

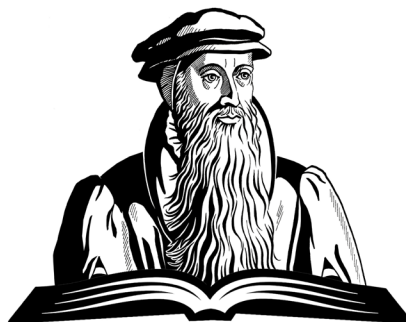
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #2, Lord's Day 1, part 2

The Pattern of Christian Experience



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Sermon #2, Lord's Day 1, part 2

**The Pattern of
Christian Experience**

Read: Psalm 107. verses 1 to 32
Question and Answer #2

i) Introduction and Historical Review

- 1. Experiential Acquaintance with Sin**
- 2. Experiential Acquaintance with Salvation**
- 3. Experiential Acquaintance with Sanctification**

Introduction and Historical Review

Beloved congregation, why do we preach from the Heidelberg Catechism? So I made a few brief comments last week, and I promised you that I would address that briefly again. So let me say immediately that the practice of preaching from the Catechism each Lord's Day is a tradition that is unique to the Reformed churches that are in the Netherlands, and the churches here in North America that have their roots in the Netherlands. And so, there have always been those who have challenged that practice, who have said, "Rather than preaching the Catechism, we want to hear the Bible expounded; we want to hear the Bible preached." And though I somewhat understand their concern, I do believe that there is a misunderstanding about Catechism preaching that I already briefly addressed last week.

So first of all, historically, why was it that the churches in the Netherlands, at the famous Synod of Dordt, in 1618–19, why did those churches stipulate, in Article 68 of the Church Order, that this be done every Lord's Day? There was a compelling reason for it. From the very moment that the Reformation really began to develop in Europe, there came a quick recognition that it was important, also for the children, to carefully define what are the essential doctrines, what are the

essential truths of the Word of God. And that's what prompted Prince Frederick III,¹ the Governor of the Palatinate of which Heidelberg was the central city, that's what prompted him to secure the services of these two young theologians—Caspar Olevianus² and Zacharius Ursinus,³ secured their services to formulate a precisely-worded catechism, so that especially the children could be taught the essential truths of the Word of God.

What was unique about this Catechism is that, not only its Question and Answer method, but that it was a catechism that was very personal in nature. As we will see, as we will work our way through it again, how many times the question is asked, “What does this mean to you?” and how it began—we considered it last week, “What is thy only comfort in life and in death?” And gradually there became a recognition that this Catechism was also very suitable for preaching.

Anyway, to make a long story short, we have to realize the historical reason why the Synod of Dordt was convened in 1618–19. It had to do with a serious doctrinal controversy that had been raging in the Netherlands for many, many years—the so-called Arminian Controversy. And so, finally, when all politics were put aside, finally, that synod was convened, and they spent a great deal of time in addressing the so-called “Five Points of Arminius”⁴—Arminius,⁵ who was a Reformed minister, actually trained at Geneva, and yet, who was introducing a doctrinal salvation that departed from the teaching of the Word of God. And so, what the Synod of Dordt did, and they had invited representation from all the Reformed churches in Europe. They wanted this to be, in a sense, an international Synod, the kind of Synod that Calvin had always dreamed about. They spent many months carefully formulating a biblical response to the errors of Arminianism.

But they also realized that there was a great deal of ignorance among the people, a great deal of ignorance about the foundational truths of the Word of God. And because of what they had just been through, because they realized that this controversy almost utterly tore asunder the church of God in the Netherlands, they realized how necessary it was that the people be instructed regarding the foundational teachings of the Word of God. And that's what prompted that Synod in formulating its Church Order to include Article 68. And that Article stipulates that every Sunday, there needs to be a doctrinal sermon, they said explicitly, a sermon that expounds the Heidelberg Catechism. And it was divided into fifty-two Lord's Days. When Olevianus and Ursinus, when they wrote this Catechism, they just wrote one-hundred and twenty-seven Questions and Answers. But then, quickly it was divided in such a way so that the idea was, that in one year, the entire Catechism would be considered by way of preaching. So that on a regular basis, the congregation would be instructed regarding the foundational truths of the Word of God.

And as I already pointed out last week, the accusation that Catechism preaching is not preaching, that Catechism preaching is not preaching the Word of God is simply not true. And so, let me say it again. What the Catechism gives us, in each Question and Answer, it gives us the summary of all

1 Frederick III (1515–1576), was the elector Palatine of the Rhine from 1559 to 1576, and a leader of the German Protestant princes who worked for a protestant victory in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. He adopted Lutheranism in 1546, and Calvinism somewhat later, which made his electoral position insecure. By the time of his death, the Palatinate had become the center of German Calvinism.

2 Caspar Olevianus (1536–1587).

3 Zacharius Ursinus (1534–1583).

4 The “Five Points” of Arminianism asserts that 1) man has free will to choose good; 2) God's grace for regeneration is based on man's choice; 3) God's grace for regeneration is universal; 4) that God's grace for regeneration and sanctification by the Holy Spirit is resistible; 5) and that God's gift of salvation can be lost.

5 Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) was a young Dutch Reformed minister and theologian during the Protestant Reformation, who taught that it was possible for a man to be convicted of sin prior to regeneration by the Holy Spirit. After his death, his supporters continued the controversy which became known as Arminianism.

that Scripture teaches us on that particular subject. And so, when we expound the Catechism, we are expounding the Word of God, but we're doing it thematically. If you remember, I gave you a couple analogies. So when we preach from the Catechism—and I will do my utmost; as I said last week, I will do my utmost—and when I expound the Catechism, that you will hear the echo of the Word of God. That's why, by, as a matter of fact, in your Psalters, when you read the Catechism, there's a reason why so many Scripture passages are recorded at the end of each Lord's Day, with footnotes to show you clearly that the language of the Catechism is ultimately the language of the Word of God.

And so, the Catechism shows us, as I said last week, it shows us what the forest looks like, so that we understand how the individual trees, the individual passages of the Word of God, how they fit in the forest. So we need to have both. We need to focus on specific Scriptures; we need to use the zoom-lens approach. That's what I did this morning. With my zoom lens, we focused on one passage of Scripture, Psalm 23, verse 6. But even then, when we do that, as ministers, what we are called to do is, when we expound a specific text, that text is to be a window through which we see all of Scripture, through the window of that particular passage. Now, this evening, and in following Lord's Days, we will also use the wide-angle approach. That's what we do when we expound the Catechism.

And I think it's safe to say, that one of the reasons why the Reformed church of the Reformation has survived in the Netherlands until this day, even though the numbers have dwindled, has a lot to do with this remarkable tradition of Catechism preaching. And so, as your pastor, I will continue that tradition. And I will continue to expound the Catechism. But my goal, and my desire—and my consistory, they hold my feet to the fire—my desire is to let you hear the Word of God. That's the goal of Catechism preaching.

And so, last week, we began with the famous opening Question, “*What is thy only comfort in life and death?*” And congregation, I'm just wondering if you have thought about that Question this week. Boys and girls, I'm wondering if you have thought about it as well, if you have thought about that Question, What is *your* only comfort in life and death? And then, I pointed out last week already, the importance of that word, “only”. And you'll find that word many times in the Heidelberg Catechism, because ultimately, it was a Reformation document, and that word “only,” that word, “sola,” was so important in the Reformation. And so again, what that Question means, there is no other comfort. All other comforts are counterfeit comforts. All other comforts will deceive us. There is only one comfort that can carry us through life. There is only one comfort with which we are able to face death and cross the Jordan of death, and that is to know that I do not belong to myself, but I belong to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. And so, my dear congregation, I ask you, can you answer in the affirmative? Can you say, before an all-knowing and heart-searching God, that that is your only comfort, to know that this Christ—the Christ is the Scriptures—that this Christ is your Savior; to know that he has given his life for your sake, that he has paid for your sins, and your sins are washed in the precious blood of this Christ? For only then is all well.

And so, the next Question of Lord's Day 1—let's turn to Lord's Day 1, please, and let's read the second Question of the Catechism.

Question #2 reads as follows: *How many things are necessary for thee—notice again, very personal—for thee to know that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?*

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

And so, we will then consider this very simply. I mean, the points are obvious. Boys and girls, the points are very obvious. I'm going to be talking about misery, deliverance, and gratitude. Or, as I gave you the theme in the bulletin, we're going to look at *The Pattern of Christian Experience*—the pattern that we saw clearly in Psalm 107. And so, what is that pattern of Christian experience? It means that the Christian will have an *Experiential Acquaintance with Sin*; secondly, an *Experiential Acquaintance with Salvation*; and thirdly, an *Experiential Acquaintance with Sanctification*.

1. Experiential Acquaintance with Sin

And so, let us consider, first of all, the *Experiential Acquaintance with Sin*. Because the knowledge that's implied in this Question is not merely an intellectual knowledge. This is an experiential knowledge. So what do we mean by *experiential knowledge*? It's a very important term. Well, very simply, first of all, it means knowledge that we gain by experiencing something, not just by reading something, but by experiencing something. So let me give you an illustration. You could read an entire book about table salt, about its chemical composition. But nothing compares to actually putting salt on your tongue. Then you experience in one moment about salt what you could not have gained by reading an entire book. My entire life, I had heard and read about Israel. I have seen many presentations about it, read books, and in that sense, knew quite a bit about it. But it wasn't until I was actually there physically, and experienced the reality of being in Jerusalem, experienced the reality of walking in the Garden of Gethsemane. So now, the knowledge I have of Israel is no longer merely intellectual. It is now something that I have gained by experience. It's a knowledge that a husband has of his wife, and a wife has of her husband. The knowledge that parents have of their children, and vice versa. It's a knowledge that we gain by experience.

And so the whole point that the Catechism here makes from the very very outset is that we can't just know about Christ intellectually—merely with our minds. Our knowledge of this Christ must be an experiential knowledge, a knowledge that we gain from experiencing in a very real way what it means to be a sinner; to experience in a very real way the preciousness and the beauty of Christ unveiled to us in the gospel; and in a very real and experiential way, it becomes our desire to live a life to the honor of such a Savior. Only when we have such a knowledge, an experiential knowledge, a knowledge that is wrought by the Holy Spirit, will we have this only comfort in life and death.

Beloved, there's a very solemn passage that I want to look at. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 7, which stresses the importance of having an experiential knowledge of the truths of God's Word. Matthew 7, verses 21 through 23, one of the most solemn passages in all of Scripture. Look what Jesus says at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: "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." So Christ is talking here about people who profess his name, who actually say, "Lord, Lord;" talking about many who are engaged in all kind of religious activities—prophesying in his name, casting out devils, and doing wonderful works. And Christ will say to them, "I never knew you." What does he mean by that? "I never knew you." Doesn't he know everything? Yes, he knows everything, but what that word means, that Greek word, *ginōskō*, means there was never a real experiential relationship between us, even though you professed my name, even though you said "Lord, Lord." And how does Christ identify such a phony profession of his name? Well, he says, "They are they who say, Lord, Lord,

but they are not doers of my Father's will." Remarkable how Christ's describes that here. So what Christ is saying, if our knowledge of the things of God, our knowledge of the truths of Scripture, if they become an experiential reality, it will transform our lives. Not only will we come to Christ and call him "Lord, Lord," but we will become doers of his will.

That, of course, belongs to the third point, namely, a life of sanctification, a life of gratitude, which expresses itself in being doers of the will. The reason I'm emphasizing this, congregation, this is not a minor thing. This is not a minor thing, especially, because Christ says there will be many, there will be many who will be utterly aghast in the day of judgment, utterly aghast when they fully expected to enter. And Christ will say to them, "I never knew you. There was never a real relationship between us." And what makes it so solemn, these words come from the lips of the Judge. He is the one who will be doing the judging. He will be the one who sits on the throne, and there will be many, many. So this is an important matter.

And so, let me give you another example, between just having intellectual knowledge and actually having knowledge that is gained by experience, by interacting with someone. As you know, my father wrote several books about depression, and they were sold throughout bookstores. And on one day, my father and mother were in a bookstore, and my father saw that they were selling the books he had written. And so, he walked over there, and then the salesperson walked over, and he said, "I highly recommend that book." "Oh," my dad says, "why?" He says, "Well, it's a wonderful book," and he said, "I know the author." My dad said to him, "No, you don't. You don't know the author." And the man was actually flustered, he was offended. He said, "I am the author. So, you said you knew me, but you obviously did not know me." So that's the difference, you see. So he had some knowledge of who my father was, but when he actually stood in front of him, he didn't even recognize him. He did not know him. So, that's why this is not a minor issue.

So, the first thing, then, the Catechism focuses on, is that *we need to know how great our sins and miseries are*. And let me immediately emphasize that the Catechism is not suggesting for one moment that the knowledge of sin all by itself will save you. Sometimes we use the expression, "a saving knowledge of sin." And I think I understand what that means, but it can easily be misunderstood as if the knowledge of sin all by itself can save you. It cannot. What is meant by that expression is a knowledge of sin that leads to salvation; a knowledge of sin that leads me to the Deliverer, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, no one is saved just because they have experienced some conviction. No one is saved just because they shed some tears over their sins. Because if our conviction of sin does not bring us to the Deliverer, if it does not bring us to Christ, it is of no value at all.

And yet, the language here is strong, is it not? It says here, "*How great my sins and miseries are.*" Why is that an important statement? It is because we are naturally inclined to minimize sin. We are far too casual in speaking about sin. Boys and girls, the word "sin" is a very short word—three letters. But it is without a doubt the ugliest word in the English language. There is nothing more ugly than sin. Everything that's wrong in this world is because of sin. The reason why the human race is a dying human race, is because of sin.

So what is sin? Sin, of course, is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). God has given us his revealed will. And when we act contrary to his will, when we disobey his law, we are sinning. But it's more than that. It's not just an act of disobedience. When we sin, when we disobey God's revealed will, we are guilty of rebellion against our Maker. It's even worse than that, because when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, it wasn't just that they disobeyed; it wasn't just that they believed Satan's lie; no, by eating of that fruit, they were treating God as a liar. That's what sin is.

Every time we sin, we treat God as a liar. We disregard his Word. And of course, ultimately, that's what made it so grievous what Adam and Eve did. It was a despising of the love of their Maker—their Maker, who created them in his image, who gave this wonderful paradise, this wonderful place. So they disobeyed his word, they rebelled against his will, they treated him as a liar, and ultimately, they despised his love. That's what sin is, congregation. That's what it means to be a sinner. That's why we should never speak casually about sin.

2. Experiential Acquaintance with Salvation

And one thing that happens, when the Spirit of God begins to work savingly in us, and what I mean by that, when the Spirit of God gets ahold of a sinner, with one objective, and that is to ultimately lead him to the Deliverer, to lead him to Christ, what happens? Then for the first time in our life, it begins to dawn on us what it means to have sinned against God. We begin to understand what David said in Psalm 51. And he was already a believer, and you know, he fell into great sin, but when God brought him to the right place through Nathan, he said, "Against thee, and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight" (Psalm 51:4). It's one thing to say, "I have sinned." But it's another thing to say, "I have sinned against God," for it becomes real: "Against thee, thee only have I sinned."

And so, what happens when the Spirit takes the scales from our eyes? We begin to see sin the way God sees it, congregation. That's what happens in a so-called "saving conviction." And when we begin to see sin the way God sees it, then and then alone will we realize how serious our plight is. Then we realize how offensive sin is. And we need to understand that in some measure. And I'm not here tonight to somehow promote a certain depth or a certain measure. The Lord is entirely sovereign in that. But one thing I am certain of, that whenever the Holy Spirit works savingly, he will so convict us of sin that we realize there is but one answer, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work. And so the Puritans were fond of saying, "How much do you have to know of your sins?" The answer was, "Enough to see your need of Christ." Because that is the Holy Spirit's goal. That is his objective, is to make you realize who you are in God's sight, so that you will realize that unless you take refuge to Christ, you will perish; to make you realize what a grievous thing it is to sin against God, to have offended him.

And then all the miseries that come with it—the consequences of sin. I'm going to be very brief here; we're going to look at it in more detail on Lord's Days 2 through 4. But let me just mention a few things. First of all, sin alienates me from God, separates me from God. Sin makes me subject to a threefold death. Death means separation—"The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Sin brings upon us the curse of God. And to be accursed of God, congregation, means that God's judgment is inescapable unless that curse is removed. But sin also corrupts us; it defiles us. And finally, sin ultimately renders me hell-worthy. That's why God has revealed the doctrine of hell in Scripture. Because God knows that you and I tend to make light of sin. God wants us to know that sin is so serious that if you live and die in your sins, this will be the eternal consequence. That's why Jesus, during his ministry, spoke far more often of hell than he ever did of heaven, because he knows that we tend to make light of it. And when the Spirit of God gets ahold of us, we will no longer make light of sin. Then, it becomes real. Then we will need the Great Physician. We all need the Great Physician. We all need Christ. And yet, the Lord Jesus said himself, in Matthew 9, verses 12 and 13: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick...I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Dear congregation, it's like in everyday life. As long as you feel well, as long as you feel

healthy, you're not interested in going to a doctor. And I think of my first wife, who died of cancer, initially, she did not realize she had cancer. Something was wrong, but we were not talking about cancer specialists, we were not interested in cancer specialists. But when we got the devastating news that she had stage four cancer, all of a sudden, we became very interested in finding the best cancer specialist we could find. Our need made room for the fact that there were indeed such specialists that dealt with such cases. And so it is also spiritually and experientially. Because the Holy Spirit's goal is to bring us to a place where we recognize that we have sinned against God, that we are undone, in order to make us marvel at the Savior that God has provided for such sinners as we are.

And again, the measure in which that happens, the manner in which it happens, is a matter of God's sovereignty. That's why, in God's wisdom, the conversion of Lydia and the jailor are in the same chapter. And all it says about Lydia is that she paid attention to the words that were spoken by Paul, and God opened her heart, and she believed the gospel that Paul preached. Of the jailor, we read that he was on the verge of committing suicide. Now, again, that had to do with the unique circumstance of this man, and who he was. So does that mean that because the jailor's conversion was more dramatic, that it was superior to what happened to Lydia? Obviously not. And so, the point is not how dramatic our story is; the point is not how deep our conviction is; the point is whether that conviction brings us to the Deliverer, bring us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then how wonderful the gospel becomes! How wonderful the good news of the gospel then becomes! And when the Spirit then sheds light on this precious Redeemer, this precious Deliverer, because the work of the Holy Spirit is to make the Lord Jesus Christ, and all that he is, and all that he has done, to make the Lord Jesus Christ irresistibly attractive to our soul. But how precious this Christ then becomes. How precious it then becomes that he came to seek and to save that which was lost. How precious it then becomes that he is a Savior whose blood cleanses from all sin. How precious the news then becomes that if we believe in that Christ, if we put our trust in him, that God will fully and freely pardon all of our sins.

And so, the good news of the gospel only becomes good news when we have come to grips with the bad news. But again, coming to grips with the bad news is never an end in itself. It only has one purpose, and that is, to bring us to Christ. That's why you'll hear this often from me. It's not conviction of sin which makes or proves your conversion to be genuine. What proves your conversion to be genuine is if that brought you to Christ—faith in Christ. Coming to him is the only reliable biblical evidence of the saving work of the Holy Spirit. All conviction, all conviction that does not lead to this Deliverer, that does not make this Christ precious, that does not draw us to him to touch the hem of his garment, is not the work of the Holy Spirit.

And how beautiful is then the good news for someone who really knows they are a sinner. What good news it is that Christ is a Savior who has perfectly obeyed the law of God on my behalf—something that I cannot achieve. How beautiful then the good news becomes that this Christ has paid the penalty for sin in full. How beautiful the news then becomes that this Christ was made a curse in our place, nailed to the accursed cross, in order that we could receive the blessed favor, and that we could be blessed in and through him. Oh, how beautiful and how lovely that Savior then becomes!

It's why I've always been so impressed by a story my father-in-law told me about his grandfather, the old Mr. Teun Sweetman, who lived many years ago, and he told me the story many times—a dear, tender godly man. And someone, at the end of his life, once came to him, and said, “Mr. Sweetman, how is it with your soul?” And he was quiet for a moment. Then he pointed to the door,

and he said, “Do you see the key in that lock?” He said, “Christ fits in my soul the way that key fits in that lock.” That’s it, congregation. Because by nature, Christ does not fit in our hearts. By nature, without grace, we do not need this Christ. And that’s exactly what the Holy Spirit does. He makes room for this Christ. I think that’s a very biblical idea. He makes room for this Christ. In the Psalm we read, Psalm 107, you read time and again, that when God granted them deliverance, there was a real need for that deliverance. And that’s what the Holy Spirit does. He so works in our heart that Christ becomes an exact fit. Christ becomes the one that fits my need, that fits my heart the way that a key fits in that lock. Do you know that Christ, congregation? Does Christ fit your heart the way a key fits a lock? Is Christ exactly the Savior you need? Has Christ become precious to you? Have you learned that only in him can we experience full deliverance from sin and from all of our miseries?

3. Experiential Acquaintance with Sanctification

But importantly, the Catechism goes on to say, the third is that, *How I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance*. Again, a very simple statement, but that will flow out of that, you see, out of that experiential knowledge of Christ. Out of that experiential interaction with him by faith, will flow a desire to live a life in which I express my gratitude to God for such deliverance. Because, you see, not only is there a negative aspect to Christ’s saving work—he saves us *from* our sins; but he also saves us *unto* something. He saves us *unto* something. In other words, the whole purpose of our redemption, the whole purpose of our deliverance is not to keep us out of hell and get us into heaven. That’s the cheap version of the gospel prevalent today. No, we are saved and redeemed in order to be restored, to be what God originally created us to be. That’s the goal of redemption.

And by means of the work of Christ, you see, the separation between God and us is removed. On the basis of his finished work, we can be reconciled with God; we can be restored into his favor. But the whole purpose of that restoration is that we, as restored sinners, that we might begin to live the life we were intended to live when God originally created us. That’s why those who know Christ experientially, who have come to him by faith, will always be people, who, by grace, will become the faithful followers of the Christ in whom they have put their trust. Or, to use the famous theological terms, what is it simply saying?—that justification will always produce sanctification. In other words, a forgiven sinner will always be a God-fearing sinner. Or, to make it all revolve around Christ is, when we come to Christ, and we believe in Christ, and we trust in Christ, we will become followers of Christ. A true Christian is someone who lives out of Christ, and whose desire is to live for Christ. That’s the point Jesus made in Matthew 7. He said, “Don’t call me Lord, Lord, if you’re not a doer of my will.”

And so, what is a Christian? A Christian is a redeemed law-breaker. And the amazing thing is that when God redeems a law-breaker—which is what we are; we are law-breakers; we are sinners—but when we are redeemed, when we are restored, then redeemed law-breakers, by grace, become law-keepers again; we become doers of his will. That’s why Jesus said on several occasions, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

And congregation, if all of this is real, then is it not even self-evident, if we experience the wonder that God saves a wretch like me—and you know, when John Newton wrote that, that was so very real to him, “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me”—ah, you see, and then, and that’s real, what a desire we then will have to live unto that Savior, that Savior that saved me from my sins. It’s like somebody who is drowning, who has gone through the ice and

about to drown, and somebody rescues him. How thankful you will be to that person, knowing that your death would have been a certainty had he not rescued you. How grateful you will be the rest of your life for the fact that someone came to rescue you from certain death. And so the Catechism is saying, so it is in the life of grace. Those, who by the work of the Holy Spirit, come to Christ, will also become like Christ. Those who are united to Christ will have a desire to live unto Christ, and to show that we love him, by loving his revealed will.

There's another way I can put it—if Christ, and Christ is, Christ is the living Word of God. And how do we know that we really know the living Word, how do we know that we love the living Word? We love the living Word by honoring his written word. Because the living Word and the written Word are inseparably together. And so, when we love the living Word, when we love Christ, we cannot but love his written Word, and desire to take his Word seriously.

And so, those are the three essential components of the Christian life. This is *The Pattern of Christian Experience*. And it's not so much how the specific details of your life are, but this all believers have in common. Take your Bibles and turn with me to Psalm 130, where we have a beautiful illustration of what is set before us here in Question #2 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Psalm 130, verses 3 and 4. We read there: "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" So there's the confession of David. He's saying, "Lord, if thou wouldest hold me accountable for my iniquities, then I cannot stand before thee, then I stand condemned before thee." And then there comes the wonderful turn, "But,"—"But there is forgiveness with thee"—that's the gospel, in all of its beauty, but against that background, because what amazes David is that the very God before whom he could not stand, the very God who he had offended by his sin, that with that God, there is forgiveness! And why, of course?—for Christ's sake. That's the beauty of the gospel. But you see, the reason this was precious to David is because he again covered the beauty of the gospel, the beauty that God is a forgiving God, against the background of his own sinner-ship. Literally he knew he didn't have a leg to stand on. "Lord, if thou wouldest mark my iniquities, I'm done, I'm finished." "But, there is forgiveness with thee." And then note what follows: "that thou mayest be feared"—there, you have it. "That thou mayest"—in order that thou mayest be feared. So, the very purpose of being pardoned is that, as pardoned sinners, we would fear the Lord the remainder of our life, as an expression of gratitude. That's, by the way, the reason why I also emphasized last week, that it's the Holy Spirit's work to not only lead us to salvation, but to assure us of our salvation. And why is it that the Holy Spirit wants to assure us of our redemption in Christ?—so that we will be free to serve him. And so, by assuring us of our pardon, we will be able to fear God without fear, without the fear of losing our redemption. That's the beauty of it. But that can only be when we fully grasp what Christ has accomplished for us. Because the goal of our redemption is that we would fear God. The goal of our redemption is that we would again answer to the purpose for which we were made, that we would walk in his ways, and specifically, that we would honor, by our lives, the very Christ who has saved and who has redeemed us.

And so, therefore, the pattern is a biblical pattern. It is not a manmade idea. This is a biblical pattern. We see it here in Psalm 130. Other places, I have no time to go there now: Psalm 40, the opening verses; Psalm 50; the whole book of Romans is structured that way. The first three chapters deal with man's misery. Chapters 4 through 11 deals with deliverance, and the remaining chapters deal with gratitude. You see it in the Beatitudes. Who are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness?—they who know they are poor in spirit, who mourn, and who humble themselves before God. They hunger and thirst after righteousness, and they will be filled, and that will spill over into a godly life, in which we are merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. And so this

is a biblical pattern. If you're taking notes, another way to remember it is it's the biblical trio of repentance, faith, and obedience—repentance, faith, and obedience. Another simple way to remember is that, the Catechism addresses sin, salvation, and service. Three S's: sin, salvation, and service.

One final remark about this particular truth here, that we need to understand that this is a pattern that repeats itself over, and over, and over again. So we call it a cyclical pattern. So it's not that the Christian life is one-third misery, one-third deliverance, one-third gratitude, no. It's a cycle, a cycle that repeats itself over, and over again in the life of God's children. Every renewed exercise of faith is always an exercise of faith because by renewal, we see our need of Christ; by renewal, the reality of our sinner-ship, our failure as a Christian drives us out to him, to put our trust in him again. And that will, in turn, produce the fruit of gratitude. So it's a pattern that repeats itself over, and over again.

And so, my dear congregation, do we know these things experientially? Not just intellectually, but experientially? Have we learned what it means to be a sinner, to be a sinner before God? And have we also learned, as a sinner, to take refuge to Christ, and to put our trust in him, to touch the hem of his garments? And is it evident in your and my life, is it evident that we are doers of the Father's will? That's the point Jesus makes in Matthew 7. He's saying, "Whose religion is real? That religion is real of those who not only call me 'Lord,' but who are doers of my Father's will." And so, what must I know? How many things are necessary for us to know, enjoying this comfort, that we may live and die happily?

May God, by his grace, and by his Spirit, teach us these three fundamental truths over, and over again, that we may know our sins, in order that we may know our Savior, and that we may live a life to his glory. Amen.

Let's pray.

Lord, wilt thou bless thy Word? The very nature of this message is that it calls us to self-examination, to examine ourselves, not by human standards, but by the standards of thy precious Word. And Lord, we pray that by grace, we may understand the language of David, when he confessed, "LORD, if thou shouldest mark my iniquities, who could stand, but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Lord, we pray that this may indeed also reflect the pattern of our own experience. And so, we pray that thou wouldest bless the ministry of thy Word, to show us our need of Christ, so that we would recognize that there is but one name given under heaven; there is but one Savior who can save us from our sins; a Savior who will save us to the uttermost if we take refuge to him; who will deliver us from all of our sins and from all of our miseries. Lord, we pray that also, by grace, we would demonstrate by our very lives, that we truly belong to this Savior, that we are united to him, that by our very lives, we would give evidence that we truly know Christ in a saving way, and that we would express our love for him also by honoring his Word in every aspect of life. Bless us in this coming week, bless the labor of our hands. Keep us safely from harm and danger. And bring us here again this coming Lord's Day. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.