

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

*Sermon #55, Lord's Day 44*

## Final Observations About the Law of God



The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education

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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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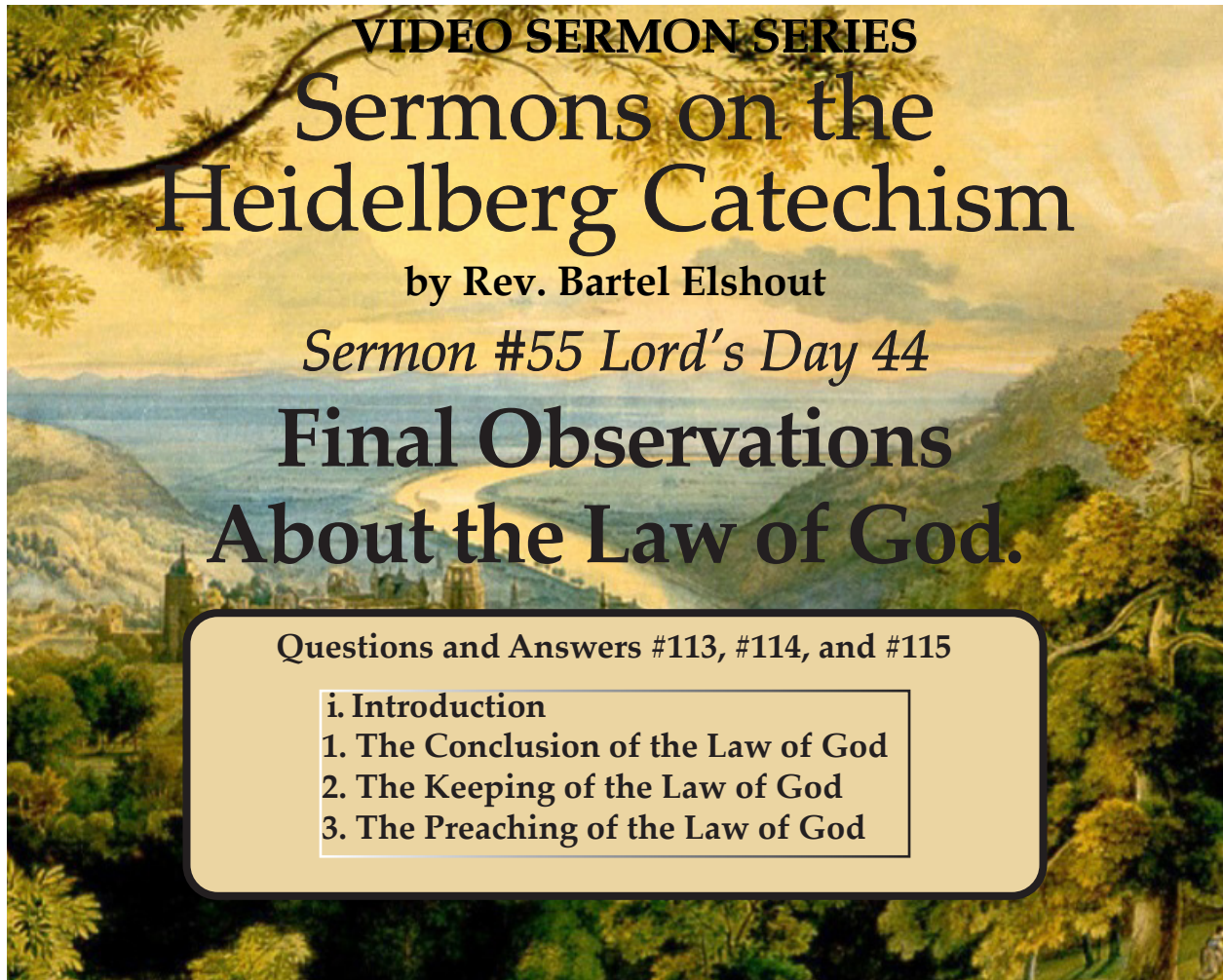
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*Sermon #55 Lord's Day 44*

**Final Observations  
About the Law of God.**

Questions and Answers #113, #114, and #115

**i. Introduction**

- 1. The Conclusion of the Law of God**
- 2. The Keeping of the Law of God**
- 3. The Preaching of the Law of God**

**Introduction**

Congregation, let's turn to Lord's Day 44 of the Heidelberg Catechism, in which we will address the tenth and final Commandment of the holy law of God as he gave it at Mount Horeb to his redeemed people, Israel. Lord's Day 44.

Question #113: *What doth the tenth commandment require of us?*

The Answer is: *That even the smallest inclination or thought contrary to any of God's commandments never rise in our hearts, but that at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness.*

Question #114: *But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?*

The Answer is: *No, but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.*

Question #115: *Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?*

The Answer is: *First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavor and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection*

*proposed to us in a life to come.*

And so, congregation, we will consider *Final Observations About the Holy Law of God*. First of all, we will consider *The Conclusion of that Law*, the Tenth Commandment, “Thou shalt not covet.” Secondly, we will address *The Keeping of that Law* in the life of the believer. *Can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?* And then, thirdly, *The Preaching of the Law of God*, the preaching of the law of God to which we are so accustomed. And we’ve had the privilege of having the Heidelberg Catechism expounded to us all the day of our life. And there are many, many church communions, also in North America, where there is never an exposition of the Ten Commandments. And so, why is it that our forefathers understood clearly that the law of God needs to be preached, especially since no man in this life can keep them? And then we will see three things to make us more and more aware of our sinful nature, so that we look outside of ourselves, to Christ, for our justification, and to the Spirit for our sanctification.

First of all, let us consider,

### **1. The Conclusion of the Law of God**

The final Commandment is so very simple, “Thou shalt not covet.” What does that mean, coveting? Coveting in this context means an unlawful desire toward something that is not mine. And congregation, that’s been our sin since day one. What did Satan succeed in doing when he asked that subtle and devious question, “Hath God said?” (Genesis 3:1)? And then he proceeded to communicate to our first mother that God was withholding something, and she began to covet, she began to desire that which was not lawfully hers. Because God had said, “You may eat from all the trees in the garden except this one tree.” And what Satan succeeded in doing is to make her dissatisfied with what God had given her and Adam, and made her covet that which was not lawfully hers. And ever since that day, this is the great sin of the human race. We can say that coveting, desiring that which is not lawfully ours, desiring to do that which the law of God forbids us, is the root sin of humanity.

That’s what we read in Romans 7, and it was the Apostle Paul who understood that. God used the Tenth Commandment to really get through to this proud, arrogant Pharisee, who was boastful before his conversion that he had kept God’s law perfectly; who was a boastful as the rich young ruler who came to Christ and who wanted to know if he was lacking anything yet. And so, we read it in Romans 7, verse 7, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay,”—listen carefully—“I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust”—lust is another word for desiring unlawfully that which is not ours—“I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” And so, the Apostle Paul understood clearly that that Commandment, in a sense, comprehends the entire law. That’s why the Catechism correctly answers by saying that not *even the smallest inclination or thought contrary to any of God’s commandments never rise in our hearts*. That’s what the Tenth Commandment requires when it says, “Thou shalt not covet.” And the reason this had to be emphasized is because Roman Catholicism taught that all that mattered is whether you kept the letter of the law. And as you know, that was the great error of Pharisaism. That’s why, in Matthew 5, the first chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ gives the spirituality of the law, to convict the Pharisees and the people of Israel that there was more to keeping the law than by merely observing the outward letter of the law. And so, the Apostle Paul had been enormously successful in meeting the Pharisaical requirements. He had been enormously successful in outwardly ordering his life according to God’s precepts, until Christ struck him down on the way to Damascus, until the scales from his spiritual eyes in Damascus, and for the first time, the Apostle Paul saw himself the way God saw him. And then the Apostle was done. It’s

very clear that much of Romans 7 is autobiographical. So here, Paul really gives us an insight of what happened there in the street that is straight. God used this Commandment to move away that Pharisaical veneer behind which he had been hiding himself.

And so what the Catechism powerfully articulates here is that God's Commandment is exceeding broad, we read in Psalm 119 (verse 96), exceeding broad. God's Commandment, God's law is so broad, is so all-encompassing, so comprehensive, that the Tenth Commandment forbids us to even have the smallest inclination or thought contrary to any of God's Commandments to arise in our hearts. And congregation, that's very correctly and biblically stated. We need to understand that the law is the transcript of the mind of God, and what God requires is absolute, perfect, and flawless holiness. Nothing will please him except that his law will be perfectly and completely kept. And congregation, we need to understand that. It's very convicting. We need to understand that, even though we are now fallen creatures, God has not changed, his requirements have not changed, his law has not changed. And why does this need to be impressed upon us? Because, as we will see in our third point, the ultimate goal, the ultimate objective of this Lord's Day, as we conclude the exposition of the law, is to make us realize afresh that there is but only one solution for lawbreakers as we are. And as you know, as we will see in a moment, God's children continue to be lawbreakers until they breathe their last breath. And so the only hope, the only hope for us also God's redeemed people, the only hope is outside of us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it also states positively what this Tenth Commandment requires. Again, the language is very comprehensive, very, very precise. Listen—*But that at all times*—at all times—*we hate all sin with our whole heart*. Congregation, can you say that? Can you say that before an all-knowing, all-seeing, heart-searching God, that you hate sin at all times with your whole heart? Yet, the psalmist, of Psalm 119, expressed that on several occasions. And if you read attentively when we read Romans 7, what is it that the Apostle said? “That which I desire to do, I do not do.” And then he says, “That which I hate, that I do.” You see, that's the difference between the believer and between an unbeliever. As I've said numerous times, sometimes God's children can commit the very same sins an unbeliever commits, sadly. Think of what David did. But the enormous difference is this, that for the true believer, this is a grievous matter, because the believer hates it. We hate the fact that we still commit sin.

Listen to the language of Psalm 119. I'm going to give you four passages where the word “hate” occurs. First, verse 104: “I hate every false way.” Congregation, can you subscribe to that? Can you say before an all-knowing, all-seeing, and heart-searching God, “Lord, I hate every false way”? You see, that's evidence of that new life. Because that new man that is created in Christ Jesus; that new man has but one desire, and that is to please and honor God. And when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, oh, there comes a hatred for sin. “I hate every false way.” Verse 113: “I hate vain thoughts; but thy law do I love.” I hate vain thoughts. In other words, a true believer isn't just concerned about the things he says, or she, but even sinful thoughts are a grievous matter to the true believer. And for the true believer, as we've said here many times, a true believer will grieve in secret, will grieve over those vain thoughts that no one else knows about except God who knows my heart and the secrets within. And because the love of God is shed abroad, the true believer, they hate vain thoughts. Why?—because, “thy law do I love.” Verse 128, again, he repeats himself: “I hate every false way.” Verse 163: “I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.”

Therefore, we read the next phrase, not only are we called *at all times to hate all sin with our whole heart*, but also to *delight in all righteousness*. “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97). It becomes the desire of the new man to live according to God's precepts.

And you can't help but read Psalm 119, that remarkable Psalm, to sense that time and time again—the deep yearning of the psalmist, “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” (verse 5). Congregation, boys and girls, can you relate to that? Can you lay your heart bare before an all-knowing and all-seeing God, that you also desire precisely this? That's why Jesus said, in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the pure in heart” (Matthew 5:8). Not just, blessed are those who observe outward purity. No, he says, “Blessed are the pure in heart.” You see, true holiness true godliness begins in the heart, and proceeds from the heart, and will manifest itself in our lives. And so, the true believer is concerned, not just whether the outside of his life is acceptable; but the true believer is concerned about purity of heart. Because the pure in heart are the poor in spirit. The pure in heart are those that mourn over sin. The pure in heart are the meek. The pure in heart are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

That brings us to our second point,

## **2. The Keeping of the Law of God**

So, we have this very appropriate Question, #114, *But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?* Again, as we are accustomed to, the Questions are always very carefully formulated, and the Questions are always weighty, the Questions themselves already communicate an important truth. What's implied here is that for those who are not converted to God, or the unbeliever, the answer is an obvious “No.” The unbeliever lives an ungodly life. In the unbeliever, there is no desire, no desire to walk in God's ways. Of course, there are hidden hypocrites, especially in the church, who are able to maintain an outward veneer of conformity, who in their heart of hearts, have no desire whatsoever after the ways of God. And so, for the ungodly, for the ungodly, the answer is a resounding “No.” Because to be a sinner means that we are always inclined to be lawbreakers. Our whole disposition is contrary to the law of God. And when the grace of God transforms us, and we become a new creature, can we then say that those who are converted to God, those who have been renewed by God's Spirit, those who have been cut off from Adam and have been grafted into Christ, are they able to keep God's law perfectly? And of course, the Answer is, a resounding “No.” That's what the rich young ruler failed to realize. Because the inclination of the self-righteous and legalistic heart is to say, “Yes, I can.” The rich young ruler thought he could. The Apostle Paul thought he could before Christ dealt with him. But the Answer, of course, is “No.”

And that's important also today, because there are those who teach today that Christians are able to reach perfection in this life. Of course, that's entirely contrary to Scripture. In 1 John 1, verse 8, we read, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” in James 3, verse 2, we read, “For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.” And so, the answer is a resounding “No.” And every true and genuine believer, anywhere in the world, would grievously agree with that assessment, that the answer is “No.”

And look how the Answer continues, it says, *But even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience.* And again, every true Christian understands this; they understand this experientially. They understand, to their sorrow, that we have but a small beginning of that obedience which God requires. Because it is the desire of the new man, it is the desire of the new creature to live according to God's revealed will. *Even the holiest of men have but a small beginning of that new obedience.* So, that applies to the holiest men of Scripture.

Think of Noah, a preacher of righteousness. After the flood, builds a wonderful large vineyard, and as a result, becomes drunk; and what a wretched story that is (Genesis 9:20–21). Because,

Noah, even though he was a man who was righteous in God's sight, even though he was chosen by God as the means whereby the human race would be perpetuated, and out of whom Christ would ultimately come in the fulness of time, even this man continued to be a sinner—he had but a small beginning of new obedience. How about Abraham? The friend of God, yet a man, who, at various times in his life, proved to be very weak in himself. Think of the times that he lied about his wife to protect himself (Genesis 20:2–12). Think of the utter foolishness of marrying the maid of his wife, trying to help God fulfill the promise for a promised seed (Genesis 16:4). So Abraham himself also was a man who had but a small beginning of that obedience. How about Moses? Moses, the friend of God, Moses who knew God face to face. Yet, at a critical moment, how greatly he failed God, and how greatly he failed his people; so much so that God told him he could not enter the promised land (Numbers 20:8–11 and 27:12–14). How about David, the man after God's own heart, the man whom God used to give us so many precious Psalms, that so beautifully describe the life of God's children, that so resonate in the hearts of God's people? How deeply David fell; he became guilty of adultery, dishonesty, murder, and a whole host of other sins, because in himself, David was not able to maintain this, to sustain this (2 Samuel chapter 11). We think of Peter—Peter, who, Jesus called Peter, he called him “Rock.” And that same Peter, when Jesus had said, “Whom do men say that I am?” He said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and then Jesus said, “On this confession, I will build my church.” (Matthew 16:13–18). Peter, who denied his Master three times, and who fell so very, very deeply. Even the Apostle Paul, very obviously was a man of a strong and intense temper. And we read about the sad conflict between him and Barnabas, causing their separation (Acts 15:36–40). And so, we could go on and on.

And every true believer, every child of God, would readily agree that we have but a small beginning of that new obedience, the painful reality that the Apostle Paul struggled with, and expressed in Romans chapter 7. Oh, how many of God's children throughout the ages have been thankful that God recorded this in his Word; that he moved the Apostle Paul to put in writing his own intense spiritual warfare, his own intense spiritual struggle! How many of God's children would have despaired if those words were not there in Romans 7? “For the good that I would,” he says, “I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (verse 19). Verse 21, “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” The Apostle is saying, “Even in my holiest moments, even when I'm in my closet alone with God, even then, evil is present with me.” That's why, in holy despair, he threw up his hands and said, “O wretched man”—not that I was but—“O wretched men that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (verse 24). But that's, you see, that's precisely where he needed to be. Because it was at that moment that, the gospel opened up for him in all of its glory, in all of its beauty, and he said, “I thank God through Jesus Christ [my] Lord.”

And *Yet*, it says here, even though we must, to our grief, confess that we have but a small beginning of that obedience, *Yet so—Yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.* You see, that's the sincere resolution of the believer. That's the inward commitment that is true for all of God's children. And so, I put that in one of the questions too. And so, what the Catechism is saying is that God's children are Ten Commandment Christians—Ten Commandment Christians. All of God's Commandments are of equal value to them. Their desire is that their life would be ordered according to all of God's Commandments. So God's children do not pick and choose which Commandments they want to honor. No, their desire is to honor the entire law of God. The Apostle Paul expressed that beautifully in Philippians 3, verses 13 and 14. Open your Bible. There, we read of this sincere resolution of the genuine Christian, that sincere resolution that they begin to live according to

all the Commandments of God. And there, Paul says this, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended”—you know what he said here? he said, I realize I have not yet arrived. I have not yet arrived as a Christian—“but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” That’s why the psalmist says, in Psalm 119, verses 4 and 5, and those two verses belong together: “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.” And the true believer understands that. The true believer understands that this is our obligation towards God. This is the gratitude we are to display in our lives for the wonder of redemption. “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.” And then comes that petition, the petition of all of God’s children, “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” You see, that prayer, that petition of the psalmist is a mark of spiritual maturity. It’s the mark of one who understands what a sacred obligation it is, but also who understands that he can’t make it on his own, and he needs the grace of God. “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!”

Again, congregation, I ask you to examine your own heart tonight. Do you understand this experientially? Can you relate to this petition? Is that the petition of your heart and your soul when you bow your knees, when you’re alone in your closet, when you’re alone with God, alone with Him who knows all things and who sees all things. Is that your groaning within, “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” Because, you see, it is by our obedience that we honor the Christ who has saved us and redeemed us. Because the mark of the true believer is that because they love the living Word, therefore they seek to honor the written Word. Because those two belong inseparably together.

So that brings us to our final thought:

### **3. The Preaching of the Law of God**

Question #115: *Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?* Why will he have them so strictly preached? Why is it that we are called, as God’s servants, not merely to teach you the letter of the law, but why are we to teach you the spirituality of all of God’s Commandments? This is what Christ did in Matthew 5. If you’ll remember, he was speaking to an audience, who were clueless that they were sinners—clueless. All they had heard was the teaching of the Pharisees. And so, Christ pulls away that veneer, and he goes beyond the surface of the Commandments, and he gives the spirituality of the law. And why is it? Because God wants to expose the deepest recesses of our deceitful and desperately-wicked hearts—for a reason, as we will see in a moment. Open your Bibles to Hebrews 4, verses 12 and 13: “For the word of God is quick”—the word of God is lively—“and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart....All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” But the purpose of it all is—it’s not to make us legalists—the purpose of it all is, why also in the life of sanctification, also in the context of sanctification, why the law must be strictly preached is because God wants his people to know, “This is my standard. This is the only standard by which your life is to be measured.” Because, as I’ve said before, the law is the transcript of the mind of God. That law is as eternal as God is eternal. That law will endure forever. That law will govern the lives of God’s glorified redeemed people throughout all eternity. That law is the transcript of the mind of God. And here, in this context, in the context of sanctification, the Catechism understands correctly that its purpose is that we would look outside of ourselves, that we would not look within. It’s to strip us of all carnal security. That’s what happens when the law is never expounded. Then God’s children become

comfortable, we think we're doing quite well. That's why it's so healthy when we are forced to look into the mirror of God's law, because what that will do, it makes us realize that what Paul said about himself is also true of us, that in us, that is, in our flesh, "dwelleth no good thing." And why is that so profitable? So that we would look outside of ourselves, that we would look to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It says it so beautifully, *And thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ*. And so, not only do we have to learn that lesson once, but we need to learn that lesson over and over again our entire lifetime. That's why God, as we have said many times here, he instituted the morning and evening sacrifice for his redeemed people, of whom he would know that they would sin every day; but he wanted to teach them and communicate to them, that though they would sin every day, that there was a divine remedy also for their sins as his redeemed people. And so every morning and every evening, a lamb was slain, whereby God communicated that with Him, there is forgiveness, that he may be feared (Psalm 130:4). And so, it is so very healthy for our spiritual life when every day afresh we recognize that we come so short; that every day afresh, we realize the ways in which we have grieved the Lord, the ways in which we have departed, so that every single day, we would again look outside of ourselves and look to Christ, and rest in Him alone. That's a lifelong lesson, a lifelong lesson that we have to learn. Titus 3, verse 5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us." Romans 4, verse 5, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." And that's why the true believer does not come to Christ but once. For the true believer, there is this repeatedly going out to him, seeking him again, time and again, convicted by the Spirit of having come short of God's will, and making me realize afresh that I need to rest in him, that I need to come to him, in whom God is always ready to forgive. And so, though we sin daily, there is daily forgiveness—daily forgiveness in order that God may be feared. That's a lifelong experience.

So, if Christians are honest with themselves, when we faithfully come into our closet, when we reflect on the day, how could we go to sleep without confessing freely the ways in which we have failed that day. But then, to take refuge, to take refuge to Christ day after day, to plead that precious promise of 1 John 1, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (verse 9). "If any man sin,"—1 John 2—"we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (verse 1). This is a lifelong learning experience. Because we are still so inclined to secretly rest in something in ourselves. Then, if we've had a fairly good day, and we think, secretly we think, that God will be more favorably disposed towards me than when I utterly failed on a given day. And we could not be more mistaken. And so it is so profitable in the life of God's children, when that interaction with God's Word confronts us time and again, that we have but a small beginning of that obedience; so that time and again, we are compelled to look outside of ourselves, and to again rest in Christ, to again embrace him with the arms of faith. Because that's how we grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's how we learn what the Apostle means when he says we are "complete in Him." That's easier said than done. Oh, to learn not to rest in anything of myself, but to learn to rest in Christ alone is the lifelong lesson that we have to learn. That's why the law of God must be so strictly preached, so that we will not fall into the illusion that we're doing well, then we would learn that, from God's perspective, there's only one way he can deal with us, only one way he can embrace us, only one way he can be pleased with us, and that is if we rest alone in the finished work of his only begotten Son. So that we will begin to learn the beauty of what is expressed in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 30, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and

sanctification, and redemption.”

That’s why Jesus instructs us, in John 15, that we must learn to abide in him; that every day, we must abide in him; every day we must take refuge to him. Wilhelms á Brakel<sup>1</sup> in his chapter on faith, makes this striking statement—he says, “The Christian is characterized by the fact that he takes refuge to Christ thousands upon thousand times, over, and over, and over again.” That’s the life of faith. And that’s why the Holy Spirit will, time and again, compel us to look into the mirror of God’s law, so that we understand time and again experientially that my only hope is in a Christ who has obeyed that law perfectly on my behalf; a Christ who has paid the penalty for the transgression of that law; the Christ who has silenced the curse of that law; the Christ who has done a complete work on our behalf. And so, when Christ says, “Abide in me,” he’s saying, “Abide in my Person. Abide in my finished work. Abide in my wounds. Abide in all that I have accomplished.” And that’s the way, you see, in which Christ increases, as we proportionally continue to discover how wretched we are and remain in ourselves, as we proportionally discover that we have but a small beginning of that new obedience; proportionally, Christ will become more and more precious, more and more desirable; more and more we begin to understand that there is no hope for me outside of Christ.

And *likewise*, it says here, *that we constantly endeavor and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit*. So the preaching of the law compels us to rest in Christ for our justification; but also to take refuge to the Holy Spirit to enable us, to equip us to live a godly life. And that’s why the law is dealt with in the third segment of the Catechism. Because all through Scripture, as you know, justification and sanctification are inseparably connected. There will never be the one without the other. And so, a true believer is justified—that means that in Christ our relationship with God is restored; but out of that restored relationship flows a new life. A restored relationship with God *in Christ* results in a life *with Christ*. And so there’s no such thing as being justified and there being no evidence of sanctification; because when the Spirit works the one, he will always work the other. Because the whole purpose of redemption is to make us new creatures. The whole purpose of the redeeming work of Christ is to restore our relationship with God. And that relationship, by the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, becomes a functioning relationship. And so, there will never be a true believer in whom the evidence of sanctification will not begin to manifest itself.

And what is that life of sanctification? Well, it says here, *That we may become more and more conformable to the image of God*. That’s the goal of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ. His goal is to conform us to Christ. And so, his indwelling work is to make us more and more to look like Christ. And so, is that true for you and me? Is there a growing Christ-likeness? Can those who live with us, our spouses, our children, our employees, can they perceive in us that we are united to this Christ? Because it’s impossible to be united to Christ and not to become like Christ. The life that flows out of Christ will draw us to Christ and enable us to be like Christ, not to earn God’s favor, but as an expression of our love for this Christ. So *that we constantly endeavor and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit*, because that Spirit also becomes very precious to the believer. More and more we realize that apart from that Spirit, we cannot make any spiritual progress. But remember, that Spirit is as willing to work grace in you as Christ was willing to save you. The Triune God, they labor and work together in perfect harmony, also in the life of sanctification.

What is sanctification? Again, let me briefly define it. I have no time to unpack it; there will be other opportunities. But what has helped me enormously is when, through the faithful instruction of another Christian, I realized that sanctification is not being what you ought to be, because we

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelms á Brakel (1635–1711), aka “Father Brakel”, was a Protestant Reformed minister and theologian in the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands, famous for his 4 volumes, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*.

never will. That's the language of our Catechism here. As long as we live, we will have but a small beginning of that new obedience. But sanctification is becoming what we are. Sanctification means that gradually, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we become what we are in Christ. In Christ, we are complete. In Christ, God has bestowed everything. But the work of sanctification is to bring our life into conformity to what we are in Christ. And that's enormously liberating, because, congregation, we do fail. As Christians, we fail in the life of sanctification. What a comfort it is that when we fail, that our failure does not disrupt my relationship, does not change my relationship with God. It may disrupt my fellowship with God, but it doesn't change my relationship with Him. So even when I fail, I can begin the next day, and say, "Lord, enable me today, enable me, by grace, to be what I am; enable me to be what I am in Christ." And I think that's what the psalmist means in Psalm 130, that "With thee there is forgiveness, that thou mayest be feared" (verse 4). That's why God want his children to be assured of that divine pardon, so that we realize that my faulty sanctification cannot undo that divine pardon that we may have in Christ. Sanctification—by grace, and through the Holy Spirit, becoming slowly but surely what we already are in Christ.

And *till*, it says here, *we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a life to come*. And oh, how believers increasingly begin to yearn for that day, that day, to at last be delivered from yourself, from your wretched self; to be delivered from the body of this death. But there's a day coming for every believer, when they will achieve that perfection which God requires. Because there will be a glorious future of God's redeemed people. The moment a believer dies, they die to themselves, and they enter into the presence of Christ. And when the day comes when Christ returns, and when all of God's people will arise, we will then, with a perfect body and soul, we will forever live in perfect obedience to God's law. And true believers long for that. For true believers, this is something that they cannot wrap their minds around, that there is a sinless future that awaits us. But that's the future, *till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a life to come*.

David expressed it so beautifully in Psalm 17, verse 15, "As for me," he said, "I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." First John 3, verse 2, "But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Oh, do you long for that day? Do you long for that day, in the depth of your soul, to see him as we've never seen him before and at last to be like him? And what a comfort it is that, while we're still journeying through the wilderness of this life, that we serve a Christ in whom everything is to be found which we need also for our pilgrim's journey. So, looking to him daily, abiding in him, trusting in him, we can progress in our pilgrim's journey; looking to a Savior who has done everything to redeem lawbreakers such as we are; so that by his grace, and by his Spirit, we again become law-keepers, not to earn our salvation, but as an expression of gratitude for the salvation he has accomplished for us. So that, with the words of Colossians 1, verse 10, with which I want to end, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Amen.

### **Let's pray.**

Our gracious God, we thank thee for the privilege we've had to be in thy house today. Bless thy Word also which we have endeavored to expound tonight. And Lord, how convicting on the one hand, and yet how encouraging on the other hand to know that it pleases thee to use the strict preaching of thy law, to compel us to rest in Christ alone, who has done a complete work on behalf of his people. So we pray that also as a fruit upon thy Word tonight, that by renewal, by faith, we may close with Christ; that by renewal we may rest in him; and that looking unto him we may run the race that is set before us; and that we would endeavor, by grace, to honor our Savior by

honoring his Word, expecting it all from Him and from His blessed Spirit who dwells in the heart of every believer, and that so, increasingly we may reflect something of the beauty and glory of Christ in our lives, also in our everyday walk. And so, go with us in this coming week, as we return to our daily calling, as our children and young people return to school. And Lord, give us grace, precisely where thou hast planted us, to be a godly, Christ-honoring people. Forgive all of our sins, and hear us for Jesus' sake alone. Amen.