

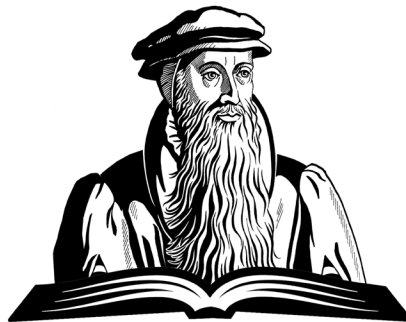
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #41, Lord's Day 33

The True Conversion of Man



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

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



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 the 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 #41, Lord's Day 33

**The True Conversion
of Man**

2 Corinthians 5, verse 17

Questions and Answers #88 thru #91

i. Introduction

- 1. The Nature of True Conversion**
- 2. The Components of True Conversion**
- 3. The Manifestation of True Conversion**

Introduction

Please turn with me for a moment to 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17, and there, we read God's Word, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." And so the Apostle Paul uses an expression that is woven throughout all his writings, namely, the expression of being "in Christ". We can safely say that that was Paul's favorite way of describing a Christian, a child of God. To be a Christian means to be in Christ. To be a Christian means to be united to Christ. To be a Christian means to be a living branch of the vine, Jesus Christ. But, what's important in our passage, that that union to Christ cannot but manifest itself. Because Paul is saying, when you are a new creation in Christ, a new creation—and Paul uses the word "creature" here deliberately, because we know that a creature cannot create itself. A creature is created, and in this case, of course, it is the great work of God the Holy Spirit, who makes a fallen sinner, a son or daughter of Adam, who makes them a new creature in Christ.

But that new creature will manifest itself, just like in everyday life. We know that someone is alive by the way they act. And even a mother knows that she has conceived a child, because it will not take very long before that life begins to manifest itself. That's what the Apostle Paul is saying here. When you are a new creature in Christ, when there is a real, genuine, living union that unites us to Christ, that cannot but manifest itself. And in this text, he says what will happen is that old things are passed away, and that all things are become new. And the Heidelberg Catechism

describes that as follows. It calls it *the mortification of the old man*, the dying of the old man, and the *quickening*, or the resurrection, *of the new man*.

And that brings us to Lord's Day 33, which deals with *The Conversion of Man*. We're now in the section of the Heidelberg Catechism that deals with *Gratitude*. And last week, we saw how that the gratitude of the Christian, the gratitude for having been delivered from my misery manifests itself in a godly life; manifests itself in a life that will be marked by good works; not good works to earn God's favor, but good works as an expression of gratitude for God's favor bestowed upon us. And this is unpacked for us in great detail in Lord's Day 33. And so, we read in,

Question #88: *Of how many parts doth the true conversion of man consist?*

The Answer is: *Of two parts: of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man.*

Question #89: *What is the mortification of the old man?*

So, boys and girls, "mortification" is an old word, it means literally the putting to death of the old man. What does the dying of the old man consist of?

The Answer is: *It is a sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins, and more and more to hate and flee from them.*

Question #90: *What is the quickening of the new man?* (The making alive of the new man.)

The Answer: *It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.*

Question #91: *But what are good works?*

The Answer is: *Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations or the institutions of men.*

So, the theme of the sermon is very simple and straight forward, *The True Conversion of Man*. First of all, *The Nature of True Conversion*—mortification of the old, quickening of the new. And secondly, we look in depth at what that means, what these *Components are of a True Conversion*. And thirdly, *The Manifestation of True Conversion*. It will manifest itself in a godly life. It will manifest itself in a life of habitual obedience towards the revealed will of God. So, *The Nature of True Conversion*, *The Components of True Conversion*, and, *The Manifestation of True Conversion*.

1. The Nature of True Conversion

Undoubtedly, you have noticed often that the Heidelberg Catechism uses the word "true," the adjective "true" to describe faith, but here, also conversion. Because they recognize that there is such a thing as a counterfeit conversion, which may appear to be a true conversion. That's why the Lord Jesus told several parables to highlight that. That's why he told the parable of the wise builder and the foolish builder. That's why he told the parable to highlight that outwardly, the house of our life may appear to be in order, and yet, that a true foundation is missing, resulting in the collapse of that house. We think of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, a very, very heart-searching parable. Because the difference between the wise and foolish virgins will not manifest itself until the bridegroom returns.

And so, it's very important for us to know whether we have experienced a true conversion. For unless our conversion is a true conversion, a genuine conversion, a conversion wrought by the Holy Spirit, it will all be in vain, and we will ultimately perish. God forbid that any of us would go through life with an imaginary conversion, and in the end, face the judge of all the earth, who will then say to us, Depart from me; I've never known you, ye workers of iniquity (Matthew 7:23). And yet, God's Word is very clear, and the Heidelberg Catechism echoes the teaching of the Word

of God, by which we can examine ourselves whether we are truly in the faith—the faith that is wrought by the Holy Spirit; the faith that cannot but manifest itself in the fruits of that faith.

And so, first of all, what we need to do is, we need to carefully define our terms. Because sometimes we use the expression, “So and so is a converted person.” And there’s nothing wrong with that in and of itself. But it’s clear from this Lord’s Day, the description of it, that conversion is a lifelong process. It’s a lifelong dying to yourself, the dying of the old man, and a lifelong quickening of the new man. That’s why we need to distinguish between conversion and between regeneration.

First of all, the word “conversion,” sometimes the Bible uses the word “repentance.” In the Old Testament, it’s described by the simple verb, “to turn”—very frequently used in the Old Testament. And so, the Old Testament word to describe conversion, to describe repentance, is a change of direction. That’s a very powerful word, a change of direction. That’s what happens in true conversion. Because, by nature, the way we are born, we are moving in the wrong direction. By nature, we live with our back towards God, and we are moving in a way that will lead us to everlasting perdition. And so, when true conversion takes place, there comes about a complete turnabout. Instead of moving away from God, we now begin to move towards God; so, “to turn.”

The New Testament word is “to change one’s mind.” That means that we begin to think differently. Hopefully, you’ll understand that those terms are closely connected. Because in true conversion, there is a change of mind, and as a result, there is a change of direction. We begin to think differently, and as a result of that, we begin to live differently, and we begin to act differently. But all of this, of course, is the result of the miracle of regeneration. And so, we need to distinguish between regeneration and conversion.

So many of our forefathers, many of our former divines, would describe conversion as regeneration as well, as regeneration in what we’d call the wider sense. But because of developments also in church history, it has become very important, especially in our day, to clearly distinguish between what we call regeneration in its *narrow sense*, and regeneration in its *wider sense*.

So, regeneration in its *narrow sense* is that divine act of the Holy Spirit, that act of a moment, when he takes hold of a sinner dead in trespasses and sins, and makes that sinner a living soul, granting that sinner spiritual life. So you could compare that to the conception of a human being in the womb of the mother. That’s a moment, in a moment that life begins, that new life that is created, and so it is also spiritually. One moment, we are spiritually dead, and the next moment, as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, we become spiritually alive. But you see, that life, that spiritual life that is established in the moment of regeneration, and of course, that act itself is shrouded in mystery. Very rarely would anyone know the moment when that happens.

It’s when we begin to discover the results of it that we become aware of the fact that the wonder of regeneration has taken place, because regeneration in its narrow sense, the gift of life, the transformation by the Holy Spirit, that will result in what we call regeneration in its *wider sense*. That’s why our forefathers often would say that regeneration is the fruit of faith. What they meant to say is that saving faith will produce this new life, will produce what we now call regeneration in its narrow sense. And so, regeneration is the gift of spiritual life. And conversion is the life that flows out of it. Conversion is the result of that regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. And so, the gift of new life will result in a new life.

And of course, when we talk about regeneration in its narrower sense, the sinner is entirely passive—that is the sovereign work of God, of which Paul reminded in Ephesians. He said, “You who were dead in trespasses and sins, you hath he quickened, you hath he made alive” (Ephesians 2:1). And as a result of that sovereign work of making a dead sinner spiritually alive, that life

begins to function, that life will begin to manifest itself. And so, we could say that conversion is the lifelong fruit of regeneration. Conversion is the holy activity of a sinner who has been made alive. It is the activity of a living soul.

That's why the work of conversion does not end until a believer breathes his last breath. Conversion is a lifelong experience. In that way, we can say that God's children are not converted until they die. And so, all through life, the Holy Spirit, who then makes his abode in the heart of the sinner, that Holy Spirit will manifest himself. It's impossible to be indwelt by that Spirit who makes us spiritually alive, and for his indwelling presence not to manifest itself in our life. And that's why the Bible, in so many ways, so frequently, emphasizes this point. We cannot claim to be a child of the living God, we cannot claim to be a believer unless there is reliable biblical evidence that there is real spiritual life, reliable evidence that the Spirit who quickens, the Spirit who makes alive, that that Spirit dwells in us, that that Spirit works in us.

That's why conversion is both the work of God, and it is the work of the believer. Paul expresses that very remarkably in Philippians 2, verse 12. Why don't you open your Bible and turn to that passage a moment. And there the Apostle Paul writes, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (verses 12–13). It's remarkable what Paul says there. He's saying to the Philippians, precisely because God works in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure, because he works in you, therefore that should urge you and motivate you to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. That's why Paul could say, in Ephesians 4, verse 22, "Put off concerning the former conversation the old man." And so the believer, the child of God, the living soul, the regenerated soul becomes very actively involved in that whole lifelong process of conversion.

And so, conversion, or repentance, simply said—I've said this before, and this is a lifelong experience—it's a *turning to God and a turning from sin*. I remind you again of 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 9, that precisely establishes that important order, when Paul says, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." And that order is very important. That is a lifelong experience, a lifelong turning to God, and you see, in turning to God, we cannot but turn from our idols. So in the true conversion, it's not that we break with sin, and then, in the process, turn to God. No, it's because, by the grace of God, we turn to God as a result of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is as we turn to God, as God becomes real, in all that he has revealed of himself, that's what motivates the sinner to turn from his idols and to break with sin.

And so, let's move on to,

2. The Components of True Conversion

The components of true repentance—and so, first of all, it consists of the mortification of the old man, and then three things are highlighted by the Heidelberg Catechism; and then, the quickening of the new man, and again, three things are highlighted by the Catechism. So in true conversion, there is a negative aspect, and there is a positive aspect; and those are two sides of one coin that belong inseparably together.

And the mortification of the old man is, indeed, a very important part of true conversion. That old man, that man of sin, that indwelling corruption must be put to death. That old man cannot be modified. That old man has to die. That old man has to be crucified. It's like this, boys and girls—you can take a mud-covered pig, and you can wash that pig, and you can scrub that pig, and you can really make that pig look nice. But it's still a pig, because it won't take very long, and that pig will return to the mire and wallow in the mire. And so it is. In other words, we cannot modify that old man of ours. That old man has to die.

And the Catechism really describes that whole process of the mortification of the old man, that dying of the old man, in a very clear and precise way. First of all, it tells us that mortification of the old man is expressed by *a sincere sorrow of heart* regarding sin. What an important aspect that is of true conversion. Because when the Spirit of God makes us alive, when God becomes real, sin become real, sin becomes painfully real. But what's unique about the description here, is that it's not just a being convicted of your sin, no, it is a recognition of sin that causes me to grieve, and that causes me to sorrow. And why is that? Because, in regeneration, the Spirit of God sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God. And when that love begins to burn in my soul, when that love begins to function in my soul, I begin to see sin in all of its vileness, in all of its ugliness, sin becomes a grievous thing for me. That's a lifelong sorrow. Until we die, God's children grapple with sin, with the reality of their indwelling sin.

That's, of course, described for us, remarkably in Romans 7, verses 14 through 25. And that sorrow for sin is a sorrow that focuses on the very nature of sin. It's not that I just grieve over sin or the consequences of sin. No, the believer, the truly converted person, the spiritually living person, grieves over sin because of the very nature of sin. That's, of course, expressed clearly in Psalm 51, that wonderful Psalm that David wrote when he was convicted of the evil he had done. And what does he say? "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me." And here it comes—"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (verses 3 and 4). Now, over against that sincere sorrow for sin, over against that is the positive side, because then, when the Catechism talks about the quickening of the new man, it says, *It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ* (Question #90).

And so, when the Holy Spirit dwells in us, and when he makes us conscious of sin; when he makes us sensitive to sin; when he shows us the vileness of it, he does it for one reason, and that is to make room in our hearts for the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work. But you see, we will never see our need of Christ until we have realized our sinnership, because that's when he becomes precious. Then, he becomes precious as the Savior of sinners. Then, he becomes precious that he is a Christ who shed his blood to secure the pardon of sin, that his blood cleanses from all sin. That's why the Apostle Paul says, the Christian is someone who grieves and rejoices, and those two belong inseparably together—a sincere sorrow over sin, a sincere sorrow over my secret sin; at the same time, that sincere joy when I am enabled by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to look outside of myself, and to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work, will fill the heart of the converted person with unspeakable joy. And that interaction, that interaction takes place the entire lifetime of the believer. On the one hand, a sincere sorrow for sin; on the other hand, the wonder of rejoicing in Christ and his accomplished work. The more we realize our sinnership, the more we begin to see it, the more precious the Lord Jesus Christ becomes, and the more I learn to find my joy in him alone. So we see the parallel there.

Now, the second parallel—it says, *and more and more to hate sin*. And so, that's another mark of true conversion, that there is a growing hatred for sin. The Apostle Paul, in Romans 7, talks about that perplexity in his life, that what he desires to do, he does not do; and that he ends up doing, and he says, what he hates. You see, when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, we cannot but hate sin. Then sin becomes so very vile to us. Let me just quote from Psalm 119. We just read part of it. Let me read two passages where that word is actually used. Psalm 119, verse 104, it says, "I hate every false way." Verse 113, "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love." And verse 163, "I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love."

Congregation, you can examine yourself, I can examine myself. Can you say before God, "Lord, thou knowest that I hate sin. Thou knowest that I hate every false way. Thou knowest that

I hate those vain thoughts. Thou knowest that I hate those sinful desires that manifest themselves time and again.” You see, that’s the mark of true spiritual life. Paul hated it. And the true believer, the true child of God, they hate it. And the more we grow in grace, the more we advance in the spiritual life, the more we are going to hate even the very stirrings of sin in our heart. I’ve said this before, that the mark of the true believer is that they struggle; not just with sinful actions, but they struggle with those sinful inclinations, with those sinful desires. A true believer, they grieve as deeply over a sinful thought as they do over a sinful action. Because the true believer understands that a sinful inclination, a sinful desire is sin in the sight of God. And the more we are conformed to Christ, the more we learn to abide in Christ and to live out of Christ, the more hypersensitive we will become to sin.

So we can say that the mark of a true believer is that they will have—and listen carefully—they will have zero tolerance for sin; zero tolerance for sin. It does not mean that they no longer sin. I’m not saying that. But the closer we live to Christ, the more we are conformed to Christ, the more sensitive we become to sin. The more we see it in all of its ugliness, and all of its vileness—zero tolerance for sin.

Now the positive side—so, a growing hatred for sin, but on the other hand, a love for and delight in the will of God. Psalm 119, verse 97—we read it—“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.” Well, that’s why Paul, in Romans 7, he says, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” Congregation, can you say that? Can you say that before an all-knowing, heart-searching God, that your delight is after God, that your delight is after his will, that you delight in his law, and that it is your meditation all the day? You see, those two, again, they go hand in hand. That’s why I said that the negative part of conversion, and the positive part of conversion; the mortification of the old man, and the quickening of the new, they are two sides of one coin. They go hand in hand. That’s why, in Romans 7, the same Paul who says, “I hate sin,” is the Paul who says, “I delight in the law of God.” Do you recognize that? Is that the deepest desire of your soul? Do you long? Do you long for the day that you will be delivered from sin once and for all? The day when you will be done with it? And by grace, you may face a future where you will forever delight yourselves in the will of God in that glorious new reality.

Oh, I know that it’s the mark of a true believer that they long for that day. And as a matter of fact, when we think of that reality that awaits the people of God, a sinless future, it’s something we cannot grasp. Because here, as long as we live, until we breathe our last breath, everything is stained by sin. But for the true believer who has been quickened by the Spirit, in whom that new life is functioning, there is that deep, deep yearning, that deep desire to be delivered once and for all from the body of this death, to face a future, to know that the day is coming when we shall forever be doers of the will of God, and do it perfectly. So a sincere sorrow of heart regarding sin, and a sincere joy in Christ; a growing hatred for sin, and a love and a delight for the will of God.

Then, there is also a fleeing from sin. Do you recognize that?—a fleeing from sin. That, again, is a mark of true spiritual life. Sadly, we cannot avoid sin until we die, but the more we are conformed to the image of Christ, the more the Spirit of God works in us, the more we will desire to flee from it. I’ve said here before that before conversion, we pursue sin; but after conversion, sin pursues us. That’s a very important difference. But you see, if we really hate sin, we will seek to flee it. We will become sensitive; we will become conscious of all that leads us into sin, and then we will begin to deal radically with it. That’s what Jesus meant when he said, If, as a believer, you know your eye is causing you trouble, you are going to pluck it out. And if you know that your right hand is offending you, you’re going to cut it off. That means that you will deal radically with that which leads you to sin.

Also, for the best example, also for our boys and girls, of fleeing from sin, is what Joseph did. If ever we see what the grace of God can accomplish in a young man's life, we see it in the life of Joseph. Here he was, far away from his parents, far away from his normal environment, from a home where he had a father who feared God. He's in Egypt. He's in the house of Potiphar, and he's been given a prominent position, and then this relentless temptation of Potiphar's wife (Genesis chapter 39). And we would say, he could have gotten away with it. But you see, that's where the true fear of God manifests itself. Because, congregation, we are a true Christian when we are all alone, when nobody is watching us. That's where it really matters. A true Christian fears God, oh, but he's all by himself. And this young man feared God in that very hostile environment, with the awful and relentless temptation for a normal young man, being tempted relentlessly by Potiphar's wife. What does he say? "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? (Genesis 39:9)" "And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out" (verse 12). See, that's the mark of true grace—fleeing from sin. Hating it, in other words, grieving over sin, hating it, and fleeing from it.

Now, the positive side—and it says here, *The quickening of the new man...is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works*. In other words, an earnest desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. Is that your desire? Is that the deepest desire of your heart, to live a God-glorifying life? Do you realize your responsibility as a believer, as a professing believer? Is it evident in your life that that is your desire? Is that evident to your wife, to your husband, to your children, that your desire is to order your life in a way that pleases Him? Paul writes in Ephesians 2, verse 10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

3. The Manifestation of True Conversion

And then, finally, the Question is asked, *But, then, what are good works?* And a very helpful and insightful Answer is given. And so, good works, and what we mean by good works, is works that are good in God's sight. What is meant by good works is living a godly life, a life in harmony with God's Word; a life that aligns with God's will; a life of obedience; a life in which we honor God's revealed will. But the Answer is, *Only those which—(1), proceed from a true faith—(2) are performed according to the law of God—(3), are to His glory.*

So this is a very important statement, because Paul writes in Romans 14, verse 23, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Hebrews 11, verse 6, "But without faith it is impossible to please him." And so, what the Catechism is simply saying is that genuine godliness is a godliness that flows out of our union with Christ. It is only when we are united to him; it is only as we abide in him that there will be a manifestation of genuine godliness. It's very important to recognize that. Because two people, a believer and an unbeliever can be doing the same thing. Both the believer and the unbeliever can do a very kind thing to their neighbor. And yet, there's a profound difference. For the believer, that act of love towards the neighbor flows out of his union with Christ. Whereas the unbeliever is simply doing this as a result of God's common grace, and perhaps to make a name for himself, for his own glory, for his own benefit. So, true godliness, living a life of obedience flows out of faith. That alone is genuine in the sight of God.

So in Psalm 130, when David writes, "But with thee there is forgiveness, that thou mayest be feared" (verse 4), he makes a very important connection between being forgiven by God, and then to live a life unto God. So it is out of that forgiveness that flows a life in which we fear God. "With thee there is forgiveness that thou mayest be feared."

Secondly, good works *are performed according to God's law*. That's why, in Lord's Days 34 through 44, we're going to examine each of the Ten Commandments, because that is the standard that determines what is a good work. And so, in the Ten Commandments, God gives us his precepts. In the Ten Commandments, God gives us the standard that he requires of men. And so, we know that the law, as we will see in the next sermon—and I hope to devote an entire sermon on the nature and purpose of the law—that that law is used by God for several purposes. First of all, it is used to convict us of our sin; to make our sin known to us; in other words, to define what sin is. Sin is, that means that our life, our behavior does not conform to God's standard. Secondly, the law is used to drive us out to Christ, to make us realize that we need a Savior who has done everything for us in terms of that law—obeying it perfectly, paying the penalty for it, and silencing the curse of that law. But then, thirdly, that law becomes the standard that defines the Christian life. That's why the Heidelberg Catechism does not deal with God's law until we have arrived at the section of Gratitude. And so, godliness, genuine godliness is defined by God's law. And with God's help, we're going to see what that means specifically also in the life of a believer.

And thirdly, they are done *to promote God's glory*. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 31, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." So, true obedience aims at God's glory. The genuinely-converted person, though he comes short in many ways, but the deepest yearning of the heart is to live a life that brings honor to God, a life that brings glory to God, a life that honors the Lord Jesus Christ. That becomes the desire of a genuinely-converted person.

And then it says, *not such as are founded on our imaginations or the institutions of men*. In other words, we cannot establish our own standards, our own qualifications for what a godly life looks like. No, we have to make sure that we define it in terms of Scripture, and especially in light of the law of God, which is God's revelation of his will for us, which is the standard of conduct. Of course, the Pharisees were guilty of that. They had made all kinds of additional rules and stipulations. And Jesus—Jesus exposed them when he said, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9).

And so, the important conclusion is that we can only be accepted in the beloved, we can only be accepted in Christ. True godliness, a truly godly life, the manifestation of genuine conversion is a life that flows out of Christ, and a life that is accepted because of Christ. And that's the comfort for the believer, is that God always views us in Christ. And that though our obedience is so deficient and so imperfect many times, that God always views his people in and through Christ. That's the comfort of what we call *the active obedience of Christ*. Christ not only paid the penalty for the transgression of God's law, but Christ obeyed that law perfectly on behalf of his people. He merited a positive righteousness.

And that's why, in Psalm 130, that connection is so important. And so, we can only fear God by being assured of our pardon in Christ—"There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (verse 4). So, only as we have focused on Christ, and focused on his finished work, can we fear God without fear—without fear that when I fail, when my obedience is deficient, that somehow my relationship with God is in jeopardy. That's the wonder of the completeness of the work of Christ, is that in Christ we are complete. And even though the work of sanctification, that's really what this lifelong conversion is all about. It's the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, whereby, slowly but surely, he conforms me to the image of Christ. And so, what a comfort it is that when I do fail—and as Christians, we do—but it's something that grieves us, remember, that's what it says—when we sin, we grieve over it; we hate it. Our desire is to flee from it. That is to know that I can begin the next day, and I can say, "Oh, blessed Savior, I failed yesterday. But grant me the grace today, by

thy Spirit, to be who I am in Christ.” What a comfort that is—accepted in the beloved.

And so, congregation, we have tried to set before you this very biblical description of what a true conversion looks like. Do you recognize yourself in this? Is it true in your life that you have a sincere sorrow of heart for provoking God by your sins? Do you also know of that unspeakable joy of resting in Christ, time and again taking refuge to him? Do you know what it means to hate sin, and on the other hand, with love and delight, to live according to the will of God in all good works? Do you know what it means to flee from it, and on the other hand, to earnestly live a life that is pleasing to God? And all of that revolves around the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s why his loving exhortation, which I hope to repeat many times, is that we have to learn to abide in Him. Only in proportion that we learn to abide in Him, where there be a positive progression in the lifelong work of conversion—the lifelong dying to ourselves, and increasingly being conformed to the image of Christ.

So, my dear congregation, are you being converted? I read a nice story of a young girl who asked her elder, she said, “Are you converted?” The elder said, “A little bit. I’m in the process of being converted.” It’s a lifelong process. Congregation, we must be able to recognize ourselves in this in some measure. Lest we deceive ourselves, we will end our journey and face the Judge of all the earth, who will dismiss us and say, “Depart from me ye workers of iniquity.” And so, let’s continue to pray the Spirit of God will continue to work this work in our midst, in our hearts, also in the lives of our children. May the Lord do so for his name’s sake. Amen.

Let’s pray.

Our gracious God, it has pleased thee in the way of thy Providence to bring us to this important subject, what is a true conversion. Lord, it compels us to examine ourselves, whether we recognize these clear marks set before us in this Lord’s Day. And so, we pray that by grace, these matters would be evident in our lives—the mortification of the old man, and the quickening of the new man; that we would learn to do so, not in our own strength, for then we will fail, but looking unto Jesus, who is the author and the finisher of our faith, and that so, we may run the race that is set before us. Forgive us all the ways in which we fail and come short. We pray, Lord, that thou wouldst establish our goings in the pathway of thy Word. Oh, blessed Holy Spirit, continue to do a mighty and irresistible work in us, to the glory of Christ. Forgive us our sins of this day and hour. Bring us home safely. Go with us in this week. Keep us safely wherever we go. Bless the labor of our hands. And bring us here again this next Lord’s Day. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.