

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

*Sermon #28, Lord's Day 21, part 2*

## The Church's Confession Regarding the Forgiveness of Sins



The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education

## **John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

© 2025 by John Knox Institute of Higher Education

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, John Knox Institute, P.O. Box 19398, Kalamazoo, MI 49019-19398, USA.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

Visit our website: [www.johnknoxinstitute.org](http://www.johnknoxinstitute.org)

Bartel Elshout is pastor of the Kalamazoo Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan. He previously served as pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregations of Jordan (Ontario), Chilliwack (British Columbia), and Hull (Iowa). He continues to serve as a part-time instructor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He previously served as the founding principal of the Netherlands Reformed Christian School in Pompton Plains, New Jersey and as an evangelist in Denver, Colorado. He is also the translator of Wilhelmus à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death* by Theodorus van der Groe, and Alexander Comrie's *The Distinctive Marks of Saving Faith*. He was previously married to his late wife, Joan, with whom he has two children, David and Sarah, and seven grandchildren. He is presently married to Clarice.

[www.kalamazooreformed.org](http://www.kalamazooreformed.org)



**VIDEO SERMON SERIES**  
**Sermons on the**  
**Heidelberg Catechism**  
**by Rev. Bartel Elshout**

1. The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death (Lord's Day 1–1, Question 1)
2. The Pattern of Christian Experience (Lord's Day 1–2, Question 2)
3. The Law of God and Our Misery (Lord's Day 2, Questions 3–5)
4. The Total (Radical) Depravity of Man (Lord's Day 3, Questions 6–8)
5. Man's Sinnership in Light of God's Justice (Lord's Day 4-1, Questions 9–11)
6. The Doctrine of Hell (Lord's Day 4-2, Question 11)
7. Perfect Satisfaction: A Requirement for Deliverance (Lord's Day 5, Q. 12–15)
8. The One Mediator Between God and Man (Lord's Day 6, Questions 16–19)
9. True Saving Faith (Lord's Day 7, Questions 20–23)
10. The God of Salvation: A Triune God (Lord's Day 8, Questions 24–25)
11. Faith in God the Father (Lord's Day 9, Question 26)
12. The Providence of God (Lord's Day 10–1, Question 27)
13. Rich Benefits Derived from Believing God's Providence (Lord's Day 10–2, Q. 28)
14. Jesus, the Savior of Sinners (Lord's Day 11, Questions 29–30)
15. Faith in Christ (Lord's Day 12–1, Question 31)
16. The Identity of the True Christian (Lord's Day 12–2, Question 32)
17. The Unique Identity of Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 13–1, Question 33)
18. The Lordship of Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 13–2, Question 34)
19. The Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 14, Questions 35–36)
20. Faith in the Suffering Son of God (Lord's Day 15, Questions 37–39)
21. Christ—A Savior Who Has Paid the Wages of Sin in Full (Lord's Day 16, Q. 40–44)



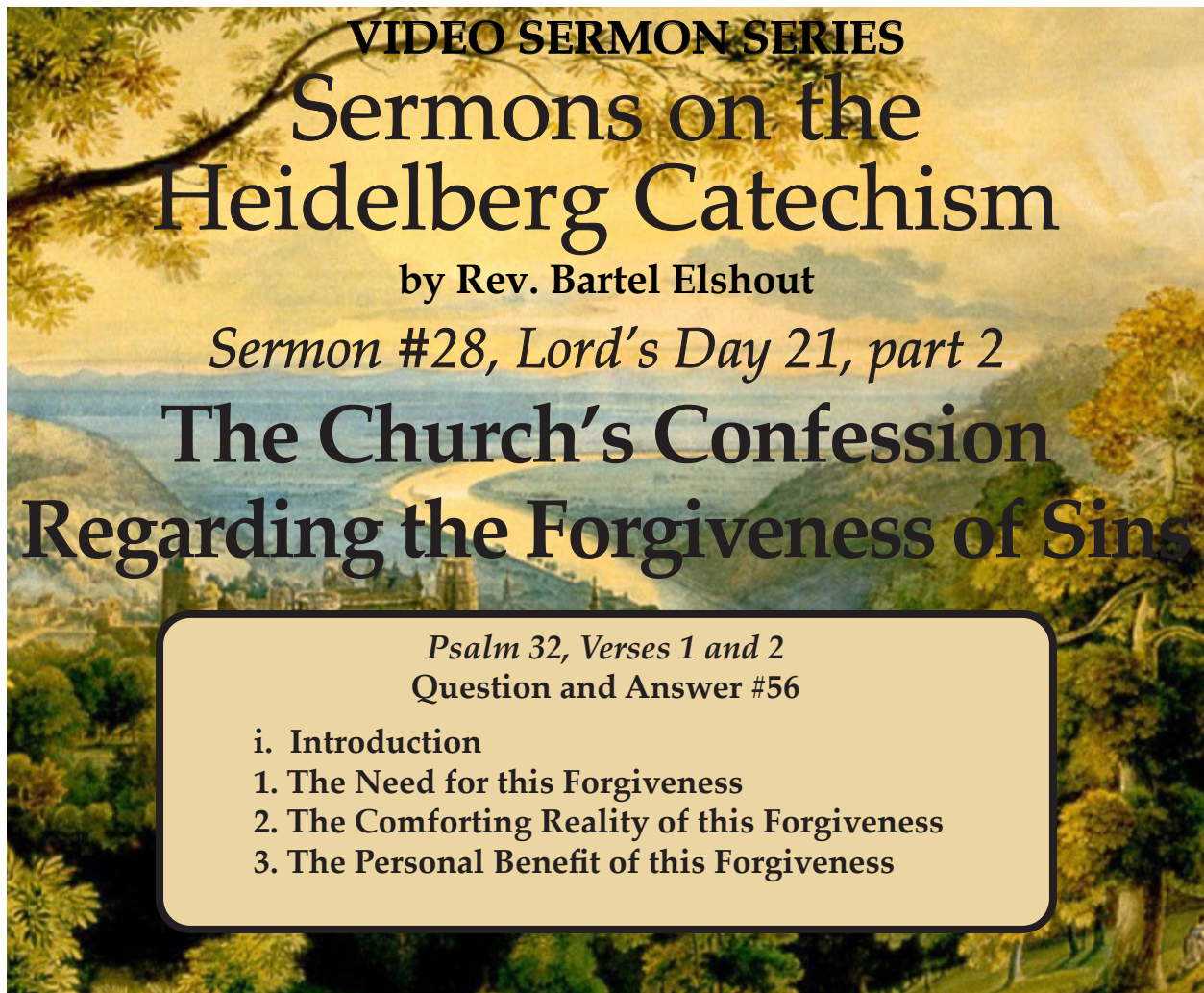
VIDEO SERMON SERIES  
**Sermons on the  
Heidelberg Catechism**  
by Rev. Bartel Elshout

22. The Threefold Benefits of the Resurrection of Christ (Lord's Day 17, Q. 45)
23. The Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 18, Questions 46–49)
24. Faith in the Exalted Christ (Lord's Day 19–1, Questions 50–51)
25. The Second Coming of Christ (Lord's Day 19–2, Question 52)
26. Faith in God the Holy Spirit (Lord's Day 20, Question 53)
27. The Holy Catholic (Universal) Church of Christ (Lord's Day 21–1, Q. 54–56)
- 28. The Church's Confession Regarding Forgiveness of Sins (Lord's Day 21–2, Q. 56)**
29. The Future of the Christian (Lord's Day 22, Questions 57–58)
30. Justifying Faith (Lord's Day 23, Questions 59–61)
31. The Believer and Good Works (Lord's Day 24, Questions 62–64)
32. Faith and the Sacraments (Lord's Day 25, Questions 65–68)
33. Holy Baptism and the Promise of the Gospel (Lord's Day 26, Questions 69–71)
34. The Water of Holy Baptism (Lord's Day 27–1 Questions 72–73)
35. The Baptism of Infants (Lord's Day 27–2, Question 74)
36. The Holy Supper of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 28, Questions 75–77)
37. The Value of the Lord's Supper (Lord's Day 29, Questions 78–79)
38. The Observance of the Lord's Supper (Lord's Day 30, Questions 80–82)
39. The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Lord's Day 31, Questions 83–85)
40. The Good Works of the Christian (Lord's Day 32, Questions 86–87)
41. The True Conversion of Man (Lord's Day 33, Questions 88–91)
42. The Transcript of God's Mind (Lord's Day 34–1, Questions 92–95)



**VIDEO SERMON SERIES**  
**Sermons on the**  
**Heidelberg Catechism**  
**by Rev. Bartel Elshout**

43. The Holy Law of God (Lord's Day 34–2, Questions 92–95)
44. The Second Commandment (Lord's Day 35–1, Questions 96–97)
45. Preaching of God's Word and Graven Images (Lord's Day 35–2, Question 98)
46. God's Commandment Concerning His Name (Lord's Day 36, Questions 99–100)
47. God's Name and the Oath (Lord's Day 37, Questions 101–102)
48. The Fourth Commandment, part 1 (Lord's Day 38–1, Question 103)
49. The Fourth Commandment, part 2 (Lord's Day 38–2, Question 103)
50. The Threefold Requirement of the Fifth Commandment (Lord's Day 39, Q. 104)
51. The Sixth Commandment (Lord's Day 40, Questions 105–107)
52. The Seventh Commandment and Marriage (Lord's Day 41, Questions 108–109)
53. The Eighth Commandment (Lord's Day 42, Questions 110–111)
54. The Ninth Commandment (Lord's Day 43, Question 112)
55. Final Observations About the Law of God (Lord's Day 44, Questions 113–115)
56. The Prayer of the Christian (Lord's Day 45, Questions 116–119)
57. The Address of the Lord's Prayer (Lord's Day 46, Questions 120–121)
58. Hallowing of God's "Father" Name (Lord's Day 47, Question 122)
59. The Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer (Lord's Day 48, Question 123)
60. The Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer, (Lord's Day 49, Question 124)
61. The Christian's Petition for Daily Bread (Lord's Day 50, Question 125)
62. Readiness to Forgive (Lord's Day 51, Question 126)
63. The Last Petition of the Lord's Prayer (Lord's Day 52, Questions 127–129)



VIDEO SERMON SERIES

# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

*Sermon #28, Lord's Day 21, part 2*

## The Church's Confession Regarding the Forgiveness of Sins

*Psalm 32, Verses 1 and 2*  
Question and Answer #56

### **i. Introduction**

- 1. The Need for this Forgiveness**
- 2. The Comforting Reality of this Forgiveness**
- 3. The Personal Benefit of this Forgiveness**

### **Introduction**

Congregation, turn with me for a moment to 2 Samuel chapter 12. This is the chapter that records for us Nathan's visit to the palace of David, sent there by God to confront David with his sin. You know, boys and girls, that David had fallen very grievously into sin. He committed adultery with a woman not his wife, and then he tried to cover up what he had done. And he thought he had succeeded, except that it says at the very end of chapter 11, "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (verse 27). Oh, our foolishness to think that our sinful behavior goes unnoticed, because it doesn't. And then the Lord sends Nathan to David. And you know the story of how Nathan uses the parable of this poor man who had but one ewe lamb, and how this rich man took that one ewe lamb to use that to feed his guests. David was filled with anger, and said "This man deserves to die." And that made Nathan, given the courage and boldness from God, there to confront his king. And in that culture, that would often mean a death sentence. You just didn't do that. And Nathan said, "Thou art the man." Thou art the man. Then, now look at verse 13, how David responds, and that's so wonderful. Then we see the grace of God in this king: "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD." Notice, he doesn't just say, "I have sinned." No, "I have sinned against the LORD"—with those capital letters—I have sinned against the God of my salvation. "I have sinned against the LORD." And then, immediately Nathan answers and

says, “The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” That’s amazing. So, no sooner did David confess his sin, no sooner did he acknowledge his iniquity, and Nathan was commissioned by God to immediately declare to him that his sin was forgiven. Because, congregation, such is the nature and such is the character of God. Though what David had done was exceedingly vile and exceedingly wicked, the grace of God exceeded his wickedness.

And so, what this demonstrates is that God is a God who delights in mercy; that God is a God who delights to pardon. And that’s what we hope to focus on again tonight. In God’s Providence, I was not really able to deal with Question and Answer #56. I was able to say a little bit about it, but this is such an important article of our faith, when we confess, in the Apostles’ Creed that “We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins.” And so, we want to focus on that, with God’s help. Let’s read Question and Answer #56 of Lord’s Day 21, of our the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Question is asked: *What believest thou concerning “the forgiveness of sins?”*

The Answer is: *That God, for the sake of Christ’s satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God.*

And so, *The Church’s Confession Regarding the Forgiveness of Sins*. First of all, we will consider *The Need for this Forgiveness*. Why do you and I need to be forgiven? Secondly, *The Comforting Reality of this Forgiveness*, namely, that God does so for the sake of Christ’s satisfaction, that for the sake of Christ’s satisfaction, he graciously imputes to me, the guilty sinner, the righteousness of Christ—so, *The Comforting Reality of this Forgiveness*. And thirdly, *The Personal Benefit of this Forgiveness*. So, this forgiveness is so comprehensive that, in the very last line, it says, *That I may never—never—be condemned before the tribunal of God*. So, *The Need for this Forgiveness; The Comforting Reality of this Forgiveness; and The Personal Benefit of this Forgiveness*.

## **1. The Need for this Forgiveness**

Congregation, how serious is sin? This morning, we considered what Christ had to do to deal with the reality of sin. And I’ve said this before, and I’m speaking to myself, far too often we think lightly of sin. Far too often, we fail to realize how seemingly offensive sin is in the sight of God. We fail to realize how supremely it dishonors God when we sin. And what does it mean to sin? So, boys and girls, I’m sure some of you would be able to answer that question. You would say, “Well, Pastor, it’s when we do wrong things.” Yes, that’s true, when we do wrong things. So how do we know whether we do wrong things? Well, God has given us his law. He’s given us his Word. And so, any time we act contrary to that Word, anytime we act contrary to that law, we are sinning.

And when we sin, we are offending the God who created us. We are supremely offending him. That’s why I pointed out this morning already that the cross of Calvary and what God did to his own Son, congregation, the cross of Calvary is God’s ultimate statement to us of how he views sin. Sin is so serious that in order to secure the salvation of sinners, God had to subject his only begotten Son to the accursed death on the cross; in order that on the basis of that sacrifice, he would be able to grant to sinners, to transgressors, to rebels, to enemies as we are by nature, to grant to them the full and free pardon of all of their sins. And congregation, that is so very important for us.

And so, my question then, right away, is to you—boys and girls, I’m asking you the question too—if suddenly you were to die—that happens; sometimes children die; sometimes serious accidents happen—how would you die? How would you meet your God? Would you meet him as a forgiven sinner? Because that’s the only way, congregation, that our life’s journey will end well,

in this sin that separates us from God. That's why Psalm 130—we sang it together—David says, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (verse 3). What a serious statement that is! And so, the implication of that statement, then, is saying, we cannot stand before God if God would hold us accountable for our transgressions; and he will, congregation. God is a God who cannot overlook sin. God is a God who cannot compromise. The nature of sin is such that his divine being can only respond in one way, and that is to punish those who transgress his Word, who transgress his holy law.

That's why I began by saying, do we realize how serious it is to be a sinner? And that's why it's so important for us to know—boys and girls, for you too—it is so important for us to know whether our sins are forgiven. Because, only when our sins are forgiven, are we reconciled with God. Only then can we truly face the remainder of our life's journey. But the wonderful truth of the gospel is that the very God against whom we have sinned, the very God who we offend, that that God has eternally purposed to provide the full and free pardon of sin. Oh, we need to realize that the whole gospel of forgiveness, congregation, that gospel comes out of the heart of God himself. If there is anything that unveils to us the character of God, it is the fact that this God, who is infinitely holy, that this God is a God who delights in mercy. Because, when we sinned, God's character did not change. That means, of course, the attributes of his holiness and his justice are unchangeable, but also the attributes of his love. God is a God of love.

## **2. The Comforting Realty of this Forgiveness**

And that's why God has eternally purposed that he would find a way in which he would be able to pardon sinners; to be able to pardon rebels; to be able to pardon those who, by nature, hate God and hate their neighbor; those, who by nature, have no regard for God; those, who by nature are transgressors of his law; those who are worthy, who only deserve one thing, and that is, the everlasting wrath of God. That's why God has eternally purposed that he would give his only begotten Son to be a sacrifice for sin. Because, as you know, as I've said this already repeatedly, God is a God who cannot compromise. It is impossible for God to overlook one single sin. If he were to overlook one single sin, he would cease to be God. His character is such that sin must be dealt with.

That's why your and my only hope is that the God against whom we have sinned, that he pardons our sin, that he forgives our sin. And to that end, he sent his Son into a world that did not ask for a Savior. God looked down from heaven, you know, Psalms 14 and 53, repeated in Romans 3, he looked down from heaven...to see if there were any that sought after God. There was none. But God is God, you see, and so even though we fell in Adam, even though we changed, God is the unchangeable one. He cannot deny himself. There had to be a way in which his eternal love could flow forth in a manner that is entirely consistent with his being. And that's why Christ came—came into the world to suffer and die. That's why he came, as we saw this morning, to allow his blessed body to be broken, and why his blood flowed freely on Calvary. Because he himself testified to the disciples as he instituted the Lord's Supper that he would shed that blood for the remission of sins. Christ understood fully that that is the foundational blessing that had to be secured for fallen sons and daughters of Adam. And congregation, it is God's delight to bestow a full and free pardon on sinners for the sake of what his Son has accomplished. Because it is God's eternal desire to bring fallen sinners like you and I, to bring us back to himself. God's desire is to bring us back into an everlasting love relationship with himself, but that can only be on the basis of forgiven sins. Our sins have to be removed. And that's why the forgiveness of sins is such a foundational truth of the

gospel.

And so, we read—open your Bible for a minute to Micah 7. It's such a powerful passage related to this subject. Turn with me to Micah 7, verse 18. And there, we read this. There is Micah; in holy amazement, he cries out: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." Because the God against whom we have sinned is a God of infinite love, and he found a way that that love could be manifested to sinners like us. And that's why the Son had to come into the world. "God so loved the world that he gave" the Son of his love, so that whoever would "believe in him would not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). So that whoever believes in that Christ would obtain the full and free pardon of sin.

And so, let's just walk through Scripture. I recently, of course, we did a whole topic on this, and so some of these passages that I will be quoting, and you will find in my outline as well that I provided for all of you. But you see, this truth that God is a pardoning God, that God is a God who delights in mercy, that truth is woven all through Scripture.

So let's open our Bibles to Exodus 34, verse 6, that foundational passage of the Old Testament, where God reveals himself to Moses—a passage that was deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of God's people; a passage to which the psalmists frequently refer. Exodus 34, verse 6, and so, the Lord shows Moses his glory: "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed"—and look what God says about himself, congregation, look what he says about himself—"The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Three different words are used here for sin. In other words, God wanted Moses to know that the very character of his mercy is such that it encompasses every conceivable type of sin. And that the rich truth of the gospel, congregation.

That's why the gospel is such good news for sinners like we are. Because the gospel tells us it doesn't matter how much you have sinned, it doesn't matter how long you have sinned, it doesn't matter how ugly your sins are, how vile they are, God will pardon them. He will pardon any sinner that takes refuge to him. That's why, without any hesitation, Nathan said, After all the wicked stuff you did, your adultery, your deceit, your murder, God has pardoned it all, and you will not die. Such is the character of God. That's why Manasseh, when he humbled himself in the prison cell, when he besought the God of his fathers, and he cried out for mercy, God was gracious, even to that exceedingly wicked king (2 Chronicles 33:12–13).

Of course, as I have said here often already, we see it also in the institution of the morning and evening sacrifice. Turn with me to Numbers 14, verses 19 and 20, where we see a beautiful application of that. Because the morning and evening sacrifice were appointed by this gracious God who delights in mercy. He wanted his people to know every morning and evening that he, on the basis of the shed blood of that lamb—a lamb was slain every morning and evening—that he could be their God and that every day, he was ready to pardon their sins. In Numbers 14—now Moses is beseeching, he's praying for his people—he said: "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word." So, what Moses did, he appealed to God's character. He aimed right for God's heart. And congregation, God's character is such, he loves to be reminded by us of who he is. When you read the great prayers of Scripture, the prayer of Solomon (1 Kings 8:22), the prayer of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:5), they always took aim at the heart of God. And that's what Moses did here, as he interceded. He said, Lord, hast

thou not “pardoned this people, even from Egypt even until now?” And the Lord heard him, and he allowed himself to be, reverently speaking, persuaded by Moses, and he said, “I have pardoned according to thy word.” Why?—because that’s his character. He delights to pardon. He is a God who is ready to pardon. And that’s why, the calling of the priest was, whenever an Israelite would come with the appointed sacrifice, they were called by God to declare to that Israelite, “Your sin is forgiven; it shall be forgiven.”

Turn with me to Isaiah 1, the witness of the prophets, Isaiah 1, verse 18. And again, what is profound there in that chapter is that, in the first 17 verses, God indicts the people of Israel, confronts them with their wickedness. He said, even an ox knows his master, but you? And then God begins to describe the sinfulness of his own people. And then we come to this amazing verse, and he says, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” That’s what God does. In the gospel, he reasons with us. He reasons with us on the basis of the finished work of his only begotten Son. Oh, in the gospel, he says, “Come, sinner, let us reason together. Let us reason with what my Son has accomplished.” And he declares to us in his Word that if we take refuge to his Son, if we believe in his Son, if we trust in his Son, we will find him to be a God who is ready to forgive. In Jeremiah 33, verse 8, God says, “And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.”

That’s why, in the parable of the king and his servant, Jesus deliberately describes that king in such a way that we would grasp the very character of God. You know that that servant, he owed his king ten thousand talents, and one talent is six thousand pence, and one pence is the daily wage of a laborer. So ten thousand talents in our currency today is anywhere from seven to ten billion dollars. So, an overwhelmingly large amount, a debt that this man could not pay. But his king was gracious to him, and with one word, he cancelled that entire debt—it was gone. And Christ wanted the people, he wanted his disciples to know, this is the character of God (Matthew 18:23–34). This is the character, congregation, that we sought to describe a few weeks ago to you, when we spoke about the parable of the gracious father who received his repentant son, a son who had so offended his father (Luke 15:11–32). And what we see in that parable? That father runs to embrace his son in the arms of his love. And Jesus told that story to illustrate why he received sinners and actually even ate with them. Of course, in the New Testament, too, this truth is taught in various ways. I need to move on here.

First of all, Acts 5:31, right, where Peter says: “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. Acts 13:38, Paul ends his sermon by saying: “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” First John 1, verse 9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

That’s why the Catechism says so beautifully here, *That God...will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long.* He will no more remember my sins. So, boys and girls, you might ask, “How can that be? God is all-knowing. How is it possible that God can no longer remember my sin?” Well, that simply means that when God pardons, he pardons once and for all. He will never, ever come back to it. That’s it. He will remember our sins no more. Listen to Isaiah 38, verse 17: “For thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.” That’s what God does when he pardons our sins. Isaiah 43, verse 25: “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy

transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” Micah 7, verse 19: “Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

Oh, such is the nature of God’s grace. Such is the nature of that divine pardon, that he offers freely in the gospel to any sinner, no matter how much we have sinned, no matter how long we have sinned. The promise of the gospel is that if we take refuge to his only begotten Son, and we put our trust in him, God will cast all of our sins behind his back forever.

So, boys and girls, let me explain it to you this way. Just imagine now that I would ask you on a black board, or a white board, to write down every sin that you can think of, every sin that you have committed. Let’s assume that you would be able to fill an entire white board with all the sinful thoughts you have thought, all the sinful words you have said, all the sinful things you have done. What God does, in one moment, he erases that entire record of sin. That’s what it means that he will remember our sins no more. It’s like where if you would use your—you’re a whole new generation—but if you would use your computers, your laptop, and you would fill a sheet on your computer, you would fill it with all of your sins that you can think of, and if you pressed control-A, and press the delete button, it’s gone. That’s what God does. That’s how he pardons sin. He will remember it no more.

*Neither*; it says here, *my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long*. You see, here it addresses the reality of the life of the Christian. Because it is true, when, by God’s grace, and by the work of the Holy Spirit, we take refuge to Christ for the first time, and when, by grace, we touch the hem of his garment, and we put our trust in him, at that moment, God grants the sinner a full and complete and irreversible pardon. But the painful reality in the life of the Christian is that we continue to sin the rest of our days. We have to deal with the bitter reality of our corrupt nature, of our corrupt and ungodly flesh, that old nature. You have to realize that our flesh is flesh. That old nature is our old nature. That’s incorrigible. Our flesh, the flesh of the believer, is as wicked as the flesh of an unbeliever. That’s why the flesh has to be crucified.

But the difference is that now there comes this holy warfare in the life of the believer, that battle between the new nature and that old nature, that battle which the Apostle Paul describes in the second half of Romans chapter 7—a passage that has been so comforting to so many of God’s children throughout the ages. Because they recognize in that passage, they recognize their own struggle, that wretched tendency, that when I wish to do what pleases God, I end up doing that which I hate; and I end up doing what I do not intend to do. Even in my most holy moments, Paul says, even then, sin is ever present with me, causing him to cry out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But then he cries out by faith, you see, that recognition of his own wretchedness, by renewal, made him look outside of himself, and he cries out with joy, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 8:22–25).

That’s the difference, you see, between a nominal believer and a true believer. The nominal believer doesn’t have that struggle. And so, we have people that cannot relate to that struggle. We have what I call, we have so-called zip-a-dee-doo-dah<sup>1</sup> Christians. They don’t know what this is. They don’t struggle with their flesh. But God’s children, they will struggle. They know what that struggle is. They struggle with this every single day.

That’s why we are called to preach the gospel to you again and again. That’s why, actually, what we need to do is that every day we need to preach the gospel to ourselves. We need to remind ourselves of what the gospel is. We need to remind ourselves of the full and all-encompassing nature of what Christ has accomplished. We need to remind ourselves that even when we fail,

<sup>1</sup> zip-a-dee-doo-dah is an American colloquialism, an exclamation of happiness, often used sarcastically.

and when we stumble, that God is always ready to forgive. That's the whole point of the morning and evening sacrifice. God knew what to expect from Israel. He knew they would sin against him daily. But he wanted them to know that he was ready to forgive them daily. Every morning, every evening, he communicated by means of that sacrifice, "No matter how often you sin against me, I am always ready to pardon on the basis of that sacrifice," that lamb that was slain, that pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to his finished work.

And so, God is able to do it. We've already, of course, we have alluded to that already, *for the sake*, it says here, *of Christ's satisfaction*, a simple but profound statement—*Christ's satisfaction*. And so, God can be completely gracious. God can be completely ready to forgive sins, because he is completely satisfied with the finished work of his only begotten Son. That's what Christ accomplished. And so, in order for God to be a pardoning God, sin had to be dealt with. That's what happened at Calvary's cross. There, he paid the penalty of sin in full. There, he endured the wrath of God against sin. There, he experienced the reality of hell itself. He made perfect satisfaction—a satisfaction that is of eternal value. That's why it's so important to know that the Savior who hung on the cross, in his humanity, was nevertheless, very God. And therefore, what he did on that cross in six hours is of eternal value. And God demonstrated how well pleased he was with that sacrifice when he rent the veil, and when he raised his Son again from the dead. That's why Paul writes in Romans 3:25, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past."

### **3. The Personal Benefit of this Forgiveness**

Then the Catechism goes on to say, *That ...for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, [he] will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ*. You see, we can only be acceptable to God if we are righteous. God is a righteous God. But the wonder of the gospel is that the righteousness which God demands, and the righteousness which we utterly lack, that he provides that righteousness in his only begotten Son. And so, the promise of the gospel is that if we put our trust in Christ, that God imputes to me the righteousness, the flawless righteousness of his Son. That's the beauty of the gospel, that the righteousness which God requires, he has provided in his only begotten Son.

So, what does that mean, "to impute"? That's an old English word. So, boys and girls, let me try and explain that to you. So let's assume there is somebody who because of all kinds of mishaps, loses every penny he owns. He's bankrupt. And he owes, he owes a staggering amount of money to his creditors, and he can't pay it. And somehow, there is a benevolent man, a caring man, who hears about the plight of this man, and he's wealthy. So what he does is, he makes a transfer from his bank account into the empty bank account of that poor man. And so, suddenly he has the funds to be able to pay his debts. And you see, the bankers don't care, the creditors don't care where the money comes from, as long as the bills are paid. And so here, this man who had nothing, suddenly is able, he is debt free because someone transferred his wealth into his account. That wealth was credited to his account. That's exactly what God does. You and I, we are bankrupt; we are absolutely bankrupt. But when, by grace, we put our trust in Christ, that simple act of faith, as simple as the act of the woman touching the hem of his garment, by that simple act that so honors God, that so pleases him when we believe in his Son, that he will credit to my bankrupt sinner's account, he will credit the flawless righteousness of his only begotten Son. And he will then view me, the sinner, in light of that imputed righteousness, as if it were my own.

And so, what God really does is, first, he makes us righteous by imputing the righteousness of his Son, and then he declares us righteous on the basis of that righteousness, that alien righteousness, that righteousness that comes from outside of ourselves. That's, again, the foundational truth and promise of the gospel. That's why, in Psalm 32, we read it together, it begins this way, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity" (verses 1 and 2). Ah, you see, that's that blessed exchange that Luther was so fond of emphasizing in his preaching. Christ, my sin; and I, his righteousness—that's it; that's that blessed exchange.

Now congregation, that gift, that gracious gift is irreversible. Once God imputes that righteousness to me, he will never, ever take it back. Romans 3:24, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." And so, in Romans 8, verse 1, he can therefore say boldly, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." That's the gospel. That's the gospel we are called to proclaim. That's why the Word of God says that this truth will make you free indeed. And God wants his people to understand this. He wants them to believe it. He wants them to experience that blessed reality that he is ready to pardon, seventy times seven times; that he's ready to pardon, not only the first time, but ready to pardon over and over again. Because that's what we do. Because of our corrupt nature, we sin seventy times seven times. But his grace infinitely exceeds our sin. And so this is the promise, the promise that's articulated in Luke 24:47. That's a significant verse, because there we have the great commission, when Jesus sends his disciples into the world, and says, This is your message, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

And of course, this is also beautifully expressed, and I want you to turn to this with me. This is a beautiful passage, Isaiah 55, verse 7, again, so beautifully it sets before us the character of God. It sums up everything I've tried to say, Isaiah 55, verse 7. It says, "Let the wicked"—no flattering language—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God"—and here it comes—"for he will abundantly pardon." Not "he will reluctantly pardon," or "he will rarely pardon"—no, "he will abundantly pardon," because he delights in mercy. For Christ's sake, he can freely and fully pardon the sinner.

That's why, dear believer, God wants you to be assured of that reality. He does not want you to live in doubt about whether your sins are forgiven. That's why we have the sacred responsibility to preach this over and over again, to comfort you, to comfort you, to speak comfortably to my people, and to tell them that your warfare is accomplished, your iniquities are pardoned, you have received double for all of your sins (Isaiah 40:2). That's not presumption, congregation. You are not presuming something. This is the foundation of the gospel. This is the foundation of your relationship with God. God wants his people to be assured of that blessed reality.

And so, then, it ends there, it says, *That I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God.* What a precious statement that is, because we will all appear before God's tribunal. And when we stand before that tribunal, we will be judged by the Judge of all the earth. But when we have taken refuge to Christ, if we have become partakers of this salvation, if we have experienced the liberating truth of the gospel that God will pardon us fully and freely, then we do not have to fear that tribunal.

But if your sins are not forgiven, then you had better fear that tribunal, for then it will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, especially if you have lived under the gospel; especially if this salvation had been offered to you freely in Christ; especially if you have managed

to ignore what God has stated in his Word, it will be a fearful thing to fall into his hands.

But those who have taken refuge in Christ, they do not need to fear the tribunal of God. That's why Paul could say so boldly in Romans 8: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" (verses 33 and 34). And if anyone had a right to condemn, it would be God. But he will not condemn. Why? Because, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God" (verse 34). And so, for those who are in Christ, there is no condemnation. We do not have to fear the tribunal of God. On that last day, God will publically justify all those who have put their trust in Christ. That's why Paul could confidently face the end of his journey. In 2 Timothy 4, he is writing to his young son in the faith, Timothy. And he knows his end is coming, and he says, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to be only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). He was able to face the righteous Judge. He understood the gospel so well that he knew that God, as a righteous Judge, could not but welcome him, could not but allow him to enter into his everlasting presence, because he understood that Christ had stood in his place; that Christ had made satisfaction for him. And that a righteous Judge would be able to welcome him into His presence. Why? Because he had imputed also to Paul the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. But not only for me, he says, "but unto all them...that love his appearing."

What a beautiful description this is of the believer: "all who love his appearing." Could you relate to that? Do you love his appearing? Do you long to see him now, unveiled in the gospel? Do you long to see him, when the sacraments are administered? Do you long to see him, when you are alone in your closet when you read God's Word? Do you love his appearing? Because once, once we become acquainted graciously and experientially with this Christ, once we have learned to see his beauty, then we long to see it again. That's what really makes the believer happy, to behold Christ in all his beauty and in all his preciousness. Oh, Paul says, if you love his appearing as I do, you will be able to face that righteous Judge. Oh, with thee there is forgiveness, the God before whom we cannot stand; there is forgiveness for Christ's sake.

And dear believer, you are not presumptuous in trusting God's Word if that applies to you. If Christ has become precious to you, and if you have taken refuge to him, then I must declare to you that your sins are forgiven. This is foundational. It's God's desire that you would know this. That's why Jesus says, "Come unto me...and I'll give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). And in the present tense, "Keep coming to me, and I will keep giving you rest; not rest in anything of yourselves, not rest in anything in what you feel, but rest in me, rest in my finished work."

And so, congregation, are your sins forgiven? Boys and girls, are your sins forgiven? Do we have the wedding garment? You know that story. The king came in to see his guests—Matthew 22—and he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. And he said unto him, "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless" (verse 12). God forbid that that would be true of any of us. But thanks be to God, when the gospel is preached, God freely offers that wedding garment to sinners without money and without price. God declares to us again and again that he that believes in his Son will not perish but have everlasting life; that in Christ, he is ready to forgive—more ready than you are to repent, as Matthew Henry<sup>2</sup> says—ready to forgive you, seventy times seven times. And so, do not rest until you may know on biblical grounds that your sins are forgiven. Amen.

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry (1662–1714, was a British nonconformist and Presbyterian minister and author, best known for his six-volume biblical commentary, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*.

**Let's pray.**

Our gracious God, thou who art ready to forgive, we bow before thee. We give thee thanks for this glorious truth unveiled to us in the gospel; that gospel which declares to us that thy Son gave his life to secure the pardon of sin; thy Son, who sent his disciples into the world to preach repentance and remission of sins. Lord, bless thy Word as we have sought to expound it tonight, as we have sought to set before our dear congregation once again this extraordinary truth of the gospel, so foundational to the gospel; a gospel which says, "Be it known unto you men and brethren that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." And so, bless this word. Oh, we pray that none, none who are gathered here would end their journey without having their sins forgiven. Oh, what a fearful thing that will be. That so we may hear thy voice, while thou art still proffering peace and pardon. Go with us now to our homes. Give us traveling mercies. Bless us in this coming week, as we engage in our callings, as our boys and girls and our young people return to the classroom. Bless our time tonight as we gather with the young people. And look upon us in Christ, and pardon our sins for his sake. Amen.