

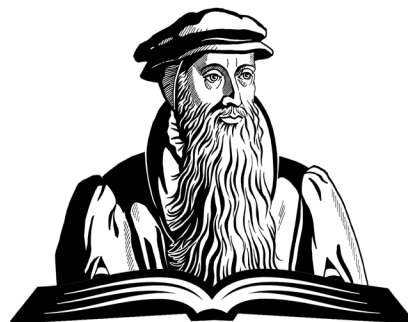
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #22, Lord's Day 17

The Threefold Benefits of the Resurrection of Christ



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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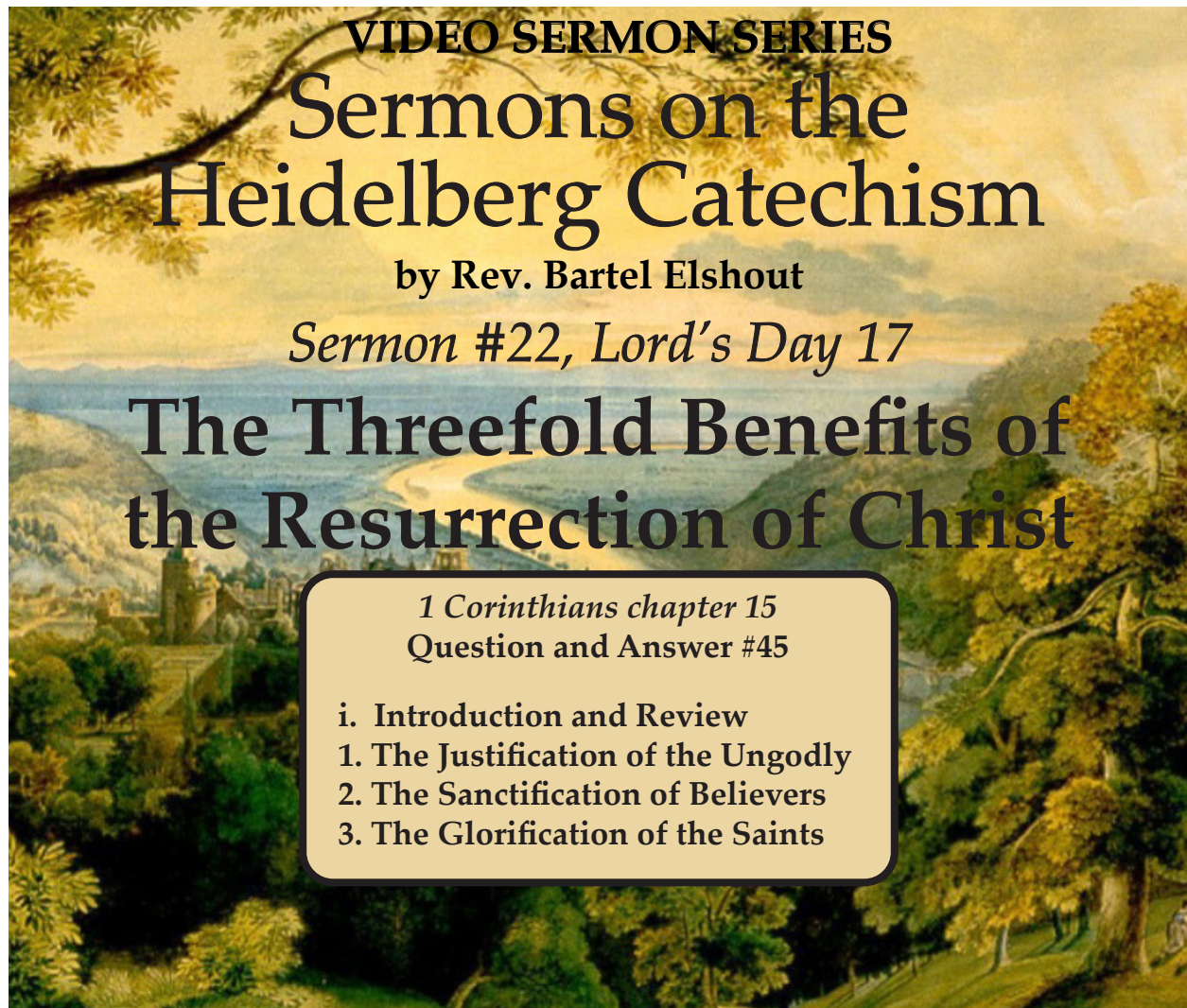
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Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

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Sermon #22, Lord's Day 17

The Threefold Benefits of the Resurrection of Christ

1 Corinthians chapter 15
Question and Answer #45

- i. Introduction and Review
 - 1. The Justification of the Ungodly
 - 2. The Sanctification of Believers
 - 3. The Glorification of the Saints

Introduction and Review

Beloved congregation, boys and girls, we cannot really understand why Jesus came into the world to do what he did, unless we go back to Genesis. In proportion to how we grasp how God made us, for what purpose he made us, and what has happened, as a result of our fall, we will not comprehend what it is that Christ came to accomplish. And so, very simply, when God created us, when he created Adam and Eve, he created them to dwell with him in this very special love relationship with himself. That's what defined the life of Adam and Eve. They were living souls, because they had a wonderful relationship with the God who made them, and they also lived in fellowship with him. And so, they enjoyed union and communion with the living God.

And of all that God had made, man was, indeed, the crown jewel of God's creation, created in the image of God's only begotten Son. And so, in that sense, man was highly elevated above all of creation. And all of that changed when Adam and Eve sinned. So when we talk about the fall, that means that man fell from that lofty position. Man fell from that extraordinary position of privilege to be a child of the living God, to live in fellowship with the living God. And so, man fell, fell to the level of the beast.

And so, boys and girls, why was it that Jesus was born exactly where he was born? Why

was he born in a stable that was meant for animals? Why was he laid in a manger, in a feeding trough for animals. That's not arbitrary. That's not accidental. That's not just because Joseph and Mary could not find another place, because there was no room for them at the inn. It was by divine direction that Christ would be born precisely under such circumstances. Because what the illustrates is that man has fallen to the level of the beast. What do animals live for? Animals just live for themselves. Animals live for the gratification of their basic needs and lusts. Animals are completely preoccupied. That's why God made us so different, boys and girls. That's why, when God made Adam and Eve, they didn't walk around on all fours. Animals do—they actually are focused on the earth. That's all that matters to them. We were created in an upright position. Why? Because we were created to be worshippers of the living God. That's what makes the fall of man so wretched and so tragic—created to live in union and communion with God, and to live like the beasts, only concerned about the gratification of self.

That's why, as we said last week, that's why the Lord Jesus, in order to be the Savior of fallen sinners, in order to bring us back to God, he had to literally descend into every aspect of that fall. That's why we talked about the steps of his humiliation. Because, congregation, the world has romanticized the birth of Christ. But the birth of Christ is the first step of his humiliation. He was born under very humble circumstances, highly offensive circumstances. So that was the first step. Then he lived a life in which he had to breathe in the stench of a fallen world. And he suffered—the second step of his humiliation. He died, and then he was buried. But on the cross, he also descended into hell, experienced the full reality of hell. Because, you see, that's the ultimate consequence of our fall. Created to live in intimate communion and fellowship with God, hell would be dramatically the opposite of that. Hell is a place. That's why hell is so dreadful for human beings created to find our fulfillment and our happiness in God, created to live in union and communion with our Maker; and to be forever separated from him, and to forever have to endure his wrath.

That's why, to be the Savior of such sinners as we are—we who deserve that ultimate destiny—Christ descended, step, by step, into the full reality of our fallenness. That's what the steps of his humiliation are all about. He completely identified himself with fallen sinners. And once he accomplished it, then begins his exaltation. And today, we're going to focus on the first step of his exaltation. If the wages of sin are death, the resurrection marks that moment where Christ begins to reverse all of that. You've heard that Dr. Barrett¹ often said, Christ came to be the great curse reverser. But before he could reverse the curse, he first was made a curse. And once he had accomplished that, now begins his exaltation, beginning with the resurrection. And then we see the restoration of life, fallen by his ascension—the restoration of our position in God's presence. The third step, his intercession—the restoration of communion and fellowship with God. And ultimately, his return in glory, when God's redeemed people will receive a new body, of which we read from 1 Corinthians chapter 15, equipped to enjoy forever what God originally designed man for, to live forever in union and communion with God. And so, Christ descended into our fall, in order to bring us back to where God originally created us.

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And so, let's focus on that first step of his exaltation. Question #45 of our Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 17.

Question #45: *What doth the resurrection of Christ profit us?*

A very personal question, again, as they always are.

Answer: *First, by His resurrection He has overcome death, that He might make us partakers of that righteousness which He had purchased for us by His death; secondly, we are also by His power raised up to a new life—the original actually says, “we are being raised up to a new life”—and lastly, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection.*

And so, we're going to focus on *The Threefold Benefits of the Resurrection of Christ*. First of all, *The Justification of the Ungodly*. By virtue of his resurrection, Christ makes his people partakers of the righteousness that he merited. So, *The Justification of the Ungodly*. Secondly, *The Sanctification of Believers—secondly, we are also, by his power, being raised up to a new life*. So that's ultimately about sanctification. And then, finally, glorification, *The Glorification of the Saints. The resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection*. Justification, sanctification, and glorification are the three benefits that flow from the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's interesting that the Catechism doesn't make any attempt to prove that the resurrection was indeed an historical fact. And why is that? Well, you have to realize that the Heidelberg Catechism is a historical document. And in many ways, it was a reactionary document. That's why so much space is allotted to the sacraments, for instance, because that was a huge issue in Heidelberg. And when the Catechism was written, the validity, the truthfulness of the resurrection was not being challenged. And so, as they wrote the Catechism, it was assumed that there was no one who even remotely challenged that the resurrection was indeed a true historical fact. And of course, we read together 1 Corinthians chapter 15. And Paul goes out of his way in the opening verses to remind the Corinthians how the resurrection, the physical resurrection of Christ, was affirmed by so many witnesses. You might wonder if there has ever been an historical event that has been verified by so many witnesses, who saw the risen Christ. Of course, he, then, proceeds to address those in Corinth who denied the resurrection of the dead. And he said, if there is no resurrection of the dead, that means that Christ is not arisen. And if Christ is not risen, our preaching is in vain, our faith is in vain. And everything I've taught you ultimately means nothing, and I have no message. But thanks be to God, he said, Christ is risen. He is risen from the dead. And that's why he spends forty days before his ascension, to appear to so many who would be the credible witnesses of his resurrection. That's why, when the disciples went forth into the world, they preached Christ and the resurrection. Oh, that resurrection, the fact that their Savior, risen indeed, was the very foundation of the gospel. And it is, congregation, because, had he not risen, all that Christ accomplished on the cross would have been in vain.

And so, on the cross, as we saw, Christ paid the penalty for sin. “The wages for sin is death” He paid the penalty in full. But the resurrection is the confirmation that God has accepted that payment. The resurrection is the Father's way of declaring, “I am well pleased with what my Son has accomplished. I have accepted the payment he has made, in full.” Oh, the resurrection is the Father's “Amen” upon what his Son accomplished on the cross.

So we could say that the resurrection is the justification of the Mediator. So let me explain that. What do I mean by that? Well, he went to the cross as a guilty Mediator, not guilty of personal sin, but guilty as the substitute of his people. God reckons the guilt and sin of his people to him. And that's why, in the state of his humiliation, he was a debtor to the justice of God. God viewed him

as guilty. But once the penalty was paid, the Father now justifies him. The Father now absolves him from all of this. And so, the resurrection is the Father's public vindication of his Son. That's why Paul begins his epistle in Romans, by saying that Christ was "declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). You could actually say that in the resurrection, God declares what he declared at his baptism: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). I am well pleased with what he has accomplished. I am well pleased with his sacrifice. He has paid everything in full. And so, *By his resurrection*, as the Catechism says, *He has overcome death*, as the ultimate penalty for sin—victorious over death.

We talked about death last week—death, which entered God's creation; death which is so unnatural; death, that stalks all of us; death, which is an ever-present reality. And oh, the resurrection tells us that Christ has overcome death. Remember, boys and girls, what death means? The word death? It's important for you to remember that. Death means separation. In death, something comes apart that is supposed to be together. Of course, when we die, our body and soul separate. But when the Bible talks about death, when God said to Adam and Eve, "The day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17), he is saying, When you disobey me, there will come a separation—as I explained last week, the exact opposite of the covenant relationship that God created for Adam and Eve. And so, before they fell, they were united to God. And God said, "When you sin, you will become separated from me." And that's why death was the penalty that fit the crime. That's why Jesus had to die.

But oh, if he had remained in the grave, his labors would have been in vain; the cross would have been in vain. It was absolutely necessary, not only for him to die, but absolutely necessary for him to rise again. Because he came to save sinners. He came to restore life. And his resurrection is the powerful affirmation; that it is exactly what he has achieved. That's why he could end in doxology at the end of chapter 15: "O death," he says, "where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?...Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57).

1. The Justification of the Ungodly

By his resurrection He has overcome death, the Catechism says here, *that He might make us partakers of that righteousness which He had purchased for us by His death*. And so, very simply, in his humiliation, Christ purchased that righteousness. In his exaltation, he sees to it that sinners receive the benefits of that righteousness. And in Adam, we had that righteousness. In Adam, we had a right relationship with God. In Adam, we were compatible with God. A righteous God could live in fellowship with a righteous creature. And because of our fall, we lost that righteousness. We had become unrighteous. And so, Christ suffered, and died, and rose again to secure that righteousness which we need, in order to have an everlasting relationship with God. He merited that flawless and perfect righteousness. That's the wonder of the cross. That's the wonder of the redeeming work of Christ, congregation, is that by giving his only begotten Son to suffer, and die, and rise again, God has provided the righteousness that he requires of us—a righteousness which we do not have; a righteousness which we have lost. And so, in his Son, God has provided the righteousness that he requires, the righteousness that meets his requirements. And Christ now sees to it, that for all those for whom he died, that they will become partakers of that righteousness.

And so, his resurrection is the warranty of the justification of every believer. It's by virtue of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of what he has merited; that God can now freely impute to an ungodly sinner the flawless righteousness of his only begotten Son. That's why Paul

says, “Being justified by faith” (Romans 5:1). Oh, that simple exercise of faith, when a sinner, wrought upon by the Holy Spirit; when a sinner takes refuge to Christ; when he touches the hem of His garment, God imputes to that guilty, hell-worthy sinner, the flawless righteousness of his only begotten Son. And then he declares us righteous on the basis of that righteousness which he has granted. All of that was secured by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, it is the delight of the risen Christ; it is the delight of the exalted Christ at the Father’s right hand, to make sinners partakers of what he accomplished on the cross. So, let me put it very simply. In his humiliation, Christ has merited salvation. In his exaltation, he makes sinners the partakers of that salvation. And so, Christ is a complete Savior. He is a Savior who saves to the uttermost. Because if that were not true, if that were not true that the exalted Christ, by his Spirit, makes us partakers of that righteousness, makes us partakers of that salvation that he secured on the cross, he would have died in vain. Because there is no human being, who, of themselves, is even remotely inclined to seek that righteousness. We are dead in sins and trespasses. But Christ has been exalted as a Prince and a Savior at the Father’s right hand. He has been exalted to give repentance to fallen sons and daughters of Adam.

And so, Paul beautifully summarizes it in the last verse of Romans 4, where he gives us that two sides of one coin. The coin of redemption has two sides: “Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification” (verse 25). And that little word “for” in the Greek language is so profoundly important. That word “for” communicates, he did that on our behalf, dear people of God, dear believer, on your behalf, he was delivered for your offences, but he was also raised again for your justification. So Peter puts it this way, in 1 Peter 3, verse 18: “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust”—and here comes this beautiful phrase—“that he might bring us to God”—that’s it—“being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.”

And so, Christ suffered and died, not so that sinners could have a place in heaven. Christ did not suffer and die to secure heaven, although that’s one of the benefits. Christ suffered and died to reconcile us with God. He suffered and died to restore us unto God. He suffered, and died, and rose again to bring us back to God, to bring us in a personal, everlasting love relationship with God. And that’s why, you see, the resurrection of Christ guarantees the full and free pardon of the sins of his people. Christ suffered, and died, and rose again, so that God can freely pardon all of your sins, and remove completely that which separates us from him.

That’s why the blessing of the forgiveness of sins is such a foundational component of the gospel that needs to be emphasized time and again. That’s why it is Christ’s desire, that’s why he ministers to us through his Word and Spirit. That’s why he labors in our soul to bring us to that realization. It is Christ’s desire, it is Christ’s desire that those for whom he died and rose again would enjoy the full benefits of what he has accomplished, and to live in the joy of that salvation. Because that’s what the resurrection guarantees. Oh, the resurrection of Christ guarantees that in Christ, dear believer, you, who, by grace, have taken refuge to this Christ, that in him, God is forever with you. That’s why his name is “Emmanuel...God with us: (Matthew 1:23). That’s why Paul could say so boldly that nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God which is Christ Jesus (Romans 8:39). Oh, God is with us because of what Christ has done for us. Again, Romans 8, that wonderful chapter, and Paul, as it were, boldly challenges even the devils, and says, “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” (verses 33–34).

2. The Sanctification of Believers

But out of this, out of this, flows another blessing. *Secondly*, it says, *we are also by His power raised up to a new life*—or better, [being] *raised up to a new life*. So not only does the resurrection of Christ guarantee the justification of God's people. It also guarantees their sanctification. You know, those are two very important words. Even our boys and girls will, no doubt, learn this in school—two very important words that belong together very, very closely. And so again, what is justification? By means of justification, God restores our relationship with him. But in sanctification, we begin to live in that new relationship. That's why Paul refers to God's children as "new creatures" in Christ (2 Corinthians 5, verse 17)—new creatures in Christ. And so, dear believer, you have been redeemed for a purpose. You have been redeemed in order to live a life, again, that begins to answer to the purpose for which you were created.

We are also by His power [being] raised up to a new life—a life devoted to God. And so, in justification, God lays the foundation of that life again. That's why it is impossible to separate those two. It is impossible that someone is justified and is also not sanctified. Because those who are saved by Christ are also predestined to become like Christ. That's why the resurrection of Christ is also the basis and the foundation of the quickening work of the Spirit of Christ. That's why, after he returned to his Father, that's why he pours out his Holy Spirit; so that by his Spirit, fallen sinners dead in trespasses and sins might be made partakers of that new life, might become living souls again. And what is a living soul? A living soul is someone who, again, begins to live in union and communion with God, resurrected unto a new life.

That's why regeneration could justly be called the resurrection of the soul. And so, if by the grace of God, you may be a living soul, if the evidences of that new life do manifest themselves in your life in some measure, it's because you have experienced a spiritual resurrection—a spiritual resurrection that is the direct result of Christ's resurrection. Because in regeneration, dead sinners are made alive again. So Paul writes to the Ephesians, in Ephesians 2, verse 1, "And you," he says, "you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."

I have no time now, but for your own edification, go to the Canons of Dort—jot this down, if you're taking notes. Go to chapters 3 and 4, and read article 12, page 108 in the back of your psalter, where you have a marvelous description of that spiritual resurrection, that marvelous work of regeneration.

And as I said this morning already, in regeneration, what makes the soul alive is because the Spirit unites us to Christ. He unites us to this living Savior. There comes a living union with him. And so that life of the believer is a life that flows out of his risen Christ. And that's why the very nature of that life is that it will be focused on Christ; it will be oriented on Christ. That's why Jesus said, "Every man...that has heard, and hath learned of the Father" (John 6:45)—and he uses a tense in the Greek that refers to the wonder of regeneration—Anyone that has been quickened; anyone who has been quickened by my Father, and who receives his instruction, they will come to me. That's why our religious experience is null and void, and it is of no value, no matter how many tears we may have shed, if it does not lead us to Christ. Because the life that the sinner receives comes out of Christ. Because in regeneration, we are united to Christ. And therefore, that life that flows out of him is attracted to him, and is oriented to him. And that's why Jesus said, "Every man...that has heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me," and will continue to come unto me.

And that union with Christ cannot but produce a new life. So let me read the entire text: 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is anew creature: old things are

passed away...all things are become new.” And that’s why we can never separate justification and sanctification. That’s why James said—as we saw this morning—that’s why he said that Abraham and Rahab were justified by works. He was not suggesting that they were saved by their works, but he was saying that their works, what they did, justified the fact that they were believers (James 2:23).

That’s why, throughout Scripture, there is this inseparable connection. That’s why Jesus said, If you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15). There is no such thing as being a believer in Christ and not be a follower of Christ. Those two belong inseparably together. Or, to put it very simply, those that come to Christ—listen carefully—those that come to Christ will always become like Christ. Those who come to Christ will become like Christ. And if that’s missing, then the real evidence of the work of the Spirit of Christ, who now dwells in the believer, the Spirit of the exalted Christ, who makes his abode in the believer—that Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, whose work it is to glorify him, to take out of him and to show it unto us—how can it be that the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, and that that indwelling does not manifest itself in a growing likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ?

And so, we can simply say—I’ll repeat it—that sanctification—this manifestation of the new life—sanctification is the justification of our justification. Now, that sounded like a mouthful. Sanctification is the justification of our justification. And that simply means, it is a sanctified life, a Christlike life, which is the only reliable biblical evidence that we are justified in Christ, because the two belong inseparably together.

And so, that’s the wonderful privilege of the believer. That’s why Paul set down these beautiful words in Galatians 2, verse 20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live”—and listen to what he says—“yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” And the result of that indwelling ministry of Christ in the believer is that gradually, we become more and more conformed to him. That’s sanctification. Sanctification is that we more and more die to ourselves, and that more and more, we begin to resemble him. Because that’s the purpose for which we were chosen in him. We were chosen in Christ, to become like Christ.

And so, sanctification is the process of a believer, who is complete in Christ, and who slowly but surely becomes like Christ. That’s why I said here before, sanctification is not becoming what we ought to be, because that’s a hopeless case. Sanctification, dear congregation, means that slowly but surely, we become what we are in Christ. In Christ, we are complete. In Christ, we are without spot or wrinkle. And slowly but surely, the Holy Spirit works in us till we become what we already are in him. That’s so, that’s so encouraging, so encouraging, congregation, because that means, with all of our struggles, with all of our ups and downs, with all of our failures, it doesn’t change who I am, it doesn’t change my position. That position is absolutely secure. That means that tomorrow morning, you can rise, and bow your knees and say, “Oh, Holy Spirit, enable me today to be what I am—enable me to be what I am!” That’s sanctification.

But the comfort of the resurrection is that, not only is your justification is guaranteed by the resurrection, but your sanctification is guaranteed by the resurrection. Read Romans 6. Your sanctification is guaranteed. The Christ who has redeemed you will sanctify you by his Spirit. He will not forsake the work of his own hands. That’s why Paul could say, in Philippians 1, verse 6: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

3. The Glorification of the Saints

And lastly, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection. And I have to be brief here, but it will come up again in subsequent Lord's Days, where I can unpack this a little bit more. But I have to be brief here. What a blessed reality it is! Christ, the first fruits, we read from 1 Corinthians 15. And so, dear believer, his resurrection is the warranty of your final resurrection. As surely as he rose from the dead, so surely will you rise, when your soul and body will be reunited; and you will receive a body like unto Christ's.

So let's close with looking at this wonderful passage that summarizes all of this, in 1 John 3. Please open your Bibles to 1 John 3, the opening verses: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." Then notice, that's the purpose of redemption, that we, who were in Adam, were a son and daughter of God, that in and through Christ, we become the sons and daughters of the living God. "Behold, what manner of love." And now, verse 2: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." What a precious word that is!

Two things, two wonderful blessings that a believer may look forward to. John says, when he appears, when He comes in glory, "we shall be like him." At last, at last, "we shall be like him." Because we were chosen. We have been predestined to be conformed to his image. The goal of his redeeming work is that we shall be like him. And that day is coming, when at last, we shall be like him, delivered from the body of this death, and "we shall see him as he is."

And congregation, we can examine ourselves by this—what does this mean to you? Does that stir your soul? Does that stir your soul? Can you say before God that that is the deep longing of your soul? The deep longing of your soul is to be where he is, to be with him. As Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," and "to be with Christ...is far better" (Philippians 1:21, 23). To be with him, and to see him at last, as he really is, to behold him in his glory. Oh, what we see of him here is already so beautiful, and yet it's so primitive. What a day is coming! That's why Paul speaks of those who love his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). And true believers love his appearing. They love to see him. They love to behold him. They long for this day, his day, that at last, they will see him as he is, and they shall then be like him.

Can you relate to this, congregation? Is that the desire of your life? Then, by the indwelling of the his Spirit, you might be like him, and thus, bring glory to him. That's the calling of the Christian life. The calling of the Christian life is to bring glory to our Savior, by walking in his ways; to honor the living Word by honoring his written Word. What a blessed future awaits. The people of God, a glorious future, a glorious resurrection, when we will receive a resurrection body like unto Christ; and then we shall forever be with him; when we shall forever behold his glory; when we shall forever be like him; and there will never come a cloud between us again! Oh, what a blessed future! Is it your future, congregation? That's the question. And that's the Question of the Catechism: *What doth the resurrection of Christ profit us?* Is this your future? Because it will only be your future if it is evident in this life that you believe in Christ and that you are a follower of Christ, because those belong inseparably together.

Oh, the day is coming of which Christ spoke: "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"—two options; only two possibilities. What will your and my resurrection be? A resurrection of life, or a resurrection of damnation? That's why, if you have never taken refuge to this Christ, hear his

voice today, while he proffers peace and pardon. Take refuge! Take refuge to this Christ, who said, in John 11, verses 25 and 26: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” Amen.

Let’s pray.

Lord, we give thee thanks for the privilege of being in thy house today; for the proclamation of thy Word also in this evening hour. O the glorious truths regarding a resurrected Christ, delivered for our offenses, raised again for our justification; a Christ, who is a complete Savior, who saves to the uttermost; a Christ, who in his exaltation, applies what he has merited in his humiliation. O that we would examine our hearts tonight whether we love this Christ in sincerity, whether we hunger and thirst after him and his righteousness, lest our resurrection would be a resurrection of damnation. O we pray that, by grace, our resurrection would be a resurrection unto life, that by grace, we may look forward to that day, when we will see him as he is, and we will be like him at last. Forgive us our sins of this day and hour. Go with us to our homes. Protect us in all of our ways. Life is so uncertain, death lurks everywhere. Bless us in this coming week. Bless the labor of our hands. Bless our children as they receive their education. And gather with us again this coming Lord’s Day. We ask it alone in Christ’s name. Amen.