Finally, the *goal* or *purpose* of making use of God’s name or anything whereby He is known must be God’s own glory, or the good of ourselves and our neighbours. **W**

WLC 113. What are the sins forbidden in the Third Commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the Third Commandment are, [1] the not using of God's name as is required;¹ and [2] the abuse of it in an ignorant,² vain,³ irreverent, profane,⁴ superstitious,⁵ or wicked mentioning, or otherwise using His titles, attributes,⁶ ordinances,⁷ or works,⁸ by blasphemy,⁹ perjury;¹⁰ [3] all sinful cursings,¹¹ oaths,¹² vows,¹³ and lots;¹⁴ [4] violating of our oaths and vows, if lawful;¹⁵ and fulfilling them, if of things unlawful;¹⁶ [5] murmuring and quarrelling at,¹⁷ curious prying into,¹⁸ and misapplying of God's decrees¹⁹ and providences;²⁰ [6] misinterpreting,²¹ misapplying,²² or any way perverting the Word, or any part of it,²³ to profane jests,²⁴ curious or unprofitable questions, vain janglings, or the maintaining of false doctrines;²⁵ [7] abusing it, the creatures, or any thing contained under the name of God, to charms,²⁶ or sinful lusts and practices;²⁷ [8] the maligning,²⁸ scorning,²⁹ reviling,³⁰ or any wise opposing of God's truth, grace, and ways;³¹ [9] making profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends;³² [10] being ashamed of it,³³ or a shame to it, by unconformable,³⁴ unwise,³⁵ unfruitful,³⁶ and offensive walking,³⁷ or backsliding from it.³⁸

Proofs

¹Mal 2:2; ²Acts 17:23; ³Prov 30:9; ⁴Mal 1:6–7, 12; 3:14; ⁵1 Sam 4:3–5; Jer 7:4, 9–10, 14, 31; Col 2:20–22; ⁶2 Kgs 18:30, 35; Ex 5:2; Ps 139:20; ⁷Ps 50:16–17; ⁸Isa 5:12; ⁹2 Kgs 19:22; Lev 24:11; ¹⁰Zech 5:4; 8:17; ¹¹1 Sam 17:43; 2 Sam 16:5; ¹²Jer 5:7; 23:10; ¹³Deut 23:18; Acts 23:12, 14; ¹⁴Esth 3:7; 9:24; Ps 22:18; ¹⁵Ps 24:4; Ezk 17:16, 18–19; ¹⁶Mk 6:26; 1 Sam 25:22, 32–34; ¹⁷Rom 9:14, 19–20; ¹⁸Deut 29:29; ¹⁹Rom 3:5, 7; 6:1–2; ²⁰Eccl 8:11; 9:3; Ps 39; ²¹Mt 5:21–48; ²²Ezk 13:22; ²³2 Pet 3:16; Mt 22:24–31; ²⁴Isa 22:13; Jer 23:34, 36, 38; ²⁵1 Tim 1:4, 6–7; 6:4–5, 20; 2 Tim 2:14; Tit 3:9; ²⁶Deut 18:10–14; Acts 19:13; ²⁷2 Tim 4:3–4; Rom 13:13–14; 1 Kgs 21:9–10; Jude 4; ²⁸Acts 13:45; 1 Jn 3:12; ²⁹Ps 1:1; 2 Pet 3:3; ³⁰1 Pet 4:4; ³¹Acts 13:45–46, 50; 4:18; 19:9; 1 Thes 2:16; Heb 10:29; ³²Tim 3:5; Mt 23:14; 6:1–2, 5, 16; ³³Mk 8:38; ³⁴Ps 73:14–15; ³⁵1 Cor 6:5–6; Eph 5:15–17; ³⁶Isa 5:4; 2 Pet 1:8–9; ³⁷Rom 2:23–24; ³⁸Gal 3:1, 3; Heb 6:6

Comments

The 3rd Commandment is: “*Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain...*” But as we mentioned, when the Scriptures refer to the name of God, it does not only refer to terms that identify Him, Jehovah (LORD) or derivative names such as ‘Jehovah.’ It refers, rather, to everything by which God reveals Himself. The 3rd Commandment, as such, touches on many aspects of man's relationship with God.

What are the sins forbidden in the 3rd Commandment? Our catechism classes them into ten distinct categories (as indicated in the enumeration added above).

In the *first* place, it is a violation of the 3rd Commandment, not to use God's name as it is required by Him. What does God require us to use His name for? In a word, He requires us to use it for His glory (Mal 2:2). How should we use it for His glory? We should use it according to the answer in our previous question.

In the *second* place, the 3rd Commandment forbids the abuse of God's titles, attributes, ordinances or works, whether by using them ignorantly, vainly, irreverently, irreligiously, or superstitiously, or by wicked mentioning (such as to justify sin), blasphemy (speaking impiously about God) or perjury (lying under oath).

In the *third* place, “all *sinful* cursings, oaths, vows, and lots,” are forbidden. It may be surprising for modern readers, but notice how our catechism does not forbid oaths and vows, nor lots and curses *per se*. We have seen how oaths and vows may be legitimately used by believers (WLC 108, see also **Now That is a Good Question!** in *PCC Bulletin*, vol. 6, no. 2, dated 11 July 2004). In fact, as Calvin puts it, this “Commandment refers especially to the case of oaths, in which a perverse employment of the divine name is particularly detestable” (ICR 2.8.22). But what about lots and curses? Lots were not only used by the Old Testament saints (Lev 16:8; Josh 18:6; Neh 10:34; Prov 16:33), the apostles cast lots between Matthias and Barsabas to decide who should take the place of Judas Iscariot as the twelve apostles (Acts 1:26). Therefore the use of lots is not sinful *per se*, though some would argue that they should no longer be used now that the canon of Scriptures is completed. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that lots must not be used for sinful purposes (cf. Esth 3:7; 9:24; Ps 22:18); and should only be used where all other means of arriving at a decision have been exhausted. Curses, likewise, seem unchristian. But we should realise that imprecatory prayers are really some form of curses. In so far as our Lord prayed imprecatory prayers against the enemies of God, it is legitimate for believers to do so (cf. see **Now That is a Good Question!** in *PCC Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 46, dated 18 May 2003). Thus the apostle Paul used a curse: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema...” (1Cor 16:22). But again, extreme caution must be used that curses do not become a violation of God's name. In particular, it should never be used against God's people, nor against anyone we do not like.

In the *fourth* place, the 3rd commandment forbids the “violating of our oaths and vows, if lawful; and fulfilling them, if of things unlawful.” This is quite clear. When we make oaths we call upon God as our witness to our promise or assertion. When we make a vow we are making a promise to God. Therefore oaths and vows are made in God's name, and therefore those who make oaths and vows must fulfil them, if they are lawful, or they take the name of God in vain. On the other hand, if the oaths and vows would involve us in sin, then keeping them would be to make a mockery of God's name, by suggesting that He not only approves but requires our act of sin. Therefore to keep unlawful oaths and vows violate the 3rd Commandment.

In the *fifth* place, all “murmuring and quarrelling at, curious prying into, and misapplying of God's decrees and providences” are also violations of the 3rd Commandment. That is to say we must never try to pry into or quarrel about what God has chosen not to reveal to us. “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever” (Deut 29:29). Thus, knowing and living by God's will is to be obedient to God's revealed will, not seeking to discover what God's secret decreative will is on a matter. And in so far as providence reveals what God's (decretive) will for us is, we must never murmur nor complain when anything happens to us. To murmur against providence is to murmur against God, for providence bears God's name.

In the *sixth* place, it is also a violation of the 3rd Commandment to misinterpret, misapply or in any way pervert God's Word or any part of it. To misinterpret God's Word is to make God say things He did not. To misapply His Word is to use His name to justify our sin or our whims and fancies.

In the *seventh* place, it is a sin forbidden under the 3rd Commandment to use the name of God or any thing made by God (and therefore bear His name) for making charms or for satisfying sinful lusts or carrying out pervert practices. Thus Ahab violated the 3rd Commandment grievously when he falsely charged Naboth for blaspheming God in order to confiscate his vineyard to satisfy his lust (1 Kgs 21:10). Thus the superstitious Romish practice of ascribing power to religious relics is a gross violation of the 3rd Commandment.

Eighthly, it is also a violation of the 3rd Commandment to malign, scorn, revile, or any wise oppose “God's truth, grace, and ways.” What God

has declared concerning Himself and what He requires of us must be humbly received as absolute truth because He is God. Therefore any refusal and opposition of His self-revelation is abominable.

Ninthly, it is not only a violation of the 9th Commandment but a breach of the 3rd Commandment to make “profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends.” Thus, anyone who professes to be a Christian just because he wants to marry a Christian girl is directly violating the 3rd Commandment.

But *finally*, it is also a breaking of the 3rd Commandment to be ashamed of God’s name or to be “a shame to it, by unconformable, unwise, unfruitful, and offensive walking, or backsliding from it.” To be ashamed of God’s name is to refuse to confess Him before others. Thus one who refuses to give thanks for his food in public because he is afraid of ridicule from others violates the 3rd Commandment. On the other hand, to be a shame to God’s name is to live a life that is inconsistent with the pattern of life laid down in the Scripture. When that happens, we blaspheme God by our lives since we bear His name and live contrary to it (cf. Tit 2:5). **W**

WLC 114. What reasons are annexed to the Third Commandment?

A. The reasons annexed to the Third Commandment, in these words, *The LORD thy God*, and, *For the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain*,¹ are, because He is the Lord and our God, therefore His name is not to be profaned, or any way abused by us;² especially because He will be so far from acquitting and sparing the transgressors of this commandment, as that He will not suffer them to escape His righteous judgment,³ albeit many such escape the censures and punishments of men.⁴

Proofs

¹Ex 20:7; ²Lev 19:12; ³Ezk 36:21–23; Deut 28:58–59; Zech 5:2–4; ⁴1 Sam 2:12, 17, 22, 24; cf. 1 Sam 3:13.

Comments

The 3rd commandment reads in full:

“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Ex 20:7).

The commandment itself has to do with not taking the name of God in vain. But it is worded in such a way as to include words of encouragement and warning for God’s people to keep it.

In particular, we see, first of all, that God is referred to as “The LORD thy God,” and not merely as ‘God.’ In this way we are reminded that He is not just a god, but He is the LORD, the alone living and true God, and He is our God. As such, we should especially exercise care to ensure that “His name is not to be profaned, or any way abused by us.” The world of unbelief will constantly abuse His name in words and deeds. When man created in the image of God live contrary to God’s laws, he profane God’s name. But not content with a mere passive violation of God’s name, he spews out vulgarities using God’s name and he shakes his fist against God when Providence is not to his liking. This is the way the world treats God and His name. They would disown Him, and count Him as an unworthy being if they admit His existence. But this must not be so for God’s people who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ in order that we might serve Him and enjoy Him. We not only bear God’s name in that His image is in us, but we name the name of Christ (2Tm 2:19), the Anointed of God and we are the temple of His Holy Spirit. He is our covenant God, and we are His covenant people. Shall we not, of all the people of the world, seek especially to magnify His name? The truth of words “The LORD thy God,” therefore, ought to motivate us to keep the 3rd Commandment.

But secondly, let us also take warning, *“for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”* This warning reminds us of how lightly man takes the name of God perhaps because there seems to be nothing to lose, and also because it is so easy to “escape the censures and punishments of men” for taking the name of God in vain. How many persons, not to mention, authorities, will stand up to defend the name of God? Indeed, it appears ironical that the servants of Satan, held captive in false religions would stand up to defend the name of their god even to the point of violence and murder, whereas the children of God would often stand by meekly. At first sight that may appear to be a reproach for God’s people for their timidity and apparent shame of God’s name. But a more mature consideration brings into mind how the Spirit of Christ in the hearts of believers bears fruit of meekness, gentleness, temperance and a law abiding spirit; where the spirit of the world is one of anger, vengeance, lawlessness and excess. From this angle, to a degree, it speaks well of the followers of Christ that they do not react to blasphemy in the same way as the followers of devilish religions.

That being the case, it would appear that God’s name would be left open to abuse by the world.

But not so, for God has said “Vengeance is mine; I will repay” (Rom 12:19). Even as the Spirit of God cultivates a spirit of meekness in His children so that they do not act vengefully even in the defence of God’s name, God Himself promises to take vengeance on those that take His name in vain! “He will be,” as our catechism puts it, “so far from acquitting and sparing the transgressors of this commandment, as that He will not suffer them to escape His righteous judgment.”

Man may today trample underfoot the name of God with apparent impunity. But this is so not because God’s arms are too short to defend His own name, but because He has intended it to be so, that man should voluntarily serve Him and love Him rather than being coerced to do so. Woe unto the man who abuses God’s liberality and longsuffering to abuse His name in word, deeds or thoughts, for the wrath of God will surely discover him. ^W

WLC 115. Which is the Fourth Commandment?

A. The Fourth Commandment is, *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*¹

Proofs

¹Ex 20:8–11

Comments

The 4th Commandment, like the 2nd Commandment, was given greater emphasis by the LORD if the number of words used to express it is anything to go by. But like the 2nd Commandment, it is also greatly neglected and challenged by the modern church. Any church which is seeking to reform itself, that it may walk according to the old paths, must therefore pay careful attention to it. Indeed, it is doubtful that any believer or church is serious about reformation or will succeed in reformation if there is no humble and serious attempt to obey this Commandment without diluting it with relativism.

The Sabbath is not,—as many modern evangelicals and even Reformed persons claim,—a Jewish shadow. No, in so far as the keeping of the Sabbath is mandated in the Moral Law of God, all men, Jews or Gentiles, believers or unbelievers are perpetually and universally obliged to keep the Sabbath. And not only so, but so important is the Sabbath in the eyes of the LORD, that He has made it very clear that it is to be observed by all men by instituting it with and at Creation. For He created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day and sanctified it (Gen 2:2-3). He could have created the entire universe in a split second, but He chose to create it in six days in order that He might establish a pattern of work and rest for man (see Ex 20:11). The Sabbath is therefore, a Creation Ordinance that God established for all men in order that all men may set aside one day in seven for rest and worship. As a Creation Ordinance and a Moral Law, it remains obligatory on all men today. But as the Sabbath is a covenant sign to distinguish God's people from the world (cf. Ezk 20:20), Christians, of all the people in the world, must keep the Sabbath even though the world refuses to do so. Thus, the writer of Hebrews assert: "There remaineth therefore a [Sabbath-Rest] to the people of God" (Heb 4:9; the word rendered 'rest' is the word '*sabbatismos*' [*sabbatismos*] which occurs only once in the New Testament and means 'sabbath-rest').

It may be questioned: If the Sabbath is moral, perpetual and universal, why is it that the New Covenant Christian church observe it on the first day of the week while the Old Covenant Jewish church observe it on the last day of the week.

The rationale for this change will be noted in our next study, but notice for now that the 4th Commandment does not indicate which day the Sabbath must be kept. It simply speaks of the need to rest one day in seven! The fact is the day on which the Sabbath is to be observed must be indicated by an additional positive commandment. Under the old Covenant, the Sabbath day was indicated by God resting on the seventh day after creating the world, as well as by a double portion of the manna on the day before the Sabbath when the children of Israel were first redeemed from Egypt (Ex 16:5, 22-23). In the New Testament, the day is indicated by the raising of the heavenly manna from the grave. This day, which is the first day of the week, is the day on which "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner" (Ps 118:22, cf. Acts 4:10-11). "This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118:24). **W**

A. The Fourth Commandment requireth of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as He hath appointed in His Word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian sabbath,¹ and in the New Testament called *The Lord's day*.²

Proofs

¹Deut 5:12–14; Gen 2:2–3; 1 Cor 16:1–2; Acts 20:7; Mt 5:17–18; Isa 56:2, 4, 6–7; ²Rev 1:10

Comments

We have already noted that the 4th Commandment applies to all men, everywhere and in all ages. This is so not only because it is included in the Summary of God's Moral Law, but also because the Sabbath is a creation ordinance instituted even before the nation of Israel came unto existence.

What does the 4th Commandment require? It requires that all men sanctify or set apart one day in seven for rest and worship. How we must do will be discussed in our next study, but for now let us consider a few questions related to this requirement of the 4th Commandment.

In the first place, is it not true that every day that we have belong to the Lord? What then, does it mean to keep holy or to set apart any particularly day? Should not every day be holy unto the Lord? It is true that in so far as we belong to the Lord, all our time belongs to the Lord, and we should glorify Him with all the time that we have. However, God has appointed that one day in seven must be set apart and observed differently from the rest of the six days. To put it very simply, on this one day, God requires that we do only that which is prescribed or sanctioned by Him. Whatever is not prescribed by Him is forbidden. On the other hand, on the other six days, whatever is not forbidden is allowed. In other words, the Sabbath day belongs to God, so we may not use it as we like; whereas, the other days are appointed to us to use according to our discretion and wisdom. We are free to use the day to worship God and to study His Word; and we are also free to sell part of it away to an employer, or to use it for recreation, business or housework. We may use the six days in any way so long as we do not sin against God.

In the second place, if the 4th Commandment is a perpetual and universal Moral Commandment, then how it that since the resurrection of Christ, the Sabbath day is to be observed on the first day rather than the last day. To answer this question, it should be noted first of all that the 4th Commandment itself does not indicate which day in seven is to be sanctified. It tells us that one day in seven is to be sanctified, but which day is to be sanctified is always pointed out by an additional positive commandment (cf. *WCF* 21.7).

When man first came into existence, God indicated the day of rest by resting on the seventh day after creating the world in six days. Then when the day of rest was apparently lost during the 400 years of Egyptian captivity (because the Egyptians observed a ten day work week), God indicated to the people which day they should observe the Sabbath by a double portion of the manna on the day before the Sabbath (Ex 16:5, 22-23).

This day was, however, changed in fulfilment of prophecy to the first day of the week upon the resurrection of the Lord, the Heavenly Manna on that day (Ps 118:22, cf. Acts 4:10-11). It is for this reason that the first day of the week takes prominent place in the New Testament. Consider how the Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples a total of ten times before His ascension. Out of these ten times, the day on which He appeared is only noted on six occasions, and each time it is the first day of the week! Since the Lord Jesus had during His ministry proclaimed that He is "Lord also of the Sabbath" (Mk 2:28), His discriminatory gracing of the first day of the week by His resurrection and post-resurrection appearances must be interpreted as a positive commandment for the day of rest to be moved to the first day. This is perhaps the reason why the day came to be known as the "Lord's Day" (Rev 1:10).

Remarkably this change of day was anticipated in the Old Testament. We have already noted in our previous study how it is anticipated in Psalm 118, which points to the day of the resurrection of Christ (Ps 118:22, 24 cf. Acts 4:10-11). But that is not the only place where it is anticipated. It is also anticipated in the very giving of the commandment!

Note how when the 4th Commandment was first issued in Exodus 20, the reason for keeping the command was that God rested after creating the world (v. 11); but when the commandment was repeated in Deuteronomy 5, instead of creation, the Jews were exhorted to remember their deliverance from Egypt (Deut 5:15).

The first issue of the command is nowhere abrogated; and thus the Jews whenever they kept the Sabbath would be required to commemorate God's gracious deliverance of them from Egypt, in addition to His work of creation.

This deliverance from Egypt is frequently described in the Old Testament as an act of redemption (e.g. Ex 15:13). It is as such a type of the greater redemption accomplished by Christ! Which, therefore, provides not only a strong theological reason for the change in day, upon the fulfilment of the antitype, but also a greater reason for observing the Sabbath by New Testament saints, namely redemption in Christ Jesus.

This is the basis for the remaineth therefore a

The Sabbath rest of the graced by our Lord. It is a observed by all people, but ushers in the eternal Sabbath and type. *W*

REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY

for He is our Creator

Exodus 20:9-11

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁰ But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

for He is our Redeemer

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹² Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. ¹³ Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁴ But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

¹⁵ And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day

assertion of the writer of Hebrews that "there [Sabbath-Rest] to the people of God" (Heb 4:9).

people of God today is the Lord's Day. It is a day day belonging to Him. It is a day that must be especially God's people until the Lord returns and for which the weekly Christian Sabbath is an emblem

WLC 117. How Is the Sabbath or the Lord's Day To Be Sanctified?

A. The sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day,^a not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful;^b and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy^c) in the public and private exercises of God's worship;^d and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.^e

Proofs

^a Ex 20:8, 10. ^b Ex 16:25–28; Neh 13:15–22; Jer 17:21–22. ^c Mt 12:1–13. ^d Isa 58:13; Lk 4:16; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1–2; Ps 92 title; Isa 66:23; Lev. 23:3. ^e Ex 20:8; Lk 23:54, 56; 16:22,25–26,29; Neh 13:19.

Comments

We saw in our previous study how the sanctifying of the Sabbath or the Lord's Day is a perpetual, universal and moral obligation not only for the Church, but for all men.

How is the Sabbath to be sanctified? Our catechism teaches us that we are to sanctify it in three inter-related ways.

First, it must be sanctified, “by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful.”

What this essentially means is that the Sabbath is to be kept differently from other days. As one tenth of our material possession belongs to the Lord (Mal 3:8), so one seventh of our time belongs to the Lord, only that the portion of time belonging to the Lord is specified by Him. God has given us seven days a week.

Of these seven days, six days are appointed to our stewardship in a general way. We may do what we want with the time so long as what we want to do is not contrary to God's word. We may sell a part of the time to an employer; we may use a part of it for recreation, another part of it for housework and homework, another part of it for marketing, and another part of it for Bible Studies, etc. We should, of course, use this time with prudence, and a desire to please God and to lay up treasures in heaven. But it is no sin, for example, if we fail to read the Bible for a whole day (though it may indicate spiritual declension).

The one day appointed as the Sabbath, on the other hand, is the Lord's Day. It is a day belonging to the Lord. On this day, apart from works of necessity and mercy, we are not to do anything else apart from what is prescribed in God's Word. Or to put in another way, on other days, whatever is not forbidden is allowed, whereas on the Sabbath, whatever is not prescribed is forbidden (works of necessity and mercy are prescribed, see Mt 12:1-13). Thus, worldly employments and recreations, though lawful on other days are forbidden on the Sabbath.

Accordingly, and *secondly*, we should on the Sabbath make “it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship.” The Sabbath is to be kept holy (Ex 20:8). It is to be set apart unto the Lord. As such, it should primarily be used for “public and private exercises of God's worship.” This would involve formal or specific worship exercises such as when the church gathers for public worship, or when the family gathers together for family worship.

But it would also include informal, though no less deliberate, exercises of worship such as personal times of prayer, Bible-reading, reading of Christian literature, fellowship with the saints (around topics relating to our Christian walk and sanctification), singing of psalms, etc.

Apart from these, the Lord also specifically permits and therefore sanctions works of necessity (including works related to emergency situations) and works of mercy (Mt 12:1-13). Works of necessity would include time spent cooking simple meals, eating and personal cleaning. Works of mercy may include visiting someone in the hospital, or in the case of a doctor, treating a patient, or in the case of a policeman and fireman, reporting for standby duty.

It should be noted, however, that works of necessity and mercy should not be allowed to become the primary consumer of time on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is made for man that we may rest and worship the Lord. So we must, as a matter of principle, aim to use the Sabbath as much as possible in the private and public exercises of worship. And we should moreover make it our delight to engage in these things. The prophet Isaiah puts it this way:

“¹³ If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: ¹⁴ Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa 58:13-14).

Those who have not been keeping the Sabbath, may initially find it burdensome to keep it. But once we begin to understand that God gives us these restrictions for our good and His glory, we begin to enjoy His day and find liberty in our hearts only when we are keeping His day holy.

But *thirdly* and finally, in order that we may properly enjoy the Sabbath without being burdened by unnecessary cares and interruptions, we should “prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business” that belong to the week. In other words, we should seek to finish by Saturday night what worldly business and activity that are needed by Monday. Thus accounts should be settled, presentation slides completed, homework completed, exam preparation wrapped up, car petrol topped up, clothes washed, things to be cooked on the Sabbath cut up, things that can be pre-cooked, cooked, etc, etc. That is: as much as lies in our power we should minimise or keep the Sabbath free from all worldly distractions that we may engage ourselves as much as possible in the private and public exercises of God's worship. This would of course involve foresight and diligence. And it may also involve moderation in that we may have to curtail certain things. We should for example desire to enjoy the Sabbath above being a little more prepared for the Monday examination. And likewise we should be prepared to have a more soggy meal on the Sabbath because of prior cooking, so that we do not have to spend so much time cooking on the Sabbath.

“The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mk 2:27). But that does not mean it is free for man to use it in any way he wants. It is made for man's good, and God has instructed us in His word as to what is good for us. Let us seek to honour God by honouring His day. *W*

WLC 118. Why is the charge of keeping the sabbath more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors?

A. The charge of keeping the sabbath is more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors, because they are bound not only to keep it themselves, but to see that it be observed by all those that are under their charge; and because they are prone oftentimes to hinder them by employments of their own.¹

Proofs

¹Ex 20:10; Jos 24:15; Neh 13:15–17; Jer 17:20–22; Ex 23:12.

Comments

It is seldom observed, but it is an observable fact that the 4th Commandment is more specifically directed to governors of families, and other superiors. What is the basis of this assertion? The basis is in the words:

“... thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates” (Ex 20:10).

Who has responsibility over children, servants and strangers within the gate but governors of families and other superiors? Thus the commandment is specifically directed to them.

This is, of course, not to say that those who are not in a position of authority are not required to keep the Sabbath. In fact the command itself indicates all are to keep the Sabbath.

But why is the charge of keeping the Sabbath more specially directed to those who have been appointed to positions of authority? The reasons are:

In the first place, they must realise that they are not above the law. They must have spiritual rest too and set a good example for those under their charge.

In the second place, they are responsible for the well-being of those who were by the providence of God appointed to their care. There are many reasons why their subordinates may not keep the Sabbath. Children may be too young to understand the need to observe the Sabbath or to prepare themselves or to restrain themselves from breaking it. Which child, for example, would automatically finish up their school work by Saturday so that he would not need to do it on the Sabbath? Employees, likewise, may be tempted to labour even on the Sabbath, for fear of offending their employers, etc.

In the third place, had the 4th commandment not been directed specially at those who have been appointed authority, they might be tempted to require their children and subordinates to work on the Sabbath.

Bearing these things in mind, parents, teachers, employers, superiors at work, etc must be careful not to encourage the breaking of the Sabbath by their subordinates. And they must not be nonchalant when their subordinates break the Sabbath under their watch. Thus parents should not be so occupied doing their own things on the Sabbath that the young children are left to decide for themselves how they want to pass their time. Thus those who have position of influence at the schools and at the workplace should ensure that no one be forced to do that which may be done on other days. *W*

WLC 119. What are the sins forbidden in the Fourth Commandment?

- A.** The sins forbidden in the Fourth Commandment are, all omissions of the duties required,¹ all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them;²
all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful;³
and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about
our worldly employments and recreations.⁴

Proofs

¹Ezk 22:26; ²Acts 20:7, 9; Ezk 33:30–32; Amos 8:5; Mal 1:13; ³Ezk 23:38; ⁴Jer 17:24, 27; Isa 58:13

Comments

In the view of many modern believers, the 4th Commandment is the most negative and restrictive of all the 10 commandments. However, this arises out of wrong thinking and wrong attitude, for the 4th Commandment is really one of only two of the Ten Commandments which are stated positively. The 4th Commandment, should therefore be viewed positively, and kept cheerfully. Indeed, the Sabbath should be our delight (Isa 58:13).

The only reason why it is not our delight is because of sin. When we enter our eternal rest for which the weekly Sabbath is but an emblem and type, we shall enjoy our rest with perfect and uninterrupted bliss. We will not need to be reminded of what should not be done, for we will not want to do any thing that should not be done on the Sabbath at all!

But today we have to contend with sin, and so we must consciously take heed to doing the duties which are required of us on the Sabbath, while at the same time, consciously resist the temptations to do the things that are forbidden.

We saw in our earlier study that our primary duty on the Sabbath is the “public and private exercises of God’s worship” (WLC 117). As we noted in our earlier commentary:

This would involve formal or specific worship exercises such as when the church gathers for public worship, or when the family gathers together for family worship. But it would also include informal, though no less deliberate, exercises of worship such as personal times of prayer, Bible-reading, reading of Christian literature, fellowship with the saints (around topics relating to our Christian walk and sanctification), singing of psalms, etc.

The *first* thing that is forbidden in the 4th Commandment is “all omissions of the duties required, all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them.” Naturally, this has to do primarily with appointed duties such as public worship and family worship. Thus, a failure to attend public worship at the stated times constitute a violation of the Sabbath. So too it is a profaning of the Sabbath to be weary of the means or to go through the motion in worship.

This assertion may be very startling for the modern believer who thinks that going or not going for public worship is his choice; or that he has fulfilled his duties if he has gone for one worship service, although the under-shepherd in his church has appointed for the church to worship morning and evening. To dispel this sinful idea, it is essential that we remember that the Sabbath day is the Lord’s Day. It is the Lord’s Day not only that Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, but that it is a day belonging to the Lord. If it is a day belonging to the Lord, should any believer who is a member of a local congregation despise the call of Christ through the leaders to join in public worship?

The *second* thing that is forbidden in the 4th Commandment is “all profaning the day by idleness.” This is again quite startling, for a common notion about keeping the Sabbath is that it should be a day of rest, where by ‘rest’ is meant idleness or inactivity. But this is not the ‘rest of the holy sabbath’ (Ex 16:23). The ‘rest’ that the 4th Commandment enjoins is rest from our regular earthly employments that we might worship God! In Exodus 20:11, we are told, “the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.” To hallow it is to sanctify it, or to set it apart for holy use. Thus we read in Leviticus 23:3—

“Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation...”

An holy ‘convocation’ is a calling or assembly for worship. The worship of the Sabbath is to give us a foretaste of our eternal Sabbath, when we shall be worshipping God day and night forever and ever. Thus, far from keeping the Sabbath, being idle on it, is to profane it.

Of course, this does not mean that it is sinful to take a nap on the Sabbath afternoon. This may be necessary for some in order to be refreshed for the next worship service. But the point is, we must never equate rest with inactivity and worst substitute inactivity for worship.

The *third* thing that is forbidden on the Sabbath is “doing that which is in itself sinful.” This needs little explanation, though it could be argued that the same sin committed on this queen of days, is more grievous than when committed on other days.

Finally, the Sabbath can also be profaned “by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.” We have seen how our Lord teaches us that works of emergency, necessity, and mercy are permitted on the Lord’s Day. But we must be careful not to allow these things to become our primary activities on the Sabbath. At the same time, we must take care not to allow needless or unnecessary works, words or thoughts about our worldly employments and recreations to intrude into our day.

But what are needless works, words or thoughts about our worldly employments and recreations? Well, the list is endless and it is unprofitable to enumerate it. But something is needless on the Sabbath if it can be done on other days.

Does this mean that on the Sabbath, believers should never ask one another about their worldly employment? I do not think so. In the course of our conversations, it is often needful and charitable for us to ask after our brethren concerning their week. But what we should do is to bear in mind that the Sabbath is the Lord’s and therefore our conversations in that day should conscientiously revolve around Him and His work in our lives. In other words, we have strayed too far in conversation and thoughts if the primary subject becomes work and recreation rather than Christ and His saints.

These prohibitions, we should remember, apply not only to believers but also to unbelievers since the 4th Commandment is moral, universal and perpetual. As such, it is needful for believers, as far as possible, not to be engaged in anything that may cause others including unbelievers to profane the Sabbath. Thus it is wrong for a believer to have a meal in the restaurant or hawker centre on the Sabbath. Some may argue that it is needful to eat, but the question we should ask is: Is it needful for the store owner to open the store; and is it not possible for us to prepare our food ourselves rather than paying someone else to do it for us on the Sabbath? *W*

WLC 120. What are the reasons annexed to the Fourth Commandment,
the more to enforce it?

A. The reasons annexed to the Fourth Commandment, the more to enforce it, are taken from the equity of it, God allowing us six days of seven for our own affairs, and reserving but one for Himself, in these words, *Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:*¹ from God's challenging a special propriety in that day, *The seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God:*² from the example of God, who *in six days made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day:* and from that blessing which God put upon that day, not only in sanctifying it to be a day for His service, but in ordaining it to be a means of blessing to us in our sanctifying it; *wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*³

Proofs

¹Ex 20:9; ²Ex 20:10; ³Ex 20:11

Comments

We have already seen how the 4th commandment is one of the two commandments that God has placed especial emphasis on. In this question we see how God enjoins the keeping of the Sabbath by giving four additional reasons for us to do so.

The *first* reason is the reasonableness or equity of the Sabbath institution, for in each week of seven days, God requires us to only reserve one day for Him. In reality, all seven days belong to God since He is our Creator and the giver of life, but God has permitted us to use six days according to our own discretion so that for all intents and purposes the six days belong to us. We can do all we want with our time in the six days. We can do our leisure or we can even trade them for monetary gains. How unreasonable then it would be for us to refuse to keep just one day holy when God requires it of us?

Secondly, we must keep the Sabbath because God has challenged a special propriety in that day. He sanctified the day and He would have us know that it is a day that belongs to Him saying: "*The seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God.*" The Sabbath is the Lord's Day. It is a day belonging to the Lord. Shall we steal time from the day that God has reserved for Himself?

Thirdly, we must keep the Sabbath because God sets us a personal example by creating the world in six days and then resting on the seven. God could have created the world in a split second, or He could have created it in six billion years, but He chose to create in six days. Why six days? No doubt because He wished to set an example for us to follow: working six days and resting on the seventh. Shall we be ungrateful to Him by refusing to take heed to His example?

Fourthly, we must keep the Sabbath because God has specially ordained it to be "a means of blessing to us in our sanctifying it." "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). In other words, God has appointed the day for our good—both physical and spiritual. Shall we spurn God's kindness and refuse to accept His gift to us—even the gift of the Sabbath? *W*

WLC 121. Why is the word *Remember* set in the beginning of the Fourth Commandment?

A. The word *Remember* is set in the beginning of the Fourth Commandment,¹ [1] partly, because of the great benefit of remembering it, we being thereby helped in our preparation to keep it,² and, in keeping it, better to keep all the rest of the commandments,³ and to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption, which contain a short abridgement of religion;⁴ and [2] partly, because we are very ready to forget it,⁵ for that there is less light of nature for it,⁶ and yet it restraineth our natural liberty in things at other times lawful;⁷ [3] that it cometh but once in seven days, and many worldly businesses come between, and too often take off our minds from thinking of it, either to prepare for it, or to sanctify it;⁸ and [4] that Satan with his instruments much labour to blot out the glory, and even the memory of it, to bring in all irreligion and impiety.⁹

Proofs

¹Ex 20:8; ²Ex 16:23; Lk 23:54, 56; Mk 15:42; Neh 13:19; ³Ps 92 title, 13–14; Ezk 20:12, 19–20; ⁴Gen 2:2–3; Ps 118:22, 24; cf. Acts 4:10–11; Rev 1:10; ⁵Ezk 22:26; ⁶Neh 9:14; ⁷Ex 34:21; ⁸Deut 5:14–15; Amos 8:5; ⁹Lam 1:7; Jer 17:21–23; Neh 13:15–23.

Comments

The 4th Commandment is essentially a command to keep the Sabbath Holy. It is as such striking that it does not begin with the call to ‘Keep’ (as in Dt 5:12), but rather the call to ‘Remember.’

But why? John H. Gerstner suggested that it may be because the Sabbath, which was a creation ordinance, was forgotten during the Egyptian captivity, since the Egyptians had a ten day work week. The call to ‘remember’ therefore reminds the people that God is their Creator and that He had set an example of resting one day in seven, which example, they are obliged to follow.

This interpretation of the word ‘remember’ certainly falls within the semantic range of the word used in the original.

However, our catechism teaches us, on the basis of the nature of the commandment, that there are at least four other good reasons why the word ‘remember’ is set at the beginning of the commandment.

The *first* reason is essentially that the Sabbath is so rich in significance,—seeing that it is a celebration of God’s creating and redeeming us,—that we can only fully benefit from it if we recall and think about it.

The *second* reason is that we are especially prone to forget the Sabbath, because ‘there is less light of nature for it, and yet it restraineth our natural liberty in things at other times lawful.’ That is to say: Man as a moral being created in the image of God knows the law of God in his heart (Rom 2:14-15). His knowledge of the law has been darkened because of sin, but still there is sufficient light in his innate knowledge so that his conscience prevents him from an absolute denial of the commandments. However, for some reason, there is less light of nature illuminating the 4th Commandment, so that we not only forget it easily, but we do not by nature feel grieved by a violation of it. In fact, the very nature of the Sabbath which restrains our natural liberty in things that are at other times lawful, simply makes it even more difficult for us to observe it unless we make a deliberate effort to remember it.

The *third* reason is that the Sabbath comes only once in seven days. This being the case, it is easy for us to forget it, seeing that in the six days that intervene it, our minds are occupied with the things of the world.

And *finally*, we are to strive to remember the Sabbath day because Satan hates it and is labouring to “blot out the glory and memory of it.” If he succeeds, a torrent of irreligion and impiety will flood the church. It is as such essential that we constantly provoke to bear in mind the Sabbath and to keep it holy. *W*

WLC 122. What is the sum of the six commandments which contain our duty to man?

- A.** The sum of the six commandments which contain our duty to man, is, to love our neighbour as ourselves,¹ and to do to others what we would have them to do to us.²

Proofs

¹Mt 22:39; ²Mt 7:12.

Comments

We saw in Q. 102 that “The sum of the four commandments containing our duty to God, is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind.”

This is taken from our Lord’s answer to the lawyer who asked Him “which is the great commandment in the law?” (Mt 22:36).

In that same answer, our Lord also gave what He considers to be the second greatest commandment. He says:

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mt 22:39).

And He adds:

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Mt 22:40)

Since the Ten Commandments is divided exactly into these two divisions of loving God and loving our neighbour, it is difficult not to conclude that what our Lord says concerning the first greatest commandment is in fact a summary of the first four commandments, while what He says concerning the second greatest commandment is a summary of the last six commandments. This is especially so as all the law and the prophets do indeed hang from the Ten Commandments in that every law that can be found in the Scripture can be reduced into one or more of the commandments in the Ten Commandments.

But in regards to our relationship with our neighbour, our Lord also gave a golden rule to the effect:

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mt 7:12).

Comparing this statement with Matthew 22:39, it is again difficult to escape the conclusion that the Lord is giving another summation of the last six commandments.

The apostle Paul reminds us that we all know how to love ourselves:

“For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (Eph 5:29).

To love ourselves is to do unto ourselves what we think is best for ourselves. The Lord in teaching us to love our neighbours as ourselves is essentially telling us to do unto others what is best for them. And what is best for them? What is best for them may be defined objectively by the last six commandments. But what is best for them can also be more subjectively determined by what we consider as best for ourselves, as in what we would like others do to us. In this way, when we are unsure what is the loving thing to do to someone, we may easily bounce the question off ourselves: “What would I like to have done unto me if I were in that position?”

Thus, the last six commandments may be summarised into “[loving] our neighbours as ourselves, and [doing] to others what we would have them to do to us.” *W*

WLC 123. Which is the Fifth Commandment?

A. The Fifth Commandment is, *Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.*¹

Proofs

¹Ex 20:12.

Comments

We are entering into the second table of the Ten Commandments. If we look at the order of the Ten Commandments, we will realise that there is a general progression in the severity of the sin associated with the violation of the commandments. For example, a failure to serve the Living and True God (1st Commandment) is more severe than a failure to worship Him rightly (2nd Commandment); which in turn is more severe than taking His name in vain (3rd Commandment); and likewise, murder (6th Commandment) is more severe than adultery (7th Commandment); which in turn is more severe than theft (8th Commandment) and dishonesty (9th Commandment).

If that is the way in which the Ten Commandments are ordered, and it appears to be so, then the 5th Commandment may seem to be out of place. But is it really out of place?

A careful consideration of the commandment would show us that this is not the case.

In the first place, although it may not appear to be more grievous to men to dishonour our parents than to kill, it is not necessary so in the sight of God. Consider the fact that most people would think it is less grievous to worship a false God than to tell a lie; but this cannot be the case in God's sight.

In the second place, the 5th Commandment is placed as the first of the commandments concerning our relationship with our fellow man because it has to do at least in part with honouring those whom God has appointed over us. That is, it has to do with those who have been given a portion of the authority and honour that is due to Him. Our parents, our elders and ministers and our government, are after all appointed to be God's representative over us.

In the third place, the 5th Commandment is the first commandment that every child must learn. If the 5th Commandment is not learnt well, it is unlikely that they will learn the other commandments well. Why? Because children learn by imitation and because honouring parents trains children to honour God once they begin to have a consciousness of the existence of God. *W*

WLC 124. Who are meant by *father* and *mother* in the Fifth Commandment?

A. By *father* and *mother*, in the Fifth Commandment, are meant, not only natural parents,¹ but all superiors in age² and gifts;³ and especially such as, by God's ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family,⁴ church,⁵ or commonwealth.⁶

Proofs

¹Prov 23:22, 25; Eph 6:1-2; ²1 Tim 5:1-2; ³Gen 4:20-22; 45:8; ⁴2 Kgs 5:13; ⁵2 Kgs 2:12; 13:14; Gal 4:19; ⁶Isa 49:23.

Comments

At first look, the 5th Commandment seems to have the narrowest scope of the six commandments in the second table. It appears to apply only to those who have living parents, and have nothing to do with our relationship with all other persons. So it would appear that if one's parents have passed away, he would be freed from the 5th Commandment.

This, however, is not the case. The 5th Commandment, as we shall see, has to do with how we should relate with our neighbour depending on whether we are superior, inferior or equal with them in regard to our various stations in life.

But would such an interpretation be a reading into the commandment itself since it speaks only of honouring our father and mother? Well, it would not since the Scripture itself uses the terms 'father' and 'mother' not only to refer to natural parents (Prov 23:22, 25; Eph 6:1-2), but to those who are older or more gifted as well as to those who have been appointed over us in a place of authority.

- So, in terms of gift, Jubal is said to be "the father of all such as handle the harp and organ" (Gen 4:21) and Jabal is said to be "the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle" (Gen 4:20).
- In terms of age, Paul advises Timothy:
"Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity" (1 Tim 5:1-2)
- In a similar way, in terms of spiritual maturity, seniority and indebtedness in the Church, Elisha called Elijah his father (2 Kgs 2:12) and Paul speaks to his disciples as his children and he as their father (Gal 4:19; 1Cor 4:15).
- In terms of authority in employer-employee relationship, we read of how Naaman's servant call him, "My father" (2 Kgs 5:13).
- And likewise in terms of authority in the civil government, kings are known as 'nursing fathers' and queens as 'nursing mothers' (see Isa 49:23).

It is clear, then, the 5th Commandment is not only about our relationship to our natural parents. And perhaps it is for this reason that when the apostle Paul enumerates the commandments in the second table of the Decalogue in Romans 13 (see v. 9), he does not explicitly mention the 5th Commandment. The 5th Commandment after all, has just been expounded in the first seven verses, which begin with the words:

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom 13:1);

and end with the words:

"Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" (Rom 13:7). *W*

WLC 125. Why are superiors styled *Father* and *Mother*?

A. Superiors are styled *Father* and *Mother*, both to teach them in all duties toward their inferiors, like natural parents, to express love and tenderness to them, according to their several relations;¹ and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to their superiors, as to their parents.²

Proofs

¹Eph 6:4; 2 Cor 12:14; 1 Th 2:7–8, 11; Num 11:11–12; ²1 Cor 4:14–16; 2 Kgs 5:13

Comments

We have seen how the terms ‘father’ and ‘mother’ do not only refer to our parents, but to all who are superior to us in terms of age, gift and authority. But these loaded titles carry with them implied honours and responsibilities so that the 5th commandment not only teaches the duties that children have toward their parents, but compels us to apply what we naturally know or are taught by Scripture (e.g. Eph 6:4, 2 Cor 12:14) to be the duties and responsibilities pertaining to parent-child relationship into our relationship with others, be they our superiors, inferiors or equals.

Thus, superiors, should, like natural parents, “express love and tenderness” to their inferiors in the manner appropriate to the relationship that they have entered into by the providence of God. It is in this context that Moses is called to be a “nursing father” unto the children of Israel (Num 11:12). Likewise, the apostles of Christ dealt with the somewhat ungrateful saints as nursing mothers unto their children (1 Th 2:7).

Learning from the commandment, and from these godly examples, employers, teachers in school, superiors at work, etc, should not treat their employees, students or subordinates as burdens or disposable hired hand. We should be concerned about their welfare and seek their good always.

Likewise, on the part of inferiors, knowing that the Scripture styles our superiors as parents, we must never despise their authority or dishonour them, but seek to perform our duties toward them willingly and cheerfully as to our own parents. *W*

WLC 126. What is the general scope of the Fifth Commandment?

- A.** The general scope of the Fifth Commandment is, the performance of those duties which we mutually owe in our several relations, as inferiors, superiors, or equals.¹

Proofs

¹Eph 5:21; 1 Pet 2:17; Rom 12:10

Comments

The 5th Commandment is, “Honour thy Father and thy mother &c.” We have seen how the terms ‘father’ and ‘mother’ do not only refer to our parents, but to all who are superior to us in terms of age, gift and authority. But we have also seen how the terms ‘father’ and ‘mother’ are loaded titles which carry with them implied honours and responsibilities.

Thus the 5th Commandment is not only about the duty that inferiors have towards their superiors, but also about the duties of those who are honoured and submitted unto towards their inferiors. Indeed, broadening the commandment even more, we see that we have a duty towards our inferiors, superiors and equals which may be summarised in the act of honouring and submitting. Thus the Scripture teaches us:

- “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Eph 5:21).
- “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” (1 Pet 2:17).
- “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5).
- “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Rom 12:10).

All these commandments are, no doubt, expansions and applications of the 5th Commandment.

God has placed us in different stations of life relative to one another in terms of superiority and inferiority in order that the society may function harmoniously and in order that we may know that we may learn submission to Him to whom all glory and honour belongs ultimately.

WLC 127. What is the honour that inferiors owe to their superiors?

A. The honour which inferiors owe to their superiors is, all due reverence in heart,¹ word,² and behaviour;³ prayer and thanksgiving for them;⁴ imitation of their virtues and graces;⁵ willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels;⁶ due submission to their corrections;⁷ fidelity to,⁸ defence⁹ and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks, and the nature of their places;¹⁰ bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love,¹¹ that so they may be an honour to them and to their government.¹²

Proofs

¹Mal 1:6; Lev 19:3; ²Prov 31:28; 1 Pet 3:6; ³Lev 19:32; 1 Kgs 2:19; ⁴1 Tim 2:1-2; ⁵Heb 13:7; Phil 3:17; ⁶Eph 6:1-2, 5-7; 1 Pet 2:13-14; Rom 13:1-5; Heb 13:17; Prov 4:3-4; 23:22; Ex 18:19, 24; ⁷Heb 12:9; 1 Pet 2:18-20; ⁸Tit 2:9-10; ⁹1 Sam 26:15-16; 2 Sam 18:3; Esth 6:2; ¹⁰Mt 22:21; Rom 13:6-7; 1 Tim 5:17-18; Gal 6:6; Gen 45:11; 47:12; ¹¹1 Pet 2:18; Prov 23:22; Gen 9:23; ¹²Ps 127:3-5; Prov 31:23.

Comments

The 5th Commandment unlike the other commandments teaches us our duties towards our neighbour depending on whether we are superior, inferior or equal with them. Therefore, in speaking about the sins and duties which the 5th Commandment enjoins, it is necessary to take six questions rather than the usual two. In this first of the six questions we are considering what are the duties required of inferiors towards superior. In the next question we will be consider the sin of inferiors against their superiors and so on.

Our duties, as inferiors, towards our superiors are to honour them—so that we “may be an honour to them and to their government.” But how are we to honour them? We are to honour them in seven ways, viz.:

- a. *Firstly*, we are to honour them with “all due reverence in heart, word, and behaviour.” That is, we must respect our superiors in our hearts and demonstrate our respect by our words and actions. It is as such a violation of God’s law for children to relate to their parents and their superiors as if they are equals. “Ye shall fear every man his father and his mother” (Lev 19:3) and “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD” (Lev 19:32), says the Lord.
- b. *Secondly*, we must honour them by praying for them and thanking God for them. Thus the apostle Paul exhorts us that...
“...supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim 2:1-2).
- c. *Thirdly*, we are to honour them by imitating their virtues and graces. There is no greater joy for God-fearing superiors than to see their inferiors imitating them. Thus Paul exhorts us to follow his steps (Phil 3:17) and the writer of Hebrews encourages us to follow the faith of our elders and consider their manner of life (Heb 13:7).
- d. *Fourthly*, we are to honour them by “willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels.” We are, of course, not required to obey anything that will cause us to sin against the Lord (Acts 5:29); but if a counsel or command which is not contrary to the word of God, is given to someone who has the authority over us, such as our parents, we should as far as possible obey “in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Col 3:20).
- e. *Fifthly*, we should honour them with “due submission to their corrections.” We should do so without regards to whether we like the way we are corrected or not (1 Pet 2:18).
- f. *Sixthly*, we should honour them by “fidelity to, defence and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks, and the nature of their places.” Simply stated this means that we should be faithful and loyal to them like David towards Saul. We should never, therefore, join in when our colleagues engage in ‘boss-bashing’ or ‘government-bashing’ at tea breaks. We should rather defend their good name as far as we can.
- g. *Seventhly*, and related to the last duty, we should honour our superiors by “bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love,” like Shem and Japheth towards Noah. Thus we should, for example, never spread rumours about some faults which we perceive in our elders. *W*

WLC 128. What are the sins of inferiors against their superiors?

A. The sins of inferiors against their superiors are, all neglect of the duties required toward them;¹ envying at,² contempt of,³ and rebellion⁴ against, their persons⁵ and places,⁶ in their lawful counsels,⁷ commands, and corrections;⁸ cursing, mocking,⁹ and all such refractory and scandalous carriage, as proves a shame and dishonour to them and their government.¹⁰

Proofs

¹Mt 15:4–6; ²Num 11:28–29; ³1 Sam 8:7; Isa 3:5; ⁴2 Sam 15:1–12; ⁵Ex 21:15; ⁶1 Sam 10:27;
⁷1 Sam 2:25; ⁸Deut 21:18–21; ⁹Prov 30:11, 17; ¹⁰Prov 19:26.

Comments

In our previous study, we considered what inferiors are to do towards their superiors. In this present study, we are considering what they are not to do to their superiors, or more accurately, what are their sins against their superiors. All such sins are violations of the 5th Commandment.

All omission of duties is sin, therefore, in the *first* place, all neglect of the duties required of them as discussed in our first study is prohibited by the 5th Commandment.

Secondly, it is a sin of inferiors to their superiors to disregard the authority or honour that God has vested upon them:

(1) By showing envy or jealousy towards them for what God has bestowed upon them. Joshua sinned in this regard when he, being jealous that Moses should be held in highest honour asked him to stop Edad and Medad from prophesying because they did not come to the Tent as commanded by Moses (Num 11:24-29).

(2) By showing contempt towards them, for showing contempt to our superiors is showing contempt towards God. When Israel asked Samuel to appoint them a king, citing as one of the reasons that he is too old to lead them, God told Samuel: “they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam 8:7).

(3) By ‘rebellion against, their persons and places, in their lawful counsels, commands, and corrections.’ To rebel against the persons of those who are our superiors, or to hurt them, is the equivalent to smiting our parents, which is a sin punishable by death in the Old Covenant (Ex 21:15). To rebel against their places is to refuse to show them the due honour such as when the sons of Belial questioned the authority of Saul and refused to show him honour by bring a present at his coronation (1 Sam 10:27). To rebel against the lawful counsels, commands and corrections of our superiors is to esteem them lightly or to disregard them, and so remain stubborn and intractable despite the overtures and instructions of our superiors.

Thirdly, it is a violation of the 5th Commandment to sin against our superiors by “cursing, mocking, and all such refractory and scandalous carriage, as proves a shame and dishonour to them and their government.” It is clear that all cursing and mocking of our superiors is sin and equivalent to cursing and mocking God. But what about “refractory and scandalous carriage”? What is this, but a condemnation of disrespectful ‘body language’? A stubborn and rebellious child may say with his lips that he loves and respects his parents, but his mean spirit is soon discovered by his carriage, for he shows his disrespect by refusing to look at their eyes when they talk to him, or by speaking with a disinterested carriage. King Agur puts it well when he says:

“The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it” (Prov 30:17).

Let us, therefore, learn not to pay lip-service to the superiors that God has appointed over us—whether at home (our parents, our elder brothers and sisters), in church (our elders and deacons), in school (our teachers), in the work place (our bosses) or in the nation (our magistrates and law enforcement officers), etc. Let us seek the Lord’s help to not sin against Him by sinning against those whom God has appointed over us. *W*

WLC 129. What is required of superiors toward their inferiors?

A. It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God, and that relation wherein they stand, to love,¹ pray for,² and bless their inferiors;³ to instruct,⁴ counsel, and admonish them;⁵ countenancing,⁶ commending,⁷ and rewarding such as do well;⁸ and discountenancing,⁹ reproof, and chastising such as do ill;¹⁰ protecting,¹¹ and providing for them all things necessary for soul¹² and body.¹³ and by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God,¹⁴ honour to themselves,¹⁵ and so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them.¹⁶

Proofs

¹Col 3:19; Tit 2:4; ²1 Sam 12:23; Job 1:5; ³1 Kgs 8:55–56; Heb 7:7; Gen 49:28; ⁴Deut 6:6–7; ⁵Eph 6:4; ⁶1 Pet 3:7; ⁷1 Pet 2:14; Rom 13:3; ⁸Esth 6:3; ⁹Rom 13:3–4; ¹⁰Prov 29:15; 1 Pet 2:14; ¹¹Job 29:12–17; Isa 1:10, 17; ¹²Eph 6:4; ¹³1 Tim 5:8; ¹⁴1 Tim 4:12; Tit 2:3–5; ¹⁵1 Kgs 3:28; ¹⁶Tit 2:15.

Comments

The 5th Commandment, we noted, is not only about the duties and sins of subordinates to their superiors, but also about the duties and sin of superiors to their superiors. We can quickly see how this is the case when we consider that parents are also responsible for their children's behaviour and therefore those who fail to teach their children to honour and respect them are also responsible for their children's violation of the 5th Commandment. Thus the apostle Paul, as soon as he has instructed the children to obey their parents, turn to the fathers and admonish them not to provoke their children unto wrath but to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

Of course, the duties of parents to children are very different from say an employer to an employee. Therefore, our catechism advises that the duties of superiors to their inferiors must be considered in the context of the of the "power they received from God, and that relation wherein they stand." That is essentially to say that not every duty that is require applies in every situation and to the same degree. For example, while a father may chastise his child with a rod for misdemeanour, a husband may not do the same to his wife!

Bearing this in mind, let us consider generally what is required of superiors toward their inferiors.

First, it is required of superiors to "to love, pray for, and bless their inferiors." Thus we are taught in the Scripture that husbands are to love their wives (Col 3:19), mothers are to love their children (Titus 2:4) and parents are to pray for their children as Job did to his children (Job 1:5). But what is it to bless? We know that the priests in the Old Dispensation and ministers in the New Dispensation should bless the congregation (cf. Num 6:23; Lk 24:50; Gal 1:3–5; Heb 13:20–21). But what about parents to children? Well, this is seldom done today, but we do have in the Scripture godly examples of Isaac blessing his sons, Jacob blessing his children etc. Fathers should therefore bless their children in hope that the Lord who vested them authority and responsibility over them may indeed bless them according to their heart's desire.

Secondly, superiors should "instruct, counsel, and admonish" their inferiors. This is not only true of fathers, who ought diligently to instruct their children in the way, nurture and admonition of the Lord (Dt 6:6; Eph 6:4), but it is also true of say elders in the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2) and superiors at work (e.g. Ruth 2:9, 15).

Thirdly, superiors should countenance, commend and reward such as do well. Thus, we are taught in the scriptures that governors are appointed by God "for the praise of them that do well" (1 Pet 2:14); and thus Peter urges husbands to "[give] honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel" (1 Pet 3:7). Husbands must love to commend their wives and not only their children when they do well! Husbands, when is the last time you commend your wife for the delicious meal?

Fourthly, superiors are to discountenance, reprove, and chastise such as among their charge who do ill. So the civil governed is appointed as a "minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom 13:4). So the Scripture instructs parents to chastise their children with the rod when the need arises: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov 13:24; cf. 19:18; 22:5–6; 23:13; 29:17).

Fifthly, superior are to protect and provide for their inferiors all things necessary for soul and body. This, of course, does not apply in all situation, nor in the same degree. We can see for example, that the civil government should have the foresight to provide help for their citizens when the need arise – like the way Joseph provided help for the Egyptians during the famine. We can see also how the elders of the church must provide for the spiritual needs of the flock under their care. But this is true especially for parents. Parents are not only to teach their children, they are to provide for their temporal needs. Paul speaking about the responsibility of the relatives of widows to provide for their needs makes a statement that surely applies also to parents towards their children: "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim 5:8).

Sixthly, superiors must "by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage,... procure glory to God, honour to themselves, and so ... preserve that authority which God hath put upon them." The 5th Commandment, we must remember does not only have to do with the honour of superiors but the honour of God who vested upon superiors their authority. Thus, we taught that if a wife obey not her own husband, then the word of God would be blasphemed (1 Tim 4:5). It is as such required that superiors do not,—out of a false sense of humility, or jollity in decorum, or despicable lording or otherwise,—cause that their authority should despised, for that would bring dishonour to the Lord who appoint them to their position of honour. *W*

A. The sins of superiors are, besides the neglect of the duties required of them,¹ an inordinate seeking of themselves,² their own glory,³ ease, profit, or pleasure;⁴ commanding things unlawful,⁵ or not in the power of inferiors to perform;⁶ counseling,⁷ encouraging,⁸ or favouring them in that which is evil;⁹ dissuading, discouraging, or discountenancing them in that which is good;¹⁰ correcting them unduly;¹¹ careless exposing, or leaving them to wrong, temptation, and danger;¹² provoking them to wrath;¹³ or any way dishonouring themselves, or lessening their authority, by an unjust, indiscreet, rigorous, or remiss behavior.¹⁴

Proofs

¹Ezk 34:2–4; ²Phil 2:21; ³Jn 5:44; 7:18; ⁴Isa 56:10–11; Deut 17:17; ⁵Dan 3:4–6; Acts 4:17–18; ⁶Ex 5:10–18; Mt 23:2, 4; ⁷Mt 14:8; Mk 6:24; ⁸2 Sam 13:28; ⁹1 Sam 3:13; ¹⁰Jn 7:46–49; Col 3:21; Ex 5:17; ¹¹1 Pet 2:18–20; Heb 12:10; Deut 25:3; ¹²Gen 38:11, 26; Acts 18:17; ¹³Eph 6:4; ¹⁴Gen 9:21; 1 Kgs 12:13–16; 1:6; 1 Sam 2:29–31.

Comments

We have considered, in our previous study, the duties which superiors have toward their inferiors. In so far as they are God-ordained duties, it is a sin of omission to neglect them. But besides the neglect of these duties, superiors sin relative to their inferiors in the following ways:

Firstly, they sin by “an inordinate seeking of themselves, their own glory, ease, profit, or pleasure.” We would note that the sin is not confined only to superiors, but tempts everyone in every estate (Phil 2:21; Jn 5:44; 7:18). However, it is not difficult to see how superiors are especially tempted to sin in this way since their very position of superiority can easily be misapprehended as a right or a license to seek their own good above the good of their inferiors. For this reason the Lord teaches us that the Christian leader must first be a servant as He himself came to serve (Lk 22:26).

Secondly, superiors sin by “commanding things unlawful, or not in the power of inferiors to perform.” The first part is very clear. Man by himself has no superiority. If he is superior to another person, his authority is vested upon him by the Lord, as such, how can he require his inferiors to violate the Law of God? Thus it was right for Peter and John to question the Sanhedrin: “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye” (Acts 4:19). What about commanding inferiors to do that which is not in their power to do? How is this a sin? This is a sin because it is an act designed to bind the conscience and to ensure sin (by way of breaking the 5th Commandment) on the part of the inferiors (we should take note that God alone has the right to require of us obedience, though we may not have the power to obey).

Thirdly, superiors sin by “counseling, encouraging, or favouring them in that which is evil.” This is more subtle than commanding things unlawful, but it is no less sinful. For this reason Eli was condemned by the Lord, for “his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (1 Sam 3:13).

Fourthly, and conversely, superiors sin by “dissuading, discouraging, or discountenancing them in that which is good.” Thus the Pharisees added to their sin when they ridiculed the officers who were sent to investigate the Lord by saying “Are ye also deceived?” (Jn 7:46).

Fifthly, superiors sin by “correcting them unduly.” This may seem surprising, at first reading.

But there is a law against correcting unduly, namely: “Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed: lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile unto thee” (Dt 25:3). Thus, any chastisement which is meted out (say against children, or against recruits in the army, or students in the school), which is excessive in comparison to the crime is ‘wrongful’ (1 Pet 2:18). Therefore, let all who are in position of authority seek wisdom before chastising, and seek never to chastise in anger, for experience teaches us that any chastisement meted out in anger will always tend to be excessive.

Sixthly, superiors sin by “careless exposing, or leaving [their inferiors] to wrong, temptation, and danger.” Superiors are styled ‘fathers’ because it is vested upon them to love and protect the inferiors under them. Thus superiors who stand by like Gallio and cared not (Acts 18:17) while those who under their care are being exposed to danger are worse than brute beasts, for even the dogs know how to care for their puppies.

Seventhly, superiors sin by “provoking [their inferiors] to wrath.” This is said especially of fathers. “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). How does one provoke his child or his subordinate to wrath? In many ways, such as excessive punishments, being overtly fastidious over little things, being unfair, etc.

Finally, superiors also sin by “any way dishonouring themselves, or lessening their authority, by an unjust, indiscreet, rigorous, or remiss behaviour.” Why is this so? It is so because the position of honour that superiors enjoy are not their own. They are given the office and position by the LORD (Rom 13:1). As such when they do anything that brings disrepute to their office or position, they sin against God not only by failing to use the authority vested by the Lord honourably, but by despising what God has given them. *W*

WLC 131. What are the duties of equals?

A. The duties of equals are, to regard the dignity and worth of each other,¹ in giving honour to go one before another;² and to rejoice in each other's gifts and advancement, as their own.³

Proofs

¹1 Pet 2:17; ²Rom 12:10; ³Rom 12:15–16; Phil 2:3–4

Comments

We have already considered the duties and sin of superiors and inferior as they relate to each other. But what if the two parties are neither superior nor inferior to each other? That is, what if they are equal to one another in age, gifts and authority in all spheres of life? Now, if we reflect for a moment we realise that,—if we would be precise,—there would hardly be anyone who is our equal, for hardly any one would have precisely the same age as us. Even in twins there is an older and a younger, unless they be Siamese twins!

Therefore, the principles in this question, and indeed the previous questions, must not be applied rigidly. They must always be applied with an eye to circumstance that we are in at the moment. For example, a husband and a wife are equal ontologically and spiritually (Gal 4:28), but they are not equals in terms of function. Similarly, a brother and sister in the same way would not be equals in the sphere of the home, but as members in the church, they are equals unless one is an officer in the church. Likewise two elders in the church are equals in so far as their official functions and authority, though one be 60 years of age, while the other 30 years of age. However, the younger one should learn to honour the older by way of decorum and attitude towards him. Indeed, even if the older is not an officer, he should be given due honour being superior in age (see 1 Tim 5:1). Now, this can become quite complicated when one is superior in the church to another, but inferior to the same person at work. But if we would all learn at all time to submit ourselves one to another in the fear of God (Eph 5:21), this would not be very difficult!

But bearing these things in mind, what are the duties of equals in the sphere where they are equal to one another? Our catechism teaches us essentially two duties:

First, let us have regard to the dignity and worth of each other. Let us learn to honour one another (1 Pet 2:17) and to submit to one another (Eph 5:21). As God's children we must especially learn to lay down our lives one for another, seeing that Christ laid His life down for us. Therefore we must never clamour for honour amongst our equals. We should rather, "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom 12:10).

Therefore, *secondly*, we should learn to "rejoice in each other's gifts and advancement, as [our] own." That is to say, we should esteem others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3), and so thank God for the gifts that God has given them. We should acknowledge their gifts, and pray for them that they may be advanced. **W**

WLC 132. What are the sins of equals?

- A. The sins of equals are, besides the neglect of the duties required,¹ the undervaluing of the worth,² envying the gifts,³ grieving at the advancement of prosperity one of another;⁴ and usurping pre-eminence one over another.⁵

Proofs

¹Rom 13:8; ²2 Tim 3:3; ³Acts 7:9; Gal 5:26; ⁴Num 12:2; Esth 6:12–13; ⁵3 Jn 9; Lk 22:24

Comments

We've considered the duties of equals to one another. In this question we are considering how equals sin against one another.

The sin of equals apart from neglecting our duties towards each other are:

- *Firstly*, “the undervaluing of the worth” of each other. The apostle Paul’s reference to “despisers of those that are good” (2 Tim 3:3) is essentially an allusion to this sin. The framers of our catechism have quite wisely put this as a particular sin of equals because it is particularly tempting for a person who is equal to another to fail to recognise the gifts of another. This may either be due to familiarity or due to a sinful aversion to acknowledging that our equal is better than us. But whatever the case may be it is a sin, for it is a failure to acknowledge and thank God for His gifts.
- *Secondly*, and closely related but a degree more serious than the first sin is that of ‘envying the gifts’ of our equals. This was the particular sin of the brothers of Joseph that led them to deal cruelly with him (Acts 7:9; note how the brothers of Joseph were equal to Joseph in that they were all the sons of Jacob). Instead of envying the gifts of one another we should thank God for them. “Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal 5:26) says the apostle Paul.
- *Thirdly*, and yet another degree more serious than the previous sin is that of “grieving at the advancement of prosperity one of another.” This sin has its root in undervaluing and envying the gift of another, but it is more grievous as it often leads to uncharitable remarks and actions. Aaron and Miriam were guilty of this sin against Moses (Num 12:2). Haman was guilty of this sin against Mordecai (Esth 6:12-13).

Finally, the most serious sin against equals is that of “usurping pre-eminence one over another.” The apostle John warn against Diotrephes, who so loved to have the pre-eminence among his peers that he even refused to receive the apostles (3 Jn 9). But this sin was also found among the apostles during their days of training, for we are told that they actually strove among themselves “which of them should be accounted the greatest” (Lk 22:24). This may sound childish, but has it not been the cause of grievous church politics in every age? Let us therefore watch against this sin (and the three levels preceding it) whether in the church, or at home or at school or at the work place. Let us realise that when we sin against each other by failing to submit to one another or worst by clamouring for honour one against another, we do greatly displease the Lord who humbled himself in order that we might be exalted. **W**

WLC 133. What is the reason annexed to the Fifth Commandment, the more to enforce it?

- A. The reason annexed to the Fifth Commandment, in these words, *That thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee*,¹ is an express promise of long life and prosperity, as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good, to all such as keep this commandment.²

Proofs

¹Ex 20:12; ²Deut 5:16; 1 Kgs 8:25; Eph 6:2–3

Comments

The 5th Commandment is known as the first commandment with a promise (Eph 6:2-3). When the promise is first given, it is "*That thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee*" (Ex 20:12b). This may suggest to some that the 5th Commandment and therefore all of the Ten Commandments were only for the Old Testament Jews who were delivered out of Egypt (Ex 20:1) to dwell in the Promised Land. Well, if the promise in the 5th Commandment has to do primarily with dwelling in the Promised Land and not being sent into exile, then the promise would no longer be applicable or worse, the whole commandment would not longer be applicable.

But this is not how we are to read it. The apostle Paul, writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit teaches us that we should understand the promise as: "That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on *the earth*" (Eph 6:3; *emphasis mine*). That is to say, the promise is not so much dwelling in the Promise Land, but living on earth!

Our catechism, therefore, correctly explains the annex of the 5th Commandment as an "express promise of long life and prosperity, as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good, to all such as keep this commandment."

Note how, it is not an unconditional promise of long life *per se*. It is a promise of long life and prosperity (cf. 'that it may be well with thee'—Eph 6:3) which is good for us and would directly redound to the glory of God. That is to say: where long life may bring dishonour to God or fail to serve our good, then God reserves the right to not to keep the letter of the promise. God in whom we live, and move and have our being knows what is best for us!

Now, it may be asked: Firstly, the two conditions of glory to God and good to us are really qualifiers of everything that God does for us—including sustaining us in life or taking our life. This being the case, how is the promise of long life unique to the 5th Commandment? Well, in so far as it is stated as a promise of the 5th Commandment, we must believe that how long God allows us to live on earth must be in some ways connected with whether we keep the 5th Commandment.

Secondly, it may be asked: Why is the promise of long life especially conditioned upon keeping the 5th Commandment? To this question, we may only speculate that in general such as early learn to keep the 5th Commandment would learn to obey God's laws and the laws of the land so that not only would they not jeopardise their life and prosperity by crime, but also as a lawful citizen of the land and of God's kingdom would best live for the glory of God and their own eternal good (for this life is a preparation for eternity).

Thirdly, it may be asked: If God promises long life to such as keep the 5th Commandment, then why is it that many godly men and women die young? To this we have no answer, except that it serves God's glory and the good of those His saints to bring them into glory earlier than we may expect. **W**

WLC 134. Which is the Sixth Commandment?

A. The Sixth Commandment is, *Thou shalt not kill.*¹

Proofs

1 Ex 20:13

Comments

The 6th Commandment is perhaps the most well-known of the commandments. Anyone who has cursory of the Ten Commandments will probably include this commandment when asked to recite the commandments of God that they know. But interestingly, this commandment, or rather a misapprehension of this commandment, is also one of the commandments which is frequently used by lawless persons to remonstrate against any suggestions that they are sinners deserving God's damnation: "I don't kill. I don't steal. What do you mean by saying that I am a sinner?"

This commandment, as we shall see, does not forbid all killing. In the first place, it does not forbid killing of plant and animals. In the second place, it does not forbid lawful killing of persons such as in the case of the execution of the death penalty or in the case of killing the enemies in a just war.

This commandment is therefore about the murder of persons made in the image of God (Gen 9:5-6). However, this commandment, is not only about physical murder as the lawless person may imagine. It is about the preservation of life and reputation, as well as about our attitudes and feelings towards others. **W**

WLC 134. Which is the Sixth Commandment?

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Proofs

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Comments

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WLC 135. What are the duties required in the Sixth Commandment?

A. The duties required in the Sixth Commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavours, to preserve the life of ourselves¹ and others² by resisting all thoughts and purposes,³ subduing all passions,⁴ and avoiding, all occasions,⁵ temptations,⁶ and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any;⁷ by just defence thereof against violence,⁸ patient bearing of the hand of God,⁹ quietness of mind,¹⁰ cheerfulness of spirit;¹¹ a sober use of meat,¹² drink,¹³ physical,¹⁴ sleep,¹⁵ labour,¹⁶ and recreations;¹⁷ by charitable thoughts,¹⁸ love,¹⁹ compassion,²⁰ meekness, gentleness, kindness;²¹ peaceable,²² mild and courteous speeches and behaviour;²³ forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil;²⁴ comforting and succouring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.²⁵

Proofs

¹Eph 5:28–29; ²1 Kgs 18:4; ³Jer 26:15–16; Acts 23:12, 16–17, 21, 27; ⁴Eph 4:26–27; ⁵2 Sam 2:22; Deut 22:8; ⁶Mt 4:6–7; Prov 1:10–11, 15–16; ⁷1 Sam 24:12; 26:9–11; Gen 37:21–22; ⁸Ps 82:4; Prov 24:11–12; 1 Sam 14:45; ⁹Jas 5:7–11; Heb 12:9; ¹⁰1 Thes 4:11; 1 Pet 3:3–4; Ps 37:8–11; ¹¹Prov 17:22; ¹²Prov 25:16, 27; ¹³1 Tim 5:23; ¹⁴Isa 38:21; ¹⁵Ps 127:2; ¹⁶Eccl 5:12; 2 Thes 3:10, 12; Prov 16:26; ¹⁷Eccl 3:4, 11; ¹⁸1 Sam 19:4–5; 22:13–14; ¹⁹Rom 13:10; ²⁰Lk 10:33–34; ²¹Col 3:12–13; ²²Jas 3:17; ²³1 Pet 3:8–11; Prov 15:1; Judg 8:1–3; ²⁴Mt 5:24; Eph 4:2, 32; Rom 12:17, 20–21; ²⁵1 Thes 5:14; Job 31:19–20; Mt 25:35–36; Prov 31:8–9.

Comments

It is clear that the 6th Commandment is not only about literal murder. The Lord Jesus says:

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (Mt 5:21–22).

From these words, we see that the 6th Commandment has to do not just with our actions, but also our words, thoughts and attitudes in regard to the life of ourselves and of our neighbours. The 6th Commandment, in other words, requires “all careful studies, and lawful endeavours, to preserve the life of ourselves and others.” How are we to do so?

We may do so:

- *Firstly*, “by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding, all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any.” That is, we must not entertain any thoughts of murder, nor allow any murderous feelings to persist in our hearts. We should repent of such motions. Moreover, we should always be concerned about the safety of ourselves and others. Therefore we must not put ourselves into any circumstance which may tend towards loss of life. Thus, for example, the 6th Commandment teaches us that it is our duty to God to drive safely!
- *Secondly*, “by just [self-]defence thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit.” We have a duty before God to preserve and promote our own life. Therefore we are required to defend ourselves against violence, and we are also to cultivate an attitude and countenance that tend to promote our own mental health. Think for example how cheerfulness of spirit which is reflected in a cheerful countenance tends not only to encourage friendliness on the part of our neighbours who behold us, but also tends to promote our own health: “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.” (Prov 17:22).
- *Thirdly*, by “a sober use of meat, drink, physical, sleep, labour, and recreations.” These things are essential for the maintenance of our life. Only Gnostics and stoics will think that we have a duty only to take care of our souls. Therefore, let no one think that sleep and all forms of recreations or hobbies are a waste of time and resources. Let us learn rather to use these things moderately and enjoy God’s blessings with them.
- *Fourthly*, by “charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness.” Again such feelings and attitudes will ensure that we are not quick to pick a quarrel with anyone or to entertain any murderous thoughts against others.
- *Fifthly*, by “peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behaviour.” Such behaviour encourages peace with others and quenches any spark that might erupt into a major violation of the 6th Commandment.
- *Sixthly*, by “forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil.” While the fourth and fifth points teach us how to prevent fires by our attitude and demeanour, this seventh point teaches us how to douse any fire that threatens to erupt. If we would learn these things, very few quarrels and murderous situations would centre around us, for anger is always fed by angry words and acts or words of retaliation.

Finally, the 6th Commandment requires us to comfort and succour the distressed, and to protect and defend the innocent. That is to say, the 6th Commandment requires us to defend those who are oppressed or whose lives are in danger under the hand of the wicked (Ps 82:4; Prov 24:11–12). **W**

WLC 136. What are the sins forbidden in the Sixth Commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the Sixth Commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves,¹ or of others,² except in case of public justice,³ lawful war,⁴ or necessary defence;⁵ the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life;⁶ sinful anger,⁷ hatred,⁸ envy,⁹ desire of revenge;¹⁰ all excessive passions,¹¹ distracting cares;¹² immoderate use of meat, drink,¹³ labour,¹⁴ and recreations;¹⁵ provoking words,¹⁶ oppression,¹⁷ quarrelling,¹⁸ striking, wounding,¹⁹ and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.²⁰

Proofs

¹Acts 16:28; ²Gen 9:6; ³Num 35:31, 33; ⁴Jer 48:10; Deut 20; ⁵Ex 22:2–3; ⁶Mt 25:42–43; Jas 2:15–16; Eccl 6:1–2; ⁷Mt 5:22; ⁸1 Jn 3:15; Lev 19:17; ⁹Prov 14:30; ¹⁰Rom 12:19; ¹¹Eph 4:31; ¹²Mt 6:31, 34; ¹³Lk 21:34; Rom 13:13; ¹⁴Eccl 12:12; 2:22–23; ¹⁵Isa 5:12; ¹⁶Prov 15:1, 12:18; ¹⁷Ezk 18:18; Ex 1:14; ¹⁸Gal 5:15; Prov 23:29; ¹⁹Num 35:16–18, 21; ²⁰Ex 21:18–36.

Comments

We have seen what is required in the 6th Commandment, but what does it forbid?

- *First*, the 6th Commandment forbids “all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defence.” In other words the 6th Commandment does not forbid killing of other persons, per se. It forbids murder. Killing a criminal in the execution of public justice (Num 35:31, 33), or an enemy in a just war (Jer 48:10), or a protagonist while defending ourselves (Ex 22:2–3) is no violation of the 6th Commandment. Murder, on the other hand, is a crime that ought to carry the death penalty according to God’s universal law pronounced to Noah and his descendants (Gen 9:5–6). Why is murder such a horrendous crime? It is because man is created in the image of God (Gen 9:6). It is for this same reason that suicide is forbidden, for we are made in the image of God; and our lives are on loan to us from God.
- *Secondly*, the 6th Commandment forbids “the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life.” In other words, euthanasia is forbidden, and so is the refusal to seek medical treatment for ourselves and for those under our care when it is plain that such a treatment is necessary for the preservation of life. And likewise, when we know a person to be starving or in severe thirst, and it is within our capacity to provide for his needs, and we refuse, we would be violating the 6th Commandment (cf. Mt 25:42–43).
- It should be quite obvious that the 6th Commandment forbids murder and all activities or non-activity harmful to physical life. But we must be careful to note that the commandment is not only violated when physical harm is involved. Indeed, it can be violated even when no effect, so to speak, is done upon the ‘victim.’ Our Lord makes it clear that to be angry against another person without cause is to be guilty of violating the 6th Commandment (Mt 5:22), it does not even matter if the person is not aware of your anger! Therefore, *thirdly*, the 6th Commandment forbids all “sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge” (Mt 5:22; 1 Jn 3:15; Lev 19:17; Rom 12:19).
- And *fourthly*, by implication from the facts that anger and suicide are forbidden, we see that “all excessive passions, distracting cares” are forbidden (cf. Eph 4:31; Mt 6:31, 34). The clichés, ‘anger kills’ or ‘you will worry yourself to death,’ have biblical basis!
- *Fifthly*, the 6th Commandment forbids living in such a way as to be detrimental to our health. Therefore, “immoderate use of meat, drink, labour, and recreations,” is forbidden. Likewise, we may add that a refusal to use these things moderately is forbidden by the 6th Commandment. Or to put it in another way, anorexic behaviour is a violation of the 6th Commandment, and so is a lifestyle that wrecks our health by insufficient sleep.
- *Finally*, the 6th Commandment forbids all “provoking words, oppression, quarrelling, striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.” This is quite obvious, for provoking words not only often overflow from angry hearts and incite anger, but often leads to violence and murder. Thus children should be taught that when they quarrel and fight, they are violating the 6th Commandment. **W**

WLC 137. Which is the Seventh Commandment?

A. The Seventh Commandment is, Thou shalt not commit adultery.¹

Proofs

¹Ex 20:14.

Comments

The 7th Commandment is another of the few commandments which are commonly known as being part of the Decalogue even by those who have the faintest idea of it. Unfortunately, it is also the commandment alone with the 6th and 8th Commandment which many outwardly moral persons will use to assert their righteousness.

This is probably one of the reasons why our Lord particularly highlights this commandment in the Sermon on the Mount. He says:

“²⁷ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: ²⁸ But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Mt 5:27-28).

In this familiar passage, our Lord teaches us that the 7th Commandment does not only forbid literal adultery or fornication between unmarried persons as many suppose. It is rather about purity of heart. Therefore a man can break the 7th Commandment even without any physical contact with a woman. He breaks the commandment even when he lusts after her in his heart.

This leads us to understand, as we shall see, that the 7th Commandments demands that all sexual expressions and passion be contained within the context of lawful marriage. “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb 13:4).

WLC 138. What are the duties required in the Seventh Commandment?

- A.** The duties required in the Seventh Commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections,¹ words,² and behaviour;³ and the preservation of it in ourselves and others;⁴ watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses;⁵ temperance,⁶ keeping of chaste company,⁷ modesty in apparel;⁸ marriage by those that have not the gift of continency,⁹ conjugal love,¹⁰ and cohabitation;¹¹ diligent labour in our callings;¹² shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.¹³

Proofs

¹1 Th 4:4; Job 31:1; 1 Cor 7:34; ²Col 4:6; ³1 Pet 2:3; ⁴1 Cor 7:2, 35–36; ⁵Job 31:1; ⁶Acts 24:24–25; ⁷Prov 2:16–20; ⁸1 Tim 2:9; ⁹1 Cor 7:2, 9; ¹⁰Prov 5:19–20; ¹¹1 Pet 3:7; ¹²Prov 31:11, 27–28; ¹³Prov 5:8; Gen 39:8–10

Comments

Though the 7th Commandment is worded negatively, it does require certain duties necessary for its maintenance. These duties include:

- *Firstly*, maintaining “*chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behaviour.*” This means that we must so discipline our thoughts and affections that we make it a priority to be “holy both in body and spirit” (1 Cor 7:34). Our body must be kept in purity and honour (1 Th 4:4); our behaviour and lifestyle “must be chaste” (1 Pet 2:3); and our speech must be pure and characterised by grace (Col 4:6).
- *Secondly*, “*the preservation of [chastity] in ourselves and others*” is also required by the 7th Commandment. That is to say, knowing our susceptibility to failure, we should do what is necessary and lawful to ensure we be kept chaste. For example, taking heed lest he falls, a doctor, counsellor or pastor will make sure that he is not found in a closed room alone with a woman. Likewise, a courting couple, knowing that they could easily be assaulted with many temptations must refuse to put themselves into any situation that will encourage temptation. They must ‘flee fornication’ (1Cor 6:18) and “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1Th 5:22). Thus also, if a courting couple finds themselves beginning to fall into temptations over one another, they should not delay to get married (cf. 1 Cor 7:36); or to call off or suspend courtship as the situation may demand.
- *Thirdly*, the 7th Commandment demands “*watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses.*” It is in the context of His exposition of the 7th Commandment that our Lord says: “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee... And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Mt 5:29-30). Does this not indicate a tacit recognition on the part of our Lord that the eyes and the hands are frequently instrumental in bringing about a violation of the 7th Commandment? It behoves us, therefore, to do as Job did: “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid” (Job 31:1).
- *Fourthly*, the 7th Commandment requires “*temperance, keeping of chaste company, [and] modesty in apparel.*” It is a fact that all excesses especially when it involves alcohol have a tendency to lead to debauchery and immorality. This is compounded when the company kept is light and immoral: “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor 15:33). And not only so, but the manner of dressing can also evoke lust and promiscuity. As such believers must especially take heed not to dress like the world on the pretext of convenience or comfort. We must always dress modestly (1 Tim 2:9) lest we become instrumental to causing others to sin against the Lord.
- *Fifthly*, the 7th Commandment also requires “*marriage by those that have not the gift of continency, conjugal love, and cohabitation [by husband and wife, not by unmarried persons!]*.” The apostle Paul is very explicit about this: Where a man or a woman has not the gift of continency, they should seek marriage rather than to burn with lust (1 Cor 7:2); and where a man and woman is married they must not defraud one another except it be with consent for a time and that with good reasons, lest Satan should tempt them for their lack of self-control (1 Cor 7:5). Thus, a husband and wife must always dwell together and the marriage bed must be charitably and holily maintained (cf. Heb 13:4).
- *Sixthly*, the 7th Commandment requires “*diligent labour in our callings*” in that husbands and wives must strive to make their marriage a happy and contented one so that there be no occasion for suspicion one against another and also temptations to extra-marital affairs (cf. Prov 31:11, 28).
- *Finally*, the 7th Commandment demands “*shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.*” We looked at what we should do to keep ourselves from falling into temptation to break the 7th Commandment in the second point, but here, we are reminded that there will be occasions when we will fall into such circumstances where temptation assaults us strongly. What shall we do in such circumstances? Nothing less than fleeing like Joseph in the face of seduction by Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39:8-10). In the face of temptation, sin can taste sweet especially when it has to do with a breaking of the 7th Commandment. We must as such resolve what to do before we ever fall into the situation of temptation. We must resolve to shun and to resist at the slightest hint of temptation to commit uncleanness. **W**

A. The sins forbidden in the Seventh Commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required,¹ are, adultery, fornication,² rape, incest,³ sodomy, and all unnatural lusts;⁴ all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections;⁵ all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto;⁶ wanton looks,⁷ impudent or light behaviour, immodest apparel;⁸ prohibiting of lawful,⁹ and dispensing with unlawful marriages;¹⁰ allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them;¹¹ entangling vows of single life,¹² undue delay of marriage;¹³ having more wives or husbands than one at the same time;¹⁴ unjust divorce,¹⁵ or desertion;¹⁶ idleness, gluttony, drunkenness,¹⁷ unchaste company;¹⁸ lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancing, stage plays;¹⁹ and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.²⁰

Proofs

¹Prov 5:7; ²Heb 13:4; Gal 5:19; ³2 Sam 13:14; 1 Cor 5:1; ⁴Rom 1:24, 26–27; Lev 20:15–16; ⁵Mt 5:28; 15:19; Col 3:5; ⁶Eph 5:3–4; Prov 7:5, 21–22; ⁷Isa 3:16; 2 Pet 2:14; ⁸Prov 7:10, 13; ⁹1 Tim 4:3; ¹⁰Lev 18:1–21; Mk 6:18; Mal 2:11–12; ¹¹1 Kgs 15:12; 2 Kgs 23:7; Deut 23:17–18; Lev 19:29; Jer 5:7; Prov 7:24–27; ¹²Mt 19:10–11; ¹³1 Cor 7:7–9; Gen 38:26; ¹⁴Mal 2:14–15; Mt 19:5; ¹⁵Mal 2:16; Mt 5:32; ¹⁶1 Cor 7:12–13; ¹⁷Ezk 16:49; Prov 23:30–33; ¹⁸Gen 39:10; Prov 5:8; ¹⁹Eph 5:4; Ezk 23:14–17; Isa 23:15–17; 3:16; Mk 6:22; Rom 13:13; 1 Pet 4:3; ²⁰2 Kgs 9:30; cf. Jer 4:30; Ezk 23:40.

Comments

We have already seen the duties required in the 7th Commandment. Apart from the neglect of these duties, the 7th Commandment forbids the following sins:

- *Firstly*, “adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts.” This is so obvious it hardly needs explanation. God has made men and women in such a way that there is a natural sexual need. But this need must be fulfilled only within the context of legitimate marriage. The apostle says: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb 13:4). As such, all forms of sexual expressions and acts, outside the marriage bed, and whether consensual or otherwise, are a violation of God’s law. It is foolish and wicked for those who are homosexual (cf. Rom 1:24–27) to claim that so long as they have a faithful partner they are not sinning against God.
- *Secondly*, “all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections.” Our Lord says: “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Mt 5:28). This clearly indicates that there is only a very fine line between being tempted and actually breaking the 7th Commandment. Any thought of illicit liaison necessarily involves a breaking of the 7th Commandment which should be repented of not to mention unclean fantasies.
- *Thirdly*, “all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto.” Paul says: “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Eph 5:3–4). This demands that believers especially, eschew unclean jokes no matter how innocuous they may think they are.
- *Fourthly*, “wanton looks, impudent or light behaviour, immodest apparel.” That is to say, any attempt at seductive behaviour or dressing violates the 7th Commandment. Christians must never fall into the devil’s trap of thinking the choice of one’s dressing is fully determined culturally and practically. Yes, there is a degree to which dressing is cultural and practical, but the perverseness of man’s heart has never changed. Man can never become so used to the sight of immodestly dressed women that it becomes meaningless to talk about ‘immodest apparel.’ Let none therefore appeal to practicality and culture when dressing in a seductive way.
- *Fifthly*, “prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages.” Since the 7th Commandment demands that those without the gift of continency find their needs met in lawful marriages (1 Cor 7:2,9), it follows that an attempt to prohibit lawful marriages or to sanction unlawful marriages violates the 7th Commandment in an indirect way.
- *Sixthly*, “allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them.” ‘Stews’ (O.E.) are houses of prostitution or brothels. It is obvious that the existence of such places is in direct opposition to God’s Word. As such governments which condone their operation are going against the Law of God and those who visit them violate the 7th Commandment in the most blatant fashion.
- *Seventhly*, “entangling vows of single life, undue delay of marriage.” While it is good not to marry (Mt 19:10; 1 Cor 7:1, 32–34), singlehood is not good for everyone. “Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that” (1 Cor 7:7). Indeed, very few have the gift of continency, and therefore it would be a breaking of the 7th Commandment for them to vow to remain single or to delay marriage when the opportunity arises, for “it is better to marry than to burn [with lust]” (1 Cor 7:9).
- *Eighthly*, “having more wives or husbands than one at the same time.” In making only one Eve for Adam, God demonstrated that he intended marriage to be monogamous (Mal 2:14–15). Therefore polygamy is condemned by the 7th Commandment.
- *Ninthly*, “unjust divorce, or desertion.” This follows from the fact that marriage is partly designed for the maintenance of purity. Thus anyone who disrupts his or her marriage by unjust divorce or desertion, breaks the 7th Commandment and causes the aggrieved party to break the 7th Commandment. Says our Lord: “Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Mt 5:32).
- *Tenthly*, “idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company.” These are activities that almost always lead to fornication and adultery. As such, any indulgence in them is a breaking of the 7th Commandment.
- *Eleventh*, “lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancing, stage plays.” Art is not as neutral as many claim it to be. Many artistic expressions provoke lust and are enjoyed by the wicked only because they seem to provide legitimacy to immorality. The 7th Commandment, therefore, forbids us from listening to, watching or reading, any forms of pornography, however artistic or subtle, whether on the television, internet, radio, books, magazines and even advertisements.
- *Finally*, “all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others” are also forbidden in the 7th Commandment. The world has a very lax attitude towards purity. But believers must never live by the standards of the world. Our standard is the Law of God. **W**

WLC 140. Which is the Eighth Commandment?

A. The Eighth Commandment is, *Thou shalt not steal*.¹

Proofs

¹Ex 20:15

Comments

Suggest to a moral man in the street that he is a sinner, and one of the response you will likely get is: “I don’t kill, I don’t steal, I don’t bad things to others. Surely I am not a sinner!” The 8th Commandment is well-known as a commandment of God, and it is well-known that breaking it is sin. But how many understand the full implication of the commandment?

Indeed, talk to an average believer about the 8th Commandment, and it is unlikely that he will think of himself as having broken it: “I am not a thief or a robber. I have kept the 8th Commandment from my youth up!” But has he really? Many are surprised when they brought to realise that they have broken the 8th commandments in so many ways including lateness and idleness at work, failing to put enough parking coupons, indulging in get-rich-quick schemes, income tax evasion, etc.

The 8th Commandment is therefore well-known, but at the same time much misunderstood. *W*

WLC 141. What are the duties required in the Eighth Commandment?

A. The duties required in the Eighth Commandment are, truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man;¹ rendering to everyone his due;² restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof;³ giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others;⁴ moderation of our judgments, wills, and affections concerning worldly goods;⁵ a provident care and study to get,⁶ keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition;⁷ a lawful calling,⁸ and diligence in it;⁹ frugality;¹⁰ avoiding unnecessary law-suits,¹¹ and suretiship, or other like engagements,¹² and an endeavour, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.¹³

Proofs

¹ Ps 15:2, 4; Zech 7:4, 10; 8:16-17. ² Rom 13:7. ³ Lev 6:2-5; Lk 19:8. ⁴ Lk 6:30, 38; 1 Jn 3:17; Eph 4:28; Gal 6:10. ⁵ 1 Tim 6:6-9; Gal 6:14. ⁶ 1 Tim 5:8. ⁷ Prov 27:23-27; Eccl 2:24; 3:12-13; 1 Tim 6:17-18; Isa 38:1; Mt 11:8. ⁸ 1 Cor 7:20; Gen 2:15; 3:19. ⁹ Eph 4:28; Prov 10:4. ¹⁰ Jn 6:12; Prov 21:20. ¹¹ 1 Cor 6:1-9. ¹² Prov 6:1-6; 11:15. ¹³ Lev 25:35; Deut 22:1-4; Ex 23:4-5; Gen 47:14, 20; Phil 2:4; Mt 22:39.

Comments

The 8th Commandment is fundamentally about material stewardship. God has assigned unto each man a portion of material possession for him to manage. Although ultimately everything in the universe belongs to God, once, He has assigned anything to a person, He accounts the thing as belonging to him, apart from the tithe which He reserves for Himself. Thus, Ananias and Sapphira were not condemned for withholding part of the sum that came with their sale of their property. They had every right to withhold the amount (apart from the tithe of the proceeds), as Peter says: “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” (Acts 5:4a). But they were condemned because they claimed that the amount they were giving to the apostles represented the price they were paid for the property, thus lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:4b).

Now, since God has assigned each person a portion of wealth, it becomes imperative for each one of us to be a good steward of what we have received from God, and also to help rather than to hinder others in their own exercises of stewardship. At the same time, since God works through legitimate means, it is essential that each person seek to increase or maintain what portion of wealth is necessary for himself (and his relations) through legitimate means. These, in a nutshell, are what the 8th Commandment requires of us.

But more specifically,...

In the *first* place, the 8th Commandment requires “faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man.” The lawful procurement of wealth almost always involves trading or commerce and some forms of contracts or agreements especially as it pertains to work to be done. If these agreements are not kept or if the exercise of trading is not done honestly and faithfully, the wealth of one party is often then enlarged unlawfully at the expense of the loss of another’s wealth. When that happens the 8th Commandment would clearly be violated.

Secondly, the 8th Commandment requires “rendering to everyone his due,” that is giving to everyone what justly belongs to him. Thus, if the civil law of the land requires that a certain percent of our income is to go to the state treasury, then to withhold the amount would be to break the 8th Commandment (cf. Rom 13:7). In the same way, if we have contracted to pay someone for a certain amount of work, then the amount rightfully belongs to him once he has completed the work. We must therefore pay him promptly, or else we sin against the Lord by breaking the 8th Commandment.

Thirdly, the 8th Commandment requires “restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof.” God alone has the ultimate right to assign wealth, and we may regard whatever is obtained by lawful means as being appointed by God. However, whatever is obtained unlawfully remains the property of the person from whom we have obtained it from, and therefore it is the will of God that it should be returned (cf. Lk 19:8).

Fourthly, in order to help our neighbours with regards to their outward wealth, the 8th Commandment requires us to “[give] and [lend] freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others.” Thus the Law says: “If thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee” (Lev 25:35). Our Lord simplifies it to: “Give to every man that asketh of thee” (Lk 6:30a); and the apostle John enlarges it to a principle: “Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him” (1 Jn 3:17).

Fifthly, since it is God who assigns our wealth, the 8th Commandments demands, that we be contented with our lot, or in other words, “moderation of our judgments, wills, and affections concerning worldly goods.” The apostle Paul puts it succinctly when he says: “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim 6:6).

Sixthly, the 8th Commandment requires “a provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition.” In other words, it requires us to be diligent in the procurement (e.g. 2 Th 3:10), management (Prov 27:23ff), and distribution (see 1 Tim 6:17-18) of the wealth that God has assigned to us.

Seventhly, as part of our duty to lawfully procure our wealth, the 8th Commandment requires each of us to have “a lawful calling, and [to be diligent] in it.” The apostle Paul says: “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Eph 4:28).

Eighthly, the 8th Commandment requires “frugality” in the use of our wealth. This is exemplified by our Lord, who after feeding the five thousand, instructed His disciples to “gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” (Jn 6:12).

Ninthly, in line with the principle of avoiding wastage of wealth or taking unnecessary risks which may be detrimental to our outward estate, the 8th Commandments requires “avoiding unnecessary law-suits, and suretiship, or other like engagements.”

Finally, and in summary, the 8th Commandment requires “an endeavour, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.” Our duty in regard to the wealth of others has been outlined in points 1 to 4, while our duty in regard to our own wealth has been explained in points 5 to 9 above. What remains is for us to be reminded that we are our brothers’ keepers and therefore we have some responsibility towards the preservation of their wealth. Thus, for example, the Mosaic Law says: “Thou shalt not see thy brother’s ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother” (Dt 22:1). **W**

WLC 142. What are the sins forbidden in the Eighth Commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the Eighth Commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required,¹ are, theft,² robbery,³ man-stealing,⁴ and receiving anything that is stolen;⁵ fraudulent dealing,⁶ false weights and measures,⁷ removing land-marks,⁸ injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man,⁹ or in matters of trust;¹⁰ oppression,¹¹ extortion,¹² usury,¹³ bribery,¹⁴ vexatious lawsuits,¹⁵ unjust inclosures and depopulations;¹⁶ ingrossing commodities to enhance the price;¹⁷ unlawful callings,¹⁸ and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbour what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves;¹⁹ covetousness;²⁰ inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods;²¹ distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using them;²² envying at the prosperity of others;²³ as likewise idleness,²⁴ prodigality, wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate,²⁵ and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us.²⁶

Proofs

¹Jas 2:15–16; ¹Jn 3:17; ²Eph 4:28; ³Ps 62:10; ⁴1 Tim 1:10; ⁵Prov 29:24; ⁶Ps 50:18; ⁶1 Thes 4:6; ⁷Prov 11:1; 20:10; ⁸Deut 19:14; ⁹Prov 23:10; ⁹Amos 8:5; ¹⁰Ps 37:21; ¹⁰Lk 16:10–12; ¹¹Ezk 22:29; ¹²Lev 25:17; ¹²Mt 23:25; ¹³Ezk 22:12; ¹³Ps 15:5; ¹⁴Job 15:34; ¹⁵1 Cor 6:6–8; ¹⁶Isa 5:8; ¹⁷Mic 2:2; ¹⁷Prov 11:26; ¹⁸Acts 19:19, 24–25; ¹⁹Job 20:19; ²⁰Jas 5:4; ²⁰Prov 21:6; ²⁰Lk 12:15; ²¹1 Tim 6:5; ²¹Col 3:2; ²²Prov 23:5; ²²Ps 62:10; ²²Mt 6:25, 31, 34; ²³Eccl 5:12; ²³Ps 73:3; 37:1, 7; ²⁴2 Thes 3:11; ²⁵Prov 18:9; ²⁵Prov 21:17; 23:20–21; 28:19; ²⁶Eccl 4:8; 6:2; ²⁶1 Tim 5:8.

Comments

We have seen that the 8th Commandment is fundamentally about proper stewardship of the things of this present life which God has assigned unto each person. Therefore the 8th Commandment not only requires everything that promotes or tends to promote good stewardship in our neighbours and ourselves; but forbids all that hinders or violates good stewardship of the things of this present life.

In addition to the neglect of the duties required as discussed in the previous study, the 8th Commandment forbids:

- *Firstly*, “theft, robbery, man-stealing [i.e. kidnapping], and receiving anything that is stolen.” These are all so obvious they require no elaboration except perhaps the last, for which the Scripture says: “Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul” (Prov 29:24a). Although, one who receives a stolen item without realising that it is stolen would not be guilty of breaking the 8th Commandment, it behoves believers not to purchase any item for which there is any suspicion that it is stolen.
- *Secondly*, “fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, removing land-marks, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man, or in matters of trust.” These all would *directly* hinder or disrupt the lawful bases and processes by which our own and our neighbour’s estate are to be managed, and therefore would constitute a violation of God’s law.
- *Thirdly*, “oppression, extortion, usury [i.e. taking advantage of the poor by making profit with unjust interest], bribery, vexatious lawsuits, unjust inclosures [i.e. illegal imprisonment] and depopulations” are also forbidden. These things would *indirectly* hinder or disrupt the lawful bases and processes by which our own and our neighbour’s estate are to be managed. For example, bribery is often used to secure favouritism or an unfair advantage over competitors. And when that is done, the platform for fair competition is destroyed so that those who are honest and hardworking often suffer the most losses.
- Likewise, *fourthly*, “ingrossing commodities to enhance the price” is forbidden in the 8th Commandment. Solomon condemns this practice in the proverb: “He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.” (Prov 11:26). Apparently, there were those who held back basic necessities from the people in order to artificially inflate the urgency of demand and therefore willingness to pay more for them. This is wickedness in the sight of God.
- *Fifthly*, the 8th Commandment forbids “unlawful callings, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbour what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves.” ‘Unlawful callings’ refer to vocations which would involve one in sin even if it may be a lawful vocation in the land. Thus, though prostitution is legal in Singapore, it is an unlawful calling. So likewise operating a gambling joint or selling gambling coupons (e.g. 4-D and Toto) would be forbidden in the 8th Commandment. This is so because the income would then be obtained in sin. In the same way, we would be violating the 8th Commandment as long as we are holding on to what we unjustly or sinfully take or withhold from our neighbour. Thus if we buy some goods, but refuse to pay up until we are chased for payment (as is a common practice in many companies in the world), we would be violating the law of God.
- *Sixthly*, “covetousness” is forbidden in the 8th Commandment since it would be a subtle challenge to God’s wisdom, propriety and fairness in assigning to us what He deems fit of the things of this present life.
- *Seventhly*, “inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods” violates the 8th Commandment. The things of this present life are given to us in order to assist us in our present existence. They are as such temporal and cannot be compared to heavenly riches for which we are to give priority to seeking after. Therefore to set our heart on worldly goods or to pursue them with inordinate ardour is to fail to see their proper place in our lives.
- *Eighthly*, “distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using [worldly goods]” also violate the 8th Commandment. This follows from the previous point but reminds us that we must never distrust God that He will provide what is necessary for us, and therefore we must not allow our desire for the things of this present life to distract us in our walk with the Lord.
- *Ninthly*, “envying at the prosperity of others” is also forbidden. This is similar to the 6th point, but envy suggests a wicked thought that what God had assigned to someone else should be assigned to us.
- *Tenthly*, the 8th Commandment forbids “idleness, prodigality [wastefulness], wasteful gaming [e.g. hunting for fun].” These things violate the 8th Commandment because they involve a failure to properly manage our outward estate or the wealth that God has provided but not yet assigned to individuals for their stewardship.
- *Finally*, and in summary, the 8th Commandment forbids “all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us.” **W**

WLC 143. Which is the Ninth Commandment?

A. The Ninth Commandment is, *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*¹

Proofs

¹Ex 20:16.

Comments

The 9th commandment is rather unique in the Decalogue in that unlike the other commandments such as “Thou shalt not kill” or “Thou shalt not steal,” it is worded more specifically (casuistically) than generally (apodictically). It is generally understood, and I believe, correctly, that the commandment has to do with truth bearing between man and man, and so it is equivalent to the common paraphrase “Thou shalt not tell lies.”

But as it appears in the Decalogue it is couched in the language of the courtroom. In that context, it forbids anyone who is called to be a witness in a trial (before a judge) to testify falsely against someone.

Why, it may be asked, is it couched in such a language? The answer, lies in the fact that when men relate to one another even privately, they must not assume that it is only between themselves. The fact is, God is the unseen witness, or perhaps better, judge, in all conversations or interactions between men. Man, therefore, must learn to relate to one another truthfully, for God who sees through our hearts especially hates lies (see Prov 6:16-19; notice how falsehood is referred to at least twice in this short list of things abominable to God). **W**

WLC 144. What are the duties required in the Ninth Commandment?

A. The duties required in the Ninth Commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man,¹ and the good name of our neighbour, as well as our own;² appearing and standing for the truth,³ and from the heart,⁴ sincerely,⁵ freely,⁶ clearly,⁷ and fully,⁸ speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice,⁹ and in all other things whatsoever;¹⁰ a charitable esteem of our neighbours;¹¹ loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name;¹² sorrowing for,¹³ and covering of their infirmities;¹⁴ freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces,¹⁵ defending their innocence;¹⁶ a ready receiving of a good report,¹⁷ and unwillingness to admit of an evil report,¹⁸ concerning them; discouraging tale-bearers,¹⁹ flatterers,²⁰ and slanderers;²¹ love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth;²² keeping of lawful promises;²³ studying and practising of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.²⁴

Proofs

¹Zech 8:16; ²3 Jn 12; ³Prov 31:8-9; ⁴Ps 15:2; ⁵2 Chr 19:9; ⁶1 Sam 19:4-5; ⁷Josh 7:19; ⁸2 Sam 14:18-20; ⁹Lev 19:15; Prov 14:5, 25; ¹⁰2 Cor 1:17-18; Eph 4:25; ¹¹Heb 6:9; 1 Cor 13:7; ¹²Rom 1:8; 2 Jn 4; 3 Jn 3-4; ¹³2 Cor 2:4; 12:21; ¹⁴Prov 17:9; 1 Pet 4:8; ¹⁵1 Cor 1:4-5, 7; 2 Tim 1:4-5; ¹⁶1 Sam 22:14; ¹⁷1 Cor 13:6-7; ¹⁸Ps 15:3; ¹⁹Prov 25:23; ²⁰Prov 26:24-25; ²¹Ps 101:5; ²²Prov 22:1; Jn 8:49; ²³Ps 15:4; ²⁴Phil 4:8.

Comments

The 9th commandment is essentially about the “the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man.” It is not so much about truthfulness towards God simply because God knows our hearts, so there is really no way to lie to God. When the apostle Peter condemned Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:4), he is speaking about their foolish attempt to do so. Few would be as foolish and atheistic as to try to lie to God. But many, knowing that one man cannot read another man’s mind, will tend to be flippant about the truth or even be tempted to resort to falsehood. The 9th commandment, as we saw in our previous study demands that we relate to one another as before the face of God (which indeed is the case).

But as a corollary, the 9th commandment, demands that we preserve and promote “the good name of our neighbour, as well as our own.” That is to say, we must not knowingly allow a false impression as regards ourselves or our neighbours to arise due to misinformation; and neither should we allow it to persist without correction.

To this end, the 9th Commandment requires of us several duties.

- *First*, we must “[appear] and [stand] for the truth.” We must do so not only for our own sakes, but especially for the sakes of those who are unable to defend themselves for one reason or another. Solomon urges us: “Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy” (Prov 31:8-9).
- *Secondly*, we must “from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, [speak] the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever.” That is we must in all circumstances be truthful and never equivocal or misleading in our speech.
- *Thirdly*, we must have “a charitable esteem of our neighbours.” This, at first sight, does not appear to have anything to do with truth-bearing. However, if we realise that without a charitable esteem for our neighbour, we will tend to misjudge him and so be guilty of holding a false impression about him, then we will understand why the 9th commandment demands such a frame of spirit towards our neighbour. The writer to the Hebrews gives us an excellent example of such a charitable esteem towards others when he warns that it is possible for professing believers to be misled about the reality of their faith, and then immediately adds: “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak” (Heb 6:9).
- *Fourthly*, and in line with our duty to maintain a charitable esteem of our neighbours, the 9th Commandment demands our “loving, desiring, and rejoicing in [our neighbour’s] good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocence; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them.” Note that we are not called to reject all negative reports against our neighbour, for negative reports can be true and if verified can and should be received. However, as we must esteem other better than ourselves (Phil 2:3), we must be unwilling to receive such reports. We must assume our neighbour to be innocent until proven guilty. Only in this way will we be able to fulfil the demands of the 9th Commandment to love our neighbour by seeking to promote and preserve his good name.
- *Fifthly*, the 9th commandment requires that we “[discourage] tale-bearers, flatterers, and slanderers.” Tale-bearing or gossip, flattery and slander are some of the more common ways of promoting falsehood between man and man. In flattery, a man inflates another man’s ego by giving him a false impression of himself. In this way a great disservice is done for he is puffed up in pride and blinded to his own faults. Thus Solomon says: “A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet” (Prov 29:5). In slander a man says something false about another man in order to assassinate his character. God hates slander. He says: “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off...” (Ps 101:5a). Gossip is no less pernicious, for it destroys friendship and often leads to slander: “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends” (Prov 17:9).

How do we discourage gossips, flattery and slander? By not receiving or passing on gossips; by correcting and rebuking that which is slanderous and by refusing to be flattered.

- *Sixthly*, we must not only defend the name of others, we must “love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth.” “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold” (Prov 22:1) says Solomon.
- *Seventhly*, the 9th Commandment requires us to “[keep] all lawful promises.” To make a promise and to fail to keep it would be essentially to tell a lie about our intention. Therefore we must seek to keep our promises even if it hurts us but so long as we are not forced to sin against God to keep them (Prov 15:4).
- *Eighthly*, and as a summary, the 9th Commandment teaches us to “[study] and [practise] of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.” We must be lovers of truth and believers that truth supported by a charitable spirit will always triumph to the good of man and the glory of God. **W**

A. The sins forbidden in the Ninth Commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbours, as well as our own,¹ especially in public judicature;² giving false evidence,³ suborning false witnesses,⁴ wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, out-facing and over-bearing the truth;⁵ passing unjust sentence,⁶ calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked;⁷ forgery,⁸ concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause,⁹ and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves,¹⁰ or complaint to others;¹¹ speaking the truth unseasonably,¹² or maliciously to a wrong end,¹³ or perverting it to a wrong meaning,¹⁴ or in doubtful and or equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of truth or justice;¹⁵ speaking untruth,¹⁶ lying,¹⁷ slandering,¹⁸ backbiting,¹⁹ detracting,²⁰ tale-bearing,²¹ whispering,²² scoffing,²³ reviling,²⁴ rash,²⁵ harsh,²⁶ and partial censuring;²⁷ misconstruing intentions, words, and actions;²⁸ flattering,²⁹ vain-glorious boasting,³⁰ thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others;³¹ denying the gifts and graces of God;³² aggravating smaller faults;³³ hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession;³⁴ unnecessary discovering of infirmities;³⁵ raising false rumours,³⁶ receiving and countenancing evil reports,³⁷ and stopping our ears against just defence;³⁸ evil suspicion;³⁹ envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any,⁴⁰ endeavouring or desiring to impair it,⁴¹ rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy;⁴² scornful contempt,⁴³ fond admiration;⁴⁴ breach of lawful promises;⁴⁵ neglecting such things as are of good report,⁴⁶ and practising, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.⁴⁷

Proofs

¹1 Sam 17:28; 2 Sam 16:3; 1:9–10, 15–16; ²Lev 19:15; Hab 1:4; ³Prov 19:5; 6:16, 19; ⁴Acts 6:13; ⁵Jer 9:3, 5; Acts 24:2, 5; Ps 12:3–4; 52:1–4; ⁶Prov 17:15; 1 Kgs 21:9–14; ⁷Isa 5:23; ⁸Ps 119:69; Lk 19:8; 16:5–7; ⁹Lev 5:1; Deut 13:8; Acts 5:3, 8–9; 2 Tim 4:16; ¹⁰1 Kgs 1:6; Lev 19:17; ¹¹Isa 59:4; ¹²Prov 29:11; ¹³1 Sam 22:9–10; cf. Ps 52:1–5; ¹⁴Ps 56:5; Jn 2:19; cf. Mt 26:60–61; ¹⁵Gen 3:5; 26:7, 9; ¹⁶Isa 59:13; ¹⁷Lev 19:11; Col 3:9; ¹⁸Ps 50:20; ¹⁹Ps 15:3; ²⁰Jas 4:11; Jer 38:4; ²¹Lev 19:16; ²²Rom 1:29–30; ²³Gen 21:9; cf. Gal 4:29; ²⁴1 Cor 6:10; ²⁵Mt 7:1; ²⁶Acts 28:4; ²⁷Gen 38:24; Rom 2:1; ²⁸Neh 6:6–8; Rom 3:8; Ps 69:10; 1 Sam 1:13–15; 2 Sam 10:3; ²⁹Ps 12:2–3; ³⁰2 Tim 3:2; ³¹Lk 18:9, 11; Rom 12:16; 1 Cor 4:6; Acts 12:22; Ex 4:10–14; ³²Job 27:5–6; 4:6; ³³Mt 7:3–5; ³⁴Prov 28:13; 30:20; Gen 3:12–13; Jer 2:35; 2 Kgs 5:25; Gen 4:9; ³⁵Gen 9:22; Prov 25:9–10; ³⁶Ex 23:1; ³⁷Prov 29:12; ³⁸Acts 7:56–57; Job 31:13–14; ³⁹1 Cor 13:5; 1 Tim 6:4; ⁴⁰Num 11:29; Mt 21:15; ⁴¹Ezra 4:12–13; ⁴²Jer 48:27; ⁴³Ps 35:15–16, 21; Mt 27:28–29; ⁴⁴Jude 16; Acts 12:22; ⁴⁵Rom 1:31; 2 Tim 3:3; ⁴⁶1 Sam 2:24; ⁴⁷2 Sam 13:12–13; Prov 5:8–9; 6:33.

Comments

The 9th Commandment, as we saw, is essentially about the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, including the truth as regards the name of our neighbour. Therefore the same commandment also forbids whatsoever is prejudicial or detrimental to truth and the good name of our neighbours. Our Catechism adds that this is so, “especially in public judicature [i.e. in a courtroom situation],” both because the 9th Commandment is couched in the language of witness-bearing in the courtroom, as well as because it is in such a context that the impact of falsehood would be most greatly felt in this life.

Bearing this in mind, our Catechism brings together from the Scriptures, numerous specific sins forbidden by the 9th Commandment, viz.—

- *Firstly*, the 9th Commandment forbids “giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, out-facing and over-bearing the truth.” That is to say, it is a sin to be involved in false-witnessing, whether directly or indirectly, whether by overt falsehood or by misrepresentation (out-facing) or by exaggeration (over-bearing the truth).
- *Secondly*, and related to the first point is that of “passing unjust sentence,” whether due to false-witness or otherwise.
- *Thirdly*, the 9th Commandment condemns “calling evil good, and good evil” and likewise “rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked.” To do so would be to act contrary to what is required by the truth, and therefore weakening the demands and defacing the attractiveness of truth. Thus, Solomon says: “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.” (Prov 17:15)
- *Fourthly*, “forgery” is clearly forbidden by the 9th Commandment for it is a conscious attempt to pass off something as genuine when it is not.
- *Fifthly*, “concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others” is also a violation of the 9th Commandment. This is so because it is required of us to maintain the truth between man and man, therefore if God has by His providence made us privy to the truth, we have a responsibility to declare it. Such as refuse to correct a lie when he knows the truth becomes guilty of the lie: “If a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity” (Lev 5:1).
- And likewise, *sixthly*, “speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end” is also forbidden. Doeg was telling the truth when he told Saul that he had seen David asking Ahimelech the priest for victual as well as for the sword of Goliath (1 Sam 22:9). But this truth was given ‘unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end’ (cf. Ps 52, title). Thus, the 9th Commandment does not require, but forbids, for example, a prisoner captured in war to tell the truth about his home base.
- In the same vein, the 9th Commandment forbids, *seventhly*, the “perverting [of truth] to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful and or equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of truth or justice.” That is to say, though what is said may be truth if it is taken by itself, yet if the way it is spoken causes another meaning to be received, then it is a violation of the 9th Commandment, and likewise if the plain meaning of what is said is truth, and yet the speaker does not intend to confess the truth but reserves another meaning in his mind, then he also violates the commandment. Thus, a man may say, “I believe that Jesus is God,” but he would be telling a lie if in his mind, he is thinking that “Jesus is God in the sense that God is in all things (i.e. pantheism).”
- *Eighthly*, the 9th Commandment forbids “speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, tale-bearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial [i.e. unfair] censuring.”
- *Ninthly*, “misconstructing intentions, words, and actions,” is also forbidden. Thus those who twists Paul’s words to say that he teaches, “Let us do evil, that good may come” (Rom 8:8) are violating the 9th Commandment; and likewise those who affirmed that the Lord said that he would raise the temple in three days if it is torn down were misrepresenting Him (Jn 2:19, 21) and violating the commandment of God.
- *Tenthly*, the 9th Commandment also forbids “flattering, vain-glorious boasting, thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others,” as well as “denying the gifts and graces of God.” We must affirm the truth. We must neither exaggerate our gifts nor by a false humility, undervalue what God has appointed to us.

- In the *eleventh* place, “aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession” as well as “unnecessary discovering of infirmities” are also forbidden by the 9th Commandment. Thus, one who is caught committing a sin, but tries to excuse himself by giving some reasons for his actions is breaking the 9th Commandment.
- In the *twelfth* place, “raising false rumours, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defence” is also forbidden.
- In the *thirteenth* place, the 9th Commandment implicitly forbids “evil suspicion” as well as “envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any, endeavouring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy.” Remember that the 9th Commandment has to do also with the maintenance of the good name of our neighbours.
- In the *fourteenth* place, “scornful contempt” of persons of lower estate or “fond admiration” of persons of higher estate violates the 9th Commandment; for that would be to fail to love the good name of our neighbour.
- In the *fifteenth* place, “breach of lawful promises” would clearly constitute a breaking of the 9th Commandment, for then we would not be telling the truth when we made our promise.
- *Finally*, the 9th Commandment forbids the “neglecting such things as are of good report, and practising, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.” That is to say, it is a sin to fail to make use of all opportunities that present themselves with which we can promote truth or a good name; and conversely it is also a sin if we fail to refuse involvement in anything that is prejudicial to our own or our neighbour’s good name. **W**

WLC 146. Which is the Tenth Commandment?

A. The Tenth Commandment is, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.*¹

Proofs

¹Ex 20:17

Comments

We saw in our exposition of *WLC* 107, that Rome combines what we know as the 2nd Commandment with the 1st Commandment so that they have effectively no commandment concerning the way of worship in the Bible. But now, in order to get Ten Commandments (Ex 34:28, Dt 4:13), they have to split one of the other commandments. They chose what we know as the 10th Commandment, so that their 9th Commandment is “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife,” whereas their 10th commandment is “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house” (cf. Dt 5:21; notice how the order is transposed in Ex 20:17).

What is the difference between the two commandments? The difference, according to them, is that the 9th commandment has to do with coveting our neighbour’s relations, while the 10th commandment has to do with coveting our neighbour’s property. How do they divide the two commandments from the text as it was originally given in Exodus 20? There is no way to make a clear division! For if they wish to divide Exodus 20:17 into two commandments, then the 9th Commandment ought to be about coveting property and the 10th about coveting relations? But then ox and ass would have to be included as relations!

The fact is that Rome’s decision to combine the 1st and 2nd Commandment leaves them having to make an artificial reading of God’s law. They may claim that they are following Deuteronomy 5, but what are we to do with Exodus 20? Does not the different word order on this last commandment in the two passages suggest strongly that it is really one commandment?

The fact is that the last commandment simply forbids covetousness in regard to anything that belongs to another—whether of relations or things.

And understanding that this is the last commandment and how it is generally regarded as the least important commandment, gives us a good perspective of why the apostle Paul speaks of covetousness as idolatry (Col 3:5; Eph 5:5). He speaks of the 10th Commandment as idolatry not only because whatever we covet does become our idol, but also because if covetousness is idolatry (which is the 1st Commandment), then breaking the 10th Commandment is no less heinous than breaking the 1st Commandment.

Let us therefore take heed, and seek the Lord’s help to keep the 10th Commandment as zealously we keep the 1st Commandment. **W**

WLC 147. What are the duties required in the Tenth Commandment?

A. The duties required in the Tenth Commandment are, such a full contentment with our own condition,¹ and such a charitable frame of the whole soul toward our neighbour, as that all our inward motions and affections touching him, tend unto, and further all that good which is his.²

Proofs

¹Heb 13:5; 1 Tim 6:6; ²Job 31:29; Rom 12:15; Ps 122:7–9; 1 Tim 1:5; Est 10:3; 1 Cor 13:4–7

Comments

The 10th Commandment is based on the recognition that our outward estate comprising our possessions, both tangible and intangible, as well as the circumstances surrounding us is entirely determined by the hand of God in His goodness and sovereignty. A failure, therefore, to be contented with our own condition, or to be jealously unhappy in regard to our neighbour's condition, is to be dissatisfied with God and therefore sin against Him.

The 10th Commandment, as such, requires,—firstly,—“full contentment with our own condition.” That is, we must be satisfied, happy and grateful to the Lord for the outward estate that He has assigned us. The apostle Paul puts it eloquently and succinctly when he says: “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim 6:6).

Godliness cannot be divorced from contentment for to be godly is to live before the face of God with a desire to please Him in our thoughts, deeds and speech.

Likewise the writer of Hebrews charges us:

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5)

That is to say, knowing that God will never leave us nor forsake us, but will ever take care of us, and provide us our needs, let us be content with the lot appointed to us.

And the 10th Commandment requires,—secondly,—“and such a charitable frame of the whole soul toward our neighbour, as that all our inward motions and affections touching him, tend unto, and further all that good which is his.”

That is to say: Our attitude towards our neighbours must be one of charity, sympathy and appreciation. We must “rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom 12:15). We must desire the prosperity of our neighbour. We must pray for them and we must seek their good (cf. Ps 122:7-9). **W**

WLC 148. What are the sins forbidden in the Tenth Commandment?

- A.** The sins forbidden in the Tenth Commandment are, discontentment with our own estate;¹ envying² and grieving at the good of our neighbour,³ together with all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.⁴

Proofs

¹1 Kgs 21:4; Esth 5:13; 1 Cor 10:10; ²Gal 5:26; Jas 3:14, 16; ³Ps 112:9–10; Neh 2:10;
⁴Rom 7:7–8; 13:9; Col 3:5; Deut 5:21

Comments

We have seen how the 10th Commandment requires full contentment with our own and our neighbour's outward estate. We see now, that conversely, to be discontented with our own or our neighbour's outward estate would be to covet and to violate the 10th Commandment.

Discontentment with our own estate involves being unhappy or dissatisfied with what God has apportioned to us for the moment.

It may involve being displeased or depressed because of a perceived denial of something we desire to have—like Ahab when he could not have the vineyard which he desired (cf. 1 Kgs 21:4).

Or it may involve being grieved about a situation we are in—like Haman who was very dissatisfied even though he had great honour and riches, just because Mordecai who would not bow down to him was sitting at the king's gate (Est 5:13).

As believers, we must never be discontented nor murmur about what God has appointed to us (1 Cor 10:10).

In the same way, we must not become envious of what God has appointed to our neighbours so that instead of rejoicing with them, we become grieved in our hearts, and begin to covet or lust after what they have. Such a lust is in itself sin, therefore any action toward obtaining that which is coveted after only aggravates the sin and manifests the idolatry that is in the heart (cf. Col 3:5). **W**

WLC 149. Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?

A. No man is able, either of himself,¹ or by any grace received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God;² but doth daily break them, in thought,³ word, and deed.⁴

Proofs

¹Jas 3:2; Jn 15:5; Rom 8:3; ²Ecc 7:20; 1 Jn 1:8, 10; Gal 5:17; Rom 7:18–19;
³Gen 6:5; 8:21; ⁴Rom 3:9–19; Jas 3:2–13.

Comments

To keep the commandments of God perfectly is to yield constant and uninterrupted obedience to all the commandments of God, both in heart and life. Before the fall, the first man, Adam, was able to do that for he had a perfectly holy nature which was created to enable him to fulfil the condition of the Covenant of Works (cf. Ecc 7:29), which is perfect obedience to God's commandments. But since the Fall, no *mere* man is able to do so in this life (Ecc 7:20). Only the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-Man was able to keep the Law of God perfectly (Heb 4:15), and He came to fulfil the covenant of works on behalf of His church.

But are not Christians able to keep the Law since they are recipients of God's grace? Well, we will one day be made perfect (Heb 12:23) in heaven and we will be enabled to obey God perfectly in whatsoever He shall require of us, but today, while we are able to keep the commandments *sincerely*, we cannot keep it *perfectly* because of remaining corruption cleaving to each one of us (see Rom 7:23–24).

Yes, every Christian must endeavour after perfection (Mt 5:48), and that we may attain higher and higher degrees of perfection by the sanctifying work of God's Spirit, but no, no Christian ever did or can attain to sinless perfection. This is why the Scripture tells us expressly that none is without sin and that such as claim to have no sin are deceiving themselves and making God a liar (1 Jn 1:8, 10). This is also why the Scripture records for us the sins of the most imminent saints such as Abraham (Gen 20:2); Moses (Ps 106:33); David (Ps 51); and Peter (Mt 26:72 etc).

But what about passages in the Scripture that suggest that the regenerate Christian cannot sin?

What about 1 John 3:9—“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God”? Well, this simply teaches us that the regenerate do not take pleasure and delight in sin, nor do they continue to sin without repentance.

What about the Scriptural declaration that saints such as Noah (Gen. 6:9); Hezekiah (Isa. 38:3); and Job (Job 1:8), were perfect? Well, we must take note that the perfection ascribed to them is only comparative rather than absolute. The Scripture, after all also records the sin of these men. In particular, amongst other things, the Scripture records for us Noah's drunkenness (Gen 9:21); Hezekiah's ingratitude (2 Chr 32:25) and Job's degree of impatience under the rod (Job 3:3).

So, then, no mere man is able either of himself or by any grace received in this life to keep the commandments of God perfectly. In fact, as our catechism puts it, we daily break the commandments in thought, word and deed. We break the commandments in thoughts when our thoughts are sinfully employed either with reference to God, ourselves, or our neighbours, such as when we entertain unworthy and unbecoming notions and conceptions of God (e.g. Ps 50:21); or when we gratify our pride, or when we indulge in envious thoughts about our neighbours.

We break the commandments in words not only when we utter idle and unprofitable words (Mt 12:36), but especially when we speak words that directly dishonour God or are hurtful to others (Ps 73:9, 11).

We break the commandments in deeds when the sins that we conceive in thoughts or uttered by the tongue are translated into actions which are grievous to God and our neighbours. When this happens our sin is aggravated and often involves the breaking of other related commandments. For example, the sin of covetousness can lead to theft or even to adultery.

Oh how easily it is for us to sin! And how regularly we sin! And how impossible it is by ourselves to keep from sinning! How we deserve God's wrath! Were it not for the free grace of God in granting us salvation and eternal life, we are doomed. Indeed, even our being kept from grosser sin as Christians is totally by the grace of God through the power of His Word and Spirit, for we are but unprofitable servants. We may watch against all appearance of sin, we may mortify the deeds of the flesh, we may avoid all occasions of sin and resist all temptations, yet were it not for the restraining grace of God, we shall fall.

Thanks be to God that for His sake we are freed⁵ from the reigning power of sin and are kept from grosser sins which brings shame to His name. **W**

WLC 150. Are all transgressions of the law of God
equally heinous in themselves, and in the sight of God?

A. All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous;
but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations,
are more heinous in the sight of God than others.¹

Proofs

¹Jn 19:11; Ezk 8:6, 13, 15; 1 Jn 5:16; Ps 78:17, 32, 56.

Comments

To be heinous is to be abominable, hateful, and offensive. Every sin is heinous or hateful and offensive to God. But the Scripture shows us that some are more heinous than others in God's sight. This is evident firstly from the Lord's references to 'greater sin' (Jn 19:11; cf. Mt 7:3); and secondly from His references to different degrees of punishment that shall be inflicted in hell (cf. Mt 11:22; Lk 12:47, 48).

But how are some sins more heinous in the sight of God than others?

- *Firstly*, some sins are more heinous 'in themselves,' that is: they are more heinous in comparison to other sins. For example, sins committed immediately against God, are in general more heinous than sins committed more immediately against man. Thus, violations of any precepts in the first table of the Ten Commandments would, in general, be more heinous than violations in the second table. As a case in point, blasphemy against God, is more heinous in its own nature, than defaming, or speaking evil of our neighbour (cf. 1 Sam 2:25). Likewise, sins against man that involve more permanent or painful damage are more heinous in the sight of God than sins whose wrongs can to a greater degree be corrected by restitution of some kind. As a case in point, murder is more heinous than adultery, and adultery is more heinous than theft (cf. Prov 6:30, 32).
- But *secondly*, some sins are more heinous in the sight of God than others 'by reason of several aggravations.'

We shall consider what are "those aggravations that make some sins more heinous than others" in our next study (i.e., WLC 151). But briefly, the aggravations arise from: (1) the persons offending; (2) the parties offended; (3) the nature and quality of the offence; (4) the circumstances of time and place; and (5) the manner in which the offences are committed. **W**

4. Sins receive their aggravations,

1. From the persons offending;¹ if they be of riper age,² greater experience or grace,³ eminent for profession,⁴ gifts,⁵ place,⁶ office,⁷ guides to others,⁸ and whose example is likely to be followed by others.⁹
2. From the parties offended:¹⁰ if immediately against God,¹¹ His attributes,¹² and worship;¹³ against Christ, and His grace;¹⁴ the Holy Spirit,¹⁵ His witness,¹⁶ and workings;¹⁷ against superiors, men of eminency,¹⁸ and such as we stand especially related and engaged unto;¹⁹ against any of the saints,²⁰ particularly weak brethren,²¹ the souls of them, or any other,²² and the common good of all or many.²³
3. From the nature and quality of the offence:²⁴ if it be against the express letter of the law,²⁵ break many commandments, contain in it many sins;²⁶ if not only conceived in the heart, but breaks forth in words and actions,²⁷ scandalise others,²⁸ and admit of no reparation;²⁹ if against means,³⁰ mercies,³¹ judgments,³² light of nature,³³ conviction of conscience,³⁴ public or private admonition,³⁵ censures of the church,³⁶ civil punishments;³⁷ and our prayers, purposes, promises,³⁸ vows,³⁹ covenants,⁴⁰ and engagements to God or men;⁴¹ if done deliberately,⁴² willfully,⁴³ presumptuously,⁴⁴ impudently,⁴⁵ boastingly,⁴⁶ maliciously,⁴⁷ frequently,⁴⁸ obstinately,⁴⁹ with delight,⁵⁰ continuance,⁵¹ or relapsing, after repentance.⁵²
4. From circumstances of time⁵³ and place:⁵⁴ if on the Lord's day,⁵⁵ or other times of divine worship;⁵⁶ or immediately before⁵⁷ or after these,⁵⁸ or other helps to prevent or remedy such miscarriages;⁵⁹ if in public, or in the presence of others, who are thereby likely to be provoked or defiled.⁶⁰

Proofs

¹Jer 2:8; ²Job 32:7, 9; Eccl 4:13; ³1 Kgs 11:4, 9; ⁴2 Sam 12:14; 1 Cor 5:1; ⁵Jas 4:17; Lk 12:47–48; ⁶Jer 5:4–5; ⁷2 Sam 12:7–9; Ezk 8:11–12; ⁸Rom 2:17–24; ⁹Gal 2:11–14; ¹⁰Mt 21:38–39; ¹¹1 Sam 2:25; Acts 5:4; Ps 51:4; ¹²Rom 2:4; ¹³Mal 1:8, 14; ¹⁴Heb 2:2–3; 12:25; ¹⁵Heb 10:29; Mt 12:31–32; ¹⁶Eph 4:30; ¹⁷Heb 6:4–6; ¹⁸Jude 8; Num 12:8–9; Isa 3:5; ¹⁹Prov 30:17; 2 Cor 12:15; Ps 55:12–15; ²⁰Zeph 2:8, 10–11; Mt 18:6; 1 Cor 6:8; Rev 17:6; ²¹1 Cor 8:11–12; Rom 14:13, 15, 21; ²²Ezk 13:19; 1 Cor 8:12; Rev 18:12–13; Mt 23:15; ²³1 Thes 2:15–16; Josh 22:20; ²⁴Prov 6:30–33; ²⁵Ezra 9:10–12; 1 Kgs 11:9–10; ²⁶Col 3:5; 1 Tim 6:10; Prov 5:8–12; 6:32–33; Josh 7:21; ²⁷Jas 1:14–15; Mt 5:22; Mic 2:1; ²⁸Mt 18:7; Rom 2:23–24; ²⁹Deut 22:22, 28–29; Prov 6:32–35; ³⁰Mt 11:21–24; Jn 15:22; ³¹Isa 1:3; Deut 32:6; ³²Amos 4:8–11; Jer 5:3; ³³Rom 1:26–27; ³⁴Rom 1:32; Dan 5:22; Tit 3:10–11; ³⁵Prov 29:1; ³⁶Tit 3:10; Mt 18:17; ³⁷Prov 27:22; 23:35; ³⁸Ps 78:34–37; Jer 2:20; 42:5–6, 20–21; ³⁹Eccl 5:4–6; Prov 20:25; ⁴⁰Lev 26:25; ⁴¹Prov 2:17; Ezk 17:18–19; ⁴²Ps 36:4; ⁴³Jer 6:16; ⁴⁴Num 15:30; Ex 21:14; ⁴⁵Jer 3:3; Prov 7:13; ⁴⁶Ps 52:1; ⁴⁷3 Jn 10; ⁴⁸Num 14:22; ⁴⁹Zech 7:11–12; ⁵⁰Prov 2:14; ⁵¹Isa 57:17; ⁵²Jer 34:8–11; 2 Pet 2:20–22; ⁵³2 Kgs 5:26; ⁵⁴Jer 7:10; Isa 26:10; ⁵⁵Ezk 23:37–39; ⁵⁶Isa 58:3–5; Num 25:6–7; ⁵⁷1 Cor 11:20–21; ⁵⁸Jer 7:8–10; Prov 7:14–15; Jn 13:27, 30; ⁵⁹Ezra 9:13–14; ⁶⁰2 Sam 16:22; 1 Sam 2:22–24.

Comments

We noted briefly in our last study that some sins are more heinous in the sight of God than others by reason of several aggravations. What are these aggravations?

Our catechism list four aggravations: (1) 'From the persons offending'; (2) 'From the parties offended'; (3) 'From the nature and quality of the offence'; and (4) 'From the circumstances of time and place'.

In what ways is a sin more or less heinous depending on the *person offending*? A sin is more heinous if the offender: (a) is of 'riper age'; (b) has 'greater experience' or spiritual maturity; (c) is well known as a disciple of the Lord such that his sin can give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme the name of God (cf. 2 Sam 12:14; cf. Rom 2:23–24); (d) is more knowledgeable in regard to the truth (Jas 4:17; Lk 12:47–48); (e) has a higher status in society; (f) is in a office which ought to command respect such as the office of an elder or magistrate; (g) has a responsibility to guide others such as a parent; and (h) is influential by way of example such as an elder brother to his younger siblings.

In what ways is a sin more or less heinous depending on the *parties offended*? In the first place, a sin that is more immediately against God or any persons of the Godhead is more heinous than the same sin committed against man. Thus, it is more grievous to lie against the Holy Spirit than against man (cf. Acts 5:4). In the second place, a sin is more heinous if committed against those who are superior or imminent by way of fame or by way of their position in society, at home, at work or in church. Thus it is more heinous to falsely accuse a minister of God than to falsely accuse an ordinary member of the church (cf. Num 12:8; 1 Tim 5:19). In the third place, a sin committed against the Church or against a child of God for whom Christ died (cf. 1 Cor 8:11) is more heinous than a sin committed against an enemy of Christ. Thus, it is more grievous to lead a covenant child astray than to lead an unbelieving child astray.

In what ways is a sin more heinous with respect to *the nature and quality of the offence*? An offence is more heinous: (a) if it is against the express letter of the law: (b) if it breaks many commandments at the same time; (c) if it involves not just the thought, but words and actions; (d) if it scandalise others or involve them in further sin; (e) if it admits of no reparation or restitution; (f) if it is against the means of grace; (g) if it is committed despite of '[contrary] judgments, light of nature, conviction of conscience, public or private admonition, censures of the church, civil punishments'; (h) if it is against 'our prayers, purposes, promises, vows, covenants, and engagements to God or men'; and finally (i) if it is 'done deliberately, willfully, presumptuously, impudently, boastingly, maliciously, frequently, obstinately, with delight, continuance, or relapsing, after repentance.'

In what ways is a sin aggravated by the *time at which it is committed*? A sin is aggravated if it is committed on or immediately before or after the Lord's Day or other times of divine worship (such as days of public fasting). Thus it is more sinful to commit adultery on the Lord's Day than on a weekday. In like manner, a sin is more heinous if it is committed immediately after any helps to prevent or remedy the offence, such as admonition and censure, or a sermon on the subject.

In what ways is a sin aggravated by the *place at which it is committed*? A sin is aggravated particularly when it is committed in 'in public, or in the presence of others, who are thereby likely to be provoked or defiled.' **W**

WLC 152. What doth every sin deserve at the hands of God?

A. Every sin, even the least, being against the sovereignty,¹ goodness,² and holiness of God,³ and against His righteous law,⁴ deserveth His wrath and curse,⁵ both in this life,⁶ and that which is to come;⁷ and cannot be expiated but by the blood of Christ.⁸

Proofs

¹Jas 2:10–11; ²Ex 20:1–2; ³Hab 1:13; Lev 10:3; 11:44–45; ⁴1 Jn 3:4; Rom 7:12; ⁵Eph 5:6; Gal 3:10;
⁶Lam 3:39; Deut 28:15–68; ⁷Mt 25:41; ⁸Heb 9:22; 1 Pet 1:18–19.

Comments

We saw in our previous two studies that some sin are more heinous than others. Does this mean that the Roman Catholic Church is right that there are some sins which are in their own nature so small and trivial that they can be overlooked by God or expiated by some good works on the part of the sinner?

The answer is no. God is perfectly just and holy; and every sin is against “against the sovereignty, goodness, and holiness of God, and against His righteous law.” Therefore, as all things in the universe are under His sovereign rule, we can expect that no sin will be overlooked. God’s justice requires infinite satisfaction. Every sin is like a blemish in God’s moral universe and has to be dealt with in some way so that justice will ultimately prevail.

But how must they be dealt with? They must be dealt with either by a combination of temporal and eternal punishment of the sinner, or by the substitutionary atonement of Christ, the eternal son of God. This is so because all sin is against the infinite God and therefore deserves infinite punishment. The fact that Christ’s atonement (i.e. punishment on behalf of the sinner) can effectively deal with sin is because Christ is very God, infinite and eternal.

Another way of saying the same thing is that every sin “deserveth His wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come; and cannot be expiated but by the blood of Christ.”

No sin is so small that they do not deserve God’s wrath and curse. So unless a sin has been paid for by the blood of Christ, the sinner can expect God’s punishment for it both in this life and the life to come.

Punishment in this life may take many forms including lost of health, wealth and comfort, and even death, whereas punishment in the life to come is essentially torment in hell.

The unbeliever can expect to face God’s wrath both in this life and the life to come.

On the other hand, the believer, having his sins already paid for by the Lord Jesus Christ may expect to experience God’s love both in this life and the life to come. The Scripture, of course, teaches us that God will sometime chastise us for our sin for such chastisement are meted out of love rather than wrath, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb 12:6). Even death, is for the believer transformed from a curse into a blessing, for it is for him a portal into blessed presence and enjoyment of God. **W**

WLC 153. What doth God require of us, that we may escape His wrath and curse due to us by reason of the transgression of the law?

A. That we may escape the wrath and curse of God due to us by reason of the transgression of the law, He requireth of us repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,¹ and the diligent use of the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of His mediation.²

Proofs

¹Acts 20:21; Mt 3:7–8; Lk 13:3, 5; Acts 16:30–31; Jn 3:16, 18; ²Prov 2:1–5; 8:33–36.

Comments

All men deserve the wrath and curse of God not only on account of our guilt in Adam, but also by reason of our own transgression of the Law of God. And we cannot escape the wrath and curse of God by anything we do, for “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6); and, “by the works of the law, shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16).

This being the case, the answer to this question, may seem rather contradictory at first sight. Is it teaching us ‘salvation by works’ or as some put it, ‘Gospel work.’ Is it saying that though we cannot be saved by keeping the law, we can be saved by believing, repenting and making use of the means of grace. If this is so, then our catechism is indeed teaching the heresy.

But this is not the case. Why?

Well, first, we must understand that this question is not about justification. All who are saved are justified. We are saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus alone. This happens at the point of justification as far as the application of grace to us is concerned. We contribute precisely nothing to our justification. The question therefore cannot be about justification. It is rather about sanctification. Our salvation or escaping the wrath and curse of God, is not something which happens only at a point of time. It begins with our justification, but it progresses through our sanctification. All who are truly justified will be sanctified because a new life has begun in them. This new life will manifest itself in a lively response to what God requires for its continued growth in grace, namely faith, repentance and the use of the means of grace. Therefore it is true that in order to escape the wrath and curse due to our sin, God requires of us repentance, faith and the use of the means. Consider an analogy: The Lord raised up Lazarus from the dead, but does that mean that he needs not eat and drink to live? No, in order that he might live on, he had to eat and drink. If he did not, it would indicate that he was not really alive, not to mention being able to live on.

Moreover, on the second place, we must understand that those duties as performed by us, cannot merit eternal life. Even our sanctification is something which the Holy Spirit effects in our soul graciously. While God requires these duties, he is not obliged to pay us for them. He does not owe us anything. Or to put it in another way: These duties are instrumental, but not meritorious causes of our salvation. God requires them of us if we would escape His wrath and curse, but they are not the reason why we escape His wrath and curse. The reason is Christ.

But why does God require of us faith, repentance and the means?

In the first place, faith in Christ Jesus is required to escape God’s wrath and curse, because God has appointed faith as the instrument by which we express our interest in Christ and receive all the benefits of redemption He has purchased for us (Eph 2:8; Acts 10:43; Phil 3:9).

In the second place, repentance is required if we would escape God’s wrath and curse, because we cannot cling on to Christ and to our sin at the same time. He who loves sin, hates Christ. He who loves Christ, must hate sin. It is simply not God’s honour to pardon and save any that go on still in their sin (cf. Acts 3:19).

And finally, God requires of us the diligent use of all outward means to escape His wrath and curse, because He has so appointed that He will generally work through means. He can, of course, save without means, but He has chosen not to do so. Therefore, as He has appointed means for our salvation, we cannot expect to receive the redemption by any other way, but by the appointed means (cf. 1 Cor 1:21). **W**

WLC 154. What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of His mediation?

A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to His church the benefits of His mediation, are all His ordinances; especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.¹

Proofs

¹Mt 28:19–20; Acts 2:42, 46–47.

Comments

We saw that to escape God's wrath and curse due to us by reason of the transgression of the law, God requires of us, among other things, "the diligent use of the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of His mediation" (*WLC* 153).

What are these outward means? In the answer to the present question, we are informed that they are the ordinances of Christ, or the things which Christ himself ordained, instituted, appointed or commanded. These are the things which Christ instructed His disciples to teach the church:

“¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach [or make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Mt 28:19-20)

Making use of these ordinance and these alone is necessarily if we are to receive the benefits of Christ's mediation.

What about the ordinances of man such as additional sacraments and rituals? Well, common sense tells us that they are of no use for who are we to think that God will accept the methods of man when he His Son has already appointed the means. Indeed, the Scriptures teaches us that to us the ordinances of man is will-worship (Col 2:20, 22–23), which is both vain and offensive to God (Mt 15:9). Those who use them, not only can have no assurance that they will receive any blessing from the Lord, but can expect chastisement from Him!

But how do we know if something is an ordinance of Christ and not of man? We can only know that something is an ordinance of Christ if it taught in the written word. What then are the ordinances? Our catechism lists the chiefest of them, namely, the Word, sacraments and prayers (cf. Acts 2:42). But there are other ordinances too (as indicated by the word 'especially'). This were listed earlier in *WLC* 108, namely, "church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto Him."

And notice how these outward means are also the "*ordinary* means whereby Christ communicates to His church the benefits of His mediation." Why are called 'ordinary means'? They are so called, because the Lord has not limited and bound up himself unto these ordinances. He can in special circumstances bring some out of a state of nature into a state of grace by other means, such as when He converted Saul of Tarsus by a light and a voice from heaven. Indeed, He can bypass the means altogether such as when he regenerates elect infants in their infancy. But still the ordinances are the most usual means of conversion and salvation, so that if we fail to use them, we cannot, upon good ground, expect that any benefit of redemption should be communicated to us.

But notice further, that the ordinances are not necessarily effectual to all who use them. Indeed, they are made effectual only to the *elect* who use them by faith. And they are made effectual 'for their salvation.' This 'salvation', we must remember must not be equated with regeneration and justification, for it includes sanctification and glorification as well. That is to say, it includes "not only a begun deliverance from all sin and misery, and a begun possession of all happiness and blessedness in this life; but likewise a total freedom from the one, and a full and uninterrupted enjoyment of the other, in the life to come" (Thomas Vincent). **W**

A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening,¹ convincing, and humbling sinners;² of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ;³ of conforming them to His image,⁴ and subduing them to His will;⁵ of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions;⁶ of building them up in grace,⁷ and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.⁸

Proofs

¹Neh 8:8; Acts 26:18; Ps 19:8; ²1 Cor 14:24–25; 2 Chr 34:18–19, 26–28; ³Acts 2:37, 41; 8:27–39; ⁴2 Cor 3:18; ⁵2 Cor 10:4–6; Rom 6:17; ⁶Mt 4:4, 7, 10; Eph 6:16–17; Ps 19:11; 1 Cor 10:11; ⁷Acts 20:32; 2 Tim 3:15–17; ⁸Rom 16:25; 1 Thes 3:2, 10–11, 13; Rom 15:4; 10:13–17; 1:16.

Comments

The Word of God which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament is the chief and primary means of our salvation. But how is it made effectual for this purposed? It is made effectual,—the Scripture teaches us and our catechism affirms,—through the private and public reading, but especially the preaching of the Word (cf. Jn 5:39; 1Tm 4:13; 2 Tim 4:2; 1 Cor 1:21). That is to say: the Spirit of Christ works through the reading of the Scripture, but He especially makes use of the faithful preaching of His Word. Thus Calvin says:

“The preaching of the gospel, which is committed to [the Church], is the spiritual sceptre of God, by which He displays His power” (*comm. on Isa 45:14*)

But what exactly does the Spirit of Christ do with the Word when it is preached? Our catechism teaches us He does 5 things when the word is received by faith.

- *First*, the Spirit of Christ uses the Word to enlighten, convince and humble sinners. The writer of Hebrews says:

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

Though the works of the Law is written in the hearts of all men, yet none will come to be truly convicted of their sin except through the hearing of God’s Word.

- *Secondly*, the Spirit uses the Word to drive sinners out of themselves and to draw them unto Christ. Thus, those who heard the preaching of the apostle Peter were “pricked in their heart” and cried out unto the apostles: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Likewise, the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah 53 was lead to Christ as the Holy Spirit applied the exposition of Philip to his heart.
- *Thirdly*, the Spirit by the Word conforms God’s children into the image of Christ and subdues them to His will (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). This is accomplished by the Word pulling down strongholds of sinful attitude (2 Cpr 10:4-6) and revealing what is God’s will for our attitude and behaviour (cf. Rom 6:17). The Scripture itself says:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16–17).

- *Fourthly*, the Spirit uses the Word to strengthen His saints against temptations and corruption.

The Psalmist says:

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Ps 119:9).

Thus the apostle Paul teaches us to put on the full armour of God including the sword of the Spirit in order that we may stand the wiles of the evil one (Eph 6:13, 17; cf. Rom 16:25; Eph 4:14).

- *Finally*, the Spirit of Christ, through the Word preached and read, establishes the hearts of believer in comfort in addition to building them up in grace and holiness.

This He does as the Word reveals and hold forth the chiefest grounds of comfort, such as the promises of pardon and eternal life (Isa 40:1-2). In this way, in an inexplicable manner, Word becomes the means of conveying to the soul who receive it by faith the most sweet and unutterable joy of the Holy Ghost. **W**

WLC 156. Is the Word of God to be read by all?

A. Although all are not to be permitted to read the Word publicly to the congregation,¹ yet all sorts of people are bound to read it apart by themselves,² and with their families:³ to which end, the Holy Scriptures are to be translated out of the original into vulgar languages.⁴

Proofs

¹Deut 31:9, 11–13; Neh 8:2–3; 9:3–5; ²Deut 17:19; Rev 1:3; Jn 5:39; Isa 34:16; ³Deut 6:6–9; Gen 18:17, 19; Ps 78:5–7; ⁴1 Cor 14:6, 9, 11–12, 15–16, 24, 27–28.

Comments

We will see in *WLC 158* that “the Word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office.” This, we believe to be the true teaching of Scripture although there is no explicit statement to forbid ‘lay-preaching.’

One of the main arguments why we believe this is the teaching of Scripture is that in the biblical records, those who preached the Word were either appointed as prophets, priests and Levites, apostles, teachers or pastors. In other words, they were called to the offices, which require them to teach and preach publicly. This being the case, the public reading of the Word of God today should similarly be restricted to those who have been called or gifted to the office which requires them to be ‘apt to teach’ (1 Tim 3:2), namely the office of eldership.

But the public reading of the Word of God apart, everyone who can read “are bound to read it apart by themselves, and with their families.” Again, we do not have a clear statement in Scripture to teach us this duty, but it is both implied as a duty by a proper sense of gratitude upon being given such a great privilege of having the Word of God available to read; and also by the call in Scripture to search the Scriptures personally and to teach our families the Scriptures.

For example, the Lord told the Jews: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (Jn 5:39); or when it is said that the Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians in that they “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Act 17:11).

Likewise, we are commanded in the Law to teach our children the Word of God (Deut 5:6-9), “that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments” (Ps 78:7). How best can we teach the Word of God but by reading the Word of God to them?

It is for this reason, that it becomes imperative that the Holy Scriptures should be translated out of the original language into the languages that are commonly understood by the people (this is what ‘vulgar languages’ mean in our answer). After all, very few today speak or understand Hebrew or Greek, so that if the minister was to read the Bible in the original languages, it would be meaningless to most people (cf. 1 Cor 14: 6, 9, 11–12, 15–16, 24, 27–28)!

It is no wonder that great blessings began to descend upon God’s people around the world once the translation of the Bible into common languages went underway. Indeed, the Reformation in the English speaking world did not begin in 1517, it began when John Wycliffe translated the Vulgate into English in the 14th Century! It is no wonder that he is called the Morning Star of the English Reformation.

The fact that we have the Bible in the language we can understand is such a tremendous privilege that to refuse to read it is almost criminal! Shall we not read it diligently personally and in our families! **W**

WLC 157. How is the Word of God to be read?

A. The Holy Scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them;¹ with a firm persuasion that they are the very word of God,² and that He only can enable us to understand them;³ with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them;⁴ with diligence,⁵ and attention to the matter and scope of them;⁶ with meditation,⁷ application,⁸ self-denial,⁹ and prayer.¹⁰

Proofs

¹Ps 19:10; Neh 8:3–10; Ex 24:7; 2 Chr 34:27; Isa 66:2; ²2 Pet 1:19–21; ³Lk 24:45; 2 Cor 3:13–16; ⁴Deut 17:19–20; ⁵Acts 17:11; ⁶Acts 8:30, 34; Lk 10:26–28; ⁷Ps 1:2; 119:97; ⁸2 Chr 34:21; ⁹Prov 3:5; Deut 33:3; ¹⁰Prov 2:1–6; Ps 119:18; Neh 8:6, 8.

Comments

The Bible is not an ordinary book that can be read and studied like some ancient literature. It is the Word of God. Therefore, it must always be handled carefully and respectfully.

In particular, as our catechism instructs us, that:

- *Firstly*, the Holy Scriptures should be read with ‘an high and reverent esteem’ of them. During the post-exilic days, there was an occasion when Ezra assembled the people to read the Scriptures to them. We are told that “when he opened it, all the people stood up” (Neh 8:6); and we are told too that “the people wept, when they heard the words of the law” (Neh 8:9). Now, we are not saying that we must always stand up or weep when the Scriptures are read. What we are saying is that we should have the same attitude as our brethren in those days.

We must not attend to the reading of the Word of God with drowsily, or with a flippant and careless attitude, or with a critical mindset. We must attend to the reading of the Word,—whether it is read publicly on the pulpit, or privately in family worship or personally by ourselves,—with a special reverence and care to receive what is being read. The Lord says through Isaiah: “...but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa 66:2b)
- *Secondly*, the Scriptures must be read “with a firm persuasion that they are the very word of God, and that He only can enable us to understand them.” All Scripture is ‘God-breathed’ (2 Tim 3:16). They came not by the will of man: “but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet 1:21). This truth must be firm lodged in our hearts as we read the Scripture. And therefore, we must take what we hear or read from the Scripture as the very voice of God speaking to us. And since the Scriptures are the very Word of God, and we are finite while he is infinite, we must understand that “He only can enable us to understand them” (cf. 1 Cor 2:13). And therefore, we should read prayerfully, desiring that God will by His Spirit enable us to understand the things that we read
- *Thirdly*, we must read the Scripture “with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them.” That is, we must not read the Scripture merely to find information to increase in knowledge. We must desire to be transformed by the renewing of our minds whenever we read the Scripture. Therefore we must believe all that the Scripture teaches us and resolve to obey all that it requires of us.
- *Fourthly*, we must read the Holy Scriptures, “with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of them.” We must be like the Bereans, who “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). We must seek to understand what we read or hear and we must consider how it relates to our present life.
- *Finally*, we must read the Holy Scriptures “with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer.” We ought to seek the Spirit assistance before we open the Scriptures. And we ought to prayerfully think about what we hear or read when we close the Scriptures. We ought not to simply forget about it. The words of Scripture should continue to resound in our hearts. And we should seek to apply what we have read or heard, seeking always to conform to the Word rather than insisting on our own ways and own thinking. **W**

WLC 158. By whom is the Word of God to be preached?

- A. The Word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted,¹
and also duly approved and called to that office.²

Proofs

¹1 Tim 3:2, 6; Eph 4:8–11; Hos 4:6; Mal 2:7; 2 Cor 3:6; ²Jer 14:15; Rom 10:15; Heb 5:4;
1 Cor 12:28–29; 1 Tim 3:10; 4:14; 5:22

Comments

We have seen how “The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of [salvation]” (WLC 155). This being the case, it is little wonder that the Scripture suggests to us that not everyone may preach the Word. We say, ‘suggests’, rather than ‘commands’ or even ‘informs’ because there is not really any verse or passage that explicitly state this prohibition, or specify who is allowed to preach God’s Word. This, of course, does not mean that the restriction is unimportant; but what it does mean is that a certain amount of flexibility in the exercise of the principle in the church must be tolerated.

In any case, the Scriptural restriction may be derived from the following passages.

First, the apostle Paul instructs us that ‘apostle’, ‘prophets’, ‘evangelists’, and ‘pastor-teachers’ are given or appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ and that together with their calling, they are assigned suitable spiritual gifts for the purpose of ‘edifying the body of Christ’ in knowledge and faith (Eph 4:8-13; cf. 2 Cor 3:6). Today, the offices of apostles, prophets and evangelists have ceased; but pastor-teachers remain under the broader office of elders. They are elders who “who labour in word and doctrine” (1 Tim 5:17). We conclude therefore that only those who are called to be elders and gifted to preach ought to preach the Word.

Secondly, the apostle Paul teaches us that an elder must be ‘apt to teach’ (1 Tim 3:2) and ‘not a novice’ (1 Tim 3:6). If this is so, then so much the more these restrictions must be applicable to the elders “who labour in word and doctrine” (1 Tim 5:17), who are called to preach. Therefore we conclude that none who are novice or are not apt to teach ought to take upon themselves the onerous task of preaching the Word.

Thirdly, the Lord condemns through Hosea the priests who were unable fail to teach the people because they themselves are ignorant:

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” (Hos 4:6).

Therefore, we conclude that a person who seems to have been called into the office which licenses him to preach and yet does not know the Scriptures sufficiently or is not gifted to preach, ought not to preach because his calling would be in question (cf. Mal 2:7).

Fourthly, the apostle reminds us that preachers cannot ‘preach’ “except they be sent” (Rom 5:10). Of course, anyone can just stand up at the pulpit and, as it were, ‘preach.’ But only those who are sent by the Lord may truly ‘preach’ as heralds of Christ who speak with His authority. This is why the Lord condemns, through Jeremiah, the prophets who claim to prophesy in His name, but were not sent by Him (Jer 14:15). These were especially condemned for prophesying falsehood; and therefore we learn that such as are not called to the ministry, and yet preach the Word and that erroneously, are guilty of double-transgression.

Fifthly, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that no man may take upon himself the office of priesthood (Heb 5:4); and therefore we learn that no one may take upon himself to preach without intruding into the office of a preacher.

Sixthly, the apostle Paul instructs Timothy to “Lay hands suddenly on no man” (1 Tim 5:22), which teaches us that those who are called to be elders ought to be ‘duly approved.’ How much more then, in the case of those who will minister the Gospel. Thus, we believe that all who aspire to the ministry ought to be systematically trained and examined before being ordained to the ministry.

The testimony of Scripture is very clear: Only those who “are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to [the] office [of a preacher or pastor-teacher]” ought to preach the Word of God. The Word of God does not sanction lay-preaching.

But if that is the case, what about students who are training for the ministry? Can they be allowed to preach? Well, churches that subscribe to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* would often have a mechanism by which such students are allowed to preach as part of their training and also as part of the provision for the congregations to know them before they are formally called and installed into the pastorate. This mechanism is call ‘licensing.’

In Pilgrim Covenant Church, the license is issued with a view of giving those who are aspiring to the ministry opportunities to “occasionally both read the word, and exercise [his] gift in preaching in the congregation” (*The Directory of Public Worship*, s.v., “Of Publick Reading of the Holy Scriptures”). This licence is issued after a thorough examination by the Session and where possible by a Presbytery convened for the purpose.

Once the licence is issued, the licentiate may preach the word occasionally, but he will continue under the oversight of the church Session. He will not administer the Lord’s Supper nor pronounce the benediction.

But the question may be asked: If he is not ordained, how can he be said to be a herald of Christ? This is the reason why churches which allow unordained persons to preach would often term them as ‘giving an exhortation’ rather than ‘preaching.’ We do not make this distinction in so far as the Scripture does not seem to make such a distinction. We would rather speak of the authority of the licentiate’s preaching as being derived from Christ on the basis when the church finally elects the licentiate into a pastorate, it is really a ratification of the call of Christ, rather than the call itself. We must remember that it is not the church that calls, but Christ who calls.

When the Presbytery or Session issues a license to preach, it is essentially declaring that in its collective judgement, all things being equal, the man being licensed appears to be gifted for the ministry by the Lord and will one day be formally called to the ministry. In other words, the licence is partly a declaration by the Presbytery and Session that there is little doubt in their mind that the licentiate has discerned the Lord’s subjective call correctly.

Therefore, when a licentiate preaches he preaches as one who does not take the privilege upon himself, who has been duly approved by the Session or Presbytery, and who is pending a ratification of his call by the Lord. **W**

WLC 159. How is the Word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?

A. They that are called to labour in the ministry of the Word, are to preach sound doctrine,¹ diligently,² in season and out of season;³ plainly,⁴ not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power;⁵ faithfully,⁶ making known the whole counsel of God;⁷ wisely,⁸ applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers;⁹ zealously,¹⁰ with fervent love to God¹¹ and the souls of His people;¹² sincerely,¹³ aiming at His glory,¹⁴ and their conversion,¹⁵ edification,¹⁶ and salvation.¹⁷

Proofs

¹Tit 2:1, 8; ²Acts 18:25; ³2 Tim 4:2; ⁴1 Cor 14:19; ⁵1 Cor 2:4; ⁶Jer 23:28; 1 Cor 4:1-2; ⁷Acts 20:27; ⁸Col 1:28; 2 Tim 2:15; ⁹1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12-14; Lk 12:42; ¹⁰Acts 18:25; ¹¹2 Cor 5:13-14; Phil 1:15-17; ¹²Col 4:12; 2 Cor 12:15; ¹³2 Cor 2:17; 4:2; ¹⁴1 Thes 2:4-6; Jn 7:18; ¹⁵1 Cor 9:19-22; ¹⁶2 Cor 12:19; Eph 4:12; ¹⁷1 Tim 4:16; Acts 26:16-18.

Comments

We have already seen who are to preach the Word of God. These are elders who "labour in word and doctrine" (1 Tim 5:17), or in other words, 'teaching-elders' or 'pastors.' But how are they to preach?

Our catechism gives us ten considerations:

First, they are to preach "sound doctrine [Tit 2:1, 8], diligently [Acts 18:25], in season and out of season [2 Tim 4:2]." Those who preach must understand that they are not called to entertain but to instruct and exhort the people of God entrusted to their care. They must diligently prepare to speak to the people and yet they must be prepared at all times to bring the word. The preacher as such is not a professional just doing his job; he is a servant of the Lord entrusted with an onerous responsibility which he must discharge cheerfully, conscientiously and patiently.

Secondly, those who preach are to do so "plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power [cf. 1 Cor 2:4]." The preacher is not called to be eloquent, charming or charismatic. Neither is he called to flaunt his scholarship and knowledge. He is called to convey the truth of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. He is to enter the pulpit with prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit and an earnest desire that Christ be exalted and the congregation hears and understands what the Lord would have them hear.

Thirdly, they are to preach "faithfully [Jer 23:28; 1 Cor 4:1-2], making known the whole counsel of God [Acts 20:27]." That is to say: he must not be innovative. He is called to preach the Word of God, no more, no less. He must not withhold from the congregation anything that is taught in the Word of God. And he must not preach his opinion and ideas that are not securely founded upon the Word of God.

Fourthly, they who preach must do so "wisely [Col 1:28; 2 Tim 2:15], applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers [1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12-14; Lk 12:42]." In other words, they must recognise that preaching is not about the preacher but about Christ and His flock. The preacher is an undershepherd speaking on behalf of Christ the Shepherd. He must take care that the flock of Christ,—which include both mature sheep and young lamb, and sheep that has just been brought into the fold,—must all be fed. So the preacher must consider and know the state of the flock to see how best to feed it. In one flock, he may have to give mostly milk, whereas in another flock, he must give strong meat. In one congregation he must put emphasis on one subject, in another he may have to emphasise something else. In one season, he may have to strive to convict, in another, he may have to seek to comfort. He must preach wisely in accordance to the needs of the flock.

Fifthly, they are to preach "zealously [1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12-14; Lk 12:42], with fervent love to God [Acts 18:25] and the souls of His people [2 Cor 5:13-14; Phil 1:15-17]." They are not called to lecture or to merely convey some truth. He is to preach! He is to preach as one hot with the constraining love of Christ and of His flock. He must preach as a dying man to dying men that peradventure he may by the grace of God rescue some from the snares of eternal fire.

But finally and in summary, those who preach are to preach "sincerely [2 Cor 2:17; 4:2], aiming at His glory [1 Th 2:4-6; Jn 7:18], and [the] conversion [1 Cor 9:19-22], edification [2 Cor 12:19; Eph 4:12], and salvation [of God's people] [1 Tim 4:16; Acts 26:16-18]." The preacher must never go about his duty dispassionately as an actor or even a salesperson may do. He must rather set as his heart on seeking the two-fold objective of glorifying God who called him; and saving and edifying the church whom Christ redeemed.

This is how preachers of God's Word must preached. **W**

WLC 160. What is required of those that hear the Word preached?

A. It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence,¹ preparation,² and prayer;³ examine what they hear by the Scriptures;⁴ receive the truth with faith,⁵ love,⁶ meekness,⁷ and readiness of mind,⁸ as the Word of God;⁹ meditate,¹⁰ and confer of it;¹¹ hide it in their hearts,¹² and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.¹³

Proofs

¹Prov 8:34; ²1 Pet 2:1–2; Lk 8:18; ³Ps 119:18; Eph 6:18–19; ⁴Acts 17:11; ⁵Heb 4:2; ⁶2 Thes 2:10; ⁷Jas 1:21; ⁸Acts 17:11; ⁹1 Thes 2:13; ¹⁰Lk 9:44; Heb 2:1; ¹¹Lk 24:14; Deut 6:6–7; ¹²Prov 2:1; Ps 119:11; ¹³Lk 8:15; Jas 1:25.

Comments

The Scripture, experience and our catechism teaches us that the Word preached is principle means of grace. By the Word preached, men, women and children have been remarkably transformed and enabled to live holy lives that redound to the glory of Christ. But experience also shows us that very often those who attend the preaching of God’s Word go away with no apparent spiritual improvement. Sometimes, this happens because of a failure on the part of the preacher to preach accurately, faithfully, plainly or earnestly (see *WLC* 159). But often, it is not the case. Very often, a sermon preached may have remarkable effects on some members of the congregation while apparently having little impact on the rest.

Why is this so? This is so, because the effectiveness of the Word preach (as a means of grace), depends not only on how it is preached, but also how it is received.

The preacher must preach as if it all depends on him as far as human responsibility go. Unless there is obvious hardness of heart, he must never give in to the temptation to blame the listeners if the Word preached does not bear the desired fruit. On the other hand, the listener must listen as if it all depends on him as far as human responsibility go. Unless the preacher is clearly preaching heresy, he must not give in to the temptation to blame the preacher if he does not seem to benefit from the Word. He must examine himself to see where he has failed as a listener.

But how should those hear the Word preached attend unto it that they may reap the best spiritual fruits.

First, it is required of those who hear the Word preached, “that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer.” No one should expect to receive any benefit from the preaching of the Word who comes to it with nonchalance or a careless attitude. Those who would benefit from the preaching of the Word must prepare themselves not only by resting well the night before, but by prayerful self-examination, confession and repentance in which they lay aside all malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies and evil-surmising in their hearts (1 Pet 2:1-2). They must put aside and repent of their pre-conceived notions and any negative attitude that they may have towards Christ, his preacher, or those whom they would worship with. Then they must deliberately and diligently listen to the Word preached with a mind to hear what the Lord would have them hear.

Secondly, those who hear the Word preached may best benefit from it if they “examine what they hear by the Scriptures.” The Bereans Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica because they did two things which the latter did not: they “received the word with all readiness of mind” and they “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). It is obvious that those who benefit from the Word preached must receive the Word with all readiness of mind rather than with reluctance. But that is not enough. It is necessary that they also compare what they hear against the Scriptures, not only that they may proof all things and received only that which is true and therefore good (1Th 5:21), but also that that the truth being personally considered against God’s revelation may be more deeply etched in the heart.

Thirdly, in order to benefit from the Word preached, the hearers of the Word must “receive the *truth* with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God.” Why does our catechism speak about receiving the *truth*, rather than receiving *all that is preached*? Because we have no obligation to receive falsehood! The Bereans were commended for their receiving the Word first, and then secondly for their searching the Scriptures, but that is because it was the apostle Paul preaching! What he was preaching was true to the written Word! So too, we ought to receive the Word preached with all readiness of mind when it is brought to us by a minister of God lawfully ordained and familiar to us. We ought never to attend the hearing of God’s Word with a suspicious attitude. Yet at the same time, we must remember that it is the truth that we must receive. Therefore, if the spoken word is true to the written Word, then it must be received ‘as the Word of God’, with faith, love, meekness and readiness of mind. We must believe what is told us from the Scripture; we must love it; we must submit to it meekly without trying to justify our sins, and we must be quick to apply it to our heart.

Fourthly, to further benefit from the preached word, we must “meditate, and confer of it.” That is, we must think about it and we must talk about it. How often have we walked away from a sermon we enjoyed and then forget the Scripture text that was preached on the very next day! This ought not to be the case. We ought rather, as a matter of practice and discipline to regularly bring to mind and to talk about the things we heard in the sermons. This we may do by steering any conversation we have in the church to share about how the sermon has affected us; by meditating on what is said when we have a moment to be alone; and by reiterating the points received during family worship. Indeed, as much as circumstance would allow, we should still be thinking and talking about some particular points in the sermon way into the week. In this way, the Word of God preach would be a most effective instrument for our sanctification.

Finally, that the Word of God may be effectual to the salvation of those who hear it, they must “hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.” This takes the previous point a little further to require us to remember what we have heard and to bring forth fruit by applying the Word. The Lord Jesus teaches us that there are four kinds of grounds on which the seed of the Word of God falls (see Mt 13:1-23). There is the wayside, which essentially represent those who paid no attention to the Word who did not receive the Word at all. Then there are the thorny and stony soils. These receive the Word with all readiness, and appear for a season to be affected by the Word, but by and by because of the cares of the world or because of persecution, the Word is forgotten and bears no fruit. But finally, there is the good soil. Here the word of God grows healthy roots, withstands the onslaught of the cares of the world and of persecution, and bear fruit some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some hundred-fold.

As God’s children and the sheep of Christ, we must hear and receive the Word of God with hearts that may be describe as good soil. We must hide the Word in our heart that we may not sin against the Lord (Ps 119:11). We must daily seek the help of the Spirit to bring to remembrance the things that we have hear to the intent that we may be transformed by the renewing of our minds as we strive to live by His Word. **W**

WLC 161. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?

A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ, by whom they are instituted.¹

Proofs

¹1 Pet 3:21; Acts 8:13; cf. Acts 8:23; 1 Cor 3:6–7; 12:13.

Comments

We have seen that in addition to the Word, sacraments are also a means by which Christ communicates to His church the benefits of His mediation (*WLC* 154). We shall only define what is a sacrament in the next question, but the sacraments of the New Testament are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These ordinances, like the Word, are means of grace for our sanctification, though they differ somewhat from the Word in the way they function and the specific purpose for which they are appointed for our use.

But sacraments, unlike, preaching or prayer, are more ritualistic in that they involve certain appointed elements and actions both on the part of those who administer and those who receive them. As a result, many superstitious ideas surrounding sacraments have evolved in the Christian church.

It is essential, therefore, for us to be very clear how the sacraments become effectual means of salvation.

In the first place, sacraments do not become effectual “by any power in themselves.” The Roman Catholic Church teaches that sacraments have power in themselves and they confer grace *ex opere operato* (i.e. out of the work performed). But this is an error. If sacraments confer power in the very act, then Simon Magus would have been a regenerate believer. But Peter said to him after he was baptised: “For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23).

In the second place, sacraments do not become efficacious “any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered.” Although Rome admits that the efficacy of the sacrament is not dependant on the piety of the person, she insists that it depends: (a) Upon the fact that the administrator is canonically authorised; and (b) Upon the fact that the administrator exercises at the moment of administration the secret ‘intention’ of doing what the Church intends in the definition of the sacrament (see Hodge, *Confession of Faith*, 333). But if that is the case, then no one outside Rome has received any spiritual benefits from the Sacraments, and no one in the Roman Catholic Church (even if it is a true church in the first place) can have any confidence that the sacrament they receive has any power, for it depends on what is in the mind of the priest administering; and who knows what is in his mind?

Rather the efficacy of the sacrament is dependent on two things primarily: “the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ.” Sacraments are ordained by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a privilege accorded by Him to His people. Therefore He alone decides whether to make it effectual for a person or otherwise. And this decision is worked out in two steps. First, He has appointed the sacraments, therefore the must sacrament be administered according to Christ's appointment if it were to be effectual.

Such sacrament rightly administered has Christ's blessing. Thus, our Confession of Faith speaks of “the efficacy of a sacrament” as being dependant on “the word of institution; which contains, together with a precept authorising the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers” (*WCF* 27.3). This word of institution (found in the Scriptures) is the objective basis for the efficacy of the Sacrament. For this reason, this word is generally read out or alluded to by the ministers when they administer the sacrament. But there is yet a subjective element to the efficacy of the Sacrament, namely the word of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit alone makes the Sacrament lawfully administered efficacious to whom He will. **W**

WLC 162. What is a sacrament?

A. A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in His Church,¹ to signify, seal, and exhibit² unto those that are within the Covenant of Grace,³ the benefits of His mediation;⁴ to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces;⁵ to oblige them to obedience;⁶ to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another;⁷ and to distinguish them from those that are without.⁸

Proofs

¹Gen 17:7, 10; Ex 12; Mt 28:19; 26:26–28; ²Rom 4:11; 1 Cor 11:24–25; ³Rom 15:8; Ex 12:48; ⁴Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 10:16; ⁵Rom 4:11; Gal 3:27; ⁶Rom 6:3–4; 1 Cor 10:21; ⁷Eph 4:2–5; 1 Cor 12:13; ⁸Eph 2:11–12; Gen 34:14.

Comments

The word *sacrament* is not a ‘Roman Catholic term’ as some suppose. Although it is not found in the Scriptures, any more than the word Trinity, it has been used in the New Testament church since very early in her history to describe a particular class of ecclesiastical ordinances, which is by their nature distinguished from other ordinances.

How did the term come into use? The Latin word *sacramentum* was originally used to describe a military oath, whereby the general obliges himself to be faithful unto his soldiers, and the soldiers engage themselves to be faithful unto their general. It was probably because our fathers in the faith saw that there was a class of ordinances that were in some ways like the sacramentum, binding Christ and His people, that the term came into use in the church to describe these ordinances.

More specifically, sacraments are distinguished from other ordinances in that:

- Firstly, they are a holy ordinance since they are not instituted by man, but by Christ for His Church.
- Secondly, they “signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the Covenant of Grace, the benefits of [Christ’s] mediation.”

They signify, in that they provide symbolic means of displaying the invisible, spiritual benefits of the Covenant of Grace to the senses (hearing, sight, taste, touch and smell) of the children of God.

They seal in that they are the official means by which the Lord authenticates the conveying of the spiritual benefits bestowed upon His people, so that those who partake of them by faith can have the assurance that they are, in fact, receiving genuine spiritual benefits. By them the Lord obliges Himself to fulfil the promise of the covenant unto us.

Likewise, they exhibit the benefits of Christ’s mediation in that by them, the things that are otherwise intangible are made known in a tangible way to God’s children.

- Thirdly, sacraments are also a means by which the Spirit of Christ applies the benefit of Christ’s redemption to worthy receivers (see *WSC* 92); or in other words, the Spirit of Christ would ordinarily use sacraments as means to “strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces.” He is not bound to use these means, but He does use them so that we cannot expect to receive any spiritual benefits if we refuse to use them when we are able to.
- Fourthly, the sacraments oblige the members of the Church to obey Christ, for by partaking them they declare their union and their gratitude to Him. As Christ promises to bless us in His giving us the sacraments, so likewise by our receiving them, we oblige ourselves to be the Lord’s, and to be true and faithful unto Him.
- Fifthly, the sacraments oblige the members of the covenant “to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another.” This is so because the sacraments, as we shall see, are corporate exercises of ingrafting into the body and also communion in the body.
- Finally, the sacraments are a means to distinguish those who are in the covenant from those that are without. It is as such required that the Church refuse to administer the sacraments to any who is clearly still a stranger to the covenant.

Indeed, it should be carefully borne in mind that sacraments are intended to represent, seal, and apply Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, not unto all that partake thereof, but unto believers only. Faith is the eye of the soul, to discern the things represented, and the hand of the soul, to receive the things sealed and exhibited in the sacrament. Those who are without faith and are therefore strangers to the covenant makes use of the seal of Christ fraudulently and therefore can expect judgement rather than blessings from the Lord. **W**

WLC 163. What are the parts of a sacrament?

A. The parts of a sacrament are two; the one an outward and sensible sign, used according to Christ's own appointment; the other an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified.¹

Proofs

¹Mt 3:11; 1 Pet 3:21; Rom 2:28–29.

Comments

We have seen that a sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in His Church, to signify, seal, exhibit, and apply unto those that are within the Covenant of Grace, the benefits of His mediation.

In order to fully appreciate what a sacrament is, however, it is necessary to understand there are two parts to a sacrament, viz., the sign and thing signified.

The sign is said to be 'sensible' not because it make sense, but because it appeals not only to our hearing, but also to our other senses, namely, sight, touch, taste and smell. That is, they are 'sensory.' It is said that a picture speaks a thousand words, but sacraments are more than pictures. And moreover, it is appointed by Christ himself. Indeed, sacraments may be said to be the only sensory or dramatic representation of the spiritual things, which Christ has appointed, and therefore, they are the only kind of 'drama' which the New Testament church ought to use.

The other part of the sacrament is the 'inward and spiritual grace thereby signified,' or more specifically, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant. These are things which we cannot feel or see with our physical senses, though they are no less real. Christ is in heaven, seated at the right hand of the throne of God. All believers behold him with spiritual eyes. Likewise, the benefits of Christ's mediation were procured through some historical acts of His, and are real, albeit spiritual. Though we do not receive them as we might receive tangible presents of this present life, we can actually receive them and they do make a difference in our lives. The sacraments signify such benefits.

But why is it necessary to highlight this distinction, between the sign and the things signified when it seems so obvious?

Well, it is necessary especially since the Roman Catholic Church and even some Protestant churches have failed to make the distinction and have fallen into some serious errors. Rome, for example, teaches that in the Lord's Supper (one of the Sacraments), the bread actually becomes the flesh of Christ, thereby making the sign and the thing signified actually one, which in turns leads to the idolatry of the Romish Mass.

It is necessary to highlight the distinction between the sign and the thing signified, moreover because the spiritual relationship between the sign and thing signified, i.e., the sacramental union, is so close that Scripture frequently uses expressions in which the names of the signs and the things signified are exchanged. Thus in the Old Testament, the Lord said: "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised" (Gen 17:10). Obviously circumcision is not the covenant but signifies the benefit of the covenant. Similarly, Christ giving the bread to His disciples said: "this is my body, which is broken for you" (1 Cor 11:24); and when He passed the wine, He said, "this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mt 26:28).

Obviously, Christ did not mean as Rome and the Lutherans teach that the bread was literally His flesh or contains His flesh, nor the wine literally His blood or contains His blood. In the case of Baptism, it is the same Paul said: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit 3:5). Clearly, Paul is referring primarily to the spiritual reality of regeneration, but he alludes to the sign of baptism to remind his readers that baptism as a work does not save, rather, it signifies and seals regeneration. Indeed, sometimes, the name of the sacrament is used, at the same time, to refer both to the sign,—in one sense,—and the thing signified,—in another sense. This is probably how we should understand Colossians 2:11–12—"In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Here Paul is clearly referring to water baptism (cf. Rom 6:3), yet he says that baptism is "circumcision made without hands" alluding to inward grace. The difficulty is resolved when we realise that Paul is comparing physical circumcision with water baptism by pointing to the same inward reality they both represent. **W**

WLC 164. How many sacraments
hath Christ instituted in His Church under the New Testament?
A. Under the New Testament Christ hath instituted in His Church
only two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's supper.¹

Proofs

¹Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:20, 23; Mt 26:26–28

Comments

It is clear from the New Testament that the Lord Jesus ordained only two ordinances which fit the description of sacraments, viz., such as serves to signify, seal, exhibit and apply Christ and the benefits of the Covenant of Grace to the elect of Christ. These two ordinances are Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Indeed, it is very likely that our fathers in the faith spoke of sacraments because they noticed the similarity in the functions of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as their counterparts in the Old Testament, namely, Circumcision and the Passover. It is true that since the Old Covenant, was an era of shadows and types it is possible, as Calvin suggests, that other things such as the Rock by which God watered the people (1 Cor 10:4), could have sacramental meanings. But only two ordinances, namely Circumcision and the Passover were observed through the Old Covenant period after they were instituted. And these two bloody ordinances were replaced by bloodless ordinances which carry the same sacramental meanings under the New Covenant. Just as circumcision was the ordinance of initiation into the covenant body, baptism is the means of ratifying membership in the covenant body. Just as the Passover was a means of spiritual nourishment, so the Lord Supper is a means of spiritual nutrition.

So it is very clear that only two sacraments were ordained by the Lord for use under the New Covenant.

The Roman Catholic Church is clearly in error when she insists that there are seven sacraments under the New Testament, viz., Baptism, the Lord's Supper (which they prefer to call holy communion), confirmation, penance, ordination, marriage, and extreme unction.

To be sure, some of these ordinances, marriage and ordination, are legitimate and necessary under the New Covenant. But no where do we have any indication in the Word that they are to be use sacraments or as signs and seals of the covenant of grace. The Romish idea that these additional ordinances confer grace is idolatrous and superstitious. **W**

WLC 165. What is Baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,¹ to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into Himself,² of remission of sins by His blood,³ and regeneration by His Spirit,⁴ of adoption,⁵ and resurrection unto everlasting life;⁶ and whereby the parties baptised are solemnly admitted into the visible church,⁷ and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.⁸

Proofs

¹Mt 28:19; ²Gal 3:27; ³Mk 1:4; Rev 1:5; ⁴Tit 3:5; Eph 5:26; ⁵Gal 3:26–27; ⁶1 Cor 15:29; Rom 6:5; ⁷1 Cor 12:13; ⁸Rom 6:4.

Comments

All professing Christians, and even most unbelievers who know anything about Christianity know what is baptism. At least we know what is involved in baptism. We know for example that Presbyterian churches pour or sprinkle water on the head of believers and their children, whereas Baptist churches would immerse only adult believers. We are also familiar with the baptismal formula: “I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.”

Yet, unless we know the meaning of baptism, we do not really know what it is. This explains the rather lengthy answer in our catechism to the question what is baptism.

Seven things about baptism are highlighted in our answer.

First, we note that it is a sacrament, so it is an ordinance instituted by Christ to signify, seal, exhibit, and apply the benefits of His mediation unto those that are within the Covenant of Grace.

Secondly, we see that this sacrament involves the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The Greek words *baptivzw* and *baptismov* from which we get the English words ‘baptize’ and ‘baptism’, do not mean ‘immerse’ and ‘immersion’ as the Baptists may claim. They mean ‘wash’ and ‘washing.’ Thus, we read in Mark 7:4—“And when they come from the market, except they wash [*baptivzw*], they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing [*baptismov*] of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables” (Mk 7:4). It would be quite intolerable to have to immerse oneself before each meal; and it would be quite a task to immerse tables (or beds or couch as some translations have it)!

Thirdly, we see that baptism signify and seal several things, viz. (1) our ingrafting into Christ or our union with Christ, for says the apostle Paul,—“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27); (2) our remission of sins by the blood of Christ,—For we are told that John “did... preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mk 1:4); and that the Lord Jesus Christ, “washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev 1:5); (3) our regeneration by the Spirit of Christ, for as Paul puts it, Christ “saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit 3:5); (4) our adoption, for again as Paul teaches us, “ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:26-27); and (5) our resurrection unto everlasting life, for “so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? [and] if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom 6:3, 5).

WLC 166. Unto whom is Baptism to be administered?

A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to Him,¹ but infants descended from parents, either both, or but one of them professing faith in Christ, and obedience to Him, are, in that respect, within the covenant, and to be baptised.²

Proofs

¹Acts 8:36–38; 2:38; ²Gen 17:7, 9; cf. Gal 3:9, 14; Col 2:11–12; Acts 2:38–39; Rom 4:11–12; 1 Cor 7:14; Mt 28:19; Lk 18:15–16; Rom 11:16.

Comments

Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace appointed by Christ for His covenant members. As such, baptism must not be administered to those who are without Christ, and strangers to the covenant, “having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). To administer baptism to such, would not only be meaningless, but also to take the name of the Lord in vain, and to count the blood of Christ and His ordinance as nothing.

Baptism, being a sign and seal of the covenant of grace would only be meaningful and efficacious for those who are truly the members of the covenant.

Who are the members of the covenant? They are the elect of Christ, who are united to Him. But God has appointed that we do not know who are elect and who are not. As such baptism is not to be administered only to the elect, but to those who may be *regarded* to be members of the covenant.

Who are these? The Scripture gives us only two classes of people, viz., adults who profess faith and obedience to Christ, and infants descended from parents, either both, or but one of them professing faith in Christ, and obedience to Him.

Of the adults, we read the Lord’s declaration: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mk 16:16). So the apostle Peter at his inaugural sermon called out unto the people, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). We read also that when the Ethiopian Eunuch sought baptism, Philip said to him: “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.” The Eunuch answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37), and Philip baptised him.

So today, the Church need only to ascertain if a person seeking baptism has a *credible* profession of faith. The church cannot tell a person’s heart and is not required to. We must take a person’s profession charitably, though considering his life to see if there is indeed some evidence that a work of grace has begun in his heart—just so that we may avoid baptising a Simon Magus (Acts 8:13-23) knowingly. So then, the church must not baptise just anyone who ask to be baptised; and yet at the same time, it is not the business of the church to determine infallibly who is born again and who is not. The church needs only to be satisfied that the confession of the mature professor of faith is *probably* genuine before baptising him or her.

Infants of believers who are members of the church, on the other hand, may and ought to be baptised on account of the fact that they are members of the covenant, and the promise of the covenant belong to them, and thus the seal of the covenant belongs to them also. This is what the apostle Peter is essentially saying when he explains his call to the congregation to repent and be baptise in the words, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). Peter was referring to the Abraham covenant, for the promise of the Spirit (v. 38) is a promise of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gal 3:14). The Abrahmic covenant is but an expression of the Covenant of Grace.

Under the Abrahamic Covenant, God had instructed Abraham to circumcised all his infant sons as they are also comprehended under His covenant:

“And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. ... This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised” (Gen 17:7, 10).

Since the Abrahamic covenant is an everlasting covenant, Christ being the mediator of it (Gal 3:29; Heb 6:17-18), and since the privilege of infants in the covenant has never been repeal in the New Testament, covenant infants should today be baptised as covenant infants were circumcised. **W**

WLC 167. How is our baptism to be improved by us?

A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others;¹ by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein;² by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements;³ by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament;⁴ by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptised, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace;⁵ and by endeavouring to live by faith,⁶ to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness,⁷ as those that have therein given up their names to Christ;⁸ and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptised by the same Spirit into one body.⁹

Proofs

¹Col 2:11–12; Rom 6:4, 6, 11; ²Rom 6:3–5; ³1 Cor 1:11–13; Rom 6:2–3; ⁴Rom 4:11–12; 1 Pet 3:21; ⁵Rom 6:3–5; ⁶Gal 3:26–27; ⁷Rom 6:22; ⁸Acts 2:38; ⁹1 Cor 12:13, 25–27.

Comments

Baptism is something that we receive only once in our lifetime (unless we are Anabaptists). We could have received it passively as a covenant infant incognizant of what was done to us; or we could have received it as a grateful believing adult overjoyed at the thought of a new life in Christ. But either way, through the ravage of time, the event is usually soon forgotten so that its significance as a means of grace become difficult to appreciate unlike in the case of the regular means such as the preaching of the Word or even the Lord's Supper.

It is not difficult to see that this should not be the case for baptism is such a great privilege bestowed upon us that it should surely continue to be a means of spiritual strengthening for such as received it. But how may it be so? Or how may baptism be improved by us for our spiritual benefit?

Our catechism answers this question in two parts. First, we are taught that this 'much neglected duty of improving our baptism' is to be performed by us, 'all our life long,' but especially in two situations, (1) 'in the time of temptation', and (2) 'when we are present at the administration of it to others.' It is easy to see why we should especially do spiritual exercises that conduce to the improvement of our own baptism when we see others being baptised. As we behold the sign and seal of the covenant being applied to others, let us recall and meditate on the blessings that Christ promises us in granting us baptism. But why should we especially improve on our baptism in the time of temptation? We should do so because at such time, we are most in need of being reminded that we belong to Christ and our promise to walk with Him. The same holds true at times when we are overwhelmed with a sense of doubt concerning our salvation. It is for this reason that Luther once cried out: "I am a son of God. I have been baptized. Let me alone, devil." Luther, plagued by doubts concerning some theological points, found strength to labour on for the Lord upon reflection that he had received the Lord's seal of ownership.

But what should we do at such times to improve our baptism?

First, we must seriously and thankfully consider "the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby." The purpose for which Christ instituted baptism is found in *WLC* 165. In particular, let us remember that baptism is a privilege granted by the Lord by which he marks us out as belonging to him, and at the same time promises and applies the benefits of his redemption such as regeneration and adoption. We may not see or feel the Spirit's work in our heart, and therefore our faith may be shaken and we may doubt the Lord's goodness towards us. Our baptism, being a definite event in time and space provides us a means to assure us of what the Lord has done and will do for us.

Secondly, to improve our baptism, we must seriously and thankfully consider "our solemn vow made therein." Baptism is a sacrament, wherein those who partake of it also pledge their allegiance to the King of the Church. But more than that, it is customary in the Reformed Church that, adults who are baptised covenant before God to be a fruitful and faithful disciples of Christ and members of the church; and likewise, parents who submit their covenant children to be baptised would also vow to bring up their charge in the fear and nature of the Lord. To improve our baptism, we should regularly recollect our vows or the vows that our parents made at our baptism in order that we may consider if we are living in accordance to them.

Thirdly, to improve our baptism, we should humble ourselves "for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements [or vows]." That is we should consider wherein we have failed to lived as a baptised person should, and wherein we had failed to keep our vow or our parents' vow which were made at our baptism. For example, we should humbly repent of our failure to seek first the kingdom of Christ and His righteousness as well as our failure to use the talents which the Lord has given us to serve in the congregation which represent His visible Church to which we are engrafted to.

Fourthly, we may improve our baptism "by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament." That is, we should cultivate our assurance of forgiveness, our being in possession of new life in Christ and of our being a child of God. This may be done meditating on the Word of God, by considering the evidence of grace in our hearts and also by reminding ourselves that we were not baptised by chance or by our volition. Our baptism was ordered by the Lord who remains faithful despite our unworthiness.

Fifthly, we must improve our baptism, "by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptised, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace." That is, since baptism is a sign and seal of our union with Christ and regeneration as well as resurrection unto everlasting life in Him, we must boldly to come before the Lord to seek His strength to fight against sin and to grow in grace. We have every warrant to appeal to the Lord to hear our prayers on the basis of our baptism.

Sixthly, to improve our baptism, we must endeavour "to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ." To fail so to endeavour or resolve is to do is to allow ourselves to slide into hypocrisy, and therefore to despise our baptism.

And likewise seventhly, we must improve our baptism by resolving "to walk in brotherly love, as being baptised by the same Spirit into one body." The apostle Paul says:

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body,... there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor 12:13, 25-26).

As by spirit-baptism we are joined to the Church Universal Visible, so by water-baptism, are admitted as a member of the local visible church. The local visible church is the means by which our membership in the body of Christ universal must find expression. Therefore such as are baptised must strive to walk in brotherly love with other members of the church that the unity of the body of Christ may be seen of all who behold and enjoyed by every member. Or in other words, if we would seek to walk in unity and brotherly love with other members of the church, we would enjoy the benefits of baptism, whereas if we are schismatic, we make a mockery of our baptism. **W**

WLC 168. What is the Lord's Supper?

A. The Lord's supper is a sacrament of the New Testament,¹ wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, His death is showed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed upon His body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace;² have their union and communion with Him confirmed;³ testify and renew their thankfulness,⁴ and engagement to God,⁵ and their mutual love and fellowship each with other, as members of the same mystical body.⁶

Proofs

¹Lk 22:20; ²Mt 26:26–28; 1 Cor 11:23–26; ³1 Cor 10:16; ⁴1 Cor 11:24; ⁵1 Cor 10:14–16, 21; ⁶1 Cor 10:17.

Comments

While baptism is the sacrament of initiation, the Lord's Supper is the sacrament of nourishment and nurture of the New Testament. While baptism involves washing, the Lord's Supper involves eating and drinking. It is called a supper partly for this reason, and partly because it was instituted in place of the Passover meal (which was always observed in the evening).

The procedure in the Lord's Supper is familiar to most of us though the actual execution of it may differ from church to church, depending amongst other things whether the communicants are asked to wait for one another before eating and drinking together. But typically, the minister administering it would first explain the purpose of the Supper and then remind the congregation from the Scripture (such as Luke 26:26-28 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26) that it is in obedience to the Lord that they are observing it. Secondly, he gives thanks to the Father for the bread and wine (as our Lord did,—Lk 22:19; Mk 14:23) and prays for the Lord's blessing upon the ordinance. Thirdly he breaks the bread in the view of the congregation, saying as he does do so, something to the effect “Our Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it signifying the breaking of His body; and He gave it to His disciples” (cf. 1 Cor 11:24; Lk 22:19). Then (typically) when the bread is distributed, he says, “The Lord Jesus says, ‘Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me’” (1 Cor 11:24); at which point the whole congregation eats the bread together. Fourthly, the minister takes the wine, pours it out into a cup if it is not already poured out and then hands the cup(s) out through the elders. Then if it is given out in individual cuplets, he says, “The Lord Jesus says, ‘This cup is the New Covenant in my blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sin; this do in remembrance of me’ (Lk 22:19; Mt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:25); and the congregation drinks the cup together. And finally, the minister leads the congregation to in thanksgiving for the sacrament, praying that the Lord would apply the spiritual benefits signified by the elements to those who partook with faith.

What is the meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper? Our catechism highlights five points.

First, by the Lord's Supper, the death of Christ is showed forth. “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come” (1 Cor 11:26), says the apostle Paul. That is: whenever we observe the Lord's Supper, we testify to others and to one another, that the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, died for us in order to reconcile us to our Holy Heavenly Father.

Secondly, worthy receivers of it feed upon the body and blood of Christ crucified for them, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. The Lord himself says, “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (Jn 6:55). Though he was not at that point speaking about the Lord's Supper (which was not yet instituted), it is very likely that He was alluding to what the Lord's Supper would signify; for just as bread and wine do nourish, strengthen, and refresh the body, and satisfy the natural appetite, so the body and blood of Christ, received in this sacrament, do nourish, strengthen, and refresh the soul, and satisfy the spiritual appetite.

Thirdly, through the Lord's Supper, worthy receivers “have their union and communion with Him confirmed.” Paul says: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ. For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor 10:16-17). As we partake of the one bread, we confirm that we are one in Christ who is the head of the Church. For this reason, we cannot share the table with infidels and those who hold to heretical views concerning Christ, for if they are not united to the Christ of the Bible, then they are united to a devilish idol whom we can have nothing to do with (2 Cor 6:14-15).

Fourthly, those who partake of the Lord's Supper worthily, “testify and renew their thankfulness, and engagement to God, and their mutual love and fellowship each with other, as members of the same mystical body.” This follows from the previous point, for we not only confirm our union and communion with Christ and with one another, but in the partaking of the sacrament, we testify of our gratitude to Him and pledge to walk in love and harmony especially with those who share the same table with us.

WLC 169. How hath Christ appointed bread and wine to be given and received in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

A. Christ hath appointed the ministers of His Word, in the administration of this sacrament of the Lord's supper, to set apart the bread and wine from common use, by the Word of institution, thanksgiving, and prayer; to take and break the bread, and to give both the bread and the wine to the communicants: who are, by the same appointment, to take and eat the bread, and to drink the wine, in thankful remembrance that the body of Christ was broken and given, and His blood shed, for them.¹

Proofs

¹1 Cor 11:23–24; Mt 26:26–28; Mk 14:22–24; Lk 22:19–20.

Comments

We have already seen the typical order in which the Lord's Supper is observed in a Protestant Church. There are, of course, variations. For example, some churches would use only one piece of bread which is broken into two by the minister, and then each communicant pinches a piece and eat it as the bread is passed; while others would have most of the bread already broken or cut up. Likewise, some churches, use multiple cup-lets while others have one common cup which all the communicants drink from. These variations are, I believe, perfectly legitimate in that they do not impinge on the essence of the sacrament.

But certain aspects of the Supper are 'non-negotiable.' These are the aspects which are dealt with in this question.

First, we note that the Supper should be administered by the ministers of the Gospel. This is because, the sacrament and the Word are inseparable. As Calvin puts it, "the sacraments derive their virtue from the Word when it is preached intelligibly" (*Tracts* 2.191). Without a minister of the Gospel who has been ordained to represent Christ, to explain the ordinance, the Supper is only as good as an empty ritual.

Secondly, the minister must "set apart the bread and wine from common use, by the Word of institution, thanksgiving, and prayer." We do not believe that the bread and wine becomes the actual flesh and blood of Christ as the Roman Catholics teach. Neither do we believe that they become infused with the body and blood of Christ as the Lutherans teach. But we do believe that in the Lord's Supper, the common bread and wine, set apart by prayer and thanksgiving together with the word of institution, becomes sacramentally united to body and blood of Christ which they represent.

The word of institution should be read from the Scripture from passages such as 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Thirdly, the minister must "to take and break the bread, and to give both the bread and the wine to the communicants." These actions represent God's taking His Son, and giving Him to be broken and crucified upon the cross for us; and also, His giving Him in this sacrament unto us to be our Redeemer and Saviour.

Finally, as the minister hands out both bread and wine, so the communicants must "take and eat the bread, and to drink the wine, in thankful remembrance that the body of Christ was broken and given, and His blood shed, for them." These actions represent their receiving of Jesus Christ, given them by the Father, and feeding upon Him in the sacrament. Notice that they are to take both bread and wine. The apostle Paul says, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that BREAD, *and* drink of that CUP" (1 Cor 11:28). Therefore the Romish practice of withholding of the cup from the people, is both unwarranted and sacrilegious. **W**

WLC 170. How do they that worthily communicate in the Lord's supper feed upon the body and blood of Christ therein?

A. As the body and blood of Christ are not corporally or carnally present in, with, or under the bread and wine in the Lord's supper,¹ and yet are spiritually present to the faith of the receiver, no less truly and really than the elements themselves are to their outward senses;² so they that worthily communicate in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, do therein feed upon the body and blood of Christ, not after a corporal and carnal, but in a spiritual manner; yet truly and really,³ while by faith they receive and apply unto themselves Christ crucified, and all the benefits of His death.⁴

Proofs

¹Acts 3:21; ²Mt 26:26, 28; ³1 Cor 11:24–29; ⁴1 Cor 10:16

Comments

There are 4 major views with regards to the Lord's Supper.

A very common view amongst Baptists and other evangelical churches today may be known as the Purely Memorial View. This view, which is often attributed, somewhat inaccurately, to Ulrich Zwingli, asserts that we do not really feed on the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. We benefit from the Supper only in so far as we are brought to remember the Lord's death on our behalf.

But this view was not quite a significant option before or during the time of the 16th century Reformation. The reason is because the Scriptures indicates that there is more to the Lord's Supper than remembrance. Even before He instituted the Supper, the Lord himself says:

"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶ He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (Jn 6:53-56).

The apostle Paul, likewise, speaks of the unique function of the Supper when he intimates that "the cup of blessing which we bless" is "the communion of the blood of Christ" and the "bread which we break" is "the communion of the body of Christ" (1 Cor 10:16); and that such as "eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor 11:29). Indeed, Paul goes on to suggest that God will judge the church with death and physical ailments if we fail to observe the Lord's Supper worthily.

For this reason a number of views on the Lord's Supper have arisen in the church.

The Roman Catholic View is known as *Transubstantiation*. According this view, the bread and wine used in the Lord's Supper actually supernaturally change into the flesh and blood of Christ. They claim that although the bread still tastes and feels like bread, and the wine still tastes like wine, they miraculously become the actual flesh and blood of Christ in the Supper. We note that in the Bible, there is actually a case of transubstantiation: when the Lord Jesus changed the water into wine (Jn 2:1-11). But in that case, the wine tasted like wine. The guests who drank it even thought that it was the best wine they had tasted all evening! The Roman Catholic view is absurd and illogical. How can the body of Christ be in heaven and at the same time be at a thousand places at once to be literally ingested by tens of thousands? This view has also lead to manifold superstitions and gross idolatry as the faithful Roman Catholic venerate the wafer which they believe becomes the body of Christ upon priestly incantations!

Martin Luther rejected this view and taught that instead of replacing the bread and the wine, Christ's presence is added to the bread and wine. He maintained that the body and blood of Christ are "corporally or carnally present in, with, or under the bread and wine." This view is known as *Consubstantiation*. This view, however, still does not escape from absurdity involved in *Transubstantiation*.

The view adopted by the Westminster Assembly is the view taught by John Calvin, or the Real Spiritual Presence View. In brief, this view asserts that "the body and blood of Christ" is "spiritually present to the faith of the receiver, no less truly and really than the elements themselves are to their outward senses," and therefore such as partake of the ordinance by faith partake spiritual nourishment to themselves.

In order to address the confusion and errors surrounding the doctrine, our catechism elaborates and clarifies it by reiterating several points.

Firstly, only those who "worthily communicate in the sacrament" will receive these benefits. To worthily communicate is to receive the sacrament with due preparation, which includes repentance of known sins and meditations on the love of Christ, together with a heart of faith and gratitude to Christ at the time of receiving the bread and wine.

Secondly, they who worthily partake, "feed upon the body and blood of Christ, not after a corporal and carnal, but in a spiritual manner." According to Transubstantiation and Consubstantiation, those who partake of the Lord's Supper literally or physically eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood. We deny that this absurdity is taught in the Scripture. However, we admit that, in a spiritual sense, we do feed on the body and blood of Christ in the Supper.

Thirdly, this spiritual nourishment, though unseen and unfelt, really and truly happens. It happens at the same time when we eat and drink of the Supper worthily. How this happens and what is involved we cannot explain apart from the fact that this feeding is not something that happens in the physical realm. As bread and wine, nourishes and refreshes our bodies, so the body and blood of Christ nourishes us spiritually when we partake of the Lord's Supper worthily.

Fourthly, the spiritual partaking of the body and blood of Christ is equivalent to receiving and applying Christ crucified and all the benefits of His death to us. **W**

WLC 171. How are they that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper to prepare themselves before they come unto it?

A. They that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves¹ of their being in Christ,² of their sins and wants;³ of the truth and measure of their knowledge,⁴ faith,⁵ repentance;⁶ love to God and the brethren,⁷ charity to all men,⁸ forgiving those that have done them wrong;⁹ of their desires after Christ,¹⁰ and of their new obedience;¹¹ and by renewing the exercise of these graces,¹² by serious meditation,¹³ and fervent prayer.¹⁴

Proofs

¹1 Cor 11:28; ²2 Cor 13:5; ³1 Cor 5:7; cf. Ex 12:15; ⁴1 Cor 11:29; ⁵1 Cor 13:5; Mt 26:28; ⁶Zech 12:10; 1 Cor 11:31; ⁷1 Cor 10:16–17; Acts 2:46–47; ⁸1 Cor 5:8; 11:18, 20; ⁹Mt 5:23–24; ¹⁰Isa 55:1; Jn 7:37; ¹¹1 Cor 5:7–8; ¹²1 Cor 11:25–26, 28; Heb 10:21, 22, 24; Ps 26:6; ¹³1 Cor 11:24–25; ¹⁴2 Chr 30:18–19; Mt 26:26.

Comments

We have seen that in order to partake of the Lord's Supper worthily, it is essential that we prepare ourselves before we come to it. But how should we prepare? We should, according to our answer, prepare firstly by "examining [ourselves]" in regards to the various graces which we ought to possess; and secondly, by "renewing the exercise of these graces by serious meditation and fervent prayer."

How should you examine yourself?

First, you must examine yourselves as to whether you are 'in Christ,' or in other words, whether you are truly a Christian (cf. 2 Cor 13:5). Unless you are truly a born-again Christian, you cannot truly discern the Lord's body (1 Cor 11:29), for spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14). Those who are not born again will at best be able to partake the Lord's Supper ritualistically without any spiritual or emotional effect upon their souls that Christ's body was broken for them and His blood was shed for them.

Secondly you must examine the 'truth and measure' of your knowledge, faith and repentance.

In terms of knowledge, examine what you know and do not know. Do you understand what the meaning of the propitiation of Christ or why Christ had to die? Do you understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper, not just what the wine and the bread represent? Do you know why we say that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace, and how is it different from the Word as a means of grace? As yourself some of these questions and see if you are able to answer them.

In terms of repentance, examine if you truly believe you are sinner, and whether you truly hate sin. How have you dealt with sin over the last two months? What was your heart-response when you were overtaken by temptation so that you broke God's commandments directly? Are you concerned about the relative hardness of your heart and your lack of love for the Lord? Do you find in your heart any secret faults or besetting sin which needs to be repented of? Consider if you hate the consequence of sin more than sin itself?

In terms of faith, examine yourself to see if you truly believe that the Lord Jesus came to save sinners and that since you are a sinner, He came for you. Are you assured that if you were to die tonight, you will be found in paradise beholding the face of the lover of your soul? Do your hope in this life and the life to come is found in Christ and Christ alone?

Thirdly, you must examine yourself in regard to your love for God and for the brethren.

Do you truly love God? If you love Him you will keep His commandments cheerfully (1 Jn 5:3). If you truly love Him, you will give priority to spiritual things. You will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, knowing that He will provide the things that you need for this present life without your striving to obtain them (Mt 6:33). If you love God will arrange your life around the worship of God both public and private, rather than worshipping God, 'when you have the time.'

What about love for the brethren? You cannot claim to love God if you have no love for the brethren (1 Jn 4:20). If you love the brethren, you will desire fellowship with them. You will not shun to meet with the brethren when the opportunity present themselves; rather, you will look forward to every public gathering of the people of God—not only that you can worship your heavenly Father together, but that you can meet one another! If you love the brethren, you will seek to receive them and to please them however difficult and unlovely they may be to you. If you love them you will not speak evil of them.

Moreover, since our Lord teaches us to love our neighbours as ourselves, and our neighbour are not just our brethren in church, if we are truly obedient to the Lord, we will have charity to all men, and forgive all who have done us wrong.

At the Lord's Supper you will be commemorating the Lord's death for you in order that you may be forgiven of your sin. He died for you when you were yet enemies of God. How can you go to His table to remember what He did for you if you harbour bitterness or an unforgiving spirit against anyone, especially those for whom He also died for?

Fourthly, in preparing for the Lord's Table you must examine yourself with regard to your desires after Christ and the benefits of redemption that are found in Him. Christ does not invite all indiscriminately to enjoy Him, He invites only those who desire after Him to come.

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, He says: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa 55:1); and in allusion to those words, He cried out at the great day of the feast: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (Jn 7:37).

Therefore, when you prepare to go to the Lord's Table, examine your interest in Christ and the benefits of redemption. Are you thirsting for Christ and craving for the refreshment to your soul that He alone can give? Do you have a desire to meet with Christ and to fellowship with Him? If you have no desire for Him, how could you receive a blessing from Him when you come to His Table?

But *finally*, when you prepare for the Lord's Table, you must examine yourself concerning new obedience. The apostle Paul says:

"⁷Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: ⁸Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Cor 5:7-8)

Ask: Is my life characterized by malice and wickedness, or does it exult the fragrance of new obedience to Christ that is characterized by sincerity and truth?

Such as come to the Lord's Table must not in anyway harbour malice against anyone, not the least against those who are coming to the same table; and neither must they indulge in any form of wickedness (e.g. adultery, pornography, disobedience to parents, slander, cruelty to

children, covenant breaking, etc), for that would be an affront our host, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, each time you prepare for the Lord's Table, see to it that you repent of any malice and wickedness that you may discover through this exercise of self-examination. Then resolve to obey the Word of Christ as it is revealed to you; and resolve to win the approval of Christ by your life. **W**

WLC 172. May one who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation, come to the Lord's supper?

A. One who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the sacrament of the Lord's supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof;¹ and in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it,² and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ,³ and to depart from iniquity;⁴ in which case (because promises are made, and this sacrament is appointed, for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians⁵) he is to bewail his unbelief,⁶ and labour to have his doubts resolved;⁷ and, so doing, he may and ought to come to the Lord's Supper, that he may be further strengthened.⁸

Proofs

¹Isa 1:10; 1 Jn 5:13; Ps 88; 77:1–12; Jon 2:4, 7; ²Isa 54:7–10; Mt 5:3–4; Ps 31:22; 73:13, 22–23; ³Phil 3:8–9; Ps 10:17; 42:1–2, 5, 11; ⁴2 Tim 2:19; Isa 50:10; Ps 66:18–20; ⁵Isa 40:11, 29, 31; Mt 11:28; 12:20; 26:28; ⁶Mk 9:24; ⁷Acts 2:37; 16:30; ⁸Rom 4:11; 1 Cor 11:28.

Comments

This is a question that very few believers will ask today, for in this day of frivolity, most professing believers will go to the Lord's Table with little or no preparation at all. But this is spiritually dangerous, for the apostle Paul warns us that "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself..." (1 Cor 11:29).

On the other hand, where the qualifications for the Lord's Table and the need for preparation is properly taught to the people, there will always be some doubt whether they should come to the table—either because they do not have the assurance that they are in Christ, or because they are not sure if they are properly prepared. For this reason, and because experience teaches us that ironically most who doubt are generally more qualified to come than those who put no thought as to their fitness for the Table, our catechism, specifically seeks to encourage these doubters.

We are reminded, in the first place, that "One who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the sacrament of the Lord's supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof." That is to say, we must not think that anyone who doubts if he is regenerate, or if he is adequately prepared for the Lord's Supper is automatically disqualified for the Lord's Table. In fact, quite ironically, doubt often indicates seriousness and a refusal to be presumptuous in the heart of the doubter. Therefore, very frequently, those who doubt are actually in Christ and are qualified for the table despite their lack of assurance.

Indeed, in the second place, we can be sure that "in God's account" such as doubt, actually have true interest in Christ, if he is "duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it, and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity," for who but the regenerate would feel grief that he does not have a true interest in Christ, and who but the regenerate would hate sin. For the unregenerate is dead in sin and trespasses: It does not really matter to him whether He truly has Christ, and he does not hate sin, for he has a secret love for it.

Such being the case, and since the Scriptures has many promises of favour for the penitent who are weak and burden (e.g. Isa 40:11, 29, 31; Mt 11:28; 12:20; 26:28), and since by its nature, the Lord's Supper is appointed also for the relief of weak and doubting Christian, such as doubt if he is in Christ, but hate sin and desire after Christ should come to the Table. He must however, come, bewailing his unbelief and labouring to have his doubts resolved.

If he so come to the Table, then he shall find relief and strength for his weak and weary soul. **W**

WLC 173. May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, be kept from it?

A. Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in His Church,¹ until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation.²

Proofs

¹1 Cor 11:27–34; cf. Mt 7:6; 1 Cor 5; Jude 23; 1 Tim 5:22; ²2 Cor 2:7.

Comments

The practice of fencing or restricting the Lord's Table is no longer popular today. Many evangelical churches will allow just anyone who professes faith to join at the Lord's Table. Even the more conservative church will generally go only so far as to restrict the table to those who have been baptised. Because this is the generally accepted norm, many would regard churches that restrict the table to their members or to interview visitors who wish to partake at the Table as legalistic, draconian or even cultic! This is sad; and it has resulted in much abuses of the Table, and I believe is one of the causes of the judgement that has befallen large swaths of the visible church today.

Our father in the faith knew better. They understood that Church,—through the elders, unto whom the Lord has committed the keys of the kingdom (Mt 16:19),—has a duty to maintain the purity of the meal by ensuring that it is not only unto such as would profane it (cf. Mt 7:6). This is especially since those partake of the Supper unworthily would partake unto themselves the judgement of the Lord.

To this end the elders of the church should seek, as much as is within their reasonable ability and knowledge to ensure that none but those who are consciously striving to live holy lives should come to the Table.

Thus, any member of the church who are found to be “ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, ... until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation.”

This means that the elders of the church must be diligent to know the state of their flock (cf. Prov 27:23); and they should call up anyone whom they have reason to believe is living in ignorance or scandal.

And likewise, if the church should admit adherents or visitors to the Table or to the membership of the church, the elders should examine them first (through an interview) so as to ensure that they are living as credible professors of faith and not as scandalous hypocrites. **W**

WLC 174. What is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper in the time of the administration of it?

A. It is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that, during the time of the administration of it, with all holy reverence and attention they wait upon God in that ordinance,¹ diligently observe the sacramental elements and actions,² heedfully discern the Lord's body,³ and affectionately meditate on His death and sufferings,⁴ and thereby stir up themselves to a vigorous exercise of their graces;⁵ in judging themselves,⁶ and sorrowing for sin;⁷ in earnest hungering and thirsting after Christ,⁸ feeding on Him by faith,⁹ receiving of His fullness,¹⁰ trusting in His merits,¹¹ rejoicing in His love,¹² giving thanks for His grace;¹³ in renewing of their covenant with God,¹⁴ and love to all the saints.¹⁵

Proofs

¹Lev 10:3; Heb 12:28; Ps 5:7; 1 Cor 11:17, 26–27; ²Ex 24:8; cf. Mt 26:28; ³1 Cor 11:29; ⁴Lk 22:19; ⁵1 Cor 11:26; 10:3–5, 11, 14; ⁶1 Cor 11:31; ⁷Zech 12:10; ⁸Rev 22:17; ⁹Jn 6:35; ¹⁰Jn 1:16; ¹¹Phil 3:9; ¹²Ps 63:4–5; 2 Chr 30:21; ¹³Ps 22:26; ¹⁴Jer 50:5; Ps 50:5; ¹⁵Acts 2:42.

Comments

It is, I believe, not too sweeping a statement to say that most professing Christians today,—evangelical Christians not excluded,—will come to the Lord's Table with at the most a form of religion which is sprinkled with a brief moment of introspection if any.

This is sad, and certainly does not do justice to the instruction of the apostle Paul to examine ourselves so that we may not come to the Table unworthily.

Our fathers in the faith understood the gravity of Paul's instruction. Indeed, it is surely in answer to the temptation to come to the Table flippantly that they seek to teach us in these few questions what to do before, during and after partaking of the Supper.

We have seen what we must do before coming to the Table in order to prepare for it. But what must we do at the time of the administration of the Supper? Our present question answers.

First, we must “with all holy reverence and attention . . . wait upon God in that ordinance.” That is to say, we must attend to the sacrament not only with an expectant heart, but with a ‘holy reverence’ towards God, and toward Christ who has invited us to sup with Him. We must never, on account of familiarity, sit at the Table with a flippant attitude and thoughtless mechanical actions. We must engage in what we are doing, in our heart, soul and mind. We must come with gratitude and yet a fear of God knowing that He would not hold as guiltless those who partake of the body and blood of Christ unworthily.

Secondly, we must “diligently observe the sacramental elements and actions.” For this to be possible, the minister officiating the sacrament must make sure that the communicant can easily observe the breaking of the bread and the distribution of the elements. And at the same time, the communicants must look down or even engage in private prayer until they have received the elements.

Thirdly, we must “heedfully discern the Lord's body, and affectionately meditate on His death and sufferings, and thereby stir up themselves to a vigorous exercise of their graces.” In other words, as we observe the elements and sacramental actions, we must meditate on what they represent. Though our physical eyes behold the bread and wine, our spiritual eyes should affectionately behold Christ bleeding and dying for us so that we may cultivate love and gratitude for Him in our heart.

Fourthly, we must judge ourselves and sorrow for our sins. As we meditate on Christ dying for us, we should be grateful unto Him for being our substitute to turn away God's wrath from us. But at the same time, as we see that the Son of God must suffer and die so that we may be delivered from the guilt and dominion of sin, then we must surely grieve for our sin. We must consider how much God hates sin, and we must judge ourselves and consider that we are sinners and how we have sinned so that we may sorrow and repent of them.

Fifthly, we must earnestly hunger and thirst after Christ. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17). What is it to hunger and thirst after Christ? It is to desire not only the benefits that He has purchased for us, but the knowledge of Him and the enjoyment of fellowship with Him through His Word and Spirit.

Sixthly, we must not only hunger and thirst after Christ, we must feed on Him by faith, receive of His fullness, trust in His merits, rejoice in His love, and give thanks for His grace. We must do so by prayerfully recalling the works Christ on our behalf and the promises and privileges that have been extended towards us.

And *finally*, we should renew our covenant with God, and love to all the saints. Since the Lord's Supper is a covenantal meal with Christ our covenant head as the host, we should in partaking of it, consider wherein we have failed to keep our covenant obligations of living by His Word with gratitude and love. And where we have failed, we should repent and resolve to improve. Where we have done well, we should resolve to persevere. Likewise, we should use the opportunity to repent of any feelings of enmity towards any of the brethren, especially amongst those who are sharing the Table with us. And we should lament lack of love towards our brethren and resolve the more distinctly to lay down our life for them. **W**

A. The duty of Christians, after they have received the sacrament of the Lord's supper, is seriously to consider how they have behaved themselves therein, and with what success;¹ if they find quickening and comfort, to bless God for it,² beg the continuance of it,³ watch against relapses,⁴ fulfil their vows,⁵ and encourage themselves to a frequent attendance on that ordinance;⁶ but if they find no present benefit, more exactly to review their preparation to, and carriage at, the sacrament;⁷ in both which, if they can approve themselves to God and their own consciences, they are to wait for the fruit of it in due time;⁸ but, if they see they have failed in either, they are to be humbled,⁹ and to attend upon it afterwards with more care and diligence.¹⁰

Proofs

¹Ps 28:7; 85:8; 1 Cor 11:17, 30–31;²2 Chr 30:21–23, 25–26; Acts 2:42, 46–47;³Ps 36:10; Song 3:4; 1 Chr 29:18;⁴1 Cor 10:3–5, 12;⁵Ps 50:14;⁶1 Cor 11:25–26; Acts 2:42, 46;⁷Song 5:1–6;⁸Ps 123:1–2; 42:5, 8; 43:3–5;⁹2 Chr 30:18–19; Isa 1:16, 18;¹⁰2 Cor 7:11; 1 Chr 15:12–14.

Comments

We have seen what we are to do before we come to the Lord's Table and what we are to do at the Table in order that we may best benefit from the Supper. In the present question, we are considering what we must do after we have received the Supper. Our answer can be studied under 3 main headings:

1. Consider How the Supper Benefited us

In the first place, we must seriously consider what spiritual benefits we have received from partaking the Lord's Supper. We ought to spend some time after the Supper to be quiet by ourselves, to think about our experience at the Supper.

Yes; the benefits of the Supper may be imperceptible or they may not be felt immediately. We cannot do anything about that. We had prayed that the Lord would bless the sacrament to our soul. We must believe that He heard and will answer our prayer. But experience and the Scripture teach us that there is an experimental side to attendance at the means (e.g. Ps 28:7). Thus, it is possible for us to perceive,—to a degree,—whether we have been helped by our participation at the Supper (cf. 1 Cor 11:17). This is what our catechism is alluding to when it speaks of considering whether we have behaved ourselves in the Supper and with what success.

Let us as we do so, ask ourselves: Did I find myself going through the motion? Or have I been quickened and comforted as I partook of the bread and wine?

2. What if we Perceive Benefits?

If we find ourselves strengthened, encouraged and comforted through the sacrament, then:

- We must, *firstly*, remember to bless God for it. We must acknowledge that we do not deserve the least of His benefits, and yet He has bestowed them upon us. But remember to thank Him not only for the Supper of the Lord, but for the Lord of the Supper. Thank Him that our Lord rose from the dead and was present with us at the Supper, though we saw Him not with our bodily eyes. Thank Him for all the spiritual benefits that the Supper carries and represents.
- *Secondly*, we should “beg the continuance of it.” That is to say, we should pray that God would cause that the benefits experienced will continue to be enjoyed or felt. Did we find our heart burning within (Lk 24:32) and our eyes opened so that we felt the presence of Christ in a way that we do not normally experience (Lk 24:25)? Let us thank God for it and ask that this experience might be etched in our memory and be used to deepen our love for Christ. Pray that we will be able to walk with a renewed sense of nearness to Christ. Do we find our heart grieved at our own sin and filled with gratitude for the Lord's love? Pray that the Lord will keep our heart beating with this heavenly heartbeat. Pray that He will cause us to do that which we are reminded to do at the Table.
- *Thirdly*, we must “watch against relapses.” That is we must watch against falling into sin that will rob us of sweet fellowship with Christ. When we have experienced spiritual blessing at the Table, it is easy to become overconfident and trust in our own self rather than in Christ. Thus, the very experience of spiritual blessings can become a source of spiritual pride. We must guard against it, and remind ourselves that it is neither our faith nor our doing, but Christ's blessing that brings about the refreshment we experience.
- *Fourthly*, you must seek to fulfil our vows. Thanksgiving should always be accompanied by the payment of our vows (Ps 1:14). Did we make any vow prior to coming to the Table? We must not neglect to fulfil it. Are we reminded of the vows we made when we joined ourselves as members of the communion? We must not allow our failure to keep your vows destroy our enjoyment of communion with Christ and His church whether in the life of the church, or at the Supper when it is commemorated again.
- *Finally*, as we have enjoyed the benefit of the Supper, we must “encourage [ourselves] to a frequent attendance on that ordinance.” Let us resolve not to allow sin to bar us from the Table. Pray that the Lord will preserve His Church that the Supper will be enjoyed again.

3. What if we Did Not Seem to have Benefited?

But what if we find yourself receiving “no present benefit”? In that case, repentance rather than finger-pointing is in order. Do not blame the ambience in the worship hall. Do not blame the sermon, the prayer or the way that the elements were distributed. It is true that these things will affect your enjoyment of the Lord's Supper, but this is not the time to shift blame. Let us consider rather whether we were diligent in our preparation before you came for the Table (see *WLC* 171). Were we prayerful? Did we seek reconciliation with brethren we have aught against? Did we repent of known sins? Did we spend time meditating on the love of Christ for us? etc. Let us also consider how we have conducted yourselves during the Supper (see *WLC* 174). Did we have a reverential and attentive frame of mind? Did we keep your mind from wandering? Did we ponder on the wrath of God against sin which was heaped upon Christ? Did we consider how much the Lord loved us in His dying for you? etc.

Now, if we are convinced (or as our catechism puts it, if you “can approve [ourself] to God and [our] own conscience”) that we had done what we could, then there is nothing else which you need to do but to wait patiently for the Lord to bring fruit out of your participation. Let us remember that as in the case of baptism, the benefits of the Lord's Supper are not tied or limited to the time of its administration. But if we find yourself lacking, then we must humble ourselves, repent of our faults and ask the Lord for strength to exercise more care and diligence when we come to the Table again. **W**

WLC 176. Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper agree?

A. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper agree, in that the author of both is God;¹ the spiritual part of both is Christ and His benefits;² both are seals of the same covenant,³ are to be dispensed by ministers of the gospel, and by none other;⁴ and to be continued in the Church of Christ until His second coming.⁵

Proofs

¹Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23; ²Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 10:16; ³Rom 4:11; cf. Col 2:12; Mt 26:27-28; ⁴Jn 1:33; Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23; 4:1; Heb 5:4; ⁵Mt 28:19-20; 1 Cor 11:26.

Comments

We have already seen how Baptism and the Lord's Supper are classed together as sacraments partly because of their unique similarities compared to the other scriptural ordinances (see comments on *WLC* 162). The present question presents further similarities between the two sacraments.

- *First*, “the author of both is God” and it is Christ the God man who instituted them. This is clear from the Lord's words in Matthew 28:19—“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mt 28:19); and from Paul's reference to the institution of the Lord's Supper: “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread” (1 Cor 11:23).
- *Secondly*, “the spiritual part of both is Christ and His benefits.” The spiritual part of baptism is identification with Christ and therefore the experience of regeneration (baptism of the Holy Spirit) and resurrection by the power of Christ (Rom 6:3-4). The spiritual part of the Lord's Supper is communion or participation in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). What this means essentially is that through the Supper we are strengthened and sanctified by the Lord with the spiritual benefits he has purchased for us on the cross.
- *Thirdly*, “both are seals of the same covenant.” That baptism is a seal of the covenant is clear from the fact that baptism is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament sign of circumcision (Col 2:12), which “a seal of the righteousness of the faith” (Rom 4:11). That the Lord's Supper is also a seal of the covenant is evident from the Lord's words accompanying the Cup: “this is my blood of the new testament [or covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt 26:28).
- *Fourthly*, baptism and the Lord's Supper agree in that both “are to be dispensed by ministers of the gospel, and by none other.” To understand how the framers of our catechism arrive at this doctrine, we first consider two verses: (1) “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1); and (2) “And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (Heb 5:4). From these two verses, we see that being a minister of Christ to represent Christ is not something that we should take upon ourselves. We must be called of Christ. Bearing this in mind, we see that it was the apostles and all ministers of Christ following them who were commanded to baptise (Mt 28:19); and likewise it was unto the apostles, that the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was committed (from the fact that only the apostles were present at the institution of the Supper and from the fact that the apostle Paul also received the same instruction. See 1 Cor 11:23)
- *Fifthly*, Baptism and the Lord's Supper agree in that both are “to be continued in the Church of Christ until His second coming.” This is clear with baptism, for the Lord append to his command to baptise, the words: “lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Mt 28:20). For the Lord's Supper it is even clearer, for the apostle reminds us: “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come” (1 Cor 11:26). The end of the word and the second coming of Christ is the same day. **W**

WLC 177. Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper differ?

A. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ,¹ and that even to infants;² whereas the Lord's supper is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul,³ and to confirm our continuance and growth in Him,⁴ and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves.⁵

Proofs

1Mt 3:11; Tit 3:5; Gal 3:27; 2Gen 17:7, 9; Acts 2:38–39; 1 Cor 7:14; 31 Cor 11:23–26; 41 Cor 10:16; 51 Cor 11:28–29.

Comments

Although baptism and the Lord's Supper are similar in many ways, we must understand that they are different on a few very crucial points. These differences explain why they are not both administered to covenant infants in their childhood, although they are both signs and seals of the covenant.

In the first place, we must understand that baptism is an ordinance of membership initiation. It is a sign and seal of our regeneration and our ingrafting into Christ, and therefore is to be administered only once seeing that we are regenerate and engrafted into Christ only once only once.

Covenant infants are Olive shoots on the Olive Tree (cf. Rom 11:17, Ps 128:3), and therefore in a covenantal sense already engrafted into Christ. Baptism seals and signifies that ingrafting. Likewise, although it is true that we do not have any promise that our covenant infants will be regenerate in their infancy, yet since the promise (or the Spirit and therefore of regeneration as a covenant blessing) is unto us and to our children (Acts 2:39), we have the warrant to baptise them. Those who object to baptising infants on the basis that they are too young to exercise faith fail to understand that baptism is not about the faith of the individual but about God's promise and work of grace in the heart.

By contrast, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of nourishment. It represents and exhibits Christ as spiritual nourishment to our soul and confirms our continuance and growth in Him. This being the case, and especially since the apostle Paul also warns that all who partake of the Supper unworthily, partakes damnation to themselves, it is prudent and necessary that it be administered only to "such as are of years and ability to examine themselves."

Those who believe that infants or children who are able to partake of the bread and wine should also be admitted to the Table argue, Firstly, that there does not appear to be any restriction placed upon the children under the Old Covenant to participated in the Passover (cf. Ex 12:3-4); and Secondly baptism is administered to the infants though they could not keep the commandment to repent of their sin.

To these objections, we reply, Firstly, that there is no firm indication either that children partook of the Passover, and Secondly, the administration of baptism is not conditioned upon repentance, but about membership in the covenant (which for the adults happen to involve repentance and faith in Christ). **W**

WLC 178. What is Prayer?

A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God,¹ in the name of Christ,² by the help of His Spirit;³ with confession of our sins,⁴ and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.⁵

Proofs

¹Ps 62:8; ²Jn 16:23; ³Rom 8:26; ⁴Ps 32:5–6; Dan 9:4; ⁵Phil 4:6.

Comments

What is prayer? Prayer is such a common activity of the believer that we tend to take it for granted. Indeed, most of us begin to pray even before we know the definition of prayer. Even the Heidelberg catechism, which teaches us why we should pray and how we should pray (Lord's Day 45) omits to tell us what exactly is prayer.

What then is prayer? The best definitions of prayer is not to be found in the dictionaries or some academic works, but in the words of pious men who knew experimentally the teachings of Scripture, and had greatly exercised themselves in prayer. There is much we can learn from these definitions.

John Calvin defined prayer as "a communion of men with God by which, having entered the heavenly sanctuary, they appeal to him in person concerning his promises in order to experience, where necessity so demands, that what they believe was not vain, although he had promise it in word alone" (John Calvin, *ICR* 3.20.2). Elsewhere he speaks of prayer as "nothing else than the opening up of our heart before God" (Comm. on Isa 63:16).

John Bunyan famously suggests that "Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to His Word, for the good of the Church, with submission in faith to the will of God" (John Bunyan, *Prayer*, 13).

Thomas Watson puts it simply as "the soul's breathing itself into the bosom of its heavenly Father" (*The Lord's Prayer*, [BOT, 1965], 10).

The Princeton Theologian, Charles Hodge gives this definition: "Prayer is the converse of the soul with God. Therein we manifest or express to Him our reverence and love for His divine perfection, our gratitude for all His mercies, our penitence for our sins, our hope on His forgiving love, our submission to His authority, our confidence in His care, our desires for His favour and for the providential and spiritual blessings needed for ourselves and others" (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, [Eermans, reprinted 1989], 3.692).

But perhaps the best and most concise definition of prayer is to be found in our *Shorter Catechism*:

WSC 98. What is prayer?

A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.

The *Larger Catechism*, because it would deal with what we are to pray for in a subsequent question (*WLC* 184), leaves out the qualification, "for things agreeable to his will." But at the same time it adds, "by the help of His Spirit."

In any case, from this definition, we see that:

- Prayer is, *firstly*, "an offering up of our desires", i.e. it must overflow from our hearts (cf. Ps 62:8). Many pagan religions and pseudo Christian sects will.....include meaningless or unintelligible chants as prayer. But such utterances cannot be acceptable as prayer in the hearing of God who warns us of the hypocrisy of such 'prayers': "this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me" (Is 29:13).
- *Secondly*, prayer must be "unto God", i.e. prayer must be directed to God alone (cf. Ps 5:2-3). This means that we are not to direct our prayers to saints departed or alive, or to angels, or to any other creature. Prayer is a part of religious worship, and God alone is worthy of our worship (cf. Mt 4:10). Moreover, God alone is everywhere present to see us, and to hear our prayers (Ps 34:15), and He alone can answer our prayers by fulfilling our desires, and giving the things which we pray for (Ps 145:18–19).
- *Thirdly*, prayer are petitions accompanied by "confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies." This is taught in numerous places in the Scriptures. For example, David teaches us that unless we confess our sins, we cannot expect our prayers to be heard: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps 66:18; cf. Ps 32:5; Ps 51:4–5; Dan 9:8). And the apostle Paul exhorts us: "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Th 5:18; cf. Phil 4:6).
- *Fourthly*, our petitions must only be made "by the help of [Christ's] Spirit." The apostle Paul teaches us that "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom 8:26). True prayer is not only heartfelt, it is directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, and it is mediated by Christ sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. We have, therefore, as it were, two intercessors: the Spirit in our hearts, and Christ in heaven. Only prayers thus mediated can find acceptance before God who is transcendent, holy and exalted, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil.

Fifthly, we must pray only "in the name of Christ" (cf. Jn 14:13–14). To pray in the name of Christ, is not merely to mention the name of Christ with our lips in the conclusion, or any part of our prayers. It is rather to depend upon Christ alone for admittance and access unto God in prayer, for acceptance, audience, and a gracious answer unto our prayers (Eph 3:12). We may, of course, explicitly mention the name of Christ to indicate our reliance on Him, especially when we are praying in the hearing of others. Conversely, as we are not to pray to any other but God, we must not pray in the name of any other but Christ who is alone is the perfect and acceptable mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5; 1 Jn 2:1). Prayers in the name of angels, the virgin Mary and other saints are therefore idolatrous and abominable (cf. Col 2:18; Rev 19:10). **W**

WLC 179. Are we to pray unto God only?

A. God only being able to search the hearts,¹ hear the requests,² pardon the sins,³ and fulfil the desires of all;⁴ and only to be believed in,⁵ and worshipped with religious worship;⁶ prayer, which is a special part thereof,⁷ is to be made by all to Him alone,⁸ and to none other.⁹

Proofs

¹1 Kgs 8:39; Acts 1:24; Rom 8:27; ²Ps 65:2; ³Mic 7:18; ⁴Ps 145:18–19; ⁵Rom 10:14; ⁶Mt 4:10; ⁷1 Cor 1:2; ⁸Ps 50:15; ⁹Rom 10:14.

Comments

We saw in the earlier definition of prayer that it is “an offering up of our desires unto God,” and not to any creature. This question elaborates why this must be so.

In the first place, we are to pray unto God because God alone is “able to search the hearts, hear the requests, pardon the sins, and fulfil the desires of all.” Idols of wood and stone are no different from all other inanimate objects. “They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat” (Ps 115:5-7). So it is foolish to pray to idols. Likewise, praying to angels and departed saints is foolish. For, even if they can hear the prayers of certain individuals (such as in the case of an angel being present though unseen when a person is praying), they have no power to search the hearts (cf. Acts 1:24), to pardon sins (cf. Mic 7:18; Mk 2:7) or to fulfil the desires of everyone who petition them (Ps 145:18-19).

In the second place, we must only pray to God because He alone is “to be believed in, and worshipped with religious worship.” When the devil tempted the Lord to worship him, the Lord replied by quoting Deuteronomy 6:13 in the words—“Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” God alone is worthy of receiving our worship in prayer, for He is our Creator and Redeemer. **W**

WLC 180. What is it to pray in the name of Christ?

A. To pray in the name of Christ is, in obedience to His command, and in confidence on His promises, to ask mercy for His sake;¹ not by bare mentioning of His name,² but by drawing our encouragement to pray, and our boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and His mediation.³

Proofs

¹Jn 14:13–14; 16:24; Dan 9:17; ²Mt 7:21; ³Heb 4:14–16; 1 Jn 5:13–15.

Comments

Our Lord teaches us:

“Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14).

For many Christians, this means that we must end our prayers with the phrase “In Jesus Name. Amen.” In fact, most of us have been taught to pray in this way, and most of us do pray in this way. Indeed, some of us may even think that any prayer that does not end with ‘In Jesus Name, Amen’ is simply not a complete prayer. But this cannot be what our Lord is teaching us, for we cannot find a single prayer in the Bible that ends with the phrase “In Jesus name.” Even the Lord’s Prayer does not end with that phrase! Therefore to pray in the name of Christ cannot be to make ‘bare mention of His name.’

Rather, to pray in the name of Christ is, ‘in obedience to His command, and in confidence on His promises, to ask mercy for His sake.’ That is: it is to petition the Father for His mercy on account of what Christ has done for us, and our union with Him.

This may involve a reverential mentioning of his name,—and we should mention his name often (Col 3:17; Heb 13:15),—but it is more than that. It is to draw our encouragement to pray, and our boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and His mediation.

That is to say, to pray in the name of Christ is to pray with a consciousness that God is holy and unapproachable, and yet has provided a way of approaching Him in Christ. Because He is holy, sinners have no right to approach Him, and expect to be received and heard, much less to have their prayers answered. For we all sin and fall short of His glory (Rom 3:23) and He is “purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13). But God has not left us without help. He has provided us a Great High Priest, even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through whom we can “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:14-16).

We must, as such, approach God not in a thoughtless or flippant manner, but with a consciousness of our dependence upon Christ and His mediation that our prayers may find acceptance and answer before a holy God. **W**

WLC 181. Why Are We To Pray In the Name of Christ?

A. The sinfulness of man, and his distance from God by reason thereof, being so great, as that we can have no access into his presence without a mediator;^a and there being none in heaven or earth appointed to, or fit for, that glorious work but Christ alone,^b we are to pray in no other name but his only.^c

Proofs

^a John 14:6; Isa 59:2; Eph. 3:12. ^b John 6:27; Heb. 7:25–27; 1 Tim. 2:5. ^c Col. 3:17; Heb. 13:15

Comments

We have seen that praying in the name of Christ involves not just a bare mention of his name, but drawing nigh to God on the basis of what Christ has done.

But why is this necessary? Can we not simply speak to God? This is what our present question addresses.

To answer this question is to distinguish between Christian prayer and the prayer of idolatry. For the gods of idolatry, are crafted after the likeness of man. Though the idolater may fear them for irrational reasons, it does not cross his mind that his prayers may not be acceptable to them.

The living and true God, on the other hand, is infinite and holy. The distance between Him and man is immeasurable. Man is finite, He is infinite. Man is a creature, He is the Creator. Moreover, he is utterly pure and holy: “yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight” (Job 15:15); whereas man is totally sinful, yea, even “our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6a). Man can therefore “have no access into [God’s] presence without a mediator.”

This mediator must necessarily be as pure and holy as God is; and he must be man to represent men and yet be without sin for otherwise how can his mediation be acceptable to God.

Thank God that He has appointed such a mediator, even the Lord Jesus Christ, the Immanuel, the God-Man. Indeed, He alone is qualified for this glorious work. Thus, the apostle Paul reminds us: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5).

It is in recognition that we cannot find acceptance before God except through Christ our mediator, that we pray in His name and His name alone. It is foolish to pray through any other name not only because God has not appointed any other to be our mediator, but also because none is fit to be our mediator but Christ alone. **W**

WLC 182. How doth the Spirit help us to pray?

A. We not knowing what to pray for as we ought, the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, by enabling us to understand both for whom, and what, and how prayer is to be made; and by working and quickening in our hearts (although not in all persons, nor at all times, in the same measure) those apprehensions, affections, and graces which are requisite for the right performance of that duty.¹

Proofs

¹Rom 8:26–27; Ps 10:17; Zech 12:10.

Comments

The classic text on the Holy Spirit's help in prayer is Romans 8:26-27—

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷ And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

This passage is, however, quite enigmatic to many. Some, in particular, the Charismatic believe that the “groanings which cannot be uttered” refers to tongues which the Spirit enables the believer to pray.

This, however, cannot be the case, for the groanings that is spoken of cannot be uttered. It is not our groaning but the groaning of the Holy Spirit!

The apostle Paul is speaking about how the Holy Spirit assists us in prayer in inscrutable ways. This assistance is necessary, for “we know not what we should pray for as we ought.” Left to ourselves, we are at a loss as to what or whom we should pray for or even how to pray. Very few believers who have made any honest attempt at praying consistently would not have experienced this difficulty. Neither would we not know the help of the Spirit. We would know His help from the time the Spirit regenerated our hearts; and we will, in an inexplicable way, experience His help to varying degrees from day to day.

How does He help us?

First, He illumines our heart and enables us to perceive prayer needs through our interaction with various people and through the news that we receive. And not only so, but we are led in regard to the content of our prayer and the manner in which we should pray. Some items of prayer, for example, are best offered in the closet while others may best be brought out into corporate public prayers. And some things should be prayed for once and left, while others require persistence and even fasting (Mk 9:29).

Secondly, the Holy Spirit helps us by “working and quickening in our hearts... those apprehensions, affections, and graces which are requisite for the right performance of that duty.” This help is rather subjective. All true believers would have received such a help, though not to the same degree. But not every person will be conscious of the help and neither is it received at all time. One who is indulging in certain sins in his life, for example, would not expect to know the Spirit's help (cf. Ps 66:18).

But when the Spirit's assistance is known, the heart is made to sense the urgency of the matter, the assurance that God would be pleased to hear our plea on the matter. We would also be made to feel the grief, sorrow, joy, pity or any other affections (cf. Zech 12:10) that would stir us to pray while at the same time we are given the words to bring before the throne of grace. **W**

WLC 183. For whom are we to pray?

A. We are to pray for the whole church of Christ upon earth;¹ for magistrates,² and ministers;³ for ourselves,⁴ our brethren,⁵ yea, our enemies;⁶ and for all sorts of men living,⁷ or that shall live hereafter;⁸ but not for the dead,⁹ nor for those that are known to have sinned the sin unto death.¹⁰

Proofs

¹Eph 6:18; Ps 28:9; ²1 Tim 2:1-2; ³Col 4:3; ⁴Gen 32:11; ⁵Jas 5:16; ⁶Mt 5:44; ⁷1 Tim 2:1-2; ⁸Jn 17:20; 2 Sam 7:29; ⁹2 Sam 12:21-23; ¹⁰1 Jn 5:16.

Comments

When a believer first learns to pray, he may imagine that he can pray for anyone and anything.

Well, it is quite true that we are not tightly restricted on whom we may pray for. But the Word of God, does indicate who we should especially pray for and who we must not pray for.

We may pray for “all sorts of men living [1 Tim 2:1-2], or that shall live hereafter [cf. Jn 17:20; 2 Sam 7:29],” but especially, we must pray for ourselves, for our brethren, for the civil government, for ministers of the Gospel and even for our enemies.

We should pray for ourselves for protection and blessing both spiritual and physical. The prayer of Jabez is an instructive example of how we may pray for ourselves:

“Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested” (1 Chr 4:10).

We should pray for our brethren (Jas 5:16) for spiritual and temporal prosperity (3 Jn 1:2). We should also pray for them according to their requests for prayer so long as it is for things that are legitimate.

We should pray for magistrates or civil authorities for the salvation and for wisdom and equity to rule the people, “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” (1 Tim 2:2).

We should pray for ministers of the Gospel that God may open unto them “a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ” (Col 4:3) and that “the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified” (2 Th 3:1).

What shall we pray for our enemies (Mt 5:44)? Shall we not pray for their repentance, for the restoration of our relationship, and for the Lord’s blessing as the case may be?

These are the persons we should especially pray for.

But the Scripture also teaches us that there are two classes of men we should not pray for.

First, we must not pray for “the dead.” Thus when David’s child with Bathsheba was alive and ill, he fasted and prayed for him that the Lord might restore him, but once he died, he arose and cease from praying for him (2 Sam 12:21-23). The Roman Catholic idea of praying for the dead has no Scriptural basis. It is derived from the extra-biblical doctrine of Purgatory and from apocryphal passages such as 2 Maccabees 12:40-46. Rather than affirming that there is such a place as purgatory, the inspired Scriptures teaches us that the dead would either be with Christ in paradise (Lk 23:43; 2Cor 5:8) or with the devil in hell (Mt 10:28; Lk 16:23). If the person is in heaven, there is no need to pray for him. If the person is in hell, it would be audacious and impertinent to pray for him.

Secondly, we must not pray for “those that are known to have sinned the sin unto death” (see 1 Jn 5:16). What is this sin unto death? I believe that John is referring to the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mt 12:24-32), or sin that is closely related to it. The unpardonable sin is “unto death” in the sense that it cannot be repented of, and proves for all intents and purposes that the person is a reprobate.

A sin which is related to the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, is that of apostasy of false believers who “were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost” (Heb 6:4-6). These are those who knowingly and wilfully “crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb 6:6); and “trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, ... an unholy thing” (Heb 10:29). In the context of the book of Hebrews, this would refer to those who despite knowing that Christ came to fulfil Old Testament prophecies and types draw back into Judaistic worship (cf. Heb 10:39).

It is very probable that the apostle John, had in mind the group of apostate who were once part of the Church, but had departed from the Church, thereby demonstrating their anti-christian spirit (1 Jn 2:19), and their not having the “unction from the Holy One” (1 Jn 2:20). These same individuals must have also denied that Christ came in the flesh (1 Jn 2:22-23, 4:2), and perhaps demonstrated hatred for the brethren in some ways (1 Jn 3:14-15). John does not want us to pray for such persons. **W**

WLC 184. For what things are we to pray?

A. We are to pray for all things tending to the glory of God,¹ the welfare of the church,² our own³ or others good;⁴ but not for anything that is unlawful.⁵

Proofs

¹Mt 6:9; ²Ps 51:18; 122:6; ³Mt 7:11; ⁴Ps 125:4; ⁵1 Jn 5:14

Comments

We saw in the previous question *whom* we are to pray for and *whom* we are not to pray for.

In this question, we will consider what *things* we are to pray for, and what we should not.

In the first place, we learn from the Scriptures that we must pray according to God's will (1 Jn 5:14) and therefore, we must never pray for anything that is unlawful. For example, a man must never pray that God will bless an adulterous affair that he is indulging in; nor should he pray that he would strike lottery; nor should he pray for a business opportunity when he meets someone on the Sabbath. Such prayers are wicked in the sight of God. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov 28:9). How much worst is a prayer that is contrary to God's law!

Apart from this restriction, it is legitimate to pray for all sorts of thing, though we must especially and particularly pray for things that: (1) redound to the glory of God; (2) conduce to the welfare of the church; and (3) tend to the good of others and ourselves.

So for example, we should pray for the furtherance of Christ's kingdom and the reformation of the church, for this will most manifest the glory of God. Likewise, we should pray for the unity and growth of the church; and for the bodily and spiritual health and prosperity of ourselves and other whom we know. **W**

WLC 185. How are we to pray?

A. We are to pray with an awful apprehension of the majesty of God,¹ and deep sense of our own unworthiness,² necessities,³ and sins;⁴ with penitent,⁵ thankful,⁶ and enlarged hearts;⁷ with understanding,⁸ faith,⁹ sincerity,¹⁰ fervency,¹¹ love,¹² and perseverance,¹³ waiting upon Him,¹⁴ with humble submission to His will.¹⁵

Proofs

¹Ecc1 5:1; ²Gen 18:27; 32:10; ³Lk 15:17–19; ⁴Lk 18:13–14; ⁵Ps 51:17; ⁶Phil 4:6; ⁷1 Sam 1:15; 2:1; ⁸1 Cor 14:15; ⁹Mk 11:24; Jas 1:6; ¹⁰Ps 145:18; 17:1; ¹¹Jas 5:16; ¹²1 Tim 2:8; ¹³Eph 6:18; ¹⁴Mic 7:7; ¹⁵Mt 26:39.

Comments

Although prayer is, in a sense, talking with God. It is not to be engaged in lightly or flippantly as when one talks with her next door neighbour. Prayer is the converse of the soul of a finite creature with the infinite Creator. It must therefore be entered into reverently and with the right attitude.

In particular, in the first place, we must approach God in prayer with “an awful apprehension of the majesty of God, and deep sense of our own unworthiness, necessities, and sins.” That is I must be acutely aware the greatness of God in contrast to my insignificance; the transcendent holiness of God in contrast to my vile sinfulness; and the wealth and sufficiency of God in contrast to my poverty and want.

In the second place, we must enter into prayer “with penitent, thankful and enlarged hearts.” That is, I must consider how I have fallen short of God’s glory and how I have sinned against Him in all my transgressions; while at the same time, I must stir myself to gratitude know all that God has done for me both spiritually and temporally so that my heart is enlarged and overflowing. My prayer should be an overflow of my heart, checked only by a sense of my unworthiness before God.

In the third place, we must approach the throne of God “with understanding, faith, sincerity, fervency, love, and perseverance, waiting upon Him, with humble submission to His will.” That is, I must pray: (1) with my understanding and in a tongue known to me rather than chant some gibberish; (2) with faith believing that God is able and willing hear my petitions; (3) with sincerity not hypocrisy in regard to all that I ask; (4) with fervency, not with coldness and apathy; (5) with love both for God and for my neighbour; (6) with perseverance or persistence while waiting, and not fainting or doubting that God would hear and answer my prayer; and finally (7) with humble submission to His will, knowing that God has the sovereign right in whatever way to answer my petition and that if he chooses to answer in any other way that I had requested that it must be best for me and for His glory.

This is how we must pray in according to God’s will.

Seeing that we are forgetful creatures and sinful who easily slip into an attitude of callousness in prayer, it is needful that we remind ourselves constantly of these things whenever we approach God in prayer. Prayer must be a common exercise in our walk with the Lord, but it must not become so familiar to us that we take the privilege for granted. **W**

WLC 186. What rule hath God given for our direction in the duty of prayer?

A. The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in the duty of prayer;¹ but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which our Saviour Christ taught His disciples, commonly called *The Lord's Prayer*.²

Proofs

¹1 Jn 5:14; ²Mt 6:9–13; Lk 11:2–4.

Comments

The apostle John says:

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:” (1 Jn 5:14).

That is to say: We can expect God to hear and answer our prayers if we pray according to His will.

But what is it to pray according to God's will? It is, we believe, to pray according to God's revealed will, or what is revealed in “the whole Word of God,” for the secret will of God is hidden from us: we cannot consciously pray according to God's secret will.

And what is it to pray according to God's revealed will? Briefly, it is to pray in the way *taught* in God's Word in terms of content, manner, and time.

In terms of *content*, or what to pray for; God's word teaches us that we pray for things promised by God, for things pleasing to Him and for things which He teaches us to pray for. Prayer is not a shopping spree. There are things which we are enjoined to pray for in the Scriptures such as those listed in *WLC* 183 & 184. But there are things which we should never pray for, and if we do, we would add to our wickedness if we expect God to hear and answer us. For example, we must never ask for God's blessing upon a sinful action or relationship, and neither should we ask Him for anything which we covet after. James says: “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3)

Secondly, in terms of *manner* or the how of prayer, God's Word teaches us that we must pray in the name of Christ; and we pray with faith and with reverence, confession of sin and thanksgiving. We have already considered how we are to pray in *WLC* 185.

Even if the things we are asking for is right, but the way we approach God is wrong, we cannot expect God to hear our prayer. For the psalmist says: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps 66:18; cf. Prov 15:29; cf. Jms 1:5-7).

And finally in terms of *time*, or the when of prayer, the Scripture teaches that there are time when we should be doing rather than praying and there are times when we should cease to pray for certain things. Moses was told by the Lord to stop asking to be allowed into the Promised Land (Deut 3:26). God had determined not to allow it. In the same way, we ought not to continue to ask God for something which he has indicated by His providence that He will not give. We must, for example, cease to pray for an unbelieving man,—that he will go to heaven,—once the Lord takes His life.

Indeed, very often we should cease to pray or to change our prayer when God indicates by His providence that He would not hear our prayer. This is the only time we should pray according to God's secret will for at such times, God is as it were, pulling the curtain to reveal what has been kept secret from all eternity. Thus if we are praying for a brother who is suffering from cancer, we should pray for full recovery. But if in the course of time, God indicates that he would not restore him, then our prayers should rather be to he be prepared for his eternal home.

This then is, briefly, how we are to pray according to “the whole Word of God.” But perhaps the most instructive guideline and indeed “the special rule of direction” on how we ought to pray is the form of prayer which Christ our Lord taught his disciples, commonly called the Lord's Prayer.

The remaining 10 questions of the Westminster Larger Catechism contains on of the most thorough and yet succinct exposition of the Lord's Prayer; and therefore we shall add nothing on it for now except to say that the Lord taught his disciples this prayer twice. The first time, it was incorporated into his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:9-13), while the second time, it was in response to the disciple's request: “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Lk 11:1ff).


As we begin our study of this model pray provided by the Lord, let us ask him fervently as the disciples did, ““Lord, teach us to pray.” **W**

A. The Lord's Prayer is not only for direction, as a pattern, according to which we are to make other prayers; but may also be used as a prayer, so that it be done with understanding, faith, reverence, and other graces necessary to the right performance of the duty of prayer.¹

Proofs

¹Mt 6:9; cf. Lk 11:2

Comments

When our taught the disciples the Lord's Prayer, He prefaced it with the Words, "*after this manner* [Grk. , i.e. 'in this way', 'thus'] therefore pray ye..." (Mt 6:9). These words are very general and suggests that the prayer that is being taught may be used both for direction, as a pattern for our own prayers, and as a prayer itself. However, just before the Lord taught the disciples the Lord's Prayer, he says unto them: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do" (v. 7). These words suggest that the Lord's Prayer should be used primarily as a pattern for our own prayer and only secondarily as a prayer by itself. They suggest also that if we use the pattern as a prayer, then we "it be done with understanding, faith, reverence, and other graces necessary to the right performance of the duty of prayer." Otherwise, it becomes a vain repetition.

Sadly, churches which emphasis the Lord's Prayer as a prayer itself rather than as a pattern, or use it as part of their private and public liturgy, would often fall into formalism and vain repetition.

Think of the Roman Catholic church. Think of their use of the rosary. This is what is recommended in the rosary centre on the website (<http://www.rosary-center.org/howto.htm>):

"Make the Sign of the Cross and say the Apostles' Creed.

Say the Lord's Prayer.

Say the "Hail Mary" three times. "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Say the Gloria Patri: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Announce the First Mystery; then say the Lord's Prayer.

Say ten Hail Marys, while meditating on the Mystery.

Say the Gloria Patri

Announce the Second Mystery; then say the Lord's Prayer. Repeat 6 and 7 and continue with Third, Fourth and Fifth Mysteries in the same manner."

If this is not vain repetition, I am not sure what is! One wonders how anyone could use the Lord's Prayer in such a way when our Lord personally condemns vain repetitions before he teaches the Lord's Prayer.

But what about Christian Churches? I believe that the problem exist in Christian or Protestant churches that use the Lord's Prayer in their liturgy too, for experience teaches us that it is quite impossible to repeat the same prayer every week and not be mentally disengaged in the exercise so that the words are uttered without much thought as to the meaning of the words in the prayer. **W**

WLC 188. Of how many parts doth the Lord's Prayer consist?

A. The Lord's Prayer consists of three parts; a preface, petitions, and a conclusion.

Proofs

Mt 6:9-13

Comments

The Lord's Prayer may be found in its most complete form in Matthew 6:9-13. Although it is a prayer it has a definite structure which makes it a very suitable didactic tool.

It has three parts, as follows:

1. A Preface:

Our Father which art in heaven,...

2. Six Petitions:

- a. *Hallowed be thy name.*
- b. *Thy kingdom come.*
- c. *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*
- d. *Give us this day our daily bread.*
- e. *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*
- f. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:*

3. A Conclusion:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

While this structure may be used a pattern for our public and even our private prayers, it is obvious that our prayers do not need to be fixed according to this pattern. Rather, this pattern teaches us how we should begin and end our prayer, and how we may petition the Lord, and what we should petition him for.

It is clear, for example, that we should not simply regurgitate Scripture in our prayer; and our prayer should not only comprise of statements of thanksgiving and praise however pious that may make the prayer sound. As the Lord teaches us that the larger part of prayer should consist in petition for His glory, for the needs of His church and for our personal needs, so we must learn to make such prayers.

Prayer is an outpouring of our hearts unto the Lord not only as the subjects of the King but as sons and daughters who have been entered into a covenant relationship with the Father by the blood of His Son and the power of His Spirit. It is as such an intimate response rather than a homiletical discourse. Such a response can best be crafted according to our Lord's instruction. Let us seek to learn how to pray from our Lord, rather than from men whose eloquence in prayer have moved our heart. **W**

WLC 189. What doth the Preface of the Lord's Prayer teach us?

A. The Preface of the Lord's prayer (contained in these words, *Our Father which art in heaven*,¹) teacheth us, when we pray, to draw near to God with confidence of His fatherly goodness, and our interest therein;² with reverence, and all other child-like dispositions,³ heavenly affections,⁴ and due apprehensions of His sovereign power, majesty, and gracious condescension:⁵ as also, to pray with and for others.⁶

Proofs

¹Mt 6:9; ²Lk 11:13; Rom 8:15; ³Isa 64:9; ⁴Ps 123:1; Lam 3:41; ⁵Isa 63:15–16; Neh 1:4–6; ⁶Acts 12:5.

Comments

We would almost always begin our prayers with a preface by which we address God. It may be a simple, "Father,...", or "Gracious heavenly Father,...", or even "Eternal and Almighty God, our Loving heavenly Father..." Very often, because of the sheer number of times we pray, we may utter these words without any thoughts to the meaning. But when our Lord teaches us to pray, every of His words are carefully chosen and therefore meaningful and instructive. These words are designed not only to give us an example of how we may begin our prayer, but to remind us of the attitude with which we should enter into prayer.

The preface of our Lord's prayer is in the words, "*Our Father which art in heaven*." What do these words teach us?

First, it teaches us "*to draw near to God with confidence of His fatherly goodness, and our interest therein...*" with reverence, and all other child-like dispositions" This is what our Lord must be reminding us to do by teaching us to call unto God as our 'Father.' We should approach him as children approach their loving fathers who are able and ready to help them.

There are some disagreements between theologians as to whether our Lord is teaching us directed our prayers to the first person of the Godhead or is he teaching us to draw near to God as a father.

I believe it is not essential for us to settle the question. The Scripture does teach us that Christ and the Spirit seeks to honour the Father. And it teaches us to pray unto God as our Father, in the name of Christ and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it appears that we should be speaking to the first of the Trinity as our Lord did in His prayer. But really, since the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are equal in power and glory, it is quite immaterial whether we are thinking of God-Triune or God the Father when we address God as 'Our Father.' What is important is that we must draw to God with a holy reverence and confidence as a child unto His father.

What a great privilege! We who were children of wrath have been made the sons and daughters of God!

We now have a family. We have Christ as our elder brother and the church as our brothers and sisters in Christ. But most of all, we have a heavenly Father. We have been adopted into His family, and He has given us His Spirit of Adoption, by whom we cry unto him as our 'Abba, Father' (Rom 8:15).

God is our heavenly Father. Though God is infinitely holy, Christ His Son has torn down the church so it possible for us to enter into the Holy of holies to commune with him with all boldness.

As our Father, God is pleased to receive our prayer, and He is ready and able to help us.

How should we respond to this truth? Shall we not come to him with gratitude and love whenever we come into his presence in prayer.

Prayer is not a liturgy. It is our fellowship with our heavenly Father. Therefore when we come to pray, let us remember not to simply blurt out some words. But let us speak our heart. Let us speak unto our heavenly Father who loves us and is please to commune with us at His throne.

Secondly, the preface of our Lord's Prayer teaches us to approach God with "heavenly affections, and due apprehensions of His sovereign power, majesty, and gracious condescension."

God is not just a father unto us. He is our *heavenly* Father. Therefore while we may boldly draw near unto Him as a child unto his father, we must never pray with a kind of familiar irreverence.

The modern society sees more and more children treating their fathers as equal — calling them by their first name, speaking to them without respect and showing them no honour before the world. And sadly this has entered even into Christianity.

But this should not be the case. And especially in prayer, the true child of God will know God as Abba, Father, and his heart is filled with a loving and holy fear of God that will not allow him to approach God any how.

He will approach God with love mingled with fear. He will approach him not with careless attitude, but as a child full of respect for his heavenly Father who is both sovereign and majestic. He is conscious that God is high and exalted, whereas he is a poor creature of dust; and so God's hearing of his prayer is a gracious condescension.

Finally, by teaching us to use the plural first person pronoun, 'Our', rather than the singular pronoun, "I", the Lord is teaching us "to pray with and for others."

It is interesting to note that the phrase 'my Father' in reference to God occurs 56 times in the New Testament, but each time, it is used by Christ our Lord. Now, it cannot be wrong to say 'My Father' in our private prayers—since the Lord teaches us that we are each His brothers and sisters (Mt 12:50) so that His Father is also my Father.

Why then does He teach us to address God as "Our Father"? I believe he is teaching us that prayer is not only an individual exercise. Pray is a privilege of every member of the church of Christ.

Therefore whenever when we pray,—whether in private or public,—we must remember that we are part of a vast family of God. So our catechism teaches us "to pray with and for others." That is with and for others in the church of Christ.

Therefore we must pray not only for ourselves, but for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Therefore we must pray with other believers. We must do so in our closets. We may be alone with the Lord, but we must join the church to pray on the issues that concern the church.

No Christians can be a lone-ranger. He must assemble with the saints. He must pray with the saints. Yes, when we gather together, not everyone will be able to pray aloud. But we must pray together. The person who is appointed to pray must pray as a representative of those

gather. He does not say “My Father,” but “Our Father.” He does not say: “I pray,” but “we pray.”

But what about the rest of the congregation. We must pray with him. We must not allow our minds to wander. We may elaborate on some petitions in our hearts, but we should never drift of into our private prayers or worst into slumber land.

A. In the First Petition, (which is, *Hallowed be thy name*,¹) acknowledging the utter inability and indisposition that is in ourselves and all men to honour God aright,² we pray, that God would by His grace enable and incline us and others to know, to acknowledge, and highly to esteem Him,³ His titles,⁴ attributes,⁵ ordinances, Word,⁶ works, and whatsoever He is pleased to make Himself known by;⁷ and to glorify Him in thought, word,⁸ and deed:⁹ that He would prevent and remove atheism,¹⁰ ignorance,¹¹ idolatry,¹² profaneness,¹³ and whatsoever is dishonourable to Him;¹⁴ and, by His over-ruling providence, direct and dispose of all things to His own glory.¹⁵

Proofs

¹Mt 6:9; ²2 Cor 3:5; Ps 51:15; ³Ps 67:2–3; ⁴Ps 83:18; ⁵Ps 86:10–13, 15; ⁶2 Thes 3:1; Ps 147:19–20; 138:1–3; 2 Cor 2:14–15; ⁷Ps 145; 8; ⁸Ps 103:1; 19:14; ⁹Phil 1:9, 11; ¹⁰Ps 67:1–4; ¹¹Eph 1:17–18; ¹²Ps 97:7; ¹³Ps 74:18, 22–23; ¹⁴2 Kgs 19:15–16; ¹⁵2 Chr 20:6, 10–12; Ps 83; 140:4, 8.

Comments

The first petition of the Lord's prayer "Hallowed be thy name." Now, the word 'hallowed' means to 'make holy', or 'to sanctify'. That is to say, 'to set apart from the world, or to exalt and glorify.' So when we pray 'hallowed be thy name,' we are praying 'sanctify thy name,' or 'glorify thy name.' But what does that mean?

Well, we must remember that the 'name of God' does not only refer to the terms which we use to refer to Him. It does not only refer to terms such as 'God', 'Father', 'Jehovah' or 'Lord.' When the Bible speaks about the name of God, it is usually referring to God's self-revelation in its manifold fullness, or as our answer puts it, "his titles, attributes, ordinances, word, works [i.e. creation and providence], and whatsoever He is pleased to make himself known by."

Bearing this in mind, we may, expand the petition 'Hallowed be thy name' into three sub-petitions:

First, "acknowledging the utter inability and indisposition that is in ourselves and all men to honour God aright," we must pray that God will open our eyes to see his glory. We must as our catechism elaborate, "pray, that God would by His grace enable and incline us and others to know, to acknowledge, and highly to esteem [God's name or all that God is pleased to make himself known by]."

We are by nature spiritually blind. Because of our natural blindness, we do not see God's glory in Creation as we should. Creation displays God's glory so clearly that we have no excuse, yet we suppress the truth and would not acknowledge His greatness.

Likewise, we do not appreciate God's appointed ordinances as we should. We should highly esteem His Word, but we do not. We should rejoice in the church and the means of grace He has appointed for us to fellowship with Him, but we often do not.

Left to ourselves we would go through life like a donkey walking through an art gallery.

This surely would be unacceptable to the child of God. The child of God desires to explore His Father's world and to appreciate and understand all that His Father has done and is doing so that he may rejoice with His Father.

When we pray 'hallowed be thy name,' we are essentially acknowledging our ignorance and blindness and asking God to help us to see and appreciate and acknowledge who God is and what He doing in the world and in our lives.

So for example, we may pray specifically:

- "Father, help us to see thy greatness and glory as we behold thy creation in this beautiful park."
- "Lord, help us to see how this disaster will redound to thy glory."
- "Lord, help me to see how this trial will do good to my soul and bring glory to thy name"
- "Lord, help us to appreciate thy Word so that we may rejoice in thy greatness"
- Enable thy minister to preach in such a way that thy name may be glorified in our eyes and in the ears of all who hear.

Secondly, we must pray that God will strengthen our hands to enable us to manifest His glory or in other words "to glorify Him in thought, word, and deed" and that "He would prevent and remove atheism, ignorance, idolatry, profaneness, and whatsoever is dishonourable to Him."

God is glorifying himself by ordering all things to work together not only for the good of his children, but also for His own glory.

Since God is ordering all things, including all our actions, we know that we will glorify God even without trying. Even our sinful action will work together for the glory of God. The reprobate or vessel of wrath will display the glory of God too by showing his infinite justice in punishing sin. And they will serve to highlight the riches of his mercy towards His children.

But as the children of God, we must desire to glorify God actively and deliberately! So we must ask God to enable us to glorify Him in our words, deeds and thoughts.

For example, we may pray:

- Father, transform us by the renewing our minds so that our lives will shine forth thy glory;
- Make use better mirrors of Thee.
- Increase our faith and our love for thee so that we may magnify thy name.
- Keeping us from loosing our saltiness, and from⁷ hiding our light under the bushel.
- Remove any doubt, ignorance and idolatry from our hearts. Cause us to run for thee as being more than conquerors in Christ.
- As thou art most greatly glorified when they children worship thee with sincerity in public, so order thy providence so that we may not be hindered from coming to worship.
- So order the circumstances around our lives so that we may best be used as thy witnesses amongst an unbelieving world.
- Use this church as an instrument to draw other sheep thou hast so that we may all join our voices together to praise Thy holy name.

Finally, the first petition also teaches us to pray that God would glorify Himself by His works; or as our catechism puts it, we must pray that God would "by His over-ruling providence, direct and dispose of all things to His own glory."

God is the Creator of all things. He has made all things to the end that His glory may be display. Creation is as it were a massive exhibition. It is an exhibition of the wisdom, power, goodness and majesty of God.

The Psalmist says:

“O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens” (Ps 8:1).

The four and twenty elders who sit before the throne of God cry out day and night:

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev 4:11).

God has created all things for His own glory; and He is perfectly capable of directing everything in the universe in such a way that glory may redound to His name.

But God is pleased when His children come before Him desiring that He glorifies Himself by all the things by which He reveals Himself.

So we ought daily we pray that God will glorify Himself by His providence.

When look at the events of the world, including the terrible disasters and terrorism and we must pray, “Lord glorify thyself!”

When we look at our own life and the troubles that we are going through, we may not understand why we have to go through these trials, but we not pray: ‘Lord, why? Why so unfair?’ We must pray rather, “Lord, thou doeth well! Glorify thyself even in my trial!”

Father, hallowed by thy Name! **W**

A. In the Second Petition (which is, *Thy kingdom come*,¹) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan,² we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed,³ the gospel propagated throughout the world,⁴ the Jews called,⁵ the fullness of the Gentiles brought in;⁶ the Church furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances,⁷ purged from corruption,⁸ countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate;⁹ that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted;¹⁰ that Christ would rule in our hearts here,¹¹ and hasten the time of His second coming, and our reigning with Him for ever;¹² and that He would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of His power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.¹³

Proofs

¹Mt 6:10; ²Eph 2:2–3; ³Ps 68:1, 18; Rev 12:10–11; ⁴2 Thes 3:1; ⁵Rom 10:1; ⁶Jn 17:9, 20; Rom 11:25–26; Ps 67; ⁷Mt 9:38; 2 Thes 3:1; ⁸Mal 1:11; Zeph 3:9; ⁹1 Tim 2:1–2; ¹⁰Acts 4:29–30; Eph 6:18–20; Rom 15:29–30, 32; 2 Thes 1:11; 2:16–17; ¹¹Eph 3:14–20; ¹²Rev 22:20; ¹³Isa 64:1–2; Rev 4:8–11.

Comments

The second petition of the Lord's prayer is "Thy kingdom come." At first sight, this does not seem to be a petition. It looks like a mere statement, except that it has 'come' rather than 'comes'. But what is not clear in the English is very clear in the Greek, which may literally be translated: "Let come the Kingdom of yours."

That is, when we pray: "Thy Kingdom come" we are saying, "Lord, let thy kingdom come."

But what does that mean?

In the first place, what is the Kingdom that this petition refers to? Well, this kingdom is the Kingdom of God. But what is the kingdom of God?

Well, in the Scriptures the 'kingdom of God' is also known as the 'kingdom of heaven.' These are synonymous terms. But the term 'kingdom of heaven' reminds us that this kingdom comprises subjects who are citizens of heaven.

But the citizens of heaven are first pilgrims and strangers in this world. They are in this world, but not of this world. This means that the kingdom of God does not only exist in heaven or in eternity. It exists here and now too.

Thus Reformed theologians speak of the kingdom of God in terms the 'kingdom of grace' and the 'kingdom of glory.' The kingdom grace is the kingdom in its earthly and temporal manifestation. The kingdom of glory is its heavenly and eternal manifestation.

Think about the life cycle of a tree frog. The tree frog begins its life under water as a tadpole. But slowly it is transformed and eventually it emerges out of the water; and it lives the rest of its life in the treetops above the water.

So it is with the members of the kingdom of God. They are "*by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan*" together with all other man. By the grace of God they are given citizenship in His kingdom as subjects in the realm of the 'kingdom of grace.' But soon they graduate to become subjects in the realm of the 'kingdom of glory.'

But who are the subjects of the kingdom of God? Put simply, they are true Christians. This is why the kingdom of God is also known as the 'kingdom of Christ' (Eph 5:5) in the Scriptures.

Every person in this world belongs either to the kingdom of Christ, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords; or to the kingdom of Satan, who is the prince of the power of the air.

Christ has been appointed by the Father to be the King in His Kingdom. The kingdom of grace, comprise those who have forsaken the kingdom of Satan and have been translated by God into the Kingdom of his dear Son. These are those who truly love and obey Christ.

The kingdom of glory on the other hand, is the eternal kingdom of Christ. That is, it is the consummation of His kingdom, which will be revealed He comes again as the victorious Judge and King.

So when we pray "Thy kingdom come," we are really pleading with the Father:

"Father, let the kingdom of thy dear Son march on. Let it be victorious! Let it grow in strength, let it grow in numbers and prosperity! Let it quickly put down all those who oppose you. Cause that Christ and His army will quickly bruise Satan under their feet."

Bearing this in mind, catechism teaches us that we should learn to pray for 5 things from this petition.

First, we should pray "*that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in.*" In other words, we should pray for the Christianisation of the world through the evangelisation and conversion of Jews and Gentiles.

Secondly, we should pray that "the Church [will be] furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate" That is to say, we should pray that the institution of the church will flourish by having sufficiently qualified offices and through the protection of the civil authority.

Thirdly, we must pray that "*the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted.*" That we would should pray that the ministry of the church be carried out faithfully and effectively to the saving of souls and the building up of lives.

Fourthly, we should pray "*that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of His second coming, and our reigning with Him for ever.*" In other words, we should pray that the kingship of Christ might not only be experienced by us, but also longed for by us.

Finally, we should learn from the second petition to pray that Christ our Lord "*would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of His power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.*" Not only do we desire that we experience the kingship of Christ personally in our heart, we desire also that the kingship of Christ may be manifested in the world so the growth of the kingdom of grace, and the hastening of the kingdom of glory. **W**

WLC 192. What do we pray for in the Third Petition?

A. In the Third Petition, (which is, *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*,¹) acknowledging, that by nature we and all men are not only utterly unable and unwilling to know and do the will of God,² but prone to rebel against His Word,³ to repine and murmur against His providence,⁴ and wholly inclined to do the will of the flesh, and of the devil;⁵ we pray, that God would by His Spirit take away from ourselves and others all blindness,⁶ weakness,⁷ indisposedness,⁸ and perverseness of heart;⁹ and by His grace make us able and willing to know, do, and submit to His will in all things,¹⁰ with the like humility,¹¹ cheerfulness,¹² faithfulness,¹³ diligence,¹⁴ zeal,¹⁵ sincerity,¹⁶ and constancy,¹⁷ as the angels do in heaven.¹⁸

Proofs

¹Mt 6:10; ²Rom 7:18; Job 21:14; 1 Cor 2:14; ³Rom 8:7; ⁴Ex 17:7; Num 14:2; ⁵Eph 2:2; ⁶Eph 1:17–18; ⁷Eph 3:16; ⁸Mt 26:40–41; ⁹Jer 31:18–19; ¹⁰Ps 119:1, 8, 35–36; Acts 21:14; ¹¹Mic 6:8; ¹²Ps 100:2; Job 1:21; 2 Sam 15:25–26; ¹³Isa 38:3; ¹⁴Ps 119:4–5; ¹⁵Rom 12:11; ¹⁶Ps 119:80; ¹⁷Ps 119:112; ¹⁸Isa 6:2–3; Ps 103:20–21; Mt 18:10.

Comments

The third petition of the Lord’s prayer is “*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*.”

What is the will of God? The Scripture teaches us that we can view God’s will as having two aspects. One aspect is the decretive will of God. This refers to what God has decreed He would do from all eternity. This aspect of His will is secret until it is revealed in providence. God, for example, has willed how long each one of us will live. But this will is secret. We don’t know if we would live another 20 years, or another 20 days; or another 20 seconds. When the moment comes for us to die,—whether it be tomorrow or next year or forty years time, then we shall know what God has willed for us for the length of our life.

The other aspect of God’s will is his perceptive will. This will is revealed today in the Holy Scriptures. For example, it is God’s will for all believers that they should pray. It is also His will that we should not rebel against Him, by, say, profaning the Sabbath day.

By teaching us to pray “*thy will be done in earth*”, the Lord is reminding us of our natural antipathy to the will of God that we may acknowledge “that by nature we and all men are not only utterly unable and unwilling to know and do the will of God [as revealed in His Word], but prone to rebel against His Word, to repine and murmur against His providence [which reveals His decretive will], and wholly inclined to do the will of the flesh, and of the devil.”

It is with this acknowledgement that we pray, “thy will be done.” More specifically, we pray:

Firstly, that “God would by His Spirit take away from ourselves and others all blindness, weakness, indisposedness, and perverseness of heart.” In order that His will be done, God must make use willing to do His will. God can do so by His Spirit. He alone can remove the obstacles that stand in our way of being willing to do God’s will. We must pray that He would do so to us and to others—both for believers and unbelievers.

Conversely, in the second place, we should pray that God would “by His grace make us able and willing to know, do, and submit to His will in all things, with the like humility, cheerfulness, faithfulness, diligence, zeal, sincerity, and constancy, as the angels do in heaven.” In respect to the perceptive will of God, we pray that God would open our eyes and give us the strength, faithfulness, zeal, diligence, sincerity and constancy to obey Him as the angels obey Him in heaven. But in regards to God’s decretive will, we must pray that as His will unfolds in providence we will humbly and cheerfully acquiesce to it, as the angels do in heaven. We must pray that He would give us an attitude of thanksgiving in the confidence that He is working all things together for our good and His own glory. We must pray that He will keep us from all temptation and complaints. **W**

A. In the Fourth Petition, (which is, *Give us this day our daily bread*,¹) acknowledging, that in Adam, and by our own sin, we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them;² and that neither they of themselves are able to sustain us,³ nor we to merit,⁴ or by our own industry to procure them;⁵ but prone to desire,⁶ get,⁷ and use them unlawfully:⁸ we pray for ourselves and others, that both they and we, waiting upon the providence of God from day to day in the use of lawful means, may, of His free gift, and as to His fatherly wisdom shall seem best, enjoy a competent portion of them;⁹ and have the same continued and blessed unto us in our holy and comfortable use of them,¹⁰ and contentment in them;¹¹ and be kept from all things that are contrary to our temporal support and comfort.¹²

Proofs

¹Mt 6:11; ²Gen 2:17; 3:17; Rom 8:20–22; Jer 5:25; Deut 28:15–68; ³Deut 8:3; ⁴Gen 32:10; ⁵Deut 8:17–18; ⁶Jer 6:13; Mk 7:21–22; ⁷Hos 12:7; ⁸Jas 4:3; ⁹Gen 43:12–14; 28:20; Eph 4:28; 2 Thes 3:11–12; Phil 4:6; ¹⁰1 Tim 4:3–5; ¹¹1 Tim 6:6–8; ¹²Prov 30:8–9.

Comments

The fourth petition of the Lord's prayer is "*Give us this day our daily bread*."

In teaching us to pray this petition, our Lord is first of all reminding us that we must not assume that we deserve to receive even the outward blessings of this life. We deserve nothing but God's curses. Therefore we must petition the Lord also for the things that we need for our present life; and we must do so with the acknowledgement "*that in Adam, and by our own sin, we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them*."

At the same time, because we are prone to become over-pragmatic in regards to the provision and use of these things, it is important for us also to be clear in our mind that these things of themselves are unable "to sustain us", nor can we do anything "to merit" them, nor can we by "our own industry... procure them" except the Lord provides them to us. At the same time, we must be aware of how we are "prone to desire, get, and use them unlawfully."

Bearing this in mind, let us "pray for ourselves and others" for three things.

First, let us pray that "both they and we, waiting upon the providence of God from day to day in the use of lawful means, may, of His free gift, and as to His fatherly wisdom shall seem best, enjoy a competent portion of them." That is to say, we should pray that God would not only provide us sufficiently for our temporal need through lawful means such as honest labour, but all cultivate a spirit of gratitude and reliance upon Him knowing that he will always deal with us wisely and for our good.

Secondly, let us pray that we may have these provision "continued and blessed unto us in our holy and comfortable use of them, and contentment in them." That is to say, we should pray that God would not only continue to supply our needs, but supply them with his blessing so that we may not be tempted to discontentment nor complacency. In this regard the prayer of Asaph is exemplary: "give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov 30:8-9). *Thirdly*, and conversely, let us pray that we may be "kept from all things that are contrary to our temporal support and comfort." That is, in simple terms, we should pray that God will keep us from temporal troubles. Some may object to this prayer, saying that we should rather pray that God will give us grace not only to endure trials but to benefit spiritually from them. But such an objection is simply unrealistic, for prayer is an outpouring of our heart unto our Father, and as we cringe at the thought of temporal pains and suffering, so we pour our hearts unto the Lord to keep us from such. Thus Jabez prayed:

"Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, *and that thou wouldest keep me from evil*, that it may not grieve me!" (1 Chr 4:10).

Likewise, Jacob prayed:

"Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children" (Gen 32:11).

Even our Lord himself prayed: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mt 26:39).

So it is legitimate to pray that the Lord will deliver from evil. Of course, if the Lord in His wise providence lead us through trials despite our petition, then we must not only pray for deliverance, but for grace to learn the precious lessons that accompany the trial.

A. In the Fifth Petition, (which is, *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*,¹) acknowledging, that we and all others are guilty both of original and actual sin, and thereby become debtors to the justice of God; and that neither we, nor any other creature, can make the least satisfaction for that debt.² we pray for ourselves and others, that God of His free grace would, through the obedience and satisfaction of Christ, apprehended and applied by faith, acquit us both from the guilt and punishment of sin,³ accept us in His Beloved,⁴ continue His favour and grace to us,⁵ pardon our daily failings,⁶ and fill us with peace and joy, in giving us daily more and more assurance of forgiveness;⁷ which we are the rather emboldened to ask, and encouraged to expect, when we have this testimony in ourselves, that we from the heart forgive others their offences.⁸

Proofs

¹Mt 6:12; ²Rom 3:9–22; Mt 18:24–25; Ps 130:3–4; ³Rom 3:24–26; Heb 9:22; ⁴Eph 1:6–7; ⁵2 Pet 1:2; ⁶Hos 14:2; Jer 14:7; ⁷Rom 15:13; Ps 51:7–10, 12; ⁸Lk 11:4; Mt 6:14–15; 18:35.

Comments

The fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer is "*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*." Most of us who grew up praying the Lord's Prayer, were taught to pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

This is an old rendition of the 5th petition based on Luke 11:4 where we see the Lord teaching His disciples to pray saying: "And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Lk 11:4)

The word 'sins' in this verse is the Greek *αἰμαρτίνα*, which speaks of 'missing the mark,' or transgressing or trespassing of God's law. So it is not wrong to pray "forgive us our trespasses."

But the word 'debt' is really a richer and more instructive word. For sin makes us debtors to God. Indeed, the Lord no doubt teaches us to pray this 5th petition because "we and all others are guilty both of original and actual sin, and thereby become debtors to the justice of God; and... neither we, nor any other creature, can make the least satisfaction for that debt." Only God can make satisfaction for that debt. Only God can forgive us our debt, no one else. So we call upon God to forgive us our debts. More specifically, we pray "for ourselves and others":

Firstly, "that God of His free grace would, through the obedience and satisfaction of Christ, apprehended and applied by faith, acquit us both from the guilt and punishment of sin, [and] accept us in His Beloved." This is a prayer we must pray at the point of our conversion, when by faith we receive Christ Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. It is a prayer that marks our entrance into Christ, and a change of our status from children of wrath into children of love. In answer to this petition, our Lord declares His forgiveness and acceptance of us in Christ, and our acquittal from all guilt and punishment due to our sin, original and action.

But the fact is that although we are forgiven, we still incur God's fatherly displeasure whenever we sin. God's judicial wrath is removed through the propitiation of Christ, but when we sin, we still incur God's fatherly wrath! It is like: when my son dishonours me, I do not disown him. He remains my child. I do not cut him off as his transgression deserve. But that does not mean that I would pretend that nothing has happen. No, no; until he comes and ask for forgiveness, there will be a strain in our relationship. I will not talk with him favourably.

The prophet Isaiah is saying something similar when he says:

"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa 59:2)

And likewise, the psalmist says:

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps 66:18)

Though we are the children of God, when we sin against Him, we cause God to turn His face away from us. You remember how on the Cross of Calvary, the Lord Jesus, the only begotten Son of God was bearing the sin of the elect. He was at that moment the guiltiest person who ever lived in the history of mankind. How did He Father view Him. His Father turned His, as it were, from Him. For three hours, the Son of God and was blanketed with thick darkness. At the end of the three hours, He cried out "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!"

The Father did not disown the Son, but sin momentarily separated Him from His Son.

How much more for us who are adoptive sons and daughters. How can we expect God to hear our prayers when we regard iniquities in our heart?

It is for this reason, that we must constantly come to the Father to seek His forgiveness afresh. We must do so, especially when we become conscious of our sins.

Thus, *secondly*, we pray that God would "[1] continue His favour and grace to us, [2] pardon our daily failings, and [3] fill us with peace and joy, in giving us daily more and more assurance of forgiveness." So we are asking, first of all, that God will continue to show us his favour as those who have been justified and forgiven in Christ; secondly we are confessing our sin and asking the Father to pardon our faults and turn His fatherly displeasure from us, for the sake of His Son; and thirdly, we are praying that he will ever give us the assurance of His forgiveness and restore unto us the joy of our salvation especially when we sin against Him.

Our Lord also teaches us to add to our petition for forgiveness the words, "*as we forgive our debtors*." This is not to say that when we forgive our debtors then God owe it to us to forgive us, or that God should follow our example and forgive us. Rather, what our Lord is teaching us is that we may be encouraged to ask God to forgive us if we ourselves forgive our debtors. Or as our catechism puts it: "we are the rather emboldened to ask [to be forgiven], and encouraged to expect [forgiveness], when we have this testimony in ourselves, that we from the heart forgive others their offences." But conversely, what our Lord is teaching us is also that we cannot expect God's forgiveness, if we do not forgive those who trespass against us.

This point is obviously hard to swallow, and the Lord knew it. So he explains immediately after he teaches the Lord's Prayer:

"¹⁴ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: ¹⁵ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt 6:14-15).

What is the Lord saying, but that if we don't forgive those who trespass against us, then we should not expect God to forgive us. Or to put it in another way, if we refuse to forgive anyone, it suggests that we are still in the bonds of iniquity.

The point is: Christians cannot bear grudges. It does not matter whether the person who offends me comes to me or not. If I bear a grudge against him, then there is indication that I am still in the bonds of iniquity. It would be worst if the person comes to me and ask for forgiveness and I refuse to forgive. But it is no better if the person does not come to me, and I refuse to go to him, and therefore continue to bear a grudge.

A forgiving spirit is such an important mark of regeneration that our Lord in teaching us to ask the Father for forgiveness reminds us that we can expect his forgiveness only if we also forgive those who trespass against us.

No child of God will not forgive. The child of God knows that he has been forgiven by the Father despite his wickedness and rebellion against him. He knows that no one can owe him a debt that is greater than the debt he owes to his heavenly Father. And so He will forgive. This what our Lord is teaching us in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

This servant owed his master 10,000 talents or 60 million denari. The master forgave him. But this ungrateful man would not forgive his fellow servant of a debt of 100 denari. So when the master has called him up, he says:

“O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: ³³ Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?” (Mt 18:32-35)

The Lord Jesus then add:

“³⁴ And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. ³⁵ So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses” (Mt 18:34-35).

Bearing this instruction of the Lord in mind, I cannot pray to be forgiven without humbly seeking strength to forgive. **W**

A. In the Sixth Petition, (which is, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*,¹) acknowledging, that the most wise, righteous, and gracious God, for divers holy and just ends, may so order things, that we may be assaulted, foiled, and for a time led captive by temptations;² that Satan,³ the world,⁴ and the flesh, are ready powerfully to draw us aside, and ensnare us;⁵ and that we, even after the pardon of our sins, by reason of our corruption,⁶ weakness, and want of watchfulness,⁷ are not only subject to be tempted, and forward to expose ourselves unto temptations,⁸ but also of ourselves unable and unwilling to resist them, to recover out of them, and to improve them;⁹ and worthy to be left under the power of them.¹⁰ we pray,¹⁵ that God would so over-rule the world and all in it,¹¹ subdue the flesh,¹² and restrain Satan,¹³ order all things,¹⁴ bestow and bless all means of grace,¹⁵ and quicken us to watchfulness in the use of them, that we and all His people may by His providence be kept from being tempted to sin;¹⁶ or, if tempted, that by His Spirit we may be powerfully supported and enabled to stand in the hour of temptation;¹⁷ or when fallen, raised again and recovered out of it,¹⁸ and have a sanctified use and improvement thereof.¹⁹ that our sanctification and salvation may be perfected,²⁰ Satan trodden under our feet,²¹ and we fully freed from sin, temptation, and all evil, for ever.²²

Proofs

¹Mt 6:13; ²Chr 32:31; ³1 Chr 21:1; ⁴Lk 21:34; Mk 4:19; ⁵Jas 1:14; ⁶Gal 5:17; ⁷Mt 26:41; ⁸Mt 26:69–72; Gal 2:11–14; 2 Chr 18:3; cf. 2 Chr 19:2; ⁹Rom 7:23–24; 1 Chr 21:1–4; 2 Chr 16:7–10; ¹⁰Ps 81:11–12; ¹¹Jn 17:15; ¹²Ps 51:10; 119:133; ¹³2 Cor 12:7–8; ¹⁴1 Cor 10:12–13; ¹⁵Heb 13:20–21; ¹⁶Mt 26:41; Ps 19:13; ¹⁷Eph 3:14–17; 1 Thes 3:13; Jude 24; ¹⁸Ps 51:12; ¹⁹1 Pet 5:8–10; ²⁰2 Cor 13:7, 9; ²¹Rom 16:20; Zech 3:2; Lk 22:31–32; ²²Jn 17:15; 1 Thes 5:23.

Comments

The sixth and final petition of the Lord’s Prayer is “*lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*.”

As this petition can easily be misunderstood, it is helpful for us to begin by noting first of all the difference between temptation and sin. Sin is when we transgress God’s law, or fail to measure up to the demands of God’s law. Sin is lawlessness says the apostle John (1 Jn 3:18). When we do anything,—whether in our thoughts, speech or deeds,—that fall short of God’s law or is contrary to God’s law, we sin against God. Temptation, on the other hand, speaks of the conflict we experience in our heart when something which we know is wrong seems attractive to us. Eve knew that it was wrong to eat of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil; but when Satan lied to her about the benefits of eating of the fruit, Eve was tempted.

Secondly, let us understand in summary that our Lord is teaching us in this 6th petition to pray “that God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted” (WSC 106). That is this is a petition to the Father that He keep us from being conquered or overwhelmed by temptation.

We must make this petition for four reasons:

- First, of all, “the most wise, righteous, and gracious God, for divers holy and just ends, may so order things, that we may be assaulted, foiled, and for a time led captive by temptations.” That is to say, temptations are comprehended in God’s providence, and He has not ruled it out from our lives, but does order them for His own glory and our good.
- Secondly, we can be tempted in many many ways. In particular, “Satan, the world, and the flesh, are ready powerfully to draw us aside, and ensnare us” Thirdly, though we are justified in Christ, we are not immune to temptations, and may in fact run headlong into them in our foolishness. Our catechism elaborates that we “even after the pardon of our sins, by reason of our corruption, weakness, and want of watchfulness, are not only subject to be tempted, and forward to expose ourselves unto temptations, but also of ourselves unable and unwilling to resist them, to recover out of them, and to improve them”
- And fourthly, we are “worthy to be left under the power of [temptations].” That is to say: because of our ingratitude towards the Lord, we deserve to be assaulted by tempted, and God is not obliged to deliver us from them.

Bearing these four reasons in mind, let us consider what exactly we should pray for. Our catechism teaches us that we should be praying for three things:

- First of all, we should pray, that God would condescend to keep us from being tempted in the first place both by his providential ordering of the circumstances surrounding our lives with us and by making us love righteousness rather than wickedness through the work of His Spirit in our heart and the use of the Means of Grace He has appointed. In other words, we should pray that “God would so over-rule the world and all in it, subdue the flesh, and restrain Satan, order all things, bestow and bless all means of grace, and quicken us to watchfulness in the use of them, that we and all His people may by His providence be kept from being tempted to sin.”
- Secondly, recognising that if we do fall into temptation, then no one but the Holy Spirit can help us at the moment, we should pray “that by His Spirit we may be powerfully supported and enabled to stand in the hour [or moment] of temptation.”
- Thirdly, recognising that there will be occasions when we will fall into temptation, we must pray that if we do fall, we will be by the Lord’s grace “raised again and recovered out of it, and have a sanctified use and improvement thereof.” Simply, stated, we must pray that we will be granted repentance and that we learn precious lessons from the fall.
- Fourthly and finally, we must desire and therefore pray “that our sanctification and salvation may be perfected, Satan trodden under our feet, and we fully freed from sin, temptation, and all evil, for ever.” We must this prayer not out of a desire to have uninterrupted fellowship with God, but out of a desire that God’s name may be glorified by our lives. **W**

A. The Conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, (which is, *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*¹) teacheth us to enforce our petitions with arguments,² which are to be taken, not from any worthiness in ourselves, or in any other creature, but from God;³ and with our prayers to join praises,⁴ ascribing to God alone eternal sovereignty, omnipotency, and glorious excellency,⁵ in regard whereof, as He is able and willing to help us,⁶ so we by faith are emboldened to plead with Him that He would,⁷ and quietly to rely upon Him, that He will fulfil our requests.⁸ And, to testify this our desire and assurance, we say, *Amen.*⁹

Proofs

¹Mt 6:13; ²Rom 15:30; ³Dan 9:4, 7–9, 16–19; ⁴Phil 4:6; ⁵1 Chr 29:10–13; ⁶Eph 3:20–21; Lk 11:13; ⁷2 Chr 20:6, 11; ⁸2 Chr 14:11; ⁹1 Cor 14:16; Rev 22:20–21.

Comments

The conclusion of the Lord's Prayer is "*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*"

Our Lord is the God-Man. Unlike imperfect men, His words are always carefully chosen. Never does he say anything that has no meaning. And when he is teaching us how to pray, we can expect every word to be carefully weighed.

So we must not simply gloss through these concluding words of his prayer.

In particular, our catechism teaches us that we may learn 4 things from these concluding words, namely: (1) We must augment our prayers with arguments; (2) We must join praises to our prayers; (3) We must pray with assurance, and testify of our assurance in prayer.

1. Pray with Arguments

Our heavenly Father is pleased not only to hear about what we desire from him. He is please also to hear why we think He should answer our prayers. He is pleased, in other words to hear our arguments. Therefore, we should "enforce our petitions with arguments" which are to be drawn, "not from any worthiness in ourselves, or in any other creature, but from God."

Our Lord Jesus is, as it were, giving us an example of using arguments in the conclusion of the 6 petitions.

He teaches us to plead with the Father to answer our prayers by appealing to His sovereignty, power and glory. "*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.*"

Here are then 3 interrelated arguments:

Firstly, our Lord teaches us to appeal to the Father to hear our petition because the kingdom belongs to Him. The kingdom refers to everything in this universe, for everything in this universe is being ruled by God and by Christ His co-regent.

Thus in saying, "*For thine is the kingdom,*" we are saying: "For Thou art sovereign. Thou art the ruler over all things in this universe"!

All things belong unto God to order for His own glory, so God has the authority to give us all things that we need according to our desires.

Secondly, we should appeal to the Father on the basis that power belongs to Him. God is not only sovereign, He is also omnipotent. Therefore, He not only has the right to do what He wills, but He is able all His holy will.

Thus, in saying "*thine is the power,*" we are acknowledging that God has the power to answer our prayers according to our desires if He chooses to do so. And therefore, if He does not do so, it must be for very good reasons.

But *thirdly*, we should petition the Father on the basis that glory belongs to Him. In saying '*thine is the glory,*' we are acknowledging that glorious excellency belongs to God alone and that God has the right to glorify himself. In fact, we desire that He glorifies himself; and we desire to be enabled more and more to see his glory and to glorify Him with our lives.

So we desire that God may glorify himself even in the way He hears and answers our prayers.

In our prayers, we must learn to use arguments. We may and should use these arguments. But we must learn as the puritans did to pray with convincing arguments—not that God needs to be convinced, but that we need convincing that our prayer is in accordance to God's word.

And as our Lord teaches us to do so, we know that God is pleased when we come unto Him with arguments in our prayers. But at same time, let us notice that the arguments that our Lord teaches us to use are at the same time expressions of praise unto the Father.

Therefore secondly, we must learn to...

2. Pray with Praise

We must with our prayers, "join praises, ascribing to God alone eternal sovereignty, omnipotency, and glorious excellency."

We have already considered how these three attributes of God are highlighted by our Lord in the words "*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.*"

In highlighting these attributes and other attributes and works of God in our prayers, whether in arguments, or simply in our expression of adoration, we are praising the Lord.

Praises for our heavenly Father, in other words, do not need to be in a separate segment of prayer such as in the way that children are often taught using the acronym: CATS—Confession, Adoration, Thanks-giving and Supplication.

We should in fact constantly be full of praise for our Father in all aspects of our prayers, for He alone is worthy of our honour and praise.

And not only so, but finally, we must...

3. Pray with Assurance

In prayers we are but powerless creatures coming into the presence of the sovereign, omnipotent, and altogether glorious God.

This should humble us to the dust. But at the same time, we are encourage to pray— knowing that in Christ, God has entered into a covenant relationship with us, and that He has adopted as His adopted us as His sons and daughters.

God, who is sovereign, omnipotent and glorious has made us his children. What shall we do but come unto Him confidently, knowing that God is pleased to hear our prayers and able to answer our prayers.

We can hope in prayer because the result or answer to our prayer is not dependant on ourselves or on our worthiness. It is dependant on God alone.

God alone is He to whom belongs the Kingdom. He alone is sovereign over all things and own all things.

God alone is truly powerful or omnipotent. He alone can do all things.

God alone is He to whom belongs glory for ever, and so He is pleased to magnify His own glory by hearing and answering the prayer of His own children.

Thus when we come to prayer, we ought to come with the assurance that God is “able and willing to help us” according to the desires of our heart, and therefore we should “by faith” be “emboldened to plead with Him” with the quiet confidence that He would indeed “fulfil our request” as long as our petitions are in accordance to His will.

“And, to testify this our desire and assurance, we say, *Amen*.”

The word ‘amen’ is obviously not an English word. It is rather a Hebrew word. It is a word that has always been used by the people of God from ancient times.

It has been used by the people when a curse or blessing is pronounced. It was used to respond to the reading of God’s Word. It has been used in response to doxological statements of praise. It was used to conclude prayers or to respond to the prayers of others. It is a word that the people of God used in public assemblies to indicate that they indicate their agreement to anything that is said in public.

It was used by God’s people when they spoke Hebrew. It continue to be used without any translation by they began to use Aramaic and Greek in their worship and in their day to day conversion. Today, it continue to be used by God’s people everywhere in the world. ‘Amen’ has become the most well-know Hebrew word, and indeed the most well-known word in any language in the world.

Whether you speak Hebrew, Latin, English, French, Chinese, Arabic, Malay... you would know the word ‘Amen.’ Whatever language the people of God speak with, they would close their prayers with the word ‘Amen.’

This phenomenon no doubt came about because our Lord teaches us to close our prayers with ‘Amen.’ The Lord’s prayer was recorded in Greek, but the closing word is a Hebrew word.

What does this word mean? Some take it merely as a final punctuation to end our prayers. For these the word has much meaning as a full-stop. But to use the word in this way is to use it wrongly. For the word has a meaning.

It means simply, “so be it,” “Let it me so,” or “Let it truly be so.” It is a word that is closely related to the Hebrew word ‘amam’ which means believe. When we say ‘amen’ at the end of your prayers, we are saying, “We believe that what we are saying is true and I desire that it be so.”

When we are hearing someone pray, and we say ‘amen’ (which we should), we are saying, “I agree with him, his prayer is my prayer” (cf. 1 Cor 14:16).

And thus we return to the idea that we begun with when we started to study the Lord’s Prayer upon the word ‘Our.’ God has made and redeemed us to glorify and enjoy Him not as mere individuals but as members of His covenant people, the Church. United to Christ, our covenant head, we shall enjoy and glorify God together with one another for all eternity. Therefore, let us run the Christian race together with full assurance of the love of the Father for us. Amen. **W**