

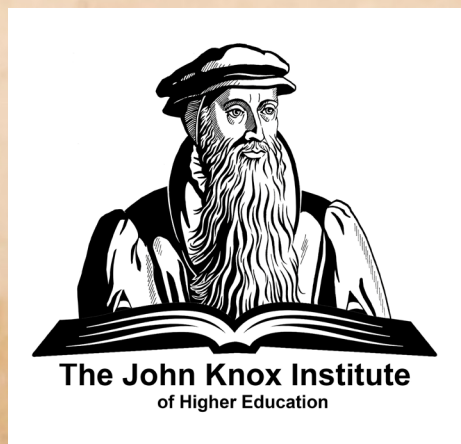
THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

Shorter
CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Master Collection of 60 Lessons



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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Rev. Jonathan Mattull is minister of the gospel at Sovereign Grace Presbyterian Church, in St. Louis, Missouri, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Presbytery of the United States of America.

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VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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Lecture #1

The Chief End of Man

Question 1: *What is the chief end of man?*

Answer: *Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.*

Have you ever thought about why you are here? Not the place where you are as you watch this video, but rather, why you are in this world. What is the purpose of your life? These are big questions. And they're big questions because they touch on all that is in our life. They guide us and they direct us, and they help us to make sense of what we're supposed to be doing at any given moment, and with the whole of our life considered.

People have been asking this question for centuries. Some have written books on it. Some have governed their life by many well-thought-out answers to this question, and it's a question that is before us today. Our Catechism asks this question, and does so with the following words. The first question of our Catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man?" And the words may sound a bit strange at first, so let's make sure that we understand what's being asked. The key words are, first, "chief end." The word "chief" means "primary" or "main" or "most important". And the word "end" means "goal" or "purpose". When we use the word here, "man", it's not referring to men as different from women. Instead it's speaking of humanity, mankind, that is, humanity in general. So the question is asking, "What is the most important purpose for all mankind?" The question is important, and it gives focus for all other questions in our lives, and all things that we're to do. The Catechism gives us an excellent summary of what the Bible teaches on this topic: "What is the chief end of man?...Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever."

It's important for us to understand these words. The word "glorify," to glorify God, means to do all things to honor him. To enjoy him means that we experience an inward delight in God, as God, and as our God. The world seems to think the most important purpose is to seek earthly, and personal, and selfish happiness. This isn't something entirely beyond what the Bible acknowledges, for the Bible, in Isaiah 22, and verse 13, characterizes some as saying, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die." So the world has adopted this in many ways as its purpose—to eat and to drink, to find pleasure so long as we have life, because eventually our lives are going to end. And the Bible gives us a far better and a more noble purpose.

And we can see this in the Bible, just serving quickly a few verses to help us see, first, that we're to glorify God. We see this in 1 Corinthians 10, and verse 31—Paul writes, "Whether there-

fore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Paul also writes in Colossians 3, and verse 17, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” So whether we eat or drink, whether we speak or do things, all is to be done to honor the Lord.

We also see, as the Bible teaches, that we are to enjoy him. So, Psalm 73, verses 25 and 26, we find the psalmist saying, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” The psalmist has come to see that his delight, his joy, is God himself. We can see this as Peter writes, in 1 Peter 1:8, speaking of Jesus Christ, he says, “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

Well, as you read the Bible, you’ll see these ideas come up again and again. But we wish to focus our lesson on three points to help us understand this teaching of the Bible. First, notice that man’s purpose is focused on God. Second, notice that man’s purpose joins glorifying and enjoying God together. And third, notice that man’s purpose, his ultimate purpose, is an everlasting purpose—a purpose that will never end.

So first, man’s purpose is focused on God. And a focus on something is to give all of our attention to it. It’s the opposite of being distracted. Most people in the world focus on the wrong thing. Preeminently, they focus on themselves, and this will lead them to wrong answers about their purpose. If you focus on a wrong target, you’re not going to hit the right target, and when men focus on themselves as their main attention, they’ll miss out on the right thing that should have their attention. When it is that men focus on themselves, they fail to start with God.

Now, if we’re going to answer the question before us correctly about man—man, by the way, is a creature which God has made—we must be sure to consider what God, who is the Creator, thinks. In the very beginning of the Bible, we’re told that God created man. Genesis 1 and 2 give us this amazing record, which we’ll think about in later lessons.

And notice particularly the account that’s given to us regarding God’s creation of man, in Genesis 1, and verses 26 and 27, where we read these words: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them having dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” What you’ll notice is that mankind is made in God’s image. He reflects him. He is like him. Now, certainly man is not like God in every way. God is infinite and eternal, while mankind is limited and bound to time. We need to sleep, but God never rests. We need to eat in order to get strong and healthy, but God is nothing but strength and life. And yet, God made man very special. Mankind was made to reflect God, to honor God. This is what he was made to be and to do. We’ll learn more about this in future questions, but for now, notice that God made man his special reflection in this world. And if we are to reflect God, if we are to honor God, we must then focus on God. You can think of a mirror. A mirror reflects what it is pointed at. If we are to reflect God, we must be pointed at him, we must know him, we must understand what he’s told us about himself. The question before us then helps us remember this important truth. We are to glorify and enjoy God, and the only way that we can do that is if we give our attention to him as he has made himself known to us in the Bible.

Now, second, notice that man’s purpose joins glorifying God and enjoying God together. This is the main focus of the answer before us—glorifying and enjoying God. What does it mean when

it says that “man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him”? Well, let’s start with what it means to glorify God. Something that is glorious is full of great honor and beauty and perfection. Now, none is as glorious as God. He is only good—most holy. He excels all other things, and infinitely so. We know that God has all glory of himself, and this is a great truth. He’s not dependent on anything else. All creation shows forth his glory, and the whole Bible testifies of his truth. We read, for instance, in Psalm 145, Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness.”

Now the Bible tells us that God is perfectly glorious. Well, if he is, how then we glorify him? Well, it’s not that we add to his glory, or make him more glorious than he already is. Instead, we glorify him when we purposely honor him in our thoughts and in our speech, and when we direct all praise to him. We glorify him when we live for him, and we don’t live for ourselves. In other words, to glorify him, is to do all for, and by, and in Christ Jesus. Remember, one of our key verses we that mentioned, Colossians 3, and verse 17, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” Christ teaches this to his disciples in Matthew 6, verse 33, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Notice the first thing, the primary thing, or in the words of our Catechism, the chief thing that we’re to do is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. When we place the honor of God first in all that we do, it’s then that we’re glorifying him. The Bible tells us we glorify God by obeying him and leading others to praise him. We see this in Matthew 5, and verse 16. Jesus says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” We can glorify God in our thoughts and desires and actions. We do so, when what we think, and what we desire, and what we do are all for God’s honor, and in accordance to what he has taught. The Catechism tells us that this is our first goal in all that we do. We have many secondary purposes—we must care for others, we must care for our own body, we must honor our parents, students must learn their lessons and study, when we grow up, we’ll have a job with a particular purpose. But all of these purposes are supposed to be done to our greatest purpose, to glorify and enjoy God.

Let me give you one example from the Bible. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus. Among other relationships, he addressed the relationship that existed between servants and masters. It was a difficult thing to be a servant in Paul’s day. They were supposed to do anything their earthly master commanded them. They were to clean, and cook, and take care of business. Well, how was a Christian servant supposed to do all of these things and glorify God? They couldn’t be a missionary and go and cross the ocean to a different land, and tell others about the gospel. They couldn’t be an apostle and go forth and plant churches to God’s praise. But you’ll notice, while a servant didn’t get to choose what he was going to do on a daily basis, he was told how he was to do the things that were demanded of him. Paul writes of this in Ephesians 6, verses 5 and 6. He says, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” You see? Yes, they were to honor their earthly masters. They were to do so sincerely. But notice, they were to do all of their difficult job unto Christ. When they were told to clean up a mess, they were to clean up that mess as if they were doing so for Christ. If they were told to prepare a meal, they were to be preparing that meal as if they were preparing it for Christ. Everything they did, they were to do it as to Christ. And this is how we can glorify

God in all of our life, regardless of our circumstances—when we speak, when we think, when we act, when we go to school, when we learn, when we eat our food, when we play with our friends, when we gather on the Lord’s Day to worship God at church, we should always be able to say, “I am doing this to honor and glorify God.”

Well, unfortunately, mankind has sinned against God. Instead of glorifying God, we have dishonored him. We cannot repair this ourselves. If we are to glorify God, to honor him, what we’ve done to dishonor him must be addressed, it must be forgiven. And it only comes by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We’ll consider what he’s done and how we receive that forgiveness more fully in future lessons, but for now, realize this—there is no way of fulfilling our chief end of glorifying or enjoying God without first trusting in Jesus Christ. We must first be restored to God in peace before we can glorify God in our lives.

We should also remember that if we are to glorify God, we must do so by loving him. We outwardly do certain things, but without love, nothing will be done sincerely. For instance, if a child is asked to clean his room, he may pick up and put away everything that’s disordered, however, his mind and heart may be angry while he’s doing it. He may be complaining in his thoughts, though he never utters a word of it. And though his action outwardly is doing what he was told, inwardly, he’s not doing the action lovingly. If we go to church and sing God’s praise, if we read the Bible and join in prayer, but we’re doing those things without love, though the right thing is being done outwardly, we are not glorifying God because we’re not loving him. This helps us see that glorifying God is joined with enjoying him. While we are glorifying God, we’re called to enjoy God. In other words, our purpose is not merely to obey—rather, we’re to obey cheerfully. We’re not only to read God’s Word, we’re to read it and find it to be sweet to our soul. We’re not just to sing God’s praise, we’re to sing with joy, and express our sincere delight to God, and in God. We’re to enjoy him.

Perhaps you wonder at times why you like the things you do. Or if someone asks you, “Why do you like these things?” You can ask a child, “Why do you like that?” The child may like candy, and you ask them why they like candy. “I like it because it’s sweet,” the child says. You could ask, “Why do you like sweet things?” And perhaps you get the answer, “I like sweet things because they make me smile, they make me happy.” We can keep asking the question, “Why?” “Why do you like?” “Why do you like?” And eventually it becomes clear that we like the things that we find to be good and pleasant, the things that make us happy. Well, this is how we’re to think of God. He is good, he is pleasant, and we ought to be happy in him. It’s true that he is the Most High. He inhabits eternity. He is most glorious. However, he has called us to enjoy him. This should raise a question in our minds right away, “How can we, who have sinned against him, ever hope to enjoy him?”

We see a picture of this struggle in the story of Adam and Eve. When they were first made, God gave them everything that they needed, everything for their provision, everything for their happiness. But they foolishly listened to the serpent, and sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit. After this, we read an important part of the story. In Genesis 3, and verse 8, we read, “And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.” Now think of that for a moment. God comes near to them, and they run and hide from him. Why did they do that? God came near to be with his special creation that was to reflect him, and instead of turning to him, they turned away from him. His creation fled from him. That’s because they couldn’t enjoy him, because they had sinned against him. They stood guilty before God, and their

consciences would not let them enjoy God. They could not enjoy him, because by sin they had become his enemies. Now this is our problem too. How could we ever hope to enjoy God when we've sinned against him. His law condemns us. Our consciences testify against us. We've sinned. We cannot enjoy God like we should. What hope is there then?

Well, the hope is not in us. We don't have the power to reestablish what we've lost. But the wonder is this—God has established a way of peace by his Son Jesus Christ. Notice how Paul teaches this in Romans 5, verse 1 and 2. He writes, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” The only way of enjoying God in our lives is first by receiving peace with him by Christ Jesus. If we have Jesus Christ and peace with God by him, we may then go about all of our lives with great joy in God. If we do not have Jesus Christ and peace with God by him, we can do many things outwardly, even religious things outwardly, but we'll never enjoy God, and we will never truly enjoy him. So be sure, as you think of this question and answer, that you start with this need. And if ever you're to glorify and enjoy him, you must first have Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners, that brings us again into restored fellowship with God. And when it is that we have Jesus as our Savior, then we will be led to a life of glorifying and enjoying God by him.

Well, thirdly, man's purpose is an everlasting purpose. We've seen that all that we do is to be done to glorify God and enjoy him. And some of the things that we do in this life, however, come to an end. For example, our days as a child will come to an end. Our days as a student in school will come to an end. A mother has a purpose to feed and nurse her baby, but when the baby grows older, she no longer has that particular purpose. These secondary purposes change and come to an end. And our primary purpose, our chief end, never ends. This is our purpose through all of life—as a young child, to an older child, from childhood to adulthood, till the day that we die. Whether single or married, with children, or without children, we're always to be glorifying God and enjoying him.

However, it goes further, and it reaches beyond this life, even into heaven. What are the saints doing in heaven? Well, right now, they are glorifying and enjoying God. We see something of a glimpse of this in Revelation, chapter 7, verses 9 through 12. Notice, all of the nations are gathered in heaven, and what are they doing?—they're worshipping, and glorifying, and delighting in God. And John writes, “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.” So it is that all who are in heaven will ever be fulfilling their highest end—glorifying God and enjoying him forever.

Well, let me close with a few thoughts to consider. We ought to think seriously upon this question and answer, and in order to do so, let's try to bring it to ourselves. The question in the Catechism reads, “What is the chief end of man?” I hope you'll have the answer memorized soon, if you don't already: “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” Now let me make it a bit more direct to you. What is your chief end? Can you answer that? You should be able to say, “My chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” You have this purpose. You have, not only a purpose in life, but the greatest purpose in life. It's far more than just making a living, or

receiving wages or an income. It's far more than learning or playing. It's even more than having a family or going to church, as important as these things are. You exist with this purpose—to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. You can use this truth every day and in every moment. We can ask the question, “Is what I am about to do glorifying to God?” We can ask, “When I read or listen to God's Word, am I finding this to be a joy to my soul?”

Well, I hope that as we continue through our lessons, you will learn more about this great God whom we are to glorify and enjoy. And I hope that as you do, you will see why he is to be glorified and enjoyed. And I hope that you will learn how to glorify and enjoy him better. But most of all, I hope that you will glorify and enjoy him forever, as you trust him and live by faith in Jesus Christ the Savior.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #2

God's Word and Its Teaching

Question 2: *What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?*

Answer: *The word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.*

Question 3: *What do the scriptures principally teach?*

Answer: *The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.*

In our last lesson, we considered the great question for our lives, “What is the chief end of man?” What is our greatest purpose? We worked through the answer, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” We saw the purpose focuses upon God, that it joins glorifying and enjoying God together, and that this purpose continues forever. In this lesson, we deal with two questions from the Shorter Catechism, the 2nd and the 3rd. These questions naturally follow the 1st. The first of these two questions identifies the standard by which we know what glorifies God, and how we enjoy him. The second of these questions will help us understand the main teaching of that standard. Now, if our main purpose is to glorify and enjoy God, we must know what glorifies and how it is we enjoy him. Without knowing these things, it’s impossible for us to know whether we are glorifying, or whether we are enjoying him.

The 2nd question of the Catechism helps us with this point. It asks, “What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?” Notice first, that the question is asking about what directs or guides us to fulfill our purpose. The word “rule” here is important. The word means something that regulates or governs. The rule in this sense is the standard. It bears authority. So the question is asking what standard or what authority has God given to guide us? What would you say? Well, the world might say, “My heart, my conscience.” Some may say, “The civil government.” Others may say, “The church,” or, “This pastor.”

Notice the answer the Catechism provides: “The word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him”—the word of God. This refers to what God has revealed, what he has made known. We speak at times of revelation, and this word is important. When something is hidden from us, we don’t

know what it is. But when it is made known to us, or revealed to us, we then are able to understand it. For example, there are times when we are with family or friends, and we ask them, “What are you thinking about?” We might have a guess about it, but we don’t know for sure. However, once they tell us, they have revealed their thoughts, and now we know. In the same way, God tells us his thoughts. He does so truly and faithfully in the Bible, his Word.

Notice these words are “contained in the scriptures.” It tells us that the word of God is found in the Bible. It is in the Scriptures—the Holy Bible. This doesn’t mean that something other than the Word of God is contained in the Bible. It means that the whole of God’s saving revelation is in the Bible only. We don’t find it by searching the stars above us, or going on special trips, or seeking a mystical experience by our minds. We find it rather made known to us in the Bible. And the words in our answer, “of the Old and New Testaments” help us to see that the whole Bible is this Word of God. From Genesis through Revelation, all sixty-six books make up that standard.

And finally, the words, “is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him,” point out that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments make up the only and ultimate standard for all of this. The Bible alone bears ultimately authority to instruct us in glorifying and enjoying God. Everything else—our heart, our conscience, the world, our culture, good books—everything else is beneath the Bible, and to be judged by the Bible. They must agree with the Bible, if we are to believe and obey them.

Now, before we dive deeper into our lesson, we should ask, “What does the Bible teach?” This is what the 3rd question of our Catechism identifies for us. So the question is, “What do the scriptures principally teach?” The word “principally” means primarily, or mainly. So it’s asking, what is the primary message, the main message of the Bible? Here’s the answer: “The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” Now there is a lot in the Bible. However, the Bible has an emphasis, or a focus. It focuses upon our faith, what man is to believe concerning God, and our obedience—“what duty God requires of man.”

Let’s now consider two main points for the rest of our lesson from these two questions. First, the Bible is our ultimate authority. It is the only rule. And second, the focus is on what to believe and what to do.

So first, the Bible is our ultimate authority, and it is the only rule. Well, what is the Bible, and why is it our ultimate authority? We see that it is the Word of God. You and I communicate with words by speaking. We also write them down and hand them to somebody. But to speak, we must allow air to pass over our vocal chords and out of our mouths. Now, this is what Paul says Scripture is. It is the very words spoken by God. Notice 2 Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

Now this word “inspiration” means “breathed out.” In other words, all Scripture is “breathed out” by God, that is, it is spoken by God. It is the very word of God, and so it bears then his authority in every word. Notice also that it is the written word of God. The word “scripture” means something written. In our Catechism, we have the phrase “which is contained in the scriptures.” This reminds us that God has given us an ultimate authority that is written down. The books of the Bible are a written record of his thoughts and actions. This is of great help to us. Think of it this way. You and I often forget what we are told, or sometimes even what we were thinking. In fact, we often need to write down things in order to remember them. Even when we think we won’t forget an important thought, we often discover that our minds are weak. However, when we have written down the thoughts and we have the thoughts with us, even if our mind forgets, we have the ability then to remember, by reading what we’ve written down, and we can know what it is we need to

know. Well, God has given us a written record of his Word. This way, we always have access to his thoughts, his promises, his works, his commandments. And if we ever forget, even if we've tried memorizing, and we forget what was attempted to be memorized, we can open his Word and see what he has revealed to us.

Notice also that the whole Bible is our authority. You probably know that there is a main division of the books in the Bible. The thirty-nine books from Genesis to Malachi make up what is known as the Old Testament. These books tell us of the creation of the world, the establishment of God's covenant of grace, the history of God's people, their eventual exile, and their restoration. And all of this takes place before the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In the books of Matthew to Revelation make up what is known as the New Testament. These books tell us of the birth of Jesus, his obedience, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection. They tell us of the work of his church, and they contain many letters that teach us more clearly what to believe and what to do.

Now, although the New Testament is in fact newer, it does not mean that the New Testament has replaced the Old Testament as our ultimate authority. The books of the Old and the New Testaments make up the whole Bible, and the whole Bible is our ultimate authority. It's true that some things in the Old Testament are no longer to be observed. For example, we're no longer to sacrifice animals. We're not to observe the Jewish holidays. However, the Bible identifies those things that have been set aside. The promises and commandments of the Old Testament still teach us about God and about his expectations. And so, we must be careful to handle the Old Testament faithfully. In order to understand the Bible well, and how it relates to us, we need to be students of both the Old and the New Testaments—the whole Bible. We cannot simply say, "Well, that was in the Old Testament, and therefore doesn't apply to us today." We must be sure that what we read in the Old Testament is no longer binding, and to do that, and to do it well and faithfully, we must be students of the whole Bible.

Let me also note that all the Bible, and all that the Bible contains, is true. This is true of the history recorded, it's true of the miracles performed, it's true of the prophecies, the instruction, and the commandments that we find in the Bible's pages. Now, we know there are some things that are hard to understand. Even Peter says this. But this doesn't mean that they are wrong, or less than true. It simply means we need to read with care and diligence, relying upon God's Spirit to lead us to understand the truth.

We must also recognize that the Bible is our ultimate standard. The Lord has given us many secondary authorities, and we're to honor them. As children, God has given us parents, and these are our authorities of our family. As citizens, we have governments, and these are civil authorities. As church members, we have pastors, and elders, and these are our spiritual authorities. However, each of these authorities are secondary—they are under God's authority. In other words, parents and governments and pastors are to command and to teach what is according to God's Word. For instance, if one of these told us to disobey God, we must realize that their command is wrong. And if they are commanding things for which they bear authority, well then we should obey them. However, if they try to use that authority to command us to do something against God's revealed will, we must obey God instead. For instance, what if a president or a pastor or a parent commanded us to steal or to lie. That would put us in a difficult position. It would be right for us to want to honor such authorities, however, such a command is sinful. And it's sinful to give, and it's also sinful to obey. And that's because the command contradicts our ultimate authority—God's Word. God has told us not to steal. God has told us not to lie. And we would be forced then to obey God, and thus disobey a sinful commandment. We see this in Acts, chapter 5, verse 29, we read, "Then

Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.” This is difficult to do, and this may mean that we suffer when we do it.

However, we then suffer for Christ Jesus. Many Christians throughout history have suffered for their obedience to Jesus Christ. Many suffer today for Jesus Christ. And it is then, if we are called to suffer for obeying Christ, we should remember what Jesus himself teaches his disciples in Matthew 5, verses 10 through 12. He said, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

Now, when these authorities command what is according to God’s Word, they rightly serve God, and they help us, and we are obligated to obey these authorities when they command what is according to God’s Word. For instance, parents may command their children to clean their room, or to do their chores. This is well within the parents’ authority and demands nothing contrary to God’s Word. Governments may command their people to pay lawful taxes, and this is within their authority. Pastors may command God’s people to love the members of their congregation, and to gather for God’s worship. However, none of these may command us to disobey God.

And now for our second main point, the Bible focuses on what to believe and what to do. What to believe and what to do is a way of speaking of faith and practice, or faith and obedience. This is the point in question and answer #3 of the Shorter Catechism, “The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” But notice, there are two main categories of what the Bible primarily teaches. The first of these is what we are to believe concerning God. The second of these is what duty, or what obedience God requires of man.

We can learn many things from the Bible. Some of those things can be learned from other books as well. For instance, we can learn about plants and animals from the Bible, and all that the Bible says about these things is true. But it’s not a book about plants and animals. We can learn about plants and animals from observing them, reading books about them, and listening to people who have studied them. Plants and animals aren’t the focus of the Bible. However, there’s nowhere else that we may learn about what God teaches and requires for salvation. It alone, the Bible alone is his revelation on topics of faith and obedience. Well, we may read books that discuss, and hear preachers who preach about these things, but these only lead us faithfully when they set before us what the Bible says about these things. This is because the Bible is God’s Word, and only the Bible is God’s Word. God speaks to us by his Word. The Bible then is the standard for faith. Hebrews 11, and verse 6 tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. If we are to glorify God, we must believe and trust God. But if we are to trust God, and not a false idea, we must be taught by God.

What is faith? A later question in our Catechism is devoted to that very question. But for now, we may simply notice that faith is trusting what God says, and whatever he says. We are to believe what he says about himself, and about his works, about his promises, and about his commandments. But how do we know what he would have us to believe? We are to believe whatever has taught us in the Bible. The Bereans are set forth as an example of this faith. When Paul and Silas visited the Jews of Berea, they listened to the Word preached, but they were sure to search the Scriptures to ensure that what was preached was according to God’s revelation in the Bible. Notice how they are commended in God’s Word, Acts 17, and verse 11: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the

scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” This reminds us that we must search the Scriptures as well. When we read a good book, or listen to a sermon, or talk with other Christians even, we must be sure to search the Scriptures. In fact, you should take what is said in these lessons, and in this Catechism, and be sure to see that these things agree with what the Bible says.

Now, finally, the Bible is the standard of our obedience. The Bible identifies a connection between faith and obedience. James 2, and verse 17 tells us, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” If one truly has faith, works—that is, obedience to God’s revealed will—will follow. We can see this in Paul’s writing to Titus, in Titus 3, and verse 8. He says, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.” So those who believe the truth of God are to give their attention to bringing forth good works.

What is obedience? It’s important that we understand what obedience to God is. In one sense, it’s very simple. It’s to do what God commands. And how do we know what God has commanded? Well, I hope that you know, the way we know what God has commanded is the Bible—it is by reading and understanding the Bible. It is the Bible alone that gives us the perfect and clear will of God. It is the Bible alone that bears the absolute authority to tell us what to do.

To bring this point a bit closer to our lives, we should be sure that our worship of God is according to God’s commandment. We should be sure that our acts of private devotion are according to God’s commandment. In other words, what we do should not be done simply because many people are doing it. What we do should not be done simply because many in the church have done it. What we do should be done because God has commanded it in the Bible.

Notice how Paul addresses this idea in Colossians 2, verses 20 through 23. He writes, “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.” Some had begun saying that certain food should not be eaten or even touched. This was supposed to be a sign of great devotion to God. Paul even acknowledges that it had the appearance of wisdom. However, he says that these are after the commandments and doctrines of men. He says they cannot bring about any spiritual benefit. And so it is with any practice that is without the command of God written in the Scripture. This is important for us. However devout a practice may appear to be, however longstanding the practice may be, if it is not commanded of God, it is spiritually worthless, and not binding upon the Christian. We must be sure that we are following God’s commandments, and not men’s.

Well, as we close, there’s a few things I’d like you to consider. First, since the Bible is God’s Word, his revelation to us, well you and I must read the Bible. If ever we’re to know about him, what we’re to believe about him, about his will, what promises we’re to believe, what commandments we’re to obey, we must know the Bible. So, do you read the Bible? Do you read God’s Word? There are many reasons that we may give to try to excuse us from reading God’s Word. We hear it sometimes from our own mouths—we’re too busy. Sometimes we might think the Bible is too difficult to understand. But there is no other book like the Bible. It alone teaches us what we are believe about God. It alone teaches us the way that we may be forgiven and saved. It alone teaches us what we are to do for God’s glory. And if we do not know the Bible, we cannot glorify and enjoy him forever—we cannot fulfill our chief end.

Well, second, we must read the Bible as God’s Word. Since it is God’s Word, we must read it

reverently. We must approach the Bible with a proper sense of honor. The verses we read are the words of God. He is a holy God. And so we should remember this as we read. And since it is God's Word that holds forth life to us, well, we should read it diligently. There's no greater treasure to be found than what is held forth to us in the Bible. Psalm 119:72 tells us, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." If I took you to a field, and told you that there was a pot of gold worth millions of dollars buried somewhere in this field, and if I told you it would be yours if you were to dig it up, I imagine that you, like I would, would be diligent in your digging. And if it took you many days or years, if you knew that there was gold, you would continue digging till you found it. Well, let me challenge you to read through the whole Bible, because in the whole Bible you will find treasure for your soul.

If you haven't done so, it would be helpful to memorize the names of the books of the Bible. And once you have done that, you can then identify the main themes of each book. And this will help you grow in your understanding of the whole Bible. For instance, Genesis, the first book, we could call "the book of beginnings," because it tells us the beginning of all creation, the beginning of mankind, the beginning of God's covenant, and covenant people. Or the book of Psalms, which is the book of praises. You have the book of Acts, which is the book of the spread of the gospel throughout all nations. Or the book of Hebrews, which is the book of the excellency of Christ in the new covenant. And you can do that with every book in the Bible.

Now, for you to do this well, you should read each book diligently. It will take you time, but as you read each diligently, and thoughtfully, and prayerfully, you'll start to see the glorious things of the Bible and understand it better. Well, we must also read it believingly. Every promise bears God's authority. Every commandment bears God's authority. Whatever we read, let us ask God's grace to believe it.

As a final note, let me point out something about the 3rd question of the Catechism, as it relates to the rest of the Catechism. From here onward, there are two main divisions to the Catechism. Questions #4 through #39 will help us to see what we are to believe concerning God. In these questions, we learn about God—his plan, his works, his salvation. And certainly, what we learn in these questions will impact our lives. But they are primarily focused on the things we are to believe. Questions #40 through #107 will help us see what duty God requires of man. In these questions, we learn about God's law, punishment for sin, faith, and repentance, the sacraments, and prayer. When we learn the things we ought to believe, each of these exhort us unto a certain action.

Well, we begin our journey to see what the Bible teaches us to believe, and what duty God requires. As we make progress by God's grace, let us always ask him to be our teacher, to give us faith, and to help us to search the Scriptures, to his glory, and our everlasting good.

the Bible gives us a far better and a more noble purpose.

And we can see this in the Bible, just serving quickly a few verses to help us see, first, that we're to glorify God. We see this in 1 Corinthians 10, and verse 31—Paul writes, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Paul also writes in Colossians 3, and verse 17, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #3

What God Is

Question 4: *What is God?*

Answer: *God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.*

In this lesson, we will be introduced to the greatest thought that you or I can have. By “thought,” we don’t mean something we merely imagine. We mean that our minds get to think on the greatest truth there is. What is this greatest truth?—it’s God. We’ve already had important truths before us—our greatest purpose, the standard by which we know what we are to believe and what we are to do, and these helped prepare for our question today.

In this our third lesson, we take up the 4th Question of the Catechism. And that question is, “What is God?” The question is raising our thoughts to think about God himself, not merely what he says or does, but what he is. The Answer is, “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” Now this is a very weighty answer. It pulls from the whole Bible, and summarizes for us in one sentence what God is. Now we could perhaps think of other words that could be included. For instance, we might think of the words “mercy” or “love,” and these would be excellent words. However, they are included in the word “goodness.” Remember that these words are words that summarize what the Bible says. It would be impossible for us to put forth an exhaustive testimony of all that God is. But again, here, the Catechism is summarizing what God has shown us of himself.

For our lesson today, I’ll first provide a brief definition for each of these important words. Hopefully this will make sure that you have some understanding of what the words mean. And then we’ll focus on two main points to help us think more fully on the truth of what God is. And we’ll close with a few applications. But first, let us look at the words in our Answer. As we do, I’ll provide one verse that you can write down, and there will be a project at the end that will help you build upon these verses.

The word “Spirit”—this word refers to an immaterial existence. In other words, God is not physical. He doesn’t have a body. He is a Spirit. This also tells us that he is a living and thinking being. John 4:24 tells us, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

The word “infinite”—this refers to the fact that God has no limits upon him. He is perfect

beyond measure in all that he is. You and I have limits—physical limits, and spiritual limits, intellectual limits, and so on. However, God has no limit. Isaiah 40, and verse 28: “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.”

The word “eternal”—this calls our attention to the way God relates to time. He has no beginning, he has no ending, he has no succession of existence. This is extremely hard for us to understand. We have a beginning, and we experience time as the minutes pass by. Notice Psalm 90, and verse 2: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”

The word “unchangeable”—this is another of the difficult ideas related to God, who is immeasurably greater than we. You and I change all the time, however, God never changes. He does not need to grow, he cannot lose or decrease in what he is or what it knows. He’s perfect. Psalm 102, verses 25 through 27: “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.”

The word “being”—this refers to the fact that God is. He exists. He is real. Isaiah 44, and verse 6: “Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.”

The word “wisdom”—God has all knowledge of all things, and directs all things perfectly. Psalm 147, verse 5: “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.”

The word “power”—God is able to do all and everything that he wants and intends. So Jeremiah 32, and verse 17: “Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee.”

The word “holiness”—God’s holiness refers to his perfect commitment to what is pure and righteous and good. It also means that he perfectly opposes and detests all sin and wickedness. The first part of Habakkuk 1, and verse 13, we read: “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.”

The word “justice”—this refers to God’s righteousness. All that he does is just and righteous. Psalm 119, and verse 137: “Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.”

The word “goodness”—what an excellent truth. God is good. In Exodus 33, and verse 19, God told Moses he would make all his goodness pass before him. It’s in Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7 that records what God caused to pass by. Notice: “And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, 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, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.”

The word “truth”—such a word indicates that God is true in all that he says, and he is also faithful to do all that he says. He would never lie, or fail to do what he has said. Hebrews 6:17 and 18: “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

Well, hopefully we have a bit better understanding of these words. And what a truth it is, “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, good-

ness, and truth.” With all of these words, it should be clear that we won’t be able to cover everything in detail. However, we can look at a couple of things with greater attention. In the rest of our lesson, we will think on two points. They are closely related to one another, but we trust that both points will help us better understand the truth related to God. The first is the greatness of God’s being, and the second is the greatness of God’s perfections.

First, on the greatness of God’s being—“Infinite, eternal, and unchangeable”—the very words impress and overwhelm our minds if we begin to think of them. Our minds are unable to take in these very ideas. You can probably imagine what it like to hold ten small pebbles. Maybe you’ve done this. You might be able to imagine holding fifty, or even a hundred of them. However, your mind cannot really conceive of holding a million pebbles. But think of this, what about ten million? What about one billion? Such numbers test our mind’s ability to imagine. But one billion pebbles are no closer to being infinite than is one pebble. Infinite means “no limit.” All that God is, is infinite. The greatness of God—it is unsearchable.

Among the many things we should consider about God, it is worth noting that God is a Spirit. Our Lord indicates this, when, in John 4:24, he said to the woman at the well, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” To be a spirit means to be without a body or anything material. You and I both have a body and a soul. Our bodies we can see. Our spirits we cannot see. However, it is our soul which thinks and understands. It’s our soul which loves and desires. And it’s a great wonder how God has made us both body and soul. We’ll think about this a bit more later. However, for now, notice that God is a Spirit. And since he has no body, he never grows tired or needs rest. He never grows nor shrinks.

You might have a question that comes to mind, If God is a Spirit, when it speaks of his hand, or his eye, or his feet, what does the Bible mean? Well, these are great questions. One thing to remember is that God loves to help us understand things that are difficult. And to do so, he has used things that are familiar to us. For instance, you and I learn much about the world by using our eyes to see. We’re able to do things with our hands. We can move around with our feet. And so when the Bible speaks about God’s eye, it doesn’t mean that he has a physical eye. He’s helping us to understand that he knows what is taking place. Just as you have a hand to pick up things, or a soldier has a hand to defend against an attacker, so God has power to do whatever he wants. He’s using the world we understand to help us understand something more about him.

Though we have a spirit, even that is different than God’s being. Our spirit is created. It’s limited. It’s able to change its thoughts and desires. Our spirit is able to learn and mature and grow. However, God is the Creator. He was not created. He is infinite—he has no limit. He does not learn or mature, because he already, and always has known all things, and all at once. Now these are difficult thoughts, because of how great and how large they are. But it should lead us, as Psalm 145, verse 3 says, to give praise to God: “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.” So God’s being is great.

And second, the greatness of God’s perfections—when we speak of God’s perfections, we speak of his attributes, or his qualities, or his properties. Now, these are all big words, so let me clarify. You have various attributes. Some are physical attributes. For instance, you have height, and weight; you might be tall or short. You have mental attributes. Perhaps you are very smart, and you understand things quickly. You have attributes of strength. You might be very strong for your age, or very fast. These, and many more things, describe what you are—they describe things about you.

While you and I have attributes that may be better or worse than others, none of us has an

attribute perfectly. If we were perfectly strong, we could lift anything we wanted to lift. If our understanding were perfect, we would never need to learn anything else. We would know everything. You and I don't have attributes in perfection. However, all of God's attributes are perfections. Think of the attributes in our Answer—being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Each of these is perfect in God. This Answer helps express this when it says he is “infinite, eternal and unchangeable.” Notice how these three are applied to everything else. In other words, God's power is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. God's truth is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Everything that is true about God, as he is in himself, is true perfectly so.

God's being is infinite. This means that all that he is, is everywhere fully, truly, and really. Wherever you are right now, your hand is in a little bit different place than your foot. Your arm is in a different place than your leg. However, all that God is, is everywhere. Consider two passages of Scripture. Jeremiah 23, verse 24: “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.” Psalm 139, verses 7 through 10: “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.”

Let me challenge you with some questions to see if you're beginning to understand these things. Which is more difficult for you—to lift a piece of paper, or to lift a desk? Some of you may be able to lift a desk, but it will take more effort and it will use more energy. Which is harder for you—to read one book in a week, or ten books in a week? To memorize one sentence, or to memorize a whole book of five hundred pages? Which is harder for you—to walk up two steps, or to walk up two thousand steps? You understand, of course, you might be able to do all of these things, but some things would be very difficult, if not impossible. Now, which is harder for God—to make one piece of dust, or to make the whole earth, the whole universe? Which is harder for God—to feed one little bird, or to feed all of the birds in the world? Which is harder for God—to know the thoughts of one man, or to know the thoughts of all men?—to direct one star, or to direct all the stars in the universe? Well, we could keep going, but the simple answer is this—none of them is harder for God. Such is the greatness of God's power that it is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, that he never grows weaker, he never needs rest, he never finds something difficult, however significant that something is to us. He is the LORD Almighty.

We've only touched on a few key thoughts raised by this Answer. And so may the Lord bless you, as you memorize and think on this in the coming days. Let me now close with four concluding thoughts for you to consider.

First, take time to meditate upon what God is. The Catechism can help you do this. You can use the Answer to this Question as a guide to gather passages from the Bible together. So remember, I gave you a verse to go with each of these attributes. You could have a little notebook, and title a page, for instance, “Eternal,” and every time you come across a passage that shows something about God's eternity, you can write down the reference. Perhaps you could write out the whole verse. If you did this with each of the main words of the Answer, you would have eleven categories of passages to help you meditate upon God—Spirit, Infinite, Eternal, Unchangeable, Being, Wisdom, Power, Holiness, Justice, Goodness, Truth. So I've given you at least one verse for each of these categories. So as you read the Bible or listen to it, take this notebook out, and write down any passage that relates to one of those categories. Soon, you will need to have more pages to write on. And as you do this, think on the meaning of each word and what it tells you about God. And be

sure to praise God for his excellencies, and tell others what you've learned.

As one encouragement, you can see various ways all of these perfections are perfectly joined together in God's works. So think of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. God displays his holiness and justice in punishing sin. He shows his goodness in providing a Savior. He shows his wisdom in arranging this wondrous work. He shows his power in pouring out his power in wrath while sustaining his Son. Indeed, if you want to see more of the perfections of God, meditate upon the cross of Jesus Christ.

Well, in addition, as we reflect upon what God is, it is good for us to make a connection. The greatness of God is the reason for our chief end. "What is man's chief end?...Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." Well, why is this our chief end? To answer that, we simply need to think about what God is. He is the greatest of all—immeasurably great. To focus our lives upon anything other than God, is to focus our lives upon something infinitely beneath God. Some focus upon possessions. Others focus upon wealth. Men may focus upon strength. Women may focus upon beauty. But none of these things are necessarily bad in themselves. But if they become our focus, they end up distracting us from the greatest and highest good there is—God.

Well, notice also that God's greatness is a reason sin is as evil as it is. Sometimes we're tempted to think that are sins are little. Some have wondered whether a sinner should be punished with death and damnation for sinning against God. However, these thoughts are misguided, because they fail to understand the one against whom we sin. When we sin, we don't just sin in general, or sin in the air. We sin against the glorious, transcendent, and magnificent God. It's no small crime to lie to a judge, or a king, or a supreme court, nor is it a small thing to lie to God.

Well, as we close, let us close with this, as we understand something of God's greatness, and we begin to see what a privilege it is to know him. It's a privilege for a student to have an intelligent teacher, to understand what is being learned, whether math or language. This provides us help when we are learning. To have the smartest teacher, who is the best teacher, you would be greatly privileged as a student. It's a privilege to have access to nutritious food. When our bodies are hungry, what a blessing it is to have healthful food. There are many such privileges in this world—good family, friends, possessions, houses. However, there is no greater privilege than to know God, who is greater than all. If know God as our God, we have the greatest privilege there is to have in all the world. I hope that you will take time to meditate upon God, to write down passages related to his various attributes. And as you memorize this Answer, think through those passages of Scripture, I hope you will come to see that God is worthy of your full devotion, all of your praise and worship, and faith, and service.

Well, our Catechism isn't finished yet in thinking about God. In our next lesson, we will think more about this great God. May he bless us as we do. For now, let us close by quoting Psalm 89, and verse 6: "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?"

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #4

One Triune God

Question 5: *Are there more Gods than one?*

Answer: *There is but one only, the living and true God.*

Question 6: *How many persons are there in the Godhead?*

Answer: *There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.*

In the space of only four Questions, you have been presented with some of the greatest truths one can encounter. Today's lesson is no different. We take up another truth worthy of our attention, our meditation, our trust, and our delight. This lesson focuses on two questions from the Shorter Catechism—Questions 5 and 6. Both of these questions deal with God. Question 5 asks, “Are there more God's than one?” The Answer: “There is but one only, the living and true God.” Question 6 asks: “How many persons are there in the Godhead?” The Answer: “There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.”

As we do in our lessons, let's begin with making sure we understand the main words that are found in these Answers. Consider the words of the 5th Question and Answer: “There is but one only, the living and true God.” The words “one only” join together to emphasize that there is absolutely only one God. The word “living” indicates that he is not a mere imagination, or just something that we dream up—he is the real God. Likewise, the word “true” reminds us that he's not an idol or a false God—he is true.

We have many important words as well in the Answer to the 6th Question. Listen again to the Answer: “There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” Let's look at some of these words briefly now, and this will help prepare us for the rest of our lesson.

The word “persons” is probably the most difficult word to define. It is carefully chosen to represent the Bible's teaching, as well as hundreds of years of theological thought. Here, the word “person” does not refer to a human person—it refers to a divine person. You are one person with one nature. So it is hard for us to understand the difference between the ideas of “person” and “nature.” But the word “person” refers to something different than the word “nature,” or the word

“substance.” The words “nature” and “substance” tell us what something is. “Person” refers to an individual instance of a whole nature. Additionally, it carries the idea of consciousness and thought, as a person is an individual and thinking instance of a whole nature. There’s a lot in that, but we trust as we search the Scriptures, this idea will come clearly to us.

Another word, “substance,” does not refer to something physical that we touch, but rather, it is referring to something that exists instead of something that is merely an idea. It’s related to the word “essence,” what something is. And the word “Godhead” refers to the divine nature. It refers back to what we covered in the Question, “What is God?” The word “equal” tells us that each of the divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of these is fully and truly God, possessing the same perfections, and worthy of the same worship.

The Answers combine to set before us what is known as the Biblical teaching of the Trinity. Now, “Trinity” is a word that does not occur in the Bible. Instead, it represents the teachings of the Bible. It simply reminds us that there are three persons in the unity of the Godhead. Thus, “tri” refers to three. And a shortened form of “unity” refers to one. Trinity is a word that connects these two ideas—three and one—not three Gods, but three persons—not one person, but one God.

Well, we’ll work through this together, and let us remember that our understanding of God is to be taken from what he has revealed of himself in the Bible. The Bible is our only rule of faith and obedience. This doesn’t mean that everything in the Bible is easy to understand. However, it does mean that everything in the Bible is true and worthy of our study and our faith. We don’t believe something because it’s easy to explain. We believe something because the true God has truly revealed it.

Well, for the rest of our lesson, let’s look at two primary points to help us understand our glorious God better. First, there is only one God. Second, there are three persons in the Godhead.

Well, first then, there is only one God. This is a basic point throughout the Scriptures. However, there are many today who reject this truth. They may do so in one of two ways. They may assert there is no God. This is known as atheism. The word “theism” comes from a Greek word meaning “god.” Thus, a-theism means “no god.” Other may assert that there are many gods. This is known as polytheism. The word “poly” comes from a Greek word meaning “many.” And so, poly-theism is the belief in many gods. Now, depending on where you live, you may encounter either atheism, or polytheism, or you may encounter both.

Now, while this saddens us to see so many turning from the one true God, it shouldn’t scare us or overwhelm us. We should remember that believers both in the Old and New Testaments faced similar circumstances. We see this in ancient Egypt. The Israelites, who were the people of the one true God, were surrounded by the Egyptians and other nations, who were polytheists. We see this as well in the New Testament times. Paul, for instance, faced this in Acts, chapter 17, when he was in Athens, at Mars Hill, more commonly known today as the Areopagus. It’s not our purpose to answer the objections of these false views today. We are sufficiently satisfied with how Scripture states the matter. For instance, in Psalm 19, and verse 1, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.” That is, creation testifies and declares the glory of the one true God. Or as Paul states, in Romans 1, verses 19 and 20, “That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” Both of these passages, along with many others, remind us that the clear testimony of all creation is that there is one God. That some men try to argue otherwise is only a display of the wickedness of a fallen and sinful heart. Man is

wicked to argue against so clear a truth.

Now let's look more closely at the clear teaching of Scripture, namely, that there is but one God. In Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verses 4 and 5, we read, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." So the one God is worthy of all of our love. If there would be more gods than one, our hearts would be divided. But that there is one God, well, then we should love him with all that we are.

We have another very clear testimony in Isaiah, chapter 45, verses 5 and 6: "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else." Notice how clear God is in this. It's not just that he's the God and the only God of Israel, as throughout all creation to the east, and all creation to the west, everywhere you can go, he's saying, I am the only God. Both of these passages join in harmony with the rest of the Bible, teaching us that there is one God. There aren't warring gods, there is one God to whom we must give our attention, our faith, and our obedience.

Now, let's look at our second point—there are three persons in the Godhead. At this point, we begin by emphasizing that this is a revealed truth. It's not something that you and I have come across. It's not something that you and I have discovered through our own philosophical study. Rather, it's something that God has revealed of himself. It's true they are technical and difficult terms, however, these terms are used to try and describe and represent what the Bible is teaching. Such terms are "persons" and "substance." These words are used to express what the Bible displays in many places.

Now, where in the Bible do we see the teaching that there are three persons in the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost? Well, it doesn't say it so simply or explicitly in one verse. Instead, the Bible gives us large and full testimony of this truth. We can summarize this testimony of the Bible with five basic points that the Bible provides us. And when we put these together, we see the truth of this statement.

The first basic point is, there is only one God. We handled this truth above, but it is good to remember this when we are talking about the Trinity. The Bible does not teach that there are three Gods. The doctrine, or the teaching, of the Trinity does not teach that the Father is a different God than the Son, and the Son is a different God than the Spirit. There is only one God, the living and true God. But it does teach that there are three persons who are this one God. Remember Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 and 5, and Isaiah 45, verses 5 and 6. There is but one living and true God.

Well, the second basic point to remember is that the Bible teaches that the Father is fully God. We'll see this regarding the Son and the Spirit as well, but notice the Scriptures teach this. Christ regularly refers to the Father as God. You can pay attention as you read through the Gospels, and see this again and again. Additionally, notice how Paul refers to the Father as God, in Galatians 1, verses 1 through 3. He writes, "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) and all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." It's clear, the Bible asserts that the Father is God.

Well, the third basic point is this—the Bible teaches that the Son is fully God, not a different God, but himself fully God. Well, to see this, remember these four categories: name, perfections, work, and honor.

First, the name—Jesus is called God. This happens in several places, but we don't have time

to show all of them. Notice one very clear place, in John, chapter 1, verse 1, and through verse 14, but notice those two verses in particular—verse 1 and verse 14. We read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” And in verse 14, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” The Word, who was God, refers to the Son. And you’ll notice verse 14 tells us that he became flesh. And so, the wonder of the incarnation is before us, which we’ll talk about, Lord willing, in another lesson. But simply note this, that he who is the Son of God, is himself called God.

Second, perfections—Jesus has the perfections of God. Again, we only have time for one example, but as you read the Bible, you’ll see others come to your attention. Notice Hebrews, chapter 13, and verse 8. We read, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” This verse tells us that Jesus Christ is unchangeable. This is a divine perfection. You and I change regularly, but Jesus is unchangeable.

The third, work—he does the work only God can do. Jesus made all things. He created all things. That’s something that you or I, or for that matter, any mere human could never do. Not even the angels have such power as to create things out of nothing. But Jesus is God, and as God, he made all things. Notice Colossians, chapter 1, verse 16: “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” Only God can make all things. And Jesus made all things.

Well, fourth, honor—Jesus receives honor only belonging to God. It would be idolatry to receive worship unless the one receiving it is God. In fact, the apostles, on several occasions, were given some degree of worship, and they said “No!” The angels were at time given some aspect of worship, and they said, “No! Only God is worthy of worship.” Well, notice in John, chapter 20, and verse 28, Thomas, who was doubting of Christ’s resurrection, is brought to see the risen Savior, Jesus Christ. And notice his words, we read “And Thomas said unto him”—that is, unto Jesus—“My Lord and my God.” He worships Jesus as God.

Well, we move now to the fourth basic point, and it is that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is fully God. So there’s one God, the Father is fully God, the Son is fully God, and now the Spirit is fully God. And we can look at the same four categories that we considered with reference to the Son. We can think of those with reference to the Spirit—name, perfections, work, and honor.

First then, name—the Holy Spirit is called God. Notice how this is shown in Acts, chapter 5, verse 3 and 4. There was this incident where a disciple lied to Peter and to the church about certain things that they were offering. Notice what Peter says: “Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost.” Later, he says, “Thou has not lied unto men, but unto God.” So lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God. The Spirit is called God.

Well, second, perfections—the Holy Spirit has the perfections belonging to God. Who but God can fully understand God himself? You can’t, and I cannot. Not even the angels can fully comprehend all that is in God. To do so would require infinite knowledge. But notice what Paul says of the Spirit, in 1 Corinthians 2, and verse 10, we read, “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” The Holy Spirit has omniscience. He knows all things—all things about the world, all things about God.

Well, third, work—the Holy Spirit does the work only God can do. Who is it that saves sinners? Well, the Bible tells us again and again, only God saves sinners. Listen to 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, and verse 11, we read, “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but

ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” The Holy Spirit saves us. That’s because the Holy Spirit is God.

Well fourth, honor—the Holy Spirit receives honor belonging to God. In Matthew, chapter 12, and verse 31, Christ is warning us against a very serious sin—blaspheming the Holy Ghost. He says, “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.” Notice how the Holy Spirit has the dignity and honor of God, so that to blaspheme his name is to commit such a sin as is worthy of damnation.

Well, the fifth and basic point to remember is that the Bible teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are distinct as persons, but united as God. The Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit. Each is distinct from the other. However, they not different Gods. They are three persons who are the one God. Now this is a tremendously high and difficult thought. To help us think through this, we can consider a few passages from the Bible.

Have you read of Christ’s baptism? If you have, you have a clear indication that the three persons of the Godhead are distinct. We read of his baptism in Matthew 3, verses 16 and 17. We read, “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Well, who was baptized?—Jesus, the Son of God was baptized. Who descended?—the Holy Spirit descended. Who spoke from heaven?—the Father. We could not say that the Spirit was baptized. We could not say that the Son spoke from heaven. We could not say that the Father descended. Each person had his distinct part in this scene.

This doesn’t mean that they are different Gods. They are distinct as persons. But they are one as God, as we have seen the Scriptures teach. If you have seen someone baptized, you’ve likely heard the minister say, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” These words are from Matthew, chapter 28. It’s there is verse 19, that Jesus commands his disciples, as he says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Now notice this verse. It shows the three persons distinctly—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—but it indicates that they share a same name. It’s singular. He doesn’t say, “Baptize them in the names”—plural, but “name”—singular. This indicates that there is but one God who is Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost at one and the same time.

Let’s clarify this a bit more. The Bible does not teach that there is one God who became different persons over time. In other words, God did not begin as Father, and then become the Son, and then become the Spirit. God is eternally these three persons. Also, the Bible does not teach that there is a primary God and two lesser Gods. It is not that the Father is the real God, and then he made the Son and the Spirit. Again, God is eternally three persons.

Putting this all together, we see that our Catechism presents the teaching of the Bible. It’s not that it answers all of the questions that we might have, but it does well state the teaching of the Scriptures: “There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” We do not believe the Biblical teaching of the Trinity merely because great men and women before us had believed it and taught it, we believe it because it is what the Bible—the Word of God—teaches.

Well, let us finish our lesson today, by noticing two truths that flow from the Biblical teaching of the Trinity. First, rejoice, that all of salvation is a divine work. Every aspect of salvation is the work of God. The Bible tells us that the Father chose his people before the world was. It tells us

that the Son of God took to himself a true human nature and died on the cross for the sins of his people. And it tells us that the Holy Spirit gives us new life, and dwells in the believer. Every part of this wondrous salvation is a part of the work of God. We are loved by God, we are forgiven by God, we are sanctified by God. As we trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation, we trust in one who is truly and fully God, and there's tremendous comfort in this, because we're trusting in one who can never fail to do what he has promised to do.

This then should lead us to worship the Triune God. The Bible presents us a great teaching about God. However, his greatness is why we are led to worship him. The Bible teaches us that there is only one God, and in this God, are three divine, distinct, and equal persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Is it bigger than we can fully understand? Of course it is. However, instead of this frustrating us, we are to come and worship this God, who is far greater than we are. I hope that as you grow, you will continue to learn more about the truth of our Triune God, and by his grace, be brought to trust in him, and to worship him, and to serve him all of your life.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #5

The Decrees of God

Question 7: *What are the decrees of God?*

Answer: *The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.*

Question 8: *How doth God execute his decrees?*

Answer: *God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.*

In our lesson today, we look at two Questions that touch on God's plan. As we'll see, the Bible teaches us that God has a plan that includes all things that take place throughout this universe. Listen to Question 7 of the Shorter Catechism: "What are the decrees of God?—The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." This Question and Answer present to us God's plan. Well, Question 8 identifies how God carries out his plan. "How doth God execute his decrees?—God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence."

Now let's look at the key words in these Answers. In the Answer to the 7th Question, "What are the decrees of God," we have several important words.

The word "decrees"—this word refers to God's plans, his decisions about what he would do in the world.

The words "eternal purpose"—purpose is the reason or goal for something. And here, it's said to be eternal. It's God's eternal purpose, his purpose that he always has had and will have.

And the words "counsel of his will"—when we receive counsel, we receive insight or advice from others. However, God's counsel is from himself—the only perfect source.

The word "foreordained"—this word means "determined ahead of time."

Finally, the words, "whatsoever comes to pass"—these words tell us that everything that happens, whatever comes to pass, is part of his perfect plan.

Well, the 8th Question, "How doth God execute his decrees?" Tells us how God accomplishes his plan.

The word "executeth" means to carry out, or to accomplish.

The word "works" refers to God's actions and how he carries out his plan.

The word “creation” is, of course, one of God’s works, whereby he made all things. We’ll talk more about this in Questions 9 and 10.

The word “providence” is another of God’s works. This word refers to God’s oversight of every detail in all the world, and we’ll talk more about this in Questions 10 and 11.

As we’ve noted, Question 8 introduces the way God carries out his decrees. It is setting up for our next few Questions. So we’ll look at creation and providence more fully in future lessons. In this lesson, let’s look at four ideas. First, the fact of God’s purpose—God has an eternal purpose. Second, the counsel of God’s purpose—God wisely considered his purpose. Third, the goal of God’s purpose—God ordered everything in his purpose toward the best goal. And fourth, the scope of God’s purpose—God’s purpose includes everything.

Well first, the fact of God’s purpose—God has an eternal purpose. Rarely does someone build a house without a plan to guide them. In fact, it’s rare that we would find any of us doing anything without some plan about what we’re about to do. Well, the best buildings follow plans that have worked through many details. And this is true as well of God’s work. All of his actions follow a perfect plan. The wonder of this is that his plan is eternal. That is, he doesn’t come up with it as things develop. He’s not waiting to see some things that will come to pass, and then making an additional plan. You and I need to adjust our plans. God’s plan has been one and the same for all eternity. In the book of Acts, James acknowledges this very truth, in chapter 15, and verse 18. It says, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” Before the world, God had established his plan. This is why Paul can speak of God’s choice of some unto salvation as having occurred before the world. We see this in Ephesians 1, and verse 4, “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” His plan was, as Paul noted, “before the foundation of the world,” that is, he established the plan in eternity before the world was. His eternal plan is perfect. There is no plan “B” because plan “A” is God’s eternal purpose.

Well, second, the counsel of God’s purpose—God wisely considered his purpose. If you or I were planning a trip to an important city that we’ve never visited, we would want to ask people who know more about it than we do. Or if we were considering an important decision to make, we should ask those who have more wisdom and experience. You see, we depend upon those who understand more than we understand, who have more experience than our experience. It’s important for us to ask questions from people wiser than we, that we can make wise decisions.

Well, God did not need to ask for input from others. He did not need to sit down with angels, or men, and gather their insights, and perspectives, and thoughts. He wasn’t stumped by certain things that were before him. Rather, God determined all things by his own perfect wisdom. He is the perfectly wise God. He’s sovereignly determined all that happens. We see this in Ephesians 1, and verse 11. We read, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” Did you hear that? “who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” Everything that is done is done as God has determined by his own will.

Now why didn’t he need to ask for input? Why was it not wise for him to go and seek advice from others? Well, if you think back to Question 4 of the Catechism, you’ll have the answer: “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom,” and so on. You see, his wisdom is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. He did not lack any perspective. He did not lack any good insight. He possesses all wisdom, perfectly so, and forever. And so he did not need to seek the advice of others, because he had all wisdom, and ever has it.

Well, third then, the goal of God's purpose—God ordered everything in his purpose toward the best goal. Every plan we make has a reason motivating it. When we give a gift to someone we love, our purpose perhaps is to show our love and to encourage them. If we hold the hand of our little brother or sister while we cross the street, it's because we have a purpose to provide them help and safety. Sometimes our purpose is more obvious to us, other times it's less clear, but if we were to stop and think about it, we can always find out our purpose by asking this question—"Why am I doing this?"

God also has a purpose in all that he has planned. There is a "why" for everything that he has determined to do. Think of the things he does. He made the world and all that is in it. He feeds the birds. He brings storms. He causes the sun to shine. He directs the stars above us. He shows kindness and mercy to his creatures. He graciously saves some sinners, while he righteously punishes others. He raises up kingdoms, and throws other kingdoms down. Now, with all of these and everything else that he does, why does it do them? The Bible tells us that he does all of this to display his glory. Everything was created for his glory.

Notice the following verses, Colossians 1, and verse 16: "For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." Psalm 19, verse 1: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork." You see, everything has been planned to show forth God's praise. Even the great wonder of God's sovereignty over those who are graciously saved, and those who are justly condemned for their sins. Even this displays God's glory. This is what Paul asserts, in Romans 9, verses 22 and 23. He writes, "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." Notice in these weighty truths, God is doing these things to show something, to display something of himself, that he would be gloriously seen and understood by them. It's a difficult passage for us, because it reminds us that God has decreed, that is, he has determined, who will be saved by grace, and who will be punished for their sins.

Ultimately, we acknowledge that God, who is good and holy, is the one who has chosen what will come to pass. And we are assured by Paul, in Ephesians 1, and verse 6, that this will be "to the praise of the glory of his grace." In other words, though some today sinfully complain about God's choices, on the last day, all will give glory and praise to God, who has done all things well.

Some might think that it is a selfish motive for God to seek his own glory, however, this is to misunderstand the truth. God is the infinitely glorious one. If he were to have appointed a different purpose, he would have sought out something less than what is perfect. He would have established a goal that was beneath what was best. Because he is the infinitely glorious one, it is right and good that all things should be done to his praise.

Well, fourth, the scope of God's purpose—God's purpose includes everything. If we were planning on building a house, we would have a lot to consider—measurements, and material, the order of construction, how long it's going to take. But even the best plan would not be able to include everything. For instance, we couldn't plan out the weather for the days we were working. There would be many other things like that outside of our control. However, God's plan includes every detail that takes place in all of the universe, and throughout all of history. Remember Ephesians 1, and verse 11, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." All things—he

works all things after the counsel of his own will. Everything that comes to pass is happening as God has determined it.

Well, does this mean that God is active in our sinning? Certainly not. James tells us, in James 1, verses 13 and 14, “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” Does this mean then that sin is outside of God’s control? Not at all. This is a great wonder to us, however we can see God’s perfect sovereignty, even over man’s sin in the Bible. The Bible gives us instances where God is shown to be sovereign, and yet not the one who is actively engaged in the sin. Notice, for instance, Acts, chapter 2, and verse 23. Peter is preaching of Jesus Christ, and he says that the Jews wickedly treated him. He says, “Him”—that is, Jesus Christ—“being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Do you see it? Christ was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. That is, God decreed it to happen. Yet the action of the Jews was sinful, it was done with wicked hands. The sins of men are not chargeable to God. The sins are committed under the sovereign purpose of God in such a way that the sinner is responsible for his wickedness. Now you and I may have many questions about this, but again, it’s important for us to gather our thoughts and our understanding from the only source that has no error, and that is true in everything that it says—the Bible.

Well, as we close, let me direct your mind to three final thoughts. First, when we truly understand the fact that God is sovereign over all that is, it should humble us. This was God’s lesson to Job. When you read Job, chapters 38 through 41, you gain a view of God who is over all that is. This has the effect of humbling Job. You see it again in Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel, chapter 4. King Nebuchadnezzar had become proud at the sight of his great kingdom. The Lord, however, brought him low, and in the end, Nebuchadnezzar declared what’s recorded in Daniel, chapter 4, and verse 37. He says, “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.” Nebuchadnezzar had come to see that there is a King who rules over all, and performs all his holy will. And this King is God. We too much acknowledge the same. God is the only one who carries out his will at all times. He is the only one who is truly the Ruler of all creation, and that ruling comes from his plan—his decrees. This is one way in which God is infinitely greater than we are. God rules all things perfectly in accordance to his perfect and eternal plan. It is for us to humble ourselves, and to give praise to him who truly is King over all.

Well, second, in closing, notice the fact that God has a perfect plan over all things. This doesn’t mean that we should ignore his promises or commands. His promises are real promises to be believed. His commands are real commands to be obeyed. In other words, this truth of his eternal plan doesn’t make us robots. It doesn’t make us puppets. When we do not obey his commands, we are guilty of sin. When we do not believe his promises, we are guilty of unbelief. There is a great mystery to this. However, the Lord himself calls us to give our attention to his revealed Word. We’re not to imagine, and think, and wonder at what his secret plan may be. We’re to fix our attention on his Word, and the revealed truth of his promises and commands. Notice Deuteronomy 29, and verse 29: “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” There are some things that are hidden from us—many things that are hidden from us. However, the things God has revealed to us in his Word are to be believed and obeyed. What should we do then? We should confess our many sins, and our slowness of heart to believe his promises. We should cry out to God for his grace to give us faith and repentance. And in doing so, we appeal to the great God

of heaven and earth to show his mercy—a thing that he has revealed that he is pleased to show.

Well, third, in closing, for the believer, there is great comfort in knowing that God has ordered everything for the best purpose. Many times, we cannot make sense of how this experience or that experience in our lives would fit into the overall purpose of God. However, we are able to trust God that it does. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, in Romans 8, and verse 28, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Because God has planned all that is, and purposes all that is to his glory, and because he has promised to his people that all will be to their ultimate good, the believer can trust him, even in the most difficult times. And so far from this causing us great consternation and frustration, the believer is given a great cause of confidence that He who does all things well is in charge, even of the difficulties. So I encourage you to take Psalm 23, and there see the expression of faith, trusting a God who is perfectly in control of all things, and resting in his promises. And as you do, may God give you faith, both to trust him and love to worship him.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #6

God's Work of Creation

Question 9: *What is the work of creation?*

Answer: *The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.*

Last lesson, we looked at God's all-inclusive and perfect plan. He has decreed all, whatsoever comes to pass. He carries out the plan by his works of creation and providence. In today's lesson, we look at the first of these works—his work of creation. He has, as we'll see, created all things. This is a great truth. In the next lesson, we'll zoom in to look more closely at his creation of mankind. For this lesson though, we'll survey the glorious truth that God has created all things.

Before we get to our Question itself, it's worth noting the reality that faces us today. Our culture openly opposes the truth that God created all things. Many today think that the world and everything in it developed over billions of years in a random way. While we cannot answer all of the objections that the world, in its unbelief, presents, we can present the truth of God's Word on this topic.

Question #9 of the Shorter Catechism asks, "What is the work of creation?"—"The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good." There are four ideas we will focus on in our lesson. First, we will look at *what material God used to create all things*. Second, we will look at *what tool God used to create all things*. Third, we'll look at *how long God took to create all things*. And last, we'll look at *the condition of all that God created*.

So first, let's look at *the material God used to create all things*. Sometimes we say that we create something. A chef creates a meal. An artist creates a sculpture. By this, of course, we mean that the person is forming something into something else. The artist may take a large chunk of marble and chisel away certain parts to make a beautiful representation of a living creature. However, he's using something that already exists. Similarly, a chef may take raw ingredients—vegetables, and meat, and spices—and combine them and cook them in such a way that they turn into an excellent meal.

Now, notice what the Catechism says: "The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing." Notice that. Everything God made was brought forth out of *nothing*. This is an amazing claim. It's an amazing truth. Most importantly, as we see this claim, it is a truth that is taught by the Bible. Notice Hebrews 11, and verse 3, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed

by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” In other words, God did not use preexistent material in order to make the things we see. This tells us several things.

First, it tells us how great and powerful God is. God did not just form the world. He brought it forth out of nothing. All that now is, once had no existence. God powerfully formed everything that is. This surpasses our ability fully to understand. However, it does direct us to see that God truly is Almighty, and is greater than all else, and is worthy of our worship.

Well, second, it tells us that there was nothing but God before he created the universe. This is a big thought for us. However, we should remember that God is eternal. Nothing else existed before he brought it into existence—no angels, no men, no preexistent material. This shouldn’t make us think that God was lonely. Remember, he is the Triune God. Within himself, the three persons ever enjoy perfect fellowship—the one true God is perfectly satisfied. But he has created all things to display his wisdom and power, and to publish his glory.

Well third, it tells us that everything owes its existence to God. This is true of trees and stars, as well as angels and men. It’s not only true of believers, it’s true of the most wicked and atheistic men and women there are in this world. All are made by him and for him, and are accountable to him.

Well, second, in our lesson, let’s look at *what tool God used to create*. What is this tool that God used to bring all things into existence? If you stop to consider even some of what God made, you would know it must have been something strong, something powerful. Having brought it all things into existence, and then shaping it, demanded infinite power, wisdom, and skill. How else could he have made the earth, the other planets, and the great stars? It must have been something very strong, and indeed, you’re right in thinking so. However, it may not be what you think it was. The *Catechism* tells us that he made all things “by the word of his power”—by his Word. Perhaps that doesn’t impress you. If that’s the case, it may be because you’re thinking about the power of your word or my word. If you or I tried to make something appear out of nothing by our word, we would fail, because our words are quite weak. However, God’s Word is so powerful, that he simply says, and that thing he says, happens.

Notice how each day in creation begins with the phrase, “And God said.” For instance, in the first day (Genesis 1:3) we read, “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” Notice, he gave a commandment, “Let there be light.” This is what he said. But what is amazing, of course, is what follows: “and there was light.” His Word is so powerful that once he speaks, it happens. When we begin to understand this, we will see that God is so powerful, he must be praised. No one else is like he is.

In fact, the Psalms help us with this. In Psalm 33, there’s an opening with a call to worship God with joy: “Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright” (Psalm 33, verse 1). And the Psalm then gives several reasons for praising him. One reason is his creating of all things by his Word. Notice verse 6: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” The same idea is in verses 8 and 9: “Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.”

When we stop and consider that the whole universe was brought forth by the Word of God, we should stop and wonder at his power, and praise him for his work. It should cause us to see how great his is, and how little we are. This truth is taught, in Hebrews 11:3, as well: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were

not made of things which do appear.” The worlds, that is, everything in the universe, was framed, made, formed by the Word of God.

Well, third, for our lesson, notice *how long God took to create*. We learned earlier that God is infinite in his power. He is Almighty. This means he could have created everything in a moment. However, as our *Catechism* states, God chose to make all things “in the space of six days.” We see this in the first chapter of Genesis. These were days of normal length. Though they were extraordinary days, since God was making all things, they were of normal duration. First and foremost, we see this in the Biblical record itself. Notice the repetition for each of the six days, in Genesis 1: “And the evening and the morning were the first day” (verse 5). It goes on, then “the second day” (verse 8). It goes on, then “the third day” (verse 13), and so on. Just as each of our days changes to the next by the transition of evening to morning, so did these first six days.

The Bible is very clear that all creation was completed in the space of six normal days. Notice, in Genesis 1, verse 31, we read, “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.” The next verse, Genesis 2:1, tells us, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” This point is confirmed elsewhere in the Bible, and, Lord willing, we’ll eventually get to the Ten Commandments in our study. But for now, it’s important to notice how the fourth commandment appeals back to this creation week. The fourth commandment, as we’ll see, tells us that God wants us to set apart a whole day—twenty-four hours—to worship him. We’ll talk more about that later.

But notice that God, in that commandment, points us back to the creation week. He’s explaining the commandment, and he directs us back to creation. In one sense, he’s answering the question, “Why should we set apart a whole twenty-four hours—a whole day?” Notice Exodus 20, verse 11. There, God says, “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.” In other words, our week is patterned after the first week. In the first week, God used six days to work. He completed his work in those six days, and after those six days, he spent a whole day glorying over his work. This is a pattern for us. We are to work and play for six days. Yet we’re to spend one whole day glorying in God and worshipping him, in our private devotions, in our family worship, and in our public praise as well.

It’s important to notice this. It’s God’s Word that teaches us how long God took to make all things. He tells us that he made everything in the space of six days. We shouldn’t, however, think that he needed six days, because he was tired, or needed to rest. He was actually presenting a beautiful order for us to consider. In fact, you can see this, if you read Genesis 1, and take notice that God is progressing in an orderly fashion as he brings things into existence. He establishes the places where things will dwell, and then he establishes the things that will dwell in those places. There’s much wisdom displayed in a diligent meditation of the order of that first week.

Well let’s move on now, fourth, to consider *the condition of what God created*. The *Catechism* tells us that what God made was “all very good.” This is actually taken from Genesis 1, verse 31: “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” This is not just a nice and sentimental thought. It is full of instruction for us. God never made something bad, wrong, or off in some way. There was nothing evil in itself. Everything was as it should be. This is far different than things are today. There’s sickness, there’s disease, and there’s death. There are broken families. There’s wickedness in our world. We see that there is evil.

Well, what has happened to upset and disturb this beauty that marked creation, especially at the first? Well, it isn’t long into the Bible before we come to the answer. The answer is that sin

was committed. We'll spend more time on this in a future lesson, but it is worth noting that God's beautiful creation was marred by sin.

This doesn't mean that God was not in control of all things. It does, however, remind us that there would be no death, no illness, no problems in this world, no sadness, no grief, no misery, were it not for sin. It's worth pausing to think of that. Sin often appears to us as something little and insignificant. And yet, the first sin is what unleashed unto the world all of its misery. We have to think seriously about that first sin, but likewise, our own sin, and see how great a need there is for a Savior of sinners.

Well, we don't wish to end in discouragement. We should remember something else that the Bible teaches us. It's true that evil has entered and disrupted this good creation. However, that's not the final story. As we've noted, we need a Savior. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ has come to conquer evil. In fact, we read of this most gracious and excellent work, in Revelation 21, and verses 4 and 5: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."

There are many question that we may have about God's work of creation. Unfortunately, we live in an age where there are many attacks upon this most glorious truth. We don't have the ability to answer every question. But one thing we can see is that though creation has been marked and marred by our sin, in the passage we just read, God has a way to restore it, and it's all through Jesus Christ.

Well, it's also true that there are some who deny that the world was created by God, some deny God himself. Many who do this consider themselves wise, educated, scientific, and thoughtful. And indeed, they may have the credentials and the degrees to show that they've done much to study. They look upon believers as darkened in their understanding, and even as fools—outdated, out of touch. And this, of course, is very sad. However, it's not new. This has been the case for a long time.

But why is it that some deny God, and deny his work of creation? Paul answers this question, in Romans 1. In verse 18, he says there are men "who hold the truth in unrighteousness." The word "hold" means "to suppress," "to hold back." Paul's noting that there are those who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. He goes on to say, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (verses 19 to 21). Well, the world may parade its scientists, its specialists, and say, "Rejecting God as the creator is the intelligent thing to do," however, this is not because of science or learning. It's because they reject the truth that is displayed by all creation. All creation testifies clearly that there is a God who made all things.

The fundamental problem is not that they don't know it. It's that they despise the God who made it. Paul says, "They glorified him not as God." You see, this is the essence of sin. Sin does not give God the glory that is due unto his name. And instead, sin has corrupted, and is corrupting, and it makes us take the glory to ourselves. Moreover, if we can remove God, well, then we feel we have the liberty to live as we want. Well, how much better is it that we acknowledge the creator instead of suppressing what is so clearly seen? Let us look upon his work of creation, and give him

the glory that is due unto his name. He is God Almighty! His wisdom and power are on full display. So let us see that there is none like unto our great God who made all things out of nothing, “by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.”

And this can be an encouragement to you. It’s natural for us to look upon mountains, and trees, and animals, the stars above us, and to wonder. And we should do so, and yet, do so with the full acknowledging that these things, which are truly wonderful for us, are things that God has made. So as you study creation, as you take up the study of science, you would do so in a way that submits yourself unto God. As you discover the various systems of the world, the planets above us, the solar system, and the various stars and galaxies of the universe, and you wonder at the magnitude of creation, let it be to the end that your mind reflects on God who made all of these. As you look for instance, and you see models of how large the earth is compared to other planets, and how large the planets are to the sun, and how large the sun is compared to other stars that are greater than it, you should think for a moment that all of this is nothing, compared to the God who made it.

And so, as we study these things, we can be brought to a fuller understanding of the greatness of God. And it should lead us then to worship him, and to praise him. Perhaps you like to look at animals, and you go to the zoo, or you walk in nature, and you see these various creatures that are all around us, remember this—every single one of them was wisely and powerfully made by God himself. And so, as you study them, you can study the works of God. But be sure then, as you come to delight in those works, to give glory to God who made them. You see, we shouldn’t be afraid of studying creation. We should indeed be afraid of our sinful ways in our mishandling of the things which God has made. But we should enter upon such study with great delight to think we are following after the works of God, and we’re seeing his wisdom that is displayed in creation. You see, we need not fear the study of science. If science is rightly done, it is the gaining of an understanding of the things which God has made. And when science is rightly done, it helps us to see more clearly the wonder, and power, and wisdom that is displayed throughout creation.

But we also need to be mindful that we study the things that God has made rightly. We study them to discern the things that God has made, and the way that God has made them, and to delight in those things, but always then to return thanks unto God. So as you walk in the woods or you go to a park and you see the birds flying in the air; or you go to the river and you can see fish swimming; if you go to the zoo or the aquarium and you see the great things; there are a few things that you should remember. Remember this, there was a time when nothing existed but God. And remember this, that all things that now exist, exist because God brought forth all that is, out of nothing, by the Word of his power. And so as you see great creatures, whether living creatures as perhaps a blue whale, or the inanimate creatures like the stars above us, remember, there is one greater than all, and that is God. So let your study of creation lead you to the worship of God.

And yet, the last thing to remember is this. Creation itself shows forth that there is brokenness. And that brokenness, as the Bible records, is because of our sin. And so, reflect upon that as well. The creation is no longer as it once was, that there have been great upheavals. Indeed, most notably, the flood, because of man’s sin. And yet, all sin has brought about brokenness. And so, as you see certain things that are wrong, as it were, in creation, let it be a remembrance to you that there is much that is wrong, and it’s all because of sin. And yet, as you think on that, may be to the end that you would reflect upon Jesus Christ, who is the Maker of all things, as well as the Redeemer of sinners. And may you look to him in faith.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #7

God's Creation of Man

Question 10: *How did God create man?*

Answer: *God created man male and female, after his own image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.*

In our previous lesson, we considered God's great work of creation. He made all things by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good. He did this, as we saw, out of nothing. Well, in this lesson, we look more closely at a particular part of his creation—mankind; you and me. It may be helpful to notice that the *Catechism* follows the order of the Bible. Genesis 1:1 through chapter 2, verse 3 gives us a big picture of all of God's creation. In Genesis 2, verses 4 through 25, there is a zooming in, to focus more particularly upon the creation of the earth, and even more particularly upon man. These aren't two different creation accounts. Genesis chapter 1 is a general survey of God creating the whole universe, and Genesis chapter 2 focuses specifically upon how he created man.

So let's look at our Question, #10, "How did God create man?" Now, before we get to the Answer, we should note that the word here "man" is being used in a general sense. It is speaking of humankind, or humanity, or, as we sometimes say, mankind—that is, both males and females. Now, the Answer to our Question is, "God created man male and female, after his own image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures."

One word that may be new to you is the word "dominion." It's a word that means to have lordship, or authority. This means that God made man with authority over the rest of the creation. Though man is a creature, yet God has given man authority over the rest of creation. It may be helpful to understand that the word "creatures" does not merely refer to things living. Sometimes when we hear the word "creature," we think only of animals or insects. However, the word itself simply means "something created." In other words, rocks are creatures. They aren't living creatures, but they are created, so they are non-living creatures. Planets and stars are creatures. They don't live, think, and feel, but they were created by God, and so they are creatures.

With these words then clear, let's move to the main points of our lesson. Today we have three. First, *Notice that Man Was Made to Reflect God*. Second, *Notice that Man Was Made with a Distinction by God*. And third, *Notice that Man Was Made to Serve God*.

So first, *Notice that Man Was Made to Reflect God*. The *Catechism* tells us that "God created man...after his own image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness." Notice the word "image."

God created man after *his own* image. Of course, this is what the Bible tells us. In Genesis 1, verse 26, we hear God say, “Let us make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.” Here, God is speaking with great majesty, as a King. This is why he speaks in the plural, “Let us.” Of course, as you’ve learned earlier, our one God is three persons. However, it seems that what is being emphasized here is his great Majesty.

So notice what this great and glorious King over the all the earth says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” The words “image” and “likeness” are synonyms. They are different words that mean essentially the same thing. Both words mean something that reflects something else, or resembles something else. So if you look in a mirror, you see your reflection, your likeness. If you see a picture of yourself, you see your image. So man was made to resemble God.

Before looking more particularly at how we are made in God’s image, let us not overlook the fact that God made man with a body and a soul. Notice in Genesis 2, and verse 7, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” There are two things to consider.

First, when God made the first man, Adam, he shaped him from the dust of the ground. Man comes from the earth. What a thought—that we were formed originally from the dust of the earth. Second, though God had formed Adam’s body from the earth, man was not alive until God gave him life by breathing into him. In other words, there are two parts to man. He has a physical body, and he has a spiritual or a reasonable soul. Both of these are what make up a human being—a body and a soul.

We actually see this at Christ’s death. His body was hanging upon the cross, and at the end of suffering on the cross, we read, in Luke 23, and verse 46, “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” And you’ll remember, there were two men that then took the body of Christ down and buried it in the tomb. So his human soul left his human body. This is what death is. It’s the separation of our soul from our body. When we’re alive, as God made us, our body and soul are united in a mysterious and yet true way. At death, our body and soul are separated. At the resurrection, our soul and body will be reunited.

So never forget that you have a real body, made by God, and a real soul. You’re not one or the other. Both of these are what you are. Your body is made by God and ought to be treated with dignity, as everyone else’s body. And your soul, which though you can’t see, is real, and needs to be cared for, and watched over, and tended to. Just as you care for your physical body, so you need to care for your spiritual soul, and this can only be done by God’s grace, through Jesus Christ.

Well, as we saw last time, all that God made is good. We should make this connection. Our physical bodies, as they are made by God, are good. We should not think upon our bodies as something evil in themselves. Nor should we think of the right use of our bodies, or the right enjoyment of the world God made, as if that’s wrong. When we see a beautiful sunset and we smile and are happy, we should thank God. He made us to enjoy his creation, and to do so to his glory. When we eat a delicious meal, we should do so with enjoyment and gratitude, and give thanks to God. When we’re sad, and our mom or our dad give us a hug, and we’re encouraged by them, we should thank God for that good expression of love. He made our bodies, and he made them to be used for his glory. It is, as Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

You see, the physical world is not the problem. Our enjoyment of good things in this world is not the problem. It is when we use the world or our bodies contrary to God’s commandment,

or when we use the world or our bodies without honoring God. To enjoy God's creation without thanking God is wrong. To set up the world and our bodies as our main goal and focus—that's wrong. You see, to use God's creation, including our bodies, contrary to God's commandment is the problem. But to use our bodies in this world rightly is good and right, and is one way of honoring the Lord.

Well now, getting back to God's image, we should be careful. Saying that God made us after his image doesn't mean that we look like God physically. It's true, as Genesis shows us, that God made our physical bodies. But remember, God is a Spirit. He doesn't have a body like you and I have. So what does it mean to be made in God's image? The *Catechism* helps us. Notice, it says, "in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness." These are things that God has in perfection. He is perfectly all-knowing. He is perfectly righteous. He is most holy. These are perfections of God. Yet, he made us to resemble him. He made us to be knowing, to be righteous, and holy creatures. We are to be creatures that think and understand. In doing so, we resemble God who understands. We are to be creatures who live righteously and according to what is good. And in doing so, we resemble God, who does what is right and good. We are to be creatures who are set apart from sin and profanity, loving what is good and pure. And in doing so, we resemble God, who is completely free of sin, and loves what is pure and good. This is how God made us.

The problem is that man turned from this and listened to Satan's lies. Instead of living by understanding the truth, man turned to live by a lie and deception. Instead of doing what was right, he did what was wrong. Instead of loving what is pure and hating what is evil, he embraced what is evil, and turned from what is pure. Man has done the exact opposite of what is good, and what he should have done.

This doesn't mean that man absolutely lost God's image, in his sin. It means that he abused God's image and corrupted God's image. This is the great wickedness of sin. Instead of living as a reflection of God, man has turned to distort God's reflection. Instead of showing the rest of creation what God is like, we corrupted God's likeness.

That men are made in God's image gives them tremendous dignity. Men and women are to be treated with honor and kindness. They aren't just random developments from apes, or other creatures. They aren't the random outcome of several processes throughout history. Humans were uniquely created by God to resemble and reflect him. Even the way we speak to other humans is to reflect this truth. Notice what James writes, in James 3, verses 8 through 10: "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." Though men have been marred and corrupted his image, they are still worthy to be treated with respect. So when we are tempted to be unkind or mean to others, we should think, This person is made after God's image. For God's sake, I will treat him with dignity and kindness.

Before moving to our second main point, notice that one part of Christ's work for his people is to renew this image in them. We see this in Ephesians 4, verses 23 and 24, Paul writes, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Notice also Colossians 3, verses 9 and 10, "Ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." When we put these two together, we see a few things.

One, God is renewing his people by renewing his image in them. When he converts a sinner from his state of sinful rebellion and death, he begins a work renewing his own likeness and image

in that person. The saved person begins to resemble God more, and to do so more fully, all by God's grace.

Two, notice how Paul speaks of the new man as "after God," and "after the image of him that created him," that is, according to or like that image. The image being renewed in the Christian is God's image. And so, the work of salvation, among other things that take place, is God restoring his image that was ruined by sin.

Finally, notice that this image is in righteousness and holiness, as Colossians 3 says, in knowledge. These are the three words that our Catechism uses, "after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness." These are the ways in which God's image particularly shines forth in his people.

Now, second, *Notice that Man Was Made with a Distinction by God*. So we read in the *Catechism*, "God created man male and female." This should be obvious to us today. Everywhere we look, we can see men and women, boys and girls, and this is how God made mankind. Notice that both males (men and boys), and females (women and girls) are created by God as part of mankind. They all share in an essential dignity, as those who bear God's image. Males and females are truly and equally bearers of God's image. This means both men and women, boys and girls, are to be treated with honor and respect.

Now we do see that there are obvious differences. These differences are as God has determined, as he has appointed, as he has established. In other words, the differences aren't cultural; they aren't imaginary. There are some physical differences that are obvious to us. There are also some differences as to the relationships and roles that men and women have. We don't need to go deeply into this, however, we should see that these differences are established by God.

We don't choose to be male or female. We don't change ourselves to become male or female. If that's a thought, that's a sinful thought. It's a testimony of brokenness which only God can heal. God is the one who makes us male or female, with all of the physical, with all of the emotional, and with all of the relational differences that each one has. It's not better to be a man or a woman. Both are crowned with great dignity of bearing God's image.

However, this does not deny the important differences between men and women. God made men to be men, and he made women to be women. And when one tries to act like the other, they're denying the difference that God made. If men act like women are to act, they're disrupting the order of what God has established. And when women try to act like men are to act, they're disrupting that order.

If you wish, you can see some of these differences in the Bible itself. And so, you can note these passages and look at them later, and you'll see this very point: 1 Corinthians 11, verses 1 through 16; 1 Corinthians 14, verses 34 and 35; Ephesians 5, verses 22 through 32; 1 Timothy 2, verses 8 through 15; and 1 Timothy 3, verses 1 through 13.

And two important things to emphasize are these: first, both men and women are made after the image of God. This gives them an equal dignity and worth. There's no place for mistreating women or mistreating men. Such things are sinful.

But second, men and women are created with real differences of physical function and relational roles. You can see these in the verses just mentioned. These are not consequences of the fall. This is an important point. The differences are part of the fabric of God's creation. We see the foundation of this in Genesis 2, verses 18, and 21 through 22: "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet [suitable] for him...And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the

flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.”

The man needed the woman. The woman was made to help the man. Additionally, it is worth noting that Adam needed a woman, Eve. Marriage is instituted by God at creation. The different roles, the different functions, the different physical realities are all before the fall. Marriage is a good thing. And yet notice, it's governed then by God. Marriage, if it's to be lawful, is only between one man and one woman. This is God's unique calling and provision. When this is disregarded in relationships, not only do those relationships and their families suffer, but churches suffer. Society falls apart. But where these things are lovingly and faithfully honored, relationships, families, churches, and society shine forth in the beauty of what God has established.

Well, third, and finally, *Notice that Man Was Made to Serve God*. We read that God created man “with dominion over the creatures.” We noted earlier that the word “dominion” means that one has authority. So why are we saying that man was made to serve God? Well, the reason is because of the nature of this dominion. Notice, it is “over the creatures.” God gave man authority over the rest of creation. We see this in Genesis 1, verse 26: “And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” God gave man authority over the whole earth.

Notice, he did not give man authority over himself to do whatever he wanted. He certainly did not give man authority over God. Man is under authority, that is, he is under God's authority. However, man is given authority over the rest of the earth. Which then means he is to use it rightly to God's glory. Man has a responsibility and a high calling to work and serve God with all creation.

Throughout the Bible, we should remember, authority is given in order to serve those under authority. We see this in marriage, in church, and in society. As one example, a husband has authority over his wife, as we see in Ephesians 5, verse 23: “For the husband is the head of the wife.” However, how is he to use that authority? Husbands are, as Paul writes in the same chapter, verse 25, to “love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” Notice the husband's authority is to be used for his wife's good. This is exactly what Christ uses his authority for, as Paul indicates. Christ bears all authority, yet he uses it for the good of his beloved people and the glory of his Father. Well, this is how we are to use our dominion over creation. We're to use it well, to the good of others and the glory of God. Having dominion doesn't mean we should abuse animals, or treat God's creation carelessly. It means that we should oversee all things for the good of men and the glory of God. Well, this is a high privilege, and a high calling we have as God's image-bearers.

As we close, let me direct your thoughts to two things. First, consider well what great dignity God has placed, not only upon mankind in general, but upon you. You may be unknown to many in the world. You may be rich or poor. You may be well educated or not. But whatever your circumstances, you have been privileged to bear God's image. How unfortunate that many people today think and teach that men and women evolved from lesser animals. If we start believing that, it's no wonder if we start behaving like lesser animals. However, when we realize that we have been made to reflect God, that ought to lead us to carry ourselves with great dignity, and treat others with great dignity as well. Whether man or woman, boy or girl, born or unborn, sick or well, all of those different categories, that they bear the image of God, so we should honor them. You bear God's image. If that's the case, you have a calling to reflect that God whose image you bear.

So second, think clearly about the wickedness of sin, that we, who were made to bear God's

image to his glory, should instead corrupt and tarnish that image to our own wicked delight, is inexcusable and damnable. We stand in need both of pardon and renewal. It is not a pardon that you or I can bring about. It's not a renewal that you or I can make happen. But praise God! He has sent Jesus Christ to pardon and renew us. In doing so, he makes all who trust in him to bear more clearly the great and glorious image of God, and all to his praise. You see, what we have corrupted, God, by his grace, restores through Jesus Christ. And so, look to Jesus Christ, and as you trust in him and are pardoned, may you, as well, know his restoring of his glorious image in you, that you may have the privilege of reflecting God more beautifully now and forever.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #8

God's Works of Providence

Question 11: *What are God's works of providence?*

Answer: *God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.*

The Bible clearly teaches that God made all things out of nothing. Do you remember the words from Latin that express this idea?—the words are, *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing”. God made everything, both seen and unseen, out of nothing. Remember that this is a great display of God’s power and wisdom. But the question comes, what did God do after he made all things? Some think that he set up the universe to function of its own power and ability. Well, we know that there are certain principles we discover in the universe that help explain how it works, such as the law of gravity, or patterns of weather. The Bible gives us more insight, and it reminds us that God continues to uphold all things. He directs all things. He’s actively at work in all that’s taking place today. God is sovereign over all.

Our Question today focuses our attention on this Biblical teaching. Look at Question 11 of the Shorter Catechism. It asks us, “What are God’s works of providence?” Well, the word “providence” comes from a word meaning “to see ahead,” or “to look after.” It has the idea of caring for something else. Here, it is asking about God’s general care of all things. We’re given this Answer: “God’s works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.”

Now, before going further, notice two words in the Answer—the words “preserving” and “governing.” These are essential to understanding what’s being said. To preserve something means “to keep it,” to guard it, to uphold it. Now sometimes, we might use the word “preserve” as when we preserve fruit or a vegetable. We’re keeping it for future use. Well, you can say, in some sense, that God is preserving everything. He’s the one that is actively causing it to continue existing. He’s the one who gives it the ability to remain. He’s engaged in the act of preserving all things.

The other word, “governing,” is from that idea of directing and guiding something. God is governing, that is, he’s directing actively everything that’s taking place at all times. Now, this is, again, a glorious truth that reminds us just how great God is, and how small we are in comparison, which should lead us to worship him who is the maker and sustainer of all things.

Well, to look at this teaching a bit more. Let us look at three main points for our lesson today. First, we’ll consider the meaning of God’s providence. Second, we’ll consider the manner of God’s

providence. And third, we'll consider the extent of God's providence—just what does his providence include?

Well, first, let's look at the meaning of God's providence. The basic meaning of God's providence is that he is, at all times, overseeing and directing everything that takes place. The Catechism tells us that "God's works of providence are his...preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions." Now, we've already looked at these two important words, preserving and governing. But let's look more at this great work of God.

The Bible teaches that God preserves all things. This helps us remember that nothing would exist, or continue to exist without God causing it to exist. In other words, the moon was brought into existence by God's work of creation. And we can say further, it remains in existence by his preserving work of providence. Now, this isn't just true about the moon. It's true of everything in the universe. From the largest star in the heavens above us to the smallest insect that you and I may never see, everything continues by the work of God causing it to continue.

We see this truth in the Bible. In Hebrews, chapter 1, and verse 3, we read about the divine Son of God, Lord Jesus Christ, "Who," the Bible says, "being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power." Notice that last part, that it is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, the eternal and divine Son of God, who is upholding all things by the word of his power. This means that he is the one giving existence to everything else that is. He is keeping everything from falling apart or ceasing to exist. This is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who is upholding all things. We could say it this way—if he stopped this work of providence, if he stopped upholding all things, everything would stop existing. He maintains it. He supports it. He gives it existence every moment, everything from angels and men, to mountains and valleys, to stars and planets, to creatures like elephants, or, as big as they are, blue whales, to mice, and other things. And indeed, everything continues, only because God is sustaining it.

This is not all. The Bible teaches that God not only preserves these things, but that he governs all things. He rules over them. He ensures they are accomplishing his purpose. This general truth is stated in Psalm 103, and verse 19. It is there that we read, "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all." The Lord is set as a King upon his throne over all that is in this world. He's ruling, he's directing, he's causing all things to carry out his perfect will.

Now, if you remember, an earlier Question asked, "What are the decrees of God?" And you'll remember that God made a plan for everything that takes place. God's works of providence are his current carrying out of his plan. This is his work. He's made his plan from eternity past, and providence is carrying out of that plan in time and history. He is the King who has decreed what will come to pass, and he is the King who carries out what he's decreed to come to pass. You can see this in many places in Scripture, but there's a memorable testimony of this very truth. There was a very great king in the ancient near-east known as Nebuchadnezzar. And in his pride, he thought that he was in control of many things. He thought of his kingdom as superior to all other kingdoms, and he took the credit for all that had come to pass. However, he was brought to acknowledge that only God is in absolute control of all things. You can read Nebuchadnezzar's story in Daniel chapter 1, through Daniel chapter 4. And in that last chapter, toward the end of the history recorded there, that after Nebuchadnezzar was brought very low before God, and then brought back to see the truth, that he confessed, in chapter 4, verse 35, "He"—speaking of God—"doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" Notice, it's God only who does according to his will, both in

heaven, and in the earth. Nebuchadnezzar, as great as he was, was brought to see that there is only one who does all that he wants, and that “none”—as he said—“can stay his hand”—none can keep him from doing it. There’s only one who governs, and that one is God.

Well, let’s move to our second point, the manner of God’s providence. We’ve seen that he preserves and governs all things, how is it that he preserves and governs all things? We can imagine an evil king governing his kingdom. And we would know that if there was an evil king, he would rule unjustly and wickedly. His kingdom would be a miserable place. How is it that God rules the universe he made? Well, you should already have some ability to answer that, when you think back to “What is God?” And all of those attributes that we discussed—his perfections—those are shown in all that he does, and this Answer clarifies that very point. Remember, it speaks in this Answer that he “preserves and governs” in such a way that is “most holy, wise, and powerful.”

Well, this is important, first, because it is telling us what the Bible says, as we’ll see. And also because it is great encouragement. Nothing that God ever does, or has done, or will do is done in sin, or in wickedness, or without having been thought out perfectly, and without wisely being established and carried out according to the truth. This is something we praise him for in Psalm 145, and verse 17, “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.” It’s not only that God is himself righteous, but in all that he does, all of his ways, and in all of his works, he is righteous and holy. Everything that God does is done by him in holiness.

Now, this may cause us to entertain a question—what about the sins of men? We see that God is sovereign over all things. We see he preserves and governs all things. And now we see that he does so in a most wise, and holy, and powerful way. How is it then that God rules over the sinful men who he’s made, and who he’s ordained to carry out his will. There are questions like this which are hard for us to answer to the full satisfaction of our curiosity. There are things that are just beyond us. We remember that, in the book of Deuteronomy, we’re told that the revealed things belong unto us—those things which he’s declared in his Word—and the secret things belong to God (Deuteronomy 29:29). So we may have many questions, not just about this particular topic, but many others, and in the end, we can’t fully answer. But we do have enough in the Bible to give us sufficient cause to trust God, and to see that he is not the one who is guilty of sin. What we know is that God is in complete control of all that happens.

But we also know, as the Bible is clear in testifying, that he’s not the one who’s committing the sin, nor is he forcing man to do something that is against that man’s will. God is not creating sinful desires within men, though he’s sovereign in his ruling over them. He actually restrains the sins of men. He’s also able to use even the sins of men for his purpose that is great and good. So while he is sovereign over all that happens, he is—we ought to remember—holy as he sovereignly rules over all that happens. So he is holy, and pure, even when he’s ruling over the sins of men, and directing them for his purpose of bringing glory to himself and salvation to his people.

We can see this very truth in the glorious display of these things in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can see this in part of Peter’s sermon in Acts chapter 2. In verses 22 through 24, we read, what he preached, “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” Now there is much here, but notice in particular what is said in verse 23. Jesus Christ was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” God had decreed that this particular act

should happen, and he was carrying out, in his providential work, this decree, and did bring it to pass. However, Peter says, of the men who carried it out, “Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” So we can see several things, but notice, they, those who were guilty of falsely accusing and crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ, were themselves active in a sinful and a responsible way. They weren’t simply machines preprogrammed to do something mindlessly without the engagement of their wills. They were responsible people, sinfully fulfilling their sinful desires in their wicked actions against God.

Now, the good news is that God ruled even in this, and brought to pass our salvation through Jesus Christ. There’s much that we may not understand, whether of this and how God sovereignly works, and yet man is guilty of his own sin, and there are many questions to which we will not receive answers. However, we see again, and again this clear and undeniable truth that God is holy, as he governs even the sinful actions of men. And so, as we learn to trust him who is good, and holy, and just in all that he is and in all that he does, let us learn indeed to trust him. Not to judge him by our standards, or by our unanswered questions, but rather to receive what is clearly testified of in his Word.

Well, you’ll also notice that his providence is “most wise.” You can actually see this in what we’ve just considered in Peter’s sermon. With great wisdom, God ruled over the actions of men who were intending to destroy Christ, and doubtlessly Satan intending to overthrow God, and yet with great wisdom, God ruled over those things to bring forth salvation. If you think more about this, you will wonder at how wise God is in all of his plans and actions. He had been working and governing all of history to bring forth his Son, as the Scriptures say, “in the fulness of time.” And so God had been preparing and working, and things that would pass our notice were yet important for the bringing to pass of these things. If you read through the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ, you can wonder at the names that are listed there. And some of their stories we know in the Scripture, and all of those were being woven together wisely and in a holy way powerfully by God, to bring forth his perfect purpose. He was bringing together all manner of strands of prophecy and history, so that he would fulfill his perfect plan of salvation.

Now, this isn’t only true of his great work of salvation in Christ. This is true in all that he does. He is working together all things in a most wise way that will cause us to praise his name for all eternity. When Paul was reflecting upon God’s great work of salvation, his plan carried out in history, he was brought to praise God, in Romans 11, and verse 33. He says there, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”

Notice that all of this demands immeasurable power. How else could God be ruling the stars and planets above us? How else could he be directing the history of nations, and kingdoms, and empires to accomplish all his holy will? How else could he be ruling over angels, and demons, and men. All of this demands perfect power—ultimate power. Indeed the Scriptures assert this in the passage we’ve already referenced—Hebrews 1, and verse 3, tells us that God does all this, “upholding all things by the word of his power.” That same Word which brought forth all things is the very Word that upholds all things.

Well, finally, let us look at our third point, the extent of God’s providence. Just what does God’s providence include? Some may be tempted to think that God’s providence is only over his good creatures and their good actions. In fact, some have thought that they honor God by saying that he isn’t in control of the evil actions of Satan and sinners. But what kind of comfort would it be to think that sin and evil are outside of God’s control? What kind of comfort would it be for you to

think that God isn't in control of the very ones who despise you? This would mean that something is at work that is beyond the oversight and the power of our God. The Catechism tells us that God's providence extends to "all his creatures and all their actions."

This is true of great things, and little things. Notice how, in Matthew 10, verses 29 through 31, Christ teaches this. He says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?"—by that, he's saying, look how insignificant they are—"and one of them," he says, "shall not fall on the ground without your Father." He says further, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." Think of what he's just said. Sparrows which fly past us today, and we don't think much of—Christ says their life and their death is in the complete control of our Father. He speaks of the hairs upon our head, and says every single strand of hair is known by our Father—not one falls from our head without the Father's knowledge and control.

Well, this is true as well of weather, and wars, and sickness, and health, and other things. This doesn't mean that we understand everything that happens. We will often be challenged by the things that God does. We'll be left with questions at times. However, it gives us reason to trust him. Remember, he is in control of everything. And remember, the one who is in control is most holy, most wise, and most powerful. Even when he brings challenging circumstances into our lives, we have a good and sure cause to trust him. In fact, notice what Paul writes in Romans 8, verse 28. He says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." In the Greek, it's even stronger. It's not just that these work together, but it is that God is working them together for good. He's at work, even in the difficulties, and has a good purpose that will come to be clearly discerned, if not in this life, then in the life to come.

Well, as we close, think for a moment how this Biblical teaching of God's providence gives us great cause to praise the Lord. It's a display of his infinite wisdom, and his infinite power, all being exercised in a most holy way, and one day we will see the outworking of these things with perfection. I encourage you, after this lesson, to read the life of Joseph in the book of Genesis. You should read Genesis chapters 37 through 50, which captures Joseph's life. And as you do so, you'll be challenged by the difficult trials Joseph suffered. Yet read to the very end, and you'll see how Joseph testifies of the praise of God through his good providence. He was able to say to the very brothers who sold him into slavery, "But as for you, ye thought even against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." Well, this is true of all of God's providence.

And finally, knowing that God is in control of all things is a great source of comfort and peace to the believer. I don't know what trials you have suffered or are suffering, and I don't know what trials you will suffer, but I do know that you will face them. I do know that they will come. And they'll be difficult, and they'll be sad; many will be confusing. But when they happen, you'll be tempted to complain, or distrust God, or even blame God, and carry on in such a way. However, this Biblical truth is of great help in those moments. It's then that you and I are to remember that God is sovereign. He is at work, and what he's doing, though we don't understand it all now, in time to come, we will see most clearly how this is not only for his glory, but even for the good of his believing people. So what should we do, but come to humble ourselves and trust this great and glorious God.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #9

God's Special Providence Towards Man

Question 12: *What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created?*

Answer: *When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.*

We have seen that God's providence extends to all creatures and all their actions. This includes actions that we think are insignificant, but it also includes the most significant actions. Today our lesson focuses on one of the most significant works that have ever been performed, and one aspect of God's providence which focuses upon our humanity. It focuses upon humankind. Particularly you'll notice that the Question before us, Question 12 of the Shorter Catechism, asks this question, "What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate he was created?" This Question is asking about the first of mankind, namely, Adam, and particularly when it was that he was made. What special arrangement did God make with him in the beginning? Well, the Answer is as follows: "When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death."

Now, we have a few important words in the Answer, particularly, the first of which is "covenant." This is an important word throughout the Bible. When you read through the Bible, you'll come across this word again, and again, especially in the Old Testament, but again, you'll see it in the New Testament. It's also important throughout our Catechism. The word "covenant" refers to a special agreement, an arrangement that leads to a relationship established between two or more individuals. In a covenant there are often promises and responsibilities. There are with those, blessings for keeping those requirements. And those blessings come by way of what's promised, and there are consequences, if one fails to keep such responsibilities as are agreed to. Now, we'll talk more about this in a moment, but it's important to understand these parts of a covenant.

Now notice also that there a word "condition." The word "condition" refers to a requirement that brings to pass something else. We could think, for instance, of a thirsty person. When someone's thirsty, they want their thirst quenched. Now a thirsty person doesn't just need to know where the water is. That person must drink the water. And drink enough so as to satisfy his thirst. That is

the requirement, in other words, for quenching his thirst. In other words, the condition for quenching his thirst is drinking the water.

Now, this Question and Answer are bringing us back to the very beginning of Genesis. And you'll remember that Genesis 2 tells us about how God made man male and female—Adam and Eve. Well in that chapter, we also see that there was one tree that God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat from—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And you'll remember, as well, there was another tree, the tree of life, as well as many others, fruit-bearing trees that they could have eaten from.

Well, we'll see that God had given an important commandment to Adam, and that this command was actually part of a covenant. This covenant held forth life and death, not only for Adam, nor only for Adam and Eve, but as we'll see later, for all humanity. Well, to help us see what this covenant was, let's look at three things in our lesson today. First, let's look at when this covenant was made; second, what this covenant established; and third, what this covenant required.

Well, for our first point, when this covenant was made—the Catechism tells us that this happened “when God had created man.” In other words, God entered into this covenant at the time God created man. Now, when we read Genesis 2, we don't see the word “covenant.” We can't turn to Genesis, chapter 2, or 1, or 3, or anywhere else and it's saying in so many words, “God entered into a covenant of life with Adam.” Now, this shouldn't bother us too much. You'll remember, as we talked about, we don't find the word “Trinity” in the Bible, but we do find the meaning of that word in the Bible. Well, it's similar here. We don't see the word “covenant,” however, we see the parts of a covenant, and when we see the parts of something, we can say that we find that thing that's being described.

For example, if I told you that there was a young boy who was sitting at a desk, and reading a book, and while he was reading, he was then working on a calculator. And he would pick up his pencil, and write on a piece of paper, and then double check what he's done, and reviewing all that had been accomplished. I don't have to use the word “study,” but you would know right away that what's being described is a young boy studying, and by using a calculator, he's probably studying math. If I describe the parts, I can describe it in such a way that you know what's being described. Or if I told you that there was a young lady and young man who were gathered together in front of a congregation, and behind them was a minister, and I told you that the young man was promising certain things to the young lady, and the young lady was, in turn, promising certain things to the young man. And at the end of their exchange of promises, the minister said, “I now pronounce you to be man and wife.” I don't need to use the word “wedding” or “marriage” for you to know what is taking place.

Well, the same is true here in Genesis, chapter 2. We don't have the word “covenant,” but we have the description of a covenant. We can see this in Genesis, chapter 2:15 through 17. God gave a commandment after he placed Adam in the garden. We read there, “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.” So here, God gave a commandment to Adam. And additionally, he told him of a consequence if he failed to keep that commandment. He said, “For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” And in this warning, there's also a promise to be discerned. If he did not eat of this tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he wouldn't die—he would live. So we have God giving a commandment, and in that, he's giving a promise. If the commandment were kept, Adam should enjoy life. If the commandment were disobeyed, he would bring death upon himself. Now we shouldn't over look the point that there

was another tree. Verse 9 tells us that, “Out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

Now remember what we mentioned earlier—a covenant is an agreement between two or more individuals. Here, we have God holding forth something to Adam—there’s the two individuals. We also remember that in a covenant, there are promises. What’s being promised?—well, life is being promised. And likewise there are responsibilities, and so God is telling Adam, “You’re not to eat of this tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” And there are also, in a covenant, consequences. The consequences were life if obeyed, and death if disobeyed. So though Genesis 2 does not use the term “covenant,” it displays the parts of a covenant very clearly. Now, when did all of this take place? It took place as soon as God had made man and placed him in the garden. In other words, it took place at creation. So God established this covenant with Adam at the time he created him. This is why our Catechism says, “When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him.”

Now, for our second point, what this covenant established—every covenant establishes something. For instance, when a young man and a young woman enter into a covenant of marriage, a new relationship is formed. A new relationship is established. They’re now married. They weren’t husband and wife, but through that covenant, now they have established a new relationship where they are husband and wife. Now, the same is true in this covenant. What was it that this covenant established? Notice the Catechism answers, “When God had created a covenant of life with him.” God established a way for Adam to have access to life.

Now, we usually use the word “life” and think merely in a physical way. But in the Bible, oftentimes the word “life” is much more full than that, and here, it particularly is. The idea of life is not just referring to physical life. The word here used, “death”—“in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die,” is not just speaking of physical death, but rather, death in its fulness, and thus, life in its fulness. You can see this in God’s Word. Genesis 2:17 says, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Now, as you probably know, Adam ate of that tree. He did not immediately die physically, however, he did indeed die. How so?—well, because, as we were saying, life is more than physical. Life is spiritual as well. You’ll remember, that when God had made man, he didn’t just make a physical thing, but he made us to be body and soul, and to bear God’s image. Well, Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and died—his soul died. This is why Paul, in Ephesians 2, is able to speak of us who are dead in our sins and transgressions (verse 1). Adam’s soul no longer lived and functioned as it was supposed to. It was no longer doing what it was supposed to do. Additionally, Adam no longer lived in fellowship with the God of life. As we’ll see, after they had eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God drew near, and what did Adam and Eve do?—they fled away. They were no longer in fellowship with the God of life. And eventually, Adam’s physical body would perish. The Catechism will describe all of this in later Questions and Answers, as “the state of sin and misery.” We’ll consider that in time to come.

But for now, notice that the covenant was holding forth a promise of life, by which Adam should continue in physical and spiritual life, and fellowship with the living God. This is what God had established, a way by which Adam should enjoy all that to the fullest. Now, we can’t fully know exactly what would have happened, had Adam not eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or if instead he had eaten of the tree of life. We know enough to say he would have

secured that life that was promised to him, physical and spiritual life, in living fellowship with the living God—truly a way of life. It is enough for us to realize that this would have been far better than what happened by disobeying God.

Well, our third point, what this covenant required—what was Adam to do in order to maintain and secure such life? Notice that the Catechism says that God “entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience.” In other words, the covenant God established required Adam to obey God perfectly. This is why God is so clear when he’s speaking to Adam: “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” There would not be a second chance to fulfill this covenant. Adam couldn’t say, “I messed up, and I’ll now keep it.” It demanded perfect obedience. Adam was demanded to obey God without the slightest fault.

Well, perhaps you’re in school, and at school, you can pass a test by getting an eighty-five percent, or you can get perhaps a ninety percent—nine out of ten questions will allow you to advance to the next lesson. Or perhaps that overall grade would allow you to advance to the next grade. When Adam was given this test, he was required to get a hundred percent obedience. To miss even a little, was to fail the test—it was to violate the terms of the covenant. Before we think that this is unfair, remember several things.

First and foremost, God is worthy of our perfect obedience in and of himself. Adam, as a creature, owed God what God had demanded. That’s because God is wise, and powerful, holy, just, and good; he’s merciful and faithful. God deserves perfect obedience. Second, remember that, as the Bible tells us, God made man upright. Adam was made as a righteous creature. He had knowledge, and righteousness, and holiness. We’ll look more at this in the future, but remember that God made man good. Adam was not already given to sin. It wasn’t as if God came to a sinful creature and said, “You owe me perfect obedience if you’re going to gain life.” But he had come to Adam, who had not yet sinned, and who had knowledge, and many benefits, and many privileges. And third, remember that Adam had everything he needed. He was in a garden with beauty and nourishment, and not least of all, he was in a garden with fellowship with God. And likewise, God made Eve to support and help him. Adam had all that he needed. And last, remember that God had been clear to Adam. When we remember all this, we see that God was not unfair to demand perfect obedience. In fact, to do anything but perfectly obey God, would demonstrate how wicked such a creature was. You’ll notice that the Catechism calls this covenant, “a covenant of life.” It does so, because it is describing the covenant by what it promised. What did the covenant promise? What did God hold forth to Adam?—he held forth life to Adam. So it was a covenant of life.

Well, elsewhere, for example, in the *Westminster Confession*, in chapter 7, this same covenant is called, “the covenant of works.” These terms are describing the same covenant. The covenant of life is one way of describing the same covenant that elsewhere is described as the covenant of works. Different terms, but the same thing. The term “covenant of life” describes this covenant by virtue of what was promised and held forth, while the term “covenant of works” looks at the same covenant based on what was required. We can put these ideas together, and say that this covenant that God established with Adam in the garden promised life by Adam’s works. Had Adam obeyed God, he would have secured life.

But notice that was a warning. The Catechism expresses this, in the event that man failed to give perfect obedience, it would bring forth the pain of death. This is the very thing that God said, “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” This is a very clear and a sober warning. Whatever else Adam could have said, he could not have said, “God, you didn’t tell me what the consequences would be.”

Well, you likely already know that Adam failed to keep this covenant. We'll see this more clearly in our next lesson. To Adam and all his descendants was held forth the promise of life, and if he had obeyed God, he would have secured life for himself, and as we will see, for all those who would come from him.

Well, at least we can see what a wicked thing sin is. Someone might ask, "But shouldn't have Adam obeyed God even without this covenant?" And of course, the answer is, Yes, absolutely! So what is the point of this covenant then? Well, Adam should have obeyed God regardless of this covenant, but the covenant added a special privilege and encouragement to Adam for securing and continuing in a state of physical and spiritual life with God. The covenant was adding an encouragement and a great benefit. God was drawing near to Adam in order to encourage him, and to warn him against the consequences of sin. And so even in this covenant—whether it's called covenant of life or covenant of works—this covenant is a display of the great kindness of God.

Well, as we close, I want to challenge you to think well on this truth. We will see that Adam ultimately sinned, and in doing so, he brought forth the consequence of which he was warned. However, we will see as well that this had a consequence upon all his descendents. It explains why the world is as it is today. This is the beginning of a sad part of our history as a human race. It is also the beginning of a section in the Catechism that deals with the consequences of sin. In our next lesson, we will look more closely at what Adam did, and how he sinned against God. And after that, we will look more generally at what sin is itself. And after that, we will spend time thinking together on the effects of sin upon the whole world of men. All of these are sad and sobering truths. However, all of these, we ought to remember, are moving toward the very good news of Jesus Christ. And remember that Jesus Christ is the Savior of sinners. Additionally, we will see that there is another covenant—the covenant of grace. We look forward to studying that in a future lesson. So as we work through these next few lessons together and focus on our sin and misery, let us remember that they are preparing us for the excellent news of the truth of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, and all of that by God's grace.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #10

The Fall of Man

Question 13: *Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?*

Answer: *Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.*

Question 15: *Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?*

Answer: *The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.*

God established a covenant of life with man. He promised to Adam life for him and for his descendents, if he would obey his commandments. Today we give our attention to the sad history of our first father. To do so, we are looking at two Questions from our Catechism. Note that the Questions are slightly out of order as you find them in the Catechism. Today we look at Questions 13 and 15. In our next lesson, we will look at Question 14, which deals generally with what sin is. Today, we look at Questions 13 and 15, which help us deal with the history of Adam in his covenant of life. The Questions before us today look at what Adam did after God established the covenant of life with him.

So here are the Questions. Question 13: "Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?" The Answer to this Question is as follows: "Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God." Notice that word "will." The word "will" refers to the ability that man has to choose what he will do. When you or I choose to do something, it is our will that is at work. We can think of it perhaps by comparison. When you or I study something, and we're thinking about something, it is our mind that is at work, while, when we're choosing something, it is our will. Our will is a part of what we are, and it is that by which we choose to do something or not to do something. Our mind is part of what we are, and it is that by which we think and understand. Now when you get older, you may read about man's faculties. This word "faculties" refers to the special abilities or powers of our soul, namely, our will by which we choose, our mind by which we think, our memory by which we remember things, and so on. But for now, just notice that the Answer before us has this word "will," and that the word refers to that ability that we have to choose to do something.

Now the other Question we consider in this lesson is Question 15. And this helps complete the story of Adam's action. It asks, "What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?" To this Question, we find the Answer, "The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created, was their eating the forbidden fruit." Now, in other words, the Answer to Question 13 tells us that Adam and Eve sinned, while the Answer to Question 15 identifies the particular sin that broke the covenant of life, and caused man to fall from the estate wherein he was created. So we can see that these two questions belong together. Both of these Questions use the expression, "first parents." This refers to Adam and Eve. You have your parents, your mom and dad, or mother and father. You also have grandparents, your mother's parents, and your father's parents. And this goes back again and again to great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents, and so on. Now, if you were to trace this history back beyond your great-great-grandparents, and keep on going back, and back, and back, you would get to the beginning, and you would find that your first parents are Adam and Eve. This is true of me; it's true of every man, every woman, every child. It's an impressive truth. The Bible teaches that all mankind descend from Adam and Eve. This is why it's most proper to speak of "the human race," instead of multiple races. Whether our skin color is different, or our language is different, or our culture is different, whatever those differences may be, each of us descends from the same first parents—Adam and Eve. Now, this truth is wondrous to us to think about, but it's also full of an important consequence, because our first parents, as we see in these Answers, did not obey God. They sinned against God and fell. And so what that means is we come from a fallen humanity. We'll look at that more both in this lesson, and in a couple of other lessons.

Notice that these Questions teach us that Adam did not do as he was supposed to do. Instead of obeying God, Adam sinned against God. The particular sin that he committed was his eating the forbidden fruit. The record of this is found primarily in Genesis chapter 3. Before moving into the main focus of our lesson, you'll notice that these first three chapters of the Bible—Genesis 1, 2, and 3—are of tremendous importance. They tell us of the beginning of the whole universe—God made all things out of nothing. They also tell us that mankind was made after God's own image, and that man was made male and female, and with dominion over the creatures. It tells, of course, as you read, in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, that God established work, and God established marriage, and that marriage is between one man and one woman. It tells us of the first covenant that God made with man—the covenant of life or the covenant of works. And as we see here, it also tells us that man sinned against God and failed to keep this covenant. These are tremendously important truths. We'll also come to see that in Genesis 3, there is the first promise of the gospel. We'll save that for later. For now, simply note that these first three chapters are very significant for understanding both the Word of God, and the world in which we live. And I encourage, and even exhort and challenge you to be much in your studying of these first three chapters, and think and meditate much upon them.

Well, let's move into the main part of our lesson, as we look at this sin Adam committed while in the covenant of life. First, we'll look at man's state at creation. And second, we'll look at man's will at creation. And third, we'll look at man's choice at creation.

Well, first, let's look at man's state at creation. Remember that God made man after his own image. After making man, God looked over all that he had made, and as Genesis 1, verse 31 says, "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." This, of course, includes man. Man was made good. This is very different than man is today. Man today desires sinful things, and we see that these truths of man being made good, and yet today is sinful, it's stated very

clearly in Ecclesiastes, chapter 7, verse 29. It's there we read, "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." Man was made upright, but he's gone astray in his own devising of sin. What this means is that mankind, and particularly, our first parents, Adam and Eve, when they were first made, they had no sinful tendencies within them. They were not like you, not like I am. We are sinners, even from our conception. Remember when David was convicted of his sin? We have Psalm 51 that gives us his confession, and oh, praise God for such a Psalm, that reminds us of our acceptance by God's grace. Well, while David is confessing his sin, he says, in Psalm 51, verse 5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." This is true of all men, male and female, adult and child, after Adam's sin.

However, Adam and Eve were made without sin. They were made upright. They were made without sinful desires and inclinations. Additionally, they were surrounded by an unbroken and an unspoiled creation. They did not have sickness and death, they did not have famine and war. They were placed in a garden, with plenty of food, and beauty all around them. Even better, neither of them is isolated. Adam was given Eve, because it was not good for man to be alone. They knew one another, they loved one another, they supported one another, but best of all, in this state, they had God's instruction and fellowship. We've already seen that God gave them instruction, "You may eat of every tree, except this one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." We read of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. The garden is where Adam and Eve were placed, and God was with them. This is the best of all, that Adam and Eve had the privilege of God teaching them, and of being near them.

This is the point. Adam and Eve were in an estate of paradise. They had all that they needed. They had all that was good. And best of all, they had God. This is what is meant when both Questions refer to "the estate wherein they were created." They were surrounded by what was good. They were themselves good. They had everything their bodies needed. They had everything their souls needed. They had everything they needed. Moreover, as we considered last lesson, God had entered into a special relationship with them, and this covenant of life held forth that rich blessing of life. Everything in this state was good.

Second, let us look at man's will at creation. Question 13 tells us that they were "left to the freedom of their own will." Now, this is an important expression. Remember, man's will is his power to choose. Here, it says that they had freedom of will. This means that they were not compelled, or constrained, or forced by anything outside of them. They weren't inclined within to evil. They didn't have sinful tendencies, and they certainly weren't forced to sin, as if it were against their will. This is different from you and me in some ways. No one can force us to sin. However, by the fall, as we'll see, our wills, as well as our minds, and our desires, our hearts, have undergone a change. Our will is no longer free in the same sense that Adam's will was free.

Now, it's true that even fallen men truly choose what they desire. However, since the fall, man's heart desires what is sinful and wrong. Man's will is bound to a wicked heart that desires wicked things. We see this throughout the Scripture after the fall. We can see it throughout the whole of the Bible. We can see it particularly in Genesis 6, and in Genesis 8. Now this is important, because Genesis 6 talks about men before the flood. This is after the fall, but before the flood. Whereas Genesis 8 talks about men after the flood. So Genesis 6 is fallen men before the flood. Genesis 8 is fallen men after the flood. Notice Genesis 6, verse 5 says, "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This is far from a flattering picture of mankind. It's a very gruesome picture of how wicked man is. It doesn't mean that man is as bad as he could be. We can imagine

that the worst of men could always have done something even more wicked and evil. It does, however, mean that fallen man is always given and inclined to what is bad. The same is expressed of men after the flood. In other words, though the flood judged the whole earth, and destroyed all but Noah and his family in the ark, it did not cause the heart of man to change. So, in Genesis 8:21, we read, “The LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” Notice, before the flood and after the flood, fallen man is described as one who is wicked. The desires of his heart are only even continually. So this is true of all men since the fall.

Remember, these Questions are dealing with Adam and Eve before the fall. And so it’s far different with Adam before sin, and with Eve before sin. Adam’s will before his sin was free from wicked inclination. His heart was not what was only devising evil continually. He was not inclined unto evil, or rebellion, or sin. So when it speaks of “the freedom of their own will,” it is telling us two things. First, it’s telling us that man before the fall had a will that could choose what is good. Second, it’s telling us that there was nothing that forced man to do what was wrong. Man’s will before the fall, at creation, was good.

Well now, third, let’s look at man’s choice at creation. What was it that man chose? Well, Genesis 3 gives us the context of this history. It opens with the first notice of something wrong. It presents to us Satan working through and in a serpent to tempt man. So we read, in Genesis 3:1, “And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” Well, we aren’t told much about Satan’s fall from heaven. We know he was an angel that sinned against God. However, how or when did it happen? Well, we aren’t given those specifics. But what we do know is that he now challenged Eve to disobey God. He raises a subtle question, mentioned just before, as we noted. And then he directly challenges God’s truthfulness. He says, “Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Remember, God said, “In the day that ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die,” and now Satan says, “God knows that you won’t die.” And this sends Eve on a way of temptation. She then, as the Bible goes on to say, “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise.”

So Satan misdirected Eve. He set her on a course that seemed right and desirable. Isn’t this the way with all temptation? James mentions this in his epistle, James, chapter 1, and verse 14. He says, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” Oh, that Eve had remembered the goodness of God, the faithfulness of God, the wisdom of God. But instead, she trusted Satan. She leaned unto her own understanding, and as Genesis 3, verse 6 records, “She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat.” Notice too that Scripture makes a point about Eve being deceived, which Paul, in 1 Timothy 2, verse 14, notes as a reason that women are not to serve as officers in the church of Christ. We must remember that Adam also took the forbidden fruit, and ate it himself. In fact, in the same verse that records that Eve took the fruit and did eat, we read, in fact, in the same sentence that Eve “gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” All of this took place with Adam nearby. And instead of Adam stepping in and protecting his wife, and counseling her, and intervening; instead, he took the fruit as well, and ate it.

What was it that Adam chose with his will? Well, he chose to sin against God by eating the forbidden fruit. It’s possible that he had many arguments and reasons that were going through his mind. Perhaps he thought, After all, it is good to look at and beautiful. And even as was notice with reference to Eve, maybe he also thought, Well, it will give nourishment, it’s good for food. Perhaps he himself was inclined to entertain what Satan was saying, that by eating this, maybe God was

keeping something from us, and so if we ate it, we would get better. Or maybe he thought further, Well, now that my wife has eaten it, and she that is given to be a help for me, is holding it out to me, well, I'll eat it too. The truth is, we don't know exactly all that was going on in Adam's mind, but we do know this, whatever Adam had in his mind as a reason to eat the fruit, notice that his will chose to sin against God. Think of that. He chose to trust himself. He chose to trust his wife. He chose to trust Satan. And in doing so, he chose to distrust God. God, who had made him, God who had sustained him, God who had provided for him, God who had promised life to him. He took all that God had said, and he threw it aside, and he chose what God had forbidden. He rejected God's counsel and chose to sin against God. This is, as we'll see true of all sin, whenever we sin, we're rejecting God's counsel, and we're choosing something else.

But this sin is, in a particular way, significant and important. It was the sin that caused the covenant of life to be ruined. This is why the Catechism calls this sin "the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created." Well, soon enough we will see that unleashes a torrent of misery upon mankind. But for now, see what foolishness it was. Life was held forth by God. A lie was held forth by Satan. Our first parents rejected life to follow a lie. The human race was plunged into misery by the following of a lie. Death was chosen over life. Sin was chosen over righteousness. Satan was chosen over God. This first sin was most wicked.

What a sad lesson this is. God made man upright, but he has sought out many inventions. And we will see that this is the fountainhead of all the miseries that engulf our world today. It is the beginning of an innumerable number of sins and rebellions against God. It is the mother, the womb of all other sin. It reminds us that man is not evolving into something better, because man was made good and upright, and instead of him evolving into something better, he's actually fallen from something better into something worse. Man was made good, but by sin, he has left that good estate, and has fallen into an estate of sin and misery.

Yet, we must remember that this tremendous failure of mankind by his rebellion against God will be overcome by the Son of God, who became man to save sinners. We look forward to getting to that in a few more lessons. However, the next number of lessons, we will look more closely at the effects of this fall. And remember, that's why we call this "the fall of man," because Adam and Eve were created in a good position, and a good estate with God, and yet by their sin, they fell into an estate of sin and misery. Well, as we look at what that means, and what that's brought to pass, we'll see just how miserable it is. And as we do, we pray that God would cause us to see how far we have fallen by our sin, and how desperately we need the Savior, even the Lord Jesus Christ. And in doing so, may he prepare us to take hope by trusting in the Savior, even the Son of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, the Savior of fallen sinners.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #11

What Sin Is

Question 14: *What is sin?*

Answer: *Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression against, the law of God.*

In this lesson, we look at a very simple question and answer. It's easy to understand, but it casts great light upon a subject that is ignored in our world today. The question is, "What is sin?" This is question #14 from *the Shorter Catechism*. The answer provided is, "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. Well, to make sure we understand the basic idea in this answer, notice the following words.

The word "want" means "lack." We use this word today to refer to something we desire. For instance, we may want to have desert. However, here, the word indicates something that is missing, something that is lacking. So here, when it says, "any want of conformity," it means any lack of conformity.

And then you'll notice the word itself, "conformity." This refers to a fulfilling of a requirement. To conform to something is to match it, to be up to the standard that is demanded.

And you'll also notice the word "transgression." This is a word that speaks of sin. To transgress is to depart from the path that is appointed for us to walk. It is to go beyond what was forbidden.

And then here you'll also see the expression "law of God." This directs us to God's Commandments. Whatever God has commanded makes up his law. We can see this law collected and summarized in certain places. For instance, in Exodus 20, we see the Ten Commandments. You see it also in Deuteronomy, chapter 5. However, there are Commandments in many other places of the Bible, and these may clarify or specify what God demands in the Ten Commandments. It may summarize more generally the whole total of what is required. But all the same, all of these refer to God's law, that is, the revelation of his holy will for us.

Well, in our lesson today, we look at this simple question and answer, which helps us tremendously. And we'll look at it in three points. Firstly, we'll see that sin has an objective standard. Second, sin includes failing to do what God commands. And third, sin includes doing what God forbids. So these three points for our lesson today.

The first then, is that sin has an objective standard. People realize that there is such a thing as right and wrong. This is true throughout the whole world. And this is because there is an inescapable reality of being image-bearers unto God. Now we've seen, and we'll see this again, that that image has been corrupted by sin. However, the Lord has not left us without a witness, even in ourselves,

with our conscience. And whole societies acknowledge that there is something that's right, and there is something that's wrong. Since the fall, there has been great disagreement over what sin is. There is general agreement over certain things. For instance, most mankind will admit that stealing is a sin. If we take something that isn't ours, unlawfully, that's considered a crime in almost every society. Most will admit that murder is a sin. The unlawful taking of another's life is punishable throughout the world. However, when asked why is something sinful, it's then that we start to see the disagreements more clearly.

Some think that a culture determines what is right or wrong. Others may think that it's one's own conscience. Now, while it's true that culture may reflect what is right, and certain governments may have laws in their nation that reflect the law of God, and while it's also true that conscience may confirm what's right to the individual in light of God's law, neither culture, and civil government, nor one's conscience is the source of what is right or wrong. God himself tells us what is right and wrong. He does this primarily by his law. His law is what commands us to do what is good, and forbids us to do what is wrong. Notice how John expresses this in his first epistle, chapter 3, and verse 4. He writes, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." The law, in other words—that is, the law of God—identifies what God requires and what God forbids. And so, when we think about sin, we're orienting ourselves to God. We're thinking of what he has stated is right to do, and what he has stated is wrong to do. When we do not obey God's law, we are guilty of sin.

Now, it's true that as image-bearers, there's something within us by creation that convicts us when we've done what's wrong, and something that exhorts us unto doing what's right—we call this our conscience. It's not true to say that our conscience is the source. Rather, it's God's revelation, and he's given us his revelation, as we've seen in previous lessons, in his Word. His law as contained in his Word is what guides us to know what is right and wrong. Now, we will think more on the law of God when we get to question #39, and the questions that follow. But now we simply note that God's law is his revelation of what he demands and what he forbids.

For example, he commands us to love one another. He forbids us to take his name in vain. These are particular commandments from his law. We find a great summary of his law in the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments instruct us in the basic ways that we are to love God, and to love our neighbor. And so helpful is this great summary of God's law, that the *Catechism* will devote many questions to opening the meaning of those Commandments. But for now, we'll simply note that it's his law which he has revealed to us in his Word.

Now, some Commandments in the Bible are more specific than others. For instance, in the Ten Commandments, we're told that murder is forbidden. We read, "Thou shalt not kill." However, we find that this command reaches even to the words we speak. Not just the actions of our body, as it were, against another, taking his life, but we find more specific instruction, for instance, in Matthew 5, and verse 22. Jesus says, "I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." This is a very searching commandment, and it helps us see what God's law reveals as regards to sin. In other words, God's law is not only forbidding outward murder, but sinful anger and sinful words, these are forbidden.

Notice again the *Catechism*, it says that "any want of conformity...or transgression of the law of God" is sin. That word "any" is so small, but it's of great importance. It's not only the major departures for failings that make up sin, but rather any degree of failing to obey, any degree of

transgressing God's law is sin. We will see that this is true, not only of the Commandment which forbids us to kill, but it's true of all of God's Commandments. Sin is not only in the words we speak and in the actions that we do. It's also in the impure thoughts that we have, and the impure and sinful desires and intentions of our minds and souls. Remember what God found and stated of man, in Genesis, chapter 6, and verse 5: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." It wasn't only his actions that were contrary to God's law, but rather the imagination of the thoughts of his heart—these were sinful. These inward thoughts and inward desires were contrary to God's law.

We notice then, it's God's law, the revelation of his holy will for man that demands perfect obedience. It's the objective standard. It's a standard that is objectively able to be known by what is written, and it's a standard which governs all that man is and does. It demands perfect obedience, and if we fail to give that perfect obedience, we sin. We fail to do what God's standard has revealed we ought to do. God's law is the standard by which we measure whether something is right or wrong.

Well, this helps us to see a few things more clearly. For instance, something is not right or wrong because it has brought about benefits to us or pains to us. Something isn't wrong because of the difficulties it brings. Something isn't right because of the good things, perhaps, that we would say it brings. Rather, something is right because God commands it, and commends it. Something is wrong because God forbids it.

You'll notice also that something is not right because others think it is right. We certainly are grateful when others agree with God's Word and his law, commending what God's law says, but others thinking one thing or another doesn't make something right or wrong. So as an example, you can look at the history of any given nation. And sometimes, in the history of a nation, those generations were more fully informed by God's holy law. And so the civil laws of their nation reflected that. It had laws against, for instance, blasphemy. It had laws against different forms of immorality. But as years pass, then perhaps men start to distance themselves from God's Word, the civil government starts to change the civil commandments of their nation. Well, what's happening is not the change of what's right and wrong in God's eyes, but rather, men are departing from the law of God. The standard hasn't changed of ultimate truth and what is ultimately right. Men are rather taking a step back from it. So in other words, the standard by which we know if something is right or wrong is ultimately God's law, because God's law is his revelation of his holy will to his creation.

Well, second, sin includes failing to do what God commands. God's law commands us to do what is right. We should remember this. Everything that God's law commands is good and right. When we do not perform what he requires, we sin. We refer to this aspect of sin as a sin of omission. To omit something is to fail to do something. It is to neglect a duty. For instance, if your mom or dad told you, "Make up your bed," and you did not do it, you have omitted a duty; you have failed to fulfill your responsibility. This is what the *Catechism* refers to when it says, "Sin is any want of conformity unto...the law of God." If we do not conform to what God's law demands, we fail to do his will. We have sinned.

Let me give you an example. The Bible tells us that we are to forgive those who sin against us. So if someone sinned against you, and did something hurtful and wrong against you, but they then came to you and asked you to forgive them, God says it's his will and it's right for you to forgive that person. You're supposed to forgive that individual. This is a duty that God requires of you. However, if you are angry and bitter, and decide, instead of forgiving, you'll not forgive that

person, you're not conforming to God's requirements. You're not doing what he has commanded to be done. You are omitting to fulfill God's law.

You can see this as well in the Fifth Commandment of the Ten Commandments. That Commandment tells us, "Honour thy father and thy mother." Now notice the way this Commandment is worded. It's worded in such a way as to emphasize the duty of doing something positive. It's not only that we should not dishonor our father and our mother, instead we are actively to honor them. Of course, if we disobey our parents, we have sinned. But the Commandment doesn't just say, "Do not disobey your father and your mother." It says positively, honour them. In other words, if we fail to honor them, if we fail to promote the honor that belongs to our parents, we're also guilty of sin.

So this is a truth then that begins to show us the perfection of God's law. That which God requires of us is a complete perfection, not only in avoiding those things forbidden, but in actively doing what is prescribed and commanded. In other words, the law does not simply command us to avoid certain behaviors, it calls and demands for an active conforming of our lives to the way of righteousness revealed in God's law. In other words, the law does not only say, "Don't do this." In certain things, it also says, "Do this"—be active in doing what is good.

Think of Christ's words to John the Baptist, in Matthew 3, and verse 15. He's come to present himself to John the Baptist for baptism, and John the Baptist hesitates for a moment, but Christ answers John the Baptist and says that he must "fulfill all righteousness." What a thought! He did not come simply to avoid evil, to avoid, as it were, the things forbidden. He came to do what God's law demanded. Now this is helpful for us. Now, Christ had some things that were, for him, peculiar for him to do. But with reference to the law of God, we ought to have that mindset. We're not just to avoid what is wrong, we're to fulfill what is right, because God's law demands that we do what is right.

It comes with Commandments—love your neighbor. Certainly, we should not hate our neighbor. We should not hurt, or injure, or speak wickedly about our neighbor. However, the command, love your neighbor, tells us that we should be doing certain things for our neighbor and to our neighbor. We should be those who help and serve our neighbor. Think of the good Samaritan. Not only did he avoid injuring the man who was hurt on the side of the road, he actually went out of his way to help and serve, and as he could, heal that man. So when you think of God's law, remember that it calls you to certain actions and desires, and if we fail to fulfill those things, we're guilty of sin.

Well, third, notice as well that sin includes doing those things that God forbids. God's law forbids us to do what is wrong. For example, he forbids us to lie; he forbids us to steal; he forbids us to worship idols. You can see this idea in the expression that's frequently found in the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not." This expresses what we should not do. It forbids certain things to us. Thus, "Thou shalt not bear false witness" forbids us to lie. "Thou shalt not steal" forbids us from taking as our own what belongs to someone else. If we do what God has forbidden, we have sinned. This is perhaps the common way we think of sin. Sin is doing what God says we should not do. It's as if God has drawn a line, and said, "Don't cross the line." And sin then is crossing the line. When we do what God says we should not do, we commit and act that transgresses God's law. And this is called a sin of commission. While a sin of omission is when we omit, or fail to do, what God requires, a sin of commission is when we commit or do what God has forbidden.

Notice again, the way we know what we are supposed to avoid is by understanding God's revelation of his holy will—his law. His law forbids us to do what is wrong, or evil, or hurtful. While our sinful desires may think sin would be good, or enjoyable, or beneficial, and surely as a testimony of our own corruption, we have often smiled when we transgressed God's holy law.

We ought to remember that God's law comes to us and warns us against what our sinful desires would wrongly pursue. Remember, as Paul says, in Romans 7, verse 12, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." God never forbids what is truly pure, and righteous, and good. He only forbids what is impure, what is unrighteous, and what is evil.

If we want to know what we should avoid, we should not ask our hearts, we should not just judge by what the culture says, or what many people are doing—these are the false standards of the world. The world tells us to follow our hearts. The world tells us to do as everyone else is doing. Well, the big problem with that is that our hearts are corrupt and wrong. Our hearts will tell us that bad things are good, and good things are bad. Moreover, many times, what the rest of the world is doing is what they shouldn't be doing. If we want to know what is bad for us, we simply need to look at what God's Word forbids. He only forbids what is bad and what is wrong. And so, when it is that we do what he forbids, we're doing what's wrong—we're committing a sin.

Now before we move to our closing applications, let me clarify that true righteousness will be found both by avoiding what God forbids, and doing what God requires. In other words, these two ideas of sin are brought together. So for instance, when it is that God forbids us from doing what's wrong, he's also exhorting us to do what is right. These two ideas are closely connected throughout the scriptures. Let me give you one example.

God's law governs our speech, what we say, the words that pass through our mouths. We can sin by way of omission, when we fail to speak in the way that we are supposed to speak according to God's law. We sin by way of commission, when we speak in the way that we are forbidden to speak by his law. Here's one passage, for instance, that brings these two together: Ephesians 4, and verse 29. Paul writes, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

You can see it in this one verse. We are forbidden to allow corrupt communication to proceed out of our mouth. This means that when words come out of our mouth that are corrupt and wicked, we have transgressed God's law. We have sinned by way of commission. However, notice the second part of the verse, "but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." We are commanded to speak words that edify and minister grace to those that hear us. So when we fail to speak in that way, we're guilty of sinning by way of omission. When we both avoid corrupt communication, and engage in gracious and wholesome communication, it's then that we're honoring God. Truly, the law of the Lord is perfect.

Let us close with a few ideas for our own application. First, one thing that we should see is that this lesson and this truth calls us to be students of God's law. If ever we should come to know more clearly what is right and what is wrong, and what God expects of us, we must study the law of God. I encourage you to read through Psalm 119. It's broken up into eight verses throughout many different sections, but you'll see as you read through this Psalm how earnest the psalmist is to know and to learn God's law. If we are to know what is right or wrong, we need to know what God has revealed as what is right and wrong.

You will see that the Ten Commandments provide us a clear statement of God's law. While we will be coming to the Ten Commandments in our study of the *Catechism*, particularly in questions #43 through #81, I encourage you to begin familiarizing yourself with those Commandments now, if you have not already done so. So you could look at Exodus 20, and you'll see the Ten Commandments there. It will be good for you to begin reading and even memorizing those Commandments, because as you do so, you'll be gaining an understanding of what God has revealed to be right, and what God has revealed to be wrong.

Now all of God's Word is worthy of our attention and our memorizing, however some portions provide us with excellent summaries, such as the Ten Commandments. Likewise, Matthew 5, 6, and 7—the Sermon on the Mount, and other such places. And so it's beneficial to us, God has been helpful to us to give us these summary portions that give us a good perspective of his standard for us.

One great benefit God has given to us is our conscience. Our conscience is that faculty of our soul, that power of our soul, as it were, that convicts us regarding what is wrong and encourages us regarding what is right. But we have to remember, our conscience needs to be informed, and it's God law that informs our conscience. So if your conscience would be stronger and more able to accomplish its purpose of convicting and encouraging us as well, our consciences need to be instructed, and to do so, they need to be instructed in God's law. Study and meditate upon God's law.

Another lesson for us is that this helps us in examining ourselves. Many today fail to see themselves sinners, because they judge falsely. We're seeing that the world often judges by their own feelings, or by what others are doing, but this is what often misleads them in their own judging of themselves. But if we search ourselves by God's Word—his light—it's then that we'll discover that we've done many things that are wrong, not only in what we've done with our mouths, and words, and speech, or with our bodies and actions, but also what we've failed to do, when we've ought to have done something and we've not done it. Remembering that sin is not only doing wrong things, but also not doing right things, we will gain a better perspective on our lives. And the benefit to this is that it will show us clearly how much we stand in need of God's grace, his forgiveness, and the Savior that he provides us, even Jesus Christ. This is a great benefit indeed.

You can ask yourself, "Have I always done what God has required?" This will help us then to see how great our need is for the Lord Jesus Christ. We can also examine ourselves by remembering that any want, and any transgression is a sin. It's not just the most major displays of sin—murder, or the literal bowing down to idols—it's any degree of these things. The least sin is sin indeed, and it makes us worthy of judgment and condemnation, because the least sin is either the failing to do what God has required, or the doing of what God has forbidden. Again, this helps us to see how great our need is of a perfect Savior, which we have in Jesus Christ.

Moreover, we remember that we're to be studying God's law, which reveals to us what's right and wrong, even the believer gains a benefit, not just in seeing again his need for Christ, but also seeing the ways wherein he needs to grow. The believer is one who has been forgiven by the blood of Christ, but he's also being sanctified, being made to resemble God more faithfully. And as he is being made more like Jesus Christ, he will be delivered increasingly from the power of sin. The major sins will be less and less in his life. This doesn't mean that he has nothing else in which he should grow. Instead, the believer begins to see more of the things that he fails to do that he should be doing. This then drives the believer freshly to Christ, not only for forgiveness, but with this great request, "Oh, the Lord Jesus Christ, be pleased to work within me that I would be made to will and to do of all your holy law." The believer desires to have the whole spectrum of God's revelation more fully realized in his thoughts, and desires, in his speech, and his actions. In this life, the believer will always have areas of obedience to grow in. But blessed be God, that in this life, the believer always has access to Jesus Christ, who is able to make him grow.

Well, this lesson also should leave us with the reminder that we know what is required and what is forbidden by God's law. Now, here is the application perhaps, among others. We may not call sin what God has not called sin. In other words, only God's law identifies and defines sin. I

cannot add to his law, nor am I permitted to take away from his law. Neither can you add to his law. Neither should a pastor add to his law, or a whole denomination, or the whole church of Christ throughout. We aren't to add to it or take away from it, because it's the law of God which defines sin. Let me give you one example as we conclude.

There are certain things which I may avoid personally which may help me better to honor God. But if it's not required by God, I cannot force those things upon others. As one example, I may find it helpful to sleep for eight hours every night. In doing so, I awaken refreshed, and I may be more energized to do my work the next day to the glory of God. I'm physically in a better position to serve with greater strength and focus. There are certainly benefit to everyone to get good sleep. It's good for us, it benefits us, our bodies need it. However, I cannot make it a law for men to obey before God that they get eight hours of sleep. If I say, "If you don't sleep for eight hours in the night, you are sinning against God," I actually am adding to God's law, and I now am burdening their consciences with something that God hasn't commanded. It's true that we must care for our bodies, but God has not commanded us how many hours of sleep we must get. Such a thing will differ from person to person, and from day to day. There are some nights when God is calling us to stay up and serve him. Perhaps a mother needs to care for a sick child, or a pastor needs to visit someone in the hospital. On those nights, they will not get the eight hours of sleep that may benefit them. However, far from sinning against God, they are denying themselves in order to serve God and to serve others. They're honoring God.

So what we are saying about sleep, of course, is true about many other things as well. The point is this, if we see that it's God's law which tells us what sin is, if it's God's law which shows us what he requires, we must take care never to call something sin, unless God has called it sin. And as we do, not only will we honor God, but we'll be better informed in the knowledge of what God requires, and thereby better see both our need for Christ to forgive us, and to sanctify us that we would better honor him. May the Lord bless you as you familiarize yourself more with the law of God.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #12

The Fall's Effect on All Mankind

Question 16: *Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?*

Answer: *The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.*

Question 17: *Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?*

Answer: *The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.*

In an earlier lesson, we noted that Adam fell from the estate wherein he was created. This happened by his sinning against God. Today we learn that the consequences of this sin impacted many more than Adam and Eve themselves. In fact, all mankind has been impacted by this sin. When we look at two questions today, questions #16 and #17, from the Shorter Catechism, you should know that questions #16 through #20 all address this truth. For our lesson today then, we will focus on question #16, with some help from question #17.

Question #16 asks, “Did all mankind fall in Adam’s first transgression?” The answer: “The covenant, being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.” And just so we are sure that we have some understanding of the basic words, let’s notice the following.

First, “covenant” here refers to the covenant mentioned in Question #12, the covenant of life. This is the covenant God made with Adam, promising life to him if he would continue in obedience. This is sometimes called the covenant of works.

The second word is “posterity.” This word simply refers to Adam’s descendents, his children. However, it does not merely refer to Cain and Abel, his immediate children—it refers to all of his descendents, what we would call his grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and in fact, you and me, for we all descend from Adam.

Third, notice this expression, “ordinary generation.” This is an important part of the answer, because it clarifies something that’s of great insight. Ordinary generation refers to the normal way children are brought into this world. For a child to be born, there must be both a father and a mother. This is the normal or ordinary way of producing or generating a child. In other words, it simply refers to the normal way that a child is conceived, a father and a mother are brought together. Every human since Adam and Eve have been formed by this ordinary way, that is, every

human but one. Remember that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. Though Joseph adopted Jesus and raise him, remember that Jesus was supernaturally conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. We'll look at this more fully in the future, not long from this lesson. But for now, simply know that these words, "descending from him by ordinary generation" means all of his descendents, except for Jesus Christ.

The rest of the words are fairly clear, so we'll look briefly at the next question, which helps complete the thought of this question.

The word "fall" implies something into which Adam and his posterity fell. This question #17 in the Shorter Catechism indicates into what mankind fell. Thus the question, "Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?" The answer: "The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery."

Notice that word "estate." Today this word primarily refers to any land, or finances, or possessions that someone owns. However, the word here refers to our general standing or position. In other words, What is our standing now in this world since the fall? What is our standing now in this world before God? What is our position, as it were, in God's eyes? What is the reality of ourselves now that Adam, and we with him, have fallen. When Adam was made, he was given a privileged standing, that is, he was given a privileged standing in position before God and in this world. He was surrounded by goodness and mercy. His body was full of life, and no death, and he was innocent of sin. He was in favor with God. He enjoyed his wife and all creation. Simply put, he was in a good estate. However, he sinned, and by that sin, he fell from that estate. This question tells us that he fell into a bad estate, one of sin and misery. We'll look at this more fully in the next two questions, questions #18 and #19. But for now, just remember that man fell from a state of honor and goodness into a standing of sin and misery.

For today's lesson, we'll focus on question #16, with some help from question #17. Notice these three points. Firstly, mankind's representative. Secondly, mankind's sin. And thirdly, mankind's fall.

First then, mankind's representative. Notice that the answer says, "The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity." Now this is an important truth—a truth that impacts you and me, and every other human. The Catechism is here referring to the covenant of life, the covenant of works, which we considered earlier. The Bible teaches that Adam was not acting only as an individual, as a private person for himself alone. Instead, God had appointed him to be a representative of his posterity. All of his children, grandchildren, and so on, were being represented by his action, by what he did or didn't do. A representative is one who performs a task on behalf of others. As a representative, his work secures benefits or troubles for those whom he represents. And the Bible shows us that Adam was a representative of his descendents. It certainly does so by the fact that when Adam sinned, and fell, the sin spread to everybody, and the misery that Adam knew was instantly brought upon all of his descendents.

The Bible also explicitly tells us that Adam was a representative. One such place is 1 Corinthians 15, verses 21 to 22. Now, in context, Paul is showing the believer that all those whom Jesus represents will enjoy the benefit of the resurrection, that though they die, they shall rise again. However, notice that the relationship is also acknowledged between man and Adam. So the believer is Christ is before us, but also man and Adam. Paul writes, "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

"In Adam all die." The language places all who die in Adam, that is, as represented by him. Adam was no mere private person. Instead, we were represented in him and by him. He acted

as a representative of his descendents. And so his actions brought consequences upon all his descendents, including you and including me.

We may have many questions about this truth. For instance, why would God do this? Why would he not let all men stand or fall by their own actions. We don't have a clear answer as to why God made this arrangement, nor is God under any burden to tell us why. But we do have the clear teaching that he has made this arrangement. We'll see this arrangement confirmed in the next point when we treat of mankind's sin. But it's clear in the passage before us. We die as those who were represented by Adam.

But we also see in this passage that Adam is not the only representative. God has also appointed another representative, namely, Jesus Christ. Remember those words, "Even so in Christ shall all be made alive." In other words, salvation of sinners is by a representative, a truth most wonderful to us, and which we'll consider in the future. So Adam is a representative for man, for all mankind.

Now second, notice mankind's sin. We see that Adam represented all mankind, but what is the consequence, and what does this mean? Well since our representative sinned and was made guilty by his sin, those he represented are made guilty as well. In other words, his descendents are guilty of this Adam's first sin. This is what the Catechism means when it states, "All mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him...in his first transgression."

This doesn't deny that you and I have personal sins we have committed. We do, we ourselves have actual sins, but it affirms that we also have the guilt of Adam's first sin. Now this is the teaching of the Bible. There are several places that explicitly treat this idea, but notice in particular, Romans 5, verses 12 through 19. It's here that Paul gives another comparison of two representatives, as we saw in 1 Corinthians. There's Adam, and there's Jesus Christ, and both of what they've done has impact upon those whom they represent. These two, Adam and Jesus Christ, are representatives that bring real consequences upon those who are represented by them. Now we won't read the whole portion of Romans 5, but I encourage you to look at it carefully and see, as perhaps you chart it out, what is it that Adam has done, and what are the consequences? And what is it Christ has done, and what are the consequences? You'll find that Paul is comparing the work of our first representative, Adam, with the work of Jesus Christ, the representative of all who are saved.

Now more to our point, notice what is said of what Adam did. Verses 12 and 14 are clear in identifying Adam as the one who sinned. We read there that "By one man sin entered into the world." We also read of "Adam's transgression." Now this focus is continued throughout this section. Verse 15 mentions "the offense of one." Verse 16 mentions "by one that sinned." Verse 17, "by one man's offence." Verse 18, "the offence of one." Verse 19, "by one man's disobedience." But notice, there is one man in focus, and there is one action of his—it's Adam and his first sin that Paul focuses on in this part of his comparison. Now, this one man Adam, and his one act of disobedience is then shown to have consequences upon all mankind.

Notice what happened because of Adam's sin. Verse 12 says, "sin entered into the world." Now this is bad enough, however, something happened additionally to his descendents. It's not just that sin gained, as it were, entrance into the world. Rather, notice what's mentioned in verses 18 and 19. We read there that "by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation," and "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners." The offence of Adam and the disobedience of Adam made his descendents sinners, and brought judgment and condemnation upon them. In other words, Adam's sin was credited to us. He was representing us, and when he sinned, now we are those counted guilty. Now we don't want to lose sight that Romans 5 is directing us to the greater representative, Jesus Christ, and the blessings that come to those who are united to him.

However, we must see that all mankind stood represented by Adam. Because Adam sinned, they are accounted sinners, and thus stand guilty because of his first sin.

Well third, notice mankind's fall. Since Adam sinned and fell as our representative, we who are represented by him also fell with him. The comparisons are not perfect, but they can help us in understanding. Think for a moment of how our nations function. If the leaders of a nation declare war against another, it may be said that the whole nation is now at war. That is, the citizens now encounter the consequences of the leaders' decision. This is because the government represents the citizens of the nation. Now some nations have officials that the citizens elect. Others have officials that are appointed over them. But however their government is established, the officials represent the citizens. If the representative officials declare war, now the whole nation has to endure the consequences of that war. They'll either face the benefits or the miseries of the war their leaders have declared. Now again, this isn't a perfect comparison, because obviously there can be wrongly-appointed officials, and there can be sinful officials, and so on. God, however, appointed, remember, a sinless representative. When Adam was first formed in the government, he had no sin. He was not one corrupt like you and I are right now, but he entered the world innocent. Never was there one more able to do what God had said than Adam did. So God did not cheat us by giving us such a representative. He gave us a representative that was innocent of sin, and not yet corrupted by sin. Had Adam obeyed God, which was in his power to do, we would have enjoyed the benefits of his obedience. However, the Bible is clear that he disobeyed, and because of this, we have fallen with him.

Now, into what have we fallen? Remember the question and answer, "into an estate of sin and misery." This is the standing into which we have fallen. It is a guilty standing. It is a corrupt standing. It is a condemned standing. Additionally, as we'll see, it is a miserable standing. We stand estranged from God, and we stand in a standing of spiritual, temporal, and even everlasting death. So indeed it is an estate of sin—we see it in ourselves, we see it in the world; and misery—which again we see it in ourselves, and we see in the world. We'll consider this all more fully in the next few lessons.

But clearly this standing into which Adam, and we with Adam, have fallen, is a deplorable position. When we consider Adam's first standing, the garden with beauty and life, and fellowship with God, and many other blessings, our souls are delighted, and we wonder at the privileges that Adam knew. However, when we consider what our standing now is, we're left inwardly pained at the misery that is ours. What a grief belongs to us now in this fallen estate. This is a sad truth, but it's a truth. And all truth has its purpose in our lives and benefits that can be brought to us. So while we consider the truth of this lesson, let's focus now, as we close, on how this should impact us, how it is we may benefit from such a difficult truth as this.

If we're ever going to benefit from this truth, we must acknowledge this truth personally. All mankind sinned in him and fell with him. This means I need to realize that I stand guilty in Adam, and I fell in Adam. This means that you must recognize that you stand guilty in Adam, and you fell with Adam. And this is true of the whole world. It's a solemn and a heavy truth, but it's a truth that we do not want to accept naturally, but must accept if ever we are to benefit from it. We've seen that it is the teaching of God's Word. God has appointed Adam to be our representative. Our representative sinned. His sin is counted unto us. Our representative fell, and we fell with him. None of that can we change. We may wish to deny it, but we cannot deny that it is the teaching of God's Word, our only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. If ever we are to glorify and to enjoy God, we must come to see this truth and its application to us. This truth tells us that

we have no hope in ourselves. We are guilty from the very beginning of our existence. This is because our first father, Adam, was our representative, and when he sinned, the whole of humanity descending from him by ordinary generation sinned in him. In other words, we are guilty, even from Adam. The whole human race stands guilty and condemned by the law of God.

We have no resources from which we may build our way back to God. If we think of the estate into which we fell, it's an estate of sin and misery. There's nothing around us that we can pull from. There's nothing in us that we can improve and do. We stand guilty and condemned. We stand without power or resources to redeem ourselves. What a vain effort men perform, when they seek by their own works to climb out of this fallen estate. We see the truth of this lesson, the truth as the Bible presents it to us. We see the sad truth that all hope of restoration is cut off. We fell, and we fell into a deep and a dark pit, out of which none of us is able to escape by his own strength. This is something that we ought to mourn and lament. It is a sad truth indeed. It impacts everyone in the world, for all are the descendants of Adam. While there is more that we should do in light of this truth, surely we should lament the impact of Adam's fall.

But we ought not only to mourn. We must accept the truth that no works of our own can ever recover us from this state. If ever we are to be recovered, one who is not fallen must recover us. We could think of it in this way. We could think of all of us with Adam at the bottom of a great pit, out of which none can escape. The only hope of being brought out of that pit is that one who is still outside of it would come and rescue us. Well, praise God, as we've seen, there is one who is not fallen. There is a descendent of Adam who is not descended in an ordinary way. There is thus one who is not guilty of Adam's first sin. There is one who is not without righteousness, and that's Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is a descendent of Adam who came not by means of the ordinary way. He was conceived supernaturally. He was conceived miraculously of a virgin. He is the only descendent of Adam who is not guilty of Adam's first sin. He is the only one who is able to save those who are guilty of Adam's sin, and their own sins. Jesus Christ is the only hope of all mankind. Just as we are condemned on account of our representative, Adam's first sin, if ever we shall be saved, it will be by the work of a second representative, Jesus Christ.

Well, we're grateful that the Bible tells us much about this great Savior. We're also grateful that in future lessons, we'll learn more about this Jesus Christ, of who he is, that he is the Son of the living God, and that he was born of a woman, and not naturally, but supernaturally, and that he was sinless and perfect. And to think of our previous lesson, never did he transgress God's holy law, and never did he fail to do what God's holy law requires. This is that descendent of Adam, who descended not by ordinary ways, but by extraordinary way, and as such, he is the only one able to rescue us, who with Adam, have fallen into this dreadful estate of sin and misery.

For our next lessons, we'll look more particularly at this estate, that we may better understand just how dreadful a thing it is to have fallen with Adam into this estate of sin and misery. It will help us to understand our own circumstances better, and ourselves better, of our need for Christ more fully. It will also help explain why there's so much in this world that is broken, and wicked, and depraved. And it will show us how great the need is for mankind, that a Savior, who is able to save to the uttermost, should come and rescue us by his work. Well, we praise God for these things to come. May he bless all of these thoughts to us.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #13

The Sinfulness and Misery of Man's Fallen State

Question 18: *Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?*

Answer: *The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.*

Question 19: *What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?*

Answer: *All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.*

Our recent lessons have considered a number of Biblical truths that give us bad news. We've seen that Adam sinned as a representative—as our representative, and that this sin has brought us into an estate of sin and misery. It is a difficult thing, but today we take a bit of a closer look at this grievous state. As we do, it's our prayer that the Lord would show us how great a need we have for deliverance by a Savior. The answer to question #17 informed us that our fallen state is one of sin and misery. The two questions before us today, question #18 and question #19, help us understand what the Bible says about both the sinfulness and the misery of that estate.

Question #18, “Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?” Answer: “The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.” Well, this deals with the first part of our fallen state, its sinfulness.

Question #19 deals with the second half of this fallen state—its misery. “What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?” The answer: “All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.”

Together these questions present a summary of our fallen state. The words in the answer to question #18 are fairly familiar to us. We have met with most of them already, and the others will

be treated as we enter more fully into the lesson. It's worth noting a few words in question and answer #19 for our clarity.

The word "misery" is a word that refers to a condition of pain, and anguish, and distress.

The word "communion" refers to sharing and enjoying something with another person. Here, it refers to our sharing in the friendship of God.

The words "wrath" and "curse" are heavy words. Wrath is anger. Curse is the pronouncement of judgment.

The words "made liable"—well, to be made liable means to be legally exposed to consequences. We'll treat this more fully, and the rest of the words, of course, we'll take up in our lesson.

Well, as you can already tell, this lesson deals with a very sad and solemn truth—our fallen state. There are two points for our lesson today: first, the sinfulness of our fallen state, and second, the misery of our fallen state.

First then, the sinfulness of our fallen state. There are four parts to our sinfulness identified in the questions before us. The first part of our sinfulness is the guilt of Adam's first sin. When one has committed sin, they are legally guilty. We saw in a previous lesson that Adam was our representative while he acted in the garden. Thus, when he sinned, we sinned in him. That is, we stood guilty with Adam. His guilt is applied to us. So one part of our sinfulness is that we stand guilty before God by Adam's first sin. You'll remember in the previous lesson that we talked about the Bible's teaching that God has appointed Adam to be our representative. And it's a sad truth, of course, that in sinning, not only he fell, but we fell with him.

Well, the second part of our sinfulness is the lack of original righteousness. This is what the *Catechism* means when it mentions "the want of original righteousness." Sometimes we use the word "want" to speak of what we desire. But here, the word "want" means something that's lacking. This means then that we begin life in this world, not as those who stand in a position of righteousness, but rather, we begin life in this world as those who are without righteousness. Before his sin, Adam was a righteous person, however, he sinned and he lost that righteousness. One consequence of his sin is that we begin life without righteousness.

Well, the third part of our sinfulness tells us that it is worse still, because the third part of our sinfulness is the corruption of our whole nature. This means that when we begin life in this world, we do so already committed to sin. This is what David meant when he wrote in Psalm 51, verse 5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." He's not saying his mother committed sin in conceiving him, but rather, when he was conceived, he was already sinful. And this is applied to each of us. Our natures are sinful. That is, we are twisted, and wickedly committed to sin. If you want a picture of just how twisted mankind is, how sinful he is, you can see a picture of this in Romans 3, verses 10 through 18. We don't begin life loving God's word. We begin opposed to it. And this is what is meant by Original Sin. Our hearts, our minds, our wills, all that we are is already corrupt. We don't begin righteous or innocent. We don't need to learn how to sin. Our hearts are already committed to sin. In other words, the sins we commit originate in our hearts.

And this leads us to the last part of our sinfulness, our actual transgressions. You and I commit acts of sin. We think corrupt thoughts, we delight in sinful desires, we do wicked actions. These are the things that we do. This is what the *Catechism* refers to when it mentions "all actual transgressions." Romans 3:23 tells us very simply, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The *Catechism* reminds us that these actual sins we commit come from within. This is what Christ says, in Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders,

adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” All manner of sin, all kinds of sin, all sin comes from within. Friends, this is a sad testimony against us. However, we look at ourselves outside of Christ, and outside of his grace, and when we do, we will find a deplorable sinner in God’s eyes. We stand guilty and corrupt from the very beginning, and the length of our lives display this sin. Oh, the horrors of this sinful state. But this is only part of our fallen state—it’s sinfulness. It’s worthy of our meditation to see just how wicked we are outside of God’s grace in Christ Jesus.

Well, second, let us look now at the misery of our fallen state. Remember the word “misery” refers to a condition of pain, anguish, and distress. Our misery is seen in three things. First, our lost communion. Secondly, our relationship to God. And thirdly, the legal judgments upon us.

So first, our lost communion. What a happy thing it must have been for Adam and Eve before the fall. They enjoyed the presence and fellowship of God, and that in a place that we refer to as paradise. The greatest and the highest privilege for them was indeed that fellowship with their Maker, God himself. They could enjoy many other things, of course, and did, but to enjoy the presence and loving fellowship of God who is most good is above all other privileges. So as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, they lost that fellowship. This is what the *Catechism* refers to when it says, “lost communion with God.” Well, notice this is true of all mankind. We see it in Adam and Eve hiding away from the Lord, when God drew near to them. We see it today in all of the sins and fears that grip humanity. The greatest good one can enjoy was taken away from man because of his sin. Imagine, for instance, a rich man, who has many houses, much money, and many possessions. He may for a season be tremendously happy and have the health to enjoy all of those things. These earthly treasures are quite satisfying. However, if he’s diagnosed with a very painful and ultimately a deadly disease, think of the fact of what’s changed. He would still have access to all of the earthly treasures, but that which enabled him to enjoy them has now been removed—his health. The greatest privilege he had was his health in this life, and if that’s taken away, all of the other things are meaningless. Well, in the same way, since the fall, man has lost his greatest privilege, namely, fellowship with God. Man may still have access to many things in the world, but the greatest good has been lost. And yet this is not all of man’s misery.

So second, our misery is seen in our new relationship with God since the fall. It is not merely that we lost communion with God. We did not just enter into some sort of neutral state. Instead, we were placed in a position and in a new relationship of being under his wrath and curse. This is what the *Catechism* says, summarizing the Bible. Our sin, of course, demands something. God is righteous and holy. He is opposed to all sin. He detests it. And as a righteous Judge, he must, for his goodness’s sake, execute justice. Our sin, in other words, calls for God’s wrath. God’s wrath refers to his holy and just anger against all those that sin. Unfortunately, you and I know too much of unjust anger and misplaced anger. However, God has never once been angry at someone or at something in a wrong way. He’s never been angry at something that did not demand that he be angry at it. And oh, think of who it is that’s angry—it’s God, the holy, pure, and perfect God, whose anger is holy, pure, and perfect, and against what is wicked, sinful, and wretched. Who can endure such wrath, such anger from an holy and all-powerful God? The Bible tells us that even on the last day, there will be those who cry to the mountains, “Fall on us and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb.” In his wrath, God has cursed sinners. A curse pronounces judgment. It is the testimony that judgment shall be carried out against us. You see this in the Bible. Notice Galatians 3, verse 10, which is quoting Deuteronomy 27, verse 26: “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” The curse, in other words, is universal

to all sinners. Not just those whom we think of as the worst of sinners, but all who have sinned are brought under a curse, the wrath of the curse of God against us.

Well third, our misery is seen in the legal judgments upon us. We stand guilty because of Adam's sin. Worse still, we've added to Adam's sin by our own sins. This brings about a demand for the Lord to deal righteously against us. In this way, we are made liable, or we could say, exposed to three judgments. Notice the *Catechism* says, "so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever."

The first of these judgments is the misery experienced in this earth—while we're alive. Our earthly miseries are all of those painful experiences we have in this life. We are rightly exposed to these, as those who have sinned against God. To be clear, this does not mean that every misery, every pain, every sorrow we experience is because of something particular that we've done. However, it does mean that all of the miseries we experience, we experience them because we are in a state of sin and misery. It was righteous of God to place us in this state, for we are those who have sinned against him. In other words, before the fall, there were no illnesses or diseases, there was no heartache, or abuses, deformities, or troubles. All of these have come to pass because of Adam's first sin. His sin unleashed a world of brokenness, and part of our misery is that we experience these things in this life.

The second of these miseries is our earthly death. God was abundantly clear when he had warned Adam, in Genesis 2, verse 17, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Adam's sin was guaranteed to lead to death. It did not only lead to Adam's death, but to all of his descendents. Additionally, we have sinned, and God's Word is very clear, in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." What is death? Death is the separating of our souls from our bodies. When alive, the body was organized and active, everything was working together. At death, that ends. Moreover, our souls instantly go before the Lord for judgment. Hebrews 9, verse 27 tells us, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Death completes this life as we know it. Our bodies are buried and turned to dust, and our souls then go to God for his judgment.

And this, of course, leads to the third of these judgments, our everlasting death. I wish to emphasize that this is what is given to all those who die outside of Christ, and there'll be more to say about that judgment of grace that comes in Christ. But this is what belongs to sinners, as sinners apart from Christ—everlasting death.

Our earthly death is a great grief. It ends our experience in this world. It separates loved ones from others. However, this earthly death is not the final part of our misery. Our sin demands the execution of God's judgment. The Bible tells us that this judgment is an everlasting judgment. This is what hell is. The *Catechism* says that by the fall, we are "made liable...to the pains of hell for ever." This is a weighty statement.

But what are the pains of hell? We've no ability to express these pains fully. The Bible uses different expressions to help us understand something of these miseries. And when we look at them we see that hell is a place of conscious, spiritual, and physical torment. Notice the following two passages. Matthew 13:50—Jesus is speaking on the wicked at the end of the world, and he says that the angels "shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." In Revelation 14, verses 10 and 11, Christ foretells the agonies of those who will suffer in hell. We read there that "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and

his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.” In many other places that describe the torments of hell, they all tell us the same thing. Those who suffer in hell will suffer consciously. That is, they will understand and know their immeasurable pain. There’s no way of expressing this pain experienced by those who suffer in hell. Hell is a place of darkness, and fire, and the grief that is brought to mind when we consider those things. It’s not only physical pain, but the soul, that is, one’s understanding and conscience, the inward man will be tormented as well. Notice the words, “wailing and gnashing of teeth.” These words express deep, inward grief. When we wail and gnash our teeth, we’re crying out in agony. In other words, our inward grief is more than we can control. We can’t put words to them with clarity, because our grief is overwhelming. And the Bible tells us that this hell is everlasting. Some challenge this point, but the Bible is very clear about it. We see this in the passage above, Revelation 14:11, “The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night.” The expression “for ever and ever” is the same used elsewhere of the everlasting joy belonging to those whom God saves, and the misery of those who die in their sins is equally everlasting. The pain and anguish is more than we can understand, and it shall never stop. It will never lessen. The pains of hell are immeasurable in their intensity, and everlasting in their duration.

Some ask, “How can it be fair to punish sinners in such a place of torment forever?” Two things help us answer this. First, how great God is; and second, how wicked sin is. Remember how glorious, good, and holy, and deserving of praise and honor God is. If you’ll remember the fourth question of our *Catechism*, “What is God?” you’ll remember that he is infinitely and eternally, and unchangeably wise, powerful, holy, righteous, good, and true. In other words, when we sin, we’re sinning against this glorious God, this God who is only worthy of pure, and glad, and perfect love, and service, obedience, and praise. In other words, hell is just, because it’s punishing against the wicked for sinning against that eternal and glorious God, who is only worthy of love, adoration, and praise. Since our sin is against him who is infinite, it is just that our punishment be everlasting.

The second thing to remember is how wicked sin is. People think little of sin. It’s so common in the world today that people think sin is little, worthless, meaningless. However, sin is an immeasurable evil. The creature who has been given everything, who owes nothing but praise and honor and love to God, instead has rebelled against God. Joseph said it well, when he said, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9) Sin is no little thing. It is high treason against the high and lofty God. While men are right to see that hell is big and is no little thing, we ought to then see that sin is big and is no little thing.

As we close this lesson, we do so doubtlessly with something of a heaviness upon our soul. I would like to present to you two thoughts to meditate on in this solemn truth. First, remember that this sinfulness and misery is not something that simply belongs to other people. It belongs to you and to me. This describes your state and my state, if we’re not trusting in Christ. This is bad news indeed. It does not matter if we’re rich or poor. It does not matter where we live in this world. This is our state—in sin. This is our bad news. As many have said, our bad news is worse than we imagine. Our sin is far more sinful, our misery is far more miserable than most understand, and we need to realize that it’s ours.

And second, realize this. Unless the remedy we place our hope in answers all of our sinfulness and all of our misery, it is not then a real remedy. Many people have placed their hope in partial remedies. Some look to sports and friends, others look to education and learning. Still others look to drugs and sinful pleasures, while others look to their own moral living. The problem with each of these is that none of them actually answers the full problem. None of them fully relieves us of

our sinfulness and our misery.

But friends, there's something good to remember in the midst of this heaviness. There is a remedy. There is a real answer to all of our sinfulness, all of our misery. We rejoice that God's Word has revealed to us that hope of salvation that is in God's provision of a Savior and the salvation that comes to us by him. And it's to this that we begin to give our attention in the next number of lessons. And as we do, may God bless us to see not only our need of such a Savior, but oh, may he bless us to trust in him for our salvation.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #14

The Covenant of Grace

Question 20: *Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?*

Answer: *God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.*

Our past few lessons have surveyed the sad facts of sin in our fallen state. It would be just of God to have left all mankind in the state of sin and misery. We should remember that none of the fallen angels, known as demons, will ever experience God's mercy and grace. They will justly suffer for their rebellion. There is no hope for any of them. How excellent then that God has established something different for us.

In today's lesson, we consider question #20 of the *Shorter Catechism*. It introduces to us the way of salvation, which is, of course, good news indeed. Our question then is, "Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?" The answer: "God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer." Now there's a lot in this answer. But let's look at two words briefly before heading into our lesson.

You'll notice the word "salvation." This word is related to the word "save," that carries the idea of deliverance or rescue. And here the word refers to being delivered or rescued from the state of sin and misery.

Notice, as well, the word "Redeemer." The word itself refers to one that redeems. To redeem something is to make payment in order to gain possession of it. A redeemer then is one who makes that payment. We'll see that the Redeemer spoken of is Jesus Christ.

Well, let's move into our lesson, and we have three points: first, God's gracious election; second, God's Gracious Covenant; and third, The Relationship between God's Election and Covenant.

Well first then, God's Gracious Election. Our answer states: "God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life." This introduces us to that beautiful teaching throughout the Bible regarding God's gracious sovereignty in salvation. Let's start with

the main point, “God...elected some to everlasting life.” The word “elected” refers to the fact that God chose those who would have everlasting life. This is a truth that’s taught throughout the Bible. You can see this clearly in Ephesians 1, verses 3 through 6. Paul writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” Jesus also mentions this very truth in his prayer recorded in John 17. He refers, in verse 6, to a specific people God the Father gave to him out of the world. Notice, he says, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me.”

What this means, as we look at these passages, is that God has chosen—or as our *Catechism* says, elected—a specific an unchangeable number of people. Paul uses the term “predestinated,” which is a word meaning “determined beforehand.” It is this people whom he will most certainly save, for they were determined beforehand for that to be brought to pass. Notice that he elected “some.” God has made a distinction. Jesus prayed for those that were given to him. He did not pray for the rest of the world, as he says in John 17. While all men deserve damnation for their sins, God chose to save some sinners by grace, through the redemption in Christ Jesus.

But why did he choose some? The Bible does not give us answers that satisfy all of our curiosity, however, it does give us to have some understanding. First, it tells us that he did not choose some because they deserved it. We could say this positively in saying, God chose those he chose freely. He did not look for them to do something. He did not look throughout history and find some who were good. We see this in many places, but notice 2 Timothy 1, verse 9. Paul writes of God, “who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” God gave his chosen people, before the world began, as Paul says, to Jesus Christ. And he gave them to him that he would save them. This is not based on any works they did or would do. It was “according to his own purpose in grace.” This is what our *Catechism* means when it says, “of his mere good pleasure.” It’s a gracious choice.

Second, the Bible tells us that he did this to magnify his grace, to show his grace, and to display it. We see this in Ephesians 1, verses 5 and 6, mentioned earlier, when Paul says that all this was “according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace.” We see this also in Romans 9, verse 23, when Paul says that God did this to “make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.” In other words, the fact that he did not punish every sinner with everlasting damnation, the fact that he chose to save some is a tremendous display of his grace. All throughout heaven, there will be praise given to God for his gracious way of saving sinners, which saving of them was because of his gracious choice of them.

Notice also that God has chosen them so that they would believe in Jesus Christ. In other words, he did not choose his people because they trusted in Jesus, he chose them so that they would believe in Jesus. The truth of election is simply another way we see what the Bible teaches throughout all of its pages, that salvation, deliverance, the rescue of sinners is by grace alone. It is not based on foreseen faith or works. It is based solely on God’s grace.

Now, to summarize some important points regarding this teaching, notice the following. God delivers his chosen ones, his elect, out of the estate of sin and misery. He’s rescuing them from that. His chosen people, notice, do not enter into this world as believers. They enter this world as sinners

in need of salvation. They are born into this state of sin and misery. But praise God, he saves them from that sin and misery. This is what he's chosen to do.

Notice also that he delivers his elect into a state of salvation. He brings them to a place of safety and protection, and this is called "everlasting life". Notice those precious words of Jesus Christ, found in John 17, verse 2—again, his High Priestly Prayer, as we often call it. He prays to his Father, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." And so, as he prays to his Father, he's acknowledging that he's been given a certain number of people, and to them he will give eternal life—not just life, but eternal life. There's much more to discuss about this everlasting life, but you can see even now, that his people are given a great blessing indeed.

And finally, as we have emphasized, notice that all of this is done by a Redeemer. God has chosen a people that they would be saved by a Redeemer. He's not chosen them to be saved in a different way. He's not chosen them to be saved by their works, or by their own efforts, or by some other thing. He's chosen them that they should be saved by the Redeemer, even Jesus Christ.

Well, we've looked at God's Gracious Election. Second now, let's look at God's Gracious Covenant. Notice the words in our *Catechism*, "covenant of grace." We've already been introduced to another covenant, the covenant of life, also known as the covenant of works. But this covenant, however, is of grace. While the covenant of works promised life by the personal obedience of men themselves, this covenant operates differently. It works for the life of men by God's grace. This covenant refers to the way, in other words, that God saves sinners. The covenant of works is only useful for one who has not sinned, and therefore, all of us have no hope by the covenant of works. But the covenant of grace is the way of salvation for sinners. You'll remember that we discussed what a covenant is in question #12. The word "covenant" refers to a special relationship established between two or more people. In a covenant, there are promises, and responsibilities; there are often blessings for keeping those promises, and consequences for failing in our responsibilities.

Now, where do we find such a covenant of grace? Well, we cannot point to one single text in the Bible. Instead, we must point to the whole of the Bible, because the whole of the Bible is telling us of this gracious covenant. The Bible tells us that God entered into a covenant to save his people. There are far too many passages to look at every one, but we see an example of this, when God spoke to Abram, and changed his name to Abraham, in Genesis 17. Notice verses 2 and 7—God says, "I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly....I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." God is promising to be the God of Abraham and his children forever. He's calling these people to trust him and to obey him. And so this covenant then becomes clearer and clearer throughout the scriptures. We see that the covenant promise is forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. We find that in the Old Testament, this forgiveness and everlasting life is foreshadowed and, as it were, displayed by the sacrificed animals that were offered up. And one good example of these sacrifices is found in Leviticus chapter 16. I encourage you to read the whole chapter, and you'll see much of the detail that's given there. But notice the effect of the sacrifice stated in verse 30 of Leviticus 16. It's there we read, "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD." The sacrifice was for the atoning of sins. "Atonement" means to bring forth forgiveness. The judgment, and the guilt, and the damnation that rests upon the sinner is now forgiven by virtue of the substitute and his sacrifice.

Well, as we read through the Bible, we discover that the animals that shed their blood were all

pointing to that one Lamb of God, even Jesus Christ. It's he who shed his blood. You'll remember John the Baptist's words, in John 1, verse 29. We read there that "John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The book of Hebrews explains this truth very clearly. It is by the shedding of Christ's blood, that true forgiveness, that true eternal life is enjoyed. Notice Hebrews 9, verses 11 and 12: "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

We can say that the Bible is the unfolding of this covenant of grace. We see the first whisper of it in Genesis 3, verse 15, when God promises that a descendent of the woman would destroy the serpent. He says there to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." In other words, this singular seed, this singular descendent of the woman would be the victor over Satan. Well, this becomes clearer throughout the Bible. God established sacrifices, all of which pointed to the coming Savior. He gives promises of the coming Savior, and there are prophecies of the coming Savior. For instance, in Isaiah 53, verses 5 through 6, we read of Jesus Christ, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Well finally, the promised and prophesied Savior, Jesus Christ, comes. He accomplishes his great work, as is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This work is proclaimed throughout the book of Acts, and it's further explained throughout all the epistles. And finally, John refers to Jesus in his writing of the book of Revelation. Notice chapter 1, verse 5—he mentions "Jesus Christ...that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." In other words, this covenant of grace, this way of salvation for sinners is taught from Genesis through Revelation. There is one way of salvation, and that way of salvation is by Jesus Christ. This is why the *Catechism* says that the elect are brought "into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer." There's no salvation for the elect without Jesus Christ. The covenant of grace directs us to be saved by this Savior.

There's one covenant of grace. Of course, there are differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament. There were sacrifices offered in the Old Testament, and we no longer offer sacrifices. There were priests in the Old Testament, and there are no longer priests in the same way in the New Testament. And yet both the Old and New Testaments show us that there is one way of salvation. In fact, Paul indicates that the covenant made with Abraham is the same covenant by which we are saved today through faith in Christ. Notice Galatians 3, verses 16 and 17—he writes, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." In other words, the same promise, and the same covenant direct us to Christ Jesus. This is the only way of salvation—trusting in the only Savior, Jesus Christ. The one covenant of grace is what is taught throughout all of the Bible.

In his covenant, God gives promises and signs of those promises. We'll think more about some of those signs later in our lessons. But we can see this generally as you think of the Old Testament. Think of the sign of God's covenant, which was circumcision. This would be applied to believers, as in Abraham, and to their children. We can see this in Genesis, chapter 17. Circumcision pointed

to the need to have our uncleanness removed. There's something filthy and sinful about us that needs to be removed. Now circumcision itself didn't remove that uncleanness, but it was a sign pointing to it. We see it in the New Testament, with the sign of baptism. Baptism, of course, is applied to believers and their children as well, as in the case of Lydia and her household, in Acts chapter 16. Baptism is a sign that God will wash and cleanse his people from their sins. As water is applied to the one being baptized, it's pointing to the promises of God to cleanse us of our sins. In other words, these signs are, as it were, pointing out the message of the covenant. They're showing God's promises. God is offering to save sinners, and to do all that's needed in order that they would be saved.

Well, there's much more to say about the signs, as well as about the covenant of grace, some of which will come out in future lessons. But for this lesson, simply remember that this covenant of grace is that relationship that God establishes with us, by which he gives promises, and he offers to save us, through faith in the Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Well third, notice The Relationship between God's Election and Covenant. God has been gracious to elect sinners unto everlasting life. And he has been gracious as well to enter into a covenant with them, promising salvation, and to his elect, applying salvation to them. But we must note some important relationships between these two truths of the election and the covenant. The *Catechism* presents to us both the fact that God has elected some to everlasting life, and that he did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them. We should see that, in the relationship between these two truths, there is a distinction. God's election is not the same thing as his covenant. In other words, election and the covenant of grace are not synonymous. They're not referring to the same thing. God's election guarantees that those he has chosen shall be saved by Jesus Christ, and he brings this to pass by means of using his covenant of grace to their good. The promises he gives he makes effectual, and causes them to believe in those promises. We'll talk more about this later, an exciting and encouraging truth.

However, while God's elect are those whom he has appointed to eternal life, God's covenant will include both the elect and others. So let me explain. All those whom God appointed to everlasting life by Jesus Christ will be saved. However, not everyone in the covenant of grace are the elect. In other words, some in the covenant are chosen, others are not. We see this in God's covenantal dealings throughout the Bible. As one example among many, notice Isaac. He has two sons, Jacob and Esau. Both are born under God's covenant, both receive the sign of God's covenant, but only Jacob was chosen unto everlasting life. What you'll notice is that Esau was given many promises. However, he Esau despised those promises. He rejected the promises of the covenant. We see this as well in many of the Israelites mentioned who died in the wilderness. Hebrews 4 warns us today of rejecting the promises of God's covenant. It does so by reminding us of the Israelites, in chapter 4 and verse 2—we read there, "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." In other words, though they were in covenant with God, and though they had heard the promises of that covenant, though they had the sign of God's covenant, yet they rejected the promises of the covenant and died in unbelief.

This tells us then how great a need we have for God to give us the gift of faith. You see, the covenant of grace holds forth the promise of everlasting life by Jesus Christ. It does so, calling us to believe upon him. And this, of course, is a great privilege that God himself comes to us in his covenant, and says, "I will be your God." He promises to forgive our sins, he promises to give us eternal life. But as the Bible shows, his promises in his covenant call us to believe him. In other

words, we must trust his promises, we must believe the One who promises. And if we don't, we'll prove to be covenant-breakers.

Well, in light of this as we close, let me direct you to two things. First, there's reason to rejoice that God has made known the way of salvation by the covenant of grace. I doubt not that many of you are in this covenant. You should think of the many privileges that are yours. To you the gospel is preached. To you the Redeemer is made known. To you the Word of God is read. To you the way of salvation is held forth. To you, God says, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." This is a privilege worthy of much meditation and thanksgiving.

But second, remember that this covenant calls you to trust in the Savior. In other words, do not rest satisfied with hearing of the covenant of grace. Do not rest satisfied with these privileges you are aware of. Instead, cry out to God to give you that faith, to trust in these promises. Study these promises. Study the covenant of grace. And as you do, plead with God to give you faith that you would trust the Savior who is held forth to you, who is offered unto you, and by whom you may have salvation.

Well, gladly, our next few lessons focus on this Savior. As we consider him, may the Lord bless us with faith to trust him, not just to learn about him, not just to learn right teaching regarding this Redeemer, but that he would give us faith that we might trust him and take hold of him as he is freely offered to us in the gospel.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #15

Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of God's Elect

Question 21: *Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?*

Answer: *The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever.*

The *Catechism* has directed our attention to our great problem. If someone asked you, “What is man’s greatest problem?”—how would you answer? There are many ways of expressing it, but you would do well to remember the Bible’s teaching, as summarized in this *Catechism*. Remember the different answers to our great problem, “The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.” And in speaking of both the sinfulness and the misery, “the sinfulness of that estate into which man fell consists in the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.” This is our sinfulness, one part of our great problem and our great need. But there’s more: “All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.” Now, these are a lot of words, and express many related ideas, but what this is telling us is what our great need is. It tells us our bad news, that we have sinned, and we’ve fallen into this state of sin and misery. They help us see what our greatest problem is, and they also help us to see that the only hope for us, who are in this estate of sin and misery, is that someone outside of ourselves, someone beyond us would be our Savior. We cannot fix our problem. No amount of education, no amount of money, no amount of riches can ever address our true problem. Even if we were able to begin following God perfectly, how would we ever begin to address all of our guilt up to that point? How could we ever answer and satisfy God’s justice?

Well, we saw in our previous lesson that, though there’s no hope in us, or no hope by our own works, there is hope, and this hope is from God. God has established a gracious way of salvation, of deliverance. This is known as the covenant of grace. And we saw that he saves sinners by a Redeemer. Today we have the happy privilege of thinking more about this Redeemer. And as we do, we’ll see that he is the only one able to save us from our greatest problem.

Well, let’s look at our question then, question #21 of the *Shorter Catechism*. It asks, “Who is the Redeemer of God’s elect?” And the answer: “The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord

Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever.” Well, as is typical, there is much that is bound up in this answer, and we’ll seek to unpack it as we go through our lesson.

We’ve encountered the word “Redeemer” in our last lesson, and just to be reminded quickly, a redeemer is one who makes a payment to be in possession of something. Well, when we think of this, we’re thinking of the Redeemer of God’s elect, the one who makes a payment in order to gain possession of God’s chosen ones, even those chosen ones who were sinners. And so we get to think about that one who is the Savior of God’s chosen ones.

Well, we have four points for our lesson today. The first is Our Redeemer’s Identity. Second, Our Redeemer’s Divinity. Third, Our Redeemer’s Humanity. And fourth, Our Redeemer’s Person.

So first then, Our Redeemer’s Identity. What is the question? “Who is the Redeemer of God’s elect?” And the answer is so simple, “The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ.” Well, these words clearly identify for us who the Redeemer is, and in doing so, it is accurately summarizing the scripture’s teaching. We don’t need to spend too much time on this, because the rest of the lesson and the lessons that follow will open this idea more fully. But it’s helpful to see that the Bible clearly indicates that only Jesus Christ is the Redeemer. So notice what Jesus himself says, in John 14, verse 6: “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” There is no other way to be brought to the Father other than by Jesus Christ. He is the only way. He’s not merely “a way,” he’s the only way. He’s the only Redeemer. Peter says the same thing in Acts, chapter 4, verse 12; he says, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Notice, it is not merely that he is “a way” of salvation, as if there are many ways to be saved, or to be redeemed. Peter tells us that no one else is able to save us. Again, Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer. And just to be clear, to see this again, Paul says this same thing. Notice, 1 Timothy, chapter 2, and verse 5, he writes, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” This word “mediator” refers to one who goes between two opposed parties or individuals, and brings them into a place of peace with one another. And notice what Paul says, there’s only one mediator, one who goes between and brings them together in peace. And who is it? It’s Christ Jesus. He is the only mediator. He is the only way to the Father. He is the only one with the name by which we must be saved. He is the only Redeemer.

We will see why he is the only Redeemer, both in this, and in the next few lessons. But let’s simply see right now that the Bible is clearly showing us that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of sinners, he is the only Redeemer there is. We would be fools then to look to anyone else, whether ourselves, our parents, even a pastor, to other false gods, and to think that we might have hope by what they or what we do. Because the only Redeemer is Jesus Christ.

So we’ve seen the identity of our Redeemer. Second, let’s look at our Redeemer’s Divinity. This word “divinity” refers to a divine nature. It’s a way of talking about God’s nature. God is divine. Men are human. We speak of God’s divinity, and we speak of man’s humanity. You’ll notice that the *Catechism* refers to Christ as being “the eternal Son of God.” These words are very important. The fact that he is eternally the Son of God, means he’s always been the Son of God, from everlasting to everlasting. He didn’t become the Son of God. He is eternally the Son of God.

In an earlier lesson, we looked at the Bible’s teaching on the Trinity. Do you remember that? We considered that answer, “There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” Well, notice our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, is the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God.

There are many passages that tell us that Jesus, our Redeemer, is fully God. We don't have time to look at all of them, but as we look at a couple of them, it will help you as you study the Bible to be aware and to look for these very clear indications that Jesus is himself fully God.

We first look at John, chapter 1, verses 1 through 4. It's there we read the following: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men." You'll notice that John speaks of Jesus as "the Word." This means a lot. One thing it means is that he is the one that reveals or communicates God. Well, you'll notice, he's not just an instrument that communicates God. He himself is God. Now we know this refers to Jesus, because later on in this chapter, in verse 14, it tells us that the Word became flesh, a truth that we'll look at more in just a moment.

But notice what is said of this one who is "the Word." It tells us that he was with God in the beginning, yet it tells us that he was God. He is, in other words, distinct from the Father, but yet he is also equal to the Father. How is he distinct? Well, we've already seen this in our lesson on the Trinity. He's distinct from the Father as a person. He is a divine person. As a person, he's not the same as the Father. But he is one with the Father, equal to the Father as regards his nature. He is God. Notice that he is, in John 1:1 through 4, said to be the Maker of all things. John wrote "all things were made by him." In other words, he not a creature. He's not even the best of creatures. He's not the first of creatures. Instead, he's the Creator. So Jesus is God—truly, fully, really God.

Let's look at a second passage. Notice Titus, chapter 2, and verse 13. Paul writes, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Well, Christians are looking forward to that future appearing of Jesus Christ our Savior. He has gone up into heaven in his ascension. He's reigning in heaven presently. And we look forward to the day that he'll return. Jesus Christ, oh, what a Savior he is! But notice that Jesus is referred to as "the great God." So what is it we're looking for? Well, we're looking for the glorious appearing of whom?—"of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." He is our Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the great God. And so again we see that he is truly and fully God.

Well, instead of looking at the many other passages that show this truth that Jesus is truly and fully divine, I want to encourage and challenge you to look at one in particular. The one passage I would like you to look at is Hebrews, chapter 1. So as you open your Bible after this lesson, and you read through Hebrews chapter 1, I want you to notice what is said about the Son. As you're reading it, ask yourself these questions. What does the Father say about the Son? What did the Son do with the earth and heavens? What do the angels do to the Son? And as you read through Hebrews chapter 1, and as you answer these questions, you'll discover what's been stated already, that Jesus Christ is shown, and is declared to be, and is revealed as the Son of God, not one who became the Son, but one who has and is eternally, truly, fully, the Son of God.

Well, if we think well upon this, we will be amazed by this truth. Because what's being said is, our Redeemer is God. The Son of God was pleased to step in as our Redeemer. Now think of that. The one against whom we sinned has been pleased to become our Redeemer. But it's more than merely amazing, it is also a most necessary and blessed truth. As fallen, sinful humans, dead in our sins and trespasses, we have no ability to do what is required for our salvation. Who among us can pay off the debt we owe to God? Even more, what one mere human is able to pay off the debt owed to God by multitudes? Well, praise God that he has provided his eternal Son, who is able to do all that is required for our salvation. There is more to say, of course, but this is an important point. Our redemption is the work of him who is truly and fully divine.

Well, third, Our Redeemer's Humanity. As truly amazing as the divinity of our Redeemer is, we have more to learn about him still. Notice the *Catechism* says, "the eternal Son became man." He did not merely appear to be a man. He did not merely act like he was a man. The *Catechism* is summarizing the scriptures, and is asserting this Biblical truth. The eternal Son of God truly became a man. This doesn't mean he stopped being fully God. We see that in the *Catechism*, we see that in the Bible. But it does mean that he took to himself a real human nature. The divine and eternal Son of God, the person of the Son of God, who is fully God, added to himself that true human nature, so that he now is, and, as the *Catechism* says, "and continueth to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person for ever."

Well, we'll talk more about this in a moment, and in the next lesson. But let's be clear about this one point, that our Redeemer is truly man. Jesus became truly human. The scriptures tell us this very clearly. We referred to John 1 earlier, and noticed verse 14 in particular, this Word who was with God, and is God, and who made all things, John then says, "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." The Word, the eternal Son of God, became flesh. This refers to his becoming truly man.

Let's look at a bit larger passage, namely, Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 14 through 17. And as we do, we will see just how clearly it tells us that Jesus took to himself a true human nature. He didn't pretend to be man, he didn't just appear to be man, but he actually took to himself true humanity. It tells us as well why he did this. Well, notice the passage: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Well, there's much in this passage, but let's simply note that it tells us that he took on our nature, a human nature, remember? He also "took part of the same." "He took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren." Everything that is true of human nature, the Son of God took upon himself. In the next lesson, we'll see how this came to pass, but simply for right now notice that it did come to pass. He, the Son of God, became man.

This is not only an amazing truth, it is a truth necessary if ever we should be saved. This is what Hebrews 2 tells us as well, that he became man, in order to pay the price that was demanded—that he would die. God can't die. God is the living God. But the Son of God took upon himself a human nature that could die. And so he could offer up himself to make atonement for our sins. Again, these are truths we will talk more about in the future, but simply notice the beauty of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. As humans, we've sinned against God, and so it must be one that is human who makes the payment on our behalf. Humans sinned, humans must pay. But praise God that the Son of God became man to make that payment.

Well, fourth, Our Redeemer's Person. We've seen that our Redeemer Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. This is a tremendous truth, and who can fully understand all that this means? Well, while we cannot fully understand everything about this, the Bible does remind us of an important point that we need to clarify. And this is that he is only one person. Now this is a hard idea, but to be clear, this is hard for the smartest and best-trained theologians. Whatever your age, whatever your mental ability, whatever your learning level has been or is, this is a hard idea. How

can our Redeemer have two natures, yet be only one person. We need to remember that the Bible does not tell us everything about how this is the case. It does, however, clearly indicate that it is the case. We've already seen that Jesus is fully God, and that he is fully man.

Let's now look at how the Bible speaks of him as one person. Whenever the Bible speaks of Jesus, it does not refer to him as if he is more than one person. The Bible always speaks of him as one person. Let me give you two examples from the Bible that illustrate this. Remember John 1:14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Notice even after the divine Son of God took to himself our nature—"the Word was made flesh"—he is still spoken of as one person: "We beheld his glory." The word "his" is singular. He is one person with two natures. It doesn't say "we beheld their glory," but rather, "we beheld his glory." The one person who now has two natures is still one person. The same is taught in Colossians 2, verse 9, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." The passage is speaking of Jesus Christ. It tells us that he is truly and fully divine—"the fullness of the Godhead." He lacks nothing. He's fully God. It tells us he is fully human—we see the word "bodily." But notice it says, "In him"—singular. Though both natures are referenced, the divine and the human, he is still one person. Let me put it this way. He is not two "who's", rather we could think of it, if we ask, "Who is our Redeemer?" We speak of Christ, and we say, "He is our Redeemer." We would not say, "They are our Redeemer," pointing to Jesus, because he's not two persons, a divine person and a human person. He is one divine person with two natures. He is God and man in one person. This is why we say, "He"—singular—"is fully God and fully man." One person, two natures. The one person of Christ is truly and completely God. The one person of Christ is truly and completely man.

The *Catechism* tells us that these are two distinct natures. His divine nature is not changed into a human nature. His human nature is not changed into a divine nature. His natures are not mixed up together to make a different type of a nature. He is truly and fully God. He did not give up any of his divine attributes. He did not become something less than fully God. He is also, however, truly and fully man. He did not become a demigod of sorts, where he is more than a man, but still less than a God. He is God and man in one person. The divine person of the Son of God, who is himself fully God, took to himself a true human nature. Thus, the divine person of the Son of God now has two whole and entire natures—one divine, and one human. And yet, as the Bible says, he remains but one person.

Does this challenge your mind? Oh, it surely challenges all of our minds. But remember, the rule of our faith is the Bible, and the Bible, which is true, tells us this of Jesus Christ. He is fully God and fully man, and yet he is one person.

Finally we notice that he "continueth to be God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever." The eternal Son of God did not become man for a season, or for a moment. It's not as if he stopped, as it were, being the Son of God incarnate after his resurrection. Rather, we wonder at this great privilege, that Jesus Christ, even now, continues to be God and man forever. Right now, our Redeemer Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. As hard as it is for us to think of this, millions of years from now, he will continue to be God and man forever. The beauty of this is that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer forever. He's the only one who can reconcile God and man, and he remains that one who has reconciled God and man. Our peace will ever rest upon the Son of God incarnate. God and man, because of sin, are enemies. Yet Jesus Christ, who is God and man, is able to reconcile God and man together. No one else can do this. Because no one else is like Jesus. Why is Jesus the only Redeemer of God's elect? It is because he is the only one suitable

to reconcile God and man together, he is the only one who can reconcile God and man together.

Well, we must close, but as we do, we admit that we've been thinking on a truth that is far above our weak minds fully to understand. Well, what should we do with this? Well, first, we should see what a great blessing is before us. The *Catechism* has helpfully summarized the Bible's teaching. There is a Redeemer—Jesus Christ—the Son of God made man. He is able to do all that is required. He is able to represent us, because he has our nature. He is able to represent God, because he is God. He is able to save us to the uttermost. And this is all because of God's great grace in providing us his eternal Son to be our Savior. This is worthy of our praise, that God has made his Son, Jesus Christ, known to us.

But second, we should take hold of this great blessing. What good is it to know of a remedy if we do not make use of that remedy? What a sad thing it would be to know that there is a solution to our greatest need and problem, and yet never embrace it. Certainly there is more to learn, and as God gives us opportunity, we'll look more at these beautiful truths of our redemption. But consider this well—God has made you see that the only Savior is Jesus Christ. And so, what should we do with that but go to Jesus Christ, who is able to save, who is the only one that is able to save, and to ask him, and to beg him, and to trust him to save you. He is the Redeemer of sinners.

Well third, we should give thanks for this great blessing. If God had never provided us his Son, if his Son had never taken upon himself our nature, there would be no hope for any of us. We would be without a Redeemer. But oh, what good news! God has given us his Son. His Son has taken on himself our nature, and, as we'll see, he has done all that is required to save his people. This is worthy of our rejoicing. There is a Redeemer.

Well, we get to think about our Redeemer in the next few lessons, and what a happy thing it is to do so. As we do, may God so bless us, not only to see this great blessing, but to enjoy this great blessing of so great a Savior for sinners.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #16

The Incarnation

Question 22: *How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?*

Answer: *Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.*

What good news to know there is a Savior, a Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Were there no Savior, no sinner could ever be forgiven or reconciled to God. All sinners would only have the certain punishment of damnation awaiting them. This is cause to praise God that there is a Savior. Our *Catechism* spends the next several questions focusing upon this Savior, Jesus Christ. There's much to think about—the whole Bible is related to him. This is the focus of God's Word, from Genesis 3, testifying that there would be a descendent of the woman who would come and crush the serpent's head and deliver his people, and the progressive build of promises and prophecies pointing to the coming of Christ, until he finally does come and accomplishes his work, and ascends back to heaven, having given promises to his people to return again. Well there's much, of course, throughout the Bible.

Today we get to think about what is known as the incarnation. You probably have heard the word before. It refers to the Son of God becoming man. The word "incarnation" itself comes from a word referring to "flesh" or "body." And it's a word that refers to how the Son of God took upon himself a true human nature, flesh and blood. Remember this word "incarnation," because it will be used throughout this lesson, and it's a work that's good to know as you grow in your own study of God's Word. It's a word that reminds us that the eternal Son of God truly became man.

Our question today is #22 from the *Shorter Catechism*. It asks, "How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?" The answer is, "Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin."

Well let's clarify a few key words that show up in this answer. The first is "reasonable soul." Our soul is that immaterial part of us, that part that's not physical. It's our consciousness, our spirit. While you can point to and touch your body, you cannot point to or physically touch your soul. Your soul is what thinks, and plans, and desires, and chooses, and loves, and hates. It is true that there is a great wonder of how our body and soul relate to one another. However, it is clear that they are two different things. Our body is not our soul, and our soul is not our body, though they are brought together in our being.

Well, you'll notice it's referring to a "reasonable soul." The word "reasonable" refers to what type of soul is meant. It's a way of speaking of a human soul. The human soul has the ability to think or reason in ways that birds or other animals or fish cannot. Certainly, they think, and can even learn some tricks and ways about life in this world, but they cannot reason as humans do. They cannot formulate verbal speech, though they can make sounds and, in some sense, communicate, they can't compose rational thought. They cannot learn and know God as humans can learn about and know God. This is because humans have been given a reasonable soul.

Notice another word, the word "conceived." This refers to the forming of a human being in the womb of his mother. The normal way demands that there is a relationship between a father and a mother. And as we'll see, Christ was conceived, that is, formed as a human being, in his mother's—Mary—her womb, but this was miraculously, it was by the power of God.

Well, with these ideas, we'll now move into the main part of our lesson, and for our lesson today, we have three points. First, Our Redeemer's Preexistence; second, Our Redeemer's Conception; and third, Our Redeemer's Perfection.

So first then, Our Redeemer's Preexistence. We've seen the identity of our Redeemer in the previous lesson, it is the Lord Jesus Christ. The last question also reminded us that he is the eternal Son of God. In our question today, we see him referred to as the Son of God. This is important for us and for our lesson today. The conception of Christ, or the birth of Christ, did not make him the Son of God. He always, eternally, is the Son of God. He always has been, will be, and is the eternal Son of God. Remember the question we dealt with earlier, "How many persons are there in the Godhead?" The answer, "There are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory."

He is eternally the Son. The incarnation, his miraculous conception in Mary's womb, his birth from Mary, does not make him the Son of God. He always is the Son of God. In other words, our Redeemer is eternally the Son of God. He existed before the incarnation. We sing of this in Psalm 40, verses 6 through 8, and it's mentioned many other places as well, but in Psalm 40, verse 7, we have the word of Christ, wherein he says, "Then said I, Lo"—that is, behold, look—"I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me." Now this passage is quoted again in the book of Hebrews, and is explicitly clarified to refer to Jesus Christ. And when we think of the words, there's something important. It's not that he began to be in Mary's womb. He rather came. He, who already was, came into the world. In other words, he previously existed, and then came into this world. We could think of it by way of an illustration. You exist before you enter a room. You may be outside of the room, and then you enter into it. Well, the Son of God existed, as the Son of God, before he came into this world by means of his incarnation. This is what Christ is referring to when he said to the Jews, in the Gospel of John chapter 8, verse 58, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." He takes up the divine statement, and he says, "I am, I am God. Before Abraham was, I am. Right now I am." You see, the Jews realized that, which is one reason they took up stones to put him to death, for they accused him of blasphemy. Well, the point is, of course, that he is, and eternally is, a divine person. He is the eternal Son of God.

He precedes Abraham, not only in importance, but in existence, because he is the Son of God. To be clear, this doesn't mean that his human body and soul existed previously. His human nature began at the incarnation, in Mary's womb, as we'll see. Rather, it is as he is God, the eternal Son of God, that our Redeemer existed prior to his incarnation. After his conception in Mary's womb, he remains the Son of God, but he now has an additional nature of human nature. Remember we spoke of this in the last lesson. The point is this, as we make this connection: our Redeemer is

a divine person, who always is, and yet, as we'll see, wondrously took to himself an additional nature, even a human nature.

So now second, Our Redeemer Conception. Remember the word "conception" refers to how a human is formed in his mother's womb. Each of you was conceived in your mother's womb. Some of you may have had a younger brother or sister, and you remember when your mom's belly was getting bigger, as her pregnancy advanced? That was because your brother or sister was growing in her womb, and eventually, your mother delivered your brother or sister. It is an amazing thing. It's filled with mystery and wonder. And each of us amazingly began as a little human, tiny, and unable to be seen even by the naked eye, but grew in our mother's womb, until finally, we were brought into the world as well.

Well, what's amazing to think about is that Jesus Christ began his human existence in the same way, as a little human in Mary's womb. Now, remember, this was not the beginning of the Son of God. As the Son of God, he eternally is. Rather, he began his incarnation in his mother's womb.

In the Gospels, we see that his mother's name was Mary. You can read a part of her life in Luke, chapter 1. It's there that she finds out from the angel of God that she's been chosen of God to carry the Lord Jesus Christ in her womb. It's his human nature that was conceived in Mary's womb. His human body went through all of the normal developments in her womb, and he was eventually born and grew as a child grows, which is an amazing truth to consider.

But let's notice an important point that the *Catechism* makes. Mary is referred to as "the virgin Mary." The word "virgin" means that she was not yet involved with Joseph in a way that would cause her to become pregnant. Every other human in the world since Adam and Eve have had a human father and a human mother. This is the way that children are brought into this world. It's what our previous question referred to "ordinary generation." It's the way that a life ordinarily begins.

However, Christ, the Son of God, was brought into this world by a miracle. Well, a "miracle" refers to that which cannot happen in ordinary ways. It demands divine work that's extraordinary. In other words, he was not conceived in the ordinary way. He was conceived in an extraordinary—a way above the ordinary way. A woman who had not known a man conceived a child. Joseph was not yet her husband. Joseph had not yet been with Mary in that way, and yet she conceived a child. Now, how could this happen? In fact, Joseph himself struggled with the fact that Mary was pregnant. He thought that Mary had gone to be with another man when he found out that she was pregnant. You can read about this in Matthew, chapter 1, where he is wrestling with this truth. He thought that Mary had been unfaithful to him. Instead, the Lord showed Joseph that Mary was pregnant by a miracle. There was a miraculous work of God. Mary had miraculously, not in a normal way, but a supernatural way, conceived this child by the power of the Holy Ghost. This is what Joseph was told in Matthew 1, and verse 20: "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

It's the same thing Mary was told when she struggled to understand, in Luke, chapter 1, verse 35: "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." What this means is that God caused a miracle to happen. He did so by the power the Holy Spirit. There's much that we cannot understand about this, because it is above and beyond the normal way that things happen. It's a miracle, just like when the Red sea was parted, not by a natural cause, but by God's miraculous work. So Mary was pregnant by God's

miraculous work. So we can acknowledge that God miraculously caused his Son to be conceived in Mary's womb. It's a divine work. At that moment, his eternal Son took upon himself a true human nature.

This true human nature is made up of two primary things: a true body, and a reasonable soul, as the *Catechism* indicates. In other words, he did not merely appear to be like a human. He really became human. Again, he did not stop being fully God. He did not give up anything divine in becoming man. Instead, he took something additional to himself, and what he took to himself was a real human nature. His real body grew and developed. And when he was born, he hungered and thirsted. He felt pain, and he felt pleasure. This is not only so on the cross, of course, it is so throughout the whole of his life in this world. Additionally, just like you and me, the Son of God took upon himself a human soul. He had human thoughts and desires, feelings and longings. It is not as if the divine person of the Son of God merely took on a human body. Instead, the divine Son of God took on a full and complete human nature—body and soul. You can see this most clearly when he's on the cross, and dies. Christ's human body is nailed to the cross. He's nearing death, suffering while he pays for the sins of his people. Well, as he approaches the moment of death, notice his words recorded in Luke, chapter 23, at verse 46. It's there we read, "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." Well, what happened? His human body remained nailed to the cross. Eventually it was taken down and laid in the tomb. And of course, eventually, he would rise again. But notice at that point what happens. He dies, his body remains nailed to the cross. But as he prayed, he commended his soul, his human soul referred to in the text as "his spirit" or ghost, was commended, or placed, in the care of his Father. He had both a body and a soul. He was fully human. His death, as with the death of every human, was the separating of his human body and human soul. The eternal Son of God truly became and, there's a wonder here, remains a real human.

Well third, Our Redeemer's Perfection. We need to clarify a point that our *Catechism* makes as well. Notice the final few words at the end of the question, "Yet without sin." These words are very important. All humans since Adam and Eve are conceived in sin. Remember, "All mankind descending from Adam by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression." This is one of the things that David laments in Psalm 51. Notice verse 5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Well the Christ was not shapen or formed in iniquity. He was not conceived in sin. He was without sin. He was sinless from his conception, throughout his life, and death, and so on. Now this is beautifully stated, and simply, in 1 John, chapter 3, verse 5. John writes, "And ye know that he"—that is, Jesus—"was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin." When Christ came, he did not appear as one sinful in Mary's womb. Additionally, he never sinned. Hebrews 4, verse 15 indicates this. There we read, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Every temptation Christ faced, he faced it perfectly, never once compromising his integrity, never once sinning against God.

So Christ's incarnation means that the Son of God truly became a real human. However, it does not mean that he became a personal sinner. Adam was a real human. Before the fall, he was not a sinner. Christ entered this world in that way. He is a real human, yet not a sinner. Additionally, he lived sinlessly the whole of his life. What this means then is, he's not a sinner like you and I are sinners. He's truly human, but he's sinless from his conception throughout his life, which qualifies him to be the Savior.

This Biblical truth is beautifully expressed in the Nicene Creed. This statement of faith was developed in the first few centuries of the early church, and it's an excellent expression of what the Bible teaches regarding the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Regarding the Son of God, it expresses the truth of the incarnation in the following words. It says, "For us, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human." In other words, the incarnation, and his sinlessness, was so that he would save sinners. In other words, the incarnation is not just a wonder. It is that, of course. A miraculous thing demands wonder and amazement. But it is a gracious wonder. The reason for the incarnation is so that he would save sinners.

Well, what an amazing truth this is. It is worthy of our meditation and our praise. One thing we learn is how perfectly suited Christ is to be our Savior. He is fully God, and thus able to do all that is needed for our salvation. But he's also fully man, so that he can do it for us. We saw this in our last lesson. And this lesson helps clarify to us how this is the case—fully God, fully man.

The second thing this helps us see is the immeasurable love of Christ for his people. The Son of God, glorious and perfect, was willing to humble himself and take to himself this true human nature. We'll look more at this in the future, but it's worth noting that the Son of God was pleased to become man. Remember back to Psalm 40, you could read verses 6 through 8. And he speaks with an encouraging excitement, "Lo, I come...I delight to do thy will." He didn't come grudgingly, but he came willingly to become a man. He did not cease being God, however, he did truly become man. God and man in two distinct natures and one person for ever. And to do this, he truly took to himself a real human nature.

Well, the final point for us to consider as we close is that this is something for us to wonder at—the miraculous work of God for us. Mary wondered, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" Well, it's right for us to wonder at the miraculous power of God. It was utterly impossible for this to happen, that is, it was utterly impossible, were it not for God's power. Thus the angel responded to Mary's question, "For with God nothing shall be impossible." We should take time to praise God for his mighty work of grace. Men love to think about the accomplishment of heroic men or women from the past. But think for a moment, what are those accomplishments of mere men compared to the miraculous power of God? We ought to take time to meditate on the immeasurable power of God displayed in the incarnation. And as we do, then add this to our thought: God did this in order to save sinners. Oh, what a God we have, who would send his Son, and the Son himself willing to come and do this for us!

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #17

Christ's Office of Prophet

Question 23: *What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?*

Answer: *Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.*

Question 24: *How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?*

Answer: *Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.*

In this lesson, we continue to learn about our Redeemer. In truth, we'll never reach the end of learning about him. We may master this *Catechism*, we memorize every single word, but we will never find out all there is to find out about our beloved Savior. Even eternity will never exhaust all of the beauties and wonders of so great a Savior, Jesus Christ.

Well, today we begin a section that focuses upon what Christ does, and what Christ has done. To do so, the *Catechism* dedicates a few questions to think about what Christ has been appointed to do. The *Catechism* uses the word "office." The word refers to what Christ has come to do. An office, in this sense, refers to a position of work and service. Today we have two questions. The first question, #23, introduces these offices that Christ carries out. Our second question, #24, focuses upon the first of these offices.

Notice Question #23: "What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?" The word "execute" simply means "carry out" or "accomplishes". So the question is asking, what are the primary positions of service that Christ has come to carry out as our Redeemer? What has he been appointed to do? Notice the answer: "Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation." The answer identifies three offices—prophet, priest, and king. Now it also mentions the estate of humiliation and exaltation, which we'll get to in future lessons.

But notice, and let's focus upon these three words—prophet, priest, and king. They should be familiar to us if we've read through the Bible. Prophets like Isaiah and Elijah spoke the Word of God. And priests, like Aaron and Eliezer offered up sacrifices according to Christ's appointment. Kings like David and Josiah ruled God's people according to God's law. Well, what this answer teaches us is that Christ is a prophet, priest, and king. In fact, he is *the* Prophet, Priest, and King. The next three questions deal with each of these offices more fully. So we'll look in sequence at Christ being a prophet—that's this lesson; Christ being a priest—that's the next lesson; and Christ

being a king—the lesson after that.

So today, we look at Question #24, dealing with Christ as a prophet. Question #24 asks: “How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?” And the answer is: “Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.” The words are pretty clear, so we’ll simply note that this is telling us what Christ executes, or carries out, what he does, as a prophet. In our lesson, we’ll focus on, first, what Christ our Prophet does, and second, how Christ our Prophet does it.

So first, what Christ our Prophet does. Well, let’s remember that there are many things that Christ does. As the eternal Son of God, he rules over the whole universe. He’s the Maker of heaven and earth. He’s the sustainer of all that is. He’s the second person of the blessed Trinity. Of course, as our Redeemer, he died and rose again, and many other things, of course. However, this question is focusing upon what he’s been commissioned to do as our Prophet.

A prophet in general reveals God’s will. This was a supernatural calling. A prophet was given a supernatural gift to reveal what otherwise could not be known. Typically we think of prophecy as those pronouncements of what was to come to pass. They weren’t predictions, as we think of them. A prophet was not one who made a good guess at the future. Rather, he was the appointed mouthpiece of God, to declare to the people with authority what would certainly come to pass. This is why God gave, as a test of prophets, whether or not his words came to pass. Notice Deuteronomy 18, verses 21 through 22. It’s there we read, “And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.” In other words, true prophets truly foretold what came to pass.

Well, this is one aspect of what is known as revealing something. To reveal something is to make something known that otherwise could not be known. You could think for a moment of a gift wrapped up in a box. You don’t know what’s in it until it is opened. And once it’s unwrapped and opened, then you see what the gift is. The gift has then been revealed to you. When we speak of revelation, we’re speaking of something far more important than a hidden gift, for a birthday or something else. We’re speaking about the revealing of God’s will—what God desires, what God wants, what God demands, what God promises, what God guarantees. And this is what a prophet revealed.

A prophet did not do this on his own. He didn’t invent these things. He didn’t think up these things. He didn’t come up with them on his own. Instead, the Lord miraculously worked in and by the prophet, and he did so to give us a true understanding of God’s will. Notice 2 Peter 1, verse 21. Peter writes, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” In other words, they revealed God’s will by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in and by them.

Now, we emphasize this to help us understand what Christ, as our Prophet, does. Notice the *Catechism* says, “he reveals.” He takes what is hidden from us, and what is unknowable by our own study, or intuition, or thinking, and he makes it known to us. But what specifically is it that he makes known to us? The *Catechism* tells us, “The will of God for our salvation.” In other words, as our Redeemer, Christ serves as our Prophet, declaring God’s way of salvation for us. As a Prophet, he’s focused on making us know the way of salvation that God has established. It’s true, of course, Christ knows everything. He knows every hidden fact of the universe. He knows the most difficult principles and axioms in mathematics and science. He knows all of the points of

history and language. He could teach any of these things better than anyone else in the world. The things which presently stump the best scientists, Christ knows, and could reveal instantly.

However, as a Prophet, he is focused on teaching us the will of God for our salvation. And think for a moment what a great privilege that is, because he's revealing to us the thing which is of the greatest importance—our salvation. This is what he focused on throughout his incarnate ministry. Everywhere he went, he was teaching and preaching about the way of salvation. This is what he continues to do while he reigns in heaven. He continues to use his Word to teach us the way of salvation; how we can be forgiven; how, as forgiven, we can be sanctified; and what assurances we have; and how we grow in faith, and hope, and love. He's revealing the way, and the will of God for our salvation. What a blessing to have this to be true, that Christ is our Prophet to reveal to us the will of God for our Salvation.

And second, how Christ our Prophet does this. Christ does not do so through secret knowledge of the constellations of the stars in the sky above us. He does not do this simply by planting in us, all of a sudden, this knowledge in our minds. Instead, as the *Catechism* says, he uses "his word and Spirit." Well, let's look at each of these, and how they work together.

First, Christ uses his Word to reveal the will of God for our salvation. We read of Christ that he came teaching and preaching the kingdom of God. That is, he came speaking words to instruct us, and exhort us, reprove us, rebuke us, encourage us, command us, promise us the things regarding God's kingdom, God's salvation. We saw earlier in a previous lesson that the Word of God is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God. We saw that it is called the Word of God, because it is God's revelation to man. Just as you and I communicate to others by our speech, or our words, so God communicates to us by his speech, his words. This is what we saw in 2 Timothy 3, verse 16, that "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." It's breathed out by God. It's God's Word. So the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, is truly God's Word. And necessarily then, it is Christ's Word, for Christ is God. Moreover, the Old Testament prophets were given the words. They spoke by none less than the Spirit of Christ. Notice 1 Peter, chapter 1, verse 11, speaking of those prophets, Peter writes, "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." In other words, prophets like Moses and Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel were revealing the words that the Spirit of Christ gave them. Their words are preeminently Christ's words. When you read the prophecy of Isaiah, it's true you're reading Isaiah's words, but Isaiah's words are there because Christ gave them to Isaiah. So they're Christ's words. The whole Bible is the revelation of Christ. It's the Word of Christ. This is what he uses to make us know the will of God for our salvation. If we are going to know the way of salvation, we will only find it in the Word of Christ. What a privilege then that we have been given access to read the Word—the very Word, the true Word, the inerrant Word of Christ. What a precious thing it is that we have his Word, for this Word that teaches us the will of God for our salvation.

Well, second, Christ uses his Spirit to reveal the will of God for our salvation. Christ uses his Word to make known to us that will, but there is something else needed—not different content, but rather, in order for us to know the will of God for our salvation, we need to understand it, we need to believe it. We think for a moment about a book perhaps of history. The book contains the information about that era of history, the facts, and figures, and so on. However, if we have that book and have never read it, we don't actually benefit by it. We must have eyes to read the book. That doesn't change the content. Our eyes are the vehicles by which we take in the words. We have to have minds to understand the meaning of the words. Well, similarly, the Bible is the Word of

God. It is the revelation of the will of God for our salvation. However, our souls must be enabled to perceive its truth. We need our souls to receive this truth. Well, since man is dead in his sin, this does not happen naturally. Just as a dead body will never learn anything, however many books are presented to it, neither will a sinner dead in his sin ever truly learn the will of God regarding salvation. He must first be given life. His soul must be made to understand the things that Christ has revealed in his Word, and this only happens as Christ uses his Spirit to give understanding to the sinner. Well, praise God, this is what Christ does for his people. He gives us his Word, and likewise to his people, he blesses by his Spirit that they would understand what he's revealed.

Notice the idea in Luke chapter 24, and verse 45. This is after Christ's resurrection. He's walking with two of his disciples, though they did not recognize him. Along the way, he spoke to them about himself from the Bible, however, it was only as he worked to give them understanding that they finally were brought to understand and embrace the truth. They needed his special work of grace by his Spirit. The passage says it this way: "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures." Notice, it's not that he gave them something other than the scriptures. The scriptures are what he's talking about. That's the revelation. But they stood in need of their minds being opened to receive that. Paul says something similar, in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18. Of believers, he says, "But we all, with open face"—that is, with unveiled face, no hindrance before us—"beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." In other words, the Spirit of the Lord causes us to understand the Lord, his revelation, and to be transformed by him. We need to study the Bible. Without the Bible, we'll never know the truths of salvation. These truths are not found in other places. However, we must know the supernatural work of the Spirit, giving us understanding, making us to embrace these truths as the truths of salvation for us.

Well, this is what the Lord Jesus does. He uses his Word and Spirit to make us understand and embrace the will of God for our salvation. Jesus makes this point very clear, in John, chapter 3. Notice the exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus, in John, chapter 3, verses 5 through 8. There we read, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Well, there's a lot in this exchange, but notice that the Spirit of God is what makes man see and enter into the kingdom of God. Without the Spirit's work giving life, and causing us to know the truth of Christ, without the Spirit giving us understanding and faith, the sinner never embraces the will of God for salvation. In fact, he cannot, he does not have the power. And so, it points out quite clearly how necessary it is, if ever we should know the will of God for our salvation, both having God's Word, but also God's Spirit working upon us, that he would cause us to know the truth of his Word unto salvation.

Well, this brings us to two points for our conclusion. The first is this: we must give diligence to studying the Word of God. The Word of God is Christ's Word to us teaching us, showing us the will of God for our salvation. He does so through promises of salvation. He does so through admonitions and warnings. He does so by teaching us of heaven and hell, and directing us to consider the end of sinners, and the blessings of faith. He teaches us these things by his Word.

He tells us about himself by his Word. And so we have four Gospels, which tell us the life, and ministry, and work of Christ. We have the Old Testament which prepares the way for it, and the rest of the New Testament which explains it and applies it. All of these things, where are they found? They're found in the Bible—the Word of God. It's the Word which Christ uses to teach us the will of God for our salvation. Well it that's the case, then we must study the Word, to understand the Word, to think through the Word. And this is exactly what the Bereans did. When Paul went and preached to the Jews in Berea, they responded by diligently studying and searching out God's Word. Notice Acts, chapter 17, verse 11. Speaking of the Bereans, we read, "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether they were so." Well, by God's grace, they were blessed in their diligence. We read just after that, "Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few." In other words, God blessed their diligent study that they then believed upon that message.

Well, there's something for us in our study. We need to approach the Bible in a similar way, with diligence. We don't just sort of carelessly and casually approach God's Word, because this Word tells us the way of salvation. It holds forth the most important of things. And yes, there are things in it that are difficult to understand. Peter mentions that himself. But the fact that they are difficult, first off, doesn't mean they're impossible to understand, nor does it mean that everything is difficult to understand. And if things are difficult to understand, how much more does that argue for our diligence in it.

So let me challenge you to examine yourself, and ask the question, "Am I diligently studying God's Word? Do I have a regular time where I am reading God's Word, and not just going over the words on the page, but thinking about them, praying about them, applying them as God gives help, inquiring with others, asking, "Help me understand this," speaking to your parents perhaps, or your pastor, or getting books that help you understand. That's what diligence is. And it's worth it, because there's no greater thing than to know the way of salvation, and there's no other way to know it but by the Word of God.

Well, second, we must seek the Lord's blessing by his Spirit, in order to gain understanding. This is exactly what the psalmist does throughout Psalm 119. If you read through that Psalm, you'll see again and again, the psalmist is praying that God would give him understanding. He's bound to God's Word. He searching, meditating, memorizing, reciting God's Word. And he's constantly asking, "Quicken me"—that is, enliven me. He's asking that God would give him understanding, and teach him, and enlighten him, in order that he might believe, and keep, and understand God's Word. Well, this is how we need to approach God's Word. We need diligence in our study, and thinking through the words, and how they relate to one another, and how this sentence relates to the previous and the following, and how this book relates to the other books of the Bible. But while we do so diligently, and we study a book that's full of words and sentences, it's not enough merely to understand the words intellectually. We need the Spirit of Christ to bless this truth unto our souls that we may embrace them, believing them unto salvation.

And this is where the truth of Christ as our Prophet is of great encouragement. He is our Prophet, who, by his Word and Spirit, reveals to us the will of God for our salvation. And so we go to him, and we say as we study, "Lord, before I read, I pray that you would"—in the words of the psalmist—"open thou mine eyes, that I might behold wondrous things from thy law." Indeed we have need of Christ to open our understanding, as he did with the two disciples mentioned earlier, that we may understand and believe. And so we approach the Bible with diligence, and with dependence—diligently studying the Word, and yet depending upon Christ mercifully, graciously,

by his Spirit, to cause us to understand and believe the truth. And so, may it be that you and I both grow in our approach to the study of his Word, and as we do, that we would better understand, and believe, and delight in this salvation from God.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #18

Christ's Office of Priest

Question 25: *How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?*

Answer: *Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.*

What a blessing that God has given us a Redeemer! The Redeemer, Jesus Christ, perfectly does all that is needed to save his people. There's nothing that they lack, or nothing that they need that Christ does not provide and do for them.

Well, last lesson we were introduced to the fact that "Christ, as our redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation." We've already seen that, as a Prophet, he reveals the will of God for our salvation. Without this, we would lack the needed knowledge required for salvation.

Well today, we look another way our Redeemer does what it needed to save us. Particularly, we look at the second of those office, his priesthood. Notice Question #25 in the *Shorter Catechism*, "How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?" Again remember, the word "execute" means "carry out" or "accomplish." And so, how does Christ carry out, or how does Christ accomplish the office of a priest? And the Answer, "Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us."

Notice just a few of the words before we get into the main part of our lesson. The first of which is "satisfy." Here, this word means "to fulfill," or "meet the demand" of something else. When you get older, you may have a job. The job will have specific demands or requirements. And to satisfy those requirements means that you have satisfied what was demanded. You have done what was required.

Well, notice as well, the word "reconcile." This word means to bring enemies into a state of peace and friendship. The individuals were angry with one another. To be reconciled means that the cause of their disagreement has been dealt with, and they now are in a state of peace and friendship.

And another word, "intercession"—this refers to what someone does when they plead for blessings on behalf of another person. So if your friend needed help, you might go to a parent or to somebody else, and ask them to help your friend. You would be interceding for your friend.

Well, with that then, let's moving into our lesson more fully. In our lesson today, we'll consider

two things: first, the work of Christ our Priest; and second, the benefit of Christ our Priest.

So first then, the work of Christ our Priest. Again, remember that Christ does many things, and has done many things. But here, we're focusing upon his work as a priest. Well, in the Bible, a priest had a number of things to do, however, the majority of their work could be summarized by their focus on offering sacrifices and interceding for the people. So when you read through the work of the priest in the Old Testament, you're getting an insight of what our great and High Priest, Jesus Christ, would come to do now, what he has done, and even still is doing. Yet, he did something far better than what the priests in the Old Testament did. I encourage you, not necessarily now, but to make it a point that in the near future, you read through the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. As you do, you will see how Christ is a greater priest than the priests of the Old Testament. It's not because the priest of the Old Testament were bad, or that that priesthood was bad. It's because they were ordained as forerunners, and pictures, and pointers to Christ. When we look at the work of the priest in the Old Testament, we see a shadow, and we hear a whisper of what the great and ultimate Priest, Jesus Christ, would do. And so we can read the Old Testament with a great encouragement.

And we'll notice that the work of our Priest includes his offering up a sacrifice. Well, priests under the Old Testament would offer up sacrifices of lambs, and goats, and bulls, and other animals. They would even offer up sacrifices of various other kinds of food. A living animal would be presented to the priest, and the priest would ensure that that animal was qualified according to God's standards to be offered. Then the priest would offer up that animal as a sacrifice to God. We get a clear picture of this in the idea of sin offerings offered under the Old Testament.

Notice, as one example among many others, in Leviticus, chapter 4, verse 22 through 26. We read there of the sin offering: "When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD his God concerning things which should not be done, and is guilty; or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish: and he shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD: it is a sin offering. And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out his blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering. And he shall burn all his fat upon the altar, as the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall make an atonement for him as concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him."

Now there's a lot here, but notice the basics. A man sins. He's counted guilty as a sinner, a law breaker before God. He then brings this young goat, a male without blemish. He then lays his hand upon the head of that animal, a symbol of transferring his guilt to the animal. And the goat is now treated as the guilty party. It's killed. The priest takes its blood and applies it in order to make atonement, so that the man, the one who sinned, is now forgiven. So there's a sacrifice, an offering for the forgiveness of a sinner.

But now, let's turn our attention to our Priest, Jesus Christ. Christ offered up himself. He did not offer up an animal. He offered up himself. This is what John the Baptist meant when he pointed to Jesus Christ and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." Christ was the ordained sacrificial victim. Now that doesn't mean that he was victimized, and something happened to him that he wasn't willing to happen. He came willingly to be the sacrifice. He was the appointed substitute. He was the sacrifice appointed by God for the offering.

Of course, what is amazing is that he is also the Priest. And so, in the Old Testament, the priest would take an animal, something different than himself, of course, and offer it up. But Christ, as the greater High Priest, takes himself, and offers up himself as the sacrifice. Well, notice Hebrews

9, verses 11 and 12. It's there we read of this very point, "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." As our Priest, he offered up himself. The blood that was shed was his own blood. The blood that makes atonement was his own blood. Now, this is not because he had sinned and needed to be punished himself. Instead, he was the substitute, the Lamb provided by God, who came on behalf of others. Just as the sacrificial animal had not sinned, neither had Christ sinned. He was the spotless Lamb of God. He was not offered up for his own sins. Instead, he was offered up for the sins of his people.

I want to encourage and challenge you to read through Isaiah 53. It's a small chapter. It's something you could work through very quickly. Perhaps, right after this lesson, get your Bible out, and turn to Isaiah 53, and read through it. And as you do, you'll see this point made very clearly. As you read through that chapter, notice two things. First, who is suffering? And second, for whom is he suffering? And what you'll find again, and again, and again, is that there's one person suffering, this servant of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his suffering, all that he endures, is because of the sins of others. Well, read Isaiah 53, and you'll see it for yourself. You'll see that Christ offered up himself for his people.

Well, this offering particularly took place upon the cross. When you read of Christ going to the cross and suffering there, you're reading of Christ the Priest offering up himself in substitution for others. It's a work of his priesthood. And as you read through the Gospels, you'll get little glimpses of the zeal he had for this. There's a scene in the Gospels where he's nearing that day, and it describes him as going before the disciples. He is fixed upon his work of sacrifice that he wants to perform for the sake of his people. What a blessing to have so great a Priest to offer up himself. Well, we'll see in a moment what he accomplished by this offering, but for now, simply notice that, as Priest, Christ offered up himself in death upon the cross.

Well, second, regarding the work of our Priest, notice that he intercedes for us. We'll get in a moment to the benefit, which is the second main point, but right now, regarding what Christ does as Priest, notice that he intercedes for us. Christ's priestly work did not finish with his offering up of himself on the cross. It's true, as the Bible clearly states, he will never offer up himself again as a sacrifice. His sacrifice on the cross was a one-time event, never to be repeated, never needing to be repeated, for it perfectly accomplished what it was intended to do.

However, this doesn't mean that his work as Priest is finished. His sacrificial work ended, but his priestly work continues. Well, how does it continue? It continues by his continual intercession for his people. This is a key part of his priestly work. Notice Hebrews, chapter 7, verses 24 and 25. We read there, "But this man"—speaking of Jesus—"because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Did you hear that?—"he ever liveth." He's always living. For what?—to make intercession for them. Christ died, but Christ rose from the dead, and Christ ascended into heaven, and it's there that he's seated at the right hand of the Father, and we're told in Hebrews chapter 4 that he's seated on the throne of grace. Remember the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and the temple, it was the throne of God, and the top of it was the seat of mercy, the mercyseat, or the seat of propitiation.

And Christ, in heaven, is seated on a throne of grace. But he's not lazily passing by the days, weeks, months, and years. He's still exercising his priesthood. He's doing so by making intercession, that is, he is pleading for God's blessing upon his people. He's presenting himself as

the one that was sacrificed, and he's pleading what he's accomplished that God would then bless his people. What a blessing indeed! Just as the high priest under the Old Testament bore the names of Israel and their tribes upon his shoulders and upon his breastplate, as he engaged in his priestly work, bringing before God, as it were, the names of God's people. So the Lord Jesus Christ, the High Priest of his people, bears the names of his people before his Father, ever presenting himself, and as he stands as their Priest, he presents them in him, seeking his Father's blessing upon them.

We gain something of a glimpse of this magnificent truth, in John chapter 17. It contains for us a beautiful prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ, one that you and I can't pray as he prayed it, because he's praying there as our High Priest. Well, I encourage you to read the whole chapter, and you'll see and get a little glimpse of Christ's interceding for his people. But just to give you a sense of it, here's one part of his intercession recorded there in John 17, verses 9 through 11. Jesus, praying to the Father, says, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are." You see what he's doing? He's preparing for the time that he is going to ascend into heaven, and he's even speaking as if that time has come to pass. And he says, "My people are still in the world." So what does he do? He prays for them. This gives us a little insight into what Christ is doing right now for his people. He's praying for them, that his Father would keep them, guard them, preserve them, and protect them, that they may be his, and that they may be united, and that they may be kept by the power of God unto that last and great day. What a beautiful thing that Christ our Priest does!

Now, our second main point, the benefit of Christ our Priest. What is accomplished when Christ carries out his priesthood? Well, the *Catechism* says that he offered up himself, "a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God." The truth of divine justice is a weighty truth. Man's justice in this world often fails. Sometimes it's not carried out at all. Sometimes the guilty go on without any punishment. Other times, it's carried out imperfectly. What should have been done isn't done in all the way it should be done, and other times justice is abused, and some innocent person is punished wrongly.

However God's justice is always, without fail, perfectly executed. It never fails. No one ever escapes it. No single transgression will ever go unpunished. What a mistake it is that many make in this world thinking that God will somehow look past their many sins, or that God will somehow not see their many sins. Oh, what a sober thought to realize that hell is the reality of God's justice, and every sin shall be punished.

Well, this is a great problem for us, because each of us has sinned against the Lord. Having sinned, justice must now be executed against us. We saw this in a previous question when we thought about that most grievous misery, the pains of hell forever. This is what every sin deserves. It is what every sin demands before a just and holy God. But remember what Christ did. He offered up himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice. This is what was taking place upon the cross. He, as Priest, was offering up himself as a sacrifice. And in doing so, he was fulfilling the demands of God's most holy justice. This means that his sacrifice fulfilled all that divine justice required.

This brings us to an important idea in the Bible. The word is translated in the Bible, "propitiation." You'll see it in Romans 3, verse 25, when we read, "Whom God"—speaking of Christ—"hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Christ is set forth as a propitiation. You'll see it also in 1 John 2, verse 2: "And he"—Christ—"is the propitiation for our sins: and not for

ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” In both of these passages, Christ is shown to be the propitiation.

Well, what does this word “propitiation” mean? It refers to a sacrifice that removes the wrath of God against us by satisfying God’s divine justice. And moreover, it brings us then into a relationship of peace and fellowship. Notice, Romans 3:25 says this “propitiation is through faith in his blood”—his blood, that is, the sacrifice. It’s a sacrifice which propitiates or satisfies divine justice, and removes the wrath of God, and purchases peace with God. It brings forth the forgiveness of our sins. Earlier we referenced Hebrews 9, verse 25, and it’s there that we are told Christ’s sacrifice obtained eternal redemption for us. So what is it that Christ’s sacrifice accomplishes? It removes our sins by answering for them. Our sins were placed upon Christ, and Christ makes payment for them, so that then we are forgiven and accepted with God in peace. We’re redeemed—reconciled by the work of Christ our Priest upon the cross.

Additionally, we see that he makes continual intercession for us. We know his work consists primarily as Priest as offering up himself as sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us. So what’s the benefit of that? Well, as he’s gone into heaven, he’s presenting himself, and he’s pleading there now and always himself and his work on our behalf, that all of the blessings of salvation will be provided unto his people. This means his people continue to receive, every day, not only in this life but in the life to come, the blessings of what Christ has accomplished, because he continues to plead his work on their behalf. This way his people continue to receive blessings from God throughout life, and throughout eternity, because Christ continues to pray for them, seeking this great blessing upon them.

What benefit do we have? Oh, how can we express it totally apart from saying “salvation”? Because Christ died on behalf of sinners, those sinners for whom he died are forgiven and reconciled to God. And because Christ lives and intercedes for them, they continue to receive all of the blessings of salvation because of him. Indeed, many benefits, innumerable benefits, rich benefits belong to them who have Christ as their Priest.

Well, let me close with two applications for you. First, consider what would happen to you if you do not have Jesus Christ as your High Priest. His offering which satisfies divine justice would not be yours. This means then that you—you—must bear God’s justice against you for your sins. You must pay God what you owe for sinning against him. This is a terrible thought, a dreadful thought, and a fact which cannot fully be understood. It is unbearable to think of the infinite wrath of God bearing down upon a sinner. Who, who can endure such wrath? What a blessing then that God holds out Christ the Savior to us, and says, “He is the Priest whose sacrifice satisfies divine justice.”

This means he’s held forth to us as our Redeemer, as our High Priest, and taking him means that we gain the benefit of his sacrifice. Taking Christ means that his sacrifice did not merely satisfy divine justice in some distant way, but it satisfied divine justice against us for our sins. We take him, and his payment is then for us. For the one who embraces Christ as Redeemer, Christ is his Priest, Christ’s sacrifice is applied to him, he has nothing else to pay—Christ has satisfied divine justice. He is reconciled to God, though once an enemy of God because of his sin. Now, because of Christ and his priestly work, he’s not only forgiven, but he’s brought into fellowship and friendship with God, and all of this is because of Jesus Christ. Oh, then, do not rest without Christ as your Redeemer.

Well, second, in closing, if you have trusted Christ as your Redeemer, think for just a moment that you have a constant cause of encouragement and rejoicing. I don’t mean that you don’t have

trials and troubles, but I do mean that you have a cause to rejoice still. Not only did his sacrifice satisfy divine justice for you, and reconcile you to God. In addition, He continues to seek God's blessings for you. Right now, as you've been listening to this lesson, Christ has been pleading what he has accomplished to be applied and to be a blessing to you. When you sleep, as a believer, and your mind drifts off from the state of consciousness, Christ is, as it were, awake praying for you. When your mind is fixed on other things throughout the day, his mind is fixed on your eternal good, as he pleads the blessings of God to be applied to you because of what he's done. Oh, what an encouragement this is! Think about it. Take time to meditate on it. He's pleading, believer, for you. Let us then learn to rejoice in him. Let us grow in our love for him. And let us give thanks to him for his ongoing work of intercession, by which we receive all of the blessings of God which he's purchased for his people.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #19

Christ's Office of King

Question 26: *How doth Christ execute the office of a king?*

Answer: *Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.*

So far, we have looked at two of the three offices Christ, as our Redeemer, carries out. He's that Prophet that instructs in the will of God for our salvation. He's the Priest that offered up himself to atone for the sins of his people, and he continues to intercede for them. Now, these two offices are great blessings to God's people. And if we had no such Prophet, we would not know the way of salvation. If we did not have such a Priest, we would have no advocate with the Father. So praise God that we have such a Savior as we do in Jesus.

In this lesson, we look at the third office that Christ fulfills—his Kingship. Now, before we look at the question from our *Catechism*, let's simply see that Christ is a King. We see this, of course, in Isaiah's prophecy, chapter 9, verses 6 and 7. It's there we read, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." So even long before Christ was incarnate, we have this prophecy given us, which we can still derive much comfort from. He is a King, whose throne shall continue forever.

Paul writes, in Ephesians 1, verses 21 to 23 of Christ's kingship. He mentions Christ's resurrection and ascension, and we read there, "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Christ's kingship is over all that is, and he has special reference to the church, that he has been exalted above all for the sake of the church. And so he governs all things in the whole of the universe for the good of his beloved people. Again and again, we see the fact that Christ is the King—the King over all that is.

So with that, let's look at the *Catechism* and see how it is that he serves as King. Question #26 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, "How doth Christ execute the office of a king?" The answer, "Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself; in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies." Each of these words is pretty clear,

and you'll notice his actions: subduing, ruling, defending, restraining, and conquering. Well each of these speak of his power and authority, and how he exercises himself toward both his enemies and toward his people. We'll look at each of these throughout the lesson that follows.

Well, for this lesson, we'll look at two main points: first, Christ as King over his people, and second, Christ as King over his enemies. It reminds us that Christ is not just King over a section of the people in this world. But he is King over all the inhabitants of this world. But it helps us see how he functions toward his people versus how he functions toward his enemies.

So first of all, Christ is King towards his people. Well, Christ is King over all the earth, but we focus now on his kingly actions toward his people. And as we do, we want to highlight two key ideas regarding his work as King for his people. First, as the *Catechism* says, he subdues them, and second, he rules and defends them.

So then, Christ subdues his people. The *Catechism* says that "Christ executeth the office of a king in subduing us to himself. We remember that God has chosen a people unto salvation, by Christ, before the world was. But they do not enter this world as believers, or those who love God. In fact, they enter this world dead in their sins, and they stand as rebels against God. Paul states this clearly in Ephesians 2, verses 1 through 3, when he's writing to those who are now believers, he says, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." And of course, this is not a good picture—dead in sins? following the world and following Satan? fulfilling the desires of the flesh? This speaks of a people who are not subdued to Jesus Christ. You remember how David described himself, in Psalm 51, he wrote, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." This is true of all those who will be brought to salvation. They enter this world as those who despise God because of their sin.

What this means is that even those that God has chosen unto salvation begin this life in this world as those who are his enemies. But we remember that he's chosen them to be saved. And this means that there must be a process by which he subdues them. Those that are opposed must be made willing to submit unto the Lord God. Well, how is it then that these enemies end up submitting to Christ, trusting Christ, and serving Christ gladly and joyfully? Well, ultimately, it has nothing to do with their own personal wisdom, and strength, and inclination. It has everything to do with Christ himself. But he graciously brings them to be subdued to him. He does this through the mighty work of what's known as "effectual calling." Now, we'll look more at that when we take up Questions #30 and #31 in the future. But for now, you can see that Christ works within his chosen people while they are yet sinners. And he gives them a new heart and will, enlivening them so that they come to him but most gladly, and willingly, embracing him as their Savior. In other words, he works in them to make them willing to submit to him. You can see this as John says it in John chapter 1, verses 12 and 13: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." You see, God worked in them first, so that they then would receive Christ. Well, this work of grace that was upon them and within them brought them truly and personally to receive Jesus Christ. In other words, they trust Christ, they embrace Christ, they submit to Christ, because he graciously subdues them to himself.

But his Kingly work does not end when he brings them to himself. He subdues them, they

who were once enemies are now subdued to be made subjects of this great King. Those who were enemies are now friends of this great King, and all because of his gracious work. But notice, he continues to work in and for them. He rules and defends his people. He first brings them into his kingdom, then he continues his work in and over them. You can think of it this way—they were first rebels, but then he subdues them and they come willingly to submit to him in faith. Now he governs them and protects them within his kingdom. By ruling them, he instructs them and governs them. He oversees them and provides for them as well. He teaches them his promises, his commandments, and his will. And he also directs them by working within them, and by using others whom he's appointed to shepherd them. We see this, for instance, in the fact that he's ordained and established ministers and elders in the church. And they are appointed to oversee and care for and govern his beloved people. They serve in Christ's kingdom for our good. Hebrews 13:17 helps us understand the work of pastors for our good, and how it is that Christ is working through them for our good. We read there, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

But notice, these ministers and elders who have authority are not the ultimate authority. They're not kings in Christ's church. While they're given that authority in the church, they're given that authority to care for us, to serve us. And they themselves must give an answer to the true and only King, even Jesus Christ. And this is clarified in that commandment that Christ gave to his apostles, that we know as The Great Commission, Matthew 28:18–20. It's there we read, "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Well who has all power, all authority?—not the apostles—Jesus does. What are the apostles supposed to teach? Not whatever they think of, not whatever they think is right or good. Rather, as Christ says, "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." In other words, all ministers of the gospel are to teach his people his Word. This is why Paul commands Timothy, in 2 Timothy 4, verse 2: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Timothy was not to preach his own thoughts. Timothy was not to preach his own opinions. Timothy was not to preach what the culture wanted. He was to preach Christ's Word. And this is true of every minister today. They are to take what Christ has said and proclaim it to his people. They're to govern his people not according to their selfish desires, or their best thoughts, but according to Christ's will revealed in the Scripture. Christ, in other words, uses his Word and his pastors appointed to proclaim his Word, to direct, guide, and govern his people.

Well, as members of the church, we must listen to his Word. We're to believe his promises, we're to obey his commands, and we don't do this simply because a pastor says so. We do this because it's the Word of the King—the good King, the saving King, the King who cares for us, who has befriended us, who has saved us. To do otherwise than to believe his promises, or obey his commands, or carry out his will is actually to injure ourselves, and to rebel against him who is only good. However, Christ does not leave it to us in our own power to do this. Instead, he graciously works within us to bring us to follow him. He sanctifies us. He continues the work he began when he made us new. We'll look more at sanctification in the future. But we can get a picture of this in Philippians 2, verse 13, where we read, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." This is that gracious work of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He doesn't

only bring us to follow him, he causes us to want to follow him. He works within us that we find it our delight to follow him. He's subdued us to himself, and he governs us both outwardly by his Word, and by the ministers of the church, and the ordinances of the church, but he also governs us inwardly by his Word and Spirit in grace.

But he also defends us. Now, we'll look more at this in the second main point of our lesson. But what a blessing it is to know that the Son of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us, has ascended on high, and reigns over all the earth. He remembers us, he defends us from wicked men and Satan himself. This doesn't mean that his people never suffer. Instead, it means that even when his people suffer, it is always within the perfect control of none other than our loving and powerful Savior, Jesus Christ. We may not always know why it is that these things are taking place, but it is that we must know the one who is controlling these things is indeed our beloved Savior.

Well, he defends us. We should remember what God said to Satan about Job, in Job 1, verse 12. We read there, "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD." In other words, Satan could do nothing against Job except what God had ordained and permitted. So God's people today, those who trust in Christ, have this great assurance. He defends us from all things. Everything that happens to us is ultimately happening to us as his people, in his perfect and good caring for us through Jesus Christ. Nothing will ever come to the Lord's people except what he has ordained as right, and good, and ultimately for his praise.

Well secondly now, let's look at Christ as King over his enemies. Christ has enemies. It amazes us, of course, to see how wickedly his enemies treated him during his incarnate ministry. He went about doing good. When you read the Gospels, you see him doing this good, and that good, and other good things. He went about all his life and ministry doing what was good. He performed merciful miracles to help people who stood in need. He taught people the way of salvation. He called people from darkness to light. He called people from death to life. He came in kindness. Yet his enemies misrepresented him on purpose. They falsely accused him, and conspired against him, and ultimately they crucified him. As amazing as this is, it makes sense when you remember the following—man, since the fall, does not love God. Jesus explains it this way, in John 3, verses 19 and 20: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." It is a sad thing that men hate Christ, because he's the truth, and because he tells the truth.

You will notice, if we are Christ's, we have the same enemies. They hate Christ, and they hate his people, his things, his ways, his church. Christ forewarns his disciples of this very truth, in Matthew 10, verse 22. He says, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." And in the same chapter, verses 24 and 25: "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" This is a sobering truth. As we follow Christ in our thoughts and actions, men will look upon us as enemies.

Well, what are we to do about that? There is much to say, and the Bible gives us good practical advice about how to carry ourselves in the world. But the foundation of our hope is not in what we can do, it is in what our King does. So the *Catechism* states it: "He restrains and conquers all his and our enemies." He restrains them. We saw this in our reference to Job. Consider that what we read is about our worst enemy, Satan. Satan didn't have the liberty to do whatever he wanted, at his

own desire and in his own way. When Satan approached God, God restrained Satan. Satan can do nothing more than what God ordained and permitted. If Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and we must be watchful against his ways, and take up the full armor of God, yet our hope rests in our King who rules over Satan.

This is true of all of the enemies against Christ and his people. Our Savior and King reigns high over all. We sing of this in Psalm 2. Notice the picture that's set for us, in verses 1 through 3—a picture of enemies against Christ and his kingdom. The psalmist says, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” The nations and rulers of the nations are enemies against God. They hate God. They hate the Messiah. Now, we're thankful that history shows us that there are rulers who trust the Lord and serve the Lord. But we see many places where this is the case still, that rulers and people of great influence despise the Lord, and they would try all that they can to overthrow his purpose.

But notice God's response, as given to us in that Psalm. We read, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” Do you see it? God is not scared. He's not overwhelmed, or overpowered by these enemies, however great they are, however numerous they are, however united they are, however strategic they are. The King is enthroned, and he will do all his holy will and stand victorious over all. So that, at the end of this Psalm, there's a great assurance: “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” I encourage you to read and sing the whole of Psalm 2. Doing so will direct you to your comfort in your King against all of his and your enemies.

Well, in addition, we are sure that he—Christ—will destroy all his and our enemies. We don't always see this in the present world. Certainly there are times and seasons where his enemies continue for an appointed period. Sometimes it seems that the wicked—the enemies of Christ—succeed and prosper. We can read of this in Psalm 73, and see that even the best of God's people are faced with this temptation at times to despair. However, the psalmist eventually comes to see where his hope is. It is in God, who will ultimately both destroy his enemies and bless his people.

Ultimately, this will take place on the last day, and what a tremendous day that will be. Christ speaks of this as that day when he will separate his people—whom he subdued, whom he governs, and whom he defends—from his and their enemies. I encourage you to read of that great day, in Matthew 25, verses 31 through 46. Well, on that day, Christ will both welcome his people into his glorious kingdom, and he will send all of his enemies and their enemies unto their ultimate and everlasting destruction. Consider the weight of verse 41. Speaking of Christ, we read, “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Ultimately, all his and our enemies will suffer destruction for their sins. And it will be our great King, who has had mercy on us, and subdued us to himself, and has saved us. It will be our great King who conquers them on that day.

Well, there's much more we can say about our King and his Word. I encourage you, as you read through the Bible, to pay attention to the different ways his kingly work is held forth, and what great hope, and peace, and comfort that gives to his believing people, but also what terror that awakens for his enemies.

So let me close by encouraging you to think of this great King. There's none like him. None has such power and authority as he has. None is so perfectly full of all goodness and compassion.

None is so righteous and just. There's no king like King Jesus.

So a question: Have you submitted to him as your King? or, Do you stand at present as one who is his enemy? What a sad thing it would be to remain an enemy of so great and perfect a King. Well, if that's where you are, I have one word to you—Go to this King who you've sinned against, and plead with him for mercy. Remember, he came and preached the kingdom of God, and called them to repent and believe. So go to him, and ask him to subdue you to himself, to forgive your sins. Ask him to rescue you from your own rebellion.

And as for you who have trusted in him, who have been subdued by him to take hold of him, give praise to him. Your King has saved you from what you deserve in your sin. Moreover, give thanks to him, for he rules over all that is, and he directs all things, at this present moment for the good of those that love him, who are the called according to his purpose, which, by his grace to you who have believed, includes you. What a great King we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #20

The Humiliation of Christ

Question 27: *Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?*

Answer: *Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.*

We have seen that our Redeemer is the eternal Son of God. We've seen that he took upon himself a true body and a reasonable soul at his incarnation. We've also seen that he serves as Prophet, Priest, and King, and this is to save his people. The next two Questions summarize his service to us. The Question before us speaks of his *humiliation*, and the next speaks of his *exaltation*.

But one word I want you to think about before we go further into this lesson is the word "humiliation." This word refers to being brought low. If someone humbles himself, he makes himself low in his own eyes, and in the eyes of others. So when we speak of Christ's humiliation, we're referring to Christ making himself low.

It's important to remember that as he humbled himself, he served as Prophet, Priest, and King. He did not become our Prophet, Priest, or King after his humiliation. Instead, he served as our Prophet, Priest, and King throughout his humiliation. Of course, he continues to serve in his threefold office, as we'll see. But remember that he served as Prophet, Priest, and King throughout the time of his humiliation. In the next lesson, we get to think about his exaltation, that is, his rising up in glory.

But now, let's look at Question #27 from the Catechism. Question: "Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?" And the Answer: "Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time."

We want to consider this in three ways. The first is Christ Voluntarily Humbled Himself; the second, is Christ Truly Humbled Himself; and the third, Christ Temporarily Humbled Himself.

So first then for our lesson, Christ Voluntarily Humbled Himself. The Bible shows us that Christ willingly, or voluntarily, humbled himself. He was not forced to humble himself against his will. Instead, we read and sing of his delighting to humble himself, when we take up Psalm 40, verses 7 and 8. These are Christ's words, and he says, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." Well, Hebrews 10, verses 5 through 7, quotes this Psalm, and it adds to this, in Hebrews 10, and verse

10, explaining this as the voluntary work of Christ.

Notice, “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” This helps us see that it was by his voluntary humiliation—“By the which will.” He willed to do it. He desired to do it. And because of his desire taking this up, it’s then that we who believe in him are saved. If Christ did not willingly suffer, his people would never have been saved. Paul tells us the same truth, in Philippians 2, and verse 7. Speaking of Christ, he says, “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” We’ll talk more about this, but for now, notice the beginning of this verse, “made himself.” He was not humbled by someone else, or some force outside of him. He was not in the strictest sense a victim to the desire of others. Instead, as the Bible teaches, he humbled himself. This tells us that Christ, our Savior, came willingly, and even that he came gladly. He entered upon the work to save his people because he delighted to do so. All that he endured, he endured willingly. And we see what he was willing to do in this next point coming up. This should strike us as truly amazing.

So the second thing, Christ Truly Humbled Himself. The Catechism emphasizes the steps of his humiliation, and each of these demonstrates the reality that Christ truly humbled himself. It’s not that he just pretended to do it. It’s not just that he said he would humble himself, or that others thought he did. But each step shows that he was truly brought low. You maybe ask why we should take any time to consider each of these steps. Well, there are many reasons, two of which we can at least note. The first is that by considering these steps, we better see and know the love of Christ, because we’re seeing the steps he took for us. The second is that we learn that Christ spared no aspect of our misery in saving us. He did not flinch from any of what our sin brought us to face. We can think of each of these steps as steps downward in his humiliation.

The first step of his humiliation is that he was born. Now, this is true of all humanity. Every one of us has been born. The only two humans who were not born were the first two—Adam and Eve. The greatest kings began as a child. The richest and most influential began in the same way. So why then is this a part of Christ’s humiliation? Well, it’s a part of his humiliation because it was the Son of God who was conceived and born as a human. This is part of what we considered in our earlier question, “How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?” Well, we should never forget this amazing truth. The eternal Son of God, who made all things, who upholds all things, who is worshipped together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, as the one true eternal God, he humbled himself to be born as a man.

That’s not all. The second step—his birth was in the low condition. Perhaps we would think that he, being the Son of God, should be born in a palace, or to a wealthy family. Of course, even this would be infinitely beneath what he, as the eternal Son of God, deserves. Yet it would somehow make a little bit more sense in our mind how to think of the circumstances of his birth as the Scriptures record them. His first bed was a manger, or a feeding trough for farm animals. He was born to a rather poor family. He did not have a privileged upbringing of wealth and outward comforts. He humbled himself, not only in being born, but being born in a low condition.

Well, the third step—he was born under the law. This is explicitly stated in Galatians 4, and verse 4. Paul writes, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” Now this is an amazing truth. The eternal Son of God who gave the law to men, that they would obey him, now became a subject to that law to obey it. When those who ought to have obeyed it rebelled against it, he himself became man to obey it in their place. Notice how Paul continues this thought, in Galatians 4, and verse 5, “To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” He humbled himself under the law to

obey the law so that his people would then be saved.

Well, the fourth step—he underwent the miseries of this life. When he entered the world, he did not hide from any trouble or avoid any misery. If he was to save his people who had fallen into an estate of sin and misery, he must enter that world. He did so in love. You see this as you read of his life as recorded throughout the Gospels. And notice this prophetic summary in Isaiah 53, verses 3 and 4: “He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” On one occasion, he spoke of part of that misery. He said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). He was sustained by the kindness and hospitality of others. His whole life was one of enduring misery. Why? In order to save his people, who had entered this misery by their sin. Think of this: they entered this misery by their sin; he entered this misery because of his love to them.

Well, the fifth step—he endured the wrath of God. The wrath of God is God’s just anger against those who sin. How could Christ, the Son of God, take up the wrath of God? He had never sinned. He had never done what was wrong. In fact, he had only done what was right. This is true, but in his humiliation, he became the substitute for his sinful people. Notice how Paul expresses this in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, and verse 21. It says, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Christ was charged, credited with the sins of his people. Moreover, he willingly accepted this exchange. This is why he suffered God’s wrath. The anguish he endured is beyond our ability fully to understand. You can see him in agony, bearing God’s wrath in Gethsemane. He sweat, in grief, as it were, blood. And you can see it most fully on the cross, his cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). The wrath of God was truly, and justly, and fully poured out upon him. And he, with knowledge, willingly took this upon himself. He humbled himself to endure this. And why?—so that his beloved people would be forgiven and accepted, so that they would be saved.

And the sixth step—he was made a curse. The Catechism says he endured “the cursed death of the cross.” Indeed, we’ve already seen something of this, but notice how Paul states it in Galatians 3, and verse 13: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.” Christ was nailed to the cross, not for sentimental or emotional lessons. Rather, he was nailed there as a curse. We sinned and deserve to be cursed ourselves, but Christ became a curse for his people. He took on himself the judgment of God against his people. This then is that Savior who willingly humbled himself. Were he not to have been made a curse, his people must face that curse of God forever.

Well, the seventh step—he was buried. This is an important part of his humiliation. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), which includes, not only temporal, and spiritual, but even eternal death. We ought not overlook the temporal, the bodily death. Christ truly died. His body was truly buried. He did not merely faint, or pass out. He did not enter into a coma. The Scriptures indicate that he truly died, and his burial is a testimony of that fact. In doing so, as some have said, he has sanctified the tomb for the believer. The grave is now, as it were, a resting place for the bodies of those who died in faith in Christ. This burial was part of the misery that we deserve. He entered that misery and took it upon himself. He did so that his believing people would need not fear the grave, for our Savior has been there. And as we will see, he has conquered the grave by his resurrection.

Well, the eighth step—he remained under death for a time. This is an amazing thought as well. The human body of the Lord and the giver of life remained lifeless for a season. This reminds us

that though some of his people have been buried for a very long time, they are not lost or forgotten. Just as he remained under the power of death, but ultimately conquered it in his resurrection, so his people, who remain under the power of death, will be raised by his power.

So before moving to our third point, notice that there is great benefit in meditating on each of these steps. And as you do, asking, “What does it mean? What did he do?” But also asking, “Why did he do it?” And you’ll find in that question of “Why” two things: because his people deserved to have misery by their sin; and the second is, because he would save his people from their misery by his grace.

Well, third, Christ Temporarily Humbled Himself. We don’t need to be long with this point. We get to think of it more fully in the next lesson when we take up his exaltation. But for now we want to make this simple clarification. Christ’s humiliation turned into his exaltation. He went as low as we saw, and indeed, in the brief time that we’ve considered it, we’ve only touched upon the depths of his agony and misery. However, his humiliation is not the end of the story. We get to learn more about this in the Question regarding his exaltation. But for now, simply notice this, as our Catechism says, “he remained under the power of death for a time.” He’s not dead still. He’s not any long under the power of death. He was brought under the power of death, but that’s not the end of the story. Rather, the story continues with his conquering death, as he conquered sin and Satan. His humiliation ended with his resurrection, when he arose from the dead in power and glory. And the one who humbled himself did so for a purpose to save his people. And he did save them, victoriously. His humiliation, we can think of it as a thing of the past, because he’s now exalted in heaven above, and what’s more is, he’s awaiting the full manifestation of that exaltation when he returns in glory.

So it’s right for us to read through the Bible and to consider these truths as we are in the Catechism, and to be struck by the wonder of such great love that would cause him willingly to endure such agony and misery in his humiliation. But we shouldn’t close the book where it is that he dies, or close the book where it is that he’s buried. Even as the Gospels cause us to see. If you read through the Gospels you’ll see this point. The end of this good news, as it were, is with the resurrection, and the testimony of his exaltation. And so, let us ever remember that he who humbled himself is now, and ever shall be, exalted.

Well, let me close with some points of application. First, thinking upon Christ’s humiliation provides us great comfort, because we’ve sinned, and we live in a world of misery. Your miseries may be many. They may be more than mine. They may be deeper than mine. But whatever the case, each of us has some experience of misery. Christ’s miseries were full. For the believer, this gives great comfort. Notice Hebrews 4, verses 14 through 16, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Because Christ faced the same miseries we do, we have a High Priest who knows our sorrows. Yet, because Christ overcame those temptations and miseries, he’s able to provide us help that by him, we may face them with hope and the assurance of ultimate victory by his grace.

Well, second, this also reminds us of the great love of Christ Jesus. What a great display of the love of Christ his humiliation is. He knew all the miseries he must face. He knew the shame, and the reproach that he would endure. He knew the misery he would experience, every aspect of it—every lash upon his back; every thorn upon his head; every word of reproach that pierced his

ear and, through it, his soul; the darkness of the clouds above him; the agony of the cross; even the turning away of his disciples; and ultimately, his being made a curse, his death on the cross, and his burial. And yet, he willingly entered upon each and every one of them with love to his people.

Well, third, let me challenge anyone who may not yet have trusted in Jesus Christ. Because when you consider what Christ endured, the shame, the misery, the agony, the wrath placed upon him in his humiliation, what you witness is what sinners deserve. It's true, Christ did not deserve any of this personally, but his people did, and he endured it because his people deserved that misery, that he would save them. If he had not suffered, they must suffer. So when you see the agony of Christ, you get a picture of what a sinner deserves. You get a picture of what hell is. This is what sinner's deserve. This is what you and I deserve because of our sins, and it is what everyone who refuses to trust in Christ will experience for all eternity upon their death. We see then the necessity of fleeing to Christ. He alone is our hope.

Well, fourth, let me encourage all who have trusted in Christ. Christ has gone before you. He has faced every misery in this world there is to face, and he then is able to sustain you when you face trials and afflictions. He is your great High Priest. He is on the throne of grace for you. Remember this. He who humbled himself is now exalted. We get to look at that more in the next lesson, but one thing we should say is this—if you have trusted in Christ, you will share in his exaltation, because he humbled himself for you. This world of misery is not your end. You have a world of glory to come, all because Christ humbled himself for us. Surely then, believer, here is cause for you and for me to praise our God for Christ Jesus, and to look to Christ, who humbled himself for us, in faith, knowing that he who has overcome is able to make us overcome, and to share with him in his glory by his grace as well.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #21

Christ's Exaltation

Question 28: *Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?*

Answer: *Christ's exaltation consisteth in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.*

In our last lesson, we looked at how Jesus humbled himself, and did so as our Prophet, Priest, and King. In this lesson, we consider how he was exalted unto glory. In his humiliation, the Son of God brought himself low, even to the point of death, and that, the cursed death of the cross. In his exaltation, the Son of God incarnate is raised up to the highest glory that there is. He is exalted. To be clear, as he is the Son of God, he is equal to the Father, and always is most glorious. However, here we consider him as he is the God-man, that is, the incarnate Son of God, and our appointed Mediator between God and man. It is as the incarnate Son of God that he is raised up to the highest honor, as we will see.

Well, our Question today is Question #28 from the *Shorter Catechism*. It asks, "Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?" And the Answer, "Christ's exaltation consisteth in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day." Well, you'll notice that the Question contains four parts in its answer, all of which touch on various stages of Christ's exaltation. It mentions his rising, his ascending, his sitting, and his coming. These refer to historical events. His rising again refers to what we call his resurrection. His ascending up into heaven is known as his ascension. His sitting at the right hand of the Father refers to what is known as his "session." And his coming to judge the world is his return, or his second advent. We will simply take those four in order as each of these display parts or stages of his exaltation. Well first then for our lesson, will be that Christ was exalted in his resurrection. Second will be that Christ was exalted in his ascension. Third, Christ was exalted in his session. And fourth, Christ will be exalted in his return.

So first then, for our lesson, Christ was exalted in his resurrection. When we understand what Christ accomplished by his death, we rightly focus on that part of his work. And the Bible emphasizes his death, and rightly so. If Christ had not died as a substitute, there would be no hope of forgiveness for anyone,—no salvation whatsoever. But Christ's death satisfied God's justice, and so his death is rightly a focus for our lives. However, Christ's resurrection is likewise important. If Christ remained dead, we would have no hope of everlasting life. And this is what Paul indicates

in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 17 through 19. He writes, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” Notice that if Christ only died, then the true victory and salvation would not fully have been realized. The more we study the Bible, the more we learn how important the resurrection is.

But what is the resurrection? The word “resurrection” simply means “to rise again”. The Bible is very clear. Christ did not rise again from sleep or a coma—he rose again from the dead. This is one of the features of the Scriptures, when talking about Christ’s death, it is very clear that he died—truly died. You have the witness of his shed blood, you have the witness of the Roman centurion, you have the witness of his disciples, all of which did indeed see him dead. Notice a simple expression, in 1 Peter 1, verse 3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” He rose again from the dead. Well, this is a miraculous truth. The word “miracle” is thrown around loosely today. But a miracle is that which goes beyond what is normal. Not only that, but it is something that cannot be done by natural ability, by natural strength, by natural law. It demands supernatural and divine intervention immediately so. Every morning, there are people who rise again from their beds, having slept, they’re awake. There are plenty of times when people have risen from a coma in a hospital. However, to rise from the dead, that is a miracle. It requires the supernatural power of God.

When we say that Christ rose again from the dead, we are affirming a Biblical truth, and an historical fact. We must emphasize this. The Gospels indicate that Christ’s resurrection is an historical truth. Each Gospel account give verifiable details. They’re not simply relating what was a sentimental desire or a wish of the disciples. They record and relate to us what actually took place in history. Paul emphasized this historical fact, in 1 Corinthians 15. Notice verses 3 through 8, he says to the Corinthians, “I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.” Paul does not merely say that these people believed that Christ arose. He asserts that they actually saw the risen Christ. The same Christ that died is the same Christ they saw after he had risen again. In his day, that is, Paul’s day, there were hundreds of eyewitnesses to this historical fact.

What does all of this mean? Well, it means many things. But one thing it does is it shows to us and to the world that Christ is who he claimed to be. He claimed to be the Son of God. He claimed to be the Messiah, the Savior that would die and rise again. And Paul picks up on this point, in Romans 1, verse 4. He writes that he was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” The word “declared” means “to be marked out.” In other words, the resurrection marks out Jesus, or shows Jesus to be the Son of God. To be clear, the resurrection did not make Jesus the Son of God. Rather, the resurrection is a part of evidence. It’s pointing to, it’s marking out that he is indeed who he claimed to be.

This is an important part of his exaltation. He endured the shame of the cross in his humiliation. He was ridiculed and mocked. Remember those words which are heavy to us, to think of the glorious Son of God incarnate suffering these words that men cast at him. Matthew 27, verses 39 through 43 record these: “And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying,

Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” Christ, in love, endured such ridicule. He’s given honor in his resurrection. His resurrection answers the challenges and the mockeries he endured. Think of those words, “If thou be the Son of God.” They’re saying it to Christ, they’re mocking him, “If you are the Son of God.” And you hear others say, “If he is the King of Israel.” Christ endured these mockeries. And his resurrection gives undeniable evidence and honor to him, that he is the Son of God, and that he is the King of Israel, the Savior of sinners. You see, his resurrection exalts him publically and lastingly.

But this is not the end of his glory. So second, Christ was exalted in his ascension. The Catechism reminds us of this historical fact—his “ascending up into heaven.” This means that he went up from the earth into heaven. Jesus prepared his disciples for this event throughout his earthly ministry. They didn’t fully understand it, as they didn’t understand his resurrection. You can read of his preparing them for this, in John’s Gospel, chapter 14 and chapter 15. After his resurrection, he spoke of his ascension again. He mentioned this to Mary, in John 20, and verse 17. He said, “I am not yet ascended unto my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” Well, this took place, as Luke indicates, in Acts, chapter 1, verse 3. He mentions that it took place forty days after his resurrection. Notice again the historical references. And he records this event as happening, in Acts 1, verses 9 through 11. He writes, “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

What an event that must have been, to see their Savior so mistreated by the creatures of this world, by the men, by the way, who he made and sustained! And now, to see him received up into heaven, in glory! Oh, how they must have been filled with wonder and hope, and to know, even as the angels shared with them, that he would return again! Oh, how encouraging this historical event was, to know that he entered victoriously into heaven, and gloriously unto that throne! What an encouragement and blessing! It’s no wonder that they who, prior to his resurrection and prior to his ascension were fearful; after his resurrection and after his ascension are bold. And they are they, who, as one said, turned the world upside-down with their fearless proclamation of Christ. Why?—well, God had given them grace, and he had done so in causing them to see and believe this Savior who had risen and ascended into heaven.

Well, we are no less privileged, because we have the record of this event in the Scriptures for our instruction and our encouragement. The ascension testifies to all that our Lord and Savior has conquered the world, and he stands victorious over it, and has been received in the heaven to reign. It’s true this world is full of misery, but our Lord has conquered it and reigns over it, and those who trust in him have every reason to live their lives with the assurance that this world will not conquer them, for their Savior reigns over it.

But what has Christ gone into heaven to do? Well, this brings us then to our third point. Christ was exalted in his session. The word “session” again refers to his being seated. The Bible tells us that Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father. Paul writes of this in Ephesians 1, and verse

20, when he speaks of God, who “raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” The right hand, in the Bible, as well as in various cultures, is the position of the highest honor. Now this should not surprise us, as Jesus is the Son of God incarnate. However, we should not miss the wonder of what is taking place. The one who was shamed by men is now honored by God. At the right hand of the Father, the highest position of honor and glory is the humanity—the flesh, blood, and human soul—of the Son of God. The one who was mocked and ridiculed, the one who was spat upon, and beaten, and crucified, is now, in his flesh, at the right hand of the Father. How can we say this more clearly? A human, albeit much more than a human, and yet truly a human is at the position of the highest honor over all. To be clear, he is both fully God and fully man, and yet let us not miss and overlook this truth, that it is the incarnate Son of God who is exalted to the right hand of the Father. It is as seated in that position, that he governs over all the earth. And it is he that makes intercession with the Father for his beloved people. He continues in his position of honor to serve as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his people. What a glorious encouragement this is to us.

And yet, there is more glory to our Savior. His sitting at the right hand of the Father is not all. In fact, notice the expectation of Hebrews 1, verse 13, “But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?” In other words, his session continues until a certain point. This brings us to the fourth part of our lesson. Christ will be exalted in his return, or what is known as his second advent. This but one further part of Christ’s exaltation. And it is a part of his exaltation that is yet to come. It refers to his glorious and bodily return to this world. The same body that suffered, died, and was buried is the same body that rose again, ascended, and is seated; and it is the same one that will come in glory again to this world. Christ mentioned this to his disciples before his death. Notice John 14, verses 2 and 3. It says, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Our exalted King has not left us or abandoned us. He will come again, and what blessedness to those who believe in him, he will receive them to himself.

But this is not the only thing that will happen when he returns. Notice the Catechism states that in coming, he will come to “judge the world at the last day.” This event is yet to come. His return will be the end of this current world as we know it. What a glorious day that will be unto Christ. Christ will be the single focus of every creature, every angel, every human. All that is will be focused on him and his glory. The one who has been ignored, and despised and reject, the object of so much hatred by sinners will now be seen as that glorious one who alone is glorious. He who was refused and ridiculed will stand as the Judge over all the earth. Every man, every woman, every child, all nations, all tribes, all tongues, all generations, every single individual will answer to this glorious King. Paul mentioned this in his sermon in Athens, Acts 17, verse 31. He said, “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

Now, this is a most sobering truth. It should grip us. It should direct our thoughts, and impact our lives. And indeed Christ calls us to consider this well. I encourage you, after this lesson, to sit down with your Bible and read through Matthew chapter 25, and you’ll see Christ’s exhorting of us, and his calling of us to consider these things. But notice in particular, verses 31 through 33 of that chapter. He says, “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and

he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.” All the world will be gathered before him. There will be a great separation marked by that day, those who did not trust in him, and those who did trust in him. To his people who trusted in him and served him in love, he will say, as verse 34 of Matthew 25 indicates: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” But to those who did not trust in him, he will say, as verse 41 indicates, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” The horror then, to summarize in verse 46, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” What a day, that will be!

Realize this, you and I will be there at that day. You and I, with our eyes, will see him. You and I, with our ears, will hear his voice. And so, you and I must prepare for it. Our Savior shall come again. Paul gives us encouragement for believers, Philippians 3, verses 20 and 21: “For our conversation”—that is, our life and conduct—“is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” You see, the believer does not need to cower in fear for that day, but with longing expectation, looks for that glorious day to come.

Let me close with just two points of application. First, it may be that you are a member of a church. It may be that you consider these things to be true. And it may be indeed that you acknowledge them to be true, and share them to be true to others. However, it may be that you do not trust in the Savior. If that’s the case, let me both warn and encourage you. The glorious King will come again to judge with vengeance all those who refused to embrace him. If you are one who does not embrace him by faith, on that day he will have no mercy. On that day he will not spare. The Bible tells us that on that day, the men of this world will look, and then they’ll look to the mountains and cry out that they would fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. That day will not be a day of mercy, but of judgment. That should sober you. Because if you’re not trusting in him right now, that day will come upon you with a fierce wrath against you for your sins. And yet, there is encouragement for you. The King of heaven and earth has ordered your life right now that you should hear this warning and consider that day before it comes to pass. Is this not a merciful display from so great and honorable a King? Is it not a way he’s calling you to repent, that this would be the day of mercy for you?

Well, second, it may be that you are one who’s trusting in the Lord. And I may not know all of your trials and difficulties, but I do know this—your Savior, who lives, your Savior has entered heaven and is seated in glory over all, and your Savior will come again for you. My dear believer, you have hope. It is in Christ who has conquered the world, is reigning over all, and will come again for you.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #22

Redemption Applied

Question 29: *How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?*

Answer: *We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit.*

Question 30: *How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?*

Answer: *The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.*

In our last lesson, we closed with a summary of Christ's work as the Redeemer. As Prophet, Priest, and King, Christ humbled himself to save his people, and he was exalted in glory. And we long for that day yet to come when he will return in that glory. Well, truly, his work is amazing. It should fill us with wonder, and it should cause us to order our lives in light of his work. It should be much in our minds and our meditation.

However, there should be a question that comes up in one way or another—how does his work benefit us? How is it that what he's done should then be brought unto us for our good? Well, for instance, we might think of what it is that we're hungry. We sense our need for food. And yet merely knowing that there is food is not what satisfies our hunger. It's not what gives us nourishment. But nourishing food must be brought unto us, and must be made one, as it were, with our body. As we eat it, and our body digests it, we get strengthened by it. Merely knowing that there is food is not what satisfies or benefits us. We have to take some unto ourselves.

Well, merely knowing about Christ's work, as good as that work is, and as glorious a thing as that is, is not what benefits us. So there's a similarity between food and our nourishment, and Christ and our salvation. Merely knowing about his work is not all that's needed. Rather, if ever we are to be helped by Christ's work, what he's done must be applied onto us. The next four Questions of the Catechism, that is, Questions #29 through #32, introduced this and explained the way it happens. In our lesson today, we'll look at two Questions, #29 and #30. And these introduce the way in which Christ and his salvation is applied onto his people.

Question #29 asks, "How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?" The Answer, "We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit." And Question #30, "How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?" The Answer, "The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ

by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.”

Well, notice a couple of words. First, “partakers”—to be a partaker is to be one who shares in something, to have a part in something. If we are partakers of a meal, we share in the food that’s before us.

Second, notice the word “effectual.” This word means that something takes effect, that is, it works, it accomplishes its purpose. For instance, a fire is an effectual way of cooking food. It’s effectual because it accomplishes the purpose of cooking. You’ll notice that the word comes up in both Questions before us: the effectual application, and effectual calling. In this lesson, we’ll look more at the effectual application of Christ’s redemption, and we’ll look next lesson more particularly at the work of the Spirit known as effectual calling.

So let’s look at two points for our lesson today. First, Christ’s purchased redemption; and Second, the Spirit’s gracious application.

So first, Christ’s purchased redemption. We’ve already looked at Christ’s work in previous lessons, and oh, that we would continue to consider it, not only for the short time of these lessons, but all of our life. But you’ll notice that these Questions before us are referring to that work again. And so, though we’ve concluded the summary of his work, yet his work is never taken away, as it were, from the important focus of our lives, and for the benefit of our salvation. So the Questions before us refer to the redemption purchased by Christ. Remember that the word “redeem” refers to gaining something by way of purchase. Christ’s redemption refers to his work of purchasing his people and their salvation by his sacrificial death.

This reminds of the work of Christ in atoning for the sins of his people. He made payment for them. And praise God, this will bring to pass the redemption of his people. He did not die in vain. You’ll likely know how Isaiah 53 holds forth Christ’s death. In Isaiah 53, we have an encouraging testimony. We read there that “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (verse 11). In other words, Christ’s death will bring forth its purpose. He did not die for the possibility of redeeming a people. He died for the certainty of redeeming his people. This is a glorious truth. Christ’s atonement certainly secures the salvation for those for whom he died.

It is mirrored in his prayer recorded in John 17. Notice verses 6 and 9, Jesus prayed to the Father, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.” And verse 9, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.” Well, likewise, Christ laid down his life for his sheep. He laid down his life for those given to him, and to the glory of his name, not one drop of his blood, not one part of his suffering was in vain. He has secured the salvation of each of his chosen people. As Isaiah 53 says, “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.” He will not be disappointed on the last day, because he will see the effect of his work.

Well, although the price has been paid, the price which guarantees the salvation of his people, his people are still brought into this world as sinners. They have a portion of their lives dedicated to rebellion and sin, and were God to leave them in their sin, they would only continue in that state. In other words, they exist for a season apart from that salvation that Christ has purchased for them. Paul mentions this in Ephesians 2, and verse 1. Writing to the Ephesian Christians, he says, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” Before they are given life, before they share in the salvation that Christ purchased for them, they were dead. Paul says this is true of everyone. Those for whom Christ gave his life must be given life, they must be given that salvation

which has been purchased for them by Christ.

And so we see the redemption Christ has purchased is a completed thing, a perfect thing, and it will not go without being applied. But it must be applied. And this is what brings us to the next point of our lesson, the Spirit gracious application.

We remember that God is one God. We also remember that there are three persons in the Godhead. You'll remember the answer to that Question, "How many persons are there in the Godhead?" "There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." And the Catechism now directs us to the work of the third person of the blessed and holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. And so, it's the Spirit that applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ. Notice the answer to the Question before us, Question #29, "We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit."

Well, this helpfully summarizes the Bible's teaching, and it reminds us that it is the Holy Spirit who applies the redemption of Christ to his people. In other words, it is the Spirit who takes the salvation purchased by Christ, and gives it effectually to his beloved people. Because of this, we are able to say that salvation was planned by God, accomplished by God, and is applied by God. To be more specific, as others have said, Salvation was planned by God the Father, accomplished by God the Son, and is applied by God the Spirit. Every part of salvation is of divine work. This is why the Psalms, the book of praise that God has given, is so full of praise to God, who is only the Savior. There is no other savior, nor do we contribute to our salvation. But God is the one who has planned it, has accomplished it, and applies it.

Well, Titus 3, verses 4 through 6, gives us a helpful summary of great point. Paul writes there, "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." The love of God that was prepared appeared. Jesus Christ our Savior suffered and died. But how is this applied to his people? Paul says it is "not by the works of righteousness that we have done." This tells us that we are not the ones who qualify ourselves, or apply it to ourselves. Rather, as Paul wrote that it is "according to his mercy," "by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." In other words, the Holy Spirit applies this salvation to his people.

Well, "to apply" something means to put something on, or put something in. For example, if you have a cut, your parent, or perhaps a nurse or doctor may place medicine on that cut. We would say, a doctor applies medicine to the cut or wound. He's taking the medicine—what heals our wound—and he places it on our wound. He's applying it. Now notice what the Spirit applies. The Spirit applies the redemption purchased by Christ. The Spirit takes the work of Christ, and gives that work, and applies it to his people. And in doing so, the salvation planned, and purchased, is then applied. We can build on this illustration perhaps. Sin is the problem. It's the spiritual disease, and death, and curse, and guilt, and misery and so on. That's our problem. Christ's work is the remedy. It's the answer to the whole problem. We've seen this in previous lessons. Every aspect of our sin and misery is answer for and remedied by and in Christ. Christ's work is that remedy.

Well, it's the Spirit who takes Christ and that remedy and applies it to his people, that they are made whole, that is, that they are saved. When the Spirit applies Christ's redemption to us, what happens? There's a lot to say about this, and we'll talk about that in coming lessons in more detail. But our Catechism here helps focus our attention on the main effect of his grace. Notice

the words in the Answer to Question #30: “The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.” When the Spirit applies Christ’s redemption to a sinner, he produces faith in that sinner. We’ll look at this process more fully in the next lesson, but let’s consider this main point. The way that the Spirit applies Christ’s redemption to a sinner is by giving that sinner faith, and by that faith, uniting him to Christ. In a future lesson, we’ll look at Question #86. It asks, “What is faith in Jesus Christ?” And it answers, “Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is [freely] offered to us in the gospel.”

Now don’t worry, we’ll give that Question the full attention it deserves. But for now, simply note that saving faith is receiving and resting upon Christ alone for salvation. It’s not simply knowing that Christ is the Savior, nor is it simply knowing that he would save us if we trusted in him. It is actually embracing him, relying upon him, or as the Catechism says there, “receiving and resting upon him alone.” Now that isn’t something that is in our power. It’s not something we can do of ourselves. It’s what the Spirit works within us. It’s the gift of God. He, God, gives us faith. This is why Paul can write, in Ephesians 2, and verse 8, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Notice, the salvation is the gift, and the faith is the gift of God. We do not earn this faith. We do not work it up within ourselves. We don’t somehow merit faith. We don’t do something in order to qualify for obtaining faith. Faith is the gift of God, sovereignly given, and it is the Spirit of God who gives that gift to God’s chosen people.

John reminds of this in his Gospel, in chapter 1, verses 12 through 13. We read there, “but as many as received him”—speaking of Jesus Christ—“to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” How is it that they received Christ? How is it that they believed on his name? It’s not because of their noble birth, it’s not because of their natural giftedness, it’s not because of their superior work. It’s because they were born of God. God—more particularly, God the Holy Spirit—gave them new life, and in doing so, gave them faith. This is what Christ speaks of, in John 3, to Nicodemus, when he says, in verse 3 and verse 5, “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

It’s the Spirit that gives the dead sinner life. And in doing so, the dead sinner now has the ability to see and enter into the kingdom of God. This is done by grace. Just as a dead body can do nothing physical of his own ability and power and will, so a dead sinner can do nothing spiritually of his own power, and desire, and will. Instead, first, the Spirit must give him life, and in doing so, give him faith, that he then may embrace Jesus Christ and receive him as his Savior.

Notice what faith does. The Catechism says that one effect of this gift of saving faith, is that he is then united to Christ. This doesn’t mean that we become Christ. We remain ourselves, and Christ remains himself. However, what the Spirit does, in uniting us to Christ by faith, is he makes us to receive salvation, his benefits. We see an image of this in John 15. Notice verse 5. Christ is speaking, he says, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” Just as branches are supported by and given life by the vine, so are believers supported by and given life by Christ. Well, the Spirit takes us and, as it were, places us in Christ, and he does so by giving us faith. Faith trusts in and lays hold of Christ. And as soon as the Spirit gives us that gift, the life, the blessings, the benefits, the salvation of Christ are then shared with us, because we now have Christ.

Think of it this way, as a different illustration. If you have an electrical light, it does not shine until it is plugged into the source of electrical power. It must be plugged in. It must be connected to the source, and thus, receive that electricity. And when the power and electricity flows into it, then it shines. Well, the same is true for the sinner. Until he is joined to Christ, he has no life. It's the Spirit who makes then the sinner to have life by giving faith to that sinner, so that he is joined to Christ, and made to enjoy and share in all of that salvation which Christ has purchased for him.

We get to look more at this in detail in the next lesson, but for now, simply remember this point—it is the Spirit who gives the sinner faith, in order that he may have that salvation that is found in Christ alone. And so we see again that salvation is a divine work.

Well, as we close, it's good for us to make sure we connect this truth to ourselves. So first, let us remind ourselves regularly that salvation, in all of its parts, is the work of God. There never has been and there never will be a sinner who saves himself. There never has been and there never will be a sinner who contributes to his salvation, or qualifies himself for his salvation. And to make this point more directly, you will not qualify yourself for salvation. You will not do anything that will make yourself saved. If you are saved, it is because God has saved you. If you aren't saved, and by God's grace you will be saved, it is only by the work of God. It is God and God only who saves.

This means then that all the praise for salvation goes to God and to him alone. This is why there's no one in heaven who will ever say, "Well I'm here because of what I've done. I'm here because I did better than others. When we get little glimpses of what takes place in heaven, all of the focus, all of the thanks, all of the praise is fixed on God and God alone. This makes sense. It's his plan, it's his accomplishment, and it's his application. God is the one who saves. Well if this is so, let us never look to ourselves for the hope of salvation. All hope of salvation is only in God.

Well, second, take notice of this Biblical truth—it is not enough to know that Jesus died and rose again. It's not enough to know and admit that you're a sinner, and that Jesus Christ is the Savior. It's not enough to realize that every other religion is false and that only Christianity is true. It's not enough to know that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Well, all of this is true, and all of it is good in its own way, yet more is needed. If you are to be saved, you must be united to Christ. His salvation must be applied to you. Notice that language. It's not that you apply that salvation to yourself—it must be applied to you. The Spirit of God must graciously apply it to you. This is what the Spirit does when he gives faith to a sinner. He unites the sinner to Christ by grace through faith.

So let me ask you, are you looking to Christ by faith? Not only do you acknowledge and admit that he is the Savior, but have you received and rested upon him alone for salvation? If you are, this is because the Holy Spirit has given you faith. This is because God himself has sovereignly and graciously applied to you this salvation. He has given you life. He has saved you. It's not something that you worked up. It's not something that you are just better than others in. It's because God supernaturally, graciously saved you. What a privilege. Whatever else your circumstances are in this life, know this, that God has saved you, which is reason to thank and praise him now and forever.

Perhaps you must say, "Well, I know that Christ is the Savior, and I know that there's no other Savior than Jesus. But I must say, I'm not trusting in him." Well that is a sad state. Indeed, it is a terrible state. You may be tempted in many ways, maybe panicked, and tempted to despair and say, "There's no hope. My sins are too great." You may be tempted to make yourself busy, and simply work harder. But let me direct you to your only hope. It's not in anything you do. It's in God alone. It's not in your tears, though your tears are justified. It's not in your crying though your crying is right. What else should we do if we've sinned against God and we find ourselves condemned?

It's not in your work and diligence, though we should be diligent, and reading God's Word, and attending church, and hearing the gospel preached. But none of that is your hope. Your only hope is God, the God against whom you've sinned. And here we have a reminder that the God against whom we've sinned is gracious.

And so, as you come face to face with your state, look to God, and cry out to him that he would be merciful. Cry out to him that he would do what you cannot do, what you never will be able to do. Your case is not beyond the Spirit's power. He is able to give you faith. He is able to draw you to Christ. Yes, confess your sins, and in doing so, cry out to God to have mercy upon you, to lead you to trust upon Christ. Despair of your own works, and cry out to God that he would, in his grace, give you faith, that with that faith, you would embrace Christ and know his salvation applied to you, to the glory and praise of the name of God now and always.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #23

Effectual Calling

Question 31: *What is effectual calling?*

Answer: *Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.*

Question 32: *What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?*

Answer: *They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them.*

Our previous lesson introduced us to the Biblical truth of God's Spirit applying the saving work of Christ to sinners. In this lesson, we get to continue our study with the help of two other Questions from our Catechism. In these Questions, we focus on the important Biblical teaching of effectual calling. This truth also introduces us to the beautiful display of grace in all the blessings of salvation that come to us through Christ. It prepares us to deal with the glorious truths of justification, of adoption, and sanctification, all of which are following in the coming lessons. Today we look at Questions #31 and #32 from the *Shorter Catechism*. So we'll consider these Questions now and make sure that we understand a few key terms, before we go into the main part of our lesson.

Question #31 asks, "What is effectual calling?" The Answer, "Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel." The second Question for our lesson is Question #32. This Question asks, "What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?" The Answer, "They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them."

Well, several of these words have already been discussed in previous lessons. One key word that appears here is the word "effectual" and, as an adverb, "effectually." Remember that this word means that something takes effect—that is, it works—it accomplishes its purpose. If we we're

thirsty, we'd drink water, and this is because water effectually satisfies our thirst.

Another word to notice in the answer to Question #31 is the word "persuade." To persuade someone is to convince them of your argument, your position, or your point. Your argument may be very true, and right, and good, and sound, but it may not persuade the person. It only persuades the person when they come to embrace your argument. Well, here it's the Spirit that persuades sinners to embrace Jesus Christ.

And a related word is "enable." This word means to provide someone the ability to do something. For instance, I may persuade someone that he should learn to read, however, he must be enabled, that is, given the ability to read, before he actually does.

Well, let's move into the main part of our lesson. In this lesson, we'll look at two main points. First, the gospel offered; and second, the effectual call.

Well, first then, the gospel offered. Pay attention to what is mentioned at the end of our first Question. It says, "Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel." Well, the word "gospel" is an important word. The word itself means "good news." But notice the Catechism says, "*the* good news." It's referring to a particular message that's good. Of course, this is that ultimate message of good news—the good news of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, all of which announce to us Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners. In Luke 2, an angel brought good tidings, that is, good news, a good message of great joy for all people. Well, what was it? Well notice Luke 2, verse 11: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." This is the good news. Jesus Christ is the Savior. Now let's look at three parts of this gospel offered. First, what is offered; second, to whom it is offered; and third, how it is offered.

Well, first then, what is offered in the gospel offer? Our Catechism simply says "Jesus Christ," and that's a good statement. Because the gospel, the good news, is about Jesus Christ. He's the Savior of sinners. You can see this in Romans 10, verses 13 through 17. Notice two things in the passage as it's read. First, notice the good news that saves; and second, notice how this good news is made known. Here's the passage: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Well, what is the good news that saves?—it is, as Paul says, "the gospel of peace," which tells them that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." This is the good news! The Savior has come and done everything that's needed, and he is held forth to the world, and all who believe on him are saved. How is this good news made known?—it's made known by preachers who preach the gospel, as Paul writes, who report, as he says, what the Lord has given them to preach. So preachers are those who carry forth the good news of Jesus Christ for sinners. They proclaim him, they announce him, they offer him, they hold him forth. This is the good news. Jesus Christ is the Savior for sinners. It's the person of Christ who is the Savior of sinners, and it's Jesus who is offered to sinners. The offer is this: Take Jesus Christ the Savior, and you shall be saved.

Second then, to whom is Jesus Christ offered?—our Catechism indicates simply, "to us in the gospel." This, of course, borrows from what we just said. It reminds us that the thing God uses to make people know about Jesus Christ is this message. In Mark 16, verse 15, Christ instructed his

disciples. He said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” To whom is the gospel preached?—to everyone everywhere! Go into all the world, and preach to every creature, what?—the gospel!

Well, in an earlier lesson, we learned that God has chosen a people, a specific people, whom he most certainly will save. These are known as “the elect” or “the chosen.” However, notice that Christ does not say that his minister should only preach the gospel to the elect. Rather, his ministers are to preach the gospel to everyone, to hold forth Christ to every man, every woman, every child. And what is it they were to preach?—the good news of Jesus Christ. They were to announce the good news that there is a Savior for sinners. He has done all that is needed to be saved. They were to proclaim the good news that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Well notice, though the ministers were to do that—apostles, and today preachers of course—it is ultimately God who is calling everyone to look to him. This is specifically noted in Isaiah 45, and verse 22. It’s God who says, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” He doesn’t just say, “Look to me, those of you who are my chosen,” but “all the ends of the earth, look to me. I am the only God, and I am the only Savior.” Notice as well Christ’s words, in Matthew 11, and verse 28, he says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Ultimately, it’s God who holds Christ forth to sinners throughout the world, and says, “He is held forth to you that you might be saved by him.”

Notice, the apostles never say that you must believe that Jesus first died for you specifically, and paid for your sins specifically. That can create all sorts of curiosity. How do I know that he died for me, if he died only for the elect. Instead, God, and his appointed ministers, direct sinners to the Savior, that is, the person of the Savior himself. They call, they invite, and they command sinners to receive Christ Jesus, to believe upon him. Because it’s Christ who is offered to sinners. And it’s as a sinner trusts Christ to save him that they are then assured that all that he’s done has been done for that person. And so it’s first come to Christ, because Christ has been held forth. And so the gospel goes to all men, holding forth Christ to them as the Savior.

Well thirdly then, for this main point, How is Jesus Christ offered? Notice that one word—“freely.” God does not say to sinners, “First, make yourself worthy. First, clean up your life. First, make yourself accepted and acceptable.” No, instead, we’re reminded, as Paul says, in 1 Timothy 1, and verse 15, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” In Mark 2, and verse 17, Jesus himself said, “They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Christ calls us freely. We don’t come with works in our hand to bargain with God. We don’t, as were, come to him to say, “This is what I’ll do if you do this for me.” We come to Christ, who is freely held forth to us. He’s offered to us freely.

Well now, let’s look at our second main point for our lesson, the effectual call. We could think of the gospel offer as that *general call* that goes forth to everyone who hears it. But now we look at the *effectual call*. We’ve already noted this, and it’s good for us to remember that “effectual” means something that accomplishes its intended purpose. The effectual call is that work of the Spirit of God that actually converts sinners, that actually brings them to Christ. Many are called to Christ by the preaching of the gospel, but only the elect, the chosen ones, are effectually called. In this point, we want to look at three clarifying truths. First, *the worker* of effectual calling; second, *the work* of effectual calling; and third, *the effect* of effectual calling.

Well, first, *the worker* of effectual calling. This is a simple truth, but it’s very important. The one who does the work of effectual calling is the Holy Spirit. The difference between those who

hear the gospel and refuse it, and those who hear the gospel and embrace it, has everything to do with the Holy Spirit's gracious work. It's true that both the one who refuses and the one who receives it hear the same gospel offer. But what's different is that the one who receives it, receives it because the Spirit has worked within them, giving them life to embrace what is offered to them.

When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, in John 3, he spoke of the need for the new birth. He said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (verse 3). This, of course, puzzled Nicodemus, and he was confused. And so Christ went on to say, in verses 5 through 8, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

When you see the effect of the wind in the trees, the wind blows, and some leaves shake and other don't, you see the effect of the wind. You don't actually see the wind. The wind is blowing, and you see what it does. Well, the same is true in the effectual call. You don't see the Spirit, but you see what the Spirit does. And what is it the Spirit does?—he gives life, so that a sinner comes and embraces Christ. So the effectual is the Spirit's work to bring one unto the Lord Jesus. It's the Spirit who does it. And this is not based on something that's foreseen in the person he calls. It's simply and solely by the Lord's grace.

Well, second to this point, the *work* of effectual calling. It's the Spirit who works, but what is it the Spirit does when he calls a sinner effectually? The Catechism summarizes this in the following words. We read in the Catechism, "*convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ.*" Well, we can break this part into three main ideas.

First, in effectual calling, the Holy Spirit convinces the sinner of his sin and misery. That is, he makes the sinner understand, not only what sin is, but that he has sinned, and his sins are wicked in the sight of God. The effect of this is illustrated in David's confession recorded in Psalm 51, verses 3 and 4. David says, "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." He not only realizes what sin is, he is brought to see that he is guilty and condemned. Remember the parable that Christ tells of the Pharisee and the publican, a tax collector, in the temple. And it's the tax collector who says, not able to lift up his eyes to heaven, as he smote his chest, he said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). He had been brought to see his own sin and misery.

Well second, in effectual calling, the Spirit enlightens the sinner's mind in the knowledge of Christ. This certainly means that the Spirit teaches the sinner about Christ. The sinner must know that Jesus is the Son of God, that he's fully God, fully man, that he was crucified, that he rose from the dead, and all of these things. But with this teaching, the sinner is made to see that this is the Savior he needs. He's brought to see clearly that it's not just a bunch of facts and doctrines, but this person is the one that I need.

Well third, in effectual calling, the Spirit renews the sinner's will, so that he is persuaded and enabled to embrace Jesus Christ by faith. To "renew" means to make something new. The sinner has a will, but it's dead and defiled, it's corrupt. It never chooses what is pleasing to God, because it is bound to choose what is sinful, because it's sinful itself. The will is that activity of our soul, whereby we choose things. We want things, and so we pursue it. Well, a sinner chooses many

things, but the problem is he never chooses what is pleasing to God. This is because he's dead in his sin. Because of this, he will never choose Christ. Though the truth is held forth to him, though it's clearly articulated, though it's explained over, and over, and over again, if he's left to himself, he'll never embrace the truth. But, praise God, what we can't do, God does. The Spirit of God gives life to the sinner. The Spirit gives life to his soul, so that he is persuaded and enabled to take hold of Christ who is offered to him. The Spirit is not the one who believes. The Spirit enlivens the soul of the sinner so that he is able to believe and embrace Jesus Christ.

Well, this brings us to our third point here, *the effect* of effectual calling. What happens when one is effectually called? We've already mentioned this, but when a sinner is effectually called, he or she embraces Jesus Christ by faith. He doesn't just say, "This is true, I get it, I understand. Yep, that's orthodox. That's right. I understand that these things are Biblical." Instead, when one is effectually called, he is brought to trust Jesus Christ. This was mentioned earlier, in the Answer to Question #30, when it's stated that the Spirit works faith in us, and thereby unites us to Christ in our effectual calling. In our Question in this lesson, it says that the Spirit "doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel." The main idea is that the Spirit draws us and unites us to Christ. By his grace, he gives us faith. And by faith, we are united to Christ. This means that all that he is, is now for us. Once a person is united to Christ, there are a number of blessings which come to him.

Question #32 identifies these as "justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them." Well, we get to look at these in more detail in the next several lessons. And I hope that, in some sense, you are already familiar, at least with the terms. But just in case you aren't, here's a basic meaning of some of these blessings:

"Justification" refers to that gracious act of God whereby he pardons a sinner and receives him as righteous because of the righteousness of Christ given to him.

"Adoption" refers to that gracious act of God, whereby he receives one into his family, and gives that one all the privileges that belong to his household.

"Sanctification" refers to that gracious work of God, whereby he purifies his people unto increasing holiness, so that they resemble him more and more in this life, all of their days.

Well, we'll look at all of these in greater depth in coming lessons, but simply for now, note this—that each of these is one aspect of the salvation which is given to us in Christ. Additionally notice that as they are in Christ, there is no enjoyment of any of these privileges, so long as we are apart from Christ. And so, when God works within us by his Spirit to give us faith that we embrace Jesus Christ, he gives us all of the treasury of salvation in Christ Jesus. So that, if we have Christ, by grace, through faith, we have all that is found in salvation.

Well, we must close. But as we do, notice how good it is that God comes to us and offers us the good news of Christ. We are most unworthy of so great a privilege. We've sinned against God. And oh, what wickedness it would be for us to refuse so kind and generous an offer. See how kind God is to come to us and hold forth Christ the Savior to us, we who have sinned. Well, let me saying it more clearly. God offers to you salvation. He calls you to embrace his Son. He holds forth Christ, and everlasting life, and all salvation to you. And he says, "Take Christ." To be clear, let us see how desperately we need the Spirit to work within us. Without the Spirit's work, we shall never embrace Christ. We will refuse him. Oh, the foolishness of sin! Such is our wicked and sinful nature. Well, this should lead us to cry out to God for mercy. Remember that publican we mentioned earlier. He stood there in the temple courtyard with his eyes down and his chest being pounded by his own fist. And he cried out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." So it is that we cry

out to God, “Be merciful and save us.”

Finally, if you have trusted in Christ, here is a fresh reminder to thank him. You did not trust Christ because you were better than others, because you were smarter than others. You trusted Christ because God sovereignly was gracious to you. The Holy Spirit convinced you of your sin and misery. He enlightened you in the knowledge of Christ, and he renewed your will, persuading and enabling you to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to you in the gospel. It is God’s grace that has worked in your life. Never stop praising him.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #24

Justification

Question 33: *What is justification?*

Answer: *Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.*

Today we get to look at one of the great blessings of salvation. We looked last lesson at how it is when we're united to Christ by grace through faith, that all of these benefits of salvation come to us. Today we look particularly at justification. This is one of those blessings that come to us in Christ Jesus. As we learn more about God and his Word, as well as more about ourselves, there's an important question that starts to develop. We learn that God is holy, he's righteous, he's good, he's perfect, and all that he does is good. And though we've learned that we were made in God's image, we also learned that we've turned from God. And the more we think about this, the more we see ourselves as guilty and corrupt. We realize we deserve punishment. We realize that God is holy, but we are not. And this starts to cause a question to come up, "How shall I, a sinner, ever be accepted with God? How can I, as one who has sinned, ever have peace with God?" Well, of all questions we can ask, this is among the most important in our life. To make a mistake about this is to ensure that our souls are lost forever. However, to enjoy the truth of justification by grace through faith, is to enjoy one of the greatest privileges ever given to men.

So let's look at our Question today, which is Question #33 of the *Shorter Catechism*. It asks, "What is justification?—Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." Now, two words are very important to emphasize.

The first word is "justification." This is a Biblical word, it's a Biblical doctrine. The word itself means something that is determined righteous. It is related to the word "justify," which means "to declare righteous." "Righteous" of course, meaning "right," or in accordance to what is right. So the word "justify" does not mean "make righteous," or change something into being, as it were, righteous within themselves. To justify is simply to declare or affirm what something is. Think of it this way—in a criminal trial, the judge and jury do not make a defendant innocent or guilty. They look at the evidence presented, and the evidence shows that the defendant is either innocent or guilty. If the evidence shows that the defendant committed a crime, the judge and jury find the defendant guilty. If the evidence shows that the defendant did not commit a crime, they find and declare the defendant innocent. This is what justification refers to. It is the declaration of God

regarding a sinner who trusts in Christ.

The second word is “imputed.” This word means “credited,” or “accounted,” or “reckoned.” If I reckon or credit something to you, I give you something that is not your own. But once it is given, credited to you, you are now treated as if it is yours. Well, in our Question, it is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. It’s not our personal righteousness. It’s not the righteousness that God produces within us. Rather, it’s that righteousness belonging to Christ that is considered reckoned or imputed to us. It’s credited to us, so his righteousness is now ours.

Well, for the rest of the lesson, let’s look at three main points. First, the Parts of Justification; second, the Basis of Justification; and third, the Act of Justification.

So first, the Parts of Justification. If you think of a bicycle, you think of something that one rides. It has two wheels, handlebars, peddles that your feet move. There are different parts that make up the one bicycle, and they’re all necessary for that bicycle to function as it should. Well, we could think, in some sense, of justification as having different parts to it. They’re both related, they’re intimately related to one another, but there is a distinction between them. It’s a single act, justification is, as we’ll see. However, that one act has two main parts to it. When one is justified, two related things happen. The first of these is that the sinner is fully pardoned of all sin. The second of these is that the sinner is accepted as perfectly righteous. So let’s look at each of these a bit.

The first part, the sinner is fully pardoned. The Catechism teaches that in justification, God “pardoneth all our sins.” Well, this word “pardon” means “to forgive.” The guilt is removed. Remember, sin demands God’s judgment. It demands punishment. If ever we are to have peace with God, we must have our sins forgiven, because sins demand God’s justice to be executed against us. Well, we cannot earn our forgiveness. We can’t work off our sin. We can’t erase it ourselves. It’s God, the righteous Judge, who must forgive. Praise God that his Word tells us that this is what he does for the one who trusts in Christ. Even God himself says, in Isaiah 43, and verse 25, “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” To blot out something is to mark it off, and to say “no more.” Even God says, “I will not remember your sins.” This is what David rejoices in, in Psalm 32, verse 1, when he wrote, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” This is one part of justification.

But there’s another part that is equally good. The sinner is accepted as perfectly righteous. So in other words, the sinner isn’t just brought to a neutral state before God, as it were, innocent of crime. But in addition, when a sinner is justified, God actually credits that one, and accepts that one as perfectly righteous. Not only has he been forgiven for what he’s done against God’s law, he’s now received and accepted as one who has kept God’s law. What this means, of course, is, as the Catechism says, “God accepteth us as righteous in his sight.” He looks upon us as righteous. When one is justified, they are declared righteous in God’s sight. In our second main point, we’ll look at how God does this. But for now, simply note that this is what God does when he justifies a sinner.

Paul gives us some insight when he writes in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21: “For he”—speaking of God—“hath made him”—speaking of Christ—“to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” God made Christ to bear our sins, though he was innocent. He made us to receive Christ’s righteousness, though we were guilty. Well, the point for us right now is to see that when a sinner is justified, he is accepted as righteous in God’s sight.

Now let’s look at the second main point, the Basis for Justification. We just learned that justification is that act of God whereby he both pardons and declares righteous a sinner. But what is the basis for that? On what grounds is God able to say that one is now declared righteous? When

we use the word “basis,” we’re talking about the foundation of something. When we talk about the basis of justification, we’re talking about what God looks at, the basis of how it is God is able to declare a sinner righteous.

So what is it that he looks at? Does he look at the sinner’s tears? Does he look at the sinner’s love? Does he look at the sinner’s church attendance? or Bible reading? Does he look at the sinner’s earnestness? Does he look at the sinner’s obedience? The answer to each of these is “No.” Instead, the Bible teaches that God looks at the righteousness of Christ that is given or credited to that sinner. That’s the basis. That’s the foundation. That’s what God points at and says, “Because of this, I declare you righteous.” You’ll remember 2 Corinthians 5:21—“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” This verse refers to a double exchange. Our sins were given to Christ. And Christ’s righteousness is given to the believer.

Well, understand this. Christ did not personally sin. That’s not why he was condemned. That’s not why he died on the cross. He wasn’t one who personally engaged in sin. Instead, he had our sins imputed to him. And because of that, he was condemned. Well, so it is with the believer. The believer is not declared righteous because of something good in himself, or something good that he has done or will do. Instead, the believer is justified, declared righteous because of the perfect righteousness of Christ that is transferred to our account. In other words, all of Christ’s obedience to the law of God, its perfection, is credited to the believer. It is this, the righteousness of Christ, that God looks at, the basis, the ground for his declaring us to be righteous. God takes the righteousness of Christ and places it upon us, and says, “Because of this, I declare you righteous.” “How so?” someone asks. “Is it because of a change in me? Is it because of goodness, however small, in me?” No, it is simply and solely because of Christ’s righteousness credited, or imputed, to the believer.

Notice how the Bible teaches this in Romans 5. In verses 11 to 21, Paul is comparing and contrasting the effect of Adam’s work upon all men, and Christ’s work upon all who trust in him. Well, notice Romans 5, verses 18 and 19—“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” Do you see? The righteousness of one, namely, Jesus Christ—it’s that righteousness which brings justification of life. It’s by the obedience of one, Jesus Christ, that many will be made righteous. The sinner is declared righteous. He is justified by the righteousness and obedience of one—Jesus Christ. God does not look at the believer’s good works. He looks at Christ’s good works which are credited to the believer. It’s Christ’s perfect righteousness that is given to the believer’s account that God looks at, and is then able, in righteousness, to say that you are declared righteous.

Well, third then, the Act of Justification. You’ll notice that the Catechism teaches “justification is an act of God’s free grace.” This is an insightful statement, however simple it is. An act is something that is finished once it is done. It does not continue and go on, and on, and on. It does not continue its occurrence. It doesn’t keep happening. Once it is done, it is finished, though its effect remains. Justification is an act. When the sinner trusts in Jesus Christ by God’s grace, he is justified. Think of it this way—Christ’s death was an act. Once he died, it was finished. The blessed effects of his death continue to us, but he’s not still dying, nor does he have to continue to die, or repeat his death over, and over again. His death is accomplished. It’s finished. It’s completed, because it was an act. Once it’s done, it’s over.

So is justification. The Bible does not speak about our growing in our justification. It doesn’t

speak of our beginning to be justified, our continuing to be justified, and then our finally being justified. The believer, once believing upon Christ, is justified, is always justified, and shall ever be justified, because he trusted in Christ, and Christ's righteousness is given to him. He doesn't grow in his justification. He doesn't mature in his justification. Justification is an act.

Additionally, you'll notice that this act is of God's free grace. This tells us that the reason behind God justifying a sinner has nothing to do with what the sinner did or would do. It is entirely because God chose to be gracious. God did not see the works of the sinner, and say, "Now, because he did those things, I will justify him." Nor did he look down the future and see what the sinner would do, and say, "Well, because of what he's going to do, I will justify him." Instead, God justified the sinner graciously, by applying the work of Christ to his account. Notice what the Bible says, in Romans 3, verse 24: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." A sinner is justified freely by God's grace. He does not prepare himself, or qualify himself by his obedience. Certainly there will be tears that are shed when a sinner is convicted of sin. There may even be outward changes that occur in the life of a convicted sinner. However, God doesn't look at those things and measure them up, and say, "Now I'll justify you." It's not by the sinner's activity. God justifies the sinner because he freely chose to do so in his grace, and gave that sinner Christ's righteousness.

One way that God's grace is displayed in justification is that it is by faith alone. Faith, of course, is trust in Jesus Christ. As we saw, faith receives Christ. By faith, we embrace Christ. We are united to Christ. Notice, faith does not give something to God. Faith is like the empty hand of a beggar. It's empty. It contains nothing. God gives to that empty hand Christ and his righteousness. You can see how justification is by faith alone throughout the Bible. You can read Romans chapter 4, and you'll see that Paul makes an argument, as he looks to David's example, and Abraham's example, and the teaching of Scripture throughout that chapter, as well as in Romans chapters 3, 4, and 5, and the book of Galatians, and so on. Paul is regularly making this point. But in Romans 4, Paul is clearly showing that justification is by grace alone, through faith alone. And this excludes our works, our contributions. In Romans 4:16, Paul summarizes his argument about justification by saying, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." God doesn't look at our faith and works. Faith, rather, is that which receives Christ, and in receiving Christ, we are justified. Faith is not a work that earns justification. It's not as if God looks at the act of faith, and says, "Well, since you've done that, and you've done what's right in believing, I'm going to declare you righteous." That would be making faith a work. Instead, the Bible teaches, as the Catechism expresses, that faith alone receives Christ and his righteousness. Faith does not contribute to our justification. Faith receives Christ, whose imputed righteousness justifies us.

Well, as we come to a close, I'd like to give you a way of expressing this Biblical truth in a way that summarizes this wonderful doctrine of justification. Some of you will be familiar with it, as it expresses what are known as "the solas" of the Reformation. If you're not familiar with it, I encourage you to think much upon it, and even memorize it, as it simply presents to us the way that a sinner is justified. The expression is this—*Sinners are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, as taught by the Scriptures alone*. Well, pay special attention to that word "alone."

Sinners are justified by grace alone. They're not declared righteous because they make themselves worthy by their works. They are justified by grace alone.

Notice, they are justified by grace alone, through faith alone. They do not receive their justification based on their faith and love, their faith and works, their faith and their obedience.

Faith alone receives and rests upon Christ for their acceptance with God.

Sinners are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Their faith does not look to Christ and Mary, to Christ and the saints, to Christ and a pastor, to Christ and a priest. Faith looks exclusively to Jesus Christ, trusting him alone.

Sinners are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. Since they are declared righteous by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, they receive no praise to themselves, and there's no praise to be given to anyone else. It's God's gracious work. Therefore, he alone is to be praised.

Sinners are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, as taught by the Scriptures alone. While we are grateful for faithful parents, and pastors, and other Christians who help us understand the way of salvation, it's only the Bible that gives us the infallible and authoritative teaching as to the way of salvation. Pastor's can err. Parents can make mistakes. Good Christians can be wrong. But the Bible does not and cannot err. If ever someone adds to or takes away from the Bible in anything, that's a wicked sin. But to add to or to take away from the Bible's teaching on the way of justification, that's wicked, and dangerous, and most damnable sin. Let us ever hold fast to the teaching of the Bible on this important doctrine of justification.

Well, can you say this summary once more? Sinners are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, as taught by the Scriptures alone.

There are many things that flow out of this lesson, but I want to press two points upon you. First, if you do not have Jesus Christ, you are left with your sin and guilt on your account. Your every breath is one closer to your death and judgment. And at that judgment, God will bring up your account of sin and wickedness, and you'll have no hope of escaping his condemnation. You will have to answer for your wickedness. But in God's mercy, you have not yet breathed your last breath. Right now, you have known and heard the way of Christ. He alone is the Savior. As we saw in a previous lesson, he is the one offered to us in the gospel freely. And in him is a perfect righteousness, faultless before God. Oh, see the wondrous gift that is extended to us in Christ, and take Christ as your hope.

And second, if you have received Christ by faith, you are justified. You're pardoned, and accepted as righteous in God's sight. And if this is the case for you, see how good your case is with God. Satan is our adversary. He attacks us, and he accuses us. He stands opposed to us. And he often does so by pointing out our sins. But remember, as John writes, in 1 John 2, and verse 1: "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Your standing, believer, before God is not based on your works, it is based on the work of Jesus Christ the righteous. Ever let your faith trust in him. When you are convicted of your sin, go to him again. For he is your hope, he is your pardon, he is your righteousness. In him, and in him alone, we have peace with God. And oh, believer, what a blessed truth. Such peace is yours now and forever.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #25

Adoption

Question 34: *What is adoption?*

Answer: *Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.*

In our previous lesson, we looked at one of the great blessings of salvation—justification. When God justifies a sinner, he forgives all of his sin, and accepts that sinner as righteous in his sight. You'll remember, of course, that he doesn't do this because of a change done in the sinner, but rather it is because of the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to that sinner and received by faith alone. This of course is a great blessing, and it is a great comfort to all who have trusted in Christ. But it is not all that is bound up in Christ and in salvation by Christ. Today we get to look at another great blessing of salvation, and it's called adoption.

You may already be familiar with the idea of adoption. This is because there's a sad reality in our world that some children, indeed many children, lose their parents. There are many ways that this happens, but in the end, the child is left an orphan, and as an orphan, is without many of the comforts that come because of having a loving mother and father, and a comfortable home and support. Different countries have their own ways of helping orphans, and their goal is to help the orphan receive that care which is needed. Most countries have developed ways to help orphans find new parents. And when a family takes in such a child into their own home, and gives them the care, and gives them all of the oversight of their own home, they "adopt" that child into their family. And this means that the orphan is no longer an orphan, but now is a member of a family.

Well today we get to look at the Biblical teaching on adoption. But we're not looking at the adoption of children into earthly families. Rather, we're looking at what the Bible teaches about God adopting his people into his everlasting family. So this brings us to the Question for our lesson, Question #34: "What is adoption?" The Answer: "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God." Well, each of these words is clear, so we'll move right into our lesson. And for this lesson, we'll look at three main points. First, The Absence of Adoption; second, The Blessings of Adoption; and third, The Cause of Adoption.

So first then, The Absence of Adoption. If something isn't present, it's absent. And so when we're talking about the Absence of Adoption, we're talking about what's going on when one is not received into God's family. Well, we've already noted that orphans in this life face a very sad and difficult reality. Now, if we're not orphans ourselves, it's impossible for us to know just how many

struggles such children face in these circumstances.

But there is something worse than being an orphan in this world among mere men. It is to belong to a wicked and cruel family in this world. It is a cruel reality, and it saddens us to realize this, that some parents abuse their children. Of course, there's need for loving, and firm, and faithful discipline and correction. The Bible teaches this with great clarity. However, there is a great difference between Biblical discipline and sinful abuse. It is a great sin for parents to abuse their children. And so, whereas we think of an orphan without parents, and yet hopefully under the care and provision of some who are helping them, we can think of how much worse it is for a child with parents, whose parents abuse them. It's hard to say what is worse.

But another thing most wicked as well is that there are those in this world who actually steal children. This is known as kidnapping. There are very sad stories of this happening. The child is taken from his family and is often abused by an evil person or a group of people. These are heavy, weighty things. I certainly do not mean to scare you by these things, but as we'll see, it helps us to see something about ourselves as sinners.

As sinners, we do not belong to God's family. Although he made us, and sustains us, and gives us all the good things we enjoy—from the sunshine, to the rain falling upon the field, to the food that we eat—all of these things are generously given by God to us. And yet, there is a spiritual breakdown, and the breakdown is in us. And this is known as sin. There is what is most grievous and wicked about this sin. By sin, we run away from God into the abusive oversight of Satan. Understand this. In Adam's sin, and by our own sins, we've turned from God. We have renounced his care, his love, his authority. We've turned to a wicked abuser, and we have come under that wicked one's care, if we can call it that, his oversight, and of course, most abusive. Satan only desires our destruction, and we've sided with him. The beginning of this was in Adam. Adam had been given all that he needed, but he turned from it and from God, listened to the word of Satan, and sinned against God. And this is what we continue to do, and would continue to do apart from God's grace.

Notice how the Bible mentions this in Ephesians 2, verses 1 through 3. This passage has come up quite a few times in our lessons, but it's tremendously important for our understanding of what we are apart from God's grace. Paul writes, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." This is, of course, a tremendously sad reality and accurate description of what every one of us is apart from God's saving grace in Christ. It's true of everyone who is without Christ. They are without grace, they are without Christ, and they are dead in sins, as Paul says. They're following the way of the world, and this way is the way that is directed by Satan. They're fulfilling their wicked lusts, and they are under God's wrath.

This is true of all men who are not believing in Jesus Christ. Jesus had strong and yet faithful words against the unbelieving Jews, the covenant people of God. Though they were in covenant with God, there were those who were unbelievers in that covenant. They remained in the state of death and rebellion. Notice Christ's words to such unbelieving ones, in John 8, and verse 44. It's Jesus who says, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." This is bad news

indeed. Christ said, “Ye are of your father the devil.” How desperately then we need the grace of God to deliver us from so horrible a state. But, as we’ll see, there is good news. As with every part of the ultimate good news, the gospel, this comes to us by grace through Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that sinners who trust in Christ are not only forgiven their sins, they’re not only accepted as righteous in God’s sight—all of this, of course tremendously excellent—there is an additional blessing known as ‘adoption’.

So now let’s look at those blessings. For the second main point, The Blessings of Adoption. When one believes upon Christ by God’s grace, that person is adopted into God’s family. This is what the Catechism means when it says, “we are received into the number of the sons of God.” In our next main point, we’ll look at what causes adoption—how it happens. But for this point, let’s look at two great blessings that come to one who is adopted.

The first of these great blessings is that we are made, counted, and rightfully considered sons and daughters of God. We are adopted into his family. Notice this truth from the Bible. In John’s Gospel, we read about the blessings that come to those who trust in Jesus Christ. In particular, John identifies “adoption.” Notice John chapter 1, verse 12: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” When he writes, “to them gave he power to become the sons of God,” he’s using this word which means he gave them authority, or the right to be God’s children. They did not have that right before. But by God’s grace, he gave them that right, so that they are now rightfully, or perhaps we could say it this way—lawfully, legally reckoned as God’s children. You could think of it this way, by way of adoption. An adopted child is not a member of that family by birth—naturally; they are a member of that family by law—legally. There was a bringing in of that child. And this is what God is saying about all who believe upon Christ. They once were not part of his family, and by his grace, he gave them the authority, the right, and he receives them into his family.

This is something that John says we should wonder at. In 1 John 3, and verse 1, he says, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” John is saying that this should overwhelm us. “Behold”—look at this! We who were once rebels and under God’s wrath have been taken into God’s family, where his love is displayed, where he is fully and constantly caring for us in love, grace, and mercy. Truly this is a blessing.

But with this being brought into his family comes the second of these great blessings, that as children, we are given the right to all the privileges that belong to the children of God. Notice the Catechism: “Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.” These privileges include his loving care, his provision for our earthly needs, because of his love for us, his provision for our spiritual needs. He protects us from Satan. He protects us from temptation. He protects us from the world. He gives us assurance of his love. He gives us strength unto greater holiness. He gives us more, and more, and more than we have time and space, as it were, to discuss. There are many such privileges. You can see a glimpse of these privileges in Christ’s teaching on prayer. He was teaching his disciples to pray, he said, in Matthew 7, verse 11, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” He’s making this point by comparison. You all are sinful, and you still struggle with sin, and yet you know how to give good gifts to your children. How much more does your Father in heaven, who is nothing but good, who is pure and holy, know how to and will give good things to his children as they ask him?

And thus, one aspect of these privileges is the assurance that God cares for us and provides

for us all that we need. What a privilege indeed to know that the Maker of heaven and earth is our Father in heaven, by grace, who loves us, and as it were, opens all of his privileges to us through Christ. Notice the wonder of such a truth, as Paul writes of it, in Romans 8, verses 16 and 17. He says, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” An “heir” is a child that has a right to the possessions—the lands, the money, the general estate of his parents. In short, an heir has a right to everything that his father has and gives.

This is somewhat easy for us to understand regarding Christ, because Christ, of course, is the eternal Son of God. Moreover, as the appointed Mediator in his incarnate ministry, he obeyed his Father perfectly. He proved himself worthy of so great an inheritance. But notice what Paul says. He says, believers are children of God. We’ve already seen this in this lesson. We are adopted into his family, but he opens this up for our understanding. Notice that he says, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God.” This should strike us as astounding! Believers have been brought into God’s family. Remember the rebel who had abandoned, and refused, and rejected God, is now being brought into that family to receive the riches of his grace. I encourage you, in your own time, to look up the story of the prodigal son, and you’ll get a glimpse of this beautiful truth. Oh, but Paul says that believers are “joint-heirs with Christ.” Well this is merely too much for us. If it were not the Bible telling us this, we would be those who would say, “This is too much. Who of us could ever think that we should be considered joint-heirs with Christ?” But praise God, it is his Word. God tells the believer that he, the believer is united to Christ, and in Christ, and by Christ, and for Christ’s sake, he now has a right to all the privileges of God’s inheritance. Indeed, he tells the believer that he or she is reckoned joint-heirs with Christ himself.

How is it that all of this comes to pass? We’ll look at that now in our third point, The Cause of Adoption. The Catechism rightly states that “adoption is an act of God’s free grace.” There are many things that are bound up with this statement, so we’ll look at just a few of them. Ultimately, as our Catechism indicates, adoption is by God’s *free* grace. It is not something that we qualify ourselves for. We don’t go about and earn God’s favor. It’s not by our perfect obedience, but we should be clear, it’s not by our imperfect obedience that we’re brought into God’s family. It’s not because of desires that we have. It’s not because of the intention of our heart. We don’t make promises to God that we’ll, in the future, be very good and faithful. We don’t bargain with God. We don’t enter into this great privilege by our works. Why?—because, to go back several lessons, adoption is one of those benefits that come to us because of the covenant of grace. It’s not by our works. Instead, it’s by God’s free grace. We saw this earlier when we mentioned 1 John 3, verse 1: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.” Notice it is the display of his love freely bestowed upon us. No one has the ability to purchase or earn so great a privilege and blessing. God instead has magnified his mercy. He’s made it appear with this wondrous truth, in giving so great a privilege to us freely, by his grace alone.

Notice as well, that it is an act of God’s free grace. Once it is done, it stands forever. It’s not something that one grows in, or gradually becomes a child of God. Instead, as John wrote, it is bestowed upon us, that is, it is given, it’s credited to us. It is a great privilege that receive.

At one moment, the sinner is not in God’s family. But by God’s grace, at the next moment, he is. Well, someone says, “What is it that makes the difference?” Well, we’ve seen it’s by God’s grace. Adoption is one of those great and gracious blessings that is given to us as soon as we believe upon Christ. So as soon as the sinner trusts in Christ, two main things happen. First, he is justified.

We considered this, of course, in our previous lesson. That is, the sinner is pardoned and counted righteous for Jesus' sake. But the second blessing that comes upon faith, as we embrace Christ, is that at the same time he is justified, the sinner is adopted. Now our own minds have to perceive of this in some sort of order—first justified, then adopted. This is because, of course, before we could enter into God's family, you have to be pardoned and righteous, and so, of course, that makes sense. God pardons and declares us righteous, then receives us into his family. However, we should not think that there is any delay between our justification and our adoption. As soon as the believer trusts in Christ, he is both justified and adopted. There's no space, there's no lag between these two most beautiful and blessed truths.

Let's remember that such faith is faith trusting in Christ. It's not just that by which we say we know that Jesus is the Savior, "I know that he would save me." But rather, it's that faith whereby we receive and rest upon Christ alone as he is freely offered to us in the gospel. Once one trusts Christ Jesus, this merely unthinkable blessing is given to us—we are adopted into his family. It is by God's free grace, through faith in Christ that one is adopted. All of the praise then to God, for he is the ultimate cause of our adoption.

Well, as we close, if you are trusting in Christ, you have this reason to rejoice now and always. It may be true that you have many difficulties right now, and maybe for many years to come. There may be many trials you have faced, and are facing, and will face. However, you have such a blessing right now that is greater than all of your trials. You are a child of God, and you have access to his gracious, loving, and fatherly care. Oh, take advantage of it! Give thanks to God for it! And ask him, as it were, to make you realize this privilege moreover. Someone may say, "I don't feel these privileges." This is a sad experience in many Christians' lives. I imagine that a rich man at times may not feel that he's rich. However, we should remember something—feelings do not change facts. Now of course, feelings should flow from the truth. But there are some times when our feelings are not following what is true. If you are trusting Christ, then you are God's child by grace. You have been adopted, and you do have a right to all the privileges that belong to the sons of God. So what should you do? Well, search the Scriptures. Discover what these great privileges are which belong to you. Look for them, write them down, memorize them, repeat them, and in addition, pray. Ask your loving Father to give you the gracious privilege of enjoying these great blessings. He is good. He will do it, for he is your Father.

Well, do you refuse Christ? Are you one who, though you acknowledge these things are true perhaps, you might go to church, and so on, but you refuse Christ. Oh, consider your loss! You remain under the bondage of sin. You remain under the guidance of Satan. You remain, as it were, under the wrath of God. You may have many earthly privileges, but you do not have one spiritual treasure as your own. And so, by refusing Christ, you not only dishonor God, but you injure yourself and your everlasting future. Oh, hear the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ, in John 8, verses 34 to 36: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Oh, shall you be delivered from your rebellion? Shall you be received into God's family? If ever you shall, it will be by God's grace through Christ. Then cry out to him! Cry out to the eternal Son of God, that he would save you and, by grace, bring you into God's family and there enjoy all of these blessings, by faith now in this world, and in sight in the glory to come, when it is that Christ returns.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #26

Sanctification

Question 35: *What is sanctification?*

Answer: *Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.*

So far, we've looked at two great blessings of salvation. We've looked at justification and adoption. Were this all that believers experienced in this life, theirs would be a life of immeasurable blessing. However, the Lord provides another blessing in this treasure of salvation, and that's sanctification. "Sanctification" is another big word. It comes from the word "sanctify," which means "to set apart." In the Bible, when something is sanctified, that means that it's set apart to God and to his service. This is related to the word "holy." When something is sanctified, it is then holy, or separated unto God. It's no longer to be used for common things. It's certainly not to be used for sinful things. And we can see something of an illustration of this in the anointing oil used in the Old Testament. Notice Exodus 30, verses 25 through 29: "And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, and ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy." Well, the oil was holy, by God's purpose. It was set apart unto God's use, and it was used to sanctify other things for God's use: the altar of incense, the burnt offering, as well as even the priest. All of this helps us understand the idea of sanctification. God, who is himself most holy, sets his people apart unto himself, and makes them like he is—holy. When you read the New Testament, you'll often see that church members are referred to as saints. Literally, this word "saints" means "holy ones." Believers are people who God has sanctified and is sanctifying.

Let's look at the Question in the Catechism, Question #35: "What is sanctification?" "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." We've already talked about the words "sanctify" and "sanctification," so let's take up our lesson in three parts: first, The Goal of Sanctification; second, The Parts of Sanctification; and third, The Progress of Sanctification.

First, The Goal of Sanctification. If we want to understand something, it's helpful to consider its goal or purpose. For instance, if we are taking a trip, we need to know our goal or destination. When we've seen where our goal is, it helps us understand the way that we should take to get there. Well, sanctification has a goal. You can see it in the Catechism when it says, "We are renewed in the whole man after the image of God." This means God is making us to be more like he is. His goal is to make us, and all that we are, to better resemble him, and bear his image faithfully as we serve him. Of course, man was made in God's image. However, by sin, man has ruined and defaced that image.

Some of you have probably seen statues from ancient times. Some of these are missing their hands, and others are missing their noses, others are missing a leg, but you can still tell what they were supposed to be. But they no longer bear that image in the full beauty that they once did. Well, this is like fallen man. He's a ruined image of God. Sin has corrupted and ruined him, so that the image of God is no longer seen in its beauty. In fact, man so sins that he perverts that reflection of God, which is one thing that makes him so wicked.

But God has been pleased to renew and restore this image in his people. This is one reason the Christian is called "a new man." Notice how Paul addresses this in Ephesians 4, verses 22 through 24. He writes "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The new man believers put on is created in righteousness and true holiness after, that is, according to God. In other words, God is righteous and holy. Sanctification makes his people to resemble him in righteousness and holiness. Paul says something similar in Colossians 3, verse 10—believers "have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." In other words, the goal of sanctification is to bear God's image truly and really, he comes to know God, and by grace, he comes to resemble God.

Notice, this is in the whole man. It's not just in the outward performance of actions, or in the words we speak. It certainly includes those things, but it includes as well the whole man of thoughts, and desires, as well as words and actions. The purpose of sanctification is to renew the whole man to reflect and bear God's image faithfully, as we know, trust, love, and serve him.

Well, second, The Parts of Sanctification. "Sanctification is the work of God's grace," making us more like he is. This is seen in two primary ways. The first of these is in what we stop doing, by his grace. And the second of these is in what we start doing, by his grace. Notice the Catechism, "Whereby we die more and more unto sin, and live unto righteousness." These two parts—dying to sin, and living to righteousness—help us consider God's gracious work of sanctification more clearly. Let's look at each of these in order, first dying to sin, and second, living to righteousness.

To die unto sin—well, although men in this world are physically alive, apart from God's grace, they are spiritually dead. Ephesians 2 states this very clearly. This should not lead us to think that sin is inactive like a corpse. Sin is active, but not in any life-giving way. Rather, it's like an infection or a cancer that is actively corrupting the individual. Everything that it touches, it ruins and destroys. It hurts and injures, it twists and contorts the desires of men to love what is evil, and to hate what is good.

Well, the bad news is that sin is not contained in one part of man, but rather, the whole man has been infected with and corrupted by sin. This is God's testimony against man, in Genesis 6, verse 5: "GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Well, justification pardons us all our sin, and

credits Christ's righteousness to us, that we may be declared righteous in his sight and accepted by God. But justification does not renew our own personal corruption. It doesn't fix or transform our twisted desires. But the good news is that God does deal with our sinful desires and thoughts. He does this in sanctification.

In his work of sanctification, he causes his people to die unto sin. And what an expression that is—to die unto sin! And this is how Paul speaks of believers, in Romans 6, verse 11, he exhorts believers, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Unfortunately, sin is still active in the believer. However, the believer is to die to it. He's no longer to be enticed by it. He's not longer to listen to it. He's no longer to obey it. We could think of it this way, if a human dies physically, his body is no longer responsive to the things around him. He no longer finds delight in the beautiful sunset. He is no longer excited by what others talk about. He's uninfluenced by those things. Well, in the same way, the believer is to die to the false beauties and delights of sin. In a moment, we'll talk about how this happens, but for now, simply notice that God privileges believers that they die to sin more and more, day by day.

Well, there's another part or side to sanctification—to live unto righteousness. If we think of the first part, dying unto sin, as if it tells us what we should not do—we should not live for sin; we can think of the second part, living to righteousness, as what we should do. The believer is transformed to say "No" to sin. With this, he is transformed to say "Yes" to righteousness. Righteousness refers to what is right or good—not in man's sight, because man is a false judge—but in God's sight, who is the only standard of righteousness. Sinners do not love what is righteous; they hate it. Now many pretend to be righteous. They may sincerely be concerned about their outward appearance before others, and so they do outwardly impressive things. They may serve others, but they're never doing it because they love God. They're not doing it because they love righteousness as God defines it. They do not do the right things because they love God. Many of the Pharisees were this way. They went to synagogue, they prayed, they studied the Bible, they carried themselves with outward dignity. Yet, Christ saw through all of this. On one occasion, he called them whited sepulchres, or whitewashed tombs. On the outside, they looked glorious, however, on the inside, they were corrupt—full of dead men's bones.

God's work of sanctification does not make us Pharisees. Instead, it makes us love righteousness, and live to righteousness in all that we are, in our desires and actions, as well as thoughts and words. Moreover, sanctification makes us to love these things. Paul declares this in Romans 7, verse 22: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Having been transformed by God's grace, the believer now delights in God's will—his law, which is exactly what God promised to do for his people, in Jeremiah 31, verse 33. It says, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." In other words, he transforms them from the inside out. He makes them to love righteousness, which then leads them to walk in the way of righteousness. And all of this is by his grace.

Well third, The Progress of Sanctification. When God converts a sinner, he sets him apart from his former way of life. So the believer, as soon as he believes, is now sanctified, that is, he's set apart to God. However, it does not mean that he's fully loving God, and all of his desires and thoughts are perfectly conformed to the law of God. In fact, Paul said that he delighted in the law of God after the inward man, yet he struggled with it in that he still sinned. So though the believer is now sanctified—set apart to God—there's the need for God to continue his work of sanctifying him. And this is what he does throughout the believer's life. He continues to cause the believer to

grow in likeness to God, and in intimacy with God. In other words, a believer will be more like God at the end of his life than what he was when he was first converted. This is because God works progressively in the life of a believer. He does not make him perfectly holy in his thoughts, and words, and actions at the beginning of grace. Instead, he begins a work that he will continue all the days of his life.

We should note that this work will not be perfected in this life. The most holy Christian will still face temptation and sin. Full perfection of holiness is known to our souls at death, and to our bodies and souls together at the resurrection of the dead. In fact, we get to talk more about these truths in coming lessons. But for now, simply note that the believer genuinely grows in holiness, all throughout this life. This is how Paul expresses this truth, in Philippians 1, verse 6: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Notice, it’s already begun, but it’s not yet finished, and yet it will continue to the end.

Additionally, this reminds us that it is God who works within us. It is his work in us. We are not the cause, or the author of our sanctification. Rather, it’s a gracious work of God in us. Again, in Philippians, but this time, chapter 2, verse 13, we read this: “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” While it is true that we are active, but we are enabled by his grace to desire and choose what is according to God’s pleasure, it is God that makes us able to do so.

Now, sanctification is a work of God’s grace. But how is it that God causes this to take place in us? Well, it’s the outworking of his eternal purpose to save us, and it’s through our union and our fellowship with Christ. This is what Christ meant when he compared himself to a vine, and his people to branches bearing fruit. In John 15:5, he says, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” Don’t miss the encouragement here, if you are a believer. Whoever abides, that is, remains in him by faith and communes with Christ, “bringeth forth much fruit.” This is a great promise indeed, worthy of our meditation and our prayer asking God to bring this forth in us. In other words, Christ supplies us his grace to enliven us unto holy living and fruitfulness to the glory of God. Peter expresses the same idea, in 2 Peter 1, verses 2 and 3: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” Everything that is needed to live a life of godliness is given through the knowledge of Jesus, our Lord.

We could say it this way, there is no holiness apart from Jesus Christ. Because God supplies all that we need for godly living in Christ only. He is the spring, or source, of all holiness and sanctification. This is why Paul can write, in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 30, “But of him”—that is, of God—“are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Christ is the source of our wisdom, of our righteousness, and redemption. He is these things for us. But notice, he is also our sanctification. This means there is no growth in holiness without a relationship with Christ, such a relationship that is not in name only or word only, but such a relationship as by faith, we are in him, and draw from him all that he supplies.

Well, how do we do this? Well, as we’ve noted, we do this only as God is gracious to us. But as he is gracious to us, notice what God causes to happen. We’ve seen in 2 Peter 1 the way that God directs us to Christ. Notice now, in 2 Peter 1, verse 4: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great

and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” In other words, God has given us these promises, exceeding great and precious, as Peter says, and we are to rely upon these, to believe them, to draw them before the Lord and claim them before him, asking his merciful provision of all that he’s promised. And as he graciously does, we then benefit by them, and we grow as he supplies us all that he’s promised, through faith in Christ. How is it that God has this happen? His grace ever directs us to Christ, and places within our hands promises that we bring before him, and say, “Fulfill what you’ve promised.” And by his grace, he answers those promises.

Well, let’s close with a few applications. First, here is encouragement for the believer. One great problem that the believer faces is he looks at himself, and he says, “Oh, I’m not what I should be.” But here is great encouragement, for you’ve been given the great and beautiful privilege to be sanctified. It’s already begun. But remember that in this work of grace, God continues to transform you, you who were once a rebel, now to be a brilliant reflection of himself. The world may not see this as a privilege, but eternity will prove this to be an exceedingly rich blessing indeed, that we should be made like unto God in holiness, that we should bear his image increasingly in this life, and with perfection in the life to come. Believer, whatever your deficiency now is, by God’s grace, this is what he’s doing in you, and soon enough, you will see it, to the glory of Christ.

But second, a caution—it’s important to remember that sanctification does not lead or cause salvation. We do not first seek to be holy so that God would then save us. Instead, salvation leads to sanctification. In fact, sanctification is a part of salvation. Those who are saved by grace through faith in Christ are sanctified by the same grace that has saved them. Only those who trust in Christ will ever be sanctified. So we must first trust Christ. Never forget this. If you become convicted of your sins when you look at God’s law, your first step is not to say, “Now I’m going to keep God’s law.” Your first step is to say, “Now I need the one who kept God’s law, that he might pardon me, and by his grace then likewise sanctify me.”

Well last, if you and I want greater likeness to God, as believers, we must be much with Christ by faith. As we open his Word, we seek Christ. As we attend public worship, we seek Christ. Learn his promises. Memorize his promises. But also be sure to plead his promises. And as you do, may you know the gracious blessing of drawing life from Christ who is your life, and better showing forth the glory of God’s image in your life, till the day it is perfected by his grace.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #27

Blessings of Salvation in this Life

Question 36: *What are the benefits which in life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?*

Answer: *The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.*

How excellent is the truth of salvation. Those who are saved by God's grace have been saved indeed. The truths of justification, adoption, and sanctification are great truths, full of many blessings. In the next three Questions, we get to look at some of these blessings. These Questions consider the benefits or blessings that believers enjoy in this life, at death, and at the resurrection. While each of these—justification, adoption, and sanctification—have their own blessings in and of themselves, what we'll see is there are other blessings that are bound up with them, for which we are to rejoice and give thanks to the Lord God. Certainly while health and wealth are good things for which we give thanks to the Lord, neither health nor wealth will continue throughout this life. Eventually, one gets sick. Eventually, one dies. The earthly enjoyments end. But what a blessing—the benefits of salvation never cease. They always continue and advance. And this is true, as we'll see, in this life, and at death, and at the resurrection forever.

Well, today we look at the blessings of salvation which the believer enjoys in this life. Our Question is #36 from the *Shorter Catechism*, which asks, "What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?"

Now, before we look at the Answer, let's simply notice a key idea. These "benefits"—a word which simply means "good things" or "blessings"—they accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification. This tells us that these benefits do not come to us on their own. Rather, they accompany—that is, they're distinct from but bound with justification, adoption, and sanctification. Likewise, they flow from, that is, they grow from, or they're the fruit of the effects of justification, adoption, and sanctification.

So let's look then at the Answer: "The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end." Five benefits are noted in this Answer, all of which are enjoyed in this life, before death and before the resurrection. The first is assurance of God's love; the second is peace of conscience; the third, joy in the Holy Ghost;

fourth, increase of grace; and fifth, perseverance therein to the end. We'll look at each of these in the following three points of our lesson. The first point, Gracious Enjoyment; the second, Gracious Growth; and the third, Gracious Perseverance.

Well, the first then, Gracious Enjoyment. Each of these benefits cultivate enjoyment of God. But for this point, we'll look at the first three benefits mentioned in our Answer: assurance, peace, and joy. One who these three benefits will know in this life such enjoyment the world cannot offer or experience. Certainly, anyone that's asked in this world, the question, Would you like to have joy, and would you like to have good things? They would say "Yes," and their lives pursue things that they think will provide them those things. However, nothing that the world pursues is ever able to give that lasting assurance, and that lasting peace, and that lasting joy, but the believer has access to all of them.

Notice the first of these—assurance of God's love. The word "assurance" has to do with certainty. One may be falsely assured of something, and this sets up bitter disappointment. However, here the idea deals with rightly founded assurance. To be rightly assured or certain of a good thing is a great blessing. When a hungry person, after a long day's work, has no assurance of a next meal, they experience an intensifying of their misery. That which they lack is now uncertain to be gained. However, if someone is confident of their next meal, however much hunger they may have, he or she enjoys the benefit of the assurance that they're going to sit down and enjoy the meal which satisfies their hunger. But the benefit here is an assurance of something far better than earthly food or wealth. It is the assurance of God's love. This is an astounding blessing. Love is that delight and devotion one has to another. And here we consider God's love to a believer—God's delight, God's devotion to his people. What a gracious thing that is! In Galatians 2, verse 20, Paul was able to write of "the Son of God, who loved me, gave himself for me." Notice, it's not generic, that God loved, the Son of God loved, and the Son of God gave, but "the Son of God loved *me*" Paul says, "and gave himself for *me*." What an assurance that is!

While it's true that many believers speak of, or sometimes even feel an assurance of God's love, this is a false assurance, and if it's not corrected by God's grace, it will show forth a bitter disappointment at their death and at their last day. Remember that unbelievers are in a state of spiritual death. They're dead in their sins. They are under God's wrath and curse. It is a solemn word that we find in John 3, verse 36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." The unbeliever, in other words, has the wrath of God upon him. The unbeliever has no reason to think that God is pleased with him. He's sinned against God. He stands as one that's rebelled against God, and he has no peace with God, because he does not have Christ.

However, the believer is in a different position. The believer has been brought to believe upon Jesus. He has been forgiven all his sin. He has been received in Christ, and counted righteous by Christ's righteousness imputed to him—there's justification. He has been received into God's family—there's adoption. He has been brought into holy and sanctified fellowship with God by the blood of Christ Jesus—there is sanctification. These three are great blessings. And because of these three, the believer may consider these truths and rightly conclude that he is indeed loved by God. He can say, "God has saved *me*. God has forgiven *me*. God has adopted *me*. God is sanctifying *me*." What does all this mean? It means, "God loves *me*."

This is what we see in 1 John 4, verses 9 and 10: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation

for our sins.” Oh, what a happy blessing this is—the assurance of God’s love!

Now the second of these gracious benefits which bring us enjoyment in this life is peace of conscience. What a terrible thing it is to have a conscience burdened and tormented by the guilt of sin—not just sin in general, as if sin is out there, but rather, the sins that I have committed, for which I must give an account before God. There’s no torment or grief in this life equal to such conviction. Peace is like the still and calm waters of the sea on a bright and pleasant day. There’s beauty and enjoyment. One can rest and delight in its beauty. However, a troubled conscience, a convicted conscience is like the sea blown about and troubled, waves rising up and crashing down with such violence that no one can rest. All are consumed with fear in such circumstances. Well, our conscience is that ability of our soul to understand our guilt and to accuse and blame and condemn that guilt. When it accuses and blames and condemns us for our guilt, we are rightly unsettled, troubled, and dejected.

But the believer has a great blessing. While he has sinned, he has peace with God by the blood of Christ. His peace is not founded on what he himself has done. Rather, it’s founded on the perfect work of Christ Jesus, his faultless righteousness, and his sacrifice which satisfies divine justice—all of those truths which we have considered. This is what Paul notes in Romans 5, and verse 1: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice how the peace a believer has is the consequence of justification. The one justified has peace. Now, the sense of that peace may vary as we understand and believe the truth of salvation, or as we ignore it. However, each believer has this peace because of Christ. And this is indeed a great and gracious blessing.

Well finally, the third of these gracious benefits, which bring us enjoyment—joy in the Holy Ghost. To have joy is to have cheerfulness and gladness of soul. But notice, this joy is in the Holy Ghost. Romans 5, verse 5 and verse 11 speak to this. Paul writes, “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us;” and verse 11: “And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” The Holy Spirit causes us, who have believed upon Christ, to experience the love of God, and this then leads us to rejoice in God through Jesus Christ. The Spirit’s work within us directing us to Christ makes us aware of his love, and we experience that love, and this then fills us with joy by grace. Well, the same idea is expressed by Paul in his benediction recorded in Romans 15, and verse 13. He writes, “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.” Each believer has this privilege. As the Spirit works within him, and causes him to understand and trust in Christ, the believer has a deep and abiding joy. It’s not the passing happiness of the world, which is there for a moment only to vanish, and never truly to satisfy. Rather it is an abiding joy, because it’s founded on the perfect work of Christ.

Now, we should acknowledge that the sense of these things is not always constant for the believer. There are times when the believer becomes dejected. Some believers have had long seasons of little to no assurance of the love of God to them. Seasons come when the believer’s joy is almost imperceptible. Well, why is this? One thing to note is that it is not because the believer has lost the source or reason for these benefits. In other words, a true believer does not lose his justification. He doesn’t lose his adoption; he’s not kicked out of God’s family; nor does he lose sanctification. Instead, two things may have happened.

First, he may have ignored or lost sight of the wonderful beauty and truth of his salvation. He may have had his thoughts diverted from the true ground of his peace in Christ Jesus. He may

have largely forgotten that he is securely within God's family by grace. He may have neglected his holy calling. By any of these, what happens is the reason for his assurance, peace, and joy is now overlooked, and it is, as it were, ignored. You could think of it this way, if a wealthy person were to lose sight and understanding of his wealth, it's understandable that he would lose the earthly comfort of having such wealth. However, so soon as he would regain a sight of his finances, his earthly comfort from his finances would return. Well, so it is with the believer. Once a believer returns to understanding and believing Christ and what is the believer's in Christ, then it is that a sense of assurance, and peace, and joy return by God's blessing.

A second reason may be that God, for his own holy and wise purpose, has withdrawn the enjoyment of these benefits—the sense of these benefits. On a sunny day, we may enjoy the light and warmth of the sun. However, if a storm arises and passes by, we no longer enjoy the sun's light or warmth. So it is if God withdraws the enjoyment of these benefits. It's as if a cloud has passed between our sight and enjoyment of these blessings. However, just as a cloud does not remove the sun, so when God withdraws the enjoyment of these benefits, we do not lose the cause and source of them. We are, at such a time, to trust the Lord, and remember that he does all things well. We are to ask him that he would restore to us the blessing which accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, and we are to wait on him in faith until he is pleased to do so by grace.

Well, let us move on to our second main point: Gracious Growth. Grace is what begins our enjoyment of salvation—"By grace are you saved." With other benefits, believers experience in this life the increase of grace, as our *Catechism* notices. This means that the influence of grace continues with and grows in the believer throughout his life. Neither justification or adoption change. They are final, complete, and decisive. Remember that both of these are called "an act of God's free grace." Once done, it is done forever. Once one is justified, he will always be justified. Once one is adopted, he is always adopted. However, he will grow in the enjoyment of these two aspects of salvation throughout his life. His assurance, and peace, and joy will mature as he better understands and enjoys his justification and adoption. When a sinner is converted and brought to believe upon Christ Jesus, a great change has taken place. He was dead in his sin, now he's alive. He hated holiness in his sin, but now by God's grace he desires to be holy. It's as if God has planted a seed within him, and God will cause that seed to grow or mature. By God's grace, this divine work of sanctification will continue throughout life. It's true there will be seasons of greater growth and lesser growth, yet God will continue to work within his beloved people. Christ gave himself not only to redeem, but to purify a people zealous of good works. And Christ will see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. You see this in Philippians 1, verse 6. Paul writes, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." When God began his work, he began a work that he will continue in the life of his people forever. Notice the confidence of such an encouragement, in 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 23 and 24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." The confidence that this will continue is founded upon God's faithfulness. The believer's growth, all his lifelong is due to God's grace and his faithfulness to continue this gracious work. What a blessing the believer enjoys in this life!

Well third, Gracious Perseverance. The final benefit for the believer in this life is expressed in these words: "perseverance therein to the end." The believer is guaranteed to persevere, that is, to continue, in God's saving grace throughout his life. This is a great blessing for the believer. Success and victory is guaranteed by God's grace. A rich man may lose his wealth, a healthy man

may become sick; a man of many friends may lose every last one of them. However, once a sinner is saved, he will never be lost. He will never lose his salvation. We're assured of this in the Bible. In 1 Peter 1, and verse 5, among other places, Peter speaks of believers "who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Believers are protected and preserved by God throughout life. One way God does this is by working within them the grace to persevere. So he preserves or keeps them, and he does so by working through and within them that they would press on and continue in the way of faith, and hope, and love. His work in them causes them to persevere. You can see this in Philippians 2, verses 12 and 13: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, 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." Notice, Paul is writing to believers. He's not saying to unbelievers, you are to work or to earn your salvation. Rather, he's speaking to believers who have salvation, and now they're to apply it and work it out, to continue it. But notice, they do so by God who works in them "to will," that is, to choose, and "to do," that is, to act "of his good pleasure." Believers are called to obey and give diligence, but the cause of this is the grace of God, which he has given, and is continuing to work within them. Their act of persevering is the outworking of his gracious preserving them. It is a gracious benefit that he gives them. Not one shall be lost.

Well, each of these is worthy of even more consideration. And I encourage you to gather up Scriptures as you read the Bible, and see how it is that each of these is for the believer throughout his life. But we must close, and as we do, let us take a moment to see what a great blessing salvation is for the believer in this life. It's true, as we'll see, that there are even greater blessings to come for the believer, both at death and at the resurrection. But let's not overlook—the believer in this life has great blessings that they are to enjoy. Remember, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever," and here, we see one way in which the believer may do so. It's true the believer may not have much money. He may suffer much. However, every single believer has benefits which far outweigh the best that the world has to offer. No amount of money can buy the assurance of God's love. No amount of friends can give true peace of conscience, and no worldly experience can provide the lasting joy of the Holy Spirit. Each of these is given to the believer by grace throughout his life.

Also, it's worth noting that not everyone who professes faith is truly a believer. This is why we see some who fall away. They are members of the church, and they depart. They profess faith, and then they leave. It's not that they were saved and now lost their salvation. Notice, John explains this in 1 John 2, verse 19. He writes, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." Though they were numbered among us by profession, they were not truly converted. They were not true believers.

But where does this leave us? It means that we must be sure to look to Christ, and trust in him alone for our salvation. Let us never trust in anything else. It is Christ alone who saves. Let us not trust in our prayers, in our Bible reading, in our feelings, or activities. Rather, let us be sure to look to Christ alone, who is freely offered to us in the gospel. And as we do, may God so bless us with the assurance and enjoyment of all of these benefits. And as we'll see, there are additional blessings at death, and at the resurrection. Thanks be unto God for his marvelous gift of salvation and all of the benefits. May it be that you are brought to trust in Christ, and throughout this life, enjoy each of these to his glory and praise.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #28

Blessings of Salvation at Death

Question 37: *What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?*

Answer: *The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.*

The believer has many enemies in this life. While this is a sober statement, the believer has great cause for confidence. No believer is to be confident in himself, against even the smallest enemy. Yet every believer should have confidence, even against the greatest enemy. This is because of God's grace to each individual believer. One such enemy that finds out all men, terrorizes some, and can alarm and sadden even the most experienced believer, is death. Death can be hard for us. Of course, all that we know, by personal experience at present, is life. We may experience pain or sickness, but so long as we are still living, we don't actually experience death. Many of us have been to funerals. Some have even been present when another human being died. However, none of us can speak of our own experience with death. What we do know, by seeing it in others, is that at death the body stops functioning as it did when alive. While the body remains, the person no longer breathes. His hearts stops beating. His physical life in this world has ended. This of course is very sad to us. It is especially so when someone we love dies. It can also be very scary for us when we think we may be nearing death. However, the believer has good news regarding this last enemy. The Bible tells us that the believer not only receives benefits from Christ in this life, or for the life to come. The believer receives benefits from Christ at death.

Notice our Question today, #37 of the *Shorter Catechism*: "What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?—The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection."

Well, one key word we want to emphasize, is this word "believers." A believer is one who believes, that is, trusts in Jesus Christ as his Savior. Remember how Question #31, on Effectual Calling, expressed it, when it tells us that God's Spirit effectually calls, and he does so persuading and enabling us to accept Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel. A believer is not someone who simply acknowledges that Jesus is the Savior. A believer is someone who trusts, who embraces, who receives, and rests upon Him for his own salvation. A later Question states this simply and beautifully, when it says, "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel." The point is important if we are to

understand who receives benefits from Christ at death—only those who are believers, that is, only those who have received and rested upon Christ alone for salvation.

Well, with that clearly understood, let's take up the main points of our lesson. First, The Separation at Death; second, The Perfection at Death; and third, The Rest at Death.

Well first then, The Separation at Death. What is it that takes place at death? We admit there is much that is mysterious to us. None of us has actually experienced death personally, however, we are grateful that God, who knows all things, has given us understanding regarding the main things about death. When we consider what happens at the moment of death for a human, it is important to remember what a human is. A human being is made up of a physical body, and a spiritual soul. You'll remember that when Christ became man, he took to himself a true body and a reasonable soul. So long as a human lives in this life, his body and soul are bound together in a mysterious and yet wonderful way. We have physical bodies that operate in this world, and yet we have a nonphysical or spiritual soul that is united with our body. There's a world of wonder here as we think of how our soul and our body connect and interact with each other, a thing that, in itself is unseen, and yet the effects of it are evident at all times. While we have many questions, we can understand that there is a connection between the two. When we think and feel certain things in, as we say, our emotions, this will often have an impact on our body. Likewise, when our body experiences certain things, like physical pain and harm, this impacts our mind and soul. Well, how does all of this relate to death? Well it's in this way. At death, this connection between our body and soul is severed, that is, the body and soul separate. This can be an overwhelming concept, of course. And yet we see it clearly in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Notice the words of Jesus in Luke 23, verse 46: "When Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." Notice his body is upon the cross. It says that he is "commending" that is, he's committing, or setting forth—sending—his spirit. And once he said this, "he gave up the ghost." This expression means he expired, or he breathed his last. So his words right before he died committed his soul to his Father in heaven. And once he breathed his last, his body and soul separated. Yet his human body, now dead, remained on the cross while his human soul was welcomed into the presence of his Father in heaven.

We should know this is true for believers and unbelievers alike, as far as the separation of body and soul. At death, the souls of believers and unbelievers are separated from their bodies. However, as we'll see in our next point, there is a tremendous difference between the souls of believers and unbelievers from that point onward.

Second, The Perfection at Death. We've just noted that both the souls of unbelievers and believers are separated from their bodies at death. But what happens to them? The *Catechism* says, "The souls of believers at their death are made perfect in holiness." So let's focus on this truth for a moment. Remember that when we speak of human soul, we speak of that part of human nature that has consciousness, that thinks, and understands, and desires, and experiences affections. Well, now notice that the Bible teaches that at death, the believer enjoys the perfecting of his soul, that spiritual and conscious part of what he is—it will be perfected. In Hebrews 12, the church is reminded of heavenly things. Notice, in verse 22, "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." What an expression that is! There are many things worth our attention, but for our lesson, notice that expression: "The spirits of just men made perfect"—the souls of righteous men made perfect. That's what is in heaven. In heaven, there is,

of course, the glorious and living God, which is the focus of all the hope of the saints. There's also the innumerable company of angels. There are also the souls of believers, those who have died, and their souls have entered into heaven, and yet we're told there that their souls have been made perfect.

Well, how the believer groans in this present life over his remaining sin. Is there anything that is more grievous for the believer than his own sin? Paul knew of this grief and struggle. He wrote of it, in Romans 7, verses 21 through 24. He says, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Notice, this is Paul the Apostle, and yet he's wrestling with his own grief over his own sin, longing to have further deliverance. This reminds us that the best of Christians in this life still have indwelling sin. John wrote of this simply, in 1 John 1, verse 8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Of course, we rejoice in the blood of Christ, for the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. And we also give thanks that God is at work now, making us increasingly sanctified, even throughout our whole life in this world. However, we still long to be without the slightest impurity of our thoughts and desires.

Well, here's encouragement. This is what the believer receives at death. This is what the *Catechism* means when it says, "the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness." And when does this change take place? Well, it's at death. The very moment one dies, the soul is transformed and welcomed into heaven. There's no delay, there's no holding tank for the souls of believers. There certainly is no purgatory, where believers must work off remaining consequences for their sins. All their sins have been answered for by the blood of Christ. And now it is that their souls are perfected in holiness. Notice how simply this is mentioned by Jesus Christ to the thief that believed on him at the cross, in Luke 23, verse 43, "And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Now just moments earlier, this thief had been mocking and ridiculing Christ. By God's grace, he was brought to believe on Jesus. And so soon as that happened, God speaks these words of peace—not only that his sins are forgiven, which is an immense blessing, but that he would be with Christ in paradise that day. We don't know all about the sins and crimes of this thief, but we do know that what happened to him the very moment he died was that he entered into heaven, and his soul was perfected. And this we know because Christ said, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." He did not need to wait. He did not need to suffer for the temporal punishments he deserved for his life of sin. He was ushered immediately into paradise with Christ. When did that happen? At death.

In Philippians 1, verse 21, Paul was able to write, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Why would it be gain for Paul? It wasn't he would stop existing. That would be something that was far worse, because as he was alive, he was in fellowship with God. Rather, as he goes on to put it, in verse 23, he says, "For I am in a strait"—that is, a difficulty—"betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." You see, he felt an inward wrestling of his soul. On the one hand, he wanted to live for Christ and serve His people in this world. It was his great joy in this life. However, on the other hand, he saw that death would usher him into the more intimate and the most glorious presence of Christ. "To depart," he said, "and to be with Christ." Well, this confidence that Paul expressed is not for Paul alone. It is for every believer. This is why, in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 8, Paul is able to write, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." You see, every believer has the benefit

that once death comes, his soul shall be present with the Lord.

The *Catechism* does not discuss this directly, but it's worth noting that the souls of unbelievers instantly enter upon the agony of their spiritual torments in hell. It's only the souls of believers that instantly enter into the glorious joys of their spiritual delights in heaven. It's worth remembering that this blessed and glorious change for the better is only for the believer. Unbelievers do experience a change at death. Indeed, their souls separate from their bodies, their souls don't stop to be, but rather, their soul enters a change, such a change, wherein they experience the immediate and unending torment of their soul in hell. And what is all the more agonizing is that they're awaiting the resurrection of their bodies, when their souls and bodies will be reunited and cast into the lake of fire, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth forever. It's a solemn truth. There is a change of what happens for both the believer and the unbeliever, and it happens immediately at death. Oh, by God's grace, to be a believer.

Let us move into our last point, The Rest at Death. You may be tempted to think that the perfecting of the believer's soul in heaven is the only benefit of death. After all, their body wastes away in this world. But there is another one that is a great comfort, and notice the *Catechism's* words, "and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection." It's true, the bodies of believers are lifeless once death happens. They begin to decay and disintegrate. Over time, only their bones remain, and sometimes even their bones disintegrate. Yet here is a sweet, pleasant truth. The bodies of believers remain united to Christ. Notice how Paul, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13 and 14, speaks of believers who have died. He says, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." He says that they are asleep. Now, he's not ignorant, he knows that they have physically died. He goes on in the next verse to speak of those who are still alive at the coming of Christ. He's simply likening death to sleep. It reminds us that death is not final. As those who sleep awake and arise, so those who are dead shall arise as well.

But notice that Paul says they "sleep in Jesus." This is important, because all who die are awaiting the resurrection. As we'll see, there is a resurrection that includes all men. And yet, in that resurrection, there will be the resurrection of the just, the righteous, those who are believers and who follow God in Christ; and there will be the resurrection of the wicked. And oh, what a horrible thing it would be to be resurrected unto damnation. All, in other words, are awaiting the resurrection. But for the believer, the grave is made a bed of peace, awaiting glory at the resurrection. Christ does not abandon their bodies. He remains united to them. At times, we can have a hard time going to sleep at the end of the day. I'm sure that everyone has had the experience of being afraid of the dark. We are often afraid because we imagine bad things will happen in the night. We can't see and make sense of all that's around us. Every sound can awaken a fear. Well, if you ever had that happen, you've probably had the comfort of a loved one, perhaps a mom or dad, comfort you and be with you while you fall asleep. You are able to fall asleep because you have the comfort of your loved one's presence and care.

Believer, here is comfort for you at that long sleep of death. Christ is with you. He welcomes your soul into his glorious presence, and yet he remains united to your body, never to forsake it. He will remain united to it through the years that remain until his glorious return. Now, he welcomes your soul, gloriously transforming and protecting it at death. He remains united, watching and caring for your body. As we'll see in the next lesson, he will raise it up in glory at the resurrection.

Well, as we close, let me challenge you to remember something serious. It's not easy to hear,

and it's not easy to think about, but it's something worth considering well. You will die. Now, this is not a light thought, but it's a needed thought. I certainly hope that you have a long life in this world. I hope that you have many causes for smiles and laughter. Above all, I hope that you come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your own Savior and serve him with all the life that remains. Whatever happens in this life, whatever it is, good or bad, you will come to the end of your life, you will breath your last, and you will die. This means it's important for you to prepare for that day. You should not put off preparing for that day, for many reasons, two of which include,

First, that you will never know when that day will come. It may be that you live for another eighty years, it may be that you have only eight minutes left. You simply don't know. Some people who are the greatest in health and strength die instantly for an unknown problem. This is why it's important to prepare. We don't know when death will come.

But another reason is that God has pointed out how we are to prepare. And he directs us to the hope that comforts us at death, and blesses us at death, for he points us to Jesus Christ. He is the Savior of sinners. He tells us that if we trust in him, we have everlasting life, that whether we live or die in this world, we are assured of peace and glory, because of Christ. Oh, do not put off preparing for death, for looking to Christ will bring you benefits, as we've seen, in this life, and benefits, as we've just seen, at death. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

Let me finish by comforting you who are believers. Here is a word for you. Christ, your Savior, has a treasure ready for you at the very moment you take your final breath. At that very moment, he will perfect your soul and welcome you into heaven. At that very moment, you will enter upon the fullest joy and glory ever known. At that very moment, you will be with Christ in glory. Oh, believer, I know that death can be scary. It's called "the last enemy." But I know this—Christ is our comfort. Christ is faithful. Christ is good. And when you have fears that come to you about death, remember to look to Christ, who died and conquered death. Remember to look to him, who will welcome you, believer, into heaven, who will care for your lifeless body, and he will always be your cause of rejoicing. Look to Christ, and in doing so look forward to the benefit which will be yours at death.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #29

Blessings of Salvation at the Resurrection

Question 38: *What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?*

Answer: *At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.*

Who can fully understand all of the riches of salvation? All of this salvation comes to us by grace, and it is as a treasure that can continue to overwhelm us with the blessings that the Lord provides. We have this unspeakable blessing all bound up for us in Christ Jesus. All of the blessings of salvation are ours in and by him. Without him, we have nothing. But with him, we have all things.

Our Question today presents a final chapter to the benefits that believers receive from Christ. However, this final chapter which contains these richest blessings is a chapter that itself never ends. The blessings of Christ continue for the believer forever. The Question is #38 of the *Shorter Catechism*: “What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?” And the Answer, “At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.”

Let’s look at one key word for our Question and Answer today, the word “resurrection.” The word itself means simply “to stand again” or “to rise again.” However, in the Bible, this word refers to a rising again that is greater than any other rising that we’ve ever experienced. It speaks of rising again from the dead. The word refers, in the Bible, to the bodily resurrection from the dead. We see this in the Bible. Of course, it’s what Jesus did. He rose from the dead. Each of the Gospels records this glorious truth. Paul asserts the same in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 3 and 4: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” Christ himself taught that there is a great day, when all who had died will be raised to life again. Notice this in John chapter 5, verses 28 and 29. He said, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

Well, our Question is directing us to consider the benefits that are brought to believers on this

last great day, when all who have died will rise again, and that unto the final judgment. Well, let's consider it now, as we consider three things about that day. First, The Glorious Day; second, The Public Day; and third, The Blessed Day.

So first then, The Glorious Day. The *Catechism* tells us that at the resurrection, believers will be raised up in glory. It's true, as we saw in John 5, mentioned earlier, that everyone will be raised upon the last day, believers and unbelievers. Yet, there will be a difference. For believers, it will be a glorious resurrection. For unbelievers, it will be the most miserable thing that they have and ever will, and continue to experience.

Well, how will it be glorious for the believer? First, their very bodies will be raised from the dead. We saw this in our last lesson that the souls of believers at their death are made perfect in holiness, and that their bodies do rest in the grave till the resurrection. At the resurrection, the real, physical bodies of believers will be restored and stand again. They'll be resurrected. Now, this brings obvious questions. We realize that after one dies, the body begins to disintegrate and decompose. In many cases, the physical flesh is entirely turned into dust. Of course, we know of tragic deaths, fires and other horrific circumstances which make our ability to identify even the smallest of physical remains impossible. Some have wondered then how the resurrection of one's physical body could take place. How can it be the same body? And is it not just a new body, a different body? Well, the difficulties, of course, are real for us. However, we need to remember that God is Almighty. You'll remember the Question, "What is God?" What a foundation this sets for all of these kinds of questions: "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power," and so on. Notice that which was just mentioned—he is infinite in his wisdom and power. Well, surely infinite wisdom and infinite power may and does accomplish what our very limited wisdom cannot understand, and what our very limited power could never do.

Additionally, God has already shown such power. Remember that God made all things of nothing by the word of his power. All that we see in the earth, all that is in it, the heavens above us, all of the stars, all of these things were brought forth out of nothing. Well surely, God who made all things out of nothing can bring together again all that is needed for the bodily resurrection of all men—their very same body restored on that last day. We also need to remember that this is exactly what God's Word tells us. It does not tell us *how* all of this will happen, although I encourage you to read through 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul talks much of the resurrection. The simple thing you need to note is that the Bible—the Word of God—tells us that it will happen. And with God's Word telling us that, we are very comfortable trusting in the true, faithful, and Almighty God.

Now, how else will it be a glorious resurrection? Well, their very bodies, that is, believers' bodies, will be wondrously transformed. Oh, we speak of things that we do not yet fully know or understand. Yet, this is promised to us in the Bible. It's not just that we will rise again in our own bodies—that is, of course, miraculous. It is that our bodies will be transformed and made glorious. Our very bodies that we now possess, will be the same bodies, and yet gloriously transformed.

what Paul writes in Philipians 3, verse 21, speaking of God, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." We know that certain changes will take place, though we don't understand every detail. For instance, in Luke 20, verses 35 and 36, Christ said, "But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." Notice, he doesn't say they become angels—that's not Biblical—nor that they are the class of angels, but they no longer have

death, they don't decay. They now have such power given them that is like unto the angels. Their very same bodies resurrected, there are certain changes, no doubt, have taken place, such that no longer is there any need for marriage. But each of these changes, as difficult for us to even begin to understand, are changes for the better, that we may better glorify and enjoy God in our bodies forever. It doesn't tell us everything, but it does let us know that great changes will take place, all of which will enable us to honor the Lord forever.

Well, how can we fully understand all of these things? What we do know is that our inglorious bodies will be made like unto His glorious body. Many of you have seen butterflies. Think of how a butterfly begins, as this caterpillar creeping along the ground, and it goes into a cocoon. And when it emerges from the cocoon, it has the same body, but gloriously transformed. Well, think of this for a moment. In that transformation, the caterpillar doesn't die. It's being changed within the cocoon, until it emerges this glorious sight. Now here's something that's an imperfect analogy. Because the believer's body actually dies, and it doesn't undergo transformation in the grave. But rather, that same body will be glorious transformed in a moment, and oh, what a sight it will be on that day.

Well, when will this glorious day be? We don't know as far as a date on the calendar, however we do know that it will be at the end of the world as we presently know it. It is that great day to which all history is moving, and no one shall escape. The Bible speaks of this as "the last day," and in other places, as "the great day." It is on that last day that this will take place. We see this in Matthew 25, verses 31 and following. Jesus says, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." What a scene that will be! Your eyes will behold every single person on that last great day. It is on that day that God will glorify his dearly loved, his blood-bought, and believing people.

Well, secondly, The Public Day. We have just seen this from the previous passage, but notice the *Catechism* says that believers will be openly acknowledged and acquitted. The word "openly" is similar to the word "publically." When we do something openly, we're doing it in front of, or in the presence of others. When we do something secretly, we're hiding it from others' sight. Well, notice here that the *Catechism* tells us that believers will be openly, that is, publically acknowledged and acquitted. We'll talk more about those words in a moment, "acknowledged" and "acquitted," but for now, simply note that this will be openly done, publically done before all the world. Well, what a thought that is, the whole earth, every man, every woman, every child, all the angels, and the demons, all will be gathered together to witness, to experience this scene. Now this surely can be overwhelming to think of. We can be overwhelmed by standing before a small group of people. However, our focus will not be upon the people around us, though it will be everyone. Our focus will be upon Him, who will be openly acknowledging and acquitting believers, while also openly condemning and showing forth the judgment on unbelievers.

And who will that be?—well, it's Jesus Christ. Notice our *Catechism* presents this in the Question, "What benefits do believers receive *from Christ* at the resurrection?" The Bible teaches this again and again. Remember the scene mentioned in Matthew 25—all nations, all people gathered. And who is it? It's the Son of man who is there—the Lord Jesus Christ! And this is what happens to believers on that day, in Matthew 25, verse 34, "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." It's not the voice of an apostle, as interesting as that might be. It's not the voice of an angel, as impressive as that would be. It is the voice of the King—the eternal Son

of God incarnate and glorified, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is the one who will acknowledge and acquit his people before all the world.

And what does it mean to be openly acknowledged? We've just seen it in this passage. To be openly acknowledged is to be publically owned by Christ as his beloved people. "Come, ye blessed of my Father." Notice Christ's words in Matthew chapter 10, verse 32: Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." Well on that last day, we will see this in its fulness. Christ will acknowledge each of his people as those who are his, and who have trusted him, and whom he loved, and for whom he gave himself, and for whom he's prepared a place. They have been mocked in this life. They've been ridiculed by the world in this life. Some have suffered tremendous persecution and horrific pains in this life for following Christ. And the world has laughed at them, and has been cruel to them, have thought little of them. But on that last day, these will be shown before all of the world to be the children of God and the beloved bride of Christ.

Well, what does it mean to be openly acquitted? To be openly acquitted means to be openly cleared of all guilt, as well as of all false accusations. As we've seen, each believer is already justified. They are already declared righteous. They're not waiting to be justified. For so soon as a believer so believers upon Christ, their sins are remitted for Christ's sake, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to them, and they are then and forever declared righteous. All of this is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, and that by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone. However, on the last day, this will be publically displayed before all the world. Every sin will be shown to have been pardoned by the blood of Christ. Every false charge against them as well will be entirely dismissed. And oh, what a happy day that will be for the believer, and all the world will witness it.

Well, third, The Blessed Day. What an amazing statement! Believers shall be made "perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity." It will take all eternity to understand the significance of this benefit. We cannot capture all in words now. However, we can indicate a few truths about how believers are made perfectly blessed on that day.

First, all miseries and brokenness will be removed. In our present world, all is touched by brokenness. Even the healthiest body gets sick and hurt. Even the best families experience heartache. Even the most fervent and loving Christian knows some degree of great trouble and trial. Brokenness is part of our current fallen world. And at the resurrection, believers will have no more experience of brokenness. Notice, in Revelation chapter 21, and verse 4, we read this precious testimony: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." All their miseries are removed.

Well second, a complete, full, and lasting joy will be given to the believer. Certainly this will include the blessings mentioned above, however, the complete, and full, and lasting joy will be focused upon God himself. The believer is consumed with the knowledge of the glory of God on that day. The love of God, which multiplies his love to God and his people is now fully consuming that believer. Think of the simple statement of Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 17: "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Yes, believers will be with one another, and this is a blessing. But that which transcends all is that believers shall ever be with the Lord, and that in his glory, in such intimacy that we cannot fully understand at the present.

At the end of Psalm 16, we sing about the resurrection, preeminently of Christ's resurrection, and yet, as believers are in Christ, we anticipate our own resurrection. In verse 11, we find the words,

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Fulness of joy, pleasures for evermore—now, we have experienced in this life some joy, even full joy for a moment, and we’ve known pleasures that have gladdened us, but fulness and pleasure that lasts forever, and never diminishes, this is what we will experience in its fulness forever. The enjoyment of God in Christ, his love, his fellowship—we will be transformed, and enabled body and soul to enjoy God forever.

Theologians think of this as the “beatific vision.” It refers to the blessed sight of God in heaven, which in turn furthers our own experience of blessedness. We see this in 1 John 3, verse 2. John writes, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” The believer is right now by faith being transformed into his likeness. It is by faith we know Christ. But then, on the last day, we will see Christ. Faith will be no more. Sight will now possess us, and we’ll see the glorified Christ, and likewise be blessed in him, and ever be with him. What a glorious and blessed truth. For we now know Christ by faith. Soon enough, on that last day, we will know him by sight, and such a sight as will fill us with unending joy and delight forever.

Well, as we close, I want to challenge you to set apart time even today to think about that great day. It is a day that you, and I, and everyone will certainly experience. However far off or near to us it is today, we will experience it. Thomas Watson, a pastor from many years ago, once said, “We are not so sure to rise out of our beds, as we are to rise out of our graves.” We think about and plan for things in this life, tomorrow, and weeks down the road, and even years down the road. And yet all of that is uncertain. We still feel wise to plan for them, but we tend to spend little time thinking about the last day that is certain. Oh, please, take time to think of that day, and by God’s grace in Christ, anticipate that day with much joy.

My own thoughts fail as to how I might exhort, and encourage, and compel you to consider this well. You may be a member in the church, and you may have been baptized, and you may gather with the saints every Lord’s day of the year. However, if you’re not trusting in Christ, if you’re not a believer, this day will come, but it will come as the beginning unending torment to your body and soul. So please consider well that day, and your present need for Jesus Christ, and remember that he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the resurrection. And so coming to Christ, and taking him, will open to you this treasure of salvation as well.

Well, let me add a word to you who are believing. You may be young, you may be weak. Sometimes for following Christ, you may be made fun of. You may even be abused or persecuted for your faith. But dear believer, there is a day coming when the Lord of lords and King of kings will openly acknowledge you personally as his forever. This is the day coming, when he will certify before all creation that his blood cleansed you from all your sin, and his righteousness justified you. There is a day coming when he will fill you with such blessed joy as will overwhelm you with delight for all eternity. That day is coming. It is yours because of grace.

Oh, then be not weary in serving him today. Do not compromise his promises. Do not compromise his commandments. Do not live for the vanity of this world. Devote yourself to him. Paul says in Colossians 3, if then we’re risen with Christ, we are to set our mind on things above where Christ is. Oh, then devote yourself to him. Nothing you lose in this life is able to be compared with what you will enjoy in that life. Give yourself with renewed diligence to believing, and in believing, lovingly obeying the Lord Jesus Christ.

For those of you who are trusting in Jesus, realize these benefits are yours. They are reserved for you. And one day you will get to experience and enjoy them forever. Yet, remember why they

are yours. They are yours because of God's grace. They are yours because of Jesus Christ. It is most certainly true that no believer on that day will say, "These blessings are insignificant and unsatisfying." No, they will be overwhelmed, and that forever by them. Our everlasting rejoicing is expressed well in Revelation 5, verse 12: "Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." And oh, what a resounding praise: "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (verse 13). Oh, believer, know this: your body and soul joined together on that last day will be among them who ever praise the Lamb of God. That being so, let it be your delight now to give thanks and praise to him, living every day in anticipation of that day when faith will be made sight.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #30

The Duty Required of Man

Question 39: *What is the duty which God requireth of man?*

Answer: *The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will.*

Question 40: *What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?*

Answer: *The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience was the moral law.*

Question 41: *Wherein is the moral law summarily comprehended?*

Answer: *The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments.*

Question 42: *What is the sum of the ten commandments?*

Answer: *The sum of the ten commandments is, To love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbour as ourselves.*

In this lesson, we start the second section of the *Shorter Catechism*. In the first 38 Questions, we considered what things we are to believe concerning God. In these questions, we considered God himself, his works, his plan of salvation. Now from Question #39 onward, we consider what duty God requires of man. In upcoming lessons, we'll look at each of the Ten Commandments, what they are, what they require, what they forbid. We'll look at what God requires of us to escape his wrath and curse, and this will include teaching on the sacraments and the Lord's Prayer. And in short, what we have is a survey before us. It's a survey of the main things that God requires of us. Well, to help set a foundation for this survey, in our lesson today, we'll look at four Questions, #39 through #42.

In our first Question, #39, we have a very general statement: "What is the duty which God requireth of man?—The duty which God requireth of man is obedience to his revealed will."

The second Question, #40, introduces a helpful concept regarding the nature of his holy will: "What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?—The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience was the moral law."

The third Question, #41, directs us to the summary of this revealed will in Scripture: "Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?—The moral law is summarily comprehended in the

ten commandments.”

And the fourth Question, #42, directs us to an even simpler summary of all that God requires of us: “What is the sum of the ten commandments?—The sum of the ten commandments is, To love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbour as ourselves.”

Now, why is it that the *Catechism* introduces God’s law now? We’ve talked about salvation and forgiveness. Why the law and his commandments now? Well, it’s true that the law convicts and convinces sinners of their need for Christ. This is an important use of the law of God. However, it’s also true that the law directs the enlivened and forgiven believer in the way that he should walk. So the *Catechism* is helping us see that those who have been saved, who do believe in Christ, who are united to Christ, who are filled with the Holy Spirit, and are being sanctified, that they are to walk by his grace in obedience to his holy law.

Certainly, it would be possible to spend an entire lesson on each of these Questions. However, we will look at them together, as they combine to give us a helpful starting point to understand what God requires of us for our obedience. So three points to our lesson: first, Our Duty Revealed; second, Our Duty Clarified; third, Our Duty Summarized.

So first, Our Duty Revealed. God is the only infinite, eternal, and unchangeable being. This means he is the Creator of all things. Everything else is his creature. This means that all other things are dependent upon him, and answerable to him. They are under God, and made for God. this, of course, includes mankind—men, and women, and children. Mankind is accountable to God. When you think about a duty, we’re thinking about a responsibility. A duty belongs to someone who is under another’s authority. When a teacher assigns homework, it is the student’s duty to complete it. When a parent gives a command, it is the child’s duty to perform it.

The first Question today directs our attention to our duty before God. “What is the duty which God requireth of man?—The duty which God requireth of man is obedience to his revealed will.” Notice that *God* is the one requiring this duty. Notice also that he is requiring it of *man*, that is, all mankind. In other words, the duty is a duty for all humans—men and women, adults and children, citizens of every nation, and people in all generations. And what is this duty? It’s obedience to his revealed will. “Obedience means that we obey, that is, carry out and fulfill what someone else commands. Here, of course, we’re thinking about man obeying God.

Well, notice that it God’s *revealed will* that man is to obey. If something is revealed, it is made known. It’s the opposite of hidden. Men are not supposed to obey something they make up, rather, they are to obey what God has made known. They are to obey what God has revealed. The answer to Question #40 identifies for us this revealed will: “The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience was the moral law.”

Well, what is this moral law? The term *moral law* refers to those things God requires of man because they are right in and of themselves—they are moral. In other words, God commands them and requires them of man because they are righteous and good. Even as Paul says, “The law of God is good,” in the book of Romans. So the law, the moral law, is good, and so God commands them. Such requirements are founded on both what God is himself, and what mankind is as God has made him.

For instance, it would never be right for man to worship anything other than the true and triune God. This is why God has commanded man, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” The command represents what is good and true, and thus right. There is only one God. Only this one God is worthy to be worshipped. To worship anything else is to give something else the honor that

belongs only to God. Now this is true for all time, and for all people. Thus, it's moral.

Now, there are other commandments that God has given that are for a particular purpose or season of time. For instance, as one example, Leviticus 23, verses 5 and 6, God commanded Israel: "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD's passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread." Now this commandment was only for the Israelites as a ceremony remembering his delivery of them, and anticipating the actual Lamb of God, who would die and take away the sin of the world. And so, as Christ died and rose again, the purpose of that command was fulfilled. This is why we no longer kill animals, though the Old Testament has many commandments about sacrificing animals. That's why we don't observe the dietary restrictions of the Old Testament. Certainly, these things were required of God for a time, but they were required because of a specific purpose that God had, not because they were in themselves right and good, and binding for all time.

Now, as you get older, you'll learn more about this, and you'll see three main categories of Biblical law: the Moral Law (which we'll be considering more fully); the Ceremonial Law; and the Judicial Law. The Ceremonial Law refers to those rituals and sacrifices performed under the old covenant, which were anticipating in one way or another the coming of Jesus Christ. The Judicial Law refers to the law given to Israel as a nation, which was meant to govern it as a society. But the Moral Law refers to that law that is binding upon all people, all societies, in all places, for all time.

But where was this moral law first revealed? Well, it was revealed unto all men and written upon their hearts. Notice Paul's words in Romans 2, verses 14 and 15: "For when the Gentiles"—that means the nations beyond Israel—"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law"—that is, the moral law that's written—"do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." Notice Paul's point—all men have the work of the moral law in their heart. And so he uses several important words, when he says that the nations, the Gentiles, do by nature, by fact of what they are made to be, they do the which are contained in the law, but they don't have the law of God written themselves. And they show the work of the law written in their hearts, so they have a natural understanding of this moral law. Their conscience bears witness.

So though men can suppresses it, and deny it, and hardens their hearts against the truth, each person knows, by the very fact of being a human, that it is wrong to steal. He knows that the God who made him is worthy to be honored and worshipped. He knows that he ought to honor his authorities. Why is it then that so many people ignore this and do otherwise? Well, remember that once Adam sinned, man fell into an estate of sin and misery. And this means his nature was corrupted. His thoughts and his understanding were twisted. His desires in his heart are now blackened. Instead of clearly understanding and desiring the things that they know to do, they twist and pervert the truth, and now call good evil, and evil good. But thankfully, God has not left man only with his conscience and the work of the law written upon his heart. He's also clarified his moral law in his Holy Scriptures.

So second, Our Duty Clarified. God has kindly given to us a summary of the moral law in clear and concrete commandments. We find this in the Ten Commandments. The answer to Question #41 states that, "The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments." The words "summarily comprehended" means "contained in a summary." It's summarized. It doesn't give an exhaustive and an exacting detailed list of every particular thing, but it gives the main ideas, which the rest of Scripture fills out for us. We'll spend several lessons looking at each of

these commandments in greater focus, but we will not consider them right now. As you look ahead, for future lessons, you'll find the Ten Commandments in two places in their entirety—in Exodus chapter 20, and Deuteronomy chapter 5.

Now, how do we know that the Ten Commandments are the summary of the moral law? How do we know that they were meant to express for us, for all time, and to all men, what God requires of us? Well, there are many reasons, but for now, let me point out two.

First, God himself clearly made a distinction between the Ten Commandments—the moral law—and the ceremonies and sacrifices, and civil laws that he commanded to Israel through Moses under the old covenant. So, whereas the ceremonies and sacrifices, and civil laws are no longer binding upon us, since the old covenant is passed, the Ten Commandments are. Well, how did God make this clear? Well, notice the Ten Commandments were spoken by God immediately, directly, and with a clear and loud voice. That's an important point. Whereas other things were given mediately through Moses, and by Moses written down, or shown in visions, God himself spoke clearly and loudly the Ten Commandments before all.

Second, out of all the commandments, only the Ten Commandments were written directly by God. Moses writes that these were written “with the finger of God.” So it's not Moses writing the Ten Commandments, it's God himself. Another point which shows us God makes this distinction is that only the Ten Commandments were written by God upon two tablets of stone; not on a scroll, or a parchment, or a piece of paper, but on stone, which was an emblem of their enduring legacy, binding upon all. And fourth, the circumstances surrounding the giving of the Ten Commandments made it clear to all the Israelites that these commandments were particularly special. Think of the scene: lightnings, thundering, this voice and trumpet that was blaring. People realized that what's being given now is of particular significance.

Well, you can see this as you read through Exodus, and throughout the rest of the Pentateuch in various places. But notice Deuteronomy 10, verses 3 and 4. These verses provide a helpful summary of most of these points. So see if you can identify these special marks of this special law. Moses said, “And I made an ark of shittim wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in mine hand. And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the LORD spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly: and the LORD gave them unto me.” Tables of stone, written by God, spoken by God audibly to all men, surrounded by a fiery mountain, in the public sight of the assembly of God's people. Well, every Israelite would have known, God was marking these ten out as particularly special.

There's a second way of knowing these commandments are special, and that's by considering what it is they command, and how they are used and acknowledged throughout the whole of Scripture. Well, we don't have time to look at this detail right now. We will do it more as we look at each individual commandment in the next number of lessons. But for now, you can look at these commandments, and you'll see that these commandments are commanding things that are for all generations and all people. And as we'll see in those coming lessons, even the New Testament shows us the same thing.

Well, third, as to our final point in the lesson, Our Duty Summarized. It's true, the Ten Commandments are a summary of the duty God requires of us. However, there is a summary that is even more concise. You can think of it as a summary of the summary. Notice the Answer to Question #42: “The sum of the ten commandments is, To love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbour as ourselves.”

You'll likely recognize these words. They are taken from the Bible, particularly Matthew 22, verses 37 through 40.

But how is it that love summarizes obedience? The world doesn't understand this. Many people think that they don't need to worry about God's commandments, because they have a warm feeling towards God that they call "love." After all, the Bible's commandments, they don't sound pleasant to the world. And they'd rather have feelings that are pleasant. Well, the Bible shows us that true love leads to obedience. Notice how John writes of this in 1 John 2, verses 3 through 5. He writes, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him." An evidence of loving God is keeping his commandments. As sin is the transgression of the law, so love leads to the fulfilling of the law.

Of course, this should make sense to us. If we love someone who is in authority over us, we desire to honor and obey them. Children who love their parents, obey their parents. And thus, people who love God obey God. They don't obey God by their own power and ability to be saved by God, as we'll see. Those who obey God do so because of God's grace. Well, notice that Christ himself taught this relationship of love and obedience—John chapter 14, verse 21: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." You can then see the connection between the summary and the law. If someone loves God, they will obey his commandments. If you look at the first four commandments, "Thou shalt have no other god," through "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," you'll see commandments that focus more directly on God himself. If someone loves God, they will obey these commandments. The same is true toward our neighbor. If we love God and our neighbor, well then we'll want to keep that second group of commandments, #5 through #10, "Honour thy father and thy mother," through, "Thou shalt not covet," because these express what is to be done toward our neighbor in love.

You can see how love and obedience are related, just by looking at Romans 13, verses 8 through 10. In these three verses, we see a call to love our neighbor. But Paul goes on to show that if we love our neighbor, we are actually obeying God's commandments. That is, when we obey God's commandments, we love our neighbor, and when we love our neighbor, we'll obey God's commandments. Notice he writes, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Think of it this way. If I love my friend, would I steal from him? Would I lie about him? this is why Paul says, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour." Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. He does not mean that love replaces the law, as if it's an alternate to the law. Instead, as he shows, he means that when we love our neighbor, love will follow the revealed will of God's holy law.

Well, we must close, and as we do, notice two things. First, God requires of you and me to obey his revealed will. It's not an option. It's not reserved for a special group of people. Whether believer or unbeliever, he requires it of us all. Our obedience is to be sincere and loving. God is not to be obeyed outwardly while our hearts are far from him. We're not to mimic the Pharisees, who on their outside appeared religious, and yet on the inside were full, as Christ says, of dead men's bones. God is to be obeyed joyfully with gladness. We're to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We don't want others to be kind to our face while they hate us in their hearts. So we are to love our neighbors, doing such things to them as we desire them to do to us. That is what is obedience. That's what God requires. Anything short of this is sin. Remember, what is sin? 'Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.' Well here is seen a foundation laid about what God's law requires.

Well second, see how great your need is for Christ. In disobeying, we disobey God's revealed will. And surely then, we need Christ, that by his blood, we would be pardoned, and by his righteousness imputed to us, we would be declared righteous. And yet even as believers who have been forgiven, who are justified, how can we ever hope to obey God and offer to him what his revealed will requires without Christ working in us? We must look to Christ. For only he is able to supply us that measure of grace needed, so that we are able to walk in his ways with love and gladness, not going after a lower standard that we make up, but looking to God's lofty standard, to love him with all of our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. This must be done. And yet it can only be done by and through Christ. Remember, as Christ said, he is the vine, we're the branches. As we abide in him, and he in us, then we bear much fruit. And so, as we think about God's requirement of us to obey him, we must think of his supply to us in Christ. As we consider the commandments that are coming, we need to remember our need for Christ, both for pardon, and for purity. And oh, may it be that he would supply us that grace, that both being pardoned and purified, we would then obey him in love more and more, and all to his glory.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #31

The Ten Commandments: A Preface of Grace

Question 43: *What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?*

Answer: *The preface to the ten commandments is in these words, “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”*

Question 44: *What doth the preface to the ten commandments teach us?*

Answer: *The preface to the ten commandments teacheth us, That because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer; therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.*

In our lesson today, we begin our study of the Ten Commandments. You may already be very familiar with each of these Ten Commandments, but if not, I hope that the following lessons will assist you in understanding this divinely given summary of the moral law, what God requires of all men. If you haven't yet done so, let me encourage you take the time and to commit the whole of the Ten Commandments to memory. As you do so, you'll begin to meditate upon this grand summary of all that the Lord requires of us. And you'll find help, by the Lord's blessing, not only for the conviction of sin, but the understanding of what Christ did for us in fulfilling these commandments, as well as learning to express your gratitude in trusting him.

Well, how do the Ten Commandments begin? I would certainly understand if you said, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” That is the first commandment. However, it's not actually how the Ten Commandments start. And what do I mean? It's that they begin with an introduction, and an important introduction. This introduction helps provide us with a key to understanding the right way of using the Ten Commandments. And it gives us encouragement as well, as we consider obeying them. Our *Catechism* refers to this introduction as a “preface.” A preface is something that goes before other things. Many books will have a brief preface preceding the main body of the text. The preface usually supplies helpful insights for understanding the rest of the book. And as we'll see, this is true of the preface to the Ten Commandments. If you've not yet memorized the Ten Commandments, be sure to start with this preface, and you'll find that it supplies you a great help as you consider these blessed words.

There are two Questions for our lesson today. The first is Question #43 in the *Shorter Catechism*.

It supplies us the words of the Biblical text itself. And the second, Question #44, helps explain the meaning of these important words. The first, Question #43: “What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?” And the Answer: “The preface to the ten commandments is in these words, *I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*” These are the words that we find in Exodus 20, verse 2. It’s helpful to see, as well, that just before this verse, in verse 1, we read, “And God spake all these words, saying.” Always remember this. The Ten Commandments weren’t given by Moses. They aren’t Moses’ words. They aren’t Moses’ commandments. These commandments were spoken, written, and delivered by God.

Now, our next Question, #44, helps explain the meaning of the words of verse 2: “What doth the preface to the ten commandments teach us?—The preface to the ten commandments teacheth us, That because is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.” As the answer to Question #44 shows, the preface actually provides us helpful reasons to remember why we should keep his commandments. We’re to look at each of these in the lesson that follows. Following this helpful guidance of the *Catechism*, we’ll look at three points, all of which show us reasons for obeying God. The first is, God’s Transcendence; the second is, God’s Covenant; and the third is, God’s Redemption.

Now, before we go further, let me simply note that when we understand the preface well, we will see there is no argument to obey God in order to earn salvation. The preface itself addresses a people God has already called to himself, a people that he has brought out of bondage. There is a significant point here for us to understand that both for Israel under the Old Testament, and for the obedience offered by the believer today, we do not obey God’s commandments in order to be saved. But rather, because he’s shown mercy to us, and, yea, even when he’s redeemed us by the blood of Christ, we thus are those who want to keep and obey his commandments, which is his holy will for us.

Well, first then, for our lesson, God’s Transcendence. “Transcendence” is a big word. The word itself comes from the idea of climbing, or going beyond something. You can fill a cup with water, however, you can also hold it under a faucet, and let the water fill it and overflow the cup. The cup is too little to contain all that’s being poured into it. The water transcends it. When we speak about God’s transcendence, we refer to the truth that God transcends, that is, he exceeds or goes beyond our ability to comprehend him fully. Remember, he is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

And notice the words of the preface, “I am the LORD.” In the Hebrew, the word “LORD” is “Jehovah.” It is the name God takes to himself, and it’s related to his words that he spoke to Moses at the burning bush, in Exodus 3, and verse 14. We read, “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” It refers to God as he is self-existing. The *Larger Catechism* helpfully explains this a bit more, when it says, “God manifesteth his sovereignty as being JEHOVAH, the eternal, immutable, and almighty God, having his being in and of himself” (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question #101). Whenever you read the Bible, and you come across the Lord’s name, and in the English, you see it as “LORD” with all capital letters, that’s standing for JEHOVAH. You should have this in mind, that this is reminding us that he is Jehovah, the eternal, immutable, and almighty God, who has being in and of himself. He’s dependent upon none.

Well, with that for our understanding, this then is why our Question says, “because God is the Lord.” God that gave these Ten Commandments is Jehovah, the glorious God who transcends all creation. In that he has all life and being of himself, he is not part of the creation. He is the Creator. This reminds us that he is supreme. His authority is above all else that is. There’s no one before

him, and there's no one above him. Let's put it a little bit differently. If we were to disobey him, indeed to our shame, when we disobey him, we disobey the greatest, the highest, and the best that there is. It shows us the great wickedness and foolishness of sin. And we would remember that God is the supreme one, the all-glorious one that transcends all, we see, "Well, of course, I ought to obey him." There is none better than he is, none greater than he is, none more glorious than he is. And the preface helps remind us of this. No one compares with God. God is above everyone. And so we shouldn't think, Well, I'll follow after my friends, or my fellow students, or I'll go after what I want to desire. If it's in contradiction to what God has explained in his Word, we would be following a lesser, instead of the greatest. And so we remember, because God is the LORD, because he's the greatest there is, we're bound to obey him.

But notice, second, God's covenant. We see these words, "I am the LORD thy God." Of course, it's true that God is God over all that is. The God of the Bible, the God that gave the Ten Commandments is God over atheists. He's God over Hindus. He's God over Muslims. He's God over all pagans and idolaters. He's God over all the world. However, this expression, "thy God," refers to that special relationship he established with his people—the covenant. You see this well expressed in Genesis 17. It's certainly not the only place, but it's a helpful illustration of this great privilege of being in relationship with God by covenant. This records, of course, when God was establishing this covenant with Abraham. So notice Genesis 17, verses 7 and 8. God says, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." Now, as this passage shows, God established a special relationship with Abraham and his descendants. Notice again that language, "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee...I will be their God." This, of course, is a foundation for all that he's doing toward his people.

We've come across this word "covenant" before. We noted then that the word "covenant" refers to a special relationship established between two or more people. In a covenant, there are promises, and there are responsibilities, and there are often blessings for keeping those promises, and consequences for failing in our responsibilities. We can see some of this in Genesis 17, that's just been mentioned. There's a special relationship established between God and Abraham, and Abraham's descendants. There are promises given, the most fundamental of which is, "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee...I will be their God." Well, this brings them into such a relationship that God now says, "I am the LORD thy God."

Yes again, it's true, all mankind is answerable to God, for he is God over all the earth. However, those with whom he has covenanted, they have been given a tremendous privilege. This privilege makes it so that they should obey him all the more. He's come near to us and said, "I will be your God. You will be my people." He owns us as his own people. And he gives us the privilege of having him as our God. Doubtlessly, you've seen baptisms take place, and what's taking place in a baptism is, the outward sign and seal of the covenant of grace is being applied to one. And think of the language, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." There's a relationship of one being brought into fellowship, a covenant with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Now, as we've said before, this doesn't mean that that person is saved, but what it does mean is, God is saying to that one, "I will be your God. And I'm privileging you with all of my care, all of my Word, my promises and commandments. I'll give you the privilege of hearing my Word Sabbath by Sabbath. I'll give you the privilege of shepherding you

by those pastors that I've sent after my own heart." And so he cares for us, and he takes us, as it were, out of the world, and places us into the context where he teaches us his covenant.

Now this is a great privilege. And if you are in God's covenant, if you've been baptized, God has said to you, "You are mine, and I offer to you all that I am, for you." Well, this then is why the *Catechism* includes a reason for obedience, "Because God...is our God." Yes, while he rules over all others, and he even shows mercy to them, he has not come near to all others, as he comes near to his people. Because to his people, he says, "I give you promises. I hold forth my covenant to you, to be your God to call upon, to look to, and to be saved by." In this way, he distinguishes his covenant people from the world, which is a tremendous privilege.

Well, seeing then that God has been so kind to us in this, is it not right that we should be called to obey him? And you'll notice the language of the *Catechism*, "therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments." This binding is a notion of covenant relationship. "I am your God, so follow me." Sometimes children will say to their parents, "Well, my friend gets to do this or that." And the parent will rightly say, "Well, I'm not that person's mom or dad. I'm your mom or dad, and you are supposed to listen to me." Of all the care that mom and dad provides, they have a right to say unto their children, "This is the way our family will be." How much the more that God has established a relationship with us that is far superior to every other relationship, that in his display of kindness to us, and care and protection for us, that it would be right for him to say, "Therefore, obey me."

Well, third, God's Redemption. To "redeem" means "to buy back. It is to purchase something so that the thing you purchased is now especially yours. This is exactly what God has done for his people. Notice the language of the preface, "which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." This language, of course, speaks of deliverance. God has given his people liberty from their former bondage. However, how did he accomplish this deliverance? How did he bring them out of the house of bondage? He did so by redemption. What was the redemption? When did God purchase his people? Well, you'll notice the preface looks back to Exodus. We see this in Israel's history, early on in the book of Exodus. I hesitate to direct you to a longer passage, but notice the following portion from Exodus chapter 6, verses 2 through 7. And as you have this passage before you, listen, and you'll notice all three of these points, God's Transcendence, God's Covenant, and God's Redemption. Particularly pay attention to how God says he will redeem his people. Exodus 6:2 through 7:

"And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD; and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them. And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments; and I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

Well, that's a longer passage for our lesson, but it's a very clear testimony of these important truths. Notice God's transcendence—"by my name JEHOVAH." God's covenant—"I have also

established my covenant with them,” later, “I have remembered my covenant.” But now, God’s redemption—“I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments.” And then he says, “I will take you to me for a people.” Instead of being, as it were, under the bondage to Egypt, “I’ll redeem you, I’ll bring you out, and you will be my people.”

Well, God redeemed his enslaved people from the cruel bondage they suffered under Pharaoh’s abusive control, and he did so by great judgments. Do you remember them? You can read of them throughout the early portion of the book of Exodus. They were the plagues that he brought on Egypt. The last and the culminating plague, was, of course, the death of the firstborn. And you ought to remember what God did for his people when he brought that plague upon the land—it’s when he established the passover. You can read of this in Exodus 12, but you probably know the main parts already. Each household was kill a lamb, and put its blood on the doorway to their home. And God says, in Exodus 12, verse 23, “The LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.”

Now, why do we focus on this? It’s because, when God says, “I delivered thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage,” he’s actually pointing us back to this historical even. But this is also significant for us today, because we find that the passover—which was that culminating act of redeeming and delivering his people from this bondage—the passover ultimately points to the Lord Jesus Christ. The passover was a shadow, it was a type, it was an anticipation of Christ to come. You can see what John the Baptist said, when he saw Jesus, and he cried out, “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” Jesus is the Lamb God provided to address the sins of his people throughout the world. His blood redeems them. In Galatians 1, verse 4, Paul tells us briefly why Christ gave himself for us. He says, “Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.” You see, Christ’s work redeems from the bondage of the evil world. It delivers those who trust in him.

The link between the passover and Jesus Christ is not something we make up. The Scripture explicitly identifies it. Paul writes of it in 1 Corinthians 5, and verse 7, when he exhorts the Christians to “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” Well, it’s true that believers today do not experience the historical passover that’s recorded in the book of Exodus in the Old Testament, but it’s also true, and ought to be remembered, that we do have, with all believers of all ages the reality to which the Old Testament event pointed. The events of the Old Testament were pointing to, preparing for, and anticipating the fullest deliverance in and by Christ Jesus, and the shedding of his blood upon the cross. This means that as we look back to what Christ did for us, we too enjoy the benefit of being delivered out of the house of bondage. In other words, the preface to the Ten Commandments points us today to the redeeming work of that Mediator, Jesus Christ. And it does so by remembering that historical Old Testament event that points to that deliverance that would be wrought by Christ.

Well this helps us understand the relevance of the preface to the Ten Commandments. When God redeems a people, when he forgives them of their sins, and he purchases them unto himself, it doesn’t mean that they’re now delivered to do whatever they want. Rather, he’s purchased them that they would be his people. He makes them his. He purchases them unto himself, which is, of course, what we find throughout the Bible. Notice how Paul expressed this, as one example, in 1 Corinthians 6, verse 20: “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” God has purchased us by the blood of his Son Jesus Christ. Which

means we're no longer our own. Therefore, we are to serve the Lord with our body and soul, for all that we are now belongs to him. Peter writes the same thing in 1 Peter 1, verses 18 and 19: "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." You can hear Peter pointing to the passover, and saying, "Christ, our passover, has purchased us, and redeemed us to God.

You see then, the preface is telling us that God's transcendence, his covenantal relationship, and his gracious redemption all unite and call us to obey him. "Because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments." This grace does not remove from us the call we have to obey him. It strengthens that demand, and gives us encouragement to obey him.

Unfortunately, not everyone realizes this today. They think that God's grace and kindness removes any reason for obedience. It's true certainly that God's grace removes any attempt that we would have to obey in order to gain his salvation. Christ alone fulfills the law that we may be accepted with God. However, God's grace does not remove our responsibility to obey him, and to obey him in love. Quite the opposite—his goodness and kindness, and his love, and his grace, and his redemption all join together and cry out, "Obey me." Christ himself said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). But why is it that believers love him? John writes, in 1 John 4, "We love him because he first loved us." When we know God's love to us, it leads us to obey him. If we love him we will keep his commandments. Well, this is the message then of the preface. God shows us his goodness and love, and therefore, because of his great glory, because of his covenant, because of his redemption, let us obey him.

And we'll simply close with this—two important applications flow from this preface. The first is, there is no true obedience to God without a knowledge of his transcendence, and covenant, and redemption. Now if you're trying to obey God's law without these, you must look again, and consider your in need to embrace this covenant and trust in Christ alone for your redemption. Only then will you be led truly to obey.

And the second is this—if you are trusting in Christ, if you have been redeemed by his blood, oh, dear believer, rejoice in the Lord for his mercy, and consider well his love. And then give yourself to that loving and glad obedience which you owe to him, obeying his will revealed in the Scriptures, and as stated here in these Ten Commandments.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #32

The Ten Commandments: Love for God

Question 45: *Which is the first commandment?*

Answer: *The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

Question 46: *What is required in the first commandment?*

Answer: *The first commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly.*

Question 47: *What is forbidden in the first commandment?*

Answer: *The first commandment forbiddeth the denying, or not worshipping and glorifying, the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to him alone.*

Question 48: *What are we specially taught by these words before me in the first commandment?*

Answer: *These words before me in the first commandment teach us, That God, who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God.*

With the foundation of grace established, God now sets before his people his holy will, the Ten Commandments. Remember, these summarize for us, his will for us. And remember as well, each of these is an expression more focused and concrete of how it is that we are to love God. Well, these Ten Commandments, of course, start with this first, which is not just first, as it were, in number, but as well as, in priority. Christ said that the greatest commandment is to love God, and the second is to love your neighbor. We can see this order throughout the Ten Commandments. As you look through the *Catechism* and its treatment of the Ten Commandments, you'll notice a standard approach for each question. Each commandment is first identified, and the text of Scripture is presented to us. Then it considers what the commandment requires, and then it moves on to consider what is forbidden. Then, as appropriate, it handles any reasons that the commandment supplies.

And so, in our lesson today, we deal with all four of these related Questions from our *Catechism*. All of these touch on the first commandment—what it is, what it requires, what it forbids, and what reasons are given to obey it. Well, here they are, Questions #45 through #48 of the *Shorter Catechism*.

Question #45: “Which is the first commandment?”—“The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other God’s before me.” These are the very words from Exodus 20, verse 3. You will find also these are recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 5, where the Ten Commandments are also recorded, in verse 7 particularly, regarding the first commandment.

Then there’s the next question, #46: “What is required in the first commandment?”—“The first commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God, and to worship and glorify him accordingly.” This identifies duties, responsibilities, requirements, and we’ll consider these in the main part of our lesson.

And Question #47: “What is forbidden in the first commandment?”—“The first commandment forbiddeth the denying or not worshipping and glorifying the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to him alone.” These are the sins that the commandment forbids us to commit. They are obviously related to the duties. If we worship and glorify God as we should, we not give his worship and glory to any other. Now that provides us help, because in showing us, as it were, both sides of the commandment—what it requires, what it forbids—it clarifies, and more clearly crystallizes in our minds exactly what God demands.

Question #48: “What are we specially taught by these words *before me* in the first commandment?”—“These words *before me* in the first commandment teach us, That God, who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God.” Here we find a special reason we should keep this commandment. There are many reasons, of course, but this is one that God himself supplies, and calls us to consider. The words “before me” are not talking about order, as if God is saying, “You can have another god that’s second to me.” Rather, these words mean “in my presence”—before me, as in my presence.

So for our lesson, we’ll look at three things: firstly, What Loving God Does; secondly, What Loving God Avoids; and thirdly, What Loving God Remembers? In other words, If we love God, what will we do? If we love God, what will we avoid? And if we love God, what will we remember?

Firstly then, What Loving God Does. The commandment itself says, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” If we are to avoid having other gods, then we, of course, must know the true God. We must take him as our God. And we must give him the honor he deserves. If we don’t know the true God, we may be worshipping a false god. If we know the true God, but we don’t take him as our own, then we’re not having him as our God. If we do not give him the honor that he deserves, how can we be said to love him? “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”—no other gods. And so, God is calling us to have him.

We find these requirements provided in the Answer to Question #46: “The first commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly.” Well, let’s look at these ideas in a bit more detail.

The first commandment requires that we know and acknowledge God to be the only true God. To know God means that we understand him as he is, that is, as he has revealed himself to us in the Bible. To know God does not mean we follow our own imagination, and it certainly doesn’t mean we follow others’ thoughts. Rather, it means we know him as he’s made himself known to us. It’s true, we cannot know everything about him, but we can know the truths about him that he’s revealed to us. And at the very least, we can understand the basic ideas of what he’s told us. You’ll

remember when we thought on “God is eternal.” There is a thought there that is far beyond our ability fully to comprehend. And yet we can understand and acknowledge that he is eternal.

Additionally, we are to acknowledge him. This idea of acknowledging God to be the only true God means that we confess or profess that the God of the Bible is the only true God. So you can go back to those early Questions, “What is God?” “How many persons are there in the Godhead?” These summarize what God is, who God is. And to acknowledge him is to say, “That God, the God of the Bible, God who is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, and all that follows, God who is triune, and all that is expressed of that—that is the only true God.

The idea of acknowledging him to be the only true God means that we are ready to tell others that the triune God of the Bible is *the*, and *the only* true God. This is not a popular thought in most cultures today, but it is what God requires of us. It is what people who love God do. We don’t have to be mean about it, or bitter about it. Rather, with delight in God, and concern for others, we may tell, and ought to tell others about the one true God.

If we love something, we love to learn about it. We also like to tell others about it. I’ve met people who enjoy certain parts of history. They are careful to learn about the people and events that took place. They take time to read books about that time, and even to read books from that time. Sometimes they study artifacts, or even visit the places where that history took place. They do not find it to be a difficulty to talk about these things. They actually enjoy telling others about the people and events, and the importance of these things in history. And they do this because they enjoy it.

Well, the same is true for those who love God. They want to learn about him, so that they may know him. And as we have already learned, this is primarily done by reading and hearing the Bible, and also hearing it preached. These who love God focus on what God says about himself. They learn about his glorious works and what he has done. They study his promises and his commands, and they do so regularly and with some degree even of self-sacrifice, because they want to know him. But they also like to tell others about the true God. Why do they do this? They do it because they love God.

You’ll notice that the commandment also requires that we know and acknowledge God to be *our* God. This is related to knowing and acknowledging him to be the true God, but it adds a personal aspect to it. To know him as *my* God means that I understand his promises to save me, and I trust him to do so. Well, if this is going to happen, I need to see clearly his promises, and understand that he indeed is saying to me, “I will be your God.” Oh, what a blessing then to have the gospel preached to us, wherein the good news is announced and proclaimed! The true and triune God has made known this great privilege to us in his Word. Moreover, he has given us his eternal Son incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is through Christ that we come to know, in fact, it is only through Christ. Because, you’ll remember, in John 14, verse 6, Christ says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” This is why we are uncompromising in our continued contention that there is no knowledge of the one true God unto salvation, except by Jesus Christ.

Among other things, the commandment is calling us to acknowledge this God, not only to be *the* true God, but to be *our* God through Jesus Christ. To acknowledge God to be the only true God is to stand before others and say, “Jehovah, the God of the Bible, he is the only God.” Allah is not God, Krishna is not God. But to acknowledge him as my God means that I take him as my God, as he promises to be my God through Jesus Christ. We say, “Not only is Jehovah God, but I trust him, and he is my God.” We do this privately in the exercise of faith, but we also do so publically,

professing our faith before others. Perhaps we meet with the elders at our church, and we say, “I’ve read the promises, and I see he’s promising these things to me, and by his grace, I’m taking him as my God.” And those elders then help us think through and work through questions. And then by God’s blessing, we’re brought and given the privilege, by his great grace, to come to the Lord’s table, and to take hold of that precious sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, whereby we again profess before others that this is our God. Oh, that there’s much bound up in this! But see that this commandment is calling us, yea, demanding that we take him as our own. Well, if we know God and acknowledge him both as God and our God, then of course we would love to give him the worship and glory he deserves, and it will be our delight to do so. Oh, he is my God! Why would I give to anyone else what belongs to him?

Well, secondly, What Loving God Avoids—when we love God, what is it that we avoid? Notice the answer to one of our questions: “The first commandment forbiddeth the denying, or not worshipping and glorifying, the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to him alone.” Today, there are those who deny Jehovah to be God. When they do so absolutely, saying there is no god, this is a person we call an “atheist”—someone who says that there is no god. There are others who deny that Jehovah, the triune God, the God of the Bible is the true God, and they contend that something else is God. These are called “idolaters.” This kind of idolatry believes that the God of the Bible is not the true God, that something else, whether an impersonal force, or even self, or what we see as traditional false religions and their gods, these contend that something other than the Biblical God is God. We see this in Islam. We see this in contemporary Judaism. We see this because both Muslims and Jews deny that the true God of the Bible is triune. They both reject that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God incarnate. Well, the truth is, any religion, or any philosophy, or any personal belief that contends that the God of the Bible is not *the* and *the only* true God, is breaking this commandment. Some false religions do not permit actual idols or images in their conception of God, however they’re still idolaters, because though they’ve refrained from making a physical idol, in their imagination they’ve imagined something that is not true, and they worship that thought. Even if they never bring up an image of their false god in their mind, their understanding of their false god is idolatry.

But the commandment also forbids mankind from not worshipping and glorifying him as the true God. I’m sure it’s true in many nations, as it is in my own that there are plenty of people who would say that they believe the one true God is the God as revealed in the Bible. They would reject Mormonism. They would reject Islam. They would reject Hinduism and other false religions. However, they themselves do not actually give to God the worship he deserves. Their understanding is primarily theoretical, that is, it’s just an idea that has no real impact upon their lives. We must not keep back the worship and glory that belongs to the true God. If we do that, even though our profession may be true, there is one true God, who is Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost, yet our worshipping of him not being given to him is a great sin.

Another thing forbidden is the giving to any other worship and glory due to God alone. While this is certainly done by those who oppose the true and triune God, it may also be done by those who claim to worship the true God of the Bible. You see this most clearly in Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholics certainly claim to worship the true and triune God. They confess to do so in their official documents quite plainly. However, they also give religious adoration to angels, to Mary, and to others whom they call “canonized saints.” While they may deny that they are giving these divine worship, their action actually proves otherwise.

We don’t have time to go into all of the details. But take as one example the fact that Roman

Catholics actually pray to Mary. Now we want to be clear, we do not deny that Mary was an honorable woman, highly favored by God. The Scriptures plainly teach this. However, she was a sinner in need of salvation. For instance, in her own words, in Luke chapter 1, verses 46 and 47, she says, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” Mary was not sinless. She was not conceived sinless. She herself, as a descendent of Adam, was one who was born with sin, and committed sin. And yet, by God’s grace, she was brought to rejoice in her God and Saviour. But more than this, however holy Mary became by God’s grace, she was still a human, and only a human.

God, who is infinite, of course, can hear all prayers of all people at one and the same time, and understand every particular request, and see into the thoughts and hearts of all that are praying. No mere human, no mere mortal can do this. To believe that a mere human, as Mary is, can do this, is to believe a lie. And to pray to a mere human that is now dead, is to give to that human the worship and glory due to God alone. And so, whereas, for instance, Roman Catholics are right to acknowledge that the God of the Bible is the only true God, and that he is triune, as so on, through their act of adoring Mary, the saints, and angels, actually praying to them, they’re actually giving worship that cannot be given to men or angels. And this is a great sin.

Sometimes we ourselves experience sinning against God in this commandment. When, for instance, we may enjoy a particularly kind providence. God does something very generous to us. He brings us into a risky situation and yet he protects us. We may be tempted to say, “Well, that was lucky.” However, we should remember that this is actually failing to give God the honor that is due to him for his kindness. If he’s delivered us from temporal danger, we shouldn’t attribute that to an impersonal force. Rather, we should explicitly say, “Thank you, God for your mercy,” giving him the worship and glory that is due to him. We should see that one who loves God desires to give all credit to him for all good that ever comes to us. When the rains come in a drought, we don’t just say, “Well, the weather did this;” we say, “God brought the rain.” And so we learn to give God all the glory due unto him alone.

Well, thirdly, What Loving God Remembers—it reminds us that we are to have no other gods in the presence of the true God. “Before me,” says God. The Answer to Question #47 helps to clarify the meaning of these words: “These words *before me* in the first commandment teach us, That God, who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God.” We should remember this. However idolaters are honored by men, however successful they become, however religious they are thought to be, when God sees men having other gods, or giving to other things the worship and glory due to him alone, he sees it, and is much displeased by it. Well, one who loves God remembers this. God sees me. It would be a good thing for each of us to take heed of those words, and apply them to us at all times. She said to God, “Thou God seest me” (Genesis 16:13). There might be times when we are tempted to think that no one knows what we are doing or saying, because no one else is around. What we need to remember is that it might be true that no other mere human knows what we are doing, because no other human is around. We may think, My, mom and dad may not be around, so they don’t know. My Pastor isn’t around, so he doesn’t know. My teacher isn’t around. My brother or sister or friend, they are not around, so they do not know. However, let us always remember that God sees us.

This commandment includes this argument or reason to help us, to support us, to remind us that God does see. God sees whether we acknowledge him as God and as our God. God sees whether we give him the worship and glory due to him alone. It’s true there may be many people who do not care about whether we do this or not. It is even true that there are some people who would

rather have us not give glory to God, not worship him. But whatever it is that others do, we need to remember that God sees, and is much displeased with the sin of having any other god.

Well, do you struggle with this? Because it's easy to struggle with this. We look around, and we see people who put pressure on us, and the culture puts pressure on us. Well, here's a help for you. Set it before your understanding: *God sees all*. We think of what those who have died for the cause of God ever had before them. They knew that there were men who came with very painful things against them. But God saw. And so you see those who would not bow to an idol. And it was said they were going to be thrown into a furnace—of course, Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And yet, they remembered that God had told them they were not to give worship to any other thing. And so they were willing to suffer rather than to sin, and why?—because God saw. Well, though you may be away from others, you will never be away from God.

Well, if we're going to obey this commandment, one thing we must do is become diligent students of God's Word. Why is that the case? Because the commandment is calling us to know him. And if we're to know him, we have to study his Word. And so we read through it regularly. We give attention to the preaching of it in our church. Perhaps we listen to lessons like this, and sermons online. But we're diligently studying the Scriptures, so that we may better know him. Remember that—that the reason for those things is the better to know him. So be encouraged, as you study God's Word, you are in that way, obeying this commandment.

But if we're going to obey this commandment, we must also understand his promises and the warrant he gives to us to take him as our God. We're not just to know and acknowledge him as God, but also to know and acknowledge him as *our* God. And to do that, we must know the promises of God. In one sense, you could think of this—the commandment is, as it were, directing us, saying, “You must become familiar with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now let's be clear. The first commandment is not the gospel. The first commandment doesn't save us. But it's telling us that God is commanding us to take him as our own, and then the gospel, the good news of Christ comes and says, “Here's the good news: God is pleased to receive us to himself by the work of Christ believed upon.” And so the commandment is directing us to the gospel. And so, learn well those gospel promises. Become more familiar with Christ Jesus, and see indeed that it is he who says, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). And the commandment says you must go to him. But oh, blessed be God, the gospel says, “You may come to me; I offer you myself.”

Well, if we're going to obey this commandment, we must take him then, the true and triune God, as our God, through Jesus Christ. Let us not be ashamed of him. Let us take hold of him, and let us tell others of him, to the glory of his name, as we love him, the one true, and triune God, as we know and acknowledge him, not only to be God, but our God, and as we then give him the worship and glory that is due to him alone.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #33

The Ten Commandments: Love for God's Worship

Question 49: *Which is the second commandment?*

Answer: *The second commandment is, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."*

Question 50: *What is required in the second commandment?*

Answer: *The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word.*

Question 51: *What is forbidden in the second commandment?*

Answer: *The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word.*

Question 52: *What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment?*

Answer: *The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God's sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath to his own worship.*

In this lesson, we give our attention to the second commandment. The first commandment tells us whom we are to love and worship—the one true God. The second commandment tells us how we are to worship him—only in the way he has commanded us. As with the first commandment, we will look at four Questions from our Catechism. The first identifies the commandment; the second explains what is required; the third explains what is forbidden; and the fourth explains the reasons God gave for us to remember. Here are the Questions:

Question #49: “Which is the second commandment?”—“The second commandment is, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” We find these words in Exodus chapter 20, verses 4 through 6. It’s paralleled in Deuteronomy chapter 5, verses 8 through 10.

And our next Question, #50, explains what this commandment requires: “What is required in the second commandment?”—“The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word.”

Well, now Question #51 looks to what is forbidden. “What is forbidden in the second commandment?”—“The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word.”

And our last Question, #52, expresses the reasons: “What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment?”—“The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God’s sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath to his own worship.”

Well, clearly, there’s a lot before us in this lesson with these Questions, and we don’t have time to look at every detail. But we do what to touch on the main things by looking at three points. The first is, Pure Worship; the second is, Corrupt Worship; and the third is, God’s Worship.

So first, Pure Worship—this commandment, as we’ll see, is fundamentally about the right way of worshipping the Lord. We first consider the positive idea in this commandment, when we consider pure worship, or what is required. You’ll notice the commandment is worded negatively, that is, “thou shalt not”—don’t do these things. But as we know, if we are to avoid doing something, we must be engaged positively in doing something else. The commandment is focused on how we worship God. It tells us, don’t use images; don’t use graven images.

Well, what then are we supposed to use? God has himself revealed to us how we are to worship him, what things we are to do in his worship. And these are called his religious worship and ordinances. The word “ordinance” refers to something put in order, or an authorized order, something that one who has authority has said, “This needs to be done.” Well, God, the one we worship, has instructed us how we are to worship him. He’s done so in his Word. And under the New Testament, we find that God has commanded us to pray, to read and to hear his Word preached, to sing his Psalms, to administer baptism and the Lord’s supper, to give and receive the benediction, as well as there are times when discipline needs to be administered in the church, and other times when we are to swear by God, and to vow to God. We see this on occasion at baptisms. And there are also occasional days of fasting and humiliation, as well as thanksgiving, as God’s providence guides us. These are the things that God, in his Word, has commanded us to do.

Now notice, the Biblical requirement for pure worship is that these things he’s commanded us should then be done by us. And let’s be very clear. These things, that is, only what God has commanded us to do, these are the things that are to be offered to him in worship. Let’s look at just one example—Deuteronomy chapter 12, verses 31 and 32. God is warning his people against idolatry. However, he’s not merely warning them against worshipping other gods. That would be a sin against the first commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” He’s actually warning them against worshipping him, the true God, in the wrong way. Listen: “Thou shalt not

do so unto the LORD thy God; for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” So do you see? Do not do so unto the Lord thy God. He’s saying, “These things are not acceptable in my worship.” We’re not to take the things they do towards their gods, and say, “Well, they’re just giving to the wrong god. We’re going to incorporate that in the true God’s worship.” God says, “No! I’ve not commanded this for you to do. The only things you are to do is what I have commanded.” You see the principle he gives in the last verse, “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” Well this is telling us that the only things we’re to do in God’s worship are those things he commands us.

Everyone would agree that whatever God has forbidden in his worship should not be done. If God says, “Don’t do this” or “Don’t do that,” of course we’re not supposed to do that. However, God is telling us in his Word that the only things we are to do in God’s worship are those things he has commanded us. Everything else corrupts his worship. This is why the Answer to Question #50 says, “The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word.” We are to receive and observe, not to make up an event. We are to take what God has given us, and offer that to him in worship.

These religious ordinances, this worship, is to be done as God has appointed in his Word. To do that, we must be limited to what he has commanded. This simplifies our worship, because now we no longer have to study all of what others are doing, and so on, or to think, What does our culture think would work? But we simply take up God’s worship as his Word has told us, and we offer his worship in accordance to it. To keep his worship and ordinances pure and entire, means that we must not add to or take away from them. Someone may say, “God hasn’t forbidden us to do something, therefore I’m going to do it.” Well, it’s true, God may not have forbidden us strictly. But to keep God’s worship pure, we must only do what he has commanded us to do. We’re not to add to it. Think of it this way. The Word of God is the only authoritative declaration and instruction as to what God wants. As soon as we start adding to his worship, we’re founding that upon, at best, a fallen man’s understanding.

It is not only far safer to stick to God’s Word, it’s actually what God demands of us. We see that in Deuteronomy, but notice how Christ himself instructs the apostles, in Matthew 28, verses 19 and 20, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Now this is a very rich passage, and we’ll revisit again when we come to baptism. But notice, as he commissions his apostles, he lays this clear charge upon them that they are teach all the nations “to observe...whatsoever I have commanded you.” He did not give his apostles the power to invent new doctrines, and he didn’t give his apostles the power to invent new approaches to worship. He didn’t say, “As you go to these nations and you observe how they do their things, well, just make sure you incorporate that now to the true God and his worship.” No, only do what I have commanded you.

In 1 Corinthians 11, when Paul is addressing the corruptions of the Lord’s supper that were taking place in Corinth, he expresses this to them by saying, as “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.” That’s the model. We don’t add to what we’ve received. But rather, in God’s worship, particularly even the Lord’s supper, this wondrous testimony of God’s

grace, we aren't to say, "Well, God is gracious, so we're going to add to it." No, "God is gracious, so we're going to hold fast to what he's give us to do. We're not going to add to, or take away from these things." Christ's apostles were to hand down to others exactly what Christ commanded them to do.

People who love God want to keep God's worship pure according to his commandments. They don't want to do something in worship or use something in worship just because their parents have done so, or their grandparents, or their great grandparents. They don't want to bring something into worship just because they've discovered that some church down in the ages past have done so. They want to do what God has commanded, because they love God, and they love his worship.

Well, second, Corrupt Worship—notice the Answer to Question #51: "The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word." We are forbidden from corrupting his worship by the use of images, and, as it says, any other way that he has not appointed. The commandment itself specifically focuses on the use of images. You'll notice, it not only rejects using them in worship, it forbids the making of graven images: thou shalt not make; thou shalt not bow down; thou shalt not serve. We certainly know that God did not forbid art in general. He's not saying, "Never make an image," but rather, in context, an image of God—an image that would indeed evoke devotion. We see examples of the right use of imagery, for instance, in the temple. God gave a commandment, make these curtains this way, make the cherubims that way. But interestingly, there is never an image there that represented God. Never in the Scripture is their one image given of God, and never in Scripture is there any example of an image being used of God in a way that his honorable. In other words, God forbids us to make or to use images of himself.

Well, sadly, even Protestant churches today have been using images, not only in literature and other things for instruction, but in worship, which is most grievous. Here, God clearly forbids such things. We should not make use of images, because God forbids it. And why should we avoid it? Well, first, as noted, God specifically commands us not to make any image of him. We see here and in other places the same thing. If people would simply do this, many other sins would be prevented.

But there's another reason—it's based on what God is. Remember the moral law—which of course this is a commandment which is helping us understand the moral law—the moral law is founded upon the nature of things, what is. God is, and he is a Spirit. He is one who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Well, think of this, God transcends every image. No one has ever seen God as he truly and fully is. No image can capture all that he truly and fully is. So soon as an artist, however skilled, tries to make an image to represent God, that artist fails miserably, and actually corrupts the idea of who he is. It's not just that the artist says, "Well, it's not perfect." But actually the image is a corrupting of the truth of God. Notice how God forbids the making of images clearly in Deuteronomy 4, verses 15 through 18: "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, the likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth." How clearly does God need to state it? No image whatsoever is to be used to represent God.

And yet, someone may say, "Jesus Christ is God, and people saw Jesus," and this is certainly true. It's a glorious truth, the incarnation of the eternal Son of God. But two things should be noted. First, no authentic representation of Christ exists. Certainly, photography was not around.

Moreover, Christ did not tell anyone to draw him or paint his image. In addition, there's no physical description of him. But second, no image, statue, or portrayal of any sort can represent Christ as the incarnate Son of God. He is not just his humanity. He is also divine. No image can convey to us the reality that Jesus is the Son of God. So soon as the artist tries to do this, perhaps with that halo over his head, or a light shining down, is so quickly to explicitly transgress the commandment and try to capture some image of God. What's the point? No image can accurately express to us the truth of God, whether God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit. They all fall infinitely short. Some may say, "But they're moving! And they are quite amazing and spectacles of great art." Well, perhaps all that's true, but if we're governed by his Word, we would say, however well executed those pieces of art are, however moving and beautiful they are, they are a corruption of the representing of God, and so are to be abhorred and set aside. We want to worship God. We want our hearts stirred in devotion in the ways and by the things that he's given us in his Word.

Think back to Exodus 32 and the golden calf. What was the sin? It was not worshipping a different god. Notice the words in Exodus 32, verses 5 and 6. After having made the golden calf, we read, "And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." To whom was the feast? To whom were the offerings? To whom were the sacrifices?—to Jehovah. The people were using the image to try and represent and worship the true God. This was an attempt to worship the true God in a way he had not commanded, and God, of course, saw this as a great sin.

But notice that the commandment is not only concerned with images. As we read, "The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word." To use an image in worship is to contribute something to God's worship that he's not commanded. It is but one instance—a very prominent instance—but one instance of a more general sin, the sin of offering to God what he's not commanded. It is corrupting his pure worship in that God has not said, "Make an image of me." Using images is a way of corrupting his worship, however, the principle behind this is that we must not invent ways of worshipping God.

At the end of Leviticus chapter 9, God's people were rejoicing in the great blessings of God. There was a benediction pronounced upon the people of God, and God was manifesting his nearness to his people. And two priests, Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, were moved to worship God. And they were right to worship God, but what did they do? Leviticus 10:1 tells us, "Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not." What's this saying? Those two parts, "strange fire," and "which he commanded them not." The word "strange" comes from an idea "to turn"—instead of going straight on, "to come off," or "to turn away."

In other words, fire was offered that was not according to what was right, what was "straight on." The phrase "which he commanded them not" means "which he did not command them to offer." It's not saying, which he had forbidden them from offering. It's rather saying, they offered something that he never gave them a command to offer. He never gave them a commandment. He never said, "Do this," and yet they did it. They may have wanted to offer it to him. They may have felt great joy in thinking, We're doing to give him something that he's never asked for. They may have thought, This is going to be in addition to it, and oh, the joy and gladness of worshipping God. But they had no right to offer it, because he never commanded them to do it.

Was it a serious sin? Was it a significant thing? Here are two priests who had been ordained to

offer offering of praise and thanksgiving, and were going about their work, and they simply added something to God's worship, which he had never forbidden them. He had never said, "Don't offer that." He had only said, "Offer this," and they were not offering the "this" that he commanded. Was it so serious a sin? Well, Leviticus 10, verses 2 and 3 tells us, "There went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace." Oh, there is much here, but simply note, Moses' words to his brother Aaron—of course, Moses was the uncle of Nadab and Abihu—his words point out that those who draw near to him in worship are to sanctify him, to remember he is God. We're to offer him what he's commanded. He is the one who tells us how we are to worship him. It's a lesson we must learn today.

Well, third, and quickly, God's Worship—the Answer to Question #52 explains, "The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God's sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath to his own worship." We see these reasons in Exodus 20, verse 5 and 6. God says, "For I the LORD thy God am a jealous God." And then he testifies of his punishing of those who depart from his ways, and his mercy towards those who love and keep his commandments. Well, notice, he is the sovereign one in worship: "I the LORD, Jehovah, the self-possessed one, I who possess all. I am commanding these things." And it is his right that he governs our worship of him. "I the LORD thy God"—we're not gods unto ourselves, but rather, God governs us and instructs us in the way. This is what the words "his propriety in us" mean. It's his right to govern us, and particularly his right to govern how we will worship him. He's our God.

Moreover, he is zealous for his worship. Notice, "I...am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Well, there's more here than we can fully treat in this lesson. But notice two things. First, worship is God's worship. It's not something that's the church's. We might say, "The church is worshipping God," or we might say, "The worship of that church." But fundamentally, worship belongs to God. It's his. And so, it's not only offered to him, it's governed by him. He's the one that tells us, "Do this." And only when he tells us "Do this," are we then to go and do it. He is the LORD our God, sovereign over us and rightly directing us.

But second notice, God is zealous for his worship. We see this in the words that he is a jealous God. Now we can be sinfully jealous over our own possessions, and we wish to keep them to ourselves. But that's not what's being said of God. There is a right kind of jealousy that one may have. A parent would rightly be jealous for his children, to protect them, and care for them, and nurture them. This is what God is, when he is jealous for his worship. He is serious and earnest about his worship. It's a good thing, a pure thing, and he desires it to be kept and treated and such. So he's giving us clear commands that he desires us to take it seriously. And oh, the warning that he is against those who turn from his ways, and those descendants who continue in the profaning of his worship, his judgment will fall against them; and all the riches of his mercy toward those who hold fast.

Well, we must close this lesson. It is certainly true that we must love the Lord we worship. When we hear his Word or sing his praise, our hearts must be engaged. If our hearts despise God, we may sing the right words, we may hear the most faithful preaching, but God is not honored. We must worship him with a delight. However, this is not the only way that one corrupts God's worship. The second commandment actually directs us to consider the means we use to worship him—his religious worship and ordinances. We must ask ourselves when we worship God, "Is

what I'm using, is what I'm employing to worship God actually and clearly commanded by him?" Oh, if it's not, we should not hesitate to abandon those things, because God says only what is commanded is to be done. We should stick to what God has commanded, and be encouraged to know that, as we do, he is glorified by it.

While we see there are clear dangers to those who corrupt God's worship, we shouldn't miss this fact that there are great encouragements for those who would worship God as he has commanded, "Shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." Well, let us remember that God is delighted when we worship him. As we exercise our faith and love to him by means of the ordinances he has given, this is how we love him in our worship of him. So the next time you approach God in his worship, be sure that you're using only what he's commanded, but as you do so, be sure that you draw near to him by faith in Christ, and give him the glory that is due unto his name.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #34

The Ten Commandments: Love for God's Name

Question 53: *Which is the third commandment?*

Answer: *The third commandment is, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”*

Question 54: *What is required in the third commandment?*

Answer: *The third commandment requireth the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works.*

Question 55: *What is forbidden in the third commandment?*

Answer: *The third commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing of anything whereby God maketh himself known.*

Question 56: *What is the reason annexed to the third commandment?*

Answer: *The reason annexed to the third commandment is, That however the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment.*

So far, in the study of the Ten Commandments with the help of the *Shorter Catechism*, we've looked at the preface and the first two commandments. We've seen that the preface establishes a foundation of grace for true obedience to the believer. The first commandment directs us to the one we are to love and worship, and the second commandment reminds us to worship him only as he has commanded in his Word. In this lesson, we look at the third commandment. And as we'll see, this commandment reveals the attitude we are to have toward this great God. Again, we have four Questions from the *Catechism*, and we'll deal with the meaning of the Answers more in the main part of the lesson. So for now, let's look at each of the Questions and Answers, with some brief comments to help us understand what's being said.

First, is Question #53 in the *Shorter Catechism*. It identifies the third commandment: “Which

is the third commandment?”—“The third commandment is, Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” We find this commandment recorded in Exodus chapter 20, and verse 7, as well as in Deuteronomy chapter 5, and verse 11. It’s important to notice this word “vain,” in the commandment itself. This word refers to something that is false or empty, weightless. Thus, the text is forbidding us to use God’s name lightly or falsely.

So our second Questions, #54, “What is required in the third commandment?”—“The third commandment requireth the holy and reverent use of God’s names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works.” This sets out the positive requirement. Here we see the words “holy” and “reverent,” both of which are reminding us that God’s name is holy and to be treated as such. And again, we see that the commandments are founded upon what is. God is holy, and so we’re to treat his name and all that he uses to reveal himself with reverence.

Our third Question is #55, “What is forbidden in the third commandment?”—“The third commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing of anything whereby God maketh himself known.” You can see a helpful clarification by putting this and the previous question together. In the previous Answer, we read of “God’s names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works.” In this Answer, we read, “of anything whereby God maketh himself known.” In other words, God’s names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works are those things whereby God makes himself known. They all unite in revealing to us God and his will for us.

And, for our last Question, #56, “What is the reason annexed to the third commandment?”—“The reason annexed to the third commandment is, That however the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment.” As we’ll see, this reminds us that God is serious about the reverent use of his name.

Well, let’s get into the main part of our lesson, by looking at three points for our consideration: first, *The Name We Are to Love*; second, *The Way We Are to Love this Name*; and third, *A Warning for Not Loving this Name*.

So first, *The Name We Are to Love*. The commandment itself forbids us from taking the name of the Lord in vain. We’ll spend more time considering what this means, with the help of the *Catechism*. But before we do, we must understand what is meant by “the name of the Lord.” When we think of the word “name,” we probably just think of a few syllables that label someone. However, when a name is associated with a person, it serves as a quick way of identifying the person himself and representing him. A name itself may only be a word, but it is representing to us the person, and in some sense, serves as a summary of that person—what he is to us, or what she’s done to us—and the name quickly identifies that person for us. When we get to know someone, the more meaning that the name has to us.

Well, God’s name tells us about God himself. It’s like a quick summary or a message about him for our attention. God’s name is not just a few sounds put together to form the word “Jehovah.” Rather, the name “Jehovah” is representing the one who bears the name. It serves as a quick way to identify this great and glorious God. So we can say, “Who made this world? Who exercised power and wisdom to create all that is here? Jehovah did.” And all of a sudden, with one word, a name, we’ve identified this powerful and wise God who did these things. In other words, a name makes someone known. If you must stay home from church on the Lord’s day because you’re sick, when the rest of your family gets home, you might ask, “Well, who was at church today?” And when you hear the names that your family mentions, you’re not just thinking about the sounds, or the letters, how they’re put together. Rather, the sounds you hear, the names, are causing you

to think about the actual people who are represented and identified by those sounds. If you're familiar with the Bible, the names "Moses," "Ruth," and "Paul," bring up very different thoughts than the names "Goliath," "Jezebel," and "Judas Iscariot." Well that's not because the sounds in their names are good or bad themselves. It's because of the persons associated with these names, and their characters, their actions, and their words are all quickly remembered by you with just the mention of their name.

Here's another and a special example. When Mary and Joseph were told to name the son given to them, which Mary had conceived miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit, they were told to name him "JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Well, this is full of meaning. The name "Jesus" is related to the name "Joshua," which means "Jehovah saves." So the name "Jesus" is actually telling us about him. He is Jehovah who saves. What a blessed name has been given to the Savior!

Well, this will help us understand what the *Catechism* is getting at when it says this commandment "requireth the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works." What do God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works have in common? They all help us to know God more accurately and more fully. They reveal God. They tell us something about what he is, what he loves, what he does, what he will do. We don't have time to look at all of his names and titles, or his attributes. But to help you see these things, consider the following examples.

His names—Jehovah, I am that I am. Well, among other things, these tell us of something he is in himself. They remind us of his great transcendence, and his self-sufficiency. And think of the names of each person of the blessed Godhead, the one true God, and the three persons who are that one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. While these names tell us something about God toward us, they are primarily revealing something of what these persons are to one another in the Godhead. The Son is eternally-begotten of the Father, and the Father eternally loves the Son, and the Holy Ghost is eternally communicated by them, and indeed is proceeding from them. Well, there's much in this, as we start to think about the names of God.

Think of his titles—Creator; Judge of all the earth. These show us what he is toward other things. He is, toward the world, Creator. Toward the inhabitants of all the earth, he is their Judge. So these titles are making him known.

His attributes—holy, wise, loving, and so on. Each of these help us consider God's being, by focusing on a display of his perfection. In some sense, to study the attributes of God revealed to us, is to give an intense study of God as relating to other things. So God is holy, most holy. Well, that he is holy tells us of God's glorious being in relationship to what is pure and what is impure; what is righteous and what is sinful. He is entirely pure, and he entirely detests what is impure. Now, this can be done with all of his attributes.

But let's look at his ordinances—these refer to those means he has appointed for his worship—the preaching of his Word, and the administration of the sacraments, the singing of Psalms. Each of these help us to see him more fully. They reveal him to us more clearly. The preaching of his Word, as one example, declares his will toward us. The sacrament of the Lord's supper is another example; it declares his gracious and loving desire to commune with his people. And you can do that with each of the ordinances. They're all conveying to us something of himself and his will.

His Word—his Word is his great gift to us that tells us plainly what he is. It tells us of his purpose. It tells us what his will is. And oh, praise God that he's ever given us his Word which tells us of himself.

His works—when we think of creation out of nothing, how can we not think of the great power and wisdom displayed by such a great work. And so each of his works tells us something about God. His judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah tells us of his holy and just wrath against sinners. His provision of his Son to die on the cross for his people tells us of his great and immeasurable love toward his people.

Well, we could go on, and on, but hopefully we've seen enough to see the main point. God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word and works all make God known to us. They are intimately associated with God himself.

Well, second, *The Way We Love this Name*. If we love God, we will honor him, and those means he has appointed to make himself known to us. There's nothing greater than God, and to know him is the greatest privilege we have. Notice that the *Catechism* says that this commandment requires "the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works." Well, what does it mean to use his name in a "holy and reverent way"? The word refers to something set apart. "Holy" is pointing out something that is set apart from a common use to a special use. God is holy. He is set apart from all vanity, all levity, all sin, all wickedness. If something is to be holy then is to be set apart to God. To use something in a holy way means that we are using it in a way that is set apart from all vanity, and levity, and sin, and wickedness.

And similarly, "reverent" refers to a solemn awe and loving fear toward God and his things. So if we're going to use his name and his titles, his attributes, his ordinances, his Word and works in a holy and reverent way, we will use them without vanity; we'll use them without levity; will use them without sin, and without wickedness. Instead, we'll use them in a way that shows our solemn awe, and our loving fear.

And why does this happen? It happens because we love God, and so we love the things that make God known to us. When we speak of God, we'll speak of him truly, and humbly, and lovingly. When we read his Word, we'll do so with faith, and love, and respect, and humility. And when we attend worship, whether public with the people of God, or private in our own homes, or even in secret by ourselves, we'll do so as those who are in the presence of the Most High and holy God.

We get a sense of this reverence from Ecclesiastes 5, verses 1 and 2: "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." Similarly, Hebrews 12, verses 28 and 29: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." Now, this does not mean that we should be gloomy and never happy as believers. Rather, it means our joy and gladness should be shown reverently to him, who is above all that is. Our joy isn't light and weightless, but it's meaningful and significant. We ought to rejoice in him deeply and sincerely, with great joy, but we must do so in a way that remembers he is God Most High.

If using these means in a holy and reverent way is required, then notice what is forbidden—"all profaning or abusing of anything whereby God maketh himself known." To profane something means to treat something that is holy as common; or worse, to take something that is holy and employ it in explicitly sinful ways. This fails to treat something that is holy, as holy. To abuse something means that we take something holy and use it in a way that is contrary to holiness. And so profaning and abusing are closely related. For instance, if we casually use God's name in a promise, we're both profaning and abusing or misusing his name. When we use God's name

carelessly or casually, we sin. When we make jokes about God, or his Word, or his revealed way, we sin. And this isn't because we, as Christians, are killjoys, who do not wish to have fun. But rather, because as Christians, we see the great weight and glory of God, and of his means of making himself known.

Unfortunately, casually and lightly treating his name is a very prominent sin today. And this, of course, is all the more concerning because it's often found within the church. The commandment itself is focused upon a very clear way that this sin is shown, in swearing an oath or a vow. Oaths and vows are special kinds of promises. In an oath, we call upon God to witness our words before others. In effect, we're saying, my words are true, and I call upon God Most High to witness these things. This is a solemn thought. And so whereas the Bible does not forbid any use of an oath, or any use of a vow, it does forbid the vain use of them, and the casual use of them. You can see that when Christ says, let your yea be yea, and nay, nay (Matthew 5:37). He's not saying, "Never take an oath, and never vow." We see godly examples of oaths and vows in the Scriptures. Rather, he's saying, do not be light in these things, and if you swear, swear truly and solemnly about weighty matters.

Well, a vow is related to an oath, however, in a vow, we make a solemn promise to God himself. We say, "God, I solemnly promise to do (this thing). To do this requires understanding. We cannot vow to God something that is contrary to his Word. And it demands sincerity. We cannot vow to God something that's according to his Word, and yet we don't mean it sincerely. We must understand what we are testifying or promising, and the things that we testify or promise must be true, and we must also be sincere in such things. Thus, to make an oath or vow without truth or sincerity is a great sin, because it is done while invoking God himself.

Peter sinned in this way. When Christ was betrayed, and then taken and then tried, we read of his denying of Christ. Matthew 26, verse 72 says, "And again he"—that is, Peter—"denied with an oath, I do not know the man." Even worse, we read in verse 74, "Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man." And oh, it was a dreadful sin indeed. Peter took God as his witness, and called curses upon himself, saying, "If I do know Jesus, then may God curse me." The one thing this tells us is how easy it is to commit such a great and wicked sin. But also, if you know the rest of Peter's life, it tells us how gracious God is to forgive such a great sin, as he forgave Peter.

Well, we should remember, if we've been baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we are presently bearing his name. So if we fail to trust his promise, if we fail to live in a way that honors his name, we profane it with our actions, our words, and even our thoughts. Oh, if you've been baptized, remember that God has placed his name upon you. And so think with what weight he comes to you and says, "Take my name, and take it in faith." Own him as your God.

Well, thirdly, *A Warning for Not Loving this Name*. The commandment itself warns us, "For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." This is a searching and sobering warning. The *Catechism* helpfully explains this: "However the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment." It grieves the Christian that men use God's name in vain so commonly. In fact, it's almost impossible to go through a week, or even a day, without hearing God's name abused. We might be tempted to think wrongly that taking God's name in vain must not be all that bad, since we don't see many outward signs of judgment against those who are so free in taking his name in vain. This is a wrong conclusion. It fails to consider God's Word. He will indeed, without doubt,

punish those who take his name in vain. And what a dreadful misery it will be, when those who so casually took his name in vain will then, for the first time, see the glory of him whose name they took in vain, and if without Christ, they shall suffer that dreadful misery of damnation, because of sinning against so great, so high, so holy and almighty a God. It's then that they will understand that these were not little sins.

Well, we must close. But first, let me encourage you to make a diligent study of God's various names, and titles, attributes, ordinances, word and works. And doing so will help you know him better. These are the things God has given us to know him. And perhaps to help you, you can start with a notebook that you keep near where you do your own reading. And each chapter you read, you can be looking for a new name, or a new title, a new attribute that you've discovered. And you can jot it down, and think upon it. You can look for explanations as well, of what his ordinances are meant to do, and how they make him known. You can record certain works that are recorded in the Bible, and say how this work helps me understand God better. If you do this regularly, you will expand your own understanding of God. What a great privilege that would be.

Well, second, let me press this duty upon you. God is holy. He is Most High. So see what a great and dreadful sin it is to use his name vainly, to joke about his Word, to enter upon his worship casually or carelessly. It is a great grief when ministers joke from the pulpit about God or his Word, because it is not giving God the glory due unto his name. And it's likewise a great sin if we are the ones who misuse his name or joke about these things. God is holy, and so, when we speak of God, or his Word, or works, or these other things whereby he makes himself known, we are to do so with reverence.

What if you have taken God's name in vain? Well surely, it's not "if" but it's that you have, just as all of us have in one way or another. We should see this—there's no hope in ourselves, but there is hope in taking Christ as our Savior. Remember his name, Jesus—that he shall save his people from their sins. Whatever the rest of the world thinks, or even many in the church, God's Word tells us that it is a great sin to treat lightly his name, and everything by which he makes himself known. Well, while it is true that we must cut off this sin, by God's grace, we must realize that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin, and by Christ, we may be reconciled to this great and holy God. And as Christ dwells in us, and lives in us, it is that we may more and more give him the glory due unto his name. As we trust in the name of Jesus, we rightly take his name, and trust him, giving him glory. So, take hold of this great name.

And for those of you who have, and who love God, well then show your love to God by honoring his name, and all that he uses to make himself known.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #35

The Ten Commandments: A Day for Holy Love

Question 57: *Which is the fourth commandment?*

Answer: *The fourth commandment is, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”*

Question 58: *What is required in the fourth commandment?*

Answer: *The fourth commandment requireth the keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy sabbath to himself.*

Question 59: *Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly sabbath?*

Answer: *From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian sabbath.*

As we continue our study of the *Catechism* and the Ten Commandments, we come now to the fourth commandment. The preface has reminded us of God’s grace. The first commandment has directed us to love the one true God. And the second commandment has taught us to worship him as he has commanded in his Word. The third commandment exhorted us to give God the glory that is due unto his name. And now the fourth commandment comes and also focuses upon God, and directs us in one way of loving him. It commands us to use the time he has appointed for his holy worship, and to do so in a holy way. Thus, these commandments call us to love God. The

Catechism takes a little more space to treat this commandment, but this is due to some special features of the commandment itself. Instead of trying to consider all that the *Catechism* has to say about the fourth commandment in one lesson, we'll divide our treatment of it into two. In this lesson, we'll look at how God, by this commandment, sets apart an entire day for a holy purpose. In our next lesson, we'll look at how we are to use that day in a holy way.

So for this lesson, we have three Questions. The first, identifies the commandment, Question #57: "Which is the fourth commandment?"—"The fourth commandment is, Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." Notice that the commandment addresses those who are leaders in the home—husband and father. And yet it commands him regarding all that is under his authority. So it's not just that he personally is to keep it, but he is to use influence over those in his home, as it impacts them as well. Now, this is important, as we think about what we do on the day, and how it impacts others.

Well, let's look at the next Question, #58: "What is required in the fourth commandment?"—"The fourth commandment requireth the keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy sabbath to himself." Simply note that it's "such set time as *he* hath appointed in his word." Not that a pastor, not that a council, not that any mere man, not the whole church collectively, but what God has established—that's to be kept holy.

We'll spend a lot of our lesson on this idea, so let's look at the next Question, which is #59: "Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly sabbath?"—"From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian sabbath." Now, in this lesson, you'll hear me refer to this as "the Lord's Day," or "the Sabbath," or "the Christian Sabbath." All of those are synonyms referring to the same thing. So the Lord's Day is the Christian Sabbath; the Christian Sabbath is the Lord's Day; or we can simply say it's the Sabbath. Well, we'll look at these things more in detail.

For our lesson today, we'll look at three points: first, *An Appointed Time for Holy Love*; second, *A Day Appointed for Holy Love*; and third, *The Day Appointed for Holy Love*.

So first, *An Appointed Time for Holy Love*. Whatever we do, demands that we dedicate certain time to do it. If you're going to train your body to run long distance, you must set apart time to run. If you're going to read a book, you must dedicate time to do so. You may have a strong desire to run. You may read a lot about it. You may study it. You may think it through, and talk to others who do so. But if you do not set apart time to do it, it will never happen. It's true of reading. You may want to read many books in a month, or in a year, or however you wish to measure it. If you don't set apart time, it will never happen.

Well, this is also true of the most important thing we have, which is to worship God. Worship does not just take place accidentally. It demands specific time for us to stop whatever else we're doing, so that we may focus our thoughts and affections upon God. In order to hear God's Word preached, people have to gather at a specific time. In order to sing his divine praises and fellowship, we have to be together at a specific time. God's people, in other words, must gather at a specific time in order to worship him. This is true of family worship. If our family is going to worship him

in the home, everyone must have the same time set apart for that.

You see, the idea is, if we're going to engage in this, we have to do so at a certain time. This is true of public, and private, and secret worship. Of course, it's true that we are to honor God at all times. There's not a time in our lives, a second in our lives that we're not supposed to be honoring God. Remember, our chief duty, our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever (Question #1). So whether it's a Monday, or a Wednesday, or a Thursday; whether we're eating and drinking; whether we're playing, or studying, or working; whatever we're doing, we're supposed to be doing so to the glory and enjoyment of God.

However, to worship him demands that we set apart ourselves unto that focused devotion to God. We have to focus exclusively upon him, and devote our attention, our thoughts, and desires, all that we are, to him. Perhaps this might help us see this point. In our own day, people are starting to show frustration and concern about the way that personal time with family and friends is often interrupted by our phones. The family may be together for a meal, and yet each member may be distracted by their phone. They're texting their other friend or family members, they're engaging in other activities, but they're not actually focused. So that they're physically present, but they're mentally distracted. Well, one way some have begun to deal with this is to put their phone on silent—not just vibrate, but silent; or even to turn it off altogether, so that the personal relationship and interaction with the people present may take place without distraction. The personal relationship is special, and so they're saying no to these virtual things.

So think of it this way, when a man and a woman get married, they're often make plans to have time together on their own after their wedding. They're effectively saying no to every other engagement, and to every other person. They take off time from work or school. They assign out other responsibilities of theirs to others to take care of, and put everything else aside, so that they can be with one another without distraction. Why do they do this? They're not just doing it because it's a duty or expectation. They do it because they love one another and they want to spend time with one another.

Well, this might help us understand what God is doing with this commandment. He's saying, "I want time with you. I don't want you to be present and distracted. I don't want time where your attention is divided. I want time with you. As we'll see, the commandment tells us to set aside everything else, so that we can give our undivided attention to him. Moreover, the commandment is telling us, as if God is saying, "You need undistracted time with me." Isn't that true? It's so easy for us to become distracted with other things—with hobbies, with jobs, with work, with school, with friends, with family even—and yet our attention to God becomes less. God is saying, "This is what you need. It's for your good." Of course, this is necessary, if we're going to love God and have a meaningful relationship with him through Jesus Christ, we must have time set apart to do so. However, we are not the ones to tell God when that time is. We don't get our calendar out, we don't pull out our phone and say, "Well, I can fit you in here or there." No, God is the one above us, and he tells us what that time is. He says, "Clear your schedule." He says, "Don't make appointments." He says, "Don't do other things. This is the day, this is the time that I want with you." Well, this is what he's done in the commandment. He's identified the time that we're to keep free from all other things in order to worship him.

And so, second, *A Day Appointed for Holy Love*. So far we've seen that if we're to give God the honor that he deserves, it demands that a specific time is honored and set apart. In other words, if we're going to focus upon God, and particularly worship him, we must do so at a certain time. We've also seen that it is right for God to determine what that time is. The commandment identifies

that he has specifically set apart one entire day, as that time to be kept free from everything else. Well, certainly, on every other day, we should be praying, and reading our Bibles, and talking about the Lord. But this day is special. It's set apart from everything else. You see, the commandment directs us back to creation. This is important. We read, "in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." In other words, the seven-day week is not an accident of history. In fact, there have been times in history when people have tried to disrupt the seven-day week, and they made it ten days, and it's been disastrous. It is ordered by God for our lives. It was established at creation. In fact, if you look back at Genesis, you'll see that God worked for six days, then he rested the seventh—six days labor, one day resting.

But notice the commandment: "The LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." What this means is that God has set apart that day, the entire day, a full day, for a holy purpose. Well, when did he do this? Well, he did it at creation. This means he did it before his covenant with Abraham. He did it before he met with Moses at Mount Sinai. He did it before the tabernacle was established, and he did it before the temple was established. He did it before there were Jews and Gentiles, because he did it when there was no such division. He did it for all mankind. This is exactly what Jesus indicates in Mark chapter 2, and verse 27. Now he was reproving certain corruptions and legalistic tendencies of the Pharisees, but notice his words. He says, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." This tells us both that the Sabbath is a good gift, but it also tells us that it was not made for the Jews. It wasn't made for Abraham and his descendents. Oh, it includes them, but it's not exclusively for them. The Sabbath was made for man. Marriage was made for man. Marriage is not a Jewish institution. It's not a Mosaic institution, though Moses was used of God to help clarify and set boundaries upon the institution of marriage. But marriage itself goes back to creation. And so it's lawful for men and women who aren't Christians to become married, because it's an institution God has given to all men. Well, the Sabbath is the same. It was made before the fall, so it's not something that's ceremonial. It was made for all men, and so it stands still today. In other words, God set apart one day, at the beginning of all creation, for all men, for all time. Of course, this should make sense. All men ought to worship God, not only personally and privately, but publically. Setting apart everything else is to devote themselves to his worship. And to do that there must be time set apart. And God has established that one whole day devoted to that. Thus, all men ought to give God the time he's appointed to worship him.

And what a hurtful thing it is for men, women, and children do not observe this day. There are other things creep in, or they even shamefully prioritize other things—their own entertainment and recreation, or jobs and extra money. Oh, the Lord has given us an entire day for his worship, which is for our good, and we need such a day. Throughout the world, people ignore this appointment and use it for their own purpose. The great problem with that is that such things take us from the actual thing we need: to worship God, and to receive his guidance, his correction, his reproof, but also his encouragement and promises, and indeed his blessings of salvation on that day.

Notice as well, it is a whole day set apart to God. God has set apart one entire day. Remember the Sabbath *day* to keep it holy—not remember the Sabbath morning; not remember the Sabbath day to keep most of it holy; but remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. And the Lord blessed the Sabbath *day* to keep it holy. And the Lord blessed the Sabbath *day*, and hallowed it. He did not set apart an hour, a morning, or any other part of the day. He set apart the entire day, a whole day, that is, to be kept holy. It is not to be used like the other days. The other days are common. They are to be used for any and every lawful thing. But God has set apart one day to be a day for worship.

We'll look more at what is to be done on that day in the next lesson, but simply notice for now that it is the whole day that is set apart by God, for all men. If we can remember that, we would gain much in our understanding.

Well, third, *The Day Appointed for Holy Love*. We've seen that by this commandment, the Lord sovereignly and kindly appointed that one whole day in seven be set apart as a holy day unto himself. Well, which day is it? In the Old Testament, we see that it was the seventh day of the week. We can see this in the week of creation. The first day of the week corresponds to our Sunday, the second day of the week to our Monday, and so on through the seventh day, which is our Saturday. Thus God did all of his creative work Sunday the first day through Friday, the sixth day, then he rested on the seventh day, our Saturday. Throughout the Old Testament, we see the Jews observing the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath. And even today, if you're around those who are practicing Jews, they go to the synagogue—or the temple, as they call it—on the seventh day of the week.

Well, some even have taught that Christians ought to keep the fourth commandment by keeping the seventh day. However, this would be to ignore a most important change that God has established in his Word. Now, he hasn't told us that in so many words, "I've changed this day to that day," but he has through example done it. Remember when John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus Christ and said, "Are you the Christ, the one we're looking for?" And Christ didn't then sit down telling words. He said, "Go show John what you've seen, as he heals the sick, and he casts out demons. He's showing them these things. God's actions are those which likewise teach us.

Now, God has not changed any of the moral requirement. He still expects and demands that we keep holy unto him such set times as he has appointed in his Word. What he has changed is the day that is to be observed. Now, it's not church that changed this, it's not a council of churches that changed this. Instead, as we see in Scripture, God is the one. Before Christ's death and resurrection, we see the same pattern—seventh day of the week came, and those who were in covenant went to worship God. But after the resurrection, a great change took place. I'm quite confident to say that you gather with God's people to worship him on the first day of the week, our Sunday. Well, why is that? It is because God has appointed that day to be the day that his new covenant church observes as the Sabbath. It's not that he said in so many words, "I'm changing this." Instead, as noted, he showed the change. Just as he set apart the seventh day as the Sabbath, by his act of resting from creation, so he changed the day from the seventh to the first, by his Son, who is God, resting from his work of humiliation in redeeming his people. So let's see how.

Well, what happened on the first day of the week? I hope and I trust that you know—Christ arose. And the Scriptures are very clear on this. Notice John 20, verse 1: "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre." It's the day that Jesus arose from the dead. He was finished with his work of suffering. His humiliation was over! He had redeemed his people, both from sin, and the curse, and from death. And he finished that work on the first day of the week, when he arose from the dead. He rested from that work. Notice the emphasis the Bible makes of this throughout the New Testament. The first day is that day that he arose.

Well, it's also the day that Christ appeared to his disciples, and so he's patterning something for them. "This day isn't just day that I arose, but it's the day that you now are to be gathered together to meet with me." Notice John 20, and verse 19: "Then the same day"—that is, the first day—"at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace

be unto you.” Now, you’ll remember Thomas wasn’t there that first time, and yet he is there a week later. And what happens? Thomas is with the disciples, and we read (verse 26): “And after eight days again his disciples were within and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.” This expression, “eight days” is a way of saying an entire week passed. So the first day of the next week, God’s people are gathered together, and Christ appears again to his people. He is patterning and showing his blessing of his people on this day. What a privilege it is to have this day!

Well, the church discerned. It didn’t dictate, it didn’t command. But it discerned what Christ had done. So we find, for instance, the church is gathered together, and there at Pentecost, which would have been the first day of the week, the Spirit is poured out. We find as well in Acts chapter 20, and verse 7, “Upon the first day of the week,” we read, “when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” Thus, even though Christ had ascended, the church continued to observe the first day of the week as that day set apart for worship.

Even when Paul was going to Corinth, and was preparing them ahead of time for a collection that he would then take in order to help those who stood in need, he wrote to them, in 1 Corinthians 16, verse 2, “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” What he’s saying is this, “Since you’re already gathering on the first day, on that day, bring your giving,” so that they don’t have to be tracking down and other gatherings on other days. What’s his point? The church in Corinth—not Jerusalem, but Corinth—as with all the churches, were gathering on the first day of the week, in remembrance of Christ, keeping that day holy to him.

Even after many years had passed, when John was exiled to Patmos because of the Word of God, we see this day especially named in Revelation 1, verse 10, where he says, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” That term “Lord’s Day” means the day especially owned by the Lord. Oh, he owns every day, but this day is sacred. This day especially is. This is why the *Catechism* says, “From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian sabbath.”

The moral requirement of the Sabbath remains to all generations. We are to keep that day he’s appointed holy. What has changed is the day we observe. And the reason this is changed is because God, in his Word, has indicated the change, both by the resurrection of his Son, and by the visits of his Son, and by the outpouring of his Spirit, and by the pattern that was observed by the church.

Well, let me close with one encouragement. Did you know that Christ, in his Word, has appointed fifty-two holy days each year for the church? To the Christian, each first day of the week is a new holy day. Under the New Testament, Christ has done away with all the Old Testament holy days—Passover and others. Though they, from the Bible, testify of Christ, they were all shadows of Christ, and are taken away. But he hasn’t left the church without a holy day. He’s given us one. It’s the Lord’s Day, the Christian Sabbath. And this comes to us every week, the first day of the week. What a happy occasion! What a great privilege that Christ has given us this for every week of the year to remember Christ, as we worship him, the resurrected Christ, the Son of God incarnate. What a great privilege that is!

Well, since this is so, let us look forward to the Lord’s Day. It approaches every week, and so every week we should be thinking about this. Oh, it’s coming! The Lord’s Day, the day of Christ’s resurrection, the day set apart for the best of things, to worship God, to be with his people, and to

love God! Oh, a time that God has set apart that he would express his love to us, and that we also may show our love to him. Well, as we'll see, there's great reason then to call the Sabbath a delight, and delight ourselves in the Lord, because the Lord has set apart the Sabbath as a day of delight. Holy love from God and through Christ, holy love to God as well. Well, may the Lord bless you as you meditate on these things, and come to delight yourselves in this blessed and holy day, to the glory of God through Christ Jesus.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #36

The Ten Commandments: Love for God's Day

Question 60: *How is the sabbath to be sanctified?*

Answer: *The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except to much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.*

Question 61: *What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?*

Answer: *The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.*

Question 62: *What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment?*

Answer: *The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment are, God's allowing us six days of the week for our own employments, his challenging a special propriety in the seventh, his own example, and his blessing the sabbath day.*

In our last lesson, we looked at an important part of the fourth commandment. We saw that God has appointed one whole day in seven to be set apart for him. One whole day in seven is a holy day by God's ordaining. We also saw that since the resurrection of Christ, this day is the first day of the week. Well, in this lesson, we're going to look at how we are supposed to keep this day holy. And remember that all of the commandments show us how to love God. So we think of this as showing love for God's day. So as we keep it holy, we're loving God, and honoring him on this day. In other words, one way that we show our love for God is by keeping this day holy to him.

We have three Questions from the *Catechism* for us in this lesson. The first is Question #60. It asks, "How is the sabbath to be sanctified?"—"The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except to much as

is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.” There’s a lot in this Question, which we’ll cover throughout this lesson. Well, notice that one thing it’s saying is, it’s not that we’re resting from sin—which some people say, “Well that’s how we keep the sabbath; we rest from sin.” No, we are of course to stop sinning, and to put it to death, even by the Spirit. But the way we are to honor God on this day is by setting aside even lawful things from other days: worldly employments, our jobs, and studies, and recreations, our play, and so on. We set that aside in order to spend the whole time in the public and private exercise of God’s worship.

Well, the next Question, #61, asks, “What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?”—“The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.” And so, as is common to the other commandments, the *Catechism* tells us what is forbidden. To omit or carelessly perform what God requires, or by profaning the day with idleness, or doing what is of itself sinful.

And the last Question, #62, “What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment?”—“The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment are, God’s allowing us six days of the week for our own employments, his challenging a special propriety in the seventh, his own example, and his blessing the sabbath day.” Well, we should note that we can’t go into every detail throughout from these questions, but we do hope to cover the main points that are being made, so as to help you better understand not only what the *Catechism* is saying, but what God in the Bible has indicated is holy will for us.

So let’s look at three things for this lesson. Firstly, *Showing Love to God in Worship on this Day*; secondly, *Showing Love to God in Service on this Day*; thirdly, *The Good Reasons for Showing Love to God on this Day*.

So firstly, *Showing Love to God in Worship on this Day*. Notice the *Catechism* says that we sanctify the Sabbath—that is, we keep it holy; we ourselves approach the holy day in a holy way—“by a holy resting all that day.” Now this is important because it’s not that the day is appointed for our sleep. Sometimes people think that the Sabbath is a day off. Well, it’s a day off from our worldly jobs and our recreations, but it’s not a day just of rest. It’s a day of holy rest, the whole day. What is it we rest from? The *Catechism* says, “even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days.” So, our lawful jobs, or lawful callings in this world, our lawful playing, and sports, and other things that we may be engaged in are set aside, though they are lawful on other days. We say “No” to them, so that, as the *Catechism* says, we may spend “the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship.” So the main focus of the day is that we are spending time with God, to worship him, both in private individually in our secret devotions, private with our families in family worship, but also public with the assembled people of God, we’re focused on this. And this is something we need to emphasize. The Sabbath is stated in a positive way, “Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.” It’s orienting us toward that positive aspect. And so it’s telling us to remember, to keep it forward in our minds, that this is a day that is holy, and we’re to be engaged in holy things.

Well, some of this is explained quite well in a passage from Isaiah, chapter 58, verses 13 and 14. We read there, “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken

it.” Do you see this? There is to be delight in this day, because the day is calling us to delight ourselves in the Lord. We get to say no to everything else, that we may say yes to the Lord.

And remember, this is what the Lord has appointed. The Lord has cleared a day for us to be with him—a whole day. We can say no to our jobs, to our school, to our schoolwork, our homework, to our recreation and play, because we have a far greater calling and privilege. We get to be with God, by his ordinances, in private and public. It helps correct a dry and outward approach to the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not a day for us just to go through religious motions. And certainly we’re not to do the right things for our own glory. And yet it may be that we’re tempted to think, I’m going to fill my day with prayer, with reading, with worship, with listening to sermons, both with my church, and then I’ll get downloaded sermons and listen to them, and I’ll read the best books, and so on. And yet a person may miss the main point still. In other words, it’s not about mere religious diligence, and mere religious activity, however right and good. It is about seeking God and communing with him. And so we do fill our days, as we’ll see, with private worship, and public worship, and meditation, and prayer, and Christian fellowship, and we’re saying no to other things, and doing all this. But we’re doing it all for a purpose. Even as Isaiah 58 says, we call the Sabbath a delight, and delight ourselves in the Lord. We’ve made a plan, in other words, and we’ve got a full day before us, not to have a full day, but to have a full day, by grace, through Christ, with God.

Notice, the commandment is forbidding “the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required.” And so it’s not just that we’re going to fill the day with these things, but we’re going to be engaged in them. So it would be sinful not to have these things done, but it would also be sinful to have these things in our day and go about it carelessly. We sit in church, and our mind wanders, and we don’t bring it back. We sit down with the Bible in front of us for a private time with the Lord, and we hardly remember anything that’s been read. Those things are profaning the day as well. And so it’s necessary for us to remember that the Lord’s calling us to engage our souls by his grace, through faith in Christ, with the means of grace before us. To omit something is to avoid doing it. To perform something carelessly is to do it, as we might say, half-heartedly. These things, of course, are sinful.

And certainly, to commit sin itself is always forbidden, and it’s forbidden on this day. But also notice, so are our unnecessary thoughts, words, or works about our worldly employments or recreations. And there may be need on the Lord’s Day. Perhaps we’re with brothers and sisters, and there’s need for prayer about things going on at our job or school. We’ve got an exam coming up later that week, and we say, “Would you pray for me this week, because I’ve got an important exam,” or, “I’ve got an important meeting.” And that’s fine, we’re having people pray for us. But it would be wrong to dominate the discussion about all that we’ve done: “Well, I was on vacation, and I saw this, and I saw that, and the other thing.” And you know, “There’s this thing that I participated in,” and all these other ways we talk about. If it’s unnecessary for the promotion of God’s glory or the edifying of the saints, it ought to be set aside.

Now this is taken, as we’ve seen, from Isaiah 58. But why is it—let’s remember this—why is it that we set aside our own thoughts, and words, and works? Because those things distract us from the main thing. What God is saying is that we are to say no to these lesser things, these unnecessary things, that we may say yes to the best thing. To be clear, the commandment’s not demanding that we spend the whole day in the public worship of God, though that is to be a priority. There is, of course, private and family worship to take place. There may be things, of course, that interrupt us gathering in our family during the week. Perhaps there’s a responsibility at work or school that

makes us have to miss a time of family worship in morning or evening. But on the Lord's Day, we're protected from those things. God's securing this day, that we can say, "There's nothing, apart from God's providence, that's going to interfere with these things." And the same is the case with our secret devotion. God has given us a day protected from other things creeping in, so that we can have a full day with him. What a privilege it is that God has thought of us to do these things.

Well, to do that, of course, demands that we prepare. If we're a student, we get our homework done before the Lord's Day. We don't say, "Well, I'll go to church in the morning, and then I have a few hours, and I'll get some studying done, and then I'll come back to church in the evening," or any other ways, no. The Lord's Day is holy. It's set apart. And so we're diligent all the other six days of the week. We're diligent in class. We're diligent in our homework. We're diligent on Saturday. We're doing all of these things throughout the week, so that the whole day is a day to give ourselves without distraction to the Lord. And so we're getting those things finished ahead of time.

Well, of course, in order to fill the day in this way, we need to be well rested. Which means we need to have gone to bed at a decent time, and had a good night's sleep, as the Lord provides that. We should think ahead, as well, to think, Well, are my clothes already, are they presented, are they laid out? So we can have those things established ahead of the time. It's interesting, isn't it? The commandment says, "Remember the sabbath day." And so, we're thinking about it ahead of time. Perhaps we're responsible, and we're able eventually to drive a car, and we have to drive to church. So what do we do? Well, we fill up the tank with gas the day before, so that we have a full tank, so we can travel there and back. All of these things have been prepared, so that the day itself can be full.

I'll give you an illustration. Perhaps you've been to a wedding before, and there, the groom and the bride are standing before this assembly. And there, they've made a plan so that nothing else is going to interrupt on that day. And so, they've been planning it perhaps for weeks or months, and now the day has come. And they're standing there, and they're about to exchange vows, and you'd be shocked if either the man or woman reached into his or her pocket, and pulled out their phone, and said, "Hold on, I've got to take care of a few things." It would be astounding for such a thing to happen. Why is that? Because the nature of what's going on is special—it is to be protected. Well, the same should be true of our approach to the Lord's Day. We're saying no to everything else, in order to say yes to God. And so we're diligent to turn off certain things. We're diligent to put away certain things, in order that we can focus on the Lord. That's what the day is about—to delight ourselves in the Lord: "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy." Well, what is it to keep it holy? It is to devote ourselves to God, that we would not treat the day as a common day, as the rest of the days are, but that the whole of the day would be given to the Lord, in both public and private exercises of God's worship.

Well, second, we're to be *Showing Love for God in Service on this Day*. God will certainly have us worship him, and this is, of course, the priority of the day. The psalmist says, "I joy'd when to the house of God, go up they said to me" (Psalm 122, Scottish Metrical Psalter). And in some sense, every Lord's Day comes, and the believer says, "I joyed that this day has come." Another Psalm tells us that "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24). And particularly and interestingly, it's indicating that it is the day that Christ arose.

Well, though these things are true, God will not have us ignore the needs that either we have, or that others have. God is a merciful God and remembers our frame. And he would also have us remember the needs of others. We'd be mistaken to think that we should ignore those who need

our help. Notice, the *Catechism* says that, of course, we're to keep these things and abstain from others, "except to much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy."

Well, what is a work of necessity? If something is necessary, it must be done; it's not optional. Well, there are activities that must be done for our earthly continuance in this world, to have strength and health. For instance, we need to eat; we need to drink. These things are needed. Well, someone might argue and say, "Well you can go a day without eating," and that's true; there are days of fasting. And yet, this day is a day of rejoicing. And so it's a day where our bodies need strength, which is normally supplied by a regular intake of food and drink, so we eat. We shouldn't be surprised when Christ and his disciples were walking on the Sabbath day through a field of grain. Mark 2, verse 23 tells us, "And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn." It was the custom in Israel to leave the edges of fields unharvested, so that the poor could grab a handful of grain to eat for their necessary provision. Well, Christ and his disciples were poor. You'll remember, Christ said, "The Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Thus, they were not working the fields as farmers. They weren't bringing in a harvest. They were gathering a handful of grain for their necessary food.

Now this is the idea for us today. We don't go to the grocery store on the Lord's Day, in order to buy a bunch of food. We don't go to a restaurant, in order to force others to work so that we can be having our ease. But we do need to eat. And so, on the Lord's Day, we don't hesitate to have a meal at home, or perhaps at church if we have a fellowship meal there, or in another person's home. It may be necessary to clear a driveway or walkway, if snow comes on a Saturday night or Sunday morning. It may be necessary to set up chairs in a room where we meet on the Lord's Day. Now certainly, these are necessary things. They have to be done if we're going to gather for worship. If it can be done on a different day, it ought to be done on a different day. But if it can't be, well then we have need to do those things. And so, a necessary thing is not necessary for my work, but necessary for my life, or for another's life or safety.

Well, what are works of mercy? They're related, of course, to works of necessity, but they're focused more on the work showing compassion to those who are in need. I'll give you an illustration. If we were on our way to church on the Lord's Day, and we saw someone along the side fall and injure themselves, we wouldn't think in our minds, Well, it's the Lord's Day, the Sabbath, I'm not going to help them. No, we would go over and see if there's something we could do—perhaps help them up if they were on the ground. Or maybe it was such a serious way that we would have to then call an ambulance and have them help them. Why is that? Well, the Lord is merciful, and he would have us show mercy. Remember that Christ, again and again, was willing to heal those who came to him on the Sabbath day, and he corrected and reproofed the Pharisees, who were trying to judge him for doing so. The Sabbath is a day for mercy. This is why we may visit those who are sick at home, or those who are shut in and can't make it out to church. We visit them, and encourage them, and pray with them, or bring them a meal. Or we would visit those who are in the hospital on the Sabbath. We're showing mercy.

This is also why some jobs are lawful on the Sabbath. We need firefighters, and we need doctors, we need policemen, because they provide a necessary service to the well-being of people. But most jobs are not necessary. Most jobs are not actually needed for life to continue. Most jobs may take a day off. Why is it then that most don't today? It's because most today do not love God enough to stop all else that they're doing, in order to honor God and the day he set apart.

Well this is reminding us then that we need to remember others and serve them. It's very sad

that we see this commandment broken by many who profess Christ. It's common to see people who are going out to eat on the Lord's Day. And Christians might say, "Well, I'm not working, and it's needed that I eat," and so on. But they're missing the fundamental point. It is needed that we eat, but we can plan by going to the store on Friday or Saturday, and having our meal planned at home, or with other Christians, on the Lord's Day.

We also notice that we need to care for others who are under us. So the commandment talks of our children, and our servants. And so we need to be careful to care for them, so we're not causing them to have too many things to do on the Lord's Day. There may be necessary chores that need to be done. Perhaps we have chickens, and they need to have food given to them. But we aren't doing a lot of work, and certainly not unnecessary work on the Lord's Day. And we're not making others do it either. It does us no good to say, "Well, I'm going to keep the Sabbath by making others work." No, the commandment actually tells us that neither we, nor our children, nor our servants are to do those things.

Well, let's look then, third, at *The Good Reasons for Showing Love to God on this Day*. The commandment directs us to several reasons to keep this day holy and give God our love, and enjoy his. Notice the *Catechism*, "God's allowing us six days of the week for our own employments, his challenging a special propriety in the seventh, his own example, and his blessing the sabbath day." Well, God has given us six days out of seven—six out of seven for our own employments. In fact, he says, "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work." And so, step back for a moment and think of this. God has given us six days to do out work, to have our recreations, to do our study—everything in six days. And he gives us one day, and he says, "None of that, but give yourself to me." So surely, all arguing should stop, for God has given us six days for all other things, and has required but one for the setting aside of our other things to worship him.

Notice, his "special propriety"—this refers to the commandment as it says, "the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God." Notice this, it is his. Just as under the New Testament, it's called "The Lord's Day." It's not our day. It's not the church's day. It's *his* day. And so he's told us what he wants us to do on his day, which is to keep it holy unto him. So remember that as you come to the next Lord's Day, the next Sabbath day. It's *his*, and so give yourself then to him.

Notice also, "his own example." "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth" (Exodus 20:11). And what did he do? He rested on the seventh. And so God was patterning for us, much like a wise father patterns behavior for his children, so God was patterning the same for us. That we have a whole six days to do all our work, but the Lord saw that we needed one day for our spiritual concerns.

Well, lastly, his blessing—"Wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." Think of that. This commandment tells us that he's placed a blessing upon this day, and oh, then that we would consider that well and think, if we want God's blessing, then we ought to make a good use—not only filling it full—but by his grace, through faith in Christ, seeking God on this the Lord's Day.

Some may say, "This all sounds quite demanding, or boring, or dull." Well, I imagine it's very possible to make the Sabbath dull and boring. However, the Sabbath itself and its purpose is far from dull or boring. It is a day of great joy, of gladness, a day to enjoy the Lord without distraction. And, if you can see it, it's a foretaste of heaven—that lasting day that knows no end, where the focus of everything will be consumed with God. Every Sabbath day is, as it were, a new whisper, a fresh breeze from heaven.

Well, let me close by giving you some practical helps. If we're going to keep this day holy,

notice the following things. First, we need to prepare. Remember the Sabbath day. Chores, and laundry, clothes ready, gas in the vehicle—everything should be prepared ahead of time. And what that does is it helps us be ready for the Lord's Day. Perhaps there's a special thing that has to take place on Monday—get it ready on Saturday. So throughout the Lord's Day, you're not thinking about Monday coming up. All is ready. So prepare.

Second, we need to plan on filling the day. Private devotions, and family worship, and books to read. We're committed to attending both services of worship, morning and afternoon or evening. This is the main focus—the worship of God. Perhaps we need a twenty to thirty-minute nap in order to refresh our bodies. But we keep it, as it were, short, so that we can give ourselves to filling the day with his worship. Perhaps we schedule a visit to a nursing home, or somebody in our congregation who's unable to get out. We're planning to fill the day. But we're not just filling it; we're filling it in order to seek the Lord. You see, if we don't plan to do this, we'll be tempted to look at the day as long. "What am I going to do now? What am I supposed to do to fill a day?" If we plan on it, it helps us then, say yes to God. When you plan on it, it makes it far easier to say no to distractions and unlawful things.

Yet, third, we need to be sure that we are focusing on the main thing. We don't just want to fill the day. We don't just want to be busy. We don't just want to be one who is going about, cumbered about with much serving. Rather, we want to fill the day with those things that help us keep the day holy, and delight ourselves in God. Our purpose in all of it is to seek the Lord. Oh, see then what a privilege God has given us in giving us the Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day. What a wicked sin it is to despise such a day. And oh, how it injures our own souls if we profane this day.

Well, once you see the Lord's Day for what it is, you'll see why the Christian is to call the Sabbath a delight, and delight himself in God. Well, may it be so to each of us, by God's grace, through Jesus Christ.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #37

The Ten Commandments: Love within Our Relationships

Question 63: *Which is the fifth commandment?*

Answer: *The fifth commandment is, “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”*

Question 64: *What is required in the fifth commandment?*

Answer: *The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honour, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.*

Question 65: *What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?*

Answer: *The fifth commandment forbiddeth the neglecting of, or doing anything against, the honour and duty which belongeth to every one in their several places and relations.*

Question 66: *What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?*

Answer: *The reason annexed to the fifth commandment, is a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God’s glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment..*

We’ve looked at the first four of the Ten Commandments. The first four make up what we refer to as the first table of the law of God, and more directly, show us what love to God looks like. Well, with this lesson, we begin our treatment of the second table of the Ten Commandment—the fifth through the tenth commandments. These continue to show us what love to God looks like, but each of these does so by showing us what love to our neighbor looks like. In other words, these commandments show us how we love God by loving our neighbor. There is, of course, an obvious connection here. If we love God, we will love those who bear his image, that is, men, women, and children all around us. In each of these commandments, we’ll focus on one particular aspect of our love to others. The first of these, namely, the fifth commandment, is where we begin. For our lesson, we will look at Question #63 through #66 of the *Shorter Catechism*.

Question #63 identifies the commandment, “Which is the fifth commandment?”—“The fifth commandment is, Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” This commandment is given in Exodus 20, verse 12, and Deuteronomy 5, verse 16. And it’s worth noting here that the word “honor” is a word meaning “heavy.” It’s a word often translated as “glorified.” In relationships, it is contrary to lightness, or levity, carelessness, or disrespect. If we give honor to someone, we treat them in a way that is serious and respectful. It’s kind, of course, but it’s respectful. This will include certain words and actions. But it will also include the inward thoughts and desires of our hearts.

Now, the next Question, #64, asks, “What is required in the fifth commandment?”—“The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honour, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.” As with all these commandments, the *Catechism* helps us see the foundation of what is specifically stated. We’ll see that in calling children to honor parents, the Lord is providing guidance as to how we relate to one another in our various relationships.

And so, for our next Question, #65: “What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?”—“The fifth commandment forbiddeth the neglecting of, or doing anything against, the honour and duty which belongeth to every one in their several places and relations.” There again, we see that when a virtue, or right behavior, is commanded, “Honour thy father and thy mother,” the opposite vice, or misbehavior, is forbidden.

Well, our last Question, #66: “What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?”—“The reason annexed to the fifth commandment, is a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God’s glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment.” This is drawn from the part of the commandment which reads, “that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”

Well, as we enter upon the main part of our lesson, we’ll consider these main ideas in three points. Firstly, *Divinely-Ordered Relationships*; secondly, *Honoring These Relationships*; and thirdly, *Encouragement for the Obedient*.

So first, *Divinely-Ordered Relationships*. Well, notice that the Answer to Question #64 uses this expression: “every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.” The words of the commandment itself focus upon children honoring their parents. But this is a specific way of showing a more foundational truth—namely, that God has established order. When we are under the authority of someone, we owe then honor. Remember, the word “honor” refers to a sincerely respectful treatment of someone else.

Before we go further, we should see that God is the one who has ordered or established these relationships. We can see this in the most fundamental way within the family. A man and a woman get married, and in the Lord’s provision, he gives them children. He does so, of course, through the natural process of pregnancy and birth, but it is he who orders it all. And so, children are the gift of God to a couple. The children, of course, did not choose his parents, nor did the child precede his parents. The Lord sovereignly, by his providence, appointed and orchestrated the whole matter. He placed the child under the oversight and in the care of those parents.

The same is true regarding all those who have authority over us. Of course, each of these things is brought to pass by different means, but it is still the Lord who oversees and orders all things. For instance, you didn’t choose to be born in the nation you were born in, and thus, you weren’t the one who chose all of the national privileges, as well as national troubles that you face. Well, this is true in everything. In church, our minister, elders, and deacons are appointed ultimately by God. In the

state, or nation, God is the one who raises up the civil rulers in our lands. Now we should not think that this means that everyone who bears authority uses it well, or as God has commanded them. There are wicked rulers. There are wicked pastors. There are wicked parents. And there are wicked husbands. And when they are wicked, they abuse that authority. And this has very sad effects on those who are under their authority. Those who have authority and abuse it will be judged by God for their misuse of that authority that he's given them.

But to keep to our point, the Lord is the one who has appointed those who bear authority over us: in marriage—the husband; in our home—parents; in the church—pastors and elders; in the state—governors and rulers. We can extend this to our school—teachers; to our places of work—our bosses and managers. Each of these is placed over us in these particular relationships. And this is what the *Catechism* means by the word “superiors.”

The word “superior” comes from a word meaning “above.” Thus, a superior is one that is placed above us in a particular relationship. They have authority over us. Parents have authority over their children; pastors have authority over the members of their congregation; mayors over the citizens of a city; teachers over their students. This authority is not absolute. Even the highest earthly authority is under the authority of God himself, and of Christ the King. One of the titles that we rejoice in is that Jesus is called “the Lord of lords, and the King of kings” (Revelation 17:14; 19:16).

I encourage you to read through Psalm 2, and you'll see this exhortation to the rulers and kings of the earth. Though they are exalted among men, and have authority over their citizenship, yet they are under authority and accountable to God, not just in general, but to God specifically in and through Jesus Christ. So they are called to “kiss the Son.” That is, they're to pay homage, and give reverence and obedience to the Son of God incarnate, the Messiah, the Anointed One. What a blessing it is that the Lord has given us the Psalms to sing. And in that Psalm, we specifically sing of Christ, that God has appointed his Anointed One, the Christ, and the rulers of this earth owe him obedience. Well, kings are responsible to rule in such a way that honors Him.

This is what the *Catechism* means, when it speaks not only of their doing of things to others, but of their preserving the honor due unto themselves. A king's honor is not just to be presumed upon, nor is a father's, or a parent's, or a pastor's. They're to function and use that authority in such a way as maintains that honor and gives glory to God. And when they fail to do this, they sin and misuse their authority. We'll think a bit more on this in a moment, but for now simply note that our superiors are not absolute, though God has placed them over us in certain relationships, to help, and guide, and direct us. They are superiors, and they are yet inferior to God. If he has established our superiors—those who bear authority over us—then the opposite is true also.

God has established who is under us. Just as “superior” refers to someone over or above us, so “inferior” refers to someone under or beneath us. Now this can lead to a confusion of thinking the people who are under authority or influence are lesser than we are. But we need to be clear. This is not a demeaning or a mean idea. It's a recognition of the Lord's order throughout the world. As we saw above, in the basic relationship, the family, God has made this plain. An infant is under the care of its parents. The infant is in an obvious position of needing help, and care, and guidance. They need instruction, and protection, and nourishment. Simply put, a child is under, or inferior, to the parents. To be clear, this does not mean that the infant is any less a person, or a human than its parents. The child bears God's image and possesses great dignity. However, it's clear that the infant needs the strength, and wisdom, and care of its parents. The infant is placed under the authority and care of its parents.

Well, this is true of all other relationships, but again, in different ways. A student is under the care, and therefore inferior to the teacher. The student needs the insight, the discipline, the love, the care that the teacher has to offer. The same is true of a member in a congregation. The member is under the oversight of the pastor and elders. The member is inferior to them. Again, this does not mean that the member is less a Christian, or that the member is less important to God. In fact, if you read, in Ephesians 4 (verses 11–12), you’ll see that ministers are given to serve the rest of the church. And so their authority is given to serve those who are under their authority. All of this is a simple acknowledgment of the Lord’s wise ordering of our relationships. Notice, for instance, Hebrews 13, verse 17: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

So it is that God has established this order of those above is, as well as those beneath us. But he’s also established those who are equal to us. And we have to be mindful. For instance, if we use the idea of a family, we have parents above us. But if we have brothers or sisters, we have those who are equal to us in the role of the family. And we need to realize that all of this is divinely arranged by God, and so our treatment of those above or beneath, or beside us will reflect of our thoughts and honor of God himself.

Well, second, for our lesson, *Honoring These Relationships*. We’ve seen that God is the one who’s established these relationships. He is the one who has ordained who’s above us—our superiors, who’s beneath us—our inferiors, who’s beside us—our equals.

Well, we need to think on what is our responsibility is toward each of these. Well, again, as noted, we have in our *Catechism*, the statement, “The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honour.” And this is something important. If we have authority, we need to that which preserves that honor. If we are a pastor, we need to carry out the calling of that office in such a way as preserves the honor belonging to the pastor. If we are a teacher, we need to regulate, and rule, and teach, and love our students in such a way as maintains the honor that belongs to teachers. If we were raised to office in the government, we need to do that which would preserve of that office. And this can be true of everyone, in all of their positions of authority. But notice, it goes on to say, “and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.”

Similarly, notice the sins forbidden, “the neglecting of, or doing anything against the honour and duty which belongeth to every one in their several places and relations,” both toward others, but also, as it were, the actions of ourselves in our own position. Well, one thing this means is that we need identify the various places that others stand in relation to us, and then, the responsibilities that we have toward them. We can also identify the position that we have toward others, and what we should be doing to maintain the honor that we should have.

Well, who are our superiors? Who are those that are under us? Who are those equal with us? We need to identify these relationships. And this then helps us to see more clearly what honor and duties are owed to each. So it’s a good question. Who are your superiors? Who are your inferiors? Who are your equals? And remember, these are not statements of essential superiority, as if someone is greater than you as a human, but rather, their relationship, and their responsibilities, and your responsibilities in accordance to God’s order.

Well, what about duties for our superiors? If you want to think more fully upon that, I encourage you to take up the *Larger Catechism*. And you can look at Questions #127 and #128. For our purposes, we’ll simply summarize these duties. And we can see that in these duties, we owe sincere

respect, not only outwardly in our speech and conduct. Peter writes of this in his epistle regarding servants, and not just to serve with eyeservice as men pleasers, but rather with singleness of heart. And so their actions are to be the outward display of their sincere feelings. So we owe sincere respect, not only outwardly, but inwardly, to those who are above us. This will lead us to obey their lawful commands, to speak well of them to others, to pray for them, and by God's grace, to our best to overlook their faults, with patience and kindness. There is much, of course, that's bound up in this. We can think of this as loving those above us, as God would have us love them.

Duties toward our inferiors—again, you can see more of this fully expressed in Questions #129 and #130 in the *Larger Catechism*. But we can say this much, if God has placed us in a position of influence and authority over others, if we have greater gifts and graces than others have, well, we have a responsibility to care for, to teach, to provide, and protect, and to love them. Additionally, we ought to be examples of faith, and hope, and love, and every virtue, so that we stand as honorable examples to them. See, sin corrupts this. So as soon as we think, Well, that person is beneath me, sin says, "I'm going to use them for my selfish gain." But what love does is, it says, "How am I going to use my gifts, my graces, my authority, my influence, the things that God has given me, to help them and support them?" Love gives in service, even as Christ, who has all authority, gave himself in loving service to us.

Duties toward our equals—we can see this treated again with greater detail, in the *Larger Catechism*. You can look at Questions #131 and #132. Well, for those who are in the same standing with us, we ought to pray for them, we ought to encourage them. And if, in the Lord's providence, they advance in knowing beyond our own level, if they advance in position beyond where we stand, we shouldn't be bitter against them, but we should see God is at work, thanking God, and praying for them, encouraging those as the Lord blesses them.

You see, in each of these, the fundamental duty is to love them, and to express that to them in a way that is appropriate to their position in relationship to us. Does this mean then that we should blindly obey our superiors in everything whatsoever? Simply put, No. You can see this, for instance, in Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Of course, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were collectively together, and Daniel on his own. But both were given unlawful commands by great rulers. But what did they do? They didn't say, "Well, I have to honor them, and so, I'm going to obey their unlawful commands. I'm going to stop praying to Jehovah, or I'm going to bow down to a false image." They said, "No! We are under the ultimate authority of the Lord. you command us to do something lawful, we'll heed your commandment, we'll give ourselves with diligence, but we will not follow after a commandment that will lead us to sin." That is the kind of commandment, and the only commandment that we are bound to disobey. [See Daniel chapter 3, and chapter 6.] Because, what, in truth, is happening is, we're obeying God in order to follow him. Notice Peter's response to those who commanded unlawful things to him, to stop preaching. In Acts chapter 5, verse 29, "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

It ought to be our sincere desire to honor authority over us. Parents, and teachers, and pastors; if a wife to a husband, if a citizen to a mayor, a governor, a prime minister, and so on. However, to do so, we must remember that our ultimate authority is God, as he has revealed his will to us in his Word. We don't say this lightly. But to give you an example, if a parent were to command a child to steal something, the child should see that his responsibility is to obey God. He doesn't get all upset with his parents, and so on. But that he must lovingly disobey his parent, in order to obey God. Notice, it's not the child's choice or preference, rather it's God's written Word which

governs. If a husband were to command a wife, or tell a wife to do something that was sinful, she's not just to say, "Well, you know, I'm going to get upset with you," but rather, "I have a higher calling to honor Christ Jesus."

This is true of governments. If a government commanded us not to gather and worship God, we aren't to say, "Well, the government says so." Rather, we are to say, "Our King, the Lord Jesus Christ, says we must gather, so we are to worship him." You see, it goes on, and on, and on, in every realm. Our superiors have no right to command us to do something that is contrary to the Word of God. And so it is, sometimes we might have to disobey their unlawful commands and suffer for it. Isn't this what the martyrs did? They would disobey the unlawful commands of governments in order to obey Christ, and they suffered for it. This is because the authority of men is meant to be used in ways that help us honor God. It's always to be in accordance to God's Word, and never contrary to it. When they command us something that is sinful, We must disobey them in order that we would obey God.

Well, third, and quickly, *Encouragement for the Obedient*—Notice the reason annexed to the fifth commandment, as our *Catechism* says, "is a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment." You'll notice that the fifth commandment itself addresses the promised land to Israel. Well, notice how Paul understands this in Ephesians 6, verses 1 through 3, which shouldn't surprise us, because Israel and the promised land is pointing to something bigger for the Christian. Notice Paul, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."

One thing to notice—Paul, as a Christian Apostle to the church, was not hesitant to refer back to the Ten Commandments. You see? The Ten Commandments are a guide for the Christian. But also, more to the point of our lesson, notice that he sees, in the promise of the fifth commandment, a promise of encouragement that God will supply us that which is needed for life in this world. The Lord is kind to remember and to encourage us. In this commandment, he provides that encouragement by making promise of a life in this world that has all that is needed. There's a natural component to this, of course. If we submit to and honor our authorities, learning from them, obeying their lawful commands, heeding their wise counsel, we'll be spared many pains. They've lived longer, they have greater understanding, they have greater gifts and graces, and they often know better than we do. So if you read through the Proverbs, you'll see this message again and again. "Listen to me," says the father to the son. This helps us avoid many mistakes and problems.

However, there's also provision here of a promise from God himself. He's saying that he takes notice of and will provide us what we need for life in this world. It's similar to what Christ says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). He sees it, and will provide for us. Does this mean that everyone who honors those over them will live long in this life? No, but God will certainly give all that is needed, so that the one who honors him will have all that is needed to continue honoring him until his days in this life are ended.

Moreover, there's to be an unending life in the world to come, the new heavens and the new earth, that they will enjoy forever. On that last great day, Christians, who by grace have been forgiven through Christ, by faith in him, and by grace through Christ have been brought to walk according to his will, among other things, honoring those who are above them, will enter upon the new heavens and new earth forever. As we serve others, we're encouraged to know that God will

support us as he's promised.

Well, as we close, I want to encourage you to take the time to identify the relationships God has placed in your life. You can do so by thinking of your home, your church, your school, your state, your providence, your country, perhaps your job. As one example, take your family. Who are your superiors? This would be your mom and dad. Who are your equals? This would be your brothers and sisters, if you have them. Who are your inferiors? Well, unless you're married with children, it may be that there isn't someone under your authority, or under your influence. Or if you're an older brother or sister, it may be that, on occasion, your mom or dad tells you to watch your brother or sister. For that time, you stand as their superior. It may be also that you have greater knowledge and greater gifts. Well, in that way, you stand as someone else's superior.

Now, the purpose of this is to see clearly the order God has given you in your relationships. God gave you your mom and dad. If you have siblings, he gave them to you. This then could be applied to your church. The pastors, fellow members, newer Christians, younger members of the church. You see, you can work through all of these different spheres and see the ordered relationships that God has given you.

But all of this, of course, is to help you see more clearly your call to love those above, beside, and beneath. You can examine yourself: "What is my responsibility toward these?" And in doing so you can examine your love. You know, the way you treat these different individuals, and these different relationships is a reflection and display of your love to God. If we love God, we'll love his image-bearers. And we'll love his image-bearers in whatever relationship they stand to us. When you discover that you've dishonored your superiors, or unlovingly treated your inferiors, or you've been unkind to your equals, that's a sin which needs to be specifically confessed. But moreover, remember the preface of grace to the Ten Commandments, and be taught to call upon him who is the Lord your God, both to forgive you through Jesus Christ, and to enliven you that by his grace, you may walk more faithfully in love toward all those in these different relationships ordered by God, for his glory, and your good.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #38

The Ten Commandments: Love for Life

Question 67: *Which is the sixth commandment?*

Answer: *The sixth commandment is, “Thou shalt not kill.”*

Question 68: *What is required in the sixth commandment?*

Answer: *The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others.*

Question 69: *What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?*

Answer: *The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto.*

We continue to study the Ten Commandments, all of which direct us in the way of loving God. In today’s lesson, we give attention to the sixth commandment, and as we’ll see, this commandment shows us how we love God by caring for the life that he’s given to us and to others. Every man and woman, boy and girl bear the image of God. It is, of course, true, as Proverbs 12, verse 10 says, “A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.” Thus, our treatment of animals will reflect our character. However, we need to remember that animals, and indeed all creation has been placed under the dominion of mankind. Mankind is above the rest of the earth. Man has been given the image of God. As we considered in our treatment of Question #10, we see that God made man after his own likeness. Well, this is the foundation for the commandment before us today. So keep that in mind as we work through our lesson on the sixth commandment.

We have three Questions today, #67 through #69. Question #67, “Which is the sixth commandment?”—“The sixth commandment is, Thou shalt not kill.” This answer identifies the commandment which is found in Exodus 20, verse 13, and Deuteronomy 5, verse 17. The word here translated as “kill” is a word that is used in the Bible exclusively for the killing of men. Thus, you’ll find it translated elsewhere as “murder,” or referring to people who do it as one who is a “manslayer.” So in other words, this commandment is not talking about our killing of animals or killing of plants. It’s focused on our treatment of men. In fact, the Lord gives humans permission to take the life of animals for their own nourishment. We see this in Genesis 9, verse 3, “Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.”

Nor, as we'll see, does it forbid the lawful taking of human life. There are occasions, when it is right to take the life of another human. We'll take that up more in a moment.

The next Question explains the essential duty, Question #68: "What is required in the sixth commandment?"—"The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others." The word "endeavors" means "actions" or "efforts," so we're to do those things which both preserve our own and the life of others. But notice, they are to be lawful. We're not just to do anything to preserve our own life. We shouldn't lie, or cheat, or steal, but rather those things which are in accordance to God's law.

The last Question explains what is forbidden, Question #69: "What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?"—"The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto." Well, we'll consider this more fully in a moment.

For now, let's look at the teaching of this commandment with the help of our *Catechism*, by considering three points: firstly, *The Gift of Life*; secondly, *Preserving the Gift of Life*; and thirdly, *Denying the Gift of Life*.

First, *The Gift of Life*. God created things that are. But there are differences among the things that he's created. Some things have life—like animals, plants, and humans; and some things don't—like rocks and mountains. And among living creatures, there are differences as well. Plants are alive and animals are alive, yet it is clear to see that there are great differences between the type of life that plants have, and the type of life that animals have. There's a great difference between the life of animals and humans. While the theory of evolution would make little, if any, distinction between the life of monkeys, fish, and humans, the Bible makes a clear distinction. Fundamentally, the Bible indicates that human life is superior to all other forms of earthly life in this world. And the reason for that is because God has placed his image in mankind. We can review Question #10 of the *Shorter Catechism* to see this. A simple statement of this great truth is that God has made man in his image. Now, there are wonderful things, amazing things that birds can do, and monkeys can do, and dogs can do. And none of this is to be denied. There's wonderful ways that they show the wisdom of God, and of course, as we mentioned in Proverbs, we're to treat even creatures in a way that is good.

But there is a special reality regarding humanity. And you can see, for instance, this difference between human life and animal life, when you look at Genesis 9, verse 3, and verse 6. Verse 3, regarding animal life, "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things." So there, God's saying there are creatures, and these creatures may be put to death to eat for your nourishment. Then notice verse 6, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." See the difference? The great reason that there's a difference between our treatment of animals, and the necessary taking of their life for our own nourishment, versus the unlawful taking of man's life, is that man has been made in God's image. This remains a motive for all forms of honoring those who bear that image.

James reproves us for our sinful speech against other men. And notice how he does so, James 3, verses 8 through 10: "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." In other words, we are to treat other humans with a special honor and respect, because they bear God's image. Well that's true we should respect and use all of creation in a way that honors God, but the Lord has given us dominion over all of creation, to be

stewards of it, and to use it for the benefit of mankind. And though humans are creatures, they are creatures privileged above others to have been given God's image. This is the foundation of the commandment—mankind is made in God's image. He is therefore to be treated with a special honor above all other creatures, including the diligent care and the protection of his life.

It should be no wonder that our world has increasingly ignored the great honor owed to human life, when it has increasingly denied God. But men in our age live like irrational beasts, giving themselves to nothing more than carnal pleasures and selfish desires. This shouldn't surprise us. In denying the God whose image is placed upon them, they've lost the foundation for their higher calling as image-bearers of the Most High God. Additionally, they've lost their reason for the special care of human life, God's image in each human. This, we must emphasize, includes all humankind—men, women, and children. From the moment of conception, and that to the end of life, all human life is to be honored and treated with dignity, with love, with respect. And this is because every human bears God's image, whether young or old, whether healthy or sick, whether rich or poor, whether they have mental or physical problems, those who are injured, those who are elderly and bed-ridden. They may not be able to contribute productively to society, but they are humans bearing God's image, and as such, their lives are important, and worthy of our loving support, care, and service.

Well, second, *Preserving the Gift of Life*. Since God has made man in his image, it is necessary to treat the life of men, women, and children with respect and honor. Human life is placed in a category all its own, because it bears God's image. The commandment itself forbids the taking away of life—"Thou shalt not kill." But if we're to do this, we must necessarily avoid those things which tend to it, and likewise give ourselves to the lawful preserving of life. Life doesn't just stay. It needs to be nurtured and cared for. And so we're to give ourselves to that which promotes life. There's not a neutrality in this. We can't say, "Well, I'm going to choose the middle. I neither going to take away, nor am I going to support and give." No, the nature of human life is such that it has to be protected and actively preserved. We're either doing that which injures human life, or we're doing that which is preserving it.

Notice the answer to Question #68: "The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others." The commandment calls us to all "lawful endeavours" to preserve our own life. A "lawful endeavor" is any action that is in accordance to God's law. In other words, we're called to do those things that God says are right to do, in order to preserve our own life. There's many things that could be said, but we can simplify this. This includes appropriate sleep, and food and drink, work, rest, and recreation. We certainly must be careful in these things, so that we don't add to God's law, but we can agree that a healthy diet, adequate sleep, and necessary recreation or exercise is needed for our bodies and our souls to live in this world. It's true that someone may be very mindful of what he or she eats, and gets his or her amount of sleep and exercise, and this person may still encounter sickness and disease that leads them on to death. However, the commandment is saying that we're to do what is needed to promote and preserve life. Now, we need to remember, this doesn't mean that we make idols of food, or drink, or rest, or exercise, but these are meant to give us strength and help, so that then we may serve others.

Additionally, this includes self-defense. If we're to preserve life, and someone is attacking unjustly, then we have a right to defend. If someone is unlawfully trying to harm another human, the one who's being harmed has the right to defend himself. This is because it's right to protect human life. If someone is trying to murder another, the one trying to murder may be put to death lawfully, which protects the innocent life. We see this explicitly mentioned in Exodus 22, verse 2,

“If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him.” Someone is breaking into a house, and perhaps the father awakes and goes to defend his family, and the one who broke in is then put to death. There’s been no crime committed apart from the thief breaking in, and the just defense of the house is something that is honorable.

The commandment also calls us to all lawful endeavors to preserve the life of others. We’re not only to focus on ourselves. Instead, we’re to seek to preserve the lives of our neighbors as well, in ways that honor God. Parents are to feed their children. They’re to make sure that they’re getting adequate rest, and needed exercise. Employers are to make sure that they’re not overworking their employees. This is, of course, one of the great evils of various forms of slavery throughout history. Many times, such has looked upon human slaves as those who are less than human, and has led other men to treat other image-bearers of God with such rigor and hardship that there is no concern for the preservation of their lives. It’s a great sin when this takes place. In other words, we are to use our strength and ability to promote the lives of others, especially those who are unable to do so themselves.

Proverbs 31, verses 8 and 9 remind us, “Open thy mouth for the dumb”—that is, those that cannot speak—“in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.” In other words, if we see some being injured and taken advantage of, and they can’t defend themselves, then we’re to use what influence we can to bring justice to bear. So if we see others being taken advantage of, or placed in danger, we need to use our influence to preserve their lives. In today’s world, of course, there is the very sad occasion of abortion, which is the murdering of a child within the womb. The child can’t talk. We need to do what we can to speak for those who are defenseless in the womb. The Lord indeed would bless those efforts to preserve life.

This is also why it’s lawful, not only to defend ourselves, but others. We could think of a police officer who is supposed to protect others. A wicked man begins assaulting people in a store, a police officer is right to do what he can to protect others. If the wicked man is putting the lives of others in danger, the police officer is right to put that man to death. His lawful taking of the life of the attacker is actually preserving the lives of the innocent. Now, this can be abused. But the point still stands that it is right to defend life, even when necessary, to put the wicked one to death, so that others may indeed be protected.

This is why “capital punishment,” otherwise known as “the death penalty” is a Biblically righteous judgment against murder and other heinous sins, as the Bible indicates. Paul mentions this in Romans 13, when he’s speaking of the civil government. Notice his words, in Romans 13, verse 4: “For he”—speaking of the ruler—“is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” In other words, God has given civil rulers the right and duty to defend life, and to protect the nation, or state, or those in that society, by putting to death heinous criminals. The civil government bears the sword. The sword, of course, was the ancient instrument of putting to death. Soldiers used swords. Today, we have guns and other things as we well know. But this instrument, this tool that was used for the inflicting of the death penalty was given by God to the civil ruler to be used to punish murderers and other notorious sinners. Now, doing this actually honors God’s word and preserves life, by giving an open warning to others. Genesis 9:6, as we read: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” When rulers rightly take up that call and that responsibility, they are actually giving a public warning to all others, and in doing so, are preserving the lives of

those in their society.

Well, third, *The Denying the Gift of Life*. Ultimately, it is God who gives life and takes it away. If we believe this, we'll avoid this by denying our careless use of our own lives or of others. Notice what the commandment forbids: "the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto." The taking away of our own life is called "suicide." It often comes when one is in heavy despair, either due to personal sin, or pain inflicted upon them by others, or illnesses that are quite painful. It's a serious temptation in those seasons. But it is, regardless of circumstances, a serious sin.

The reason it is so great a sin, is because it denies God to be the one who begins and ends human life. It places ourselves in the position of God over our own life. This is not to deny the immense pain that some experience, physically and emotionally, nor is it to deny the great shame that may be experienced because of sin. It is, however, to acknowledge that only God has the right over human life, to end it at his will, to do so in his timing.

I think it's right for me to say, if you ever face this temptation, you need to seek help. You need to talk to your parents, or your pastor, or some other trusted adult or friend, so that they can help you to get you the help you need in various ways, and above all, that you would get the help to seek the Lord and giver of life to support you and sustain you in your trial.

And likewise, the unlawful taking away of the life of our neighbor is forbidden. This is what we call "murder." We saw earlier that there is a lawful taking away of life in self defense, or capital punishment. However, there is the unlawful taking away of life as well, which is known as murder. It's a most shameful reality that in many place of the world, the law protects the murdering of children in the womb. This was noted earlier; it's called abortion. And you can think for a moment why this takes place. It can take place out of significant trials and hardships. It can take place out of a simple sinful desire to have an easier life, as some say. It can take place for no reason at all but that the mother or father doesn't want the child. But whatever the reason is, notice what's happening. An image-bearer of God is being put to death unlawfully. Increasingly, moreover, there's the willingness to put the elderly to death. And there is, of course, many other ways that this commandment is wickedly violated.

But notice that the commandment is clear: "Thou shalt not kill." We might say, "But, what about my desire?" "But what about my pain?" And we are to say, "But, what about God's commandment?"

Notice that the commandment also forbids whatever tends to the unlawful taking away of our own lives or others as well. In other words, the things that tend to it are forbidden. If actions place us in the position of pursuing death, or on the road to death, such actions are sinful. It's true that any action we take may result in injury or death, even with great caution. Driving a car, buckled up, and everything else, minding the laws of the road, may still find us in a fatal accident. However, the commandment is not saying "Don't do those lawful and necessary actions that we need to do in order to live in this world." It's forbidding, rather, the careless and foolish behaviors that unnecessarily place us in a position of danger. For instance, seeking a thrill through a foolish stunt. The abuse of food or drink because of pleasure. So when one abuses alcohol, and they get drunk, they're impaired. Well, there are laws throughout the world against drunk driving. Why is that? Because that tends to the taking away of life—one's own, or even others. And oh, the tragedy when it is so, that one is put to death, brought to death, killed, in fact, murdered because of a drunk driver. We need to consider the tendency of our actions. Are they leading to and promoting the preservation of life, or are they leading us toward and pursuing death.

You see, this also forbids things that we may not at first think of. It forbids unrighteous anger and hatred, and hate-filled speech. You think for a moment that oftentimes murder takes place because of one being angry. And if we cultivate the anger, we're cultivating that which would lead to murder. Christ points this out, in Matthew 5, verses 21 and 22: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." Christ is not saying, "Well, that commandment needs to be set aside, and now this commandment needs to be set up." He is rather helping us understand what's behind and beneath this commandment, that hatred and unlawful anger leads to actions that would murder. Sinful and hateful speech, "Thou fool," leads to the open violation of this commandment. This is why he says, if you say, "Thou fool," you're in danger of hell fire. Why? Because it violates this command. Why? Because the command is telling us that not only the act of murder, but the things that lead to it are forbidden. If we are to honor God, we must have hearts that are free of such sinful anger. Oh, dear one, is it not the case that though our hands may be free from the blood of men, that our hearts have often been filled with their blood by our sinful anger?

Let me close then by reminding you that it's not only murder itself that's forbidden. Our unrighteous anger and our hate-filled speech violate this commandment as well. Moreover, when we neglect to that which promotes and protects life, we violate this commandment. Where does all of this leave us? Doubtlessly it leaves us in need of forgiveness. We may never lift our hand so much as to strike another in anger, but if our hearts have been lifted up, we're guilty of violating this command. We need forgiveness. Hasn't this command showed us? But praise God, as John reminds us, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). As heinous as murder is, Christ's blood is able to cleanse us from that sin. As common as hate is, Christ's blood is able to cleanse us from that sin. Moreover, and praise God for this, he is able to work within us that we would be those who give ourselves to love and preserve not only our own, but others' lives, to the glory of God. But how shall this come to pass? But that he, the Lord and giver of life would give us life in Christ, and in Christ, we would love those who bear his image, and give ourselves to the promoting of life, to the preserving of life, and the protecting of life, to his glory now and always.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #39

The Ten Commandments: Love for Purity

Question 70: *Which is the seventh commandment?*

Answer: *The seventh commandment is, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”*

Question 71: *What is required in the seventh commandment?*

Answer: *The seventh commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbour’s chastity, in heart, speech, and behaviour.”*

Question 72: *What is forbidden in the seventh commandment?*

Answer: *The seventh commandment forbiddeth all unchaste thoughts, words,*

Each of the commandments instructs us in the way of loving God. The 5th through 10th commandments clarify how we are to love God by loving our neighbor. As we look at the seventh commandment in this lesson, we consider a topic that is very sensitive, and must be treated with care and respect. But while it demands care and respect, it does demand that we deal with it. We cannot ignore the topic before us. While the commandment itself addresses adultery, it opens our mind to the fact of sexual sin. Specifically, adultery is when a man has sexual relations with someone other than his wife, or a woman with someone other than her husband.

It may be that you do not yet have much knowledge about sex. It may be that you have a lot. Either way, we have to realize that, at its basic level, sexual relations—or simply, sex—is a way that God intends for a husband and wife to love, enjoy, and serve one another to his glory. By it, a husband and wife are to give themselves physically and emotionally to one another’s good, in a way that only a husband and wife are meant to do. If and when you have questions about this topic, don’t turn to the foolish of this world, don’t search the internet. Instead, turn to the Lord, and make use of the help he provides you in his Word, and by the assistance of godly and wise adults.

And because sex is much abused by our world, it’s easy to think of it as less than good. However, as we’ll see, sex is a provision of the Lord, to be enjoyed in its proper place—in marriage, between one man and one woman—husband and wife. When it’s not enjoyed in this relationship, it is destructive to relationships, to society, and to souls.

While it may be difficult to discuss these things, a consideration of this topic is needed for at

least two reasons. First, God has addressed it clearly and repeatedly throughout his Word. And second, the abuse of sex is so common today that, if we avoid true and faithful instruction, we're left only with the false instruction of the world, or the imagination of our own minds.

So let us look at our Questions today from the *Shorter Catechism*, beginning with Question #70: "What is the seventh commandment?"—"The seventh commandment is, Thou shalt not commit adultery." Well, technically, "adultery" refers to sexual relations between a married man or a married woman, with someone other than his or her spouse. But related to this particular sin of adultery are many other sexual sins. One, for instance, is fornication. And this is when an unmarried person has sexual relations with someone else who is not married. So this one commandment is talking about sexual sin.

So Question #71 asks, "What is required in the seventh commandment?"—"The seventh commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbour's chastity, in heart, speech, and behavior." Now the word "chastity" comes from a word meaning "pure." The explanation here is emphasizing that the commandment is not only interested in external or physical, purity from sexual corruption, but that we are commanded throughout the Bible, and by this commandment itself, to be pure in all aspects of our lives: our desires, our words, and actions.

Question #72, "What is forbidden in the seventh commandment?"—"The seventh commandment forbiddeth all unchaste thoughts, words, and actions." "Unchaste" is the opposite of "chastity" or "chaste," and "purity" or "pure." As we'll see, it is not only the activity of sexual impurity that is forbidden, but even our desires and thoughts, as well as words, ought to be free from impurity.

Well, let's look at three points for our lesson today. Firstly, *Purity in Relationships*; secondly, *Preserving Purity*; and thirdly, *Corrupting Purity*.

So first, *Purity in Relationships*. The commandment does not forbid sexual activity or enjoyment. Instead, it is commanding that all sexual activity and enjoyment be experienced in the only right and safe and appropriate relationship—namely, lawful marriage. Marriage was ordained and provided by God. In Genesis chapter 2, the only thing that God noticed in all his creation before the fall that was not good, was that man was alone. So he then created a woman. He didn't create another man. He created of the man a woman, both humans, of course; both bearing God's image. And though essentially the same, and yet uniquely different, as a man and a woman.

Notice, in Genesis 2, verses 23 through 25: "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

It's instructive that, for marriage, it is that one man and one woman would be joined together. And so, from this first marriage, God has provided a foundation for all other marriages. This is the guide for all else that follows. God made one man, one woman, brought them together, and they were married. And so it is to be so today.

But notice that in this passage, we see no embarrassment, we see no regret. Nor do we see merely permitting something that is otherwise less than good. Instead, we see that God provided marriage as a great blessing to man. Sexual activity between a husband and wife is to be the good, and enjoyable, and beneficial expression of the most forms of human love. But you see, herein lies the temptation. As it is the expression of the most intimate human love, it is counterfeited, misrepresented, cheapened, and abused by the world. This is why we must understand and give attention to what purity in this way is. So let's quickly note that there are several reasons that God instituted marriage. We find them all clearly stated regularly in the Bible.

One is for the mutual help of the man and woman. Notice, in Genesis 2:18, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help *meet* for him.” That is, literally, a help that is *suitable* for him.

Another reason for marriage is the right relationship to express and enjoy sexual intimacy. Notice Hebrews 13, and verse 4: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” So the sexual relationship within marriage is honorable and undefiled. But the abuse of it is a sin that God will judge. Notice as well, in 1 Corinthians 7, verse 2, Paul writes, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.” So again, you see one man and one woman to be joined together for the enjoyment of that sexual intimacy.

Well, another reason for marriage is for the right way to populate the earth—“procreation”. Indeed, by sexual interaction between husband and wife, this takes place. Notice in Genesis 1, verses 27 and 28, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.” And yet this is not only, in isolation, stated here. It’s repeated again and again in the Scriptures.

And yet, within this, there’s a further reason that God identifies for marriage, that by all of what’s going on in marriage, God would then seek from children which come from that marital union of husband and wife, a godly seed. So, Malachi 2, verse 15, speaking of God, “And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.” In other words, there is one man, one woman, and as they come together and have children, and in a godly home are raised, it’s thereby that God is seeking a godly seed.

So what we see is that God established marriage to be *the* place, *the* relationship, with the greatest intimacy and support, including right and pure sexual desires and enjoyment. It is to be the unique and blessed way to fill the earth, and provide, by God’s blessing, a godly seed for the church.

But let us not overstate the matter. Marriage is not for everyone, and that’s by God’s appointment. While it is good and lawful, it is not mandatory. It’s not mandatory to be married in order to be a satisfied human being. It’s not mandatory to be married in order to be God-glorifying as a Christian. Whereas we can see that it may be the normal and ordinary way and a calling that God provides, it is not exclusive. Christ himself, of course, was a single man. We see Paul testifying that though he had the right to have a wife as other apostles did, yet it was not the case that he had a wife, and he devoted himself, in his singleness, to the service of Christ. And even in 1 Corinthians exhorts others who are single to use their singleness for service to the Lord. So we see the Bible commends singleness in several ways. We must always remember that it is trusting, knowing, and loving God in Jesus Christ that is the fullest way of satisfying what we are. Because man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

And yet, with that notice we acknowledge that, as far as human relationships are considered, there’s no greater intimacy experienced than that which is between a husband and a wife. If we fail to understand this, we will fail to make sense of this commandment. We’ll fail to see why sexual sin is a great evil and corruption. Why is it that we should be concerned about purity in our lives and relationships? It’s because the nature of sexual intimacy is extremely precious. If it is ignored, abused, or lightly treated, it ends up spoiling, and ruining, and injuring men and women, boys and girls, in ways so deep that it is hard even for the most well-trained professional, and the most

skillful of pastors to understand. Marriage, and sexual relations between husband and wife are fundamental to family, to the church, and to society.

It's an ancient tactic of Satan to lure people to commit sexual sins by the apparent attraction of pleasure. However, as soon as they engage, he turns the tables upon them and shames them for their sin. Because he's led them on to something that is not theirs for the moment, and which is precious, and once they've engaged in it, they're left, as it were, in their shame.

And let's be clear that purity is not just about actions. As with all things, our actions flow out of thoughts and desires, and are often cultivated by our speech. This means that true purity is not one of mere action or inaction. It is a matter of the mind and heart, which then leads and governs our speech and actions. Well, all of this helps us to see what purity or chastity is. It is the commitment of our whole person, body and soul; thoughts, desires, and actions; to the maintaining of sexual intimacy within the loving relationship of marriage. This means that impurity is anything that takes what ought to be peculiar and special to marriage, and desires or makes use of it outside of marriage.

So second, let's look at *Preserving Purity*. How do we preserve it? Well, we start by remembering what purity is, and that it is good. Purity is the commitment of our whole person to honoring God and others in our relationships with others. It is preserving what is special for marriage, and ensuring that it is both kept in that estate and enjoyed in that estate. Remember that this is not only right, it's good. Purity is good in and of itself. It is good for us. This is the very thing that the world seeks to overthrow. It is something that our own sinfulness denies. Sexual purity is good. It is good for us. This is true for single persons—their purity will be cultivating personal godliness and God-honoring relationships with others. This is true of married persons, who will also be cultivating personal godliness and God-honoring relationships with others, while giving themselves in that special way provided in marriage to their spouse. To do anything that fails to preserve this is to bring pain and hurt to our bodies, souls, and relationships.

Well, how then do we preserve this? Well simply, we do so by watching over three areas: our heart, our speech, and behavior regarding ourselves and others. Notice the *Catechism*, “The seventh commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbour's chastity, in heart, speech, and behaviour.” Our heart relates to our desires. If we are to preserve purity, this is where the main focus must be—the desires and inclinations of our hearts. It's not just activity that must be blameless. Our desires must be pure toward others. We're to remember that God sees into our hearts, and he knows how we think of others and other things. And so, if we're to preserve purity, we must watch our hearts.

This is true with reference to any sin. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” We must guard and watch over our hearts, to be mindful of what we let into them, and what we think about and dwell on. Our desires will, of course, lead to thoughts, and words, which often will lead then to action. A person who is loose in their speech will be led to be loose in their behavior. But that looseness, that impurity is because they failed first and foremost to guard their hearts. We should think and speak about marriage as that which is a privileged and honorable state, while we guard our hearts to ensure that they are seeking God above all else.

Well, third, *Corrupting Purity*. What are some common ways that we see purity corrupted? There is the obvious way of engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage. Sexual activity before, or in any way outside of marriage between one man and one woman, is sinful and impure. It is a corruption of the good thing that God has given to husbands and wives. And as it is impure, it is

also harmful. So think for a moment of pure water. If you put poison in the water, it's not just that it's wrong, but now it's harmful. And so it is with sexual relationships, thoughts, and other things. But if it is something engaged in outside of marriage, it's not just wrong, it's harmful.

There are many ways to corrupt this privilege. In today's visual culture, we see this in the images that are often paraded before us. With access to the internet, it is all too easy to come across, even to stumble across the most wicked abuses of sexual behavior. Indeed, many have stumbled in this regard, not even purposely seeking it out, but finding themselves off guard, and then lured to the temptation. The visual portrayal of sexual behavior is known as pornography. But it's not only explicit pornography. Advertisements, as well as suggestive dress by men and women promote the corruption of this purity as well. And to engage in those things is to corrupt purity.

Additionally, today's world is full of crude, inappropriate, and crass discussion about sex, and about others. Some come by way of jokes; others by way of provocative talk. All of this is forbidden, because all of it attacks the purity of what God has given. The commandment, remember, forbids *all* unchaste thoughts, words, and actions. All of this must be cast out.

Any way of cultivating or satisfying sexual desires outside of marriage with one spouse is to corrupt its purity. This may be by engaging in sexual activities by oneself, or with someone other than your spouse. It may be by viewing illicit material, or by lusting after someone in no other way but in your own thoughts. Notice Christ's words, in Matthew 5, verses 27 through 28: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." So notice, it's not that the person did anything outwardly. He looked, and then lusted. The word "lust" means "to desire." And here, in this sense, it is the desire for the experience or the benefit of sex with someone who is not one's spouse.

Well, in today's world, all manner of degenerate and wicked activity is being promoted. This is true specifically with reference to the seventh commandment. Sex before marriage is commonplace in the world. Promiscuity is rampant in the world. Homosexuality—that is, sexual relationships between people of the same sex—is openly promoted and celebrated. Even laws are passed in various nations to support it. Unbiblical divorce, and the consequential adultery that follows is tolerated even in churches. Entertainment, which portrays all forms of sexual deviancy is common, and we are surrounded by all manner of impurity.

All of this means then that we must be vigilant, as the corruption surrounds us. But we should remember, these things are not the causes of impurity. These are the display of it. The truth is, if we have impure thoughts, words, or behavior, it is because we have distorted and corrupted desires within us. Our hearts are influenced by sin. We have hearts in need of Christ and grace. Notice Christ's words, in Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." It's true that those who promote sexual immorality will answer for their wickedness. However, our sinful thoughts, words, and actions are fundamentally our fault—our sin. And so, we must take responsibility for our thoughts, words, and actions. Impurity is not the world's problem. Impurity is our problem.

When it comes to relating to others not our spouse, it's important that we both avoid and seek out. So as we close with this application, think of this. This is true both for single people and married people. We must avoid those circumstances that would promote the desires and opportunities, not only for the activity of sexual sin, but even the cultivation of desires for it. We should not isolate ourselves with the means to seek out opportunities for impurity. So in this world, we have smart phones, and laptops, and other devices that have an instant access to the internet. We should make

use of those things in public, not in secret. Because it's a means by which we might be lured away. We shouldn't isolate ourselves with others, especially those of the opposite sex. We should be careful to avoid even the appearance of evil. So there are things that we ought to avoid.

But there are also things that we should seek out. We should seek out wholesome relationships. One practical way to do this, when single, is to avoid being one-on-one with someone to whom we may be attracted, or those of the opposite sex. Instead, be in groups together. Avoid the music and entertainment that is careless about these relationships, and portrays them with all manner of laughing, while all manner of sin is taking place. Instead, participate in those things which promote wholesome engagement with others. And do so in the public eye, and in groups, and if young, with the care and oversight of wise and godly adults.

Before I close, let me say that, if you're not married, and someone, anyone other than your spouse, as we've seen, has sought to engage, or has engaged in sexual activity or discussion with you, you need to seek out a trusted adult for help. It is grievous, but even close relatives and otherwise respected people can and have abused others. And if this has happened to you, your great need is to seek out the Lord first by prayer, but also to seek out someone who is worthy to be trusted. It's a difficult thing for people who have been so abused, but it's the right thing. It's the way to find help for what has happened.

But finally, how is it that we overcome sexual sin? In one sense, sexual sin is like any other sin. It's rebellion against God and his good order for men. It comes from a disordered and corrupt heart. Well this means that the ultimate way of overcoming it is by God's grace. We need him to send us help, and he does this by Jesus Christ. Remember, Jesus is the Savior of sinners. It may be that you have been guilty of sexual sin, in any sort, or even in its more heinous form. Our hope is the grace of God. Paul addressed this in 1 Corinthians. Among other heinous sins, notice chapter 6, verse 9 and following: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Here is the good news: even regarding our sexual sin, God is able to forgive. He's able to sanctify, to purify us, to take us who were impure and make us pure. He's able to change us, that we would love him and love others. God is able to do this, even to the end that, by his grace, we may live lives going forward that display our love to him, and our love to our neighbors in right, God-honoring, and truly satisfying ways. And all of this is done by his grace, which is given us by and in Christ.

So what is there that is more practical than this, that if you and I are either to be restored from impurity to purity, or to cultivate greater purity and maintain it, we must be much with Christ, casting all of our desires upon him, seeking him for his grace, pouring over his Word, meditating upon him, believing his promises, and asking for his Spirit to guide us, that we might walk in the path of righteousness for his name's sake. If you would fulfill this commandment, you will only be able to do so as you dwell in, and that by faith, Jesus Christ.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #40

The Ten Commandments: Love for the Lord's Allotment

Question 73: *Which is the eighth commandment?*

Answer: *The eighth commandment is, "Thou shalt not steal."*

Question 74: *What is required in the eighth commandment?*

Answer: *The eighth commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others."*

Question 75: *What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?*

Answer: *The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth or may unjustly hinder our own, or our neighbour's wealth or outward estate."*

As we continue our study of the *Shorter Catechism*, we come now to its treatment of the eighth commandment. Once again, we come across guidance from the Lord, as to how we are to love him by loving others.

So Question #73 asks, "Which is the eighth commandment?"—"The eighth commandment is, Thou shalt not steal." To "steal" is to unlawfully take from someone what belongs to them, so it understands that the Lord has given to different people the things that they possess. When we take from them what is theirs without their permission, without purchasing it, etc., that is "to steal."

Notice Question #74, "What is required in the eighth commandment?"—"The eighth commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others." To "procure" means that we gain something. To "further" means that we increase something. So the gaining and increasing of not only our own wealth and outward estate—the things that concern us—but even serving others as well. We often think of "wealth" as if it only means "riches," a lot, in abundance. But the word here simply means whatever amount we have. You can think of it as one's outward wellbeing. If someone only has ten dollars, that's the amount of his or her wealth. If someone has one million dollars or more, that's the amount of their wealth. But it isn't just finances or money. It's all the personal property that belongs to that person.

So Question #75, "What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?"—"The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth or may unjustly hinder our own, or our neighbour's wealth or outward

estate.” So we see that this commandment addresses how we approach what belongs to us, and what belongs to others. We’ll see that what belongs to us has been given, or allotted to us by the Lord.

So let’s look at three points for our lesson. First, *The Lord’s Allotment to Us*; second, *Obtaining and Preserving the Lord’s Allotment*; and third, *Abusing the Lord’s Allotment*.

So first, understanding *The Lord’s Allotment to Us*. The Lord owns all that is. All is his. This is the starting point for us with reference to our belongings and others’. So think that when Solomon was building the temple for the Lord, God caused his people to bring in an abundance of excellent things. But notice Solomon’s words in 1 Chronicles 29, verses 11 through 14. He says to God, “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.”

Solomon realized that all the things that the people were bringing were ultimately things that first and foremost belonged, and in fact, still belonged to God. These great offerings given were things that God had given to them. And this is important for us. We need to come to terms with this as the fundamental point. God owns everything. He made everything, he distributes everything, all is by him, and all is for him. If we neglect or ignore this point, we’ll be open to all manner of wrong ideas regarding property and wealth.

Well, notice, while everything belongs to him, he truly does give to men a portion, or an allotment, according to his good will. In her prayer, Hannah acknowledged this very point—1 Samuel 2, verses 7 and 8. She prayed, acknowledging this, “The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and he hath set the world upon them.” In other words, the Lord has sovereignly allotted great riches to some, and great poverty to others. This is not to deny hard work and diligence as a means to gain outward wealth. It’s simply to note that all of this is in God’s control. This means then that the property that people have first and foremost is theirs because of God.

Notice then, that to steal from someone, be it a private person or a global business or company, is fundamentally to steal from God, and to deny his goodness and wisdom. Additionally, we should note that private property is ultimately a God-given truth. God has given to each individual something that belongs to them. There could be no stealing, were it not for the fact that things belong to others. Stealing is the unlawful taking from someone what belongs to them.

“Is it the case that people own things?” some ask, “Is it the case that there’s such a thing as personal property?” others ask. Well, some appeal to the early church, and say that the church practiced a form of communism. And there’s an idea that says, people don’t actually own property, everything really belongs to everyone else together. For instance, in Acts 4, verse 32, we read, “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.”

However, we find that this is not denying personal property. Rather, it’s a clear expression of the great liberality and love that the believers had to use their personal property for the good of those

in need. In fact, in Acts chapter 5, the very next chapter, we find an example of this. As Christians were giving of their personal property in support of the church, we find two early disciples, Ananias and Sapphira, deceiving the church in what they gave. So they sold their personal property for a certain price. And then in order to gain the approval of the church, and to show themselves as if they were quite charitable, they gave a certain amount of the money, but kept other of it back, and they acted as if they were giving the full price. Well, notice, in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5, we read this very case: “A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”

Well this is a great sin. It was not a great sin because they kept back part of the price. It was because they lied and acted like they were giving them all that they had, by way of the purchase price. In other words, they were lying and acting like they were more generous than they really were. So notice Peter’s reproof, in verses 3 and 4: “Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back, part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou has not lied unto men, but unto God.” You see, what was the sin? It wasn’t in holding onto private property. When it was sold, Peter said, it was still under your power, it was still your own to do with as you desired. Instead, the sin was lying and deceiving. The point is that the Bible acknowledges private property. What God has given to men is theirs. Now, it’s theirs to use to his glory. It’s theirs to use for their needs and the support of others, but it is theirs.

Well, second, let’s look at *Obtaining and Preserving the Lord’s Allotment*. How is it then that men obtain and preserve what the Lord has allotted to them? As we search the Scriptures, we see that there are primarily two ways to gain and preserve wealth, and to increase our outward estate. It is either by the way of receiving something as a free gift, or it comes by consequence of lawful and diligent work. Work, of course, is then rewarded with payment, or wages, or outward provision.

A free gift is the free transferring of what someone owns to someone else. So perhaps you have a birthday, and a family member or a friend buys something with their own money. It’s theirs, but then they give it freely to you. That’s a gift. On other occasions, perhaps a parent dies, and they appointed that their children receive the remaining finances and outward belongings. This is the form of an outward gift. We see this even in what was taking place in Acts 4 and Acts 5. Various believers owned things, they sold things, they took the money and they gave gifts. A gift is the giving of something that one owns to someone else.

Now, we must be careful. Sometimes gifts are given, but they’re given in order to bribe someone. So though it’s not seeking, as it were, payment back in an outward way. It’s seeking influence over someone, and the Bible warns us very clearly about those sinful gifts. But lawful gifts, right gifts, are freely given, and they ought to be received with gratitude, both to the person giving, but also, as we’ve seen, to God, who is the one overseeing it all.

The other and ordinary way of obtaining and preserving the Lord’s allotment is by diligent work. The Lord has established work to be the fundamental and primary way for us to obtain outward provisions for ourselves and families, and in order to give to others. Notice Paul’s words, in 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 8 through 12. He says of his own example: “Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly,

working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.”

Well, we’ll look at some of this in a moment, but for now, simply notice, Paul says he himself worked. And the others who were workers with him worked. They didn’t just eat others’ food freely, though they had authority to, as the minister is laboring in word and in prayer, and is to be supported by those to whom he ministers. But he was particularly giving an example to encourage others to work with their own hands, and thus procure that which was needed for them. This is the point. Men are to work. That’s the ordinary way. They work their jobs. They labor, whether as a farmer, or as a mechanic, or as an office worker. Whatever their work is, they’re doing that work in order then to receive the payment that is due to them, so then they can meet their own needs, and the needs of others. This is the main point. It’s through daily work that we gain either the finances to buy what we and our families need, or that we perform certain work in exchange for what we and our families need.

Moreover, notice how our work is the way that we procure enough for ourselves *and* enough to support others who can’t work. Ephesians 4:28 addresses those who used to steal: “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” How is it that we are to procure wealth for ourselves, and to support others? Well, the primary way is by work.

Well, third, *Abusing the Lord’s Allotment*. We abuse the Lord’s way of giving to us when we do one of several things: stealing, which is able to be done by cheating, and lying, and taking; or engaging in sloth, where we don’t work, or we don’t work as hard as we should; or when we gamble, that is, when we seek to obtain wealth in a way that is not in accordance to God’s order. To steal is to take something unlawfully from someone else what is theirs. Well, what should be done instead of stealing? Well, as we’ve seen, work. We read and quoted earlier from Ephesians 4, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”

The work is not only that the worker would have enough for himself, but that he may also support others who stand in need. It’s interesting, isn’t it—stealing is always interested in taking for ourselves. But when we work, we’re not only working in order to provide for ourselves and our families, but also so that we then can have provision to give to someone else. So our work is both for ourselves, and for the benefit of those who stand in need.

But explicit stealing is not the only way of violating this commandment. Another way is sloth. A slothful person is a person who could work. They have the physical or mental ability to work, but they don’t work. There are two forms of this. The primary form is when a person is physically and mentally able to work a job, but for a variety of reasons, they don’t work at all. The other form is when one should be working diligently, but they fail to give themselves diligently to their work. So let’s look at these two ways.

First, the primary way—increasingly, men and women, and now children, think that they are owed outward care. While it’s most certainly true that we must lovingly assist and care for those who are unwell and cannot work. But it’s not the case that we simply stand by right, demanding that people give to us what we think we need. Earlier, we referred to 2 Thessalonians 3. Notice verse 10. Paul said, “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.” Now, it is clear, some cannot work. There are some people who are physically disabled, and legitimately cannot engage in physical labor to earn wages. These people need charitable support, and care, and assistance. And this is a part of loving our neighbor

and supporting them. However, it's increasingly the case that people don't work, not because they cannot, but because they will not. They actually think a certain job is beneath them, that they deserve a better job.

Well, the Bible which treats of this calls such people "slothful." We see this again and again in the Proverbs. Notice particularly Proverbs 26, verses 13 through 16: "The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason." It's not that there aren't arguments in their mouths as to why they aren't working, the point is, the arguments are groundless. It's often the case that those who are slothful have many reasons why they cannot work. However, when it comes down to it, if their bodies are able, and their minds are able, all of these are simply excuses. And if they will not work, they shouldn't be receiving support.

Let's look at the other form of sloth, namely, when one is getting paid to do work, but they fail to perform that work in the way that they should. This is often the case when a worker is paid by the hour. Instead of working diligently for that time, they purposely find ways to be lazy. Instead of doing all that they could in that hour, they take it easy, and they avoid the various things that they're supposed to be doing, all the while, still expecting to get paid. So there's some forms of work where people have to be in cars and deliver things, or they have to go and visit certain places, and they're paid for the hours that they're driving around. Well, they might pull over, and go into a building and waste time, and rack up the hours while they're not working. That's sloth, and it's a form of stealing. There are many ways of doing this.

Those who are slothful, we should be clear, steal. They either do so in clear and obvious ways, as directly taking. When they have no money, they have to gain it by stealing. But they may also do it indirectly. So think for a moment about government assistance, or charitable agencies that are privately run. When someone who could work does not work, and they still receive financial support, they're guilty of stealing from others. We don't deny that the church should provide and care for individuals and families who are truly suffering financial hardships, or are unable to work. This is part of the loving care that is to be given. We do not even deny that civil governments should assist citizens who are similarly afflicted. However, when this is done for people who could otherwise work, it's a sinful arrangement.

So take the example of government programs. These programs are funded by taxes from citizens. These citizens are working to provide for themselves and families. The tax then takes a portion of their earned income, and the government takes that portion, and of that portion, gives some of it to those who aren't working but could be working. And so those who are working are having their wages taken from them and given to others who aren't working but could be working. That's stealing.

Another prominent way of stealing is by gambling. Gambling is when someone makes a bet or wager, and puts forth a little money in an effort to get a lot more back. It's an attempt to get wealth without work. It's not a free gift. There's this appearance of investment. But it's not really investment. It's casting, as it were, a lot before the Lord without seriously seeking him. If they were seeking him, they would work. Moreover, it's often motivated by selfish desire for more, and it's pursued without earnest spiritual dependence upon the Lord, in prayer, work, and diligence.

Well much more could be said, but these are the three main ways of stealing. Well, we should also notice that it doesn't take a poor person to steal. Because we're to be interested in caring for

others. So rich businessmen could be unjustly hindering the wealth of another by not paying them what is a just wage. And that is in violation of this commandment as well.

Well, let's close by looking at applications. First, one practical thing that this commandment reminds us, is that we're to work. We're to give ourselves to labor. Now not everyone has the same gifts and calling, and not everyone will gain the same amount in return for their work. However, whatever our gifts and calling might be, we are to devote ourselves to loving the Lord by working, and looking to the Lord to provide for us by that work, that we then can provide for our families and to others. And so, if we're going to avoid stealing, one thing we should be diligent in is working. Remember that even the ability to work is God's gift.

So when we pray, for instance, "Give us this day our daily bread," and we go out and work hard, we make money, we buy the food or the other things we need, and we say, "Thank you, Lord, for giving us this day our daily bread." Why do we do that? We worked. Well, we do it because God not only gave us the ability to work, but the opportunity to work, and then to earn money to buy the food or the other things that we need, and to enjoy it. All is coming from God. And so, though we are employing this means of work and procuring finances or other provisions, we see that all of this is from God. So with Solomon, we can say, "Thank you, God, for this kind provision to us."

Well, this leads us to another application. We should thank God for the ability to work. The world lives in this idea, this fantasy of thinking, "I want to be rich and wealthy so that I don't have to work." But we should remember, work is not a consequence of the fall. Even before the fall, Adam and Eve were to work. Adam was to care for the vineyard. It was the consequence of the fall that it would be through this toilsome labor. But work itself is good. And when God gives us the ability to work, we should do so to his glory. And it's not only for our own selfish gain. It's for our necessities, but also for others. And so we thank God that he's using us and our work, not only to meet our needs, but to support and care for others who are in need. What a great thing that God gives us the privilege to enjoy.

And finally, remember that you and I have a responsibility, lovingly to care for and support others who cannot work. It's not that we have a responsibility to give to everyone who asks. But when there are legitimate people who have real needs, it's our responsibility to help and assist them, to care for them. Well, we do this by praying and asking the Lord. We also do this by giving and supporting them. And this comes by our work, that we might gain and give.

How will we do all this rightly? It's not just in the mechanics of having it happen. It all starts by knowing God's love to us, his giving to us. Think of how full the Scriptures are in this testimony that God gave—he gave his only begotten Son; the gift of God is eternal life. All of these notions of God giving, he takes of what he has, and he gives for our good. You see, this can help us, that if we work and gain, we don't just think, "Now, it's mine." But we lovingly give, even as God has given to us. Think of Jesus Christ. He owns all things. He's done all things, but he gives freely, having lovingly labored for our everlasting good. He gives everlasting life.

If you and I are going to avoid stealing but also support not only ourselves and others, it will start as we both know the love of God, and as our love to him increases, and then multiplies to others. May God bless us that we would grow in this display of love.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #41

The Ten Commandments: Love for the Truth

Question 76: *Which is the ninth commandment?*

Answer: *The ninth commandment is, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”*

Question 77: *What is required in the ninth commandment?*

Answer: *The ninth commandment requireth the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbour’s good name, especially in witness-bearing.*

Question 78: *What is forbidden in the ninth commandment?*

Answer: *The ninth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own, or our neighbour’s good name.*

We come now to the ninth commandment in our study on the *Shorter Catechism*. The commandments of God are perfect, and they address all the main parts of man’s life. You’ll remember that the first four commandments primarily focus on our more immediate worship and love to God. Well, the last six commandments direct our love to God in the way that we love our neighbors. And a large part of the interaction we have with our neighbors is by our speech and communication. Speech is a wonderful gift that God has given to his image-bearers. By speech, we can show our thoughts, and ask questions, and even express desires that we have within our hearts, with others. Such speech is a uniquely human gift among other earthly creatures. While it’s true that other earthly creatures, like birds, and horses, and fish, and even insects, can in some way communicate through sounds, and sights, and smells, they cannot do so verbally with words. They cannot think, they cannot speak like humans can and do.

Well, it’s right then that so noble a gift as speech and communication should be governed and directed by God’s law. This is what we find in the ninth commandment. So the first Question before us is Question #76, “Which is the ninth commandment?”—“The ninth commandment is, *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*” This is found in Exodus 20, verse 16, and Deuteronomy 5, verse 20. To “bear witness” means to answer, speak for or against someone. The

Hebrew word for this is most commonly translated with the word “answer.” The verse is, in other words, forbidding us to answer as a false witness, and to do so against our neighbor is specifically before us.

Well, a false witness is one who lies, or who fails to speak the whole truth in a matter. The idea is that if we’re called to speak about our neighbor, and to do so before others, we must not speak falsely about our neighbor. In other words, we must tell the truth.

So Question #77, “What is required in the ninth commandment?”—“The ninth commandment requireth the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbour’s good name, especially in witness-bearing.”

To maintain truth is to speak the truth and represent the truth rightly. Notice, it is so between man and man, that is, when we are speaking with others and about others. Additionally, we must promote the truth. We must make sure we have done what is needed for the truth to be clearly understood. This should be so with others when we speak of ourselves or others. It is especially the case when we are asked to serve as a witness about ourselves or about others. We must promote the truth. That’s what we serve with our speech.

Well, Question #78, “What is forbidden in the ninth commandment?”—“The ninth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own, or our neighbour’s good name.”

The word “prejudicial” means anything that leads men to ignore the truth, and to judge against what is true. We’ll consider this idea more fully in the main part of our lesson.

So for our lesson, we’ll look at three main points: first, *The Beauty of Truth*; second, *Sharing the Truth*; and third, *Denying the Truth*.

So first then, *The Beauty of Truth*. Everything that is right is founded upon what is true. So we’re to have no other gods before Jehovah. But why? It’s because he’s the only true God. In fact, in the Scriptures, we see that God is specifically called the “true God” in several different passages. As one example, Paul rejoiced in the Lord’s grace to the Thessalonians. He wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 9, “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” So one thing we can say is, the reason we’re to worship only Jehovah is because he is the only true God.

However, it’s not only that God is the true God, he is the God who always speaks and communicates the truth as well. This is a great comfort to us that God always and only tells the truth. We read of this in Hebrews 6, verses 17 and 18, “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

Notice, God has promised us salvation as we trust in Jesus Christ, and we can rest with the greatest assurance in this promise, for, as we read there, “it is impossible for God to lie.” Have you ever thought about this? Have you ever thought about what God cannot do? Such a thing is not bad to consider. It’s not a weakness that God cannot lie. Rather, it’s a great strength and blessing. Lying is sin and corruption, and God cannot sin. He always and only tells us the truth. The whole of his Word, the Bible, is full of nothing but his truth.

Well, this means, of course, that all that he’s communicated to us is true. And what a blessing that is, that we can look to every sentence, every word, every paragraph, every book in the Bible; every commandment, every promise, every historical incident, all of it, every detail is true. It is this which makes the Bible so beautiful to us. It’s true, we can find books that are true, and we can

find articles that have truth, but we can never find any book that, from cover to cover, is guaranteed to have every word and sentence true. Every word in the Bible is true, and therefore, every word may and ought to be believed.

Well you see, when we understand this, that God can only speak what is true, we discover a great blessing to our souls. However, we also learn why lying is forbidden to his image-bearers. To lie, is to disfigure the beauty of his image. God only tells the truth, so his image-bearers are only to tell the truth. Well, how beautiful it is when we behave like God, and speak the truth.

Well, second, *Sharing the Truth*. If we are forbidden to bear false witness, that is, to lie or to misrepresent the truth, then we must tell the truth; we must communicate the truth; we must support the truth. This is why the *Catechism* says, “The ninth commandment requireth the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbour’s good name, especially in witness-bearing.” In all of our speech and interaction with others, we are supposed to be people who advance the truth. Words are a special way that we communicate with others. We take our inward understanding and we share it with others. If we have an idea in our mind, we can then speak a few words, and our neighbor can then understand our own idea. Obviously, our words can be written as well. But the commandment requires that all our communication be true.

For something to be true, it must represent what we saw, heard, think, or know. As a simple example, imagine you were looking out your window, and you saw, perhaps, a bird fly by. And someone asked you, “What is it you see?” Well, to tell the truth would be a simple statement, “I saw this bird fly by.” We may not know exactly what kind of bird it was. Someone might say, “What kind of bird was it?” You would say, “I don’t know.” So you don’t make up something. You simply report what you do know. That’s telling the truth. It’s accurately communicating what you’ve seen and what you understand.

Well, this is not just true in personal interaction. This is to be true of businesses. They’re to tell the truth to their customers. Politicians are to tell the truth to their citizens. Ministers are to tell the truth in the pulpit. And this touches on every aspect of humanity. We are commanded in all of our relationships to maintain and promote the truth between one another. This is what the *Catechism* says, but the *Catechism*, you’ll remember, is simply helping us understand what the Bible is teaching.

Well, in addition, we’re to maintain and promote our own and our neighbor’s good name. That is, we’re to do what’s necessary to ensure that what is true about ourselves and our reputation, and what’s true about others and their reputation is indeed advanced by us. So we’re to tell the truth about what we think, and what we said, and what we’ve done, when asked. If we’re asked about by others about our neighbor, we’re to speak and share faithfully and truly what we’ve seen, and what we’ve heard, and what we’ve witnessed. It does not matter if the person is a friend, or a family member, or an enemy. We’re not only to tell good things about those whom we love, but if our enemy has done something that’s right, we’re to acknowledge the same as well. We’re to tell the truth regarding whatever we speak.

Well, this is especially needed when we’re asked by an authority to share something for their understanding. For instance, if something special has been broken in our home, and our parents ask us what happened, if we know what happened, we must tell them the truth of what we know. Or if a teacher asks us about something that happened on the playground, we’re to tell them the truth of what we know or understand. If the pastor or elder asks us about something that’s going on in our own lives, or something that’s happened in the church, we’re to tell them the truth. You see, when someone has authority over us, we’re to speak the truth. We must not lie. We may feel

that if we lied, it would make us appear better in their sight, or it might get us out of trouble. We have to remember that God sees these things, and he remembers our words. So we're to tell the truth to them.

Well, to do this, we must share what we truly understand. However, we should only share with others what we actually know is true. In other words, we should not simply share what others tell us about others, unless we know that it is actually true. To talk about others without knowing what is true about them is to engage in gossip, and gossip can have a lot of pleasure in the heart of wicked men, but it's often the cause of much harm to men's reputations. So we must be careful that when we speak, we speak what we know to be the truth.

Well, is it not the case that we should tell the truth? After all, we know the true God. We bear his image. And we are told the truth by him. We are his people, and so we ought then to speak the truth to others.

Well, third, *Denying the Truth*. To deny the truth is to misrepresent it, or to lie, to cover up what is true. Notice the *Catechism*: "The ninth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbour's good name." To speak something or show something that is prejudicial to the truth, is to guide people to a wrong conclusion about what is true. Now this doesn't only have to be with words. We might take a picture and not have the context of all that's going on, and that one snapshot could mislead an understanding of what's taking place. The point is, whatever we're communicating has to be given the proper context, and the true understanding of what's taking place, so that others understand the truth. To do otherwise is indeed to lie and to bear false witness.

Well, obviously, this means that lying itself is a sin. When we lie, we present something as true to others that we know is false. For instance, to tell our parents that we have finished our homework, and we still have several math problems to complete, it is to misrepresent the truth; that is, to lie. This also means that it is wrong to lie in order to make others feel better about something. Now, we don't need to be rude when we tell the truth. We don't need to be uncaring to those to whom we speak. But this commandment reminds us that whatever we say should be true, and not a lie.

Some people call certain kinds of lies, "white lies." They call these kind of lies that they would tell someone to make them feel better, in order to cover up perhaps the truth. These people see these kinds of lies as harmless. After all, they're meant to help and be kind. These kinds of lies often occur when people don't want to make others feel uncomfortable. So let me try to give you an example, though there are many that might come to your own mind.

Imagine that someone cooks us a meal. To us, perhaps it doesn't taste that good, but they ask us, "How is the food?" And at that moment—perhaps we love this person very much, or we simply don't want to be rude or unkind—so we're faced with this tension. Do we tell the truth, "I don't like it," and then perhaps make them feel bad? Or do we lie and say we do like it, and they'll feel happy? Well, since we don't want to make them feel bad, we might be tempted to say "It's great." Maybe it is right that we don't want them to feel bad. It may also be that we don't want to complain about the kindness that they showed to us in preparing a meal for us. However, we need to understand, to lie is not right. There are ways that we can honor them without lying.

For instance, there are many other ways we could say, "I'm very thankful that you cooked for me." They may persist and be more direct, and say, "Well, how does it taste? Do you like how it tastes?" And then we may be faced with this reality of having to tell the truth, but we can do so kindly, and in humility. For instance, we could say, "While I'm thankful for the food, it's not

my favorite,” and we could perhaps add, “I’m learning to try other foods, so I’m thankful for this opportunity.” There are lots of ways we could respond, but the point is, however we respond, we must not lie. Remember, God does not lie to us. He does not lie to make us feel better. He always tells the truth.

Perhaps a greater weight to our consideration is that some have taught that it’s okay to lie if someone else is in danger. There are certainly wicked men who want to do wicked things to others. And they ask us a question about someone else—where they are—because they want to harm that person. And when they do so, we may be tempted to lie in order to protect the other person. But let me give you another example.

In the early church, it was a punishable crime in some parts, to be a Christian. In fact, there are places in the world today where it is punishable to be a Christian. Well, should Christians deny knowing Christ in order to preserve their own lives? The lives and testimonies of the martyrs show us the faith and bravery of our fathers in the faith, who were willing to suffer rather than to deny the truth. This is a point that we need to remember. It is better to suffer than to sin, and lying always, every time, is sinful. This is because sinning is rebellion against God. It dishonors him; it misrepresents him. Suffering may be painful—even very painful—but it is to be preferred to sinning.

But what about helping others by our lies? Do we not lie to help others? someone asks. We read, of course, in the Bible about Rehab, who lied about the spies in the Book of Exodus. And there are other examples as well, where people in a moment of conflict lied in order to help someone else. Whereas that’s true, as far as the record is in the Scripture, when we closely read the biblical narratives surrounding these passages, we’ll never find anywhere where God commends the lie. He commends the faith, he commends the protecting, and so on, but he never commends the lie. Whereas Rahab is commended for her caring for the spies, she’s not commended for her lying. The Bible gives us the foundation of this in 1 John 2, and verse 21: “No lie is of the truth.” There’s no such thing as a good lie.

Well, what should we do then? Well, it doesn’t mean that we must tell everyone everything that we know, especially when those people want to do harm. If someone is wanting to harm another person, we’re not obligated to tell that person where the other one is. While we may not lie, we may be silent, and rightly so. Remember Christ, at his trial, was silent for a season, not answering the accusations or questions. Silence is not lying. The person who would abuse the truth does not have the right to know the truth; however, we do not have the right to lie.

So there’s a biblical example of how to handle those situations with wisdom. Notice the example of Samuel, in 1 Samuel 16, verse 5. This passage is referred to in many books that help us understand this principle, because it so clearly illustrates the point before us. The Lord called Samuel to go to Bethlehem in order to anoint David as king. Well, remember that Saul was alive at this time, and Samuel knew that to do this would risk his own life, if Saul or Saul’s supporters found out. So notice the communication between Samuel and the Lord, in 1 Samuel 16, and verse 2: “And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD.” So what happened? When he was asked why he came by others, we’re told his response, in 1 Samuel 16, verses 4 and 5: “And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.”

So notice, he did not share the whole story of what he was there to do, but he did tell the truth.

He did not evade a direct question, nor did he lie. The elders did not ask, “Are you come to anoint a king?” and Samuel said, “No, I’m not.” Rather, they asked him what he was doing. He shared the truth. Samuel was come to offer a sacrifice, so he spoke the truth. And the point, of course, is that when we’re asked questions—however difficult, even however dangerous—if we speak, we have only to speak the truth.

Well, as we close, let me challenge you to examine yourself. It’s rare that we’ll actually be in such situations as Samuel, where we ourselves would be in danger for answering the truth, or put others in danger if we answer the truth. We see that we shouldn’t lie, and it would be better to be silent then. In the majority of our lives though, there will still be situations where we’re tempted to lie, not because of outward danger or risk of danger to ourselves or others, but because, by sin, we would rather tell a lie than the truth. Well, are you someone who tells the truth, and only the truth? Do you do so to your parents and friends? Do you do so to your teachers, to your pastors, and fellow members of the church? Remember that to lie is to behave in a wicked way. It’s to misrepresent the truth. It’s to be unlike God. And most sobering, it’s to be like Satan. Remember what Christ said of him, Satan is the father of lies. Consider this well, and realize that when you lie, you are more like Satan than you are like God.

And, oh, what a great need we have to be convicted of this sin, and from that, to see our need for Christ! We can see something in this commandment as well, remembering that Christ fulfilled the commandments perfectly. Christ only ever spoke what is true. He never lied. In this, and in all things, he was perfectly righteous. How different he is than we are. Yet, it is this, with all of his righteousness that made him able to offer himself without spot unto God as a sacrifice. So that whereas we have lied, he only spoke the truth. And among all of the other parts of his righteousness, this is an astounding feature, that he is not only the true Savior, but the true Savior who only spoke what is true, which makes him able to offer himself without spot as a sacrifice. And oh, what a blessing it is that whereas he was committed to the truth, that he offered himself as the substitute for us, that we who have sinned by lying should have a Savior who forgives us our lying. And moreover, what a good thing it is that through Jesus Christ at work in the life of the believer, not only is the believer forgiven by Christ’s sacrifice in righteousness, but the believer is sanctified more and more, both to love and to serve the truth, promoting the truth in his words and actions. Let this be your prayer that Christ would save you, both to forgive your sins of lying and other sins, but also to sanctify you that you would be one who loves the truth, who speaks the truth, and promotes the truth to the glory of the true God who cannot lie.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #42

The Ten Commandments: Love from Within

Question 79: *Which is the tenth commandment?*

Answer: *The tenth commandment is, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, no anything that is thy neighbour’s.”*

Question 80: *What is required in the tenth commandment?*

Answer: *The tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his.*

Question 81: *What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?*

Answer: *The tenth commandment forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.*

In this lesson, we consider the last of the Ten Commandments. So far we’ve seen that each of God’s commandments directs us in the way of love—love to God, and love to our neighbor. This commandment does the same. However, it more directly addresses the inward desires of our hearts than the others do. Well, we should be clear—each of the commandments is spiritual. That is, each commandment addresses our thoughts and desires, as well as our outward actions. However, this particular commandment focuses almost exclusively on the desires of the heart. So let’s look at our Questions for the lesson before us, Questions #79 to #81, all of them regard the tenth commandment.

Question #79: “Which is the tenth commandment?”—“The tenth commandment is, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, no anything that is thy neighbour’s.*”

Notice that it’s forbidding anything that is thy neighbor’s to be coveted by us. This Question identifies the tenth commandment itself. The commandment is found in Exodus 20, and verse 17,

and Deuteronomy 5, verse 21. The word translated here as “covet,” is a word that refers to our desires. In fact, this very word is translated as “desire” in Deuteronomy 5, verse 21. So we notice the commandment is not telling us that it’s wrong to desire; it is, however, forbidding that we desire what belongs to someone else. The commandment touches on all things, thus, “any thing that is thy neighbour’s.” And so, God is saying to our hearts, as it were, “You should not long for what others have, but you should be contented with what I give you.”

Notice then, Question #80: “What is required in the tenth commandment?”—“The tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his.”

Well, here we see the duties or requirements from this commandment. By “charitable frame of spirit,” is meant an inward kindness toward our neighbor, and all that is his. We’ll look at that more fully in our lesson.

Notice then, Question #81: “What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?”—“The tenth commandment forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.”

And this Answer shows us what is forbidden, that is, what the commandment tells us we should not do. The word “inordinate” refers to something that is unregulated or obsessive. Such desires are not according to the order that God has given for our desires. We will look at this in our lesson.

For our lesson, let’s look at three main points: first, *Love Regarding Our Own*; second, *Love Regarding Our Neighbors*; and third, *Love That Is Sincere*.

Well, first then, *Love Regarding Our Own*. In order to avoid coveting what others have, we must be satisfied with what God has given to us. This is why the Answer to Question #80 notes that “the tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition.” Well, to be “content” means to be satisfied. If we’re to have full contentment with our own condition, then we will understand why the Answer to Question #81 says, “The tenth commandment forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate.” So, with the one, it’s saying that our hearts are to be satisfied with what God has given us—our own condition; and our hearts are not to express this discontentment, this dissatisfaction with what God has given us. Full contentment means to be satisfied and grateful for what God has given to us.

This is a great challenge, particularly in our cultures today, where the world ever telling us that what we have is not good enough—we need more. The Bible is reminding us to think differently than the world thinks. And so, this full contentment is to include things about our bodies, and our families, our possessions, our abilities. Certainly it does not mean that we are to be satisfied with our sin, or sins against us. It does, however, mean that what God has given to us is to satisfy us. We may be rich or poor. We’re still to be contented. We may be tall or short. We may have many opportunities to advance in this world. We may have few opportunities to advance in the world. When you read, for instance, in the book of Ephesians, you don’t find Paul telling the servants to be discontented with their state, rather, as a servant, they were to serve with gladness their masters. And surely if they, who had so few opportunities to advance in this world, were to be content and serve the Lord in faith, surely we, in our own circumstance, whatever our circumstances are, are called to be content in the Lord, and serve him with gladness.

The reason for this is that ultimately, God is the one who has given us all that we have. He’s the one who gave us our parents; he’s the one who placed us where we live; and in history when we live. He’s provided our food and our houses. Indeed, he’s given us all things. Our estate—everything that is ours—is given to us from God. So in order to be content, we need to understand

that our circumstances are ultimately governed by God. So if we're to be content about what is ours, we need to see why what is ours, is ours, namely, it's ours because God, in his wisdom, has given it to us. The way that we become content then is by reminding ourselves to look to God. He is the one who is sovereign over all things.

Well, certainly, as we stand in need of things like food, and water, and clothing, we're taught to look to him, because he's the provider, and he has promised to provide us these things. Remember his Word, that as we seek first his kingdom and righteousness, all these things—food, and water, and clothing—will be given unto us. He's promised these things to us. And we should be content to live daily upon him. Think of how Christ taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." We should be content and satisfied, even if God took all other food away from us that might exist for tomorrow and the next day in our refrigerators, or in our storage. We should then be content to trust God day by day.

You see, ultimately, this is calling us to trust him. He's promised to provide. We should be content to promise him. We may, and certainly, we must ask him for things that he has promised. This is not to be sinfully discontented with our circumstances. Rather, it's to see what our circumstances are, and to be directed to God to provide as he's promised. In other words, the great way to be content with what God has given us, is to trust in him. We're to trust his wisdom and his goodness. We're to trust him to provide what we stand in need of, when we stand in need of them.

This will also teach us to be grateful for the things we have received from him. None of us deserves even small mercies from God. He is holy. He's transcendent and glorious, and we have sinned against him. But he has kindly given to us many good things. If you took the time to make a list—and I challenge you to do this—of all the good things God has given to you just today, you would start to see how merciful and kind God has been. If you then started to think about all of your life, you would see that though there have been and will be trials and troubles, yet still, the Lord has been good to you. When we start to discern this and see it, it's then we will learn to be grateful and content, for we deserve nothing from God. And so, if we've ever received any good thing from him, surely we have cause to be satisfied. And that we have received much from him is a cause to be all the more contented with what he's given to us.

Well, second, *Love Regarding Our Neighbors*. In the second point, we switch our attention to the things that our neighbors have. We often overlook those neighbors who have less than we do, and we often look at those neighbors who have more than we do, or have better things than we do. Well, with this, we need to remember this commandment. It's calling us to be loving toward our neighbor and all that he or she has.

Notice the Answer to Question #80, that we are to have "a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his." This may hit our hearts with heavy conviction, because we are often tempted to complain that our neighbors receive better things, as we think of them, than we do. Perhaps, at school, they receive better grades. They may receive better compliments. As we get older, we may have those that we work with who receive more money. They have more possessions. They take more trips. They have better health. But if we back up and consider this perspective from a heart of love.

Remember, the commandments are particular ways that we show our love. How does love treat our neighbor when they receive good things? Well, love rejoices in the good things that God gives to our neighbors. We see God being generous to our neighbor, and in love, we're to give thanks to God for his goodness to them. When we see God blessing our neighbor, instead of envying and becoming bitter toward them and cruel toward them, we're in love to give thanks to God, to

bless his name for his goodness. This is what the *Catechism* is getting at when it shows us that necessarily forbidden is our envy toward our neighbor's good things.

Notice, "The tenth commandment forbiddeth all "envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his." This expression, "motions and affections," has to do with our feelings and emotions, and how it is within we are carrying ourselves toward our neighbor.

We see this explicitly in the commandment itself. Notice the words, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house." Remember the word "covet" is desire. Don't look at your neighbor's house and say, "That's the house I want." "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife"—a married man looking to his neighbor's wife and saying, "That's the wife I want." "Nor his manservant"—his employees, in our day—"his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is thy neighbour's." In other words, when we see what our neighbor has been given, it's sinful for us to have our hearts go toward it, and say, "That's what I want. I don't just want good things from the Lord. I want the things he gave to that person."

Well, why is it that we should not envy or grieve at the good that God gives to our neighbor? Well, first, we should not do so, because it is God who is giving to our neighbor the good things that he gives to them. To grieve at this, is to imply that God is not good or wise in what he's doing toward that neighbor. And so, ultimately, to be envious, or to be grieved by the good that our neighbor receives, is to raise an accusation against God, who is perfectly wise and always good.

But second, when we grieve at or envy at the good our neighbor receives, it is to ignore the many mercies we have received of God. Remember, not one good thing you or I have ever enjoyed, ever received, however small, is something that we've deserved from God. And as we examine and take inventory of what God has given us, we'll see that he's given us many good things. It may not be the same exact good things he gives to others, but when we understand what we deserve from God, especially as sinners, that we deserve his wrath and curse, and the experience of his judgment now and always, that we've been given small mercies is infinitely above what we've deserved. So to envy at or grieve at the good that our neighbors receive from God is to ignore the real mercies that God has given to us.

The other reason, the third reason, is that to envy or grieve at what our neighbors receive, is to ignore the right way to seek from God good things we need, namely, believing prayer. So think for a moment, what good does it ever do to us to envy or grieve at the good our neighbor has received. It does us no good. It does us, as it were, infects our souls, and it makes us bitter. And Paul has explicitly said that this bitter envying is to be put away from us, that we're to be filled with love toward our neighbor.

Well, what is it we should do when we stand in need of various things? We're to pray. We are to take our hearts to God. We can thank God for the good things we've received from him. We can thank God for the good things he's given to others. And we can come to God and say, "God, I stand in need of mercy. Be merciful to me." That's the way of faith and love.

So if we're to be loving toward our neighbor, instead of complaining about what they have, we're to give thanks to God for his kindness to them. That's what love does. Love loves God, who's doing these things. And love loves the neighbor who's receiving these good things. So love, then, rejoices from these good things.

Well, for our third point, *Love That Is Sincere*. This commandment targets our hearts directly. While we may be able to perform certain actions appropriate to the other commandment, this commandment focuses on the inward man. For example, with the third commandment, "Thou

shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain,” we may successfully keep our mouths from speaking God’s name in vain. With the fifth commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother,” we may outwardly do the things that the commandment would have us to do. However, the tenth commandment directly addresses, not our actions, but our desires: “Thou shalt not covet.” In other words, it is directly and entirely focused upon the heart.

By this commandment, the Lord is forcing us to see that he is concerned about the sincerity of our love. It is one thing to speak the right things. It’s another thing to do the right things outwardly. However, by this commandment, the Lord is directly addressing our hearts, and reminding us that our hearts must be truly and sincerely engaged with our actions.

It’s interesting, the Apostle Paul particularly identified this commandment as the one that convicted him of his sinfulness, and made him see his need of salvation. Notice his words, in Romans 7, verses 7 through 9. He writes, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”

Well, there’s much going on in this passage, however, focus for a moment on Paul’s experience. And it’s particularly this commandment, “Thou shalt not covet,” that made him aware of his internal desires, and how sinful they were. He said, “I had not known lust”—that is, the sinful desire—“except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” The commandment made Paul, prior to his conversion, to see how his heart was wicked. It’s probably the case that Paul, outwardly considered, was a fairly respectable man, even before he was converted. He was probably free from much scandalous sin. And if you had looked at him, you would have looked at him as Christ described the Pharisees—on the outside they were beautiful. But as Christ said, they were like “whited sepulchres”—tombs, on the outside looking beautiful, but on the inside, filled with “dead men’s bones.” This is what this commandment made Paul see about himself. He realized that however good his outside looked, his inside was bad.

Each commandment has an inward demand. This is why Christ directs us to our thoughts and desires, in Matthew 5, when he’s clarifying and applying the law. Thus, when he’s helping us understand the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” he says, in Matthew 5:22, “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.” In other words, our desires—“whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause”—and our words—“whosoever shall say”—are governed by this commandment.

Likewise the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Christ says, in Matthew 5, verse 28, “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” In other words, it’s not just the act of adultery that is forbidden by the commandment, it is the desire of the heart for adultery that is forbidden as well. So it would be wrong to think that only the tenth commandment addresses the heart, because the whole law—each of the ten commandments—addresses the outward and inward man, actions and desires.

Paul wrote of this in Romans 7, verse 14: “For we know that the law is spiritual.” In other words, the law does not just address our outward behavior and actions. It addresses our inward desires. Our hearts must conform to God’s requirements, and each of the ten commandments

demands this. But it is the tenth commandment in particular that forces us to consider our inward thoughts and desires more fully. In the end, what this commandment is doing is reminding us that God demands sincere—that is, real—love. We’re not merely to do outward things that seem to conform to the outward requirements. Instead, we are really, truly, sincerely to love God and our neighbor from within.

So as we think about this commandment, it forces us to examine ourselves. And as we close, it’s good for us to take that up. The commandment itself reminds us to look to God in faith and love regarding all that he’s appointed to us. It causes us to rest in his wisdom and provision, knowing that he is good and faithful. Additionally, it calls us to look with kindness upon others and what they have from God.

And we should simply ask this question, “Is that true of me? Is my heart satisfied with what God has given to me, or do I grumble and complain against God? Is my heart glad when my neighbor receives good things from God, or do I grumble and complain about it?” Well, we may deceive ourselves into thinking we are okay if we only judge our outward actions, however, this commandment directs our attention to consider our hearts, our desires. While we may say the right things, while we may do the right things outwardly at least, our hearts may, in fact, be grumbling and complaining, and within our own souls, there is the display of sin against God. We need to realize that this grumbling and complaining is sin. And in the sight of God, it is reprehensible.

I challenge you to search the Bible for this that I’ll quote to you, and see it in the Bible itself, that covetousness is idolatry. Look in the Bible for that verse that shows us, when we covet, when we are violating this command, we are actually guilty of idolatry. Now, as you search the Bible to find that, I hope that the Lord brings it to your mind with great force and weight. But notice this, when we are sinfully dissatisfied with what has given us, we’re actually challenging God himself. Covetousness is idolatry. It’s a great sin. Though it can be hidden from the sight of others, it is not hidden from the sight of God.

We should also remember that this commandment gives us a glimpse into the work of Jesus Christ. He came to fulfill all righteousness, and one aspect of that righteousness was his obeying the tenth commandment. This means that Christ was never discontented. He was never wrongly desiring something. In other words, not only did Christ do the right things always, not only did he say the right things always, he always desired the right things only. His actions and desires were always and only in perfect conformity to God’s law. What beauty there is in Christ! In Hebrews 7, verse 26, we find Christ described as, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” Everything about Christ was and is perfect. This should give us hope in two ways.

First, we are those who have not been holy, harmless, and undefiled. Not only our actions, but our desires have indeed been filled with sin. However, Christ’s righteousness is perfect. He fulfilled this commandment and all others, perfectly. This means that he was able to offer himself up as a perfect and spotless sacrifice to forgive our sins, who trust in Jesus Christ. It also means that the righteousness that he imputes to us—remember, “What is justification?”—that righteousness is perfect and faultless as we consider his actions and his desires. Thus, all those who trust in Jesus Christ have a perfect sacrifice for all of their wretched sins, outward and inward, and receive a perfect righteousness, in their perfect salvation.

Second, another encouragement is this—he is pleased to work within his believing and forgiven people to transform their hearts and their desires so that they become a people who are content and sincerely loving toward their neighbors. This is to be beautified within and without, and it is only found in Jesus Christ. If ever you or I shall have our hearts become contented, and see

covetousness put to death, it will only be as we trust in and rely upon Jesus Christ, our beloved Savior. May it be so, by God's grace, to you and to me, and all for his glory.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #43

Understanding Our Sin

Question 82: *Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?*

Answer: *No mere man, since the fall, is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed.*

Question 83: *Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?*

Answer: *Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.*

Question 84: *What doth every sin deserve?*

Answer: *Every sin deserveth God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come.*

Having considered the commandments, we're in a better position to think about sin. The commandments tell us what God requires, and sin is any lack of conformity to, or transgression of the law of God. So when we understand the commandments, we can better understand what that "want" or "lack of conformity" is, and what transgressions of God's law are. So the *Catechism* now helps us consider in what ways we sin, and what each sin deserves. So for this lesson, we look at three Questions, #82, #83, and #84.

Question #82: "Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?"—"No mere man, since the fall, is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed." Now this is an important Question and Answer. It reminds us that we are unable to obey the commandments perfectly in this life, which both humbles and convicts us.

The next Question helps us understand our sin better, #83: "Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?"—"Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others." And the word "heinous" refers to how detestable our sin is. It comes from a word meaning, "to hate." So when the *Catechism* asks, "Are all sins equally heinous," it's asking about how hateful and reprehensible sins are. It's not asking whether sins are hateful and despicable. It's asking if all sins are all of the same degree of hatefulness.

And then, Question #84: "What doth every sin deserve?"—"Every sin deserveth God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come." So however heinous a sin is, whether lesser or greater, all sin, every sin, deserves God's unending wrath and curse. Each sin is a wicked

transgression demanding just punishment from God.

So as you'll note, these Questions are very heavy. They are serious, and so we ought to be very serious in our thinking upon these truths. And so for our lesson, we'll look at three main points about sin. But we should note, this is also helping us also set up for the next Question, which asks about what God requires that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin. So the better we understand sin, the better we'll glory in that which he provides us by his grace.

So three points for our lesson: first, *Sin—The Breaking of God's Commandments*; second, *Sin, and the Degrees of Evil*; and third, *Sin, and It's Just Punishment*.

So first, *Sin—The Breaking of God's Commandments*. You'll remember the answer to the Question, "What is Sin?"—"Sin is any lack of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God" (Question #14). You'll remember that any failure that we have in obeying God's law, whether in large or small measure—any way in which we do what God forbids, however great or little—is sin. And the law, by which God reveals to us his perfect will, demands perfect obedience. Therefore, as the *Catechism* says, "any want"—or lack—"of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God" is sin. And this helps us understand what the *Catechism* means in the Answer to Question #82: "No mere man, since the fall, is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed."

Notice a few things in the Answer as it draw from the Bible. First, notice who is concerned. The *Catechism* uses an important expression: "no mere man, since the fall." The words "mere man" mean "one who is only man and nothing else." This, of course, refers to everyone since the fall, except for one. Well who is it that is truly and fully man, but is also something else? Of course, it's Jesus Christ. He is both fully, truly man, and fully, truly God in one person. So the *Catechism* is acknowledging that there is one man who is able in this life perfect to keep the commandments of God, and indeed has perfectly kept the commandments of God—it is Jesus Christ, who, though truly and fully man, he is not merely man. He is also truly and fully God.

This also means that everyone else since the fall does not have the ability to keep the law of God perfectly in this life. And this, of course, applies to you and me. Romans 3:23 states it quite simply, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." This is true of each of us. You'll remember that part of the sinfulness of mankind as fallen, is "the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin" (Question #18). It is from this fallen and corrupted nature that all of our thoughts, and words, and actions proceed. As corruption cannot bring forth purity, and illness does not bring forth health, neither can our sinful nature bring forth righteousness. This is a serious truth, particularly when we see it true of ourselves. You and I, left to ourselves, apart from God's grace in Christ, cannot fulfill the law in its perfection in this life.

Second, notice how we sin: "since the fall," mankind "doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed." We sin in our minds, our desires, our thoughts. We sin with our speech, our mouths, our words. We sin with our bodies, in our deeds and actions. This is not only true of the unconverted. It's true of those who are converted, in this life they continue to sin as well. When John was writing to Christians in his first epistle, he wrote, in chapter 1, verse 8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Well, each day confirms this truth in the Christian. It may not be that we're guilty of the worst of sins, or the more heinous of sins, as we'll see, but it is true that our thoughts are not perfectly in agreement with God's law. Our words are not always speaking what is honoring to God, loving to man. We're not always ministering grace to our hearers. Our actions are not in perfect fulfillment of God's law. And any failure is a failure, and all failures, of whatever degree, is sin.

Before we move on, notice that this is with reference to “this life.” So as long as we’re in this life, we are going to commit sins, because of what remains in us. The *Catechism* states this particular qualification for the believer, because, for the believer, in the next life, heaven, the believer will be glorified and perfected, so that his thoughts, his words, and his deeds will perfectly conform to God’s law in heaven. This is a blessed truth which comes to the believer by grace, which makes the believer, among many other reasons, long for heaven to come. And yet, so long as the believer is in this life, the believer has daily cause to confess his sins, and look only to Jesus Christ for hope.

Well, second, *Sin, and the Degrees of Evil*. The *Catechism* has indicated that each of us will sin in thought, word, and deed each day in this life. In Question #83, the *Catechism* gives us a reminder of an important biblical teaching: “Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?” Now, before we go further, notice what this is *not* asking. It’s not asking if there are types of sin that do not deserve judgment from God. It’s not asking if there is any sin that does not demand God’s just punishment in hell. As we will see in the next question, each sin deserves God’s just and everlasting wrath and curse. But what is the *Catechism* asking?

Well, the word “heinous” comes from a word which means “to hate” or “hateful.” It’s asking whether God looks upon each sin as equally repulsive, morally disgusting, and spiritually deformed. A simple way is you could think of the word “heinous” as referring to hateful. Are all sins equally hateful in God’s sight? Now it’s true that all sins are spiritually ugly, and detestable, and hateful in God’s sight, but this is asking are the *equally* ugly and hateful in God’s sight. The Answer is, “Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.” This may challenge our original thought of sin, because we’re right to understand, as the next Question and Answer remind us, that all sin deserves God’s wrath and curse. So let’s start by seeing that God’s Word affirms that he indeed looks upon some sins as more heinous than others.

The *Catechism*, in its references to the Bible, refers to Ezekiel chapter 8, particularly verses 6, 13, and 15. I encourage you to read that chapter on your own. Well, in that chapter, God is showing Ezekiel the sins of his people at that time. And each time that God shows Ezekiel one sin of Israel, he then says, as the Bible says, “Thou shalt see greater abominations than these”—notice, “greater.” In verse 6, for instance, Ezekiel writes, “He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.” Notice, the sins shown to Ezekiel are already expressed as “great abominations,” however, what he shows next are yet “greater abominations.” They are more ugly, they’re more repulsive, they’re more hateful in God’s sight. Well, we see this idea expressed by Christ himself, when he spoke to Pilate, in John 19, verse 11. Christ said, “He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.” The point is not that some sins are insignificant or little in God’s sight. All sins are wicked, yet, the Bible is telling us that some sins are more detestable than others.

Well, having seen that, let’s now look at what makes some sins more heinous or hateful in themselves than others. What is it that makes some sins more repulsive in God’s sight than others? The Answer #83 merely states that “Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.” Some sins, by their very nature, are more heinous than others. Other sins are more heinous by the number of aggravations or circumstances connected with the particular sin. So let’s look at this.

Some sins are “in themselves” more heinous than others. Well, how so? Well, think of it this

way: to defy God openly and directly is more heinous than focusing upon our defying of our parents. This doesn't mean that one is not a sin. It simply means that the more a sin is directly against God, the more heinous that sin is. This is why the first four commandments—"Thou shalt have no other gods before me" through "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy"—are about a higher priority than the last six. It's not because the last six are unimportant or insignificant; nor are they optional. It's because the first four are more directly about God himself. You could remember, when Christ was asked which is the *greatest* commandment, he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God;" and then he said, "The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22, verses 37 and 39). Christ was making a distinction. He wasn't saying that one commandment is optional; he's saying that the *greatest* commandment is to love the Lord your God. And so, the *greatest* sin is that which fails to love the Lord your God.

Well, sins may be more heinous as well because of the various circumstances and aggravations with which they are committed. So think, for an example, if there are two different sins that are yet both against the same commandment. Take the fifth commandment. This demands that we honor those in authority over us: "Honour thy father and thy mother." Well, which is more spiritually ugly; which is more heinous? A son is told to pick up his room. He disobeys his parents. So his father comes and reproves him, and the son says that he doesn't want to do what his father says. Think of a second example. The son is told to pick up his room; he disobeys his parents; his father comes and reproves him. But now, instead of merely saying, "I don't want to do it," the son now yells back, and shouts, and with great anger, cries out, "I'll never do this!" You see, both are sinful. Both address the same commandment. Both are against the same person. Both transgress God's law. But the second is more heinous because of the further and deeper display of his sin with the circumstances of expression of aggravations that we mentioned.

Well, to help us, the *Larger Catechism*, Question and Answer #151, provides us four ways of seeing how some sins are more heinous than others. The four circumstances regard first, *the persons offending*; secondly, *the parties offended*; third, *the nature and quality of the offence*; fourth, *the time and place of the sin*. So briefly think of these, and you'll have a helpful way of examining your own sins and others' as well.

So first, a sin can be more heinous when we consider the persons offending. In other words, who is it that's committing the sin? So here's an example. For a police officer to steal a candy bar is more heinous than for a three-year-old child. Now both are doing the same thing. Both are sinning. However, the police officer, the person sinning, by reason of his age, and his line of work, and his commitment, is committing a sin that is more hateful.

Well, a second aggravation comes by the parties offended, that is, against whom the sin is committed. So think of a young girl that's four or five years old. If she lies to a stranger, that's a sin. If that same girl lies to her mother, it's a greater sin. Why? Why is it more spiritually hateful? Because the girl is under greater responsibility and in a more intimate relationship with her mother. She owes her mother far more than she owes a stranger.

Well, a third aggravation is from the nature and quality of the offense, that is the sin itself. As we noted earlier, to sin directly against God is more heinous than sinning against our neighbor. Even sins against men may have different qualities. You take the same action of stealing, and you can think of someone stealing ten thousand dollars, versus someone stealing ten dollars. Which one's a sin? Which one's a crime? Well, they both are; both are stealing. But the quality of stealing ten thousand dollars is more hateful than the stealing of ten.

The last category is that of circumstances of time and place. For instance, if someone used

God's name in vain in private, in secret, this is a sin. If someone profaned God's name in public, it's more heinous; on the Lord's day it's more heinous. Why so? Well, both are direct violations of God's commandments, but the public sin is more heinous because it's spread out before the sight of others; and doing so on the Lord's day is more heinous, because that particular day is claimed by God.

So we have a helpful way of examining our own sins, and the sins of others, by these four categories.

Well, seeing that some sins are more heinous in God's sight than others, what is it that every sin deserves? So third, *Sin, and Its Just Punishment*. Question #84 states, "Every sin deserveth God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come." We should not think that a less heinous sin, a less hateful sin will somehow mean that we are not worthy of God's wrath and curse. How is it that every sin, even the least heinous sin, deserves God's wrath and curse. Well, first and foremost, we should remember that each sin is committed against a perfectly good and infinitely glorious God. While some sins are more directly against him than others, all sins are indeed against him. Well, God is infinite. He's without limit. To sin against him demands a punishment equal to the crime. God is most just. He must punish each sin righteously. As the sin is committed against the one who is infinitely good, wise, and glorious, the punishment that justice demands must answer all of that with reference to our sin. This is why every sin deserves God's wrath and curse throughout not only this life, but the life to come. A mere momentary punishment for ten years, twenty years, yea, a thousand years, ten thousand years is not just, because the sin was committed against him who is infinite and glorious. Only everlasting punishment is just for a sin committed against the infinite and eternal God.

What is the punishment due to us for sin? It is "God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come." This means that each sin is calling for God's judgment upon us in this life. This is what we deserve. Since we have sinned, we deserve only God's wrath so long as we live in this world. But this is not all. Since we have sinned, we deserve only God's wrath and curse in the life to come, for all everlasting time and eternity. Many, especially in our day, have tried to deny this teaching, however, it's exactly what the Bible affirms. Sinners who die in their sins without Christ will suffer conscious and everlasting torment forever. This is not an easy teaching, but it is the Bible's teaching.

Notice the following three passages as we begin to come to a close. Each of them affirms several things: sinners who die in their sins will experience God's wrath personally. They will experience God's wrath painfully. They will experience God's wrath everlastingly.

Matthew 13, verses 41 and 42: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Second Thessalonians 1, verses 8 and 9: "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

Revelation 14, verse 11: "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night."

How can we rightly conceive of the agony of those who, in hell, have no relief and are only experiencing the just, deserved wrath and curse of God? How overwhelming a thought! And this is what each sin deserves. Let me say it clearly. This is what every single sin you and I have committed deserves. We justly deserve God's wrath and curse forever. Oh, may the weight of that

thought make us to see how evil sin is, and that we would detest all of it, and flee to God in Christ.

Well, as we close, please take this lesson to heart. It's a heavy lesson; it's a difficult lesson. And yet, it's a needed lesson to make us see how we've sinned, and to make us see what our sins deserve. But in examining and seeing those things, make sure you see them in the light of God's Word. This is not a mere idea or an imaginary thought. This is the Bible's teaching, summarized in our *Catechism*.

But second, as you do that, fix in your mind that whereas each of your sins justly deserves that punishment from God, remember that we've learned already of Jesus Christ, who has come to save sinners. And so, see how desperately you need this one who has come to save sinners. You must either pay for all of your sins, for all everlasting time and eternity—the wrath of God against you with no relief; or, you must take hold of him who indeed is the Savior of sinners. What a blessed truth then it is that God has made a way of escape from the wrath and curse we deserve. It's not by our doing. It's by Jesus Christ. And it's a happy thing that we turn our attention to, because our next lesson will deal with this provision by God, and how it is that he requires us to escape the wrath and curse due to us for sin. The good news is that it has everything to do with Jesus Christ. And so, as the weight of this lesson comes upon you, may it cause you to see the glorious provision that is held forth to you in the preaching of the gospel, and of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #44

Escaping God's Wrath and Curse: Saving Faith

Question 85: *What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin?*

Answer: *To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.*

Question 86: *What is faith in Jesus Christ?*

Answer: *Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.*

In the last lesson, we were reminded of how we sin, and what each of our sins deserves. The reality of hell, God's just punishment against sinners, is a most sobering truth. God must necessarily punish sin. He is good and just and will tolerate no infraction of his good, and holy, and just law. However, as we've already seen in our study of the *Catechism*, and as the Bible clearly teaches, there is the blessed truth that God saves sinners. We've already considered this to some extent, of course, that God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is the one who's made payment for the sins of his people.

So our lesson today considers what God requires of us to escape his wrath and curse. In our lesson, we'll look at two Questions, #85 and #86. Question #85 highlights the next three Questions that follow, so we'll only briefly comment on it, as it's setting up for these other three Questions. For the majority of our lesson, we'll look at Question #86.

So Question #85 asks, "What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin?" Simply remember that the wrath and curse that would come upon us is what we deserve—that's due to us. Well, the Answer, "To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption." Now there's a lot in this Answer, but remember, this is highlighting three following Questions, one of which, we'll consider in this lesson. This gives us, in some sense, a preview of what's coming in Questions

#86, #87, and #88. Question #86, which we'll consider here, explains what faith in Jesus Christ is. Question #87 explains what repentance unto life is. And Question #88 identifies the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption—the means of grace.

So, we'll look at those in turn, but before we go on to the next Question, simply notice the following two points from this Question. First, God has graciously appointed a way of escape from the wrath and curse we deserve for our sin. This is a great testimony of his grace and kindness. There is no obligation for him to do so. It is graciously given. Praise God that he has so made a way.

Second, notice that the way of escape includes “faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, and the diligent use of the means of grace.” Now, as noted, we'll take up each of these in our next few lessons. But simply note that these are not things we do in order to deserve salvation. It's not that faith then purchases, or repentance purchases, or the diligent use of the means purchases God's grace. Christ has done everything in order to earn salvation for his people. These three things—faith, repentance, and the diligent use of the means—are the gracious way God provides Christ to us, and applies to us his salvation, as we'll see. So remember, these are not three ways of earning salvation, but rather, three way in which we receive salvation.

So Question #86, “What is faith in Jesus Christ?”—“Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.” Well, this is a beautiful and simple statement of the Bible's teaching on saving faith. We'll consider it in this lesson, but for now notice how saving faith not only focuses on Jesus Christ, but it receives and rest upon him alone for salvation. Peter says, in the book of Acts, that “There is none other name...given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). There's no other Savior. So it's not Jesus Christ plus the saints, or Mary, or the Pope, or others; it is Jesus Christ alone who saves. Oh, that God then would give us this faith which receives and rests upon him alone for salvation.

So for this lesson, we'll look at three main points: firstly, *The Source of Saving Faith*; secondly, *The Act of Saving Faith*; and third, *The Warrant for Saving Faith*.

So first, *The Source of Saving Faith*. The *Catechism* notes that “Faith in Jesus Christ is a *saving* grace.” Well, in general, a “grace” is a gift. In fact, you can find the word in the Greek translated that way. It is, in other words, something unearned. Not that we need to go too deeply into this; you can simply note that faith in Jesus Christ is a gift, a gift of God. No one has ever earned it by their prayers, by their sighing, by their tears, or works, or diligence, or reforming. Saving faith is freely given by God. Nothing we do can qualify us for it. This is what the Bible tells us. A passage you should memorize, if you've not yet memorized it, is Ephesians 2, from verse 8 through verse 10. In fact, the whole of Ephesians 2 would be well worth your memorizing. But notice particularly verses 8 and 9. Paul writes, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” Notice, all of it—grace, salvation, faith—is the gift of God. It's not at all of our works. It's not by anything we've done. Whenever one believes in Jesus Christ, it is, as Christ said to Peter, in Matthew 16, verse 17, “Blessed art thou...for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” The knowledge and trust is given freely by God from heaven. It's nothing that we can work out on our own. It's not something we can qualify ourselves for.

But it not just any kind of gift. God gives many gifts. He gives earthly gifts, even to the wicked and the most sinful. Christ reminds his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount that we're to love our enemies as well as our friends. Why? So that we would be like our Father in heaven who gives good things even to his enemies. He causes the rain to fall, not only upon the fields of the

righteous but of the wicked. God gives many gifts—physical and temporal gifts. He gives life, health, food, water. He gives gifts that address spiritual things, and yet which aren't saving. For instance, in 1 Samuel, chapter 10, verse 11, we find that King Saul prophesied. That was a great gift—a supernatural gift even. He exercised the gift that God gave him. However, Saul was not a converted man. Just as Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles, exercised apostolic gifts, and yet he was not a converted man. Many people today are given many gifts from God, even religious gifts, even gifts that are of the true religion. For instance, they have the Bible. They learn about Jesus. They learn about their sins. They learn about the way of salvation. They have the privilege of pastor and elders and others that care for them and teach them the way of truth. All of these are freely given gifts, however, they are not, in and of themselves, saving. One may know about the Bible, one may know about Jesus Christ, and about the way of salvation, all of which are rich gifts, and yet they may not be saved. Indeed, the demons, as James tells us in his epistle, know many truths about God, and even tremble, but they're not saved.

Faith in Jesus Christ, however, is a saving grace. In other words, it's a gift from God that saves. When one truly has faith in Jesus Christ, they have a saving gift from God. Of course, we're thankful for all the temporal gifts we receive—food for our bodies, and rest, and we're thankful for friends and family. All of these things are good gifts. We're thankful for our churches, and for our ministers, which are great blessings to us. But this gift is a gift that saves. When God gives saving faith, he gives a gift that saves. And so you can see for a moment that if we have every other kind of gift, but not this saving gift, this saving grace, oh, in the end, we'll find ourselves to be truly poor. Or we can say the other is true as well. If we have no other gift but a saving gift, saving faith, then we will find on the last day that we are, of all men, the richest there is, because we have salvation in Christ. So, the source of this gift, this faith, is God freely giving it to us, not for anything done by us or accomplished by us, but freely given.

Well second, *The Act of Saving Faith*. What is it that that faith does? The *Catechism* tells us that when one has saving faith, he receives and rests upon Christ alone for salvation. This is a very important expression of a very important truth. It is the essence, the nature, of what saving faith does. Saving faith doesn't bring anything to Christ, except for a sinner. And so, we don't clean ourselves up first, but rather, we cast ourselves, with our sins, upon Christ who saves us. True and saving faith will understand many things. It knows about sin and salvation. It understands that Jesus Christ is the Savior of sinners. True and saving faith has knowledge. And so, true and saving faith is instructed—it's taught. The Bible is given to us. We listen to sermons. We read the Bible. We read good books. All of this is informing us.

However, saving faith has more than true knowledge. It includes it, but it has more. True and saving faith will also agree with what the Bible says about Jesus Christ and the way of salvation. It will agree that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God incarnate. It will agree that Jesus is the Savior of sinners. It will agree that Jesus died on the cross, that he was buried, that he remained under the power of death for three days; that he rose again; that he ascended into heaven; and that he's seated at the right hand of the Father in glory; and that he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead on the last day. All of this, saving faith will agree with. It will even agree that Jesus will save any and all who call upon him. And so it agrees with those things.

But it does more than agree with them, because true and saving faith also trusts in Jesus Christ personally. This is what makes faith *saving* faith. You'll become familiar with these categories in other occasions as you learn, but there is what's called a "historical faith," which merely agrees with the truths that are taught. But saving faith does not only agree with the truths that are taught,

saving faith trusts in that truth personally, embraces it, rests, and receives it, as the *Catechism* says. The *Catechism* says that faith in Jesus Christ receives and rests upon him alone for salvation. In other words, saving faith not only knows that Jesus is the Savior of sinners, it not only agrees that Jesus is the Savior of sinners, it not only agrees that Jesus would save me, but saving faith is that whereby the sinner trusts Jesus as his own Savior. In essence, it takes him, and says, “Save me.”

Notice, it looks only to Jesus Christ. It receives and rests upon him alone—not the saints, not himself, not anyone else, but Jesus Christ. Notice this idea in Romans 10, verses 13 and 14. Paul writes, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” Notice, whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Paul, as you can see in earlier verses in Romans 10, indicated that this has to do particularly with Jesus Christ alone, so whoever calls upon Jesus Christ. And this word “calling” means “earnestly beseeching,” “requesting,” “crying out to.” Whoever asks him. Whosoever calls upon him, that is, asks him, trust him to do so, Jesus Christ will save that one. What a blessed truth that is!

It may be that you’re sitting there now listening or viewing this lecture, and you need to hear this quite pointedly. That which saves us is Christ. He saves us. He saves us as we call upon him. And if you’ve not called upon him, here is the Lord, as it were, reaching out to you and saying, Call upon him, ask him, rely upon him, trust him to save you. He will.

Well, notice, as the verses state, in order to call on Jesus, that is, to trust him, to receive and rest upon him, they must believe in him. Now, sometimes this word means receiving and resting upon him. But here, it means they must acknowledge him, or agree that he is the Savior. In other words, in order to trust in the Savior, we must not only know who the Savior is, but agree he is the Savior. And in order to agree that he is the Savior, they must have heard about him, that is, to learn about him, which Paul then says therefore there’s a need for the preacher. What a blessed provision it is that there are preachers in our lives who preach to us Jesus Christ, for their holding forth Jesus Christ, the only way of salvation!

So we can see these three necessities of saving faith. There must be knowledge—knowing who the Savior is. There must be agreement, agreeing that he is the Savior. But there also must be trust—relying upon him alone. In other words, though we will pray, though we may have tears, though we may have sharp conviction, it’s not technically the form of our words, it’s not technically the tears from our eyes, it’s not the depth or the detail of our conviction. It is trusting in Jesus Christ. That is saving faith. And when we rely upon him, the blessed news is, we are saved.

Well, thirdly, *The Warrant for Saving Faith*. When we speak of a warrant for something, we’re speaking of the authorization, or the basis, or the grounds for doing something. It’s answering the question, “What right do you have to do this?” Well, we can ask, “What right does any sinner have to believe upon Jesus Christ?” The *Catechism* presents this warrant very clearly, beautifully, and faithfully in accord with Scripture. Notice, “We receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.” Well, the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, the Savior for sinners. In other words, the warrant we have to believe upon Jesus Christ as our own Savior is the offer of the gospel.

Let’s be clear as to what the warrant is not. First, the warrant is not the degree of our conviction. We agree with the fact that God will convict the sinner in order that they would see their need for Christ. But it’s not the duration of the conviction, or the depth of the conviction that is the warrant for us to believe. Rather, it’s that God is holding Christ out to us, and says, “Believe on him.” So

whether our conviction is deep, or not so deep; whether it's been for many years, or for only an hour, the warrant is not about our conviction. The right we have to believe upon Jesus Christ is that God says, "Believe upon him and you'll be saved."

Well, second, the warrant is not a feeling within our soul. There will be many feelings when one is brought to faith. There will be shame over sin, and conviction of transgression. There will be wonder at the riches held forth. All of these things will be there to various degrees. But none of those feelings within us is a right we have to believe upon Jesus Christ. We don't come to God and say, "Well, I feel great conviction, therefore." But rather, we say, "Because you hold Christ out to me, I receive him." The warrant is not feelings within ourselves, however real and deep, or little those feelings may be.

And third, the warrant is not an outward sign that occurs in the stars or the events of our day. Sometimes people have thought, Well, if God would save me, maybe he'll give me a sign—a bird will fly by my window, or someone will call out my name. The warrant we have, the right we have to believe upon is that the Bible calls us to believe upon and holds Christ forth to us, and says, "Believe upon Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

Well fourth, the warrant is not how long we've been seeking God. It may be that we've been a deep and long season of conviction, and we have been striving, and reading the Bible, increasing our reading, praying, increasing our prayers, attending church; every time the doors open, we're there to hear. We're reading the best of books. We're talking with others. We're examining our lives, and we're trying with the best of our ability to cut off certain flagrant sins. And yet none of that gives us the right to believe upon Jesus Christ. The warrant is that God holds Christ out to us, and says, "Believe upon him and thou shalt be saved."

Well, we could go on, however, I trust you see and understand the point. The warrant, or the right we have to trust in Jesus Christ is not about what takes place in us. It's not about discovering we're elect. It's not about discovering signs that we're elect. None of that is the right or warrant. The right we have to trust in Jesus Christ right now is that he offers himself to us as the Savior who will save us, as he would save sinners. You see how fully he is offered to us throughout the Bible. I can't give you every reference to the promises and offer of Christ to sinners, but notice just a few, so you can see this quite clearly. And as you do, listen for what is held forth, and what the cost is to us.

In Isaiah 55, verses 1 and 2, God says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." No money, no price, and yet the richest of blessings.

Matthew 11, verses 28 through 30, Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Those who are working, and worn out, heavily laden, are not to say, "Look at all I am doing." They're simply to come to Christ and he will save them.

John 4, verse 13 and 14, where Christ is speaking to the woman at the well, "Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Notice: "Whosoever" will drink of the water that I shall give—shall have what? Everlasting life.

Revelation 3, verse 20, as Christ is reproofing a self-righteous church, he says, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” What a blessing! If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.

Revelation 22, verse 17, the very last chapter of the Bible, and almost the last verse of the Bible, and Jesus is speaking, and he tells us, “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Oh, what a blessedness that God provides us here, that at the very corners of the Bible, he reminds us, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

Now do you see, God holds forth Jesus Christ and salvation to sinners freely. He says, “Come.” He says, “Look.” He says, “Take.” He says, “Drink.” He says, “Open.” With what price? By what qualification? With no money, without price. This, and this alone is the warrant each sinner has to take Jesus Christ. God holds him forth and says, “Take him.” Oh, what a blessing! Salvation is invaluable. There’s nothing we could ever do that would be able to trigger or qualify us to be now worthy of receiving it. Indeed, the only reason anyone may receive Jesus Christ is because God has offered him freely to us.

Well, there’s much more that could be said. But as we close, here a reason to praise the Lord, that though our sins demand justice, God provides Jesus Christ. And what a way of escape it is, because it’s Christ who pays justly the punishment due to us for sin. And to take hold of him, is to take hold of him who, in our stead then, has already paid the debt. What a blessed way of salvation it is, to take hold of Christ freely offered in the gospel. There’s no other way. If you’re looking any other way, within yourself, to other things outside of yourself, here’s the truth of the Bible. The only way of escape is by rejecting everything else, and resting upon Jesus Christ as he’s freely offered to us in the gospel.

It’s something you should ask yourself, “Do I have this faith?” Not merely, “Do I know what the Bible teaches, and do I agree with what the Bible teaches” but, “Am I resting upon Jesus alone for salvation?” And if you do have this faith, well then you can trace it all the way back to its source. You have this faith, not only because God offers Christ to you, which is a great blessing, but because God has given you the saving grace of saving faith. Therefore, praise his name.

Well, what happens if you don’t have it? Well, you ought to go to God, and cry out to him to teach you that you would know the way, to work within you so that you would agree with the way, but above all else, that he would give you that faith to call upon him. So don’t stop now or ever, calling upon him, looking to him. And in looking to him, cry out to Jesus Christ, and say, “Save me!” Oh, what a blessing to know the way. And may God add his blessing that each of us would take hold of that way as Christ is offered to us in the gospel.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #45

Escaping God's Wrath and Curse: Repentance unto Life

Question 87: *What is repentance unto life?*

Answer: *Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.*

We continue our attention on the way of escape God has provided to us as sinners. We have considered what saving faith is. Now we come to repentance, which the *Catechism* refers to as “repentance unto life,” which borrows from the Scripture itself. Now, we’ve noted earlier that these are two aspects of the grace that God gives to a sinner unto salvation. In other words, where there is saving faith in Jesus Christ, there will also be repentance unto life. And where there is repentance unto life, there will be saving faith in Christ. Now we should be clear: these aren’t the same thing. Faith is not repentance, and repentance is not faith. However, they are inseparable, because they are given together, when God renews, or regenerates, a sinner to bring them unto salvation.

So we take now Question #87 from the *Shorter Catechism*. It asks, “What is repentance unto life?” And the answer, “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.”

Now, we’ll look at this answer more fully throughout our lesson. But we want to make sure that one of these words is rightly understood from the beginning. You’ll notice the expression, “apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ.” Today, many times the word “apprehension” means “fear” or “concern.” However, here it has its original idea of “understanding” or “grasping,” “holding onto.” So the apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ means, the understanding or the grasp of the mercy of God in Christ. It not only acknowledges that there is mercy of God in Christ, but it lays hold of it.

So with this, we’ll enter into our lesson by looking at three main points: firstly, *The Nature of True Repentance*—what is the main meaning of repentance? Secondly, *The Motives for True Repentance*—what does God use to motivate and lead one to repentance? And third, *The Continuance of True Repentance*—what is the duration of repentance? Does it only begin and stop

there, or does it continue the whole life of the believer?

So first, *The Nature of True Repentance*. What is the main meaning of repentance? Well, the basic meaning of the biblical term, “repentance” or “repent,” is to change or turn one’s mind or orientation. So you can think of it, if one is facing one direction, they turn and face the opposite direction. Now, it is more significant than the little ways we might change our minds throughout the day. One day we might wake up and think, “Well, I’d like to go to the park.” And something changes, and we’d say, “No, I’d like to go to my friend’s house.” Those are changes of mind, we could say.

But when the Bible speaks of repentance, it’s about something far more significant. Indeed, it’s about the greatest change that takes place. So when we think of “conversion,” it’s a turning of us unto God, and essentially, that’s what repentance is. You’ll remember that since the fall, man’s whole nature, body and soul, including the mind and the desires of the soul, all of this is corrupt and it’s committed to sin. We see this stated clearly in Genesis 6, verse 5: “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” We’re told the same in a simple way, in Jeremiah 17, and verse 9: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” This is what explains every sin, every rebellion of man against God. It may be that even the sinner is sometimes surprised at the depth of sin, but we shouldn’t be surprised, because man is throughout corrupt. Man is committed to sin.

This is what explains us apart from God’s grace. Our very core, the very essence of our being is corrupted by our sin, and thus, we stand opposed to God. This is why, in Romans 8, verse 7, Paul says, “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” It’s not just man, in his fall, is influenced by his sin, and it’s not just that every once in a while a sinner falls into sin. Apart from God’s grace, man only sins, because he despises God and his holiness.

Now, certainly, as we saw in a previous lesson, there are different degrees of heinousness, so some sins are less heinous, and others are more heinous. So it doesn’t mean that man only commits the most heinous sins. But it does mean that, though he be well-refined and presentable to other men, and may even be engaged in seemingly religious activity, that his heart is unclean, and he stands opposed to God. This means man is against God. Remember when Adam and Eve sinned against God, what happened when God drew near to them. What did they do? Well, they ran away and hid from God. This is a picture of what all men do since the fall—they run away from God.

Well, repentance is the display of a real change within man. Remember, we talked about effectual calling and regeneration, well, saving faith and repentance are the fruit of that effectual calling. When God effectually calls and regenerates one, he gives them faith and repentance. He causes the change. And what change is displayed?—it’s repentance. Notice the *Catechism*: “a sinner...doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God.” The sinner who once loved his sin and would nourish, and harbor, and protect his sin now despises his sin. And the God against whom he stood opposed is now the God to whom he runs. When one repents, that person is brought to grieve and despise their sin, and turn to God.

Notice Isaiah 55, verse 7: “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, for he will abundantly pardon.” The sinner is not only to forsake his way, this thoughts, he is then to turn to the Lord. And these are related. In turning from his sin, he’s turning at the same time unto God. So true repentance turns from self and sin to God in Christ. This repentance is the fruit

of saving grace. It's not natural to man, as fallen. Fallen man, left to himself, will only continue to sin. The types of sin may change. The depth and degree of sin may change.

That doesn't mean, of course, that sinners don't feel grief or shame over their sin. It does mean that they do not truly hate or repent from it apart from God's grace. Take, as an example, Judas Iscariot. You can read a key part of his sin and rebellion in Matthew, chapter 26, through the first part of chapter 27. These two chapters, among other things, include his betrayals: his agreement to betray, his betrayal of Christ, and then his shame, remorse, and what he does in light of his sin. If you read those verses, you'll see he agrees to betray the Lord Jesus Christ, which is a most wicked sin. And after he betrayed Christ, Judas became convicted. He actually takes the money that was paid to him and brings it back and returns it. He's ashamed of his wickedness.

So what did he do? Well, though it is that he had a turning of mind, it's not a true repentance. Notice Matthew 27, verse 3: "Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders." Well notice that the passage says he repented himself. However, it's not saying that he truly repented. There was a turning, in one sense; he had the money, and now he saw the money was not right to have. What's being said is that he regretted what he had done. And now he was ashamed of what he had done. But to what did this lead him? Did it lead him to God? Did it lead him to confess his sin, to turn to God and ask God to forgive him? Did it lead him to go to God and say, "Forgive me, and change me"? No, it led him again to himself. So from one sin, this regret, that can be common to all men, leads him to another sin—it led him to take his own life in despair.

Now let us say something. This is the natural end of all sin. It leads us to despair. It may lead us to regret. It may lead us to be shamed, and embarrassed, and convicted. But apart from God's grace, it will only lead us to continual sin, and ultimately to despair. This helps us see that, in their sin, sinners may experience remorse, and conviction, and sadness, and shame. This is one reason—though we should indeed affirm that it's right for sinners to feel remorse, and conviction, and sadness, and shame—it's a reason we don't say, "Therefore, you're converted," because Judas felt remorse, conviction, sadness, and shame, but he wasn't converted.

True repentance, or as the Bible and our *Catechism* says, repentance unto life is not the turning merely unto remorse; it is the turning unto God. When Peter reported to the church gathered in Jerusalem the mighty work of God among the Gentiles, he told them how they turned to God. And the church in Jerusalem acknowledged this very truth—Acts 11, verse 18: "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Notice, not repentance unto remorse—repentance unto life.

Notice two things. First, this repentance was a repentance unto life. Why so?—because from their rebellion against God in their sin, they turned unto God. Well second, notice that they repented by God's grace: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted"—that is, he gave them this grace. It was not something they attained by their own works. It was not something that they earned. It was not something they worked up. It was given freely by his grace. Remember, saving faith and repentance unto life, these are the fruit of God's saving work giving that regeneration by which now they are not changed from within. Repentance is a saving grace, just as saving faith is a saving grace. These are gifts freely bestowed in God's grace unto salvation.

Well second, *The Motives for True Repentance*. What it is that God uses to motivate this repentance? Well, as we think of these things, we see the *Catechism* affirms that "a sinner, out of true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God." What this means is that when God gives a sinner repentance,

he's working these two key understandings within him. He's using these things within his mind, and thoughts, and soul.

First, notice that they are given a true sense of their sin. It's not merely that they see sin is wrong; they respond to the true sense of it. What is this true sense?—well, it consists in understanding what sin is, that it is rebellion against God. But it also includes these two aspects of sin. It understands that sin violates the law, and so firstly, this makes man guilty in God's sight. Guilt in God's sight makes the sinner worthy of judgment. And when one has a true sense of this, that one loses all complaints and excuse before God. No longer will that sinner think, "Well, my sins are little and small, and others' are big and large." They acknowledge, as David acknowledged, "Against thee and thee only have I sinned," and as he goes on, "that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest" (Psalm 51:4). What's David saying?—I sinned, I'm guilty, you are right to judge me. The sinner with a true sense of his sin realizes, and acknowledges, and owns that from God, he deserves condemnation. He does not minimize his sin nor his guilt, because he has a true understanding of his sin and his guilt. He sees it and senses it for what it is.

Well, the sinner who repents also sees that, as it is a violation of God's law, and as that dwells within him, he comes to see the corruption, or the depravity of his sin. He sees its ugliness, and he detests it. He's brought to hate it. Now of course, it's not that the sinner will ever hate his sin as much as he should throughout this life, however, the sinner does come to see sin as repulsive, in and of itself; not only for the effects, that it brings forth damnation and hell—surely the sinner sees that. But the sinner is brought to see the sin itself as wicked, corrupt, and abhorrent. He sees it as godless, godlessness, rebellion, corruption.

You'll notice that this true sense is not just of sin in general, but of the sinner's personal sin, his sin. He would join with Isaiah, and say, "Woe is me! for I am undone...I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). He would join with Paul, and say, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18). He sees it in himself. And so, he will not turn to himself. Repentance is not, as sometimes you'll hear it, merely the turning over of a new leaf, as some would say, which phrase is meant to say, "I'm going to do something different in my own strength." He doesn't turn to himself; that's not repentance. He turns, rather, to God, in Christ, for grace. So there's a true sense of sin, which then leads him out of himself, away from himself.

But second, one who repents is given a true understanding, or, as the *Catechism* says, "apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ." Without this, there would be no true repentance. There may be the attempt to turn from one form of sin to a more refined form, a better form perhaps they might think. But it would not be a true turning to God. And why is that? Because in order to turn to God truly, there must be some understanding, some persuasion that God is willing to receive and be merciful to the one who comes to him. There must be an apprehension that God is willing to receive, forgive, and save the sinner.

Well in this, God's Word is clear in affirming. Remember Isaiah 55, verse 7: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return to the LORD." Well, this is repentance. He's turning from his thoughts to the Lord. But notice, the verse continues: "And he"—that is, the Lord—"will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he"—that is, our God—"will abundantly pardon." Why should I repent? Well, look, because your sins are wicked, but also because God is merciful.

Similarly, notice Jeremiah 3, verse 12 and verse 13: "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever.

Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD.” Well, again, this clearly encourages repentance, not only by their wickedness, and true sight and sense of sin, as Jeremiah makes plain, but also by the assurance that God is merciful and gracious. If we are to turn to God truly, we must be assured that God will graciously receive us as he has promised to do so in his Word. The Scripture makes this very clear. He is willing to receive us for Christ’s sake.

This is stated in Peter’s appeal to sinners who heard him preach, in Acts 2. Notice verse 38: “then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” True repentance is encouraged and helped by a firm understanding that God is gracious and that he is a gracious God who will receive sinners to himself to save them.

Well third, notice *The Continuance of True Repentance*. Sometimes we hear people speak of repentance as of a one-time act: “Well, I repented long ago,” or, “You need to repent,” and so on. All of that’s true, but it’s more than just a one-time act. There is an initial turning from sin, our initial or first-time repentance, but true repentance continues all the life of the one who is given grace. The sinner turns from his sin, as the *Catechism* says, “with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.” In other words, there’s a real change in the heart and life of a sinner so that he is not at war with his sin and in pursuit of true obedience only for the moment, but for the rest of his life.

We’ll look at this a bit more. Notice the words “new obedience.” This is an important expression. By the word “new,” the *Catechism* is helping us see that it comes from a new source and a new supply. It is not an obedience that comes from within us, and the old man. Rather, it’s that the one who repents is given a new source. So this new obedience is no longer from a source of pride, “I’m going to take care of it myself.” That form will never bring forth truth obedience to God out of love to God. Oh, such a one may, with certain words and certain actions, appear to obey God, but these are from a corrupt source, selfish principles, not motivated by God’s love. New obedience comes from a new source and seeks a new end. It comes from God’s grace, and from a sense of his love. It also pursues a loving goal—to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Well, notice, the sinner who repents turns “with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.” By God’s grace, the sinner is given a new purpose—to obey God truly, in love, by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a comprehensive change. It’s full, and contrary to partial. So true repentance will lead the sinner to a concern for full obedience. Of course, that perfection is never attained in this life, however, the Christian is now pressing on with a new heart to pursue that goal. As Paul says, “Forgetting those things which are behind,” but pressing forward, as he says, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14). So the one who truly repents is one who seeks the Lord and desires his glory and fellowship above all else.

He then endeavors after it, that is, he pursues it. It’s not only his goal, he actually orders his life to pursue it. How does he do it?—not in the old way of self reliance. But rather, in the gospel, by the way of Christ’s work, he now depends upon Christ to do it. I encourage you to read 2 Peter chapter 1, and you’ll see how clearly all of repentance, all true holiness is by God’s grace through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, with firm reliance upon his promises. God’s grace in Christ enables and strengthens us unto this new obedience. Without a true sense of sin, without an apprehension of God’s mercy in Christ, we’ll never repent. But where there is a true sense of sin and apprehension

of the mercy of God in Christ, the one who initially repented will continue to repent each day of his life, until the glorious day when Christ returns.

Well, we must close, and as we do, notice that if it's true that sinners repent by God's grace, then the only way of repentance is by God's grace. This does not excuse sinners for not repenting, but it does show us how wicked and hardened sinners are in their sins. They may come to see with Judas how abhorrent their sins are, and yet, if God is not gracious to them, they will only despair. So what is our great need? Well, it's the same as with saving faith and all of salvation. We have need that God would be gracious to us. Well, we ought to pray then for that, both for ourselves, and for others. Oh, God, give me this repentance unto life. Oh, God, give my friends, my family, even my enemies this great gift.

But second, consider for a moment, have you repented? Have you turned to God? Not merely, have you laid aside one form of sin and taken up a different form of sin. Not merely, have you seen the shame and the conviction of your sin, and you sought to attack that one. But have you, by God's grace, turned to him, and cast all of your hope upon him, imploring him for this grace, that he would give you the grace needed to forsake your sins, and to hold fast to Jesus Christ.

I would say, third, if you have repented, then you have reason to praise God. He did not leave you in your sin; he did not leave you in your shame; he did not leave you to yourself. He gave you grace. And to help you in your initial or your ongoing repentance, search out two things. Perhaps take a notebook and make a list of that which discovers the reality of sin, and secondly what discovers the mercy of God in Christ. And as you do, you'll have two great reasons, by God's grace, to turn from your sin, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #46

Escaping God's Wrath and Curse: Means of Grace

Question 88: *What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?*

Answer: *The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.*

With this lesson, we have the third of three lessons on the way of escaping God's wrath and curse. We should always remember this, that it's God's wrath and curse that we deserve, but God has very kindly supplied us a way of escape, all of which is through Jesus Christ.

Well, the previous two lessons considered *saving faith* and *repentance unto life*. In this lesson, we will look at the *means of grace* that God has given to us. We should also note that this Question sets up for the rest of the *Catechism*. We'll see in this Answer before us that we have the Word, and sacraments, and prayer presented, and the rest of the *Catechism* will deal with these three means of grace, the Word, sacraments, and prayer.

Well, for our Question, #88, "What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?" The Answer, "The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation."

Now there's a lot packed into this answer, but remember, much of it will be addressed in future lessons and Questions. For now, simply notice three words.

The first is "outward." This refers to things that are visible—things that we can see, and touch, or hear, things that are physical senses can experience.

Another word is "ordinary." This word refers to those things that are for all times and places. When something is ordinary, we might think of it as common. When something is "extraordinary"—extra ordinary—these things are above ordinary. Now this should not make us think of the ordinary means as insignificant. Rather, they are ordinary, or common, for the whole church, and for all times. They are special gifts. They are uncommon, so far as the rest of the world is considered, but they are common in the sense that they are for the whole church in all ages. So they are ordinary in that way.

Another word is “means.” This is a word that refers to an instrument that’s used. Sometimes we speak of “means to an end.” This conveys the idea of an instrument that’s used to produce something else, to accomplish something else. So you can think of a pencil. A pencil is a means, or an instrument, to write. We use it to make marks on a piece of paper, to communicate our thoughts in writing, that others can read it. You can think of a cup. A cup is a means, or an instrument, to quench our thirst. It carries water to our mouths so we can drink it. And you can think of an electrical wire as a means to carry electricity to a light bulb. With this, you can see that a means is not the same thing as the thing it’s carrying. A cup is not water; it carries water. A wire is not electricity; it carries electricity. A pencil is not writing; it is used for writing. So you can understand then, means that Christ uses are instruments that Christ uses.

Well, we can add another word for our consideration as well, and that’s “communicateth.” This word means “to share.” Think of verbal communication where we take words to share our thoughts and to have others understand this. So keep this in mind. Christ shares with us the benefits of redemption.

Well, for our lesson, let’s look at three main points. Firstly, *The Nature of the Means of Grace*; secondly, *The Identity of the Means of Grace*; and third, *The Blessing of the Means of Grace*.

So firstly, *The Nature of the Means of Grace*. Notice again the Answer to our Question: “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.” Well, there’s a lot here, as we’ve noted, but let’s look at just a few things that help us understand what these Means of Grace are, what they do.

We have already mentioned that the word “means” refers to an instrument used to accomplish something. Here we’re speaking of the means of grace—the instruments that God uses to give grace. So it’s what Christ uses to accomplish the work of salvation being applied to us. It’s not his accomplishing of salvation by means of his purchase—he’s died and risen again—that has, as it were, gained redemption. This is asking, How does he now take that redemption and apply it to us? Notice what he uses. He uses these means to communicate the benefits of redemption.

These benefits of redemption refer to all of the blessings that he purchased for his people. This includes regeneration; this includes conversion; this includes faith, and repentance, and justification, and sanctification, among others. It includes the peace of conscience that believers have. It is the assurance of salvation, their growth in holiness, their joy in the Holy Ghost. All of these things are what Christ has purchased for his people. Now you can understand this in one way. All of those things that come freely to his people, cost Christ everything. So they are a rich, an immeasurably rich treasure. And yet, he freely bestows them upon his people by the means of grace. So you could think of the benefits of redemption as the treasure that he purchased for us—the treasure of salvation. And what a rich treasure it is!

But the question comes, How does he convey, communicate, share, or give this treasure to us? Well, of course, he does it by grace. He does it graciously. This is undeniable. The Bible is very clear in this. But we can ask, How does he graciously give them to us? What instruments does he use? And the Answer before us tells us that he uses the “outward and ordinary means” of “his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer.” These are the things he uses to take the treasure he purchased, of salvation and all of its riches, and he gives them to us by these means.

Well, we’ll look at these means a bit more in a moment, but for now, notice this point. The riches of his salvation are conveyed, they’re given, they’re shared with, or as the *Catechism* says, they’re communicated to us by these means. This should amaze us in many ways, that so great

a treasure is even shared with us. It also should amaze us that the intangible and the spiritual blessings of salvation are given by Christ to us by the means of his Word, which we can read and hear; the Lord's Supper, which we can see and eat; and prayer, which we lift up our voice to God. Now, we shouldn't make a mistake and turn the outward means into the salvation and treasure itself. Well, surely, the Bible is most precious. Every word is perfect. It converts the soul. But here, we should remember this: we read the Bible, and yet it's not merely the reading of the Bible that saves us. God must bless the reading of the Bible. We're baptized, but it's not just baptism which saves us. It's that he must bless baptism, and we'll look at that in another Question. Always remember, these are means that God uses. We look through the means to the blessing, to receive Christ by them. And so we use the means diligently, but we do not turn them into a means of work and self-righteousness. We ever rely upon God to bless them to us, as we'll think through more fully.

Well, second, *The Identity of the Means of Grace*. What are the means of grace? Well, again, we'll look at this more fully in the coming Questions, as the Questions will deal with this more fully. But notice for now that the means of grace are, as the *Catechism* identifies, Christ's ordinances. An ordinance is something that one in authority ordains. You'll remember that Christ's church is his kingdom, and he is the King. And as King, he has the right to ordain what his kingdom should use and do. This is precisely what he has done in his Word. We could think of a variety of examples. When Paul is writing to Timothy, he says, "Preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). This is something that is to mark out all faithful ministers—they preach Christ's Word. Christ himself said, as he was to ascend, "Go," and what does he say? Disciple all nations, make disciples of all nations. Doing what? "teaching them," yes, but also, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19–20). And so it is that he's ordained the sacrament of baptism. You can see this with all of the ordinances.

If it is an ordinance, it is something that Christ has ordained. Notice very clearly, it's not the church's ordinances; it's *his* ordinances. The church can't invent things; the church can't come up with things; the church is to receive his ordinances. And among his ordinances, we find the reading and preaching of his Word. We find prayer, the singing of Psalms, the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper. We find personal and public fasting and humiliation. We find days of thanksgiving. We find the various officers of the church and their ministries—pastors, and elders, and deacons. We find the exercise of church discipline, the observance of the Lord's Day, the financial giving to support the cause of the church, and so on. The point is, there are many ordinances. And yet, this is what they have in common—two things: one, each of them is ordained by Christ; and secondly, each of them is a means by which Christ gives his blessing. Each of them is meant to be used as we noted earlier, to convey to God's people the various riches of Christ's redemption.

Now, the *Catechism* identifies three primary ordinances: the word, the sacraments, and prayer. This is not to deny the others that we've just noted. Rather, the *Catechism* is calling our attention to the primary ordinances and means of grace that are central to the life of the Christian and the church. And again, the rest of the *Catechism* will open these more fully. But for now, simply notice that these are the primary ways that we enjoy the enriching of our souls with the spiritual blessings of Christ Jesus. So what a blessing it is to have his Word! And oh, how large the Word should be in our lives! What a blessing it is to be taught to pray! And oh, how much our lives should be taken up with this! And what a privilege it is to have the sacraments! And oh, how we ought to treasure them! Why? Not because of any mere outward beauty to them. Not because of the corrupt

ceremonies that get added to them by others, but because they are the means by which Christ adds his blessing to us. Simply keep this in mind: when you use God's Word, when you witness or participate in the sacraments of the Lord Jesus Christ, or when you engage in prayer, it will be seeking the grace that God promises to provide through them. They're like channels through which the river flows, and these channels then convey to us the riches of salvation.

We do not mean that God always blesses these means with salvation. But we do mean that if ever we are to seek and enjoy his blessing, it will come to us by these means, as he blesses them. This is true, not only of the Word read and preached, it's not only true of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as prayer; it's also true of church discipline; it's true of public worship; and it's true of all the other things we've already mentioned. These are means by which God gives the grace of salvation. Therefore, whenever we see these, or we participate in them, we should look through them to God in Christ for his blessing.

So this can help us with some means that are difficult for us today—when church discipline is administered. The world thinks—and oh, how unfortunate that some in the church think—that church discipline is a mean thing. But if you read about what church discipline is meant to do, it's meant first, of course, to bring honor to God's name. It's meant also to warn those church members present against those sins. But it's also meant for the one who's being disciplined, to convict them, and to draw them to Jesus Christ. It's a means of grace. And it's true of all of the means. and so we should start to use them with that in our mind, seeking that God would add his blessing to them.

Well, third, *The Blessing of the Means of Grace*. What is it we are to seek by these means? Well, remember, these are the means by which “Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.” That's what we are to seek—the benefits of redemption. Well, we're to seek them as they are means to that. Not as means by which we purchase them, but means by which Christ shares them with us. They're his benefits, and yet he freely gives the treasure of salvation to us by them.

But to whom does he give these benefits, this treasure? Our *Catechism* summarizes, “all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.” We've seen this word “effectual” before, and we've seen this word “elect” before. Effectual means that which brings about its intended purpose. And the elect refers to those whom God chose before the foundation of the world that they should be saved. Now we don't have time to look at all the ways the Bible shows this to be so with all of the means of grace. Let me give you one example, though, that's very rich to help us see that the Lord uses these things to give the blessings of salvation for the elect. Notice Ephesians 1, verses 3 to 14. Now this is a longer passage, so listen carefully, or follow along in your own Bible, and as you do, pay attention to three things: first, *the blessings that God gives*; second, *the way he gives them*; and third, *to whom he gives them*. With those three things in your mind, listen now to the Word of God:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the

counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

Wow, what a passage that is—very full, and worthy of your study! But notice those three things. *The blessings God gives*: all spiritual blessings—salvation, forgiveness, adoption, inheritance of heaven—all of these benefits of redemption, by the blood of Christ purchased. *The way he gives them*: Paul said, “Ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (verse 13). Notice, they heard—the ear heard the Word, the means of the Word. Of course, they believed that Word, but the means that God used was the Word. Now, it doesn’t talk about the sacraments, and it doesn’t talk about prayer, but again, this is pointing out but one example. But *to whom does give these great blessings*? Well, in a variety of ways, Paul says, to those whom God has chosen before the foundation of the world, the elect.

There’s much here that you see, I trust. God gives his spiritual blessings purchased by Christ to his chosen people, by the means of grace. Oh, praise God that he has been pleased to do these things! That we would look upon the treasure of Christ with greater delight, and that we would look to God for his blessed provision to us, and that we would make use of the means, that we might, by his blessing, enjoy them.

Well, as we close, this should transform our approach to the means of grace, how we use them. We should learn to look upon them as God has appointed them. They’re means by which he blesses us. If we do so, it will transform the way, for instance, that we read the Bible, or the way we listen to sermons, or the way we engage in prayer. It will help us look through them, and by means of them, unto God. Notice, we don’t look to God’s grace apart from the Word. We look to God for his grace by means of the Word. No one finds their thirst quenched by a cup. They are quenched by the water that’s in the cup. It’s not the mere act of reading the Bible that satisfies our soul. It is as God blesses his Word to our souls that we enjoy the riches of salvation. We do not separate these things, the grace of God and the means of grace, but we do distinguish them. The means of grace are not the same as the redemption purchased by Christ. And so we need the redemption purchased by Christ, if ever we should be saved and enjoy those benefits. But the way God is pleased to give them to us and show them to us is by the means. And so we approach the means with thoughtfulness, with preparedness, and with an eye looking to God to bless.

Well, this then should lead us to a proper diligence, and not merely to be outward diligent—how many chapters of the Bible we read, how often we read, how many times a day we pray, and so on. Now certainly, we should read and pray daily, and doubtlessly, our lives should be more in reading and prayer and meditation. However, the kind of diligence that this should lead us to is more than just outward. It’s more than just listing how many chapters of the Bible we’ve read, or how many hours we’ve spent in prayer, or how many services of worship we attend. It is a diligent looking to God in Christ for his blessing. I encourage you to read through the whole of Psalm 119, and as you do, you’ll see this brought together. The psalmist is diligent—he’s meditating, he’s reading, he’s praying, he’s fasting. However, you’ll also see how regularly the psalmist is asking God to quicken him, to help him, to enliven him, to bless him. The point is, when we rightly understand the means of grace—the Bible, meditation, reading, listening, prayer, and so on—the more we’ll rightly use them, diligently looking to God through Christ to bless us.

So when you prepare to read the Bible, or as you prepare to go to worship God at church, and listen to sermons, and sing his praise in the Psalms he’s given, or as you set apart a day for fasting,

you should pause and ask God for his blessing. And you should never remove the conscious thought of your soul from this: “I need the blessing by God blessing these means.” There’s a beautiful passage that helps us with this, in Psalm 80, and verses 17 to 19: “Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.” Notice, the psalmist asks God to bless by Jesus Christ, the man of his right hand, the son of man. And as God blesses through Jesus Christ, he quickens, or enlivens us to pray.

Here’s the point. When you approach reading the Bible; when you approach prayer, or singing praise, or worshipping God, or the other ordinances, always do so looking to God that he would bless you through Jesus Christ, asking him to provide you that blessing you so desperately need. And when you do this, you’ll be making use of the means of grace diligently and rightly, relying upon God to give unto you the blessings of redemption Christ has purchased.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #47

Means of Grace: The Word of God

Question 89: *How is the word made effectual to salvation?*

Answer: *The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation.*

Question 90: *How is the word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?*

Answer: *That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practise it in our lives.*

We continue our study of the *Shorter Catechism*, and we're in the section of the way of escaping God's wrath and curse. In particular, we're focusing on the means of grace—those ordinances which Christ has instituted to convey to us, to give to us the blessings of salvation. In this lesson, we look particularly at how Christ uses the Word of God. And we'll take up two Questions for our lesson, #89 and #90.

Now, for background, remember an earlier Question, #2, "What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?" And the Answer, which you'll remember, is, "The Word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him." Well, this is the background, and this helps us understand what is meant by "the Word of God." It's directing us to the revelation of God himself as he's given it to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Well, the Questions now are #89 and #90.

Question #89: "How is the word made effectual to salvation?" Now remember, the word "effectual" means, how it brings to pass its purpose. "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation."

There's not much here that's too difficult, as far as terms or words. And the Answer is explaining that God, the Holy Spirit causes the Word of God, in its reading and preaching, to save sinners. "To convince" is to make one aware of and agree with. "To convert" means to turn them from one who

is at rebellion with God to one who is now trusting in God. And notice particularly the expression that it is “the reading, but especially the preaching of the word.” By “reading,” of course, includes both our personal reading of God’s Word, or when we’re with others and they’re reading it, or as well, when we’re in public worship and the minister reads the Word. The Spirit uses this to bring saving blessings to his people. And additionally, the *Catechism* highlights the preaching. Notice, “especially the preaching of the word.” Remember that Paul exhorted Timothy, in 2 Timothy 4:2, to “preach the word.” This is why the minister is to preach God’s Word, because when he does so faithfully and accurately, God’s Word is going forth with clarity to the hearer. And this preaching of God’s Word is especially used of God to bring about salvation. Paul indicates this in Romans, chapter 10. Notice verses 13 and 14, as well as verse 17, and you can read the whole chapter and see this more clearly: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” And verse 17: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” So there in Romans 10, Paul is highlighting especially the preaching of the Word, as the means that God uses to convert people unto himself. So remember, it’s both the reading and preaching of God’s Word that the Spirit uses.

Well, Question #90 is, “How is the word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?” The words “read” and “hear” are here before us. How should it be read? How should we read it? And how should we hear it? How should it be heard—both what is publically read and publically preached? “That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practise it in our lives.”

The previous answer explained that is a sovereign, gracious work of the Spirit to save sinners by the reading and preaching of his Word. This Answer explains the right way we are to approach and use the Word of God. We can think of these two answers as twin truths. When the Spirit blesses his Word, he’s causing his people to receive it with faith and love. Additionally, it’s right for us to show reverence to so noble a gift, namely, the Scriptures. And to do so, we should prepare ourselves, and seek to see our lives changed by it.

Well, let’s look more deeply at this, in looking at three points. Firstly, *The Cause of Blessing by the Word of God*; secondly, *The Effect of Blessing by the Word of God*; and third, *The Pursuit of Blessing by the Word of God*.

So first, *The Cause of Blessing by the Word*. The Word of God itself is of immeasurable value. It is God’s very word. Yet, such is the wickedness, the blindness, and the corruption of man, that merely reading God’s Word will not bless us. We’ll resist it. We seek to set it aside, or to go so far, but not all the way with God’s Word. The Scriptures show us this in many places. You can think, for instance, of what is said of Christ’s ministry to the Jews, in John, chapter 1, and verse 11: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” What an astounding statement that is! Christ came and preached the truth, and yet his own covenant people resisted it, they refused it.

Well, how then will anyone ever be blessed by the reading and preaching of God’s Word? And the answer before us is, it’s by the sovereign and gracious work of God’s Spirit. It’s not the wisdom of man, the preacher. It’s not the wisdom of man, the hearer. It’s the gracious power of God the Spirit. Paul expresses this in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 5 and 6. He writes, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy

of the Holy Ghost.” Notice, it didn’t come in word only—preaching and reading, but in power, and that by the Holy Spirit. This is how sinners are converted. The Word is the instrument that the Spirit uses, but the Spirit must be at work using it, or men remain dead in their sins.

Now this is not only true for the unconverted. The believer needs God’s Spirit to bless God’s Word to him as well. So once one is converted, by God’s grace, if ever that one should benefit and grow by the reading or preaching of the Word, there’s the need for the same Spirit to be at work by the same Word. We can see this in Paul’s prayer recorded in Ephesians 1, verse 15 through 18: “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,” and so on. Notice, Paul is writing to those at Ephesus who believed in Christ. The Spirit had already brought them to believe upon Christ. And yet, Paul didn’t say, “Well, now you’re fine; you have God’s Word.” But rather, he didn’t stop praying for them, that what would happen? That God, by his Spirit, would open their minds further, and cause them to receive the truth. So what we see is, the blessing of God’s Word is caused by God’s grace. As the Spirit works powerfully to give understanding and faith to receive the truth. What a blessed truth it is that God gives us this great gift.

Well, second, from the cause, we look now to *The Effect of Blessing by the Word*. What happens when the Spirit uses the Word of God effectually in someone’s life? Well, the *Catechism* hopefully focuses us on the main things. Toward unconverted sinners, the Spirit convinces and converts them. To be convinced means that they are brought to agree with it, and they’re persuaded of the truth of it.

Notice, it’s a special work of the Spirit to use the Word to this end. Christ spoke of the Spirit’s ministry, in John 16, verses 7 through 11. He said, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” Christ is telling the apostles, as he’s preparing them for his ascension, that he’s going to provide a great help—another Comforter; another one alongside them. It’s the Spirit of truth, as he goes on to say in this chapter. Well, it’s the Spirit of God who then reproves and brings about conviction. He uses the ministry of the apostles and their writings—the Word of God—but it’s the Spirit who brings about the conviction and conversion. We say this earlier, in 1 Thessalonians. It wasn’t the Word only, but the Word by the Spirit which converted the Thessalonians. And here, Christ is showing us why, because the Spirit, when he’s using the Word, convinces, and reproves, and persuades them of the truth—these fundamental things. So it’s the Spirit who uses the Word. And when he uses the Word powerfully, what does he do? He brings about conviction.

We’re told in Psalm 19:7, of the Word of God, that it “is perfect, converting the soul.” What a blessed way that the Spirit uses the Word. Paul said, in Romans 10, as we read, “Faith cometh by hearing.” Hearing what?—“the word of God.” And so conversion is one effect of the Spirit’s use of the Bible. And so, when the Bible is read and preached, and the Spirit’s at work in an unconverted one, he’s bringing them to be convinced of the truth of God’s Word. But he’s also bringing that unconverted one to be converted to embrace that Word. This is the mighty work of God. We noted, as mentioned, Romans 10—it’s there we read that “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the

word of God.” This is an important point, because Paul, in context, is speaking about preaching. And so you saw that earlier, that there must be a preacher who goes and preaches. And Paul’s saying, it’s preaching particularly that the Spirit loves to use, to give faith. And so, when it is that the preaching goes forth, and the Spirit blesses it, he blesses unconverted ones with the gift of faith, as Paul says, in Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace are ye saved through faith.” And then he goes on to say, this is not your doing, it’s not your works, it’s not of your works. Rather, “by grace are ye saved through faith.”

Well, what about toward those who have believed? What are the effects of God’s Spirit’s use of the Word then? To those who have believed, the Spirit uses the Word to build them up, as the *Catechism* says, “in holiness and comfort.” To be built up in holiness is to be sanctified. To be built up in comfort is to be assured. Now, there are many passages that speak of this, but if you look at John 17:17, you’ll see Christ praying, and as he prayed, he included this very beautiful request, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” So, Christ is asking the Father for this great blessing to his people. And how is it that the Father would bring about this sanctifying of them, the purifying of them, the building of them up in holiness and comfort? It’s by God’s Word. So as God blesses the Word by the ministry of his Spirit, his people are sanctified. You’ll remember Paul’s prayer in Ephesians, that he was praying that the eyes of their understanding would be opened, that they would know the will of God, and the riches of comfort that are theirs in Christ. And so, when it is that God is blessing his Word by the Spirit to his people, they will be convinced of sin, they’ll be humbled, and they’ll repent, and they’ll seek more grace from Christ. And as they feed upon Christ by faith, as the Spirit’s using the Word, they’ll grow in holiness. And likewise, as they’re drawn to Christ by the power of the Spirit using the Word, they’ll grow in comfort. So the Lord is nurturing them, maturing them, developing them, sanctifying them, and comforting them. What a blessing! And if you and I would ever be further sanctified, or more greatly comforted, we require this work of the Spirit through the Word.

Well, thirdly, *The Pursuit of Blessing by the Word*. We need to think about how blessed a gift it is that God has given us his Word. There are many people in this world who don’t have the Bible. Perhaps you’re accessing this lesson, and you don’t have a copy of the Bible. Maybe it is that you’re listening to this lesson, and passages of the Bible are being quoted and presented, and you’re wondering, “Oh, that I could read more of the Bible!” Many people have the Bible, and those who have it often don’t treasure it as they ought. We need to see how precious a gift to us the Bible is. We read in Psalm 12, and verse 6, “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” What a blessed thing, a pure thing the Word of God is. Paul wrote to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3, and verse 15, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” In itself, the Bible is perfect and pure. And as God uses it, it alone is able to lead us to faith in Christ Jesus. Supremely, we see then its transcendent value. It is a book like no other book. Oh, it has its words, it’s sentences, its subjects and objects, its verbs and adjectives, and parts of speech; it records history; it gives promises and prophecies. But there’s no book like the Bible, because the Bible alone is able to make us wise unto salvation which is by faith in Christ Jesus.

This is because of what the Bible is. Paul writes of this in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. It’s breathed out by God. The Bible is God’s Word. Just as you and I speak, and form words for others to hear, by our breathing and forming of our sounds into words, the Bible contains the very words of the true and living God.

There's no book like this book.

Well, since it alone is the true, inerrant, and perfect Word of God, and since it alone is able to make us wise unto salvation, we ought to use it differently than other books. Oh, we ought to read other books carefully. But this book is of a special nature, because it is God's Word. I do not mean that we should be superstitious and invent ceremonies regarding God's Word. Nor do I mean that we should not approach it with diligence to understand it in our reading. We simply mean that as it is the Word of God, whenever we read it, whenever we hear it read, whenever the Word of God is preached, we should approach it for what it is. It is God's Word. Think of how certain men and women in this world would cause us to listen more attentively if they were to speak—perhaps a ruler of your land, or some dignitary of a foreign nation. Because of their office, we listen more attentively. A teacher, or maybe a principal of a school would make us pay attention. Well, who more to make us pay attention than God himself? And whenever God's Word is read, and whenever it's preached faithfully, it's God who's speaking.

Well, this is why the *Catechism* directs us to the following ways we should use God's Word. As we use it in the way noted, and as God graciously blesses it then to us, we enjoy the rich blessings which Christ has purchased for his people.

Well first, notice we're to approach it rightly. This is what the Answer to Question #90 means when it says, when we read it, we're to "attend thereunto." That is, when we think of the word "attend," we sometimes think merely of the word "to be present." If we attend a dinner, for instance, we're present at the meal. But the word used in the *Catechism* comes from one meaning to direct or exert ourselves. It's related to our use of the word "attentive." If we are attentive, we are focused and observing something diligently.

Well, how is it then that we are supposed to attend to the reading and preaching of God's Word? How are we to approach it or focus upon God's Word? Notice, "with diligence, preparation, and prayer." Well, to be diligent, is to be eager, committed, and active in a work. To approach God's Word with diligence then means that we are to be eager, committed, and active in that reading and hearing. Sometimes people think of the sermon, as if that's the time when the preacher is active in worship, and the people aren't. And yet, what a false view of what's taking place! When the preacher is preaching, the hearers are to be actively, eagerly engaged to understand and to discern the truth.

Well, additionally we're to approach it with preparation. This preparation is twofold: outward and inward. Outwardly, we should prepare, by setting distractions aside. Private reading requires that we set aside time. We don't approach God's Word randomly. We prepare; we have a general plan, a time, a place, a portion to read. Now, we don't need to be so strict about this that we cannot adapt when needed. For instance, if we typically read first thing in the morning at our desk or at a bench, there will be times when we're away from home, so we won't be able to read at our usual spot. Or if we're reading through a particular book of the Bible, perhaps something comes up in our family, and for a few days it would be wise to focus on a different part of the Bible. The point is that we don't approach God's Word carelessly. Well, similarly, when we're going to church, we put away distractions so that we can focus on the reading and preaching of God's Word among the other elements of worship. We don't approach it carelessly or casually.

But it's not merely an outward thing. There is an inward, spiritual act of preparing. First Peter 2, verses 1 and 2, Peter writes, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Peter calls us to prepare by setting aside sins—malice, guile, and so on. This

is a preparing by repentance. If we're going to feed upon the pure milk of God's Word, we should turn away from the bitter poison of sin and the world. This is to prepare.

Well, to approach God's Word with prayer is to confess that we need God to help us understand. We need him to bless his Word to us. Psalm 119 is filled with these kinds of requests. As one example—and I encourage you to find others—notice Psalm 119, verse 18: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." This is how we should approach both our personal and family reading of God's Word, and our listening to it read and preached in public worship. If we're to enjoy any blessing, it must be as God mercifully helps us. So surely, we ought to pray.

Well, notice also what we're to do when we read it or hear it preached—we're to "receive it with faith and love." Well, to receive it with faith and love is to lead us then to laying it up in our hearts, and practicing it in our lives. So to receive it with faith means that we're believing it. We're not just understanding. We need to understand—our minds must be active—but we're trusting it, the commands—we're saying, yes, these are true, we're going to submit to them; the promises, yes these are true, we're going to embrace them, and we're going to cherish them. So we're willingly hearing; we're with desire hearing; and with belief we're hearing. And so, when we have this faith and love, as it's read, as it's preached, and know there's no other book that we can do this, where from the beginning to the end, we say, "Whatever here is stated, I will believe it, and it's good to be loved.

Well, when this happens, it leads to laying it up in our hearts, and practicing it in our lives. To lay it up in our hearts is to meditate on it and treasure God's Word. It's as if when we take something that's sweet, and we keep it in our mouth because of the pleasure it brings. When God's Word enters our heart, we say, "Oh, I want it to stay there." Psalm 119:11 says, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." True, we must understand the Bible with our minds, however, it is to hit a deeper target. It's to penetrate to our hearts, so that what we love and delight in is now loving and delighting in Christ. We meditate on it, and it nourishes our souls.

To practice it in our lives means that we believe its promises, we obey its commandments. We're not merely reading or listening to God's Word to be informed. That's true, but we're being informed in order, by God's grace, as the Spirit blesses, to be transformed; to be changed; to be saved; to be sanctified; to be made to glorify and enjoy God.

Well, if you have access to the Bible, consider what a blessed treasure you have—God's very Word. Oh, how it ought to be regularly read, and prayed over, and meditated upon, and studied! And when you go to church, oh, how eagerly you ought to listen to the Word read and preached, and with anticipation, yearning and praying, "Oh God, bless thou the reading and the preaching, that my soul would know the effectual work of the Spirit applying Christ to me." You see, this changes the way we prepare. It changes the way we read. Now, with anticipation and longing, I don't only want to understand. I do want to understand, but with that understanding, I long to be transformed. If unconverted, "Oh God, convert me!" If converted, "Oh God, sanctify me, instruct me, guide me!"

And so, as you read God's Word, notice, you need God's Spirit to open and apply this treasure to you. You may be able to read it, you may be able to understand the main points, but you'll never enjoy the true riches of it without the Spirit's sovereign and gracious work. This means, as we read it and hear it, we need to see how dependent we are upon God the Holy Spirit, and so, how we ought to cry out to him, to depend upon him, and to resolve that when there's a commandment given, I will obey it. Where there's a promise given, by God's grace, I will believe it. Where history

is recorded, I will acknowledge it to be true. We prepare, in order, by God's blessing, to receive, that we then, by his work, would glorify and enjoy him. Oh, treasure God's Word, read God's Word, listen to God's Word, hear good preaching. And as you do, may God, by his Spirit, bless it to you that you would better know the riches of grace through Jesus Christ.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #48

Means of Grace: The Sacraments

Question 91: *How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?*

Answer: *The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.*

Question 92: *What is a sacrament?*

Answer: *A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.*

Question 93: *Which are the sacraments of the New Testament?*

Answer: *The sacraments of the New Testament are, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.*

We now come to how God uses the sacraments as means of grace for saving his people. You may not be familiar with the word “sacrament” just yet. That’s okay, we’ll work through what is meant by this term, both in this lesson and in the following lessons. Right now, simply notice that we’re still considering the means of grace—those ordinances that Christ instituted to use in order to apply his salvation to us. So in other words, the sacraments are means that Christ uses to apply his salvation to us, just as the Word is used to apply salvation to us. Now, just as we don’t say, every time we hear God’s Word, or anyone who reads the Bible, they’re most necessarily saved; neither do we say, wherever the sacraments are used, whoever uses them, they’re certainly saved. Remember, just as the Word is made effective by the Spirit’s work, so the sacraments are only made effective by the Spirit’s work.

We have three Questions, as it introduces to us the sacraments.

Firstly, Question #91: “How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?”—“The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith received them.”

Well, it may be interesting to us that the *Catechism* first deals with how the sacraments are made blessings, instead of first defining what a sacrament is. However, one reason for this may be

that there both was, and still is much confusion over how God uses the sacraments.

Notice the word “virtue.” This is a word meaning “strength” or “power.” So the blessing does not merely come to us by a strength within the sacrament. It comes from God using the sacrament, and blessing us to enjoy the saving benefits in Christ. The answer in mind is that the only way the sacraments are used for blessing us, is as the blessing of Christ and the working of the Spirit is so applied to us. So, we start with this Question, not only because the *Catechism* does, but because it’s useful to make the point that the sacraments are blessings to us for salvation, only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of the Spirit in those who receive these sacraments by faith. In other words, this answer reminds us that it is by grace alone through faith alone that anyone receives any blessing by them. We’ll look more at it in a moment.

But now, Question #92: “What is a sacrament?”—“A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.”

By “sensible signs,” is meant something that appeals to our senses—sight, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling—these are our senses. And so something that’s sensible appeals to, and is observed by, and discerned by our senses. Well, notice, they are a “sensible signs.” It points to something else. A sign doesn’t point to itself, it’s pointing to something else. And the Answer tells us that the sacraments point to Christ, and the benefits or the blessings of the new covenant.

Well, Question #93: “Which are the sacraments of the New Testament?”—“The sacraments of the New Testament are, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.”

Well, this helpfully tells us how many sacraments there are under the New Testament, how many sacred signs appointed by Christ to represent himself and his benefits. There are two—baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, both of which we’ll look at more fully in the coming lessons.

For our lesson now, we look at three main points: first, *The Meaning of the Sacraments*; and secondly, *The Grace Brought by the Sacraments*.

So first then, *The Meaning of the Sacraments*. The word “sacrament” itself is a word that was used in the Latin Bible to translate the word “mystery.” So Paul speaks of the mysteries, the revelations that God has given. But it was also used in another context to speak of a sacred oath. And so, a sacred oath was a holy thing, and it was a pledge, a testimony of something that was solemnly taken up. And so it signified importance. And when one took a sacred pledge, they were giving a sign, as it were, that what they were saying would be what would be done. Now this is important for understanding why we use the term “sacrament.” The sacraments—baptism and the Lord’s Supper—are things that God has instituted, which, as we’ll see, are pledges to us of what he promises to do.

Now notice, a sacrament is an ordinance directly instituted by Christ. This is merely by observing the Bible. We find baptism and the Lord’s Supper both directly instituted by Christ. And so, for instance, in Matthew 28, Christ testifies that all power in heaven and earth is given to him. And as he’s commissioning the apostles, he said that they are to go and do what? They are to teach all the nations, to observe whatsoever things that he commanded them. He also said, “baptizing them, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. So it’s no surprise to us, when we read through the Book of Acts, that as those who are outside of God’s covenant are brought into God’s covenant, this sign of baptism in the name of the Triune God is applied to them, because Christ directly instituted it.

Notice, it’s an ordinance of Christ. It’s not just a church ordinance. It’s Christ’s ordinance. He’s the one who’s King, and he has appointed it to be done. So we can’t invent sacraments today. We

have to observe the ones Christ gave to the church. Remember the Lord's Supper. On the last night of Christ's earthly ministry before his death, he partook of the passover, and then he instituted the Lord's Supper. And we see him doing it. It's not the apostles doing it, he's instituting it. And so a sacrament is an ordinance that's directly instituted by Christ.

And second, a sacrament is an ordinance that uses sensible signs. And so, when the *Catechism* is helping us with this, it's pointing out that both baptism and the Lord's Supper are not just words. But rather, they are things, material things that Christ has set apart to point to something else. And so you think for a moment with reference to both baptism and the Lord's Supper—indeed, we will look more fully at this in the coming lessons—but both of them, they use signs, sensible signs. So baptism uses water. Water is something you can touch, you can feel, you can hear it when it's poured, or when it's moving around; you can see it, and so on. And so our senses observe it. They are sensible signs. The Lord's Supper, you have bread and wine. Bread you can touch, you can eat, you can feel; and so with wine, you can smell it, you can taste it, you can see it, and so on. They are signs that appeal to our senses—not just one, but multiple. And so, we'll look at this in greater depth. But then think, baptism is using water to wash. So there's a sign being given to us. Washing is cleansing. Just like when you and I get dirty, what do we need to do? We need to be washed. And baptism is a sign of cleansing. Well, the Lord's Supper is bread and wine, but it's bread that's broken, and it's shared, and we eat it. And the cup is passed around, and we drink it, at least those who are at the table of the Lord's Supper.

And so there's action with the elements. There's bread, there's wine, there's water, but then there are actions that are being done. And what are these actions doing? They're pointing to something, and so it's a sensible sign—then third—which Christ instituted to direct us to Christ and his saving work. And so the *Catechism* speaks of “Christ and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.”

Now, the word “represented” is probably familiar to you. Well, you can think for a moment that to represent something is to picture something to us. It is to present it to us in another way. And so, Christ is representing to us himself. You can see this clearly, for instance, in the Lord's Supper. Christ takes bread, he blesses it, he breaks it, and he says, “This is my body, which is broken for you” (1 Corinthians 11:24). And so it's a sign that we can see, and we can hear the words, and even hear the breaking of the bread, and we can touch the bread and taste the bread. It's a sign, but it's pointing us to what he did for us as sinners. And likewise, the cup of wine is taken. He says, “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed...for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:23). And so it's pointing us to Christ. And particularly, it's pointing us to his work of saving sinners on the cross. Baptism is not just water. It's water applied, washing us, as it were, as a sign, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And so it's saying that, whereas we stand unclean, we need to be cleansed in order to enjoy the fellowship of the Triune God.

This raises many questions, I am quite sure, but we'll get to open those meanings more fully in the coming lessons. All of these things are directing us to Christ and his saving work. And so it's representing, it's re-picturing these things for us.

But they're also sealing. Now, this is a word that perhaps you use in a different way. Sometimes there are certain bags that we seal. So there's a way of bringing the opening closed, and that way, whatever is in the bag is now sealed and secured in it. Well that word “seal” as we use it, comes from the use of that word in a different sense. And so, for instance, we use the word “seal” still in this way, when we talk about, on a certificate, there's an authority that has given its seal of approval to that document. So, for instance, in some nations, when someone is married, the government, or

the church will set its seal. And so this is a sign that says, “We authorize, and we confirm that this marriage took place.” Some places have birth certificates, and on the birth certificate, there’s a seal that’s been applied that says, “This surely took place.” Well, in ancient days, kings and queens and other great rulers would have a certain sign, perhaps on a ring, and they would have a document that was set before them. And if it was their document, and they’re telling what they would have all of their people hear, and they would have it written out, and then they would pour wax over it, and they’d take their sign—their ring that had a special sign on it—and they’d press it on the wax before it cooled. And now, the sign of their royalty is applied to that wax, that showed everyone it bears the authority of the king. What did that do? It gave assurance to the people, “This really is the king who has said these things.”

What’s the point of all of this? A seal is showing the authority behind it. It’s telling us by whose authority this is done, who verifies that this is true, who’s saying that this is real. It’s a good thing of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. They are showing us God is the one who is giving us these promises, if there’s *his* seal, if there’s *his* authority. And so, what a blessing the sacraments are, that God has not only promised us with his Word, but then he gives us these signs and seals, the sacraments, which are meant to assure us that the promises are true, and we are to believe him as he has indeed has promised.

But then they also apply, that is, they take what is far from us and place it upon us. It shares these blessing with us. Now, we’ll note that these blessings are enjoyed by faith. So it’s not just by the water applied in the name of the Triune God; it’s not just by the bread taken and eaten, or the wine as we drink it that these things are done, but rather as the Spirit blesses, and we eat and drink in faith, or as we believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ as he has promised himself to us in our baptisms. You see, then it is that the riches of his salvation are applied to us.

Well, there’s a lot that we can say, but let’s look at one example from an Old Testament sacrament. Notice how Paul speaks of this in Abraham’s life. Abraham, of course, was a believer. He was a believer before the earthly ministry of the incarnate Savior, Jesus Christ. So he’s a believer in the Old Testament. He did not have baptism, he did not have the Lord’s Supper. Those are sacraments of the New Testament. However, he did have circumcision, and other Old Testament sacraments. And notice how Paul speaks of circumcision in Romans 4, verse 11. He writes, “And he”—that’s Abraham—“received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.” Now notice this very important passage. It’s telling us that Abraham first believed and he was justified, so it was that as it says, “a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised.” This is important, because it’s reminding us that one may be a believer, one may be converted and saved without the sacraments. But this shouldn’t make us say, “Well, the sacraments aren’t important,” because though Abraham was a believer, God then gave him circumcision, which was a sign, thus pointing to something else—namely, the cleansing of filth from him. But it was also a seal, that which says, as an assurance from God, “This is real”—“A seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised.”

And so we see that the sacrament of circumcision, as all sacraments, both Old and New Testaments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, they’re given as a help to us. They don’t tell us something different than the Word of God—they confirm the Word of God. It’s as if God is saying to us, “Yes, here is my promise. Yes, here is my assurance. And, in order to strengthen your assurance, I give you this sign, this sacrament.” What a blessing it is to us that God so cares for us

to give us these helps to our faith.

Well, just note, as the *Catechism* indicates, that there are two sacraments under the New Testament—baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are the two sacraments which Christ has immediately ordained as ordinances to represent, to seal, and to apply his grace to those who receive him by faith, by the blessing of Christ and the working of the Spirit.

Well now, second, *The Grace Brought by the Sacraments*. How is it that God uses the sacraments to give blessings to his people? Well, first, we can say how he does it, and second, we can say how he does not do it. We can note four truths about how he blesses by the sacraments. It will be quick, because we have more to say in other lessons.

One thing we should notice—he does it by his grace. It's not by our works. Notice the Question again: it's "by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit." It's not by our own worthiness. It's freely conferred to us by his grace, as any blessing we ever receive is a blessing to us by grace. All of salvation is ever given by grace, by the Word of God, by the sacraments of God, by prayer.

Well, two, he does it by the blessing of Christ. So it's by his grace, as mediated through Jesus Christ, our great and high Priest. And what a blessing that is to us that as we seek the blessings, we're seeking them in, by, and through the Lord Jesus Christ. He's intimately with us, providing us the riches of his salvation.

Three, as the *Catechism* notes, he does it "by the working of his Spirit." This is no different than the way the Word is made a blessing to us. We read the Word, we might understand the Word, but we aren't blessed savingly except the Spirit blesses us by the Word. Well, similarly, it's the same with baptism and the Lord's Supper. We may be baptized, we may come to the Lord's table, but it's the Spirit who must work powerfully to convey to us the riches of Christ, and minister faith in us that we receive these things. And so, if ever we're to enjoy the grace of salvation through this means, the Spirit must be graciously at work in us.

Four, as the *Catechism* notes, he does it in those who receive the blessings by faith. So it's not just by attending baptism, or by being baptized, but one preeminent way the Spirit works is he forms faith in us, that we then look to Christ and receive the promise. Just as when we hear the Word preached, it's by faith that we receive those promises. So, when we come to the Lord's table, in due time by God's blessing, it is as by faith we eat and drink; or as we've been baptized, it is by faith we trust in God who cleanses us. So it's his grace given, giving us faith, by which we then receive these rich blessings.

Now second, we can clarify how he does not do it. One, he does not do it by some special strength or power in the sacrament itself. This is what the *Catechism* means when it says, "not by any virtue in them." It's not as if the sacraments are magical. It's not something that in itself it has something special. Bread, as we'll see, remains bread. But by the blessing of Christ and the grace of God, it becomes the means by which our faith feeds upon Jesus Christ. But the bread is still bread. It's bread, yes, set apart, and ought to be used reverently, but it's not by the sacrament itself. It's by the blessing of Christ.

Another way that this blessing does not come to us is by some special strength or power in the minister—the virtue "in him that doth administer them." So it's not as if we get a special blessing if the minister is a special man, versus a more basic blessing if the minister is not as special. Rather, the sacrament comes to us as the Word comes to us. It blesses us by his grace. So we may not have the best pastor, the most informed pastor. We may not have the most studied pastor. And if a faithful pastor comes and administers the Lord's Supper to us, we look not to the pastor, but rather, to the King, Jesus Christ, and it's by him that we're able to receive blessings through Christ. So it

is that we are ever brought to look to Jesus Christ.

Oh, what rich things the sacraments are, that by these signs and seals, Christ is represented, he's sealed, and applied to those who by faith receive him. Well, one thing that stands out as we close is how caring Christ is for his people. It would have been most gracious for him, simply to give us his Word. However, he also gave us these signs that confirm his Word to us. His Word comes to us, and says, "I will cleanse you. I will forgive your sins. Trust in me, and I will cleanse you of all your iniquity." That's a great blessing. But the sacrament of baptism is given to us, and by the outward applying of water in the name of the Triune God, we're given, as it were, this further confirmation. What a blessing that is! God doesn't just say, "I've said it, and that's it." He says it, and then he shows it to us.

Now notice, both of them, the Word preached, baptism administered, in this case, are directing us to look to him in faith. This is how we're to approach the sacraments. We hear the Bible read, of course. We see baptism administered, or we're baptized. But it's not that we're looking to baptism itself, or the Bible. We're listening ultimately to God, and believing God. We're looking through, as it were, the sacrament unto God's promise. And it's to him we ask then, "Oh, as you promised in your Word, and as you've given me this outward sign, please then, as you've promised, wash me from my sins."

How sweet it is that God should so care for us! All of this then should lead us to a right use of the sacraments. Perhaps you've been baptized, and if that's the case, praise the Lord for that. But it should lead you to remember that baptism is an outward display of that covenant promise. And so then we should reflect on that, and say, "Have I not only been baptized, but have I then trusted in God, who has both promised by his Word, and given this outward sign to me? Have I looked to him and said, 'Cleanse me'?" He's promised to do it, and so promises call for faith. You can think of it this way. The Word is a verbal, that is, it's a promise given in words, it's a verbal promise. It gives us promises: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Well, baptism is an outwardly displayed confirmation of that promise. It's God showing us his promise. Whether it's the verbal promise, or the displayed promise, they're both calling us then to look to God and call upon him to do what he's promised. It's calling for faith.

And so I encourage you to remember these things—the displayed promise of the sacraments, the written and spoken promise of God's Word. And may they both lead you, as means of grace, to seek the grace of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Now, in the next couple of lessons, we get to look more carefully at baptism and then the Lord's Supper. And as we do, we'll see all this opened up all the more, how rich of God to give us these precious signs and seals, to confirm his promises, and to direct us to trust in him.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #49

Means of Grace: Christian Baptism

Question 94: *What is baptism?*

Answer: *Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's.*

Question 95: *To whom is baptism to be administered?*

Answer: *Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized.*

In this lesson, we have two Questions looking at a particular sacrament. Remember that sacraments are a means of grace. They are instituted by Christ to serve as a sign and a seal of the blessings of the covenant of grace. In particular, we look at baptism. I imagine that you've seen someone baptized before, and if you've read through the New Testament, you've certainly come across examples recorded in the Scripture. Perhaps you yourself have been baptized. We hope that this lesson will clarify and confirm the precious gift Christ has given us in baptism. The two Questions are #94 and #95.

Question #94: "What is baptism?"—"Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's."

This Question focuses on the very basic truths of baptism. Notice particularly the word "ingrafting." It's a word that is taken from agriculture, where there can be a branch of one plant grafted into the trunk of another, and so, then it can live upon the other plant. And the idea is that we are grafted in, or brought into fellowship with Christ, to live upon him.

You'll notice that the words in this Answer, some of them, are taken directly from Scripture. For instance, in Matthew 28, verse 19, Christ says, "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." These, of course, are the names of the three divine persons of

the Godhead. And one thing that baptism teaches us is that there is great intimacy with the Triune God held forth. Well, we'll think about that more.

Question #95 is, "To whom is baptism to be administered?"—"Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized."

Well, this Answer is taking up the idea of the subject of baptism—who should be baptized. And we'll look at that more in depth in our lesson.

So let's think of the three main points for our lesson, which are, first, *An Instituted Sign*; second, *A Spiritual Message*; and third, *A Covenantal Privilege*.

First then, *An Instituted Sign*. As a sacrament, baptism was immediately instituted by Christ. That is, Christ himself instituted baptism. We see this in Matthew, chapter 28, verses 18 through 20. It's a glorious passage, well worthy of your study. But notice particularly as it relates to baptism. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Just very quickly notice that the baptizing is a mark that's given to those who are Christ's disciples, that as the apostles went forth, and ministers still today teaching all nations, then it is that they are to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and to continue teaching them, that they would then embrace the fuller commandments of Christ as he has given himself in his Word. And so it's a mark, a sign of discipleship, of belonging to Christ. This is basic to the idea.

But we want to look at the outward part of baptism for just a moment. The outward part, the sensible part—remember thinking of a sacrament that has something that appeals to our physical senses—it is the washing with water. That baptism demands water is clear throughout the New Testament. Particularly in Acts chapter 8, Philip is telling an Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus Christ. And then notice what happens in Acts 8, verse 36: "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" And so, of course, water is needed then for baptism. The *Catechism* does not specify a particular way the water is to be applied to the one being baptized. Now this is important, because some Christians have demanded that the only way one can be baptized is by being immersed, that is, to be brought all the way under water, to have his whole body brought under water.

However, notice how the word itself is used throughout the New Testament. The word that we're familiar with—baptize, baptizing, baptism—comes from a Greek word, *baptizō*. Of course, you can hear the relationship there. Well, knowing that helps us in a number of ways. For instance, we find this word translated on occasion. For instance, in Mark, chapter 7, verses 3 and 4, we read, "For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brassen vessels, and of tables." Now these verses in context are Christ reproving the false practices and superstitions of the Jews of his day. But for our purpose, notice verse 4 in particular. It's helpful because, in this verse, in the Greek, the word "baptize" and "baptizing" is used. In our translation, it says, "except they wash." Well, the Greek word here for wash is "baptize," and it could have been translated for us, "except they baptize." And later in the verse, it says, "washing of cups, and pots, brassen vessels, and of tables." Again, the word here is "baptizing," that is, the baptizing of

cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.

Well, how does this help us at all? Well, of course, the Pharisees and other Jews were not interested in Christian baptism, but the idea is helpful to us to understand what the word means. For instance, the word “tables,” there in verse 4, is a word referring to a flat piece of furniture for eating, or as in a flat piece of furniture for sleeping, like a bed or a couch. Whatever the case, plunging such a piece of furniture under water for a ceremonial purpose, every time before eating, is unthinkable. We have no record of that. It’s not as if the Jews came into a house, and said, before we eat, we have to take that table and plunge it under water. Instead, the simple point is that they were sprinkling water upon these items as an outward sign of purifying them.

The same idea is expressed in Hebrews 9, and verse 10. In this verse, the Old Testament ceremonies—divinely instituted ceremonies—are being contrasted with the New Testament. And among the Old Testament ceremonies, there are those which were said to have “stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.” And so, in Hebrews, what’s being contrasted is the old covenant signs and ceremonies, with the new covenant reality. But for our purpose, notice the word “washings,” in Hebrews 9, verse 10. It’s the word for “baptism.” In fact, it could have been translated “baptisms.” And so instead of as we read it, “divers washings,” it could have been translated “divers baptisms.” And in the Old Testament, we find instances where there were ceremonial sprinklings of water upon things that were to be set apart unto the Lord. We do not find something being plunged under water, but we do find instances of the priests sprinkling with water.

The point in all of this is to see that the main use in the Bible of the word “baptize,” or “baptism,” or “baptizing,” is associated with washing. Notice, this washing is not just an outward thing, because in Christian baptism, it is to be in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. This is, of course, to be pronounced audibly at the baptism, because the Word of God and the sign he’s instituted are always joined together. Why? Well, it’s because the sign—here, baptism—is a display of his promise. And doing these things helps display before all that it’s not some superstitious, religious institution of men, but it’s a divinely-provided outward display of a promise being given. So while water is being applied to the one being baptized, the words spoken—that he’s being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost—these words declare what this is a sign of.

Well, what is the message? Well, for this we look at our next point: second, *A Spiritual Message*. We could simplify by saying this: the message of baptism is the message of the gospel. As sinners, we’re unclean, we’re profane, we’re corrupt, and we have no right to draw near to God. Well, just as physically, if we’re dirty, we need to be cleansed before we participate in various privileges; spiritually, before we enjoy the fellowship of God, we must be cleansed. But not for washing of the outward man, but rather, the purifying of our conscience, as Peter writes.

Christ said, “baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” This is not just an expression of authority, but rather, “in the name of” is actually an expression of fellowship. In other words, they’re being brought into fellowship with the Triune God. The one being baptized is being given a great privilege to be offered the fellowship of God. Well, in order for that to happen, he must be cleansed. Remember when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, in Isaiah 6? He instantly thought, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips.” Well, that’s what all of us are. We’re unclean sinners. And if ever we should be brought into the fellowship of a holy God, we must be cleansed. And so there’s an outward sign of it.

Well, the significance of this can be seen in a number of places. In Romans 6:3, for instance,

Paul says those who are baptized are “baptized into Jesus Christ.” This means that baptism tells us of union with Christ. Not that we become Christ, but rather, we partake of Christ. We enjoy his fellowship. This is why the *Catechism* says that “baptism...doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ. To “signify” means to point out; in other words, it’s a sign. To “seal” means to authorize, or to confirm. And so, baptism is this outward display of a sign and seal that we are being brought to enjoy Christ. It’s an outward sign, pointing to that privilege. We’re being brought to Christ to enjoy him as our Savior. We’re being brought to the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost to enjoy the Triune God and his fellowship.

Well, the applying of water in the name of the Triune God indicates that in order to enjoy that fellowship, we need to be cleansed from our sin. It tells us the great message of the gospel, that God is coming and saying, “I would have you unto me, but you first must be cleansed.” It also tells us who it is that cleanses us from our sin, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, there’s another part of this message. Now he speaks of what we just talked about, but he also speaks of the enjoyment of his benefits. So it’s union with God through Jesus Christ, but it’s also then union in order to enjoy and live upon what he provides us. Thus, the *Catechism* says that baptism signifies and seals our “partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace.” To partake is to share in the good things that God has sworn to us in his covenant. What this means is that God is drawing near to us and saying, “I am giving you this sign, that I authorize you to enjoy all the riches of salvation by Christ. He’s not just content to tell us of it, he gives us then a sign to assure us of these things.

Now, as with all of God’s promises, this thing demands that we trust him. So it is with baptism. We consider the promise shown by baptism, all the riches of Jesus Christ given to us—forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, joy in the Holy Ghost, heaven forever—and it is then that we must by faith embrace them. What a privilege it is that God does not merely tell us, but then he draws near and, as it were, through the waters of baptism, holds forth a sign to assure us that this promise is for us. It is a privilege indeed. In fact, if you or I have been baptized, we can always think about the message that God has brought to us in our baptism, because that message is the message of the gospel held forth to us.

Well, there’s another part of this message. It speaks of union with Christ; it speaks of partaking of all the benefits of the covenant of grace; but it also testifies of commitment. Notice the *Catechism*, “Our engagement to be the Lord’s.” This is because God is separating us. He’s taking us out of filth, and bringing us into a covenant of grace where there is holiness. And so, by being baptized, God has claimed us. And as being claimed by God, we’re then to walk as those in fellowship with God. As God has said, in effect, “I take you to be mine,” we then come to him and say, “I take you to be mine.” There’s an engagement. And if you’ve been baptized, oh, remember this, that God has placed this upon you with all of its privileges, and you’re called then to give yourself wholly to him. Oh, there’s so much more in baptism, but I hope that this message will help you think more through it.

Before we close, consider then the third point of our lesson, that this is *A Covenantal Privilege*. Baptism is not for everyone in the world. Not everyone is supposed to be baptized. Instead, it’s a privilege for those who are in covenant with God. So first, we can say this: if someone is outside of God’s covenant, that person first must confess Jesus Christ as Savior before being baptized. There are many examples of this in the New Testament, particularly in the book of Acts. When someone who was an unbeliever outside of God’s covenant first trusted in Jesus Christ, that person was then baptized—so faith, then baptism. The kingdom of Jesus, of course, was advancing throughout

the book of Acts, gathering in people who were out of God's covenant, bringing them into God's covenant. And so, when they were brought in, then they were baptized. A good example of this is the one mentioned earlier with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, in Acts chapter 8, verses 36 and 37. We read, "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So this one outside of God's covenant—the Ethiopian eunuch—first believes, and then is baptized.

Now, by the way, this pattern is exactly how the Old Testament worked as well. Before one who was not a Jew could enjoy the benefits of the covenant of grace under the old covenant, for instance, before they could take the passover, that non-Jew had to be circumcised first. And so the sign of cleansing—the filthy part, circumcision—was applied to one who's brought into the covenant. For instance, Exodus 12, verses 47 and 48: "All the congregation of Israel shall keep it"—the passover—"And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof." Notice, circumcision was a sign of entrance into the covenant. And that particularly was under the old covenant.

Well, under the New Testament, that entrance is baptism. But it was not only believers who had to be baptized, just as it was not only those who were believing as adults were circumcised. This is because believers and their children are in God's covenant. Remember, baptism is a sacrament of the covenant of grace. This should lead us to ask the question, who is then included in the covenant of grace throughout history? And without any hesitation, the biblical answer is, "believers together with their children." There are too many examples of this to give them all, but think of some big ones that illustrate it quite clearly. When Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord, who entered the ark? It wasn't just Noah. It was also his household, his children, his wife. When Abraham believed the Lord and it was counted to him for righteousness, and he received, as Paul says, the sign and seal of the righteousness he had by faith (Romans 4:11), who was circumcised? It wasn't just Abraham who received that covenant sign, that sign and seal of the righteousness he had by faith. Instead, it was all of his male children in his household. His son, Ishmael, at thirteen years old, was circumcised, not by any faith of Ishmael, but by the faith of his father. And when his son, Isaac, was born, at eight days old, Isaac was circumcised. The point is that the believer and his children, his household are given the sign. It doesn't mean that everyone who receives the sign is saved, or is a believer. In other words, while Abraham was a believer and was circumcised, Ishmael was not. And remember, Isaac was but eight days old when he was circumcised. Ishmael would prove to reject the covenant, and Isaac, by God's grace, would be brought to embrace the covenant. And again, Isaac's two sons, Jacob and Esau, both were circumcised in their infancy. Well, as we know, Esau proved to be a rejecter of the covenant, while Jacob, by God's grace, came to believe the promise of the covenant. The main point is that a believer and his children, throughout the Bible, they together received the sign of the covenant.

And we do not find any rejection of this very point in the New Testament. Think by way of contrast, the dietary laws of the Old Testament were established hundreds of years after Abraham. These particular laws were instituted under Moses. So this was well after the flood—remember Noah and his household; it was well after Abraham—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; all of them as well, and many generations after would have been observing the covenant inclusion of children. But these dietary restrictions were instituted under Moses, and they provided certain regulations of what they could and could not eat. And so, when it came time to remove those dietary restrictions,

God was very clear and decisive, revealing that change to his church. You can read of this in Acts chapter 10, when God gave Peter a clear vision of the same. Paul dealt with the liberty to eat all sorts of foods in various of his epistles. And so there's no mistaking it, the dietary laws of the Old Testament do not apply to us under the New Testament. Now what does this have to do with baptism? What it shows is that when God determined a change of practice he instituted, he did so clearly, explicitly, and by means of divine revelation. However, when it comes to the point of including children of believers in receiving the covenant sign, there's no verse in the Bible that says anything to the effect that children no longer receive the sign of the covenant. And so, while we clearly see that circumcision is no longer observed, and baptism is now the sign of entrance into the covenant, we do not find anywhere where children are not to be receiving that sign. Well, there are examples we could give. Lydia, for instance, she is mentioned as believing, and her whole household is baptized. You can see that in Acts 16, verses 14 and 15. Well, we trust the point is clear.

This doesn't mean that children are automatically saved, just as neither Ishmael nor Esau were believers. What it does mean is that God is giving a great promise to his people, in covenant with him. He's saying to the people, "I offer you myself. I give you myself. I hold forth myself to you, and I say, I will be your God, and your children's God." And therefore he calls us then to believe on him, to trust in him, to follow him, to obey him. The covenant is a relationship of promise and belief. The covenant sign is being shown to us and holding forth that promise. It's a great mercy. He's coming to us in our baptism and saying, "I take you," and therefore, we are to take him.

Well, we must close. And how merciful of God to give us such a sign as baptism! If ever we've become convinced of our sins, surely we'd become convinced of how filthy they are. And yet baptism is the outward sign of the cleansing we can receive through faith in Jesus Christ. If you've been baptized, there's a question you need to ask. Have you embraced the promise of cleansing through Jesus Christ? God has made a promise to you, and he's claimed you as his own. Have you, by his grace, cast yourself upon him, and said, "Oh, cleanse me, forgive me, and receive me" to enjoy the benefits of the covenant of grace? And if you've been baptized, you are claimed by God, and so are called to walk for him all of your life in fellowship, not by your own strength, but by the strength of having him as your God through Jesus Christ. Oh, the privilege of the sacrament of baptism, this means of grace! May God bless it to you, and to all of us.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #50

Means of Grace: The Lord's Supper

Question 96: *What is the Lord's Supper?*

Answer: *The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.*

We now turn our attention to the other sacrament of the New Testament, the Lord's Supper. We have two lessons dedicated to this great privilege and means of grace, but first, this lesson looks at what the Lord's Supper is. The next lesson, we'll look at how we're to partake of the Lord's Supper, and to do so rightly.

Well, for this lesson, we'll look at Question #96: "What is the Lord's Supper?"—the Answer: "The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace."

There is a lot in this Answer, and it is our hope that this lesson will encourage you to continue studying, because there's many that we won't be able to go too in depth in. But to help you, you go to the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all of which record the institution of the Lord's Supper, and you'll see rich things there that Christ says regarding the Lord's Supper. Moreover, in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, as we'll see, Paul spends time teaching on the same topic.

In the Answer itself, notice the words "corporal" and "carnal." Both of these words have to do with something physical: corporal—our body; and carnal—our flesh. And so it says that "the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood." They're saying that there's not a physical eating of his body and blood, and so on. We'll talk more about that later on.

But for our lesson itself, we want to look at three main points. Since the Lord's Supper is a New Testament sacrament, like baptism is a New Testament sacrament, two of our points are similar to our lesson on baptism. For instance, our first point is that the Lord's Supper is an instituted sign. You'll remember, baptism is an instituted sign. And our second point is that there's a spiritual

message to the Lord's Supper. And you'll remember that baptism has a spiritual message. But for our third point, we remember that the Lord's Supper gives us a spiritual meal. And so, our three points: *An Instituted Sign*; *A Spiritual Message*; and *A Spiritual Meal*.

Well, firstly then, *An Instituted Sign*. Again, as a sacrament, the Lord's Supper was immediately instituted by Christ. It was not established by his apostles, or the church in general. Rather, the Lord's Supper was given by Christ himself. In other words, it was established by the only Head and King of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is clear in the Gospel accounts. It's likewise clear by Paul's words in 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, when he speaks of that which he received of the Lord, he has delivered unto them (verse 23). And so it's important to see this. Just as with baptism, the Lord's Supper is Christ's instituted sacrament. And as he's the one who instituted both baptism and the Lord's Supper, then we have no right to modify or change them at all, unless he has told us to do so.

Well, looking more particularly at the Lord's Supper as a sign, it uses outward and physical things, namely bread and wine. Well, some have tried to make much of the fact that at the passover, the bread used was unleavened. This, of course, was because of the nature of the passover and unleavened bread. We don't deny that unleavened bread was used. However, when the bread is spoken of in the institution by Christ, and elsewhere in the New Testament, instead of using a word for "unleavened bread"—which there is one in the Greek—the word that is used is always the word for "common bread," which would include unleavened or leavened bread. And this point informs us that the bread that's to be used as a sign is simply common bread. At Jesus' time at the passover, the common bread that was there was unleavened bread, whereas in your region, or in my region, the common bread may be leavened bread. And so, it's common bread that is needed. This is helpful, because bread, of course, is a basic provision for health. While there is a rare disease by which some cannot digest aspects of bread rightly, the majority of mankind depend on various types of bread, and this even in their normal day-to-day meals. Now this is important for understanding the sign. We say that bread is a staple food, that is, it is standard, and it's part of the daily diet of mankind. Well, by using bread as the outward sign, Christ is telling us of the necessity of his death and believing his death, as we'll see.

Similarly, the wine used was common wine. We should remember that non-alcoholic, or more technically, unfermented grape juice, as we know it, did not exist in Jesus' day. The passover itself made use of wine. That is, we could say, grape juice that he become fermented, so as to have alcohol. The simplest evidence of this is in the New Testament itself. When Paul was correcting abuses in Corinth, he reproved them in the following terms—1 Corinthians 11, verses 20 and 21: "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken." That word "drunken" means to be drunk, to be overtaken by the effects of the abuse of alcohol. The Corinthians, in other words, had begun treating the Lord's Supper as if it were a common banquet, or a festival, or a common feast. They had misunderstood its purpose and nature. Because of this, they gorged themselves selfishly upon the bread, and upon the wine, so much so that some had become drunk, or intoxicated. Well, however much grape juice we drink, we will not become intoxicated. In order to become "drunken" or intoxicated, there must be alcohol involved.

The point is, in the Lord's Supper, Christ established wine to be used. There's a reason for this—many reasons. One is, when we think about the purpose of wine. Psalm 104, verse 15, reminds us that wine gladdens the heart of man. It is shameful that in our day, as in previous days, people abuse this good gift of the Lord. They make an idol of earthly pleasure, and their gods

are their bellies and their appetites, and they abuse the gift of God to their own shame, and they become drunken. And everywhere it's mentioned, drunkenness is shown to be and is condemned as sin. In no way does the Bible condone or permit drunkenness. However, though many abuse alcohol and wine, this does not mean we should not rightly use it to God's glory, especially in the Lord's Supper. Wine used as Christ directed points us to the gladness that he brings, and Christ was wise to institute this, and we should not seek to be wiser than he is.

Well, before moving on to consider more fully what these signs mean, notice that it's not simply bread and wine that stands as the signs. The *Catechism* rightly indicates that this common bread and this common wine have actions done to them. Notice, "by giving and receiving bread and wine according to Christ's appointment." It's this then that holds for the message. The bread and wine are not to be paraded around and looked upon. They're certainly not to be worshipped or revered. They're not merely to be thought upon in deep meditation. They are to be given by the minister in accordance with Christ's appointment, and received by the people. These words "according to Christ's appointment" are tremendously important. We referenced earlier, Paul mentioning this, 1 Corinthians 11, verse 23: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:" and so on. Notice that, though an apostle, Paul was very careful to observe the Lord's Supper in the same way that Christ established it. And so we need to use the bread and the wine as Christ established it. We need to be able to say, "As we're received, so have we delivered," as ministers of the gospel in our day.

Well, there's several parts to the giving and receiving of bread and wine as Christ did. First, as you look at the Gospel accounts, and as Paul himself states, he took it into his hands. So he took the bread, as the Gospels tell us, and he gave thanks—he blessed it. So the first thing he did was he took it into his hands. Second, he gives thanks and blesses it. But then third, he breaks the bread. And then fourth, he pronounces the meaning of the broken bread, "This is my body which is broken for you." And then fifth, he passed the bread and told them to eat it in remembrance of him. So we can summarize by saying there are five things surrounding Christ's giving of the bread.

Similarly with the cup. First, he took the cup of wine in his hands. Second, he gave thanks and blessed it. Third, he explained the meaning of the wine. And fourth, he passed the same cup to the disciples at the table, that they would drink it. "This cup is the new testament in my blood," he said as holding the cup. "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."

So these actions are full of meaning, as we'll see. Mark them down well in your mind. There are five basic actions regarding the Lord's Supper with reference to the bread; and there are four basic actions regarding the Lord's Supper with reference to the wine. For the bread, it's taken, it's blessed, it's broken, it's explained, it's shared. Similarly, for the cup, there are four actions. It's taken, it's blessed, it's explained, and then it's shared with the communicants. Remember these actions well. Bread and wine are the elements—the things used. But then there are actions with the bread and wine that make up the outward sign of the Lord's Supper.

Well, second then, *A Spiritual Message*. Having considered the outward part of the sign—the bread and wine, with actions performed to them—now consider what these mean. The *Catechism* says simply and yet elegantly that by this giving and receiving according to Christ's appointment, the bread and the wine, "his death is shewed forth." This is the main message of the Lord's Supper. Just as baptism's message is the message of the gospel—cleansing us from our sins, receiving us into fellowship with God through Christ, and causing us, as it were, to be in fellowship so that we walk with him—so the message of the Lord's Supper is the gospel—Jesus Christ died for sinners,

and he gives himself to us. It tells us that Jesus died. “This is my body,” Christ says, “which is broken for you... This cup is the new testament in my blood;” elsewhere, “which is shed... for the remission of sins.”

So Christ explains the broken bread by saying, It’s my body broken for you. Now we should be very clear—the bread is not physically his body. It doesn’t change into being his body. At the first Lord’s Supper, his body was intact, he stood before his disciples. He’s pointing out that this is a sign. It’s point out my body. But as my body is to be broken, so this bread is broken. It’s a visible picture of what would happen to him; and from our perspective, what did happen to him. He takes the bread in his hands, and he tears it apart. This reminds us that Christ’s body was torn.

But there’s much more in this. Why was it broken? Why did Christ die? Christ tells us, “This is my body broken for you.” The believers there assembled at the table are reminded that his death was not merely an example, or a lesson in self-denial—surely, it does teach us that. It was preeminently a substitution—Christ in the place of his people, bearing the wrath of God, and Christ assuring them that “I have paid it,” because, just as the bread is broken, so my body was broken for you. Whereas you deserve to die, he’s saying, “I have died in your place.” Whereas you deserve damnation, “I experienced death for you on the cross.” He did it in their place.

The message continues, for he not only displays the broken bread, he then passes it to them, and they take the broken bread and they eat it. It’s a sensible—remember, a sacrament is a sensible sign that appeals to our senses. We can see the bread broken, we can even smell it, and then we can taste it, and so on. It’s a tangible sign to those believers at the table. Christ’s death was for you, and they take it to themselves. What a precious, precious gift it is that Christ gives us. An overwhelming intimacy is here, that Christ is not only speaking to his people in the Lord’s Supper, but he’s giving them these blessed signs, and is showing them his love.

Remember those five actions accompanying the bread, and each one touches on this message. Christ took bread. Remember, the bread is said to represent his body. The Son of God took unto himself our nature. He didn’t take to himself the nature of angels, but rather, human nature. And as he takes the bread, what then does he do? He blessed it, and so he was blessed by God for the purpose of saving sinners. And third, what happens? He explains the meaning, “This is my body which is broken for you,” and the whole Bible, particularly the Gospels, explain that Christ came to save sinners by his death. Fourth, he breaks the bread, and so Christ was broken on the cross to save sinners. Fifth, he shares the bread, and so Christ offers himself to his people to be received by faith. What a wonderful message of salvation. It is the gospel divinely ordained in picture form for us, and more than a picture. The Lord’s Supper tells us of the Son of God incarnate dying for sinners to save them, and saying, “Take it, it’s for you.”

Well, the same could be said of the cup of wine. Remember the four steps? First, he takes the cup. The cup is said to be his blood of the new testament. Well, blood is that vital fluid in our bodies that’s coursing through our veins. And so it’s telling us he took up his life. Second, he blessed it, so God blessed the life and death of Jesus Christ to save sinners. But third, he explained it. And notice his words, “This is my blood of the new testament”—or the new covenant—“which is shed for many.” The blood does not represent his blood while he was whole and living, but when he died, when he shed it. Additionally, it’s called “the blood of the new testament.” A testament is an agreement that certain blessings will be given upon the death of the one who makes the agreement. So sometimes our parents will make a last will and testament, that upon their death, these possessions of theirs will be given to us. Well, Christ says that this is “the blood of the new testament.” You can read of the new testament in Ezekiel 36; I challenge you to do that. And what

you'll see, and what Christ is saying, is that all of those promises, and elsewhere found as well—Jeremiah 31 and elsewhere—the promises of the new covenant are now opened unto you because I who made the promise, I have died. And in taking this cup, you're taking, as it were, that which authorizes you to enjoy all of the benefits of the new testament. This tells us that all of the promises of the new testament are now handed over to us, because he who gave the promise has died. And so all of those promises are secured to us. Well, fourth, it's shared with the believers at the table. This means that the benefits of his death are now shared with all who receive him—the *Catechism* is well ordered—who by faith receive. You see, it's by faith.

Well, third, and finally, *A Spiritual Meal*. What a glorious message this sacrament declares. Were all that were in the Lord's Supper provided to us, it would indeed be overwhelming for us to take in. If only what we just talked about was all that there was for us, we would be privileged. However, this message holds forth more in it to us. The *Catechism* says, "the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace." Well this tells us that there is actual spiritual health given to us. There is a real communion, a sharing in the benefits of Christ by means of the Lord's Supper received by faith.

Notice that it is not by the mere act of eating or drinking. The Lord's Supper is not automatic. It's not mechanical. This is why the *Catechism* says, "not after a corporal"—that is, bodily—or "carnal"—that is, physical—"manner." The blessings of the sacrament are not enjoyed just by eating and drinking. Rather, they come to us by faith, just as the gospel. As we believe the promise given. And what's the sacrament? It's a visible promise held forth to us. Think of it this way: no one is blessed simply by hearing the gospel preached. They're blessed when, by God's grace, they embrace that preached gospel by faith. They must trust the message of the gospel. Well, so it is at the Lord's table. No one is blessed just by eating and drinking. They're blessed when, by God's grace, they eat and drink and believe the message that is being displayed to them. In other words, while the Lord's Supper is a sign, and carries a message to us, it's also a means of grace, and conveys rich spiritual blessings to the soul who believes and receives Christ by faith. This is why Paul is able to write, in 1 Corinthians 10, and verse 16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" The word "communion" means "to share in," to "fellowship with." So it is that while believers eat with faith the bread given in accordance to Christ's institution, and as they drink with faith the cup given in the Lord's Supper, they enjoy the benefits of Christ in salvation. Well, why is that? It's because they are embracing Jesus Christ, who is freely offering himself to them. It's the gospel ordained by God in picture form, tangible form, so that it's not just the outward actions that are needed at the Lord's table. It is that eating and drinking with faith. This is why Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 11, that we must discern the Lord's body—not just the sign, but what the sign is pointing to. And so we have to have faith. Not just, "I'm going to eat this bread, and drink this wine," but "I'm going to trust in Jesus Christ and believe upon him. And as we do that, we receive blessings.

And what are those blessings? The *Catechism* says that they are "made partakers of his body and blood with all his benefits." This is why the broken bread and the cup of wine is shared them. The bread and wine are signs pointing to Christ's death on the cross. But they're not just held forth to the communicants at the table, they're shared with them. And the believers take the bread and eat it; they take the cup and drink it. And as they do this in faith, they're taking the Lord Jesus Christ to themselves. And they're particularly brought to share in the benefits of his death. All that

his death accomplished is being applied to them. This provides them “spiritual nourishment and growth in grace,” as the *Catechism* says.

Well, surely you’ve been hungry before physically, and when you are, your body is telling you that you need food. Your body needs nourishment, health, and strength, so that you can continue walking, and living, and running, and playing, and growing. Well, to gain that, you eat the food. Food provides you what your body needs. Similarly, our souls need nourishment, but bread and water, or for that matter, bread and wine, they alone cannot give nourishment to our souls. Our spiritual hunger is for spiritual nourishment, and this is given to us in Christ, who then supplies us righteousness, and forgiveness, and wisdom, and holiness, in the shedding of the love of God abroad in our hearts, and strength to resist sin and temptation. And, praise God, all of this is provided us in Jesus Christ. Christ gives us himself. And in doing so, he gives us forgiveness, he gives us God’s love, he assures us of God’s love, he strengthens our souls to resist sin, and to flee temptation, and to resist Satan, and to stand strong in faith. Christ brings us into the fellowship of God. It is this which is our spiritual nourishment, as we feed upon Christ by faith, he nourishes our souls. Christ is held forth to believers in the Lord’s Supper, to be received, and just as believers receive bread and wine, they are to receive Christ by faith, freely offered to them, and doing so to their soul’s nourishment. All of this is in accordance to his promises. So as they look upon the bread and the cup; as they eat the bread and drink the wine, their souls are lifted up to Christ, and they’re feeding upon him through his promises.

Well, as we close, one thing that stands out to us is how caring Christ is for his people. It would have been most gracious for him simply to give us his Word, but he accompanies his Word with his sign and seal. And so, as the believer comes to the table and looks and understands the meaning of the signs, and then he eats in understanding and faith, and as he drinks in understanding and faith, he’s freshly assured of the love of God in Christ; and his soul, being brought to feed upon Christ, is nourished. Oh, what a blessing God gives us!

Well, if you have not yet professed faith, you’re not to come to the Lord’s table yet, because the Lord’s table is for those who trust in Christ, who understand, and can explain to some extent what the bread means, and what the wine means, and what the actions are, and how they hold forth Christ. But preeminently, they must be those who are trusting in Christ, and this is the great need. You might be young, and say, “I’d like to come to the Lord’s table.” Well, your need is first and foremost to come to the Lord. And then, when coming to the Lord in faith, you talk with your elders, talk with your parents, and Lord willing, in due time, you too can come to the Lord’s table and enjoy his fellowship to your soul’s strengthening, as you feed upon him by faith. May the Lord bless it now and forever.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #51

Means of Grace: Receiving the Lord's Supper

Question 97: *What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper?*

Answer: *It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.*

In the previous lesson, we looked at the meaning of the Lord's Supper—what it is. In this lesson, we look at how it is we should receive the Lord's Supper. We need to remember that Christianity is not magic. Although there are deep mysteries, the Lord has given us his Word, in order to instruct us that we may grow in our understanding. And this is not only to grow in our understanding of him, but of the means of grace—his Word, the sacraments, and prayer. And so we learn more about his promises, his commandments, and all of his ordinances. And so, when we think about attending the Lord's Supper and partaking of the bread and the wine in accordance to Christ's Word, we need to draw near with an understanding of what the Lord is doing, and how we may derive benefit from him by the means of the Lord's Supper.

Well, as we saw in the last lesson, the Lord's Supper is full of much that goes beyond our fullest understanding. However, this does not mean that we should simply approach the Lord's table carelessly, or simply thinking that the benefits of the Lord's Supper will automatically be given to us. In fact, as we'll see, the Lord warns us in order to prevent danger to our souls. And he instructs us to approach with understanding, and with a cultivation of grace, and with our faith fixed upon Christ, that by him, through this means, our souls will be strengthened.

Well, our Question today helps us see what is needed for us to receive the Lord's Supper rightly, that we may come for a blessing from the Lord Jesus Christ. So Question #97 of the *Shorter Catechism*: “What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper?”—“It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.”

The word “partake” refers to coming to the Lord Supper, and eating and drinking the bread and the wine. This is to participate in the Lord's Supper; to share in what's taking place.

The word “worthily” is not speaking of a work that we have earned or merited, it’s speaking of the way that we participate in the Lord’s Supper. Are we doing this in a way that is worthy of, or appropriate to, the Lord’s Supper. Is it fitting? Is it the way that Christ has said we should. In other words, it’s saying what is required for us rightly to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

At the end of the Answer, you’ll see the opposite word—“unworthily.” This refers to someone who comes in a way that is not appropriate to the Lord’s Supper. Well, no one is strictly in himself worthy to come. But there is a right way of coming. There’s also a wrong way of coming, and this is what our lesson focuses on today.

This Question helps us to see how a believer comes to the Lord’s Supper rightly, in order to enjoy the benefits that Christ Jesus holds out to him. An important passage to help us understand this is 1 Corinthians 11, verses 26 through 32. Paul saw the church of Corinth abusing the Lord’s Supper, so he sought to correct and reform it according to the way Christ intended. So notice these verses, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

There’s a lot in this passage, but you’ll notice the main parts of the Question and Answer before us. So there were those eating and drinking unworthily. We see as well that they needed to discern the Lord’s body. They also needed to examine themselves. And there was the warning that if they persisted in their eating and drinking unworthily, they risks judgment. The word here, “damnation,” is a word that means to be judged, and the severity of judgment, even of death and illness, as Paul mentions. So we see the idea of the answer represented by the text. In fact, it’s better to say the *Catechism* is faithfully representing the teaching of the Scripture.

So for our lesson, we have three points. Firstly, *An Important Distinction*; secondly, *A Required Examination*; and thirdly, *A Real Danger*.

But remember that all of this is given to us, though soberly, it’s given to help us to come that we may enjoy the benefits of the Lord’s Supper. So we think about the warning that God gives. Remember, the warning is to keep us from the agony of enduring that judgment, and to encourage us that we may rightly enjoy the blessing.

Well first then, *An Important Distinction*. The distinction that we’re considering addresses the different ways one can approach the Lord’s Supper. Ultimately, there are two ways to come to the Lord’s Supper. There’s a right way to come, and there’s a wrong way to come. Not all come in the same way. Everyone will have different circumstances and experiences, but all who come to the table will either be coming in the way that the Lord instructs us to come, or they’ll be coming in a way contrary to that which Christ has given us.

So we know that there is a way of approaching the Lord’s Supper rightly. This is what the *Catechism* means when it says, “worthily partake”—to partake in a way that is according to the intention of God’s words, when Christ says, “This is my body which is broken for you,” “This cup is the new testament in my blood,” and then he gives these to be eaten and likewise to drink. There’s a way that we are to come rightly, not only to receive, not only the outward elements—the broken bread and the cup of wine—but by them, looking to Christ, to receive Christ himself. And this helps us see that there’s a right way of coming to seek Christ.

Well, this is the way of coming to the Lord's Supper as Christ intended. He provided this sacrament, the Lord's Supper, for our spiritual good. And so we're to come in order to seek that. But we do so, not looking to the broken bread and to the wine, as we considered in last lesson, but preeminently looking to Christ. And so this shapes our desires for him. And this helps us come in a way that is both humble—having seen our own unworthiness in ourselves—but also hopeful, because we see the provision of Christ for us.

Well, there's a way of approaching the Lord's Supper wrongly. And there are many ways to do this, but fundamentally, it's by abusing the Lord's Supper for what it was supposed to be. And so, in Corinth—if you read 1 Corinthians 11—you'll see that they had turned it into just a common feast. And so there were some gorging themselves upon the food, the bread, and others who were drinking themselves drunken by the wine. And others had nothing left to eat or to drink. And so they had used the Lord's Supper wrongly, thereby abusing it. They turned it into a carnal meal, instead of a meal of spiritual fellowship. There are other ways we can come wrongly, and yet all of them will come back to this—it is to miss the message, the purpose, of the Lord's Supper, which holds forth Christ to us, as we who are needy, and yet as he who is full of grace and truth to satisfy us. If we understand that, it will help us to avoid approaching wrongly, and to approach rightly.

Well, for our second point, *A Required Examination*. Now, to examine is to test something. And so, if we are in a class, and we've been learning some truth, whether it is with mathematics or history, and the teacher will give us a test to examine, do we really understand what we've been learning. It's easy, isn't it, to sit in a class, and say, "I understand. Yes, I'm following." But it's a different thing to be given a question that then shows us and our teacher whether or not we really understand the thing that's been taught. Well, how can we know if we were to approach the Lord's Supper rightly? The Bible tells us we need to examine ourselves. We need to put ourselves to the test. To examine is not just to take a very superficial question and give a very superficial answer—it's to think seriously upon the topic before us. And here's the topic before us: ourselves. And so notice, the *Catechism* refers to the examining, and it points out several things to examine.

One thing we examine is our spiritual understanding regarding the Lord's Supper, namely, "to discern the Lord's body." So what we're examining in this is asking ourselves the question, "Do I understand how the bread broken, in accordance to Christ's institution, and the cup of wine held forth, according to Christ's institution—do I understand the message that they're holding forth? That it's not superstitious; it's not magical, but it is a sign and seal, and it's directing me to Jesus Christ. And that Christ is holding forth himself, saying, 'I am the Savior that you in need.' And that I am coming to embrace the Savior, to enjoy his fellowship. Can I discern that? Can I think of that? Do I understand that? Moreover, do I understand that when I sit at the table, and the bread then comes, and I take the bread, and I eat it, in accordance to Christ's commandment, that I am, by grace, being led to feed upon Christ by faith." We'll get to that more in a moment.

The point is, "Do I understand the relationship between the sign—the broken bread and the cup of wine—and the thing signified—the crucified body of Jesus Christ, his death upon the cross?" This is why it's important that we understand the difference between the biblical notion of the Lord's Supper and all false views of it as well. That we, by the Bible, would reject anyone who says that Christ is dying again. It's not a new sacrifice of Christ. It's a sign pointing to the old sacrifice, the only sacrifice of Christ. And yet, I come, and I discern that what he did on the cross is still powerful and able to speak peace to me today. I'm able to think as well, that in discerning the Lord's body, I'm asking the question, "Why is it that he gave himself, but because of God's great love?" And this speaks of the great grace, and so on. So these are the kinds of things I'm

examining. Am I able to understand how the sacrament relates to the Lord Jesus himself, and particularly, his work upon the cross? But that's only one part of what we're examining.

We're also examining our faith—notice, “to feed upon him.” Now all of us understand what it is to feed, to eat food, and to drink something. But here, it's a spiritual feeding. We're feeding upon him. Many have mentioned and spoken of the two mouths present at the Lord's table. There's our physical mouth, whereby we eat the bread and drink the wine. But there's also our spiritual mouth, whereby, by faith, we're actually receiving Jesus Christ—not newly crucified, but rather as he's once again offered to us. It's not, in other words, as if we were physically eating the flesh and blood of Christ. We talked about this in the Lord's Supper lesson, that there's a difference between the sign and the thing signified. But we remember that this, as a sacrament, is directing us to Christ. Therefore, faith receives him and feeds upon him. As our hands take the bread, we freshly take Christ. As our hands take the cup, we freshly take Christ. And we rejoice to do so, because he has instituted this Lord's Supper for our good. So our soul stands in need of Christ and of his grace, and spiritual health. And faith comes trusting that Christ is given to us as he has promised, in accordance to his Word, and as the sacrament is displaying in accordance to that Word. So we're examining our understanding. We're examining our faith—do I have it? To what degree is it, strong or weak?

We also examine our obedience. There are three words that are linked together—“repentance, love, and new obedience.” All of this is under the general idea of obedience. Repentance, of course, is the turning from our sin unto God. And we can ask ourselves, have we done that at all? Has there been a real turning from our sin unto God? You'll remember the *Catechism* question #87, as it raises the fact that this is motivated both by “a true sense of our sin,” as well as an “apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ.” And so, we're asking, has this happened? But we're not just asking, has it happened? We're also asking, because some will have come to the Lord's table rightly for twenty years or thirty years, and they're still examining their repentance. And they're asking, To what degree has our repentance grown? What are the sins in our lives that repentance needs to be strengthened against? Where do we have need for help? And all of these kinds of questions. So we're examining, not only, is there repentance? But also, to what degree is repentance active? Is it healthy? Is it unhealthy? Is it weak? Is it strong? And so, we're examining these things. Have I been quick to repent, when sin has been discovered, or have I been slow to repent?

We examine our love—another aspect of obedience. Do we love God? And we can think of, remember, the ten commandments. The first four of those, particularly focused upon the love of God. So we can go through each of those ten commandments. And I encourage you, every time that your congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper, have time on your own with the ten commandments in front of you, and ask, “Is this being realized in my life?” Because what you're doing is you're examining, not only your obedience, but your love. Because, remember, when we love God, we'll keep his commandments. We can ask as well, do we love our neighbor? And so, commandments #5 through #10. We can ask, Where is there need for me to grow? While I've been doing some of this, by God's grace, I see so many failures as well. You could ask as well, What growth has there been? And many times, we can think back to the last time we sat at the Lord's table, and say, Has there been growth between these comings to the Lord's Supper?

So another aspect of examining, we examine our new obedience. Not only are we to examine whether we obey outwardly, but rather, we ask the question, is our obedience from a new principle, a new motive? Is it motivated by the love of God to us? We love God, the Bible says, “because he first loved us” (1 John 4). Is our new obedience from relying upon Christ? Is faith going to Christ,

and saying, “Give me that which you’ve promised. I need your grace in me.” Is it coming out of a communion with Christ? And is all to the glory of God? Or is our obedience merely outward, and to impress others? You see, so there is much that needs to be examined.

But the purpose of all of this examining is to see both the evidence of grace, as well as the need still of more grace. And so, the Lord’s Supper is for believers, so there has to be some evidence of grace. But it’s also for believers in this life, believers who still struggle with sin and temptation. So there is the need still of more grace, and it is to the end then that we would come with a spiritual hunger for Christ. And so in our examining, we’re actually cultivating an appetite for spiritual feasting upon and with the Lord Jesus Christ, to our soul’s good.

Well, third, *A Real Danger*. We saw in the last lesson that the Lord’s Supper is a great blessing to the believer. In the Lord’s Supper, our Savior reminds us of his love, his death, his provision, his help, and his many blessings. It’s a sacrament of the greatest intimacy in this life. And the believer comes to the table with his brothers and sisters there together. They, with delight, are together in the presence of Christ with great intimacy. However, the Bible also reminds us that with this great blessing, there’s a real danger. The danger is that if we come wrongly to the Lord’s Supper, we may incur significant judgment. Remember the distinction mentioned earlier—there are those who come rightly to the Lord’s table, and there are those who come wrongly. This is why the *Catechism* mentions those who come unworthily. In the Bible, 1 Corinthians 11, as we read earlier, gives us a clear warning against this. But how is it that someone may come unworthily?

Well, first, they may come without any grace at all. This would mean that they are not trusting in Jesus Christ personally. They do not care about real new obedience and repentance, and ultimately, do not love God. They may be members of the church, baptized; they may even have been approved by the elders. But we need to remember that membership in the church is not the same as conversion. Additionally, elders are limited to what they can know about people. They cannot see into the heart. They cannot go and see whether there is, with certainty, grace. They must be content with the answers provided, and their own observing of that one’s walk. And they’re bound to judge in charity those who make application to come to the Lord’s table. Elders are not able to give a perfect assessment. This means that unconverted sinners in the church might be at the Lord’s table. This would be to come unworthily.

But second, it’s possible for a believer to come wrongly to the Lord’s Supper. It is not saving faith alone that is required to come to the Lord’s Supper. As we saw earlier, one who would come rightly to the table needs to be able to understand how the Lord’s Supper relates to the person and work of Jesus Christ. They also need to be able to examine themselves, with faith, and repentance, and love, and then new obedience. This means they must have the ability to understand what the Scriptures mean about these things, and they must be able to compare themselves with the teaching of the Scriptures. This is not an easy thing to do. It’s something that children can’t do. Someone may be a true believer, yet they may not yet understand how Christ and the Lord’s Supper relates. It would be wrong for them to come to the Lord’s Supper, because to benefit from it, they have to understand something of it, so that their faith can then receive what Christ holds forth. They may not understand how to examine themselves. They may not yet be able to do so. The point is, it is wrong to come to the table without this.

But third, there’s another way a believer may come wrongly to the Lord’s Supper, and that is if they’ve backslidden into sin, and they care not to repent and seek Christ for grace. If someone comes as one who is unconverted, or if a believer comes who has not yet able to perform the required spiritual exercise, or if a believer comes without truly seeking Christ, this opens them to

the risk of judgment, as we saw in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. It is a fearful thing to come casually to the Lord's Supper. There is a great intimacy and delight, but a proper serenity and reverence that is married together at the Lord's table. Remember that Paul indicated that the judgment was already being carried out against some in Corinth—some were sick, and some had even died. Obviously, the danger is real and very sobering.

However, the right use of the warning is not that all would stay back perpetually out of fear. Rather, the danger is meant to lead us to observe the warning and embrace the right way. Certainly, if we're unconverted, we should not come to the Lord's table. The Lord's Supper holds forth Christ to the assurance, the help, the spiritual nourishment and blessing of the believer. Instead of going to the Lord's table, the unbeliever needs to go to Christ himself. He needs first to flee to Christ, before going to the Lord's table.

If the believer is not yet able to explain or understand the Lord's Supper, the believer should study the Scripture, and ask for help from the elders, or from other Christians, that they might grow in their understanding, in order to enjoy this great blessing. If they don't know how to examine themselves, they first need to learn this, and seek help again from the elders and other Christians. It may certainly be that a child is a true believer, yet the child first needs to grow for a number of years before he or she is able to perform the spiritual exercise. This doesn't need to discourage the child. This doesn't need to discourage the child's parents. Instead, it's an opportunity for the child to grow and mature, which should be an encouragement.

If the believer who is able to understand the Lord's Supper, and able to examine himself, and he has fallen into sin, his great need is to flee freshly to Christ, to seek grace to overcome, to repent, and then to come to the Lord's table, to find help from Christ, and strength to put away all of his sin. You see, we don't just say, "Well, I'm going to go to the Lord's table." We first, as it were, come to Christ, and in having Christ, and with the guidance and help of our elders, we're able to come rightly to enjoy the benefits.

Well, we need to close. If you're very young and growing, I hope you see how great a privilege the Lord's Supper is. My greatest desire is for you to come first to the Lord Jesus Christ. To do that is to enjoy the greatest blessing ever. But if you do, or if you already have come to Christ, you may yet have a few more years before you are able to go to the Lord's table. But don't let that discourage you. Instead, trust the Lord who saved you, and take advantage of the opportunity to grow in your understanding of the Bible in general, of the Lord Jesus, and of the Lord's Supper. And as you are in discussion with your elders, and parents perhaps, or other Christians. Seek the Lord, in his grace, to nurture you and mature you, that when you're able to come to the table, you will come with great delight and benefit. And so, may it be that all who would come to the table would come looking to Christ, and feeding upon him in faith, and growing in that grace to honor him, that day forward and forever.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #52

Means of Grace: Prayer

Question 98: *What is prayer?*

Answer: *Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.*

Question 99: *What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?*

Answer: *The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called The Lord's Prayer.*

We have seen that the primary means of grace Christ has instituted are the Word, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and prayer. In previous lessons, we've looked at the Word of God and how it's to be read and heard; we've looked at baptism and the Lord's Supper; and now we come to prayer. When we come into the *Catechism's* treatment of prayer, we actually come to the section that ends the *Catechism*. Questions #98 to #107 all deal with prayer in one way or another. Questions #98 and #99, which are taken for our lesson today, set forth what prayer is, and what God has given to guide us in our prayer. In each Question, from #100 to #107, takes up a part of *The Lord's Prayer*. If you have not done so already, I encourage you to commit to memory *The Lord's Prayer* as found in Matthew 6, verses 9 to 13. It's a short passage, and you can learn each part of it as you go. But it's a very helpful passage, whereby Christ teaches us how to pray. And as you do, you'll discover how rich this instruction is. Additionally, in the lessons that follow, you'll see how each part of that instruction Christ has given joins together to form a comprehensive guide to prayer. We'll look at each of those parts in the remaining lessons. But for now, we look at the two Questions which help set the foundation for our understanding of prayer, Question #98 and #99.

Question #98: "What is prayer?"—"Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies."

Question #99: "What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?"—"The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called *The Lord's Prayer*."

Now, we'll get right into our lesson, and we'll look at three things. Firstly, *The Meaning of*

Prayer; secondly, *The Parts of Prayer*; and thirdly, *The Acceptance of Prayer*.

So first then, *The Meaning of Prayer*: Too often, we're tempted to focus only upon the words or phrases of prayer. We settle into our routine wording. We sometimes fall into familiar patterns of expression, and know our tongue is moving, yet our hearts are not engaged. Well, it's certainly not wrong to have learned phrases from the Bible that help express what we should desire. In fact, as you memorize *The Lord's Prayer*, you'll start to learn those phrases, and you'll use them in your prayer.

However, when we begin to understand the meaning of prayer, we'll discover that true prayer is much more than merely using right or familiar words. True prayer is a matter of our desire, our heart being expressed to God. Notice the *Catechism*, "Prayer is an offering up of our desires." The word translated in the Bible as "to pray," and "prayed," or "praying," is a word that means to express our desires. In some sense, it could be translated as "wish." Although it's far more dignified than the world's way of wishing for things. In other words, it's expressing what we want. This makes sense, of course, because you already realize that in prayer, we're not merely reciting memorized words. We're approaching God, and we're doing so with our delights, and our needs, and our sorrows and sins, our confusion even. And we're asking him for things. We're asking him to provide what is needed. We ask him for help, for forgiveness of our sins, for growth in grace, for guidance and direction, for protection, and so many other things that we cannot go through them all just now. But all of this is expressing our heart's desire.

You can see throughout the Bible, of course, this connection, but one example that helps clarify this is in Colossians 1, and verse 9. Paul had heard of the Lord's work at Colossae, and he writes to the Colossians, and he says, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Now, the verse itself is quite encouraging, to see a true minister of the gospel hearing of one coming to faith, many coming to faith, and saying, "Now my desire is that they will grow in that faith." But notice the link that Paul provides between praying and desiring. He says that he is praying for them, and desiring these things for them. These are closely connected in prayer. When we're truly praying, our heart is truly desiring the things that we are saying, or thinking for that matter, as we commune with God in prayer. This is something that helps us, because one has written that in prayer, the mouth follows the heart. In other words, we don't read our prayers. We don't just read and recite. But rather, our hearts are filled with desires. And so we read in the Psalms about pouring out our hearts unto the Lord, our desires. It's as if all of our desires are filling up, and we come to the Lord, and we pour them out before him. And so we read the Bible, of course, and our mind must be understanding these things. But real prayer is issued from our hearts to the Lord. How important then, that what our hearts desire is informed by God's Word, as we'll see.

Well, notice that true prayer is only offered to God; it's an "offering up of our desires unto God." We cannot find a single example of prayer offered to an angel or a departed saint. All true prayer in the Bible is always offered to God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Preeminently, of course, it is a focus upon the Father, and yet it's always through the mediation of the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. And yet, likewise, we'll see of course, that men call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so it is that prayer is always offered to God.

This should be obvious, but consider why that's the case. Only God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. You can start to see connections, can't you, with those foundational Questions earlier on in the *Catechism*, and how they're filled with all sorts of practical instruction when we

get to these things? A departed saint is not infinite. A departed saint is not eternal and unchangeable in his wisdom, and power, and so on—only God is. And so only God can hear all of our prayers, at all times, without confusion. Only God has the power to answer all of our issues, and the ability to provide us exactly what's needed in perfect wisdom. Only God is able to answer our prayers rightly. He may employ angels, or fellow believers, or even enemies, as the instruments he uses to answer them. Remember that he was able to use a raven to bring food to Elijah, as the Bible tells us (1 Kings 17:6). But it's God who is providing the answer. Therefore, only to God do we go and ask him for these things. Only he can answer. You could think of a room filled with hundreds of people, and one person in the middle. And at one and the same time, those hundreds of people asked that one person for something specific. There would be no hope of that person in the middle even being able to understand all of what was requested; much less would they be able to provide all that was requested.

And so it is, when we think about praying to an angel, or praying to a departed saint. They're still creatures. They don't have infinite understanding. But God is God! And so, whether you and I or all creation at one and the same time ask for specific things, God is able to understand and to provide—only God can hear and answer prayer. Never are we to pray to dead people, or to loved ones, even, who have died. We're not to pray to angels or saints. We're not to pray to Mary, or Peter, or Paul. But rather, prayer is to be offered to God. Remember, when Christ instructed his disciples to pray, he taught us to pray "Our Father which art in heaven." And so it is, we pray to God.

While true "prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God," we must quickly notice the helpful words of the *Catechism* that follow, namely, "for things agreeable to his will." Unfortunately, as there's still sin in us, not all of our desires are appropriate for prayer. Each of us still struggles with sinful desires. If prayer is holding fellowship with God, think of how wrong it would be to ask God for something or to do something for us that is against his revealed will. How wicked and inappropriate it would be to ask him, "Would you please allow me to steal something without getting caught, from the store?" Or how wrong would it be to ask him, "Would you help me to make a beautiful idol to worship?" Well these examples are obvious, but they help remind us that true prayer is to ask God for things that honor him, things that are agreeable to his will.

In Question #99, we're given some help in understanding this. Question #99 asks, "What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?"—what standard, what measurement, what is that which is to guide us in prayer? The Answer, "The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called *The Lord's Prayer*."

Remember, the Word of God, the Bible, is God's revealed will. If we're to pray according to his will, we have to know the Bible. Through its history, its commandments, its prophecies, and promises, it shows us God's will. And if we're to ask for things agreeable to his will, it has to be in accordance with the Bible's teaching. This means that if we're going to offer right desires to God, our desires must be informed by his desires, as he's given to us in the Scriptures. This means we need to study the whole of God's Word, the Old and the New Testaments, the historical books, the prophetic books, the poetical books. We need to read from Isaiah, and the Psalms. We need to read from Matthew and Luke, and we need to read from Romans and Revelation. The whole of the Bible helps us to understand God's revealed will. And so we are to grow in our understanding of God's commandments and promises, his law and gospel. The whole Bible helps us know God's will. And as we ask for things that are patterned after the Bible, that are commanded by the Bible,

approved by the Bible, then we are asking for things according to his revealed will.

Additionally, there are many excellent prayers in the Bible. Some are very short. Remember the thief who believed on Jesus Christ while he was crucified. He prayed to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42). The prophet Elisha once prayed, “LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see” (2 Kings 6:17). So there are short prayers. Some are longer. I encourage you to read through Solomon’s prayer, in 1 Kings, chapter 8. In that chapter, Solomon prays from verses 23 to 53, as he seeks the Lord’s blessing. Daniel, similarly, in chapter 9 of his book, there’s a record of his prayer from verse 4 to verse 19. And many more examples might come to your own mind. Each of these are helpful examples—the short ones and the long ones. They show us different aspects and emphases of prayer. They show us an example of what it means to labor in prayer. When Jacob said to the angel of the Lord, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Genesis 32:26)—there is wrestling in prayer. Some emphasize a particular need. Some focus on thanking the Lord for mercies, others focus on pleading his promises. Some labor much in the confessing of sin. We can learn, and we will learn much by studying the prayers of the Bible, and by them, seeing models for true prayer.

However, there’s one part of the Bible that is particularly useful to teach us to pray. It’s given to us as an instruction in prayer from the Lord Jesus himself. This is why it’s called *The Lord’s Prayer*. It’s not that Jesus himself prayed it; rather, it’s a guide he taught his disciples to help them learn how to pray. We find it in two different passages. The first place is in the middle of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 6, particularly verses 8 through 13. Remember, those verses you can memorize, and it will help you. You can also find the same guide in Luke 11, verses 2 to 4, although it’s in a different context. Christ’s disciples come to him, in Luke 11, and they say, “Lord, teach us to pray” (verse 1), and then Christ gives to us this form of prayer, albeit with a bit of an abbreviation (verses 2 through 4). In both places, Christ was giving his disciples a helpful guide to direct them how to pray. In other words, it’s Christ’s basic treatment on what we should pray for. It’s simple, but we will see in the coming lessons, that each part is full of meaning, and is quite broad in its expression. Just like the Ten Commandments are rather small when you compare them to all the other specifics of the Bible, yet they’re full and comprehensive of all God’s moral requirements. Remember, “Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?” (Question #41), where is it summarized?—the Ten Commandments. So the six petitions of *The Lord’s Prayer*, with its preface, “Our Father which art in heaven,” and its conclusion, they are small, but they’re full and comprehensive of all that we can and ought to desire before the Lord in prayer.

This doesn’t mean that we should only pray the strict words of *The Lord’s Prayer*. Rather, the Lord presents this to us to help guide and instruct us in the things for which we should pray. We can use it to assess, “Am I praying in a balanced way for all of these different things?” This is why memorizing and meditating upon this part of God’s Word is very helpful to help us to learn to pray. Well, we’ll look at *The Lord’s Prayer* in the remaining lessons. For now, simply note that it is a great help to show us what God would have us desire and seek in prayer.

Well second, *The Parts of Prayer*. Any desire we have that is agreeable to God’s will is to be offered up in prayer. Every prayer has this in common. It is a desire from our heart, according to God’s revealed will, that we offer to him. You can notice a few different parts or kinds of desires that we should and do have. Question #98 expresses this a bit when it says that we offer up our desires, and we make “confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.” In general, we see three parts of prayer: petition, where we make requests; confession, where we confess our sins; and thanksgiving. A petition is to request something. When we lack something we

need and realize God has promised to give that thing to us, it is right for us to ask God to provide it. He's created a desire within us for something according to his Word, so we should come and ask him, offering up our desire to him. We'll see much of this in *The Lord's Prayer*. This can refer to healing that we need, or help. It may refer to things the church stands in need of, and so on. Whatever we need, we approach God for it. Yet, as in all prayer, we submit to his great wisdom and goodness, knowing that his way is best. Faith always, in the end, says, "Not as I will, but thy will be done" (Luke 22:42).

Confession—this is to say the same thing about our sin as God does. And so we don't justify our sins or excuse our sins, but we come, and we say, "Oh God, I see that I have sinned against you in this way, and you would be just to condemn me. But I ask, forgive me, pardon my sin." If you want some help in that, you can look at Psalm 51, and you have a great example of confessing our sins.

Thanksgiving, to give thanks to God for his mercies. This expresses our delight and gratitude: "Thank you, God, for the food we've eaten. Thank you, God, for the health we've enjoyed. Thank you, God, for the church you've given, for the pastor you've called here, for the Bible you've maintained." We rejoice in his mercies. He's treated us kindly. His mercies are innumerable. Some are temporal, they are bound to our life, our food, our health, and so on. Some are spiritual, they address our souls' needs. Some are everlasting, they carry on forever—heaven, fellowship with Christ, glory to come. All of these are mercies, and each of them call us to thank God.

Now, we can add within thanksgiving, there's adoration, whereby we draw near to God and we adore him for what he is in himself, "Great is the Lord! Merciful is the Lord! Faithful is the Lord!" We adore him, and thank him, praising him for these things.

All of these make up the basics of prayer. We come to him with our needs and ask. We come to him confessing our sins and asking for pardon. We come to him as well with rejoicing, giving thanks to him, and adoring him for his goodness. And so, we should think, "Are my prayers doing these things? Am I coming to him for the things that I need? Am I confessing my sin? Am I thanking him for his mercies?" Think of that last part. If he gives us what we need, we should thank him. In his forgiving of our sins, we should thank him. Thanksgiving should make up a large part of our prayer, because great is the Lord, and his mercies are new every morning.

Well, third, *The Acceptance of Prayer*. In one sense, the idea of prayer is universal to all men. All men instinctively know that they need God's help. Even atheists have been known to cry out for help in the midst of anguish. This is because, although sinners try to suppress the truth of God, they cannot do so perfectly. They were made in his image, and made for him. And this is something they can never escape, however hard they try. All false religions teach something about prayer. Muslims engage in prayer frequently. Roman Catholics are taught to pray many times; they pray to Mary and the saints. The ancient Greeks and the Romans prayed to their false gods. We have examples in the Bible of false prophets praying to false gods. Think of the prophets of Baal, as they cry out to Baal, in 1 Kings 18.

And yet, without hesitation, we assert that none of this is true prayer, and none of it is accepted by God. Why is that? Well, someone might say, "Well, clearly, they're earnest in expressing their desires. They really want those things." Someone else might say, "They're frequent in expressing their desires. See how regularly they pray." Well, that may be true. But one fundamental flaw is in each of them—all of that fails to draw near to the true God by faith in Jesus Christ. True prayer is only accepted by God for the sake of Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus said, in John 14, verses 13 and 14, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified

in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”

Now, it’s important to realize that Christ is not simply saying to mutter the words, “in Jesus’ name.” Now we need to be thoughtful of that. That phrase, “in Jesus’ name,” is not something we should just tack on to the end of our prayer. The whole of our praying ought to be consciously in the name and by the mediation of Jesus Christ. What Christ is getting at is, when we pray, we’re asking that Jesus would be the reason for our acceptance. When he says “ask in my name,” he’s not saying, “use the words only.” He’s rather saying that we are to approach God because of Jesus Christ, by means of Jesus Christ. It’s related to the truths stated in John 14, verse 6: “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

Well, to come near to God by Jesus Christ, demands that we approach him with our desires, as the only mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). In prayer, we draw near to God with our desires, but we’re doing so through and by the means of Jesus Christ only. We’re confessing that we have no right in ourselves to draw near to God. Our acceptance and our prayer’s acceptance are only possible because of Jesus Christ. It also means that we’re resting all of our hope upon Jesus himself. It’s not because we pray long or fervently, or regularly. It’s not how many times a day we pray, though we ought to pray much, and many times, and frequently, and regularly, and earnestly, and all of that’s true. Our hope is based upon the worthiness of Jesus Christ.

You can think of it this way. I’m poor and I have no money in myself. And a rich man says to me, “Go to the store and gather whatever you need, and tell the store that I will pay the cost.” We enter the store confidently, because of the wealth of the rich man. And so it is, when we approach God in prayer, we’re not confident in ourselves. We’re confident only in Christ. You can think of that poor man at the checkout line, and he has no money himself. The rich man then comes behind him and says, “I’ll pay for it all.” So it is in our prayer. We come and we don’t appeal to ourselves. We point to Christ, and say, “For his sake.” There’s more that can be said, but keep this in mind—prayer is only acceptable with God as we exercise faith upon our beloved Savior.

There are many defects in our prayers. Sometimes we can’t find the right words. Sometimes we don’t feel all that we should. Sometimes our prayers are too long. Other times, they’re too short. Surely we need to seek help for this. However, the assurance of our prayers being accepted with God is only by our drawing near in accordance with the person, work, and mediation of Jesus Christ. Think of it this way. From the beginning to the ending of our prayer, if God should ask us, “Why should I give you these things?”—our answer should be, “Because I come in Jesus’ name. He is worthy for these to be given. He has purchased this for me. I do not come in my own name, or in my own worthiness. I come only in the name of your eternal Son incarnate, who offered himself up for me. It’s in Jesus’ name that I appear, and for Jesus’ sake that I ask these things. So for his sake, and his glory, and his praise, provide these things to your honor.”

Well, as we close, the rest of the *Catechism* and for the rest of our lessons will focus on *The Lord’s Prayer*. Each lesson, we’ll focus on one of the petitions found in *The Lord’s Prayer*. And so remember to memorize those few verses. And as you do, and as we progress through these final lessons, take time to turn these things into prayer. Even now, consider what desires you have according to God’s Word. Consider what mercies he’s shown you, what sins you have need to confess. And then take time to seek the Lord, and yet do so only in the name and by the mediation of Jesus Christ.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #53

The Lord's Prayer: The Preface

Question 100: *What doth the preface of the Lord's prayer teach us?*

Answer: *The preface of the Lord's prayer (which is, "Our Father which art in heaven") teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others.*

Our Lord Jesus was a man of prayer. On one occasion when he was praying, his disciples witnessed it, and it led them to ask him to teach them to pray. We read of this in Luke 11, and verse 1: "And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." On that occasion, as when he was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapter 6), Christ taught them to pray. And among other things that he taught them, he provided them guidance through the Lord's Prayer.

Notice how he begins his instruction, in Luke 11, verse 2: "And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven." You'll notice that before any request is made, Christ instructs his disciples to call upon God in a very loving and reverent way, "Our Father which art in heaven." Now this is full of help and guidance in prayer, as we'll see. And Question #100, of the *Shorter Catechism* focuses our attention upon this preface. Notice the Question: "What doth the preface of the Lord's prayer teach us?" And the Answer: "The preface of the Lord's prayer (which is, *Our Father which art in heaven*) teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others."

Well, we should notice this word, "preface." It refers to something that goes before other material. We should not think of it as unimportant. Instead, it sets the foundation for what follows. You'll remember an earlier preface—the preface to the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). Well, this is not an unimportant introduction at all. In fact, we can't rightly understand the Ten Commandments without the truth of what the preface sets forth. It is of great necessity and importance, because that preface reminds us of God's grace. It provides the foundation for all true obedience. Well, similarly, this preface provides us the firm foundation for all true prayer, as we'll see.

So for our lesson, we will look at three points: first, *Reverence in Prayer*; second, *Confidence in Prayer*; and third, *Brethren in Prayer*.

So first, *Reverence in Prayer*. Prayer is a great privilege. Men and women in this world think themselves special if they're given the opportunity to meet with, and speak with, and express their desires to someone who stands above them—a ruler, perhaps, or a famous person, or a wealthy person. When that takes place, we have a tendency to think of our thoughts and words, what we'll say, how we'll appear, what we'll wear, and all of these things, because we realize we're having the opportunity that is a privilege.

Now, think of what happens in prayer. Remember the previous lesson: "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God." In prayer, we are actually permitted, in fact, elsewhere in the Bible, we're commanded to pour out our heart to the Lord. All of our concerns, all of our needs, all of our confusion, all of our confession and our thanksgiving—everything that is within our heart, we're to bring unto the Lord in prayer. Now, this is, of course, a privilege in and of itself that anything that concerns us we can express, but it's a heightened privilege when we realize to whom we express these things—to God. He is the Almighty, and all-knowing God, and it is he who welcomes us into his presence. And astonishingly, he welcomes us into his presence that he may hear from us. Well, the Answer before us tells us that we are to "draw near" to him. Prayer is a close intimacy with God. This is a great privilege indeed. This is the one true God! You'll remember, he is that "Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" (Question #4). There is nothing like God. No one in this world compares properly to God. God is above us, beyond us, most majestic, the angels never cease worshipping him, and he beckons us to draw near to him. This is indeed a wondrous privilege.

While we'll see that the believer has great encouragement to approach God with confidence and assurance because of his grace, this does not change the fact that the God who we approach, even as believers, through Christ, that this God is most glorious. He is most majestic and truly awesome. This should humble us and cause us to draw near with reverence. We see this expressed in the preface itself: "Our Father which art in heaven." The one we are privileged to call upon as Father is in heaven. He is in the highest heaven, the Holy of Holies, the one that's not made with hands as in the tabernacle and temple; rather, the heavenly most holy place. And this reminds us of God's glorious transcendence. He is above and beyond all else that is. This is expressed in some ways in Ecclesiastes, chapter 5, verse 2. We're exhorted, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." We understand a little bit of this, when we think of a little child and an adult. The child is to honor the adult. And even if that child is the child of the adult—his son or his daughter—it's still even as the fifth Commandment tells us, the child is to honor his father and his mother. Well, how much more so when we think of ourselves approaching to God, who is not only better than we are by degree, but is essentially, infinitely more than we are? It is truly a wonder.

Well, in other words, we should never think we are approaching someone who is just like we are. We should never be casual or careless with God in prayer. He is God. He is infinite, and eternal, and unchangeable. He is most holy. Isaiah 6 reminds us of the angels who have never sinned, and they're approach to God. There, in verses 1 through 3, we read, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted upon and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy,

is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.” Well, angels, as glorious as they are, as holy as they are, are still creatures, infinitely beneath God. And they perceive this. They perceive the overwhelming glory of God. And so, though sinless, they cover themselves with reverence to God. Well, men are also creatures, but we have something that the sinless angels do not. We have our own guilt, profanity, and corruption; and even though answered by grace through faith in Christ, this should humble us all the more, and cause us to approach with reverence as we draw near to God in prayer.

However, it is all holy reverence and confidence as children to a father. The reverence is likened to children drawing near to their father. This may be difficult for some cultures to understand today, where there is increasingly a lessening of the authority and dignity of adults. However, as mentioned earlier, remember the fifth Commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother.” Although there is to be great joy and blessing in the relationship between a child and his father, there is to be still a loving fear and reverence shown to the father. Not one that would make the child cowardly or scared, and overwhelmed with grief, but rather, one that would bring forth respect and honor. Well, so it is here in prayer. When we draw near to God in prayer, even as believers, we are to draw near with loving reverence to our great God. Well this should govern our thoughts and our speech. Not that we would put on a show, but with sincerity, we would lift our desires to God with reverence.

Well, second, *Confidence in Prayer*. Christ’s teaching includes this great expression of assurance: “our Father.” I realize that some, perhaps many in this world have had earthly fathers who have been unkind, and even cruel. This is a wicked abuse of a good relationship. The term “father” refers to a loving relationship in a family. The father who stands as head of the home is also to be the one who loves those in the home, who cares for them, who provides for them, who instructs them and trains them, nurtures them. When this is the case, not only will the children honor their father, the children will love their father and delight in his presence.

When we understand this, we realize what Christ is saying. He’s teaching us to draw near to *the* Father, not only as he is God in heaven, but as he is *our* Father in heaven. This expresses an assurance, a confidence, and comfort because of his mercy and love and goodness. This is why the *Catechism* says that the preface teaches us to “draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us.” When we come near to him with holy fear, we also come near to him with holy confidence—not presumption, not a carelessness, but with a holy confidence. Notice, the *Catechism* gives us the comparison, “as children to a father, able and ready to help us.” When children are persuaded that their father is able and ready to help, they come confidently with their requests. This is how we, through Christ, are to draw near to God.

There is such a thing as false confidence, and to be persuaded that something will happen, only to be let down when it does not, brings forth great disappointment, even shame. Unfortunately, many people in this world lift up their desires confidently, thinking that God in heaven will do all that they request. But they’re disappointed in the end, because they had founded their hope on a false foundation. Well, how then can we pray in the confidence that Christ teaches us to pray with? How can we be persuaded that the God who is as “a father able and ready to help us”?

Well, first, by seeing his revealed will in the Scriptures as our guide. We don’t pray for just anything. We pray for those things which are in accordance to his will. We’ll give more attention to this in the following petitions. But we remember, it’s God who has called upon us to draw near to him in prayer. And this means then that he would have us bring requests to him. To avoid doing that is to engage in sin. And so, one thing we need to see, if we’re going to have assurance, is that it is God who calls us to come near to him. Failing to do that means that we are actually sinning.

But we're to pray for things in accordance to his revealed will. So in 1 John chapter 5, and verses 14 and 15, we read, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we desired of him." Think of it this way. If our earthly father were very wealthy, and he told us that if we were ever hungry, even as adult children, that we should come to him and as him for food, we would have great confidence to approach him. Why would we have such confidence? Because he has stated explicitly that we're to come to him for those things. This is what happens when we search the Scriptures, and we see what he's promised, and we see examples of what he blesses, and this guides and governs our own requests. When we search God's Word and discover his will and his encouragements for us to pray, we can then draw near to God with assurance. As we ask for things according to his will, he hears us.

A second way to have confidence in prayer is by embracing his offered redemption. In fact, we can say this: there is no confidence in prayer, if it is not by the mediation of Jesus Christ. God has come near to us in the preaching of the gospel, and offered us pardon, and peace, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. In truth, this is the only sure ground of assurance and confidence in prayer. This is why we often in our prayers we'll say, "in Jesus' name;" or "in Christ's name;" or "for Christ's sake." Because we're saying in our prayers that it is by Christ, our great and High Priest, *the* mediator between God and man, the one to whom has been given a name, by which we must be saved. It is in Christ and by Christ that we draw near. It is the blood of Christ only that cleanses us from all sin. So when we draw near to God, through Christ the Savior, we have the assurance that God welcomes us as those forgiven and accepted through his beloved Son. So Christ must be indeed our focus, as the cause of assurance before God in prayer.

A third and related way of confidence in prayer is by enjoying the ministry of God's Spirit. Remember that believers are adopted into God's family. "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God" (Question #34). This is a great privilege. The Bible helps us understand this great privilege, in Galatians 4, verses 6 and 7. Paul gives much encouragement, when he writes the following: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into you're your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Notice what Paul's helping us see. It goes back to the second reason for assurance—through Christ. But through Christ, we are no longer slaves, but children. And the Spirit's ministry helps us lay hold of that great privilege. The Holy Spirit works within us to cry out to God as our Father through Jesus Christ. So you'll notice that his work is according to the relationship we have through Christ. If a son, then an heir of God, through Christ. And the Spirit works faith in us, and causes us to believe the promises of God in Christ. We are given great encouragement to draw near to God in confidence. And so, we ought to ask him, "Bless us to know the gracious ministry of your Spirit. Enliven us, quicken us, that we may call upon your name in prayer."

Well third, *Brethren in Prayer*. The *Catechism* picks up upon something that may have easily been missed. You'll see it at the end of the Answer. The preface teaches us "that we should pray with and for others." Well, where in the preface to we see this? It's in the word "our." Certainly, the Christian may call upon the Father as "my Father" through Christ. However, Christ is teaching us to remember something that's important. God is not only the individual believer's Father by grace; he is the Father of all of his children through Jesus Christ. And as we have been saved through Jesus Christ, all of his children are saved through Jesus Christ. And we share fellowship with them. This means that, by God's grace, we are made part of that redeemed family. We're given

many brothers and sisters. God has made us part of his family. Just as in an earthly family, we are to love our brothers and sisters, so in God's family, we're to love our brothers and sisters. And one way that this love is shown is in praying with them and for them. When we pray with them, it's right for us to pray to him who is *our* Father. And so, when we gather with others, perhaps in public worship, you'll hear the minister leading in prayer. And he'll be using that expression, "our Father." He'll pray, "We approach you," and "We ask you for these things," and "We give thanks to you for these things." His voice is representing this truth. It's not merely he alone who comes, but he with his brothers and sisters. And so, in our families, when others are praying, it's not just "I ask," and "This is what I need, and what I would hope for." But we are asking as a family. And when we're with other Christians, we do the same. When we're praying with others, we're praying together to our Father.

However, we're not always with our brothers and sisters. And of course, there is to be the exercise of faith in prayer in secret. We need to remember even then, when we're alone to pray for them. There's a great verse on this at the end of Ephesians 6, there at verse 18. Paul exhorts Christians, saying, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." This is to be a part of our praying, that we are laboring before the throne of grace, on behalf of our brothers and sisters. This is to be a regular part of our life of prayer—to pray for all saints.

And certainly this means that we need to pray for those near to us, those who we know more fully—our family, our congregation, and others who are well known to us. But it also means that we should be praying even for others still. There are ways to learn about Christians in other countries and around the world, that can help us to pray for our brothers and sisters, that God our Father would remember them and bless them. It's right for us to pray about personal things, and there's much, of course, that concerns us, that we need to seek the Lord regarding. But as Christ teaches us, we *must* pray with and for others.

Well, as we come to a close, let me call your attention to an important lesson that this preface teaches us. And if we can apply it, we can say it this way. If we're going to pray rightly, we must do so by starting with God himself. And so there's a need to acquaint ourselves and learn about the needs facing ourselves and others. But if ever we're going to pray rightly, we have to know the truth regarding God. We must first think about the God to whom we draw near. He is the glorious God of heaven and earth. This will both humble us, but encourage us. Because, as he's the Maker of heaven and earth—"our Father which art in heaven"—he has all power, and all ability. He is the glorious God who rules over all. And yet, as this encourages us by the fact of his power and wisdom. It also cultivates right and good reverence. This helps us then approach him according to his Word, because so great and glorious as God is, demands that we come near to him through the one who is "the way, the truth, and the life." Remember what Christ said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). And so we start with God, and we draw near to him through Christ. Spend time to think on this. Talk with your parents. Talk with your pastor, about ways in which you can have more faithful thoughts about God. And of course, your parents and pastor will direct you to study the Word of God, to learn about God, to realize the one you are drawing near.

We can ask ourselves, "Am I showing reverence to God as I pray? Do I spend some time reflecting upon what I've read in private time, or in public worship, or what I've heard? And do I reflect upon those things, and then draw near to God in a way prepared? Am I asking for things according to his Word? Am I consciously relying upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the reason for my hope?"

So start with God. And as you do, by his grace, it will cultivate this holy reverence and holy confidence the preface teaches us to have. This is not to discourage us. Rather, as we draw near to God through Jesus Christ by faith, we then find the assurance that God receives us, he welcomes us, indeed he commands us to draw near to him with confidence. We must remember that true confidence is not something we manufacture or invent. True confidence comes from a right understanding of God's grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. When we understand this, we'll have a real reason to come near to him with assurance.

Another thing to consider is that, as we work through the remaining Questions of our *Catechism*, which lead us through the rest of the Lord's Prayer, we'll come across many particulars for which we should pray, and ought to pray, and must pray. And as this lesson has reminded us, let us be sure to consider these petitions with reference to our brothers and sisters as well. In other words, do not only think about your personal needs. But think about the brothers and sisters in your congregation. Calling upon God as our Father necessarily reminds us we are part of a family. So this is something I challenge you to do. Start this week, if it's not your habit; start this week by going to another Christian and asking, "What needs do you have?" And then write those down, and bring those to *our* Father which art in heaven. May the Lord bless you as you do, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #54

The Lord's Prayer: The First Petition

Question 101: *What do we pray for in the first petition?*

Answer: *In the first petition (which is, "Hallowed be thy name") we pray, That God would enable us and others to glorify him in all that whereby he maketh himself known; and that he would dispose all things to his own glory.*

In our last lesson, we considered the gracious foundation for true prayer. In our lesson today, we take up the first petition Christ taught his disciples to pray. And so, we go from the encouragement to draw near to God—by Christ, of course, by faith—to consider now what it is we're to bring to God when we draw near. So this will help us understand the things for which we are to pray. What should we be desiring when we come near to God? What should our hearts be full of when we pour them out?

You'll also notice, as we work our way through the Lord's Prayer, that there is something of an order the Lord is cultivating us to understand. Remember how the Ten Commandments have an order, for the first four commandments deal with those duties more directly dealing with God himself; and then it moves to those duties which deal more with other men. Well, similarly, the Lord's Prayer starts with requests regarding God and his interests, and then it moves to those things which concern us more directly. This doesn't mean that we must always follow this order in our own prayers. But it does mean that we should be learning to balance our prayers, and that we should be thinking first and foremost of God and his glory, before we think of those things which regard ourselves.

So, our Question today is Question #101. It asks, "What do we pray for in the first petition?" The Answer, "In the first petition (which is, *Hallowed be thy name*) we pray, That God would enable us and others to glorify him in all that whereby he maketh himself known; and that he would dispose all things to his own glory." You can find this petition both in Matthew 6, verse 9, and in Luke 11:2: "Hallowed be thy name."

The word translated as "hallowed" is the word that we often find translated as "sanctified," and in other forms, "to be holy." It's important to understand that this is a petition, a request. While it would be true to say to God, "Thy name is holy," as a statement of fact and praise to God, this is a petition, which means we're requesting God to do something. And what we're asking him to do is that he would hallow, that is, that he would sanctify his name—make it to be treated as holy. The words "hallowed be" are saying, "Let it be so"—"Let it be so, God, that your name would be treated as holy in our midst." In other words, we're asking God to do something. We're saying, in

effect, “Lord, make your name to be treated as it is—to be treated as holy.” So we’re asking God to make his name sanctified in this world, to make men, to make ourselves and others, treat it as holy.

So we want to look at three things then in our lesson. First, *Remembering the Meaning of God’s Name*; second, *Enabling the Honor of God’s Name*; and third, *Securing All Glory to God’s Name*.

So first, *Remembering the Meaning of God’s Name*. “Hallowed be thy name.” Remember, this is asking God to make his name to be treated as holy. However, it’s not merely asking that the syllables associated with God’s name would be used in a holy way. Surely it includes that. Every time we speak of his name and his titles, his attributes, his Word, and works, we should be using those words in a reverent way. Every time we speak of God, of Jehovah, of Jesus, the Holy Ghost, we ought to be using these names and titles with reverence. They should never find their place in a joke. But this is only part of the meaning of God’s name.

Notice how the *Catechism* includes this expression, “in all that whereby he maketh himself known.” Remember that a name identifies someone. In this life, over time the name becomes filled with meaning to us because of what the person is and does, or has done. A name makes known someone, and over time, it becomes a short way to refer to all that the person is. I hope that you have at least begun to memorize the Ten Commandments. And if you’re doing so, or if you already have, you’ll remember the third commandment, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” Remember that the Answer to Question #54 of the *Shorter Catechism* stated, “The third commandment requireth the holy and reverent use of God’s names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works.” The Answer to Question #55 stated further, “The third commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing of any thing whereby God maketh himself known.” You’ll notice a relationship: “hallowed be thy name”—“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” In other words, by the name of God, is meant everything by which he makes himself known. He makes himself known by his name, Jehovah—the eternal one, faithful to his Word; Jesus, which means Jehovah saves, or Jehovah is salvation.

However, he also makes known himself to us by his titles and attributes. He is the Judge of all the earth. He is the Holy One. He is God Almighty. We read in the Scriptures that he is wise, and good, and many other descriptions come to us. We know him as he makes known himself through his ordinances and Word. The reading and preaching of his Word make known himself to us. His will, and his commandments, his promises are all discovered by his Scriptures. We know him by his works. As we meditate upon creation, we understand that God is wise, and powerful, and eternal, and sovereign. His work of redemption shows forth his justice and mercy, that he is both “just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus Christ” (Romans 3:26).

Well, all of these join together in one harmonious display of who God is. This is what we are concerned with when we pray, “hallowed be thy name. We are saying, “Let everything by which you make yourself known be sanctified and treated as holy by all.” Think of how wondrous a petition that is. We desire men to be brought to fear God with reverence as his Word is read. We desire men to fear God with reverence and honor as they hear his name spoken. We not only desire the casting off of all profanity, and vanity, and vain use of God’s name, his titles, attributes, ordinances, word and works; we desire men to be filled with reverence. This is what we’re praying for.

So second, *Enabling the Honor of God’s Name*. Every request implies a need. If we ask a question in class to our teacher, we’re saying, whether we state it explicitly or not, we’re saying, “We need your help, because we lack understanding.” A child may want to travel a long distance, but he cannot drive a car, so he asks his mom or his dad to drive him. The request shows that he

cannot do it himself. He needs the help of another. We've heard stories of people in very difficult positions, in danger, and they cry out for help. Why are they crying out for help? Because they can't save themselves. Well, the same idea helps us understand this and every petition. When we ask God, "Hallowed be thy name," we are confessing that we cannot do this ourselves, even though we desire it, even though we know it's correct, we are confessing that we do not have the power in ourselves to treat God's name as it should be treated.

Additionally, we look around us, and we see how many ways God's name is profaned by others. We see his Bible mistreated, and we see his name mishandled. His ordinances are mocked and profaned. We begin to realize that there is no human power able to change this. So, what do we do? Well, we come under this reality that we can't do it ourselves. We can't make ourselves treat God's name as holy, nor can we make others do it. What we are to do, however, is to go to God who alone has the power to make this change in ourselves and in others. And we come with a simple petition, "Make it so." We ask him to do it. We don't bargain with him. We don't offer to buy this gift from him in some way. We don't make promises of what we're going to do for him. We simply come and ask him to make it so.

Notice the *Catechism* directs us to how he does this, for we ask him to "enable us and others to glorify him in all that whereby he maketh himself known." Fundamentally, this is asking two related things.

First, it's asking that he would convert those who are dead in their sins and opposed to God. There's no hope of an unconverted sinner actively glorifying God apart from God's saving grace given to them. So God must first convert the sinner. This can actually encourage us if we're unconverted. We can go to God and say, "Make your name to be treated as holy by me—convert me. Bring glory to yourself in this." It can help us when we're praying for others. "Lord, let your name be honored in the life of this one who is presently unconverted." Because the only way that they will personally, and actively, and deliberately treat God's name as holy is as God converts them; as he opens their eyes to see and enter into the kingdom of heaven, by grace, through faith in Christ. So that's one thing that we're asking.

A second thing is that we're asking if he would continue his sanctifying work in those already converted. A believer is one who has trusted in Jesus Christ as his Savior. God has effectually called him, and by God's grace, he is turned from his sin unto God in Christ Jesus. However, this is not the end of God's gracious work. You'll remember that God continues to sanctify his people. This is what we're asking in this petition. If we're believers, we are acknowledging that we still need God's continued work of grace in us. If he leaves us to ourselves, we're acknowledging that we will decline and backslide. He must continue to work within us. He must live and dwell within us. Remember what Christ said, "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4). He likens us to branches of the vine. Except the branch abide in the vine, it can bear no fruit. Well, so it is with us. We need Christ to supply us his grace. And so what we're asking is, "That I would grow in holiness, in sanctification, I need you to make it so. Enable me, even though a believer, to do these things."

We have encouragement in the Bible to seek God for this, not only in this petition, but in a promise we find in Philippians 2, verse 13. Paul there writes, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." This is what we're asking God to do—that he would work within us, and cause it to be our desire and our action to honor him.

If we're believers, we're also asking him to do this in our brothers and sisters. Remember, "our Father." And so, we're asking him to do this, not just to us individually, but to all of our brothers and sisters as well. Just as we, they need God's continued grace. If we are to grow together in the

holy use of “all that whereby God maketh himself known,” this will only happen as God enables us to do this by his grace.

Remember the first Question to the *Catechism*: “What is the chief end of man?” Well, I hope by now that you’re able to answer that: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever.” Notice this connection. The only way that we can fulfill our highest calling—our chief end of glorifying God and enjoying him forever—is by God graciously working within us. In order for us to glorify God, we need God to be gracious to us, not only one time, but always. Here is an encouragement then. Christ is teaching us to draw near to our Father in heaven with this petition. What does this tell us, but that God is willing to do this in us and for us? And so, embedded in this petition is a great encouragement that God would give the grace needed that we may indeed glorify and enjoy him. And when it happens that we are brought to glorify and enjoy him, what should that bring from us but praise and thanksgiving? Thank you, God that there’s growth in sanctifying your name! Oh, may he give us faith to trust him as we pray this!

Well, third, *Securing All Glory to God’s Name*. It’s a blessing to know that God works within his people. He enables them. He makes it so that they will and do of all his good pleasure. He makes them a willing people, and all of this by his grace, through Jesus Christ. And what this means is, they, by God’s grace, are desiring and wanting to do these things. And what about all other things? What about the fact that there are wicked men who despise God, and all of their life they’ll oppose God in this world? They’ll always hate God. This means that Christians will suffer at the hands of wicked men. There are difficult things that come, afflictions and trials that come, persecutions that come. Sins have been committed by us that are in the past that we cannot control, and shamefully, sins will be committed by us—things which are contrary to God’s revealed will.

Well, notice the remaining part of the Answer to our Question, because in this request, we also ask “that he would dispose all things to his own glory.” We acknowledge that not everyone will be brought about to desire the honor of God’s name. We realize that there are sinful people and sinful actions. Indeed, we even acknowledge that we sin, that we have done wicked things. Yet this reminds us that God is able to direct even those things to his glory. There’s much here that’s mysterious to us. There’s much that’s hard for us to understand.

However, one story, with which you may be familiar, can help us. You know the story of Joseph. If you don’t, I encourage you, after this lesson, to sit down and make time to read from Genesis chapter 37 through to Genesis chapter 50. As you read it, you’ll discover the story of Joseph. He was betrayed by his brothers. They hated him because of certain favors that their father showed him, and of the dreams and visions that God had given him. And on one occasion, they made a plan to murder him. However, they ended up selling him to some Ishmaelites, who then took Joseph to Egypt. And then in Egypt, Joseph was made a servant. And while he was being favored of God, he was then falsely accused by the wife of his master, so he was thrown into prison. Eventually, though, God blessed Joseph after much anguish and shame. And in the end, God used Joseph to provide a place of refuge for his father, and even his brothers who had mistreated and abused him. In Genesis 50, Joseph’s brothers are worried, at the end of the story, that all of their wicked acts would provoke Joseph to turn against them. But notice Joseph and his perspective, and where his attention was. We see it in Genesis 50, verses 19 and 20: “And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.” Joseph was not a perfect man, but Joseph had been given a perspective informed by God’s Word, and his experience of trial, the exercise of faith, and now this evidence of God’s mercy led him to discern this truth that even the difficulties,

even the consequences of others' sins and our own sins, God is able to work it all together for good. This is something we need to remember. God is able to handle even the most wicked things that men do, and use them for good.

Now we must say, this does nothing to excuse the sinner at all. Rather, it testifies of the wonder of God's grace, that he is able to direct all things, or, as our *Catechism* says, to dispose all things to his glory and the good of his people. And there's an encouragement here for his people. In Romans 8, and verse 28, Paul writes: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." This is a great comfort to the believer. God works all things, he disposes all things for the good of his people who love him, who are the called according to his purpose. Now this is what we're praying for. "Oh God, would you make it so that you would enable us and others to glorify you, and yet even those in whom you aren't working, who will be left to their sin, and would oppose you in this life, yet would you so work all things together for your glory and our good." Now this, you see, is a great comfort.

There will be times, if you haven't yet had it, where you'll face serious grief, sadness, pain, and you'll be left with the question, "How can this promote God's glory?" Well, here's one petition that can help you in that moment. "Lord in my grief, in my loss, in my pain, in my suffering, in the suffering of my brothers, in the grief of my brothers and sisters, hallowed be thy name. Direct all of these things to the glorifying and the sanctifying of your name in us and by us." God is able to do that, and does it, as we look to him.

Well, as we close, if we're going to pray as Christ teaches us to pray in this first petition, we need to be sure to understand how holy God is. We'll never sincerely ask that God would cause his name to be hallowed among us, unless we first see how glorious and majestic God's name is. This means we need to meditate upon it. We need to take up his Word and consider the revelation of his power, and his majesty, and his holiness, and his glory. We must read, and pray, and meditate. Yet, we must also remember that in order to do even this correctly, we need God to help us. Even in our reading and our meditating, we come in reliance upon God to make use of this for our good. In other words, for us even to begin to understand God's holiness, that would then lead us to cry out, "Oh God, make it so that we would treat your name as holy." We need God to work within us. So we see again that prayer is a sincere expression of our dependence upon God and his grace. This reminds us, we can only ever approach God by grace. We can never of ourselves come as those who are deserving something from God, or as those who are strong and able and worthy to receive something from God. We approach God as those who are entirely dependent upon him, and yet, with great confidence that through Christ, he will provide.

A second thing is that we can see another way of increasing our desire to see God's name hallowed, by a more difficult exercise, which is to consider how many ways his name is mistreated and profaned today. We can start with ourselves, and see how careless we are with the Bible; how often in sermons our minds drift and we think about other things; how, in days of prayer, we struggle even to formulate expressions. We can see it in others as well. And this should grieve us. As we consider our own sins, as we consider the sins of others; as we consider how the world presently mocks God's name, and profanes his name. This creates, though, a spiritual appetite. We feel the pains of our soul in the absence of God's name being hallowed, and it makes us to cry out, "Oh, God, make it so that I and others would treat your name with reverence, for it is holy." By God's grace, this causes us to cry out to the Lord to work in grace and mercy. So take time to consider—not in a trivial way, but in a serious way—how it is that there's great need for the Lord to bring forth the holy use of his name.

Well, finally, let this petition as well give you encouragement. The Lord is teaching us to pray for things that are pleasing to him. This should encourage us. Sometimes we're faced with circumstances of wondering, Well, should I pray for that or not? But here's something that Christ says, "Go to God and pray for it!" Remember, as we mentioned in a previous lesson, 1 John 5:14 and 15, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." And so, as we come to God in Christ, and cry out, "hallowed be thy name," we're asking for something according to his will, and therefore, we have every reason to understand that he hears us, and if he hears us, that we have the petitions we desired of him. And so, we approach him in confidence, by the mediation of Christ, and look expectantly for his answer in mercy. Well, may the Lord give us that faith, and a desire as well to seek the advance of the glory of his name now and forever.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #55

The Lord's Prayer: The Second Petition

Question 102: *What do we pray for in the second petition?*

Answer: *In the second petition (which is, “Thy kingdom come”) we pray, That Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.*

We continue our study of the *Shorter Catechism* and its treatment of the Lord's Prayer. In this lesson, we give attention to the second petition. As we do, we should remember the foundation provided us in the preface: “Our Father which art in heaven.” As we do that, it helps us approach, as we remember, “with holy reverence and confidence,” remembering that, as he is in heaven, he is able to provide us all that we seek, and so, though we see opposition and difficulty, and face temptation, we're directed to him who is able to provide. And as he is our Father through Jesus Christ, we come in a humble and needy way, and yet confident that he who cares for us through Christ is not only able to provide what we seek, but is willing to do the same, especially as we seek these things according to his will.

Well, from the first petition, “Hallowed be thy name,” we now come to the second petition, and to help us is Question #102 from the *Shorter Catechism*: “What do we pray for in the second petition?” And the Answer: “In the second petition (which is, *Thy kingdom come*) we pray, That Satan's kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.”

Well, the petition is found in Matthew 6, and verse 10, as well as in Luke 11, and verse 2. Whereas the first petition, “Hallowed be thy name,” considered God more directly as himself—his name; this petition considers God more related to his way with others—his kingdom. It may be that you and I do not live in a kingdom; we live in a form of democracy or something else. Perhaps you and I have a president and congress, or a prime minister and parliament, or some other arrangement. Well, however that may be, we realize that a kingdom has a king that rules over his people. His word, his will is to guide and govern all things. And to withstand the king is to be guilty of treason. Well here, we are taught to remember that God is *the* great King, and as we realize this, we're taught to desire his reign, his authority, that his authority would be exercised throughout all the earth, and honored by all people. And as we are the ones coming unto him asking this, we're particularly asking him to bring his kingdom into our lives.

Well, for our lesson, let's look at three points: first, *A Kingdom to Destroy*; second, *A Kingdom*

to Advance; and third, *A Kingdom to Arrive*.

Well, first then, *A Kingdom to Destroy*. One reason we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” is because there is the absence of the full display of God’s reign at present in the lives of men. There’s another kingdom, a false kingdom, in fact, a rebellion that has the hearts, and minds, and lives of many, and these together are opposed to God. This stands opposed to God and his good and holy laws, and this false kingdom enslaves men and drags them to hell. It boasts of sin, and calls good evil, and evil good. And it’s overseen by none less than the father of lies, even Satan himself.

Paul acknowledged this when he wrote to the Ephesians, in chapter 2, verses 1 through 3. He’s remembering what believers once were in their sin, in their rebellion against God, and he writes, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

Notice just a few things: that this rebellion is universal to all men apart from God’s grace in Christ, so that even Paul says we all were once this way, he himself included. And that, in their sin, sinners are disobedient to God, and they’re fulfilling their wicked, sinful lusts. They’re rebels against the true King. However, also notice that they were following a false king. Here, Paul calls him the “prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” This is a reference to Satan, the father of lies, and the one who led mankind astray from the garden. Christ himself referred to Satan as “the prince of this world,” and he did so three times in the Gospel of John: chapter 12, verse 31; chapter 14, verse 30; and chapter 16, verse 11. Well, by this by this title, neither Jesus nor Paul meant that Satan is the highest ruler or equal to God. Rather, they’re acknowledging that he is the leader of a rebellion, and that he has set up a false and a wicked, and a deadly kingdom, in which all sinners participate through their rebellion.

Thus, in order for God’s kingdom to come, and one reason we pray that God would bring his kingdom, is because Satan’s treasonous and wicked kingdom presently holds sway over many men. We see this destruction of Satan’s kingdom when it is that his darkness, and error, and lies are overcome by the truth of God’s Word. Where error, and sin, and profanity are overthrown by the truth unto holiness, and where sinners who are enslaved willingly to their lusts, are by God’s grace through Christ, both pardoned and purified.

And so here is encouragement. We already see the destruction of Satan’s kingdom taking place. Every time God’s Word goes forth, there’s light shining into the darkness. Every time a sinner is converted, there’s a further destruction to Satan’s kingdom. Every time God’s worship is more purely advanced, we see error and superstition, the trademarks of Satan’s kingdom overthrown. And so, we already have encouragement. And so we ought to be more encouraged to continue seeking the destruction of Satan’s kingdom. In the end, we rejoice to know that Satan’s kingdom will be entirely demolished. You’ll remember in the garden of Eden, how Satan led men captive to this rebellion.

And in the garden, God gave a promise when he was speaking, and he said that there would be the seed of the woman, whose heel would be bruised by the seed of the serpent, and yet this seed of the woman should crush or bruise the serpent’s head. Well, we see this most truly fulfilled in Christ. He was indeed bruised upon his heel, we might say, by the serpent, and that chiefly upon the cross, when Christ suffered a miserable torment of crucifixion, and being made a curse for his people. We also see that he rose again, and he has already begun, as it were, overthrowing Satan’s kingdom.

And one day, not only shall this wicked kingdom be defeated, it will be entirely annihilated and destroyed. Notice in Romans 16, and verse 20, Paul gives Christians this encouragement: “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” This is a great comfort that every believer has access to. God will crush Satan. He does so by Christ. But what a wonder, he blesses that we should enjoy the benefit that Satan will be crushed under our very feet.

Well, second, *A Kingdom to Advance*. Graciously, God does not just destroy Satan’s kingdom. If that were all that took place, all of us would be consumed in God’s righteous anger. Remember that in our own sin, we were willing participants in this rebellion. You and I are familiar with the term “gospel”—it’s frequently found throughout the Bible, and the term itself means “good news.” Interestingly, when Christ came preaching the gospel in his earthly ministry, we see in the Gospel of Mark this joining together of gospel good news and God’s kingdom. Notice Mark 1, verse 14 and 15: “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” The good news is not only that Satan’s kingdom is being destroyed and will ultimately be fully destroyed. It’s that God brings his kingdom of righteousness to sinners, and he calls sinners to abandon their rebellion. He calls sinners to cast off their self-righteousness, and freely to receive the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. He does not call us to earn entrance into the kingdom. Rather, Christ himself brings it to us. And as you’ll be familiar elsewhere, in John 14, and verse 6, Christ says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Our entrance into the kingdom of the Father is through the King, Jesus Christ, who is the Savior of sinners. And therefore, he calls us to believe this good news, not to offer up a price for it; not to try and prepare ourselves and make ourselves those who deserve such a kingdom; but to flee from our wickedness and our rebellion, and to turn from our sin, trusting in Jesus Christ. This is why it is called a “kingdom of grace.” It comes to us by God’s grace, and receives us graciously.

Well, of this kingdom, Christ is the appointed King. He is the ruler and the governor. Remember, as the Redeemer of God’s elect, he is the Prophet, the Priest, and the King. And as King, he’s enthroned over the whole of his church even now. There are many things that come to mind. Remember that he is ascended up into the throne room of heaven, and is seated now at the right hand in the position of power and authority of the Father, and he’s been seated on a throne of grace. We hear of his kingship in Matthew 28, and of his great, verses 18 through 20: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Notice, he’s the King. All power, all authority is his. There’s none greater, as it were. It’s his Word which must be taught. He sends forth his ambassadors, the apostles and ministers of the gospel, to go and teach, not their own thoughts, but rather, his thoughts. And they’re then to disciple and bring them into his kingdom, and keep them in that kingdom. And so you can listen, and you can hear what the *Catechism* is speaking of, that by his grace, we’ve been brought in and kept in this kingdom of grace. And you see that in the great commission, the preaching of the gospel recorded in the book of Acts, and the many appeals, and exhortations, and warnings that are given to us throughout the Scriptures, and especially in the New Testament epistles. What Christ is doing is he’s gathering in a people, and he’s building them up in that kingdom, and he’s keeping them in that kingdom, and he’s doing so all by his grace.

In Psalm 45, we sing of this. We don't have time to go through the whole Psalm, though I encourage you, if you want a good picture of the King and his kingdom, spend time meditating on Psalm 45. Notice the first three verses: "To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah, Maschil, A Song of loves" (subtitle). "My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty." The heart of one renewed, who trusts in and loves Christ is taken up with the beauty and glory of Christ, and longs to see his kingdom advance. "Gird on thy sword." And likewise, the shafts, the arrows, that he shoots will bring a people into subjection unto him, and he will advance his kingdom. Oh, what a great blessing!

Christ has appointed ordinances to govern and strengthen his kingdom. He's given the preaching of his Word, the sacraments and prayer, as we've seen. He's given ministers to administer these things; elders and deacons as well to help shepherd, guide, and support his cause. After he rose again, he strengthens his kingdom by giving gifts to the church after his ascension. And when he was seated at the right hand of the Father, as Paul expresses, he then sent gifts, namely officers, to the church. Notice Ephesians 4, verse 11: "And he"—speaking of Christ—"gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." And these, of course, as he goes on to say, were meant for the service of the church, for the building up of the church. In other words, Christ cares for his kingdom by these officers he gives. Some were temporary and extraordinary, as apostles, prophets, and evangelists. Others continue to this day, as pastors and teachers, together with, as the rest of the New Testament teaches, elders and deacons. All of these are given, not only to gather in a people, but to protect and keep, and preserve that people. And all of them are given by the King.

So Christ particularly blesses his people through these gifts, and cares for them by him. And he particularly blesses the preaching of the gospel. Paul indicates this, in Romans 10, verses 13 through 17: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." This, then—the preaching of the Word of God—is the preeminent way that Christ gathers in his people, and preserves and protects them. So one thing we can say is that if you and I desire to know this kingdom of grace, we should make a priority of the preaching of his Word. This is how he advances and keeps people in his kingdom. So notice that we pray that "the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it." And he does this by his blessing of the preaching. By his grace, God brings us in and keeps us in through the preaching of Jesus Christ.

Well, third then, *A Kingdom to Arrive*. God's kingdom of grace continues to advance by the preaching of the gospel, and it will do so until the last day. At times, there are great advances through revival, as the Lord particularly pours out his Spirit, and blesses the preaching of his Word, and brings many unto himself. Other times, there's seasons of declension. Compromises seem to grow, and there's a worldliness that characterizes even the visible church. However, when we step back and survey the whole of God's work throughout history, we can see that there is an

advance of God's kingdom throughout the nations. This encourages us. However, we must admit that not everything is as it should be. Even in the best of congregations and the best of Christians, there are imperfections, and compromises, and sins. The godliest saint in this world mourns his sin and longs for perfection, not only for his own enjoyment, but also for God's great glory. Well the good news is that the kingdom of grace begun in this life will be perfected in the end. This is the kingdom that we're longing for. It's not a different kingdom. It's the same kingdom that Christ has established in this world gathering sinners unto himself, building them up, and finally on the last day, that kingdom will be perfected in glory.

The believer certainly looks forward to the privilege awaiting him at death. You'll remember from a previous lesson, that "the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection" (Question #37). For the believer, death brings many blessings. And yet, these blessings are not the glory that is to come in its fulness. In the end, it's at the resurrection, when Christ returns, that this kingdom of grace is ultimately perfected. What Christ has begun will be perfected at his second coming. The King was crucified in shame; he was raised in glory; he ascended in glory; he's seated in glory. And yet even creation, as Paul tells us, still groans for the revelation of the sons of God, when it is his kingdom shall be manifested clearly and most gloriously (Romans 8:22–23). And this will take place when Christ returns.

The hope of the Christian is not death, though there are many blessings; it's the return of Christ, and the glory that shall then be. At that day, his people, who were maligned by the world and even terrorized by Satan, will stand victorious in glory. This is a certain day coming, and it's this which leads us to cry out, not only for the advance of the kingdom of grace, but we cry out for the coming of his kingdom of glory, "Thy kingdom come." We see it in the Apostle John, at the end of the book of Revelation. Revelation 22, and verse 20: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Similarly, we think of Christ's return, as we see him there as he is. It's then that we will witness the whole of the universe giving honor to him. The glory he will give to us in his grace will be unimaginable at present. All of this makes our longing increase, "Thy kingdom come." This is the great longing and hope of every single believer. The glorious sight of God in Christ Jesus, and the glorious new heaven and the new earth which he has purchased and is preparing for us.

Well, with that before us as we close, let me help you see something. The best the world has to offer is nothing compared to the glory that is to come. This then should create within us this longing that Christ is teaching us to bring to the Father. However rich we may be, however healthy we may be, however happy we may be in this world, there is something far superior to come when the glory of Christ shall be made known throughout the earth. This also should comfort us in our distresses. If we're a believer, and we suffer in our bodies, or in our souls, or in our families, or whatever our circumstances are, should it not increase this desire: "Thy kingdom come."

Well, likewise, as we see the strength of false religion in our day; perhaps you are surrounded by all manner of idolatry and wickedness. This should grieve our souls, but it should not cause us to lose hope. The growth of atheism, and all manner of open displays of sin—this is difficult, saddening, and grievous to us. It angers us that God's honor should be so dishonored, and it grieves us that souls should be enslaved unto their own destruction. But we shouldn't lose hope, because God has a kingdom of grace that he brings by the preaching of the gospel. This petition gives us help in our sorrows and distresses. "Thy kingdom come;" when you see discouraging sights of sin, God has a kingdom and he has promised to advance it in this world. And as we remember this,

it quickens us then to call upon him, not in our own strength, but rather by his grace, to bring his kingdom to overthrow Satan, to establish his kingdom, truly, sincerely, and powerfully converting sinners and building up saints. Let us be much in prayer.

I want you to think of unconverted family—perhaps your parents, a sibling, a brother or sister, or a friend. They are willingly enslaved and serving Satan. And you and I, we must tell them of Christ and warn them of the wrath to come. The only hope of their being delivered is as God answers this petition, “Thy kingdom come.” And so as you think about them, and as your heart yearns for them, let it fill your heart, that it may be poured out to God, “Oh God, let thy kingdom come.”

Even as we experience the strength of sin in our own souls, and we’re ashamed by it, and we see still evidence of the reality of Satan’s work in our lives in our own sins that we come to God in our own weakness. And what are we to say? “Oh here, Lord, is yet still a place for your kingdom to come.” What an encouragement that is, that as we face discouragement, we have a petition that draws us to God, through Christ, that he would bring his kingdom with power and grace, as we await the coming of the kingdom of his glory.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #56

The Lord's Prayer: The Third Petition

Question 103: *What do we pray for in the third petition?*

Answer: *In the third petition (which is, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”) we pray, That God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven.*

In this life, we see the evidence of many people prioritizing their own desires, and their own wills. Not only does this cause friction between individuals, whether in a family, or among nations—people saying, “I want this,” and the other one saying, “No, I want this,” everyone pitting their own will against the other—it gives evidence of a primary problem. We would rather have our way, not only than another’s way, but even our way rather than God’s way. We would pit our will against his. We see this beginning in the garden. God had expressed his will to Adam and Eve, and he said, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.” And instead of honoring God’s will, they sinfully chose their own way, and turned against God.

Well, with this in mind, we turn our attention to the third petition in the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Christ is teaching us to desire God’s will above everything else, including our own will. In fact, we can say that he is teaching us that our will should be that his will is done.

Well, to help us understand this petition, we have Question #103 of the *Shorter Catechism*: “What do we pray for in the third petition?”—“In the third petition, (which is, *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*) we pray, That God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven.” Well, the petition is found in Matthew 6, verse 10, and Luke 11, verse 2. The word “will” refers to the desire or want that someone has. Therefore, to ask that God’s will be done, is to say that we desire—remember, prayer is the offering up of our desires—and so we’re saying, “Our will, our desire, is what he wills, what he desires. Well, there’s much that is in here, so let’s get into our lesson.

And we’ll look at three points: first, *The Focus of Our Desire*; secondly, *The Activity We Desire*; and thirdly, *The Ability to Fulfill Our Desire*.

So first, *The Focus of Our Desire*. When we ask, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” we have a focus. We focus our desire upon something in particular. What it is we desire in this petition? Well, we’re focusing on God’s will. This is the focus of our desire in this petition. His will refers to God’s desire, what he wants, what pleases him. The beauty of this petition, as we’ve already mentioned, is that we’re saying that our will, or our desire is focused on God’s will, his

desire. We desire what he desires. We want what he wants. This is the focus of the petition.

But how do we know what God wants? Some people think if we just think long and hard about it, eventually it will become clear. But we remember that God has given us his Word. He's revealed his will, his wants, his desired, if we can speak that way, in the Bible. Just as by your word, you communicate to others what you want, what you desire, so God is communicating to us his desire in his Word. His will, in other words, doesn't have to be found out by long and arduous searchings, but rather, by a reading and meditating upon his Word. Well one way we know what God wants in his Word is by his holy commandments. We've already looked at the Ten Commandments, but you can go back to them and read them. And as you do so, you'll gain a clear understanding of what God's will is. What is his revealed will for us regarding the use of his name, "all whereby he makes himself known"? It is that we take it not in vain—we use it with reverence. What is his will for us regarding the Sabbath day? It's that we remember it and keep it holy, that we keep from our own words and works, and thoughts, and give ourselves to all his holy worship, and works of necessity and mercy. What is his will for us toward our parents and other authorities? It's that we would honor them, not only with our outward actions, but with our words, and thoughts and desires. You see, the Ten Commandments give us a clear summary of all his holy will. Surely, there are particulars given to us in the rest of Scripture, which make it more specific to us, but the Ten Commandments gives us a summary of his holy will. So when we pray, "Thy will be done," our focus can be looking upon the Ten Commandments.

But another way that God makes known what he wants in his Word is by his promises. His promises tell what he's willing to do and give. This should lead us to pray that he would fulfill his promises and perform his gracious Word and will. What an encouragement this is for our prayer! As we're reading God's Word and discover his will and his promises, we can turn them back to him, and say, "This is your will. God, you promised this. Would you bring it to pass?"

For instance, God promises that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). Well, we can take that, and go to God, and say, "God, you promised, this is your will that you would forgive sinners who confess their sins to you. So now I come and I confess my sins, and I pray, let your will be done. Forgive my sins, as you promised." Or you can take that with every promise. And as we understand it rightly and faithfully, we can come to God by his promises, and say, "Thy will be done."

We can look at many other specific things in the Bible—warnings, and encouragements, and so many other things. But fundamentally, we know what God wants by the Bible. This is one reason the Bible is important to us. It tells us God's will. Not only does it tell us how we should live, but it tells us his will as to how we are to be saved—by the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. It tells us that his will is that we would be saved by his Son. And so, you'll remember that Christ was baptized, and there, the voice of the Father was heard, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He's highlighting Jesus Christ. And in his Word, he tells us that all men everywhere are called to look to him and be saved. You see, his will is being made known to us. He's telling us that it's his will that sinners should be saved by Christ.

Well, his Word tells us how to worship him rightly. It tells us what we should sing to him. It tells us how the sacraments should be administered and observed. It tells us how to pray, and why to pray. It tells us of the hope he would have us, as believers, to enjoy through Christ. You see, the Bible is a rich treasury of the will of God. And so, our focus is upon his Word.

But he also has a purpose or a desire for every detail of life that he's already planned out. Go way back to the beginning of the *Catechism*; you'll remember the Question, "What are God's works

of providence?”—“God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions” (Question #11). His providence, of course, is one way whereby he carries out his decree. So we can speak of God’s providence as the carrying out of his will. He’s made a plan, and his plan is then carried out. And so this is a part of our focus. We admit there’s a great mystery to this, but we acknowledge that God is in control of all things. And so, we can gladly submit to him even in difficult situations.

You’ll remember that Paul was troubled by an affliction he had, which he called “a thorn” in his side. And he went to God, and he prayed that God would deliver him of this: “Take this from me, remove this from me.” And yet, God’s word to him was “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:7–9). In other words, God’s will was that Paul would submit in God’s all-wise and good, though difficult, will of bearing this affliction. And yet, he would do so by depending upon his grace. And so, even in our troubles, we can learn to submit to God’s will by relying upon his grace.

And yet, as Paul would write, in Romans 8, we also have this assurance—verse 28: “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” You see, we have an assurance, that even though difficulties come to us, God will work it together for good. This is what gave Joseph the ability to say to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, “As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Genesis 50, and verse 20).

So when we pray, “Thy will be done,” without even looking at what God has revealed as his revealed will, we’ll also focus on what God has determined, and how it’s carried out in providence. And we’re asking, “Lord, let your will be done; not mine, but yours. Give me grace to submit and to live upon you, as you have promised in your Word, but let your eternal purpose be carried out to your glory.” So we’re focused on God’s will.

But second, *The Activity We Desire*. In this petition, we’re not simply thinking about God’s will, we’re not merely studying God’s will. Instead, we’re asking, “Thy will be done.” This means we’re asking him to provide particular help—help for us to obey his will, to submit to his will. Certainly, we want to, and we need to learn God’s will. If we’re going to do his will, we must understand his will. So when we ask this, we’re certainly asking he would teach us his will by his Word and Spirit. However, we’re not simply asking, “teach us thy will.” We’re asking that he would give us such grace, as that not only we individually, but we as his people together would do his will. Notice how the *Catechism* expresses this: “We pray, That God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things.”

Additionally, we’re not content to obey him in some things. We want to obey him, as the *Catechism* rightly expresses it, “in all things.” We’re asking that he would give us such grace that we would honor all of his will. We can understand something of the importance of this when we look at James chapter 2, and verses 10 and 11. James writes, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” So notice, basic to James’s point is the truth that God’s will includes all that he has commanded—all he has revealed. Well, this should lead us to pray that all his will would be honored by us and by his people, and even throughout the world. This is why the *Catechism* uses that simple expression, “in all things.” And it’s in the petition, “Thy will be done,” without qualification, without limiting it, whatever your will is, O God, we’re asking that it be done. We’re not only interested in being kept from lying, and thus telling the truth, by God’s grace, we also

want God to give us grace that we would have no other God's before him, that we would not covet, that we would not make for ourselves any graven image, and so on. We want all of God's will to be done.

You'll also notice those words that Christ includes, "in earth, as it is in heaven." We delight to think of the angels carrying out God's will. And what a comfort it is to know that though there are many failures in this world, in that world above, there is perfect and glad obedience. The *Catechism* is helping us to see something that Christ is helping us to pray. As we think about how perfectly the angels carry out God's will, we're saying, "That's how I want my own soul. That's how I long for our brothers and sisters to carry out your will, O God, even as the angels do in heaven." In heaven, the angels gladly carry out his will without doubting, without hesitation, without grumbling, without complaining. You'll notice how the angels are described in Psalm 103, verse 20: "Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word." Notice, they not only know his commandments, they do his commandments. They listen to and are attentive to the voice of his word. They're focused, fixed upon him, and so, as soon as God gives a command to an angel, the angel goes and does it. This is what we're to desire. We're to desire to listen to his Word, yes, but to listen with faith unto obedience.

Of course, this is how Christ describes his people, as a people who hear his voice and follow him. Notice, in John 10, verse 27, Christ says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." You'll notice, his people, likened unto sheep, hear his voice and follow him. They're not just hearing and saying, "Well that's his will," but they're not following him. But they also have the privilege of knowing him, being known by Christ. And so, it reminds us that this is an expression that flows out of fellowship with Christ. And as we come to the Father, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven," it's in the fellowship of Christ that we seek so. Well, the more we grow in grace, the more we want this to be true of us and others. And therefore, we pray, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Well third, *The Ability to Fulfill Our Desire*. Some people think that obeying God's revealed will is easy. Some people think that gladly submitting to God's will or providence is no difficulty. And certainly, we can say that God's will is clear and ought to be obeyed. We can say that we ought to submit to God's will; there ought to be no complaint. However, we've learned that apart from God's grace, we cannot begin to obey or submit to him as we ought. We need God's grace. This is why we ask him for it. "Thy will be done." Notice how the *Catechism* picks up on this important point: "We pray, That *God, by his grace*, would make us able and willing." We're appealing to him to help us graciously. We need God's grace in order to make us able and willing. Of course, unconverted people can do much by way of outward performance. They can do some things outwardly, but we're not interested in merely an outward form of obedience. We don't just want the appearance of doing what's right. We don't want that while our hearts remain bitter or self-righteous. Rather, we want to obey and submit with sincerity, and faith, and love, and delight, even as the angels in heaven. And this obedience can only come to pass by God's grace. What an encouragement then that we read, "God worketh in [us] to will and to do of [all] of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Perhaps you're familiar with Ephesians 2:8, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Well, in Ephesians 2, verse 10, Paul writes, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Notice, it is only by God's grace, through Christ, that we are able to do what is right. Christ

himself told us this in John 15, verses 4 and 5, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” In order to bear fruit, to obey joyfully, we must have the gracious supply of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we acknowledge that our ability to obey and submit demands God’s grace. Moreover, we ask that God would extend this grace to us, to make us willing and able.

It’s another example of coming to God by his grace for yet more grace. What a beautiful truth true religion holds forth. We don’t work ourselves up in our own power, in order then to simply be a little bit more helped by God, but in all that we are, we rely upon God, and we approach God by his grace, not by our merit, not by our works, but rather, by his grace. And we come to him according to his will, his revealed promises and truth, and we call upon him by his grace through Jesus Christ, that he who is now our Father, would yet give us more grace. What a beautiful thing this is! We then ask him for this grace, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

Well, as we close, once again we have great help given to us in this petition. Doubtless, if you’re a believer, you struggle with your own sin. It saddens you, shames you. You learn God’s Word, and in some sense, your understanding increases far more quickly than your obedience. This grieves us. What should we do? Well, we take up this petition, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Oh, God, I see how slow I am to obey. I see how sluggish I am, how bitter I can be, though I put an outward form on. I put smiles on my face when I sing your praise. Though I’m diligent to read your Word, yet my heart struggles with it. Certainly, we need to pray and confess our sins. But we may also come, and we must come and say, “Therefore, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Make my soul, and make the souls of my brethren more earnest to obey all your holy will, and to do so gladly.” As sin is any want or conformity unto or transgression of the law of God, and we discover this sin, it makes us see where God’s will is not being done. But that also teaches us then what we ask for. “Lord, where it’s not being done, make it done.” Well, here is something to encourage us in prayer then.

Here’s something you should remember. Every time you learn something new about God’s will in the Bible, you should turn it into prayer, and ask God, “Thy will be done.” If you gain new insight regarding a commandment, you should thank God for that, but you should also say, “Lord, don’t only let me understand it, but by your grace through Christ, make me to do it, and to do it gladly and gratefully as the angels do without complaint in heaven.”

Moreover, each of us will encounter trials and afflictions in this life. Here’s a petition for us. The Bible teaches us that it’s right, of course, to pray that God would deliver us from our troubles. And yet, as his providence carries on toward us, we also have to remember that we need to submit to him and rely upon his grace. And so, when we encounter difficulties, as we ask, “Lord, here is my desire, that you would deliver me, yet, ultimately, God, your will be done.” We need faith for this. As Joseph was able to discern God’s good will and providence, so we need faith to do the same, and to come under his trials; to trust him in the difficulty; to remember that, as our Shepherd, he leads us even in the valley of the shadow of death—that he’s with us. His comfort is provided to us. And so, we’re willing then to say, “Thy will be done.”

Well finally, here’s encouragement to the believer, because one day, God’s will, will be perfectly done in you. What a joy it is to think of that. “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness” (Question #37). Here is the personal and perfect fulfillment in every believer. At death, our wills will be entirely perfected to delight in what God delights in. At the resurrection, our bodies and souls, reunited and glorified together, will then perfectly keep his holy

will. Our perfect enjoyment of this will be because of his grace and the redemption given us in Jesus Christ. Take hope then, believer, because you've struggled in this life and see some growth, you ought to remember, there's a day coming when there will be no longer growth against sin, but perfection against sin, and your will, will be gladly satisfied in God's will being done perfectly in and through you, because of his grace through Jesus Christ. So pray, and hope, and as you grow in this life, remember, there's day coming when this will be perfectly realized not only in you, but in all believers everywhere. Oh, what a cause then there is to give thanks to God for Jesus Christ!

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #57

The Lord's Prayer: The Fourth Petition

Question 104: *What do we pray for in the fourth petition?*

Answer: *In the fourth petition (which is, "Give us this day our daily bread") we pray, That of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them.*

As Christ teaches us to pray, we remember he teaches us to come near by his grace, when we address God as our Father which art in heaven. From this as our great encouragement, we then seek his glory. Notice, as we follow the petitions, we want his name to be hallowed, we want his kingdom to come, and we want his will to be done in earth as it is in heaven. But the Lord's Prayer doesn't end there. This is not the end of what we're to approach God with. Christ teaches us then to come near to God with our personal needs. And so we now transition to those petitions that deal with these personal needs. The fourth, the fifth, and the sixth petitions express these needs to God.

And in today's lesson, we look at the fourth petition, which begins this second part of the Lord's Prayer. Question #104 of the *Shorter Catechism* asks, "What do we pray for in the fourth petition?"—"In the fourth petition (which is, *Give us this day our daily bread*) we pray, That of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them."

This petition comes from Matthew 6, verse 11, and is also found in Luke 11, verse 3. By using the word "bread," Christ refers to a most basic provision for our needs. Every culture uses a form of bread for food. It's what we call a staple part of our diet, a basic part of a well-balanced diet. Good and healthy bread provides necessary nutrition—protein, and minerals, and vitamins, and fiber. It's also common. It's not a delicacy reserved for the ultra-rich. It's something that the most poor in the world enjoy and eat. It's not a desert, it's a regular part of our meal. And so, by using bread, Christ is training us to look to God for all that we need in this earth. All physical needs then are to be sought from God.

You'll notice the *Catechism* uses the words "competent portion." And so, this idea is that as bread is basic, and common, and needful for us, so we're not asking for some portion that is extravagant. Certainly God may give that to some of his own. But we're asking that God would give us what's needed.

So in this petition, we consider three things: firstly, *Our Daily Portion*; secondly, *Our Merciful Gift*; and third, *Our Needed Blessing*.

So first, *Our Daily Portion*. When we use the word "portion," we're speaking of something

that is measured out to us. When we see the word “daily,” this is speaking of a portion needed for the day. You can think of it this way, you would not need a thousand loaves of bread for one day. That would be far too much for you to eat. It would be more than your daily portion, your daily measurement. Perhaps you would need a loaf, or a few slices of bread for the day. You don’t need a hundred gallons of water for one day. Perhaps you need about a gallon, or even less than that each day. It is portioned out to you as to what you need.

You have a picture of a daily portion given to us in the book of Exodus. In Exodus 16, we read of God’s miraculous provision of a portion each day of manna for the children of Israel. Every morning, there would be this small round thing, as verse 14 tells us. Moses told the Israelites, “This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat” (verse 15). And we read of the instruction given to them for each day, Exodus 16, verses 16 to 18: “This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating.” Well, God was giving his people a daily portion. You could think, a family of five would have had this five-measure portion—five omers for them. A family of two would have had two, a family of ten—ten. And so, though every household had a different measurement, everyone got a proper portion—a competent portion. Each day, God was providing them with the amount of food they needed for that day. God was teaching them that he would provide them all that they stood in need of, even in the wilderness, the desert that they walked through, God would give them all that they needed. He would not give them less than they needed, he would not give them more. He would give them their daily portion. And this is what we seek from God. As we pray, we ask that God would give us our daily portion, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Now, we should remember that God is certainly able to give more, and sometimes he does. He sometimes will withhold what may be more desired for a particular day. But we’re coming to God saying, “Whatever I have need of today to accomplish your purpose for me, please give it to me.” We shouldn’t, in other words, think that it’s only literal bread for which we pray. Bread was mentioned earlier as a way of referring to all of our basic needs. We have needs of food, and water, and clothing. Remember that Christ told us in his Word that if we have food, and water, and raiment or clothing, with these we should be content. And so, these are the basic needs for our body, for physical life in this world.

So as we think of what we need for life, we come to God and say, “God, I need you to give it to me.” Notice that Christ isn’t saying simply “what you want,” but “what you need.” And so, when we stand in need of shelter, or health, and whatever would be useful for health, we’re taught to come to God for the daily provision that we require.

Now, we realize that there’s a day coming for each of us when our lives shall end. And so, we acknowledge that God may withhold the restoration of health. But in praying, “God, give us this day our daily bread,” we’re saying, “To the end that I need strength to serve you in this life, give what I require.” When we understand this, we learn a key to contentment. Paul writes, in 1 Timothy 6, verse 8, “Having food and raiment let us be therewith content.” If we have sufficient food and clothing, we should be content—not worried, not anxious. God has promised and has provided then our day’s needs.

Now, many of us will have food laid out for a few days or a few weeks, and we should teach ourselves to say, “Look how rich God’s been to me!” He’s given me more than my daily provision

this day. We should also remember, if don't have for the next day food sufficient, we shouldn't worry. We should come in faith to our Father in heaven, "You've told us to come and ask, Give us this day our daily bread. And so I thank you that this day I've had what you've given, and I trust you for tomorrow as well." So our portion.

Well, second, *Our Merciful Gift*. There's a simple word used in this petition which reminds of how we receive these blessings. It's the word "give." It's a bold word, and simple. It's almost abrupt. However, we remember that we are approaching our Father in heaven, so we approach with holy reverence and confidence, and we acknowledge our daily needs. And we say, "Oh God, as you're the God who provides what is needed, and as you're my Father through Christ, I come and I ask, give us this day our daily bread."

Well, by teaching us to say "give," Christ is teaching us the reason we receive our daily portion, the way we receive our daily portion. It is, as the *Catechism* states, "of God's free gift." We do not receive our day's provision of food, and health, and comfort, and life, our needs met, and many times, far more than our needs, many comforts and luxuries are given to us—we don't receive these because we deserve them. We don't receive these because we've done something better than others. We receive them, rather, as free gifts. Everything we enjoy in this life comes from God. Every breath we take is a gift of God. Every morsel of food we eat is a gift of God. Every ounce of water we drink is a gift of God. Every second of sleep we enjoy is a gift of God. It all comes from God. And everything that God gives to us, he gives to us freely. We've not earned it. In fact, if we remember, our sins deserve God's wrath and curse, both in this life and in the life to come (Question #84). So when we experience good things from God, we're experiencing his great kindness. We do not come to God and say, "Give me what I deserve." Rather, we come in the simplicity of trust and faith, trusting that God is good and merciful. And we ask with humility, all holy reverence, and yet confidence, "give me this free gift."

Well, this may provoke a question in us. Does this mean that we should not work? Is it wrong for us to work, if we're seeking to receive these things freely? If God gives it freely, why then do we work? Well, we should clarify right away that it is expected, indeed commanded, that if we are healthy, we should work. And of course, if we work, it's right that we earn wages, whether that's financially, through money, or through provision—we work for food, we work for something else. Notice 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 10 through 12. Paul writes of his own example, and he says, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."

Notice that statement in verse 10: "If any would not work, neither should he eat." In other words, if we have strength and ability, we ought to work, indeed we must work. It would be sinful for us not to work if we have the ability. You may be very young, but now your parents work on your behalf. Your dad goes to a job, and your mom perhaps keeps the home and does much work around the home. They're working while you're learning, and you're playing and doing your chores and other things. Well, the time will come as you grow, that you'll need to work, and you'll need to earn, as it were, an income, so that you then can provide for yourself, and as Paul says, to those who once stole, steal no more, but work, and not only for yourself, but that you may have in order to give to others who stand in need (Ephesians 4:28). Our culture opposes this very much. Not just in my country, but in many countries. There is the thought that, if I can just live upon what the government gives, I'll be fine. But the Bible tells us we ought to work. And we should note,

there are some who cannot work. Maybe their bodies have been injured significantly, or they've aged to such an extent that they can no longer put in the time of a job. When it's that situation, family ought to care for them, or if members of a church, the church ought to assist them. Surely we ought to have compassion on those who truly can't work. However, if a person has health and opportunity and strength, they ought to work. To neglect this, whatever others may give them, to neglect it is sinful.

Well if this is the case, how then is it that we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"? It's because in asking for the desired end, "our daily bread," give us this, we are also asking that he would give us the ability to use the means to get the bread. You could think for a moment, in a very extraordinary situation, Elijah was fed bread by a raven bringing the bread from the king's table (1 Kings 17:2-6). That was a supernatural way of God giving bread. We've mentioned already from Exodus 16, God fed his people for forty years in the wilderness by manna. This was a supernatural way, an extraordinary way.

But the ordinary way is through our hard work, earning sufficient income to purchase food. But we should remember, who gives us strength to work? God does. Who gives us health that we can earn money? God does. Who gives us understanding that we can put our minds to difficult situations and labor? God does. Who gives us skills with our hands so that we can labor with our bodies? God does. Who gives us the opportunity to work? God does. So as we think about praying, "Give us this day our daily bread," we're also asking, "Give us strength to work. Restore my health. Give me rest tonight that I can awaken refreshed and attend to the various parts of my calling." So in other words, even when we work and fulfill our jobs, God is giving that freely, so that when we receive our money, or receive payment in different forms, we should say, "Thank you, God for giving us these things." When we sit at our tables with food before us, we should truly and sincerely say, "Thank you for giving this to us. God, you've given the strength. God, you've given the finances, you've given the opportunity, and you've given this food. So we thank you for your merciful blessing."

Well, third, *Our Needed Blessing*. Every living creature depends upon God to give them what they need for life. Psalm 147, verses 8 and 9 remind us that our God is he "Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." Indeed, every living creature receives its food from God, both man and animal. Psalm 145, verses 15 and 16, "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Well, this means that even his enemies, his disobedient creatures receive good things from him. Christ expresses this when he exhorts us to love our enemies, and says, in Matthew 5:45, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." God is good and merciful, freely giving, not only to his children, but even to his enemies.

Some might think then, "Well, why then should we pray? Why should we ask, Give us this day our daily bread? He's giving gifts to sinners. Well, won't he just give us the same?" We pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" as an expression of a desire in seeking it from our Father in heaven. Even though he gives daily bread to animals and enemies who never ask, we ask because we desire it from him. We acknowledge it comes from him. Certainly, we do this as an expression of humility and faith, but it also cultivates thanksgiving. We're asking also that we might also receive, not only the outward provision of health, food, and clothing, water, and whatever else our bodies require

for that day, we're doing it in fellowship with God, and seeking that we would enjoy his kindness and blessing with it.

Notice how the answer concludes, "That of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them." We're not coming with, as it were, a casual indifference to God. We're not coming commanding God. We're not coming presuming upon God. We're coming with faith, as children to a Father able and willing to provide us this day our daily bread. It's in the context of fellowship, and so we receive it as a good gift from him, and desire the goodness of that gift from him. We're acknowledging that "Every good gift and every perfect is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

So as we ask it from him, we're lovingly desiring, not only the gift, but the blessing that is given through the gift—the expression of his goodness. We're captivated with him. Think of it this way. It's not just that we're looking at what's in his hand. We're looking, as it were, into his heart, and we're seeing the love and kindness he has in giving us these good things, and we're enjoying that. The Father loves to give his children good gifts. Christ reminds us of this, when he speaks to people and he says, "If you, being evil, know how to give your children good gifts, how much more your Father in heaven?" (Matthew 7:11). Well, as a father in this life has joy in giving his child good things, it's an expression and a little whisper of the joy that our Father has in giving his children good things. And so as we ask it, we ask it of him who gladly gives it, as an expression, not only of necessity, meeting those needs for us, but as a delight the Father has toward us. And this we seek from him, which, of course, is a great privilege.

Well, as we close, here's something we must pray and ought to pray every day. Every day we have new needs. It may be that our cupboard is full, we have a full refrigerator, we have a store of food or water. It may be that we don't have much. Perhaps our storage is empty. But whether it's full or empty, the whole of our day needs God's portion given to us. We need help and strength, we need food, we need rest, and all this comes from God. And so if we realize that every day, it will lead us to pray. And so it's not just something we need to realize, it's something we need to ask. We need to go to God and say, "Lord, give us this day our daily bread." Perhaps we've awakened and we're sick, and certainly we long to be relieved of that illness immediately. Well, God's able to do that. But we may also pray in faith, "Lord, give us this day our daily bread, to the extent that I need rest, give me rest. If I need medicine, please provide the medicine. If I need to see a doctor, please provide the doctor." We approach our Father in heaven and say, "Give me what's needed." Why do we ask that? We ask it so that he would supply us what is needed for our strength, that we then, by his provision, may hallow his name, enjoy the coming of his kingdom, and do his will in earth as it is in heaven. So you can see a connection. The Lord remembers our frame, and he provides us the strength that we need, in order to honor him. What an encouragement to see the way these connect.

Well, here's something as well for which we should give thanks every day. In Luke 17, there were ten lepers who asked Christ for mercy that they would be healed. Christ sent them on their way and healed them. You would think that such a generous and kind mercy would cause all of them to return with gratitude. However, we find that only one of the ten returned to give thanks to Christ. And in response, Christ said, as recorded in Luke 17:17, "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" How many times have we been as the nine lepers. We're fed, we're healed, we're cared for, but we do not return to give Christ thanks. And this is why we should regularly give thanks to Christ. We wake up in the morning, and what should we say? "Thank you, Christ, for giving me rest." We're able to drink a cup of water—"Thank you for this water." We're able to

eat some food—“Thank you for this food.” This is why we give thanks before every meal. It’s not because it’s merely a custom or a tradition. It’s an expression of believing gratitude. As we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” so now we enjoy the bread, what should we do? We should return to God and say “Thank you! O Father in heaven, we receive this food from your hand, and we thank you for it.”

Well as we’ve indicated to some extent, remember that as God gives you kind, good things, that this goodness is meant to lead us to repentance and to a loving service. And so, let his provision to you, by his grace, be a motive toward you to serve him with gladness. He gives you these things with delight. Ought we not then to serve him with delight? Always in fellowship through Christ, only by the grace of Christ, and yet strengthened and encouraged by his kind gift. May we, through Christ, give ourselves in service, glad service to him who has so kindly treated us. Well, whatever your day’s needs are now, may it be that you seek them of your Father in heaven, for Christ’s sake, providing you all that you need, that you, to his glory, would both glorify him and enjoy him forever.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #58

The Lord's Prayer: The Fifth Petition

Question 105: *What do we pray for in the fifth petition?*

Answer: *In the fifth petition (which is, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”) we pray, That God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.*

When we approach God in prayer, we’re bringing him our heart’s desires. We’re pouring our hearts to him. And thus far in the Lord’s Prayer, we’ve seen our Savior, Jesus Christ, teach us what we’re to seek from him—we’re to seek for God’s name to be hallowed; we’re to seek his kingdom to come; we’re to seek his will to be done in earth as it is in heaven. We’ve also seen that we’re to come to him for those earthly needs that we have every day. Whatever our bodies require and for our lives in this world, we come to him and ask him to provide it to us.

However, this can present a problem to our consciences. How can we, who have sinned against this God in heaven, hope to have any enjoyment of him and his blessings in this life? So soon as we begin to lift up our desires to him, our conscience may come against us and say, “What right have you, what hope have you to seek these things from God?” That’s because our sins deserve God’s just punishment. So are we to ignore our sins? Are we to bargain with promises of obedience when we come near to God, saying, “If you do this for me, I’ll do this for you”? Well, thankfully, Christ gives us instruction as to how we should approach God about our sins. And today’s lesson looks at the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, with the help of the *Shorter Catechism*. And in this petition, we gain insight as to how we are to approach regarding our sins.

So notice the Question, #105: “What do we pray for in the fifth petition?”—“In the fifth petition (which is, *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*) we pray, That God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.” Well the petition itself comes from Matthew 6, verse 12, and you’ll find it, as well, in Luke 11, verse 4.

Here, as we’ll see, we refer to our sins as “debts.” A debt is something that we owe to another person. Well here, of course, we’re asking God to forgive us our debts, and so we’re speaking about what we owe him. And so, as we come to God, we’re acknowledging that there are debts we have before him, and we’re asking him to deal mercifully with us about them.

So in this petition, we consider three things: firstly, *A Humble Acknowledgment*; secondly, *A Requested Forgiveness*; and thirdly, *A Gracious Encouragement*.

Well first, *A Humble Acknowledgment*. Two words in this petition are very hard for us to own: “our debts.” As we’ve noted, the word “debt” refers to something we owe to someone. If we borrowed a book from a friend, but then we spilled something on it and ruined it, we would owe them the replacement of that book, or at least the cost to replace the book. We would be in debt to our friend. There is no question as to what these debts are in the petition before us. If you look at Luke 11, verse 4, we find that Christ used a different word on that occasion. Instead of saying, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” he said, “Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.” We see that it’s asking the same thing, although with different words. In other words, sins against God make us indebted to God. Our sins bring forth our debts. We remember that every sin deserves God’s wrath and curse, both in this life and that which is to come (Question #84). Everlastingly we owe this debt to God, and we can never pay it back by ourselves. That’s because sins rob God of the glory that is due to his name. Sin fails to give God the honor and praise he deserves, and this brings us into debt with God. Instead of fulfilling our purpose, by sin, we have stolen from God. You can think of it this way: if we had a job to cook food, but instead of cooking food, we stole the food for ourselves, we would be guilty, and we would owe however much food we stole. Well, unlike the earlier illustration of accidentally spilling something on a friend’s book, sin is not an accident. It’s not something that happens without purpose. Rather, we’ve sinned willfully against God. We’re guilty of a willful rebellion.

And this is true with our duty to God. We were made to give him glory, to believe him, to love him, to worship him, to obey him. Instead of doing these things, we’ve chosen to serve ourselves, and we’ve stolen from God and failed to do what we were supposed to do. And though at times, we do the outward things that God instructs, yet we can search our heart and see that it’s not full of the love that owe to him. We remember that sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God (Question #14). And so, any failure to give God what is due unto him, and any trespass, or going beyond what God forbids, makes us indebted to God.

What is this debt? Well, the Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We’ve already seen in our *Catechism* studies that there is a temporal death of our bodies, there is a spiritual death of our souls, and yet there is also an everlasting death. And it is particularly this that is the debt before us. Well, why is it that it’s an everlasting death? This is because our sin is against the infinite God. We often are tempted to think of sin as little, at least some sins. And certainly there are ways, as we’ve seen, that some sins are less heinous in the sight of God than others. But no sin is little. The reason for this is all sin is against God. We could say it this way: if God were little, then there would be something known as “little sin.” But since God is infinite, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth (Question #4), when we sin, our sin is an infinite evil. It’s tremendously overwhelming when we really come to terms with our sin, because we see that it’s not just the sin itself, but it’s the sin as committed against God.

And this brings us to see the debt we incur because of sin. This is what’s hard for us to acknowledge, that sin is not out there in the world, it’s in us. It’s not that the world has sinned—though that’s true. That’s, of course, concerning. But we have to own that we have sinned, so you’ll notice, “forgive us *our* debts.” And the only way that we ourselves can pay off this debt, that is, in our own persons, in our own actions, is by paying it off everlastingly, because the debt is infinite against God. This is something we acknowledge. We don’t come to God and say, “Well, our sins aren’t that big.” In fact, if you read through the Psalms and sing them, you’ll come across a beautiful expression: “Pardon mine iniquity”—why?—“for it is very great” (Psalm 25:11). It’s overwhelming; it burdens me.

Well, this is the humble acknowledgment. We can't deal with our debt. We can't earn it off. We can't work it off. And surely we cannot exhaust the fires of hell, because those fires of hell are but the execution of God's just vengeance against the enormity of our sin. But we have cause to praise God, though a humble acknowledgment is before us. The petition also shows us the way of having this debt removed.

So second, *A Requested Forgiveness*. The wickedness of sin is overwhelming to us. Its guilt brings about a debt beyond what we can pay off. And we understand, of course, why sinners want to try and work off this debt. They realize it is something that is wrong. And we can think about our own existence in this world. If we've done something to injure somebody else, we want to help. You can imagine if you broke a window in someone's house, and you realize that you're the one who's done it. You're responsible, and that you need to pay and have it replaced. You might find out that the cost to replace it is a hundred dollars. That may be a lot of money to you, but you can see a way by which you could work and earn that money, and then give that money to the one who owns the window.

However, the debt we owe is far more than we can understand. We cannot fully measure it. You think of how it's a criminal offense to ruin certain things that are artifacts of history, items in a museum, expensive pieces of art. To destroy these items may leave to the expensive fine of well over ten thousand dollars, or even time in prison. And so we can start to get a sense of how some things that we do incur greater debt. Well, when our consciences get a sense of the thing we've done against God, and that it has incurred an infinite debt, we start to realize quickly, we can't pay it off. Notice the clarity that God gives us in this petition: "Forgive us our debts." It's similar to the boldness that Christ places within our mouths when we come to God and say, "Give us this day our daily bread." We don't argue with God. We don't come with purchase in our hand. We're pleading with him to provide freely. And that's the same here. We aren't coming to bargain with God. We're coming with a request: "Forgive."

Well, to forgive is to remove the guilt, to take it away, that we are no longer guilty, but considered innocent. Notice, not just some or even most of our sins, but all of our sins. This is why the *Catechism* say, "all our sins."—"We pray, That God, for Christ's sake, would pardon all our sins." We must remember how it is that God forgives, and when we understand that, we can start to see how any of our sins, however heinous they may be, are able to be forgiven. Because forgiveness comes to us as sinners because of Jesus Christ. This is why the *Catechism* says, "We pray, That God, for *Christ's sake*, would freely pardon all our sins"—because of what Christ has done. This is how and why God is able to forgive us our sins. It is for Jesus' sake. It is because of what he has done.

Now, we do not approach God by appealing to our own personal righteousness. We don't call upon him to forgive us because we have earned it. We do not request his forgiveness because of what we will do on the future. But we do ask him to forgive us for something that has been done. However, it is nothing that we have done. Our appeal is that God would forgive us all of our sin because of what Christ has done. He is the one who fulfilled all righteousness. He is the spotless Lamb of God, innocent of all sin and wickedness. He only has done what was right in the sight of God while he walked on this earth. All of his thoughts, all of his desires, all of his words, all of his actions were not only not transgressing God's law, they were perfectly fulfilling what God demanded. Everything that God required was perfectly fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Thus, he deserved the testimony of his Father, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Christ pleased the Father, and he did so by perfectly doing all that God desired.

He's also the one who was made to be the substitute. Isaiah 53 makes this very clear. After this lesson, I encourage you to sit down and read through the whole of that chapter. And you'll notice, as you do, how clearly Christ's innocence and righteousness are declared. In verse 9, we read that "he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." And yet notice how clearly he has had to suffer the sins of his people. In verse 6, we read, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Paul expresses this truth, in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21. Speaking of God and the Son, Jesus Christ, Paul writes, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." So God the Father takes Christ Jesus, and he accounts our sins to him, that we, because of him, might be declared righteous. So Christ is that substitute. We have the same truth in Galatians 3, verse 13: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

Here is the great confidence we have to be forgiven, as we approach God by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has satisfied divine justice, and divine vengeance. His perfect righteousness and perfect sacrifice gives all, who take him to be their Savior, the assurance that we are forgiven, as we trust in him. Paul gives us help when commenting on the work of Christ, in Romans 3, and verse 26, when it says that this was done, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." See, by seeking forgiveness before God through Jesus Christ we have the only way that satisfies God's justice, that we may be forgiven, because Christ suffered on the cross as a substitute. And we have the way of mercy, for God is able to forgive and declare us as righteous, freely. We can say it this way: God is both just and merciful, for Jesus' sake. He's just, in that the law has been fulfilled, and his wrath has been satisfied, and this by Jesus Christ. He's merciful, in that he gives this to us freely, without any price from us. This is why the *Catechism* states, "That God, for Christ's sake, would *freely pardon* all our sins." Here is the way of free pardon. It is by and through Jesus Christ.

Well, thirdly, *A Gracious Encouragement*. Believers have been brought to enjoy the grace of God. This shows itself in many ways. The believer begins to grow in love and obedience, and the joy of the Holy Ghost begins to dominate their understanding, and they become wise and holy, and all of this by God's grace. One particular way that God's grace shows itself in the life of the believer, is that the believer, who has been forgiven much, not only loves God much, but is also enabled to forgive those who sin against him. Well, when we forgive someone, it's not only that we say, "I forgive you." We also mean that our hearts will be freed of bitterness toward that person. We're not going to cultivate and harbor in our hearts this anger and resentment toward them. We forgive them from the heart. When we do not forgive someone from the heart, that is, truly and sincerely, our lives become plagued with bitterness and resentment. We may have said the right thing, "I forgive you," but our hearts hold on with this resentment against the one who has sinned against us. And this leads us to have little ability to love those who have so sinned against us.

However, we also, in that moment, are living out a contradiction. Because, on the one hand, we're appealing to God to forgive us our debt that we could never pay off to him. While, on the other hand, we're unwilling to forgive someone's sin against us. You can see this, if you were to read Matthew 18, verses 23 through 34. Christ gives a parable, when he's told his disciples to forgive seven times seven times, or seventy times seven times. And to help them understand this, Christ tells a parable of a king who had a servant that owed him much money. It's hard to capture exactly the amount of debt the servant owed the king. It's roughly the same as a hundred days' labor. If someone worked a hundred days, that's how much the servant owed. The king freely forgives the

servant this debt. However, that servant then finds a fellow servant who owes him money, yet the debt the servant owes the forgiven servant is far less. And yet, this forgiven servant is now filled with rage and anger, and brutally treats the servant indebted to him. And we're naturally struck by the contradiction. How can this servant, who owed such a debt to the king that he could never repay, how could he be filled with such bitterness toward a fellow servant who had a far smaller debt. It doesn't make sense, does it? This is why Christ says, in verse 35, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father shall do unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." He's not saying that we earn our forgiveness by forgiving others. Rather, he's showing how necessarily connected the two things are. One who understands what it is to be forgiven by God will forgive others. One who is unwilling to forgive others does not truly understand what it is to seek forgiveness from God, and so they'll fail to seek it rightly, and in doing so, they'll never know forgiveness. If we've been forgiven by God, and forgiven such a debt as we could only pay off through everlasting eternity of hell, and we've been forgiven freely, how is it that we will not be willing to forgive those who sin against us? Yet we realize that the ability to forgive fellow sinners is because of God's grace. In other words, when we are willing to forgive others their sins against us, we're showing evidence that God has been gracious to us.

And this is the encouragement the *Catechism* speaks of. This is why the *Catechism* say that when we forgive others, we are given an encouragement. We ask God with an encouragement, as the *Catechism* says, "Which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others." Notice, it does not say, "Which we *deserve to receive* as we forgive others." Rather, just as his grace has transformed us and makes us willing to forgive those who sin against us, we are now encouraged to seek the same forgiveness from God. God's grace precedes all. It's what forgives us, and it's what makes us, from the heart, willing to forgive those who sin against us.

As we close, take a moment to consider this, that there is a way of having our debt to God freely forgiven. It's an astounding truth. God doesn't tell us to come to him with a price in our hand. He doesn't tell us to come to him and promise what we're going to do in the future. He tells us to come, and to confess our sins, knowing that he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins for Jesus' sake. If your conscience is struggling with your own sin, remember this petition, "Forgive us our debts." "I have no claim upon you, oh God, but that you would freely do and exercise this mercy."

It's a serious matter to consider this petition. Think for a moment how serious this is. What if God did not forgive your debt freely? What is it he could demand from you that would be equivalent to earning off your debt. And realize, of course, that the only answer is the fires of hell forever. God is just, and he "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:7). So the guilty must pay. It's a sobering thought. Psalm 130, verse 3 reminds us, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" The answer, of course, is none of us. None of us will be able to stand before God in our sin. We would be consumed and brought down to hell forever. But here is where the petition gives us help. It gives us great clarity and hope. It can be an overwhelming thing to become convicted of our sins and see the debt that we can never pay back to God. But whether we're a believer or an unbeliever, the sight of our sins is a terrible thing, and we can be tempted in our foolishness to begin bargaining with God. Or we can become tempted, because overwhelmed, to make our sins little in our minds, and say, "It's not a big deal."

But here is clarity from Christ. When we're convicted of our sins, we turn to God for Jesus' sake, and we approach him, saying, "Forgive us freely for Jesus' sake." Here is the good news,

the good way of forgiveness, that through Jesus Christ, we have remission—the forgiveness and pardon of all of our sins. Well, here is the way to approach the Lord God when we know our sins. We ask him to forgive us.

And if you and I have been forgiven, oh, how we ought to meditate upon what God has done. It's overwhelming to think of hell, but remember, that's what we've been saved from, the just punishment for our sins. And to think about Christ on the cross, and that's how we've been forgiven. And then, as we think of that, we'll better be able to approach those who sin against us, that by God's grace through Jesus Christ, we would then freely forgive them from the heart. Well, may the Lord bless that his grace would abound to us, and we would be consumed with the wonder in the way of forgiveness, by grace, freely, through Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #59

The Lord's Prayer: The Sixth Petition

Question 106: *What do we pray for in the sixth petition?*

Answer: *In the sixth petition (which is, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”) we pray, That God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted.*

We come to the final petition in the Lord's Prayer. Now, there's still another part of the prayer that we'll look at in the next lesson, but in this lesson, we consider the last petition. And as we do, we notice a great balance and beauty to this model and directory that Christ has given us to help us in our praying. We've seen, as you'll remember, the foundation for our reverent and confident approach to God in prayer, that we're taught to call upon him as our Father which art in heaven. We've seen the guidance that begins all, that we would seek his glory. And we've also seen how the Lord teaches us to approach him for our daily needs, as well as what to do with our awakened consciences regarding our sin. Yet there's still another aspect of our lives that needs his help, and it's the daily living in spiritual things.

Today's lesson looks at the sixth petition. And as we do, we're taught what to do with the ongoing life we live in this world, particularly with the many evils that surround us, how it is that we find the ability to overcome temptation and sin. And so, the sixth petition, with the help of Question #106 of the *Shorter Catechism*: “What do we pray for in the sixth petition?”—“In the sixth petition (which is, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*) we pray, That God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted.” This comes from Matthew 6, verse 13, and you'll find it as well in Luke 11, verse 4.

We should clarify something right away. There are two ways that we find the Bible uses the word translated as “temp,” or “tempted,” or “temptation.” One is in the sense of being tested, and so, God orders our lives that we're faced at times with circumstances that test and examine us, and not only allow us to say what we think and believe, but actually it displays what we think and believe. We see this in an example from Abraham's life, when he was told to offer up Isaac, his son of promise. And so, we read in Genesis 22, verse 1, “God did tempt Abraham.” Now, this doesn't mean that God was leading Abraham to desire sinful things. It means that God was testing Abraham. He was presenting him with circumstances that would prove through action whether Abraham trusted God or not. So as you read the whole of that chapter, you'll be amazed at Abraham's faith, which was displayed by his action. And be sure as well to read Hebrews 11, verses 17 through 19, and you'll see how it is that faith was shown by Abraham's obedience.

But there's another way of speaking about temptation. So the first is how God tests us. But there is this other idea of our hearts being drawn to something that is sinful. Perhaps this is what we often think of when we hear the word "temptation"—the attraction of our souls; the desires of our souls after something that's forbidden. Well, it's important with that to remember what James tells us in chapter 1, verses 12 to 15. He writes, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." You see how James uses the word "tempted" as translated in our Bibles in that second way. God is not tempted, that is, he's not attracted after sin. Neither is he the one that lures men and draws their hearts after sin. But rather, our own hearts, as Christ reminds us, that sin comes from our own hearts. Our hearts are allured after sin, as James has said.

This helps us understand a few things from the beginning. When we ask God, "Lead us not into temptation," we aren't acting as if God is the one who would cause our hearts to be drawn away into sin. Rather, acknowledging that he may order our lives with various things that will try us and test us, we're asking that he would keep us from those particular attacks of Satan and the appeals of the world that would be the circumstances of our hearts sinning against him. So what we'll see, what we are doing is acknowledging our need for God to intervene and help us.

So then, three things for our lesson: first, *Our Vulnerable Weakness*; second, *Our Needed Guidance*; and third, *Our Required Deliverance*.

So first, *Our Vulnerable Weakness*. Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians 10: verse 12, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Paul is warning us against pride. It's important to realize that Paul is writing to Christians. Christians may be tempted unto pride. So as soon as we think that we're able to resist sin and temptation on our own, or that we have arrived at such a place in our spiritual growth that now we are above the strength of temptation, Paul is saying we're on the verge of falling. We see this in Peter's life on the night that Jesus was betrayed. In Matthew 26, Jesus warned the disciples about what was going to happen. And he said to his disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night," by which he meant that all of you are going to stumble because of me this night. What you will see me face will cause you to stumble. He was warning them. He told them that they were going to sin. Notice how Peter responded, Matthew 26, verse 33, "Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." Instead of casting himself before the Lord and realizing that he had the ability to sin, even as Christ had forewarned, and instead of asking God for grace, and help, and mercy, he stood up confident in himself that he would not stumble, and he would not fall.

We do not need to be harsh against Peter because we share in his self confidence, and in his stumbling as well. Doubtless, he was trying to express, though misguided, his love to Christ and his desire to follow him. However, Peter failed to have considered that left to himself, he was unable to resist temptation. And this is that important lesson for us. We have a vulnerable weakness that, if it's exposed, we have no defense. When we rely upon ourselves, our own wisdom, our own power, our own ability, we are sure to fail. We may be convinced that we love Christ, indeed, we may love Christ, but this is a subtle error that enters in. While we may love Christ, self confidence may creep in and falsely assure us that by our own strength, we will be able to withstand temptation and overthrow it. We must learn that we do not have power in ourselves, by ourselves, to resist even the smallest temptation. We see this in the continuance of Peter's life.

Later on, in Matthew 26, we find Peter facing temptation, and it doesn't come by means of an armed guard; it doesn't come by means of the fear of torment. Rather, it comes in the form of a simple word from a servant girl. Christ is being mocked and beaten, and Peter is outside. Notice what happens in Matthew 26, verse 69: "Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee." This damsel, or servant girl, identified Peter as one who was with Jesus. Surely, this isn't an overwhelming truth. Peter had said, "Though all men shall be offended and fall and stumble, and yet not I." But notice Peter's response in verse 70, "But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest." And so it happens two more times, as Christ foretold. The third is the strongest of all denials—verse 74, "Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew." Peter had stumbled. He thought that he stood, and he relied on himself, only in himself to give in to temptation. What a strong word it is, that he began to curse and to swear. It's not just that he was using what we might call foul language. It's that he was, in effect, saying, "May God condemn me if I know that man. I swear in God's name that I do not know that man." Oh, what a wicked thing! What a lesson it is to remember that we have a vulnerable weakness that, once exposed, even to a servant girl, would lead us into denying Christ.

This then leads us to our second point, *Our Needed Guidance*. This shows us that we need God's gracious guidance to keep us away from temptation, and this is because we realize how weak we are. We need God to keep us from those things that would expose us to that weakness of ourselves. And so we pray, as the *Catechism* explains, that God would "keep us from being tempted to sin." And so, as it were, one way of avoiding the sin itself, is by avoiding the temptation to sin, the circumstances of it. And so we pray, "I don't want to get close to the line, oh Lord. I want you to rather lead me the opposite way."

There's an interesting passage in Exodus 13 that helps us see this. It tells about the "way" that God led Israel through the wilderness after leaving Egypt. And so they were to head to the promised land—the land of Canaan—and yet, instead of going the shorter direction, they actually went the longer way. And you can get a map out and see this way that they went. This much shorter way, you would think would be the way that God would lead them, because it was quicker, and they'd be more quickly into the promised land. But God did not lead them that way, and we're told why. Notice Exodus 13, verses 17 and 18: "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt; but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt." So the reason that God led them the longer way was to keep them from temptations. He knew the way of the Philistines was shorter, but he also knew the shorter way would face the Israelites with overwhelming circumstances, and that their desires for comfort would be so strong that they would turn back to Egypt.

Well, this is an amazing insight for us. We often think of the difficulties that we face, and say, "Why is God leading us through these difficulties." Well, remember the difficulties Israel faced in the wilderness, and yet God knew that there were even more challenging difficulties they would have faced if he would have led them the shorter way. In other words, he was guiding them mercifully. And this should let us see how good God is. It should also help us see, when we face challenges and afflictions in this life, that maybe God is actually leading us in a less challenging way, and we should learn to trust him because he is good.

And as we think of the petition, "Lead us not into temptation," it helps us see this great

encouragement that God is one who is pleased to lead us in ways that keep us from it. It doesn't mean he will always do so, because he has good and holy purposes when he does bring to pass those ordered circumstances that present us with testing and trial. But we ask him, nonetheless, knowing our weakness, that, being weak in ourselves, he would remember our frame that we are weak, and that in mercy he would lead us not into those circumstances, but away from those circumstances.

As a related point, if we're asking God not to lead us into temptation, surely we should be diligent to avoid those circumstances ourselves. Many times, consciously, we know the things that would lead us into temptation, and we know the things that would lead us away from them. And so, we should be diligent to use our own minds, and guided by God's Word, to avoid those things where we know we would be faced with temptations. But even when we do that, we're acknowledging that things out of our control may come, and so we ask him to guide us in mercy.

This leads us, third, to our last point, *Our Required Deliverance*. We realize that there are indeed occasions when God will order our lives, such that we are faced with circumstances that test and try us. And it's not because God is luring us into sin, or he's tugging upon our hearts to make us want to sin. Rather, he's testing and examining us, as we saw with Abraham. He has good and holy purposes for this. And yet we also realize that, apart from his grace, we'll give in to those circumstances and sin against him. So we cry out, "Deliver us from evil." This expression "evil" can refer to the "evil one," Satan, but it also can refer to the wicked things of this world. All of which would mean this: that those things that would come against us, and, as it were, in our own sins remaining, attract us unto sin, we pray, when that comes, deliver us from it. And so, as the *Catechism* explains, we're asking, when he is pleased to present us with these trials, that he then would support us and deliver us when we are tempted. Trials have a way of making us sense how weak we are. And what should we do then? Well, it's not that we need to strengthen ourselves, but rather, we need to appeal to God who is our strength. Remember, Paul makes much of this in Ephesians 6, when he's talking about the armor of God, and he says right before it, "Be strong in the Lord." See, we need to be strong in him, and in the power of his might. And so we appeal to God, "You support us. And as we can't fight our way through it ourselves, we ask that you would deliver us when we are tempted."

When we find ourselves in circumstances that test us, what should we do? Well, certainly, we need to be guided by God's Word, so we need to search the Scriptures. We should surround ourselves, if we are able, with fellow Christians. But we should be crying out to God, as Christ teaches us, "Deliver us from evil." And in doing so, we may enjoy that immediate deliverance, whereby the circumstances are removed, the troubles that were surrounding us, putting pressure upon us are vanished. But many times, he delivers us by giving us grace to rely upon him and overcome temptation through Christ. Notice Paul's experience in 2 Corinthians 12. He was a privileged servant of the Lord, as you know. He was given many insights regarding God and God's kingdom. But in order to keep him humble and reliant upon God, the Lord sent him a trial—an affliction. We see this in 2 Corinthians 12, verse 7. Paul writes, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

Now, we don't know exactly what it was that troubled Paul. He calls it a "thorn in the flesh." Some think it was his failing eyesight that's evident in other ways, by which he writes in large letters in signing his epistles. But we don't know that for sure. What we do know is that it troubled him, it burdened him. So what did Paul do? He rightly went to God, and said, "Deliver me from

this.” But you’ll notice what it is that happens. In verse 8, we read how earnest Paul was, “I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me,” earnestly three times. But God did not remove it. He didn’t cause the circumstances, the trial, as it were, to be removed. Instead, God gave grace to Paul to overcome the trouble. Notice verse 9: “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Well, Paul was not delivered from the affliction from the devil. He was delivered from the power of the evil, by enjoying the grace of God to overcome the temptation. And so this is a deliverance. Though the circumstances remain, he’s delivered while in those things, from the power of them. And how was it so? It was through the grace of God. And so Paul learned not to boast in himself, but to boast of his weakness, to glory in his weakness because his strength is from the Lord. And so it is with us. When we’re faced with real trials that would tempt us and afflict us, we need to call out to God to deliver us, and he may indeed deliver us absolutely from the evil. He may also deliver us from the evil by giving us grace to rely upon him, and to walk in faith and holiness while the trial continues. But notice this, either way, he’s delivering us by his grace and to his glory.

As we close, first, I wish you to remember, it is good to remember that there’s an evil one, Satan, who seeks to afflict us and even destroy us. This should rightly alarm us. Now it shouldn’t cause us anxiety and consume us. Notice that Peter acknowledges this, in 1 Peter 5, verse 8. He speaks of “your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” If you or I knew that there was a lion on the loose where we live, we would not be careless with our daily actions. Peter tells us that Satan is on the loose in this world, and he seeks to injure and destroy unsuspecting people. And so Peter writes that we’re to be sober and vigilant because of this. So we must be watchful. However, if we are watchful, we’ll not simply pay attention to the danger, we’ll be much in calling upon God for his guidance and deliverance. This is because he’s the only one who can defend us from Satan, and deliver us from Satan, and lead us in the right way away from temptation, and if indeed surrounded by it, that he can either remove it, or strengthen us by his grace to overcome it.

Secondly, we need to pray. Notice Christ’s words to his disciples, in Matthew 26, verse 41: “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” So it is that we must watch and pray. And to do this, we must be persuaded of three things. First, we must be persuaded that we will be faced with circumstances that will test us, and apart from God’s grace, they’ll lead us astray. Second, we must be persuaded that we are weak in ourselves to overcome temptation. And yet, third, we must be persuaded that our heavenly Father is both willing and able to protect and deliver us. And if we’re persuaded of these things, then we’ll be much in prayer. So think on those three things. Remember those three things. And by God’s grace then, be led to pray.

But third, though related, we need to rely upon God alone. Now this is what we should be expressing when we pray, but it’s worth emphasizing this point. We do not rely upon our praying. Rather, through prayer, we rely upon God. And so, as we watch and pray, it’s not upon our watching and praying that we’re relying, but rather, it’s upon the one to whom we pray that we rely—God, our Father which art in heaven, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. You see we learn that the whole of our life, not just the temporal needs we have—“Give us this day our daily bread;” not just the guilt we have—“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors;” but also the living out of the rest of our lives—“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” is all by God’s grace. And so, the whole of our life in this world is dependent upon our Father in heaven.

How good it is then to know that he is one who is able and willing to provide us all of these things. And may you and I learn more and more to draw near to God through Christ, that he would cause us then to have a life of holiness, not leading us into temptation, but delivering us from evil, by the grace of God in Christ, and to his praise.

The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #60

The Lord's Prayer: The Conclusion

Question 107: *What doth the conclusion of the Lord's prayer teach us?*

Answer: *The conclusion of the Lord's prayer (which is, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen") teacheth us to take our encouragement in prayer from God only, and in our prayers to praise him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to him. And, in testimony of our desire, and assurance to be heard, we say, "Amen."*

Well, we've seen that Christ teaches us to draw near to God in prayer by grace. We call upon God as our Father, and obviously he is our Father by grace through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ. And as we call upon him, as our Father in heaven, we seek first his glory; we also seek to have him supply all our many needs.

Now we come to what's known as the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer. As we take it up, we consider that there's much still in prayer that is beyond simple petitions. And in looking at the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer, we see this relationship. As we begin with God, "Our Father which art in heaven," we also end with God, as we testify that his is "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever." This reminds us that prayer is about communing with God through Jesus Christ by faith, regarding all the things of his revealed will, and regarding all the things that we need physically, temporally, and spiritually as well. In prayer, we seek God's glory by his grace.

Well, the last Question, not only dealing with the Lord's Prayer, but with the *Catechism* itself, is #107: "What doth the conclusion of the Lord's prayer teach us?"—"The conclusion of the Lord's prayer (which is, *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen*) teacheth us to take our encouragement in prayer from God only, and in our prayers to praise him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to him. And, in testimony of our desire, and assurance to be heard, we say, *Amen*."

The conclusion is found in Matthew 6, verse 13. It's giving us the reason we seek all of this from God. In some sense, it's expressing why we are seeking these things from him and not from someone else. Why do we seek these things from God? And in some sense, the answer is, Because the kingdom is his, the power is his, and the glory is his forever. From whom else should we seek it?

Well, to help us understand this a bit more, let's look at three things: firstly, *Encouragement in Prayer*; secondly, *Praise in Prayer*; and thirdly, *Assurance in Prayer*.

Well, first, *Encouragement in Prayer*. We've seen that the Lord instructs us to ask big things of

God—the advance of his praise, the daily provision for our needs, the forgiveness for our sins. All of these and all else are great things to seek from God. What confidence would we have if we went up to someone and asked them to give great things to us? If you saw perhaps someone who lived in a great house, and you thought about your desire to live in that house, would you be confident to go up to that person and say, “Please let me live in your house”? But we’re taught to ask for things that are far more important than merely the temporal house that we live in. And yet, we remember that we’re approaching our Father—not a stranger, but our Father reconciled to us through Jesus Christ.

And you’ll notice, the conclusion helps us as well. Notice the simple word “For”—“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.” This word “for” means “because,” or “here is the reason.” Here is the reason we ask such great things from you: thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. In other words, what we are asking is what you have taught us to ask. The things that we ask ultimately promote your honor, and it’s the things that only you can provide—your kingdom, your power, your glory are all before us motivating this prayer.

In one sense, we can imagine God asking us, “Why should I do these things for you?” Our response, in one sense, simply would be, “Because they are all things that would honor your name. You taught us to pray for these things, and so we seek them for your glory. They are all things that only you can provide. Only you have the power sufficient for it, and all of these things tend to your praise.” You see, our prayers are confirming our sense that all is for God and from God, and so it confirms the reality that we don’t have power to do these things of ourselves. We’re seeking them from him, because only God can do them. This is why the *Catechism* says the conclusion “teacheth us to take our encouragement in prayer from God only.” We don’t take our encouragement from a feeling within ourselves, or from circumstances surrounding us. We take our encouragement from God himself.

Perhaps we can find help when we think of what might discourage us in prayer. Surely, we would be discouraged if God did not have authority over every single thing in the universe. If there was one thing over which he had no authority, we would be worried that that one thing might overthrow God. We would be discouraged if God did not have absolute power over everything. But if we were not mightier than all else that is, something else would be stronger than he is, and this would discourage us. We would be discouraged if what we sought was seeking to promote the glory of someone else, for though he has all authority and all power, why would we have encouragement that he would provide us these things, if we’re seeking someone else’s glory. However, what great encouragement there is when we see that all we’re asking in accordance to Christ’s model here, we’re asking from him who rules the kingdom of heaven and earth. We’re seeking them from him who has all power over all things, and we are seeking them for his glory alone. Here is our encouragement, and it comes from God only. But you see, when it comes from God only, it then has a real encouragement to us. And so, if we’re to be encouraged, we need to be sure that we’re seeking God’s glory, and that we’re bringing all of our desires under him unto him that he would advance his praise, by his power, and this for the good of his people and the honor of his name.

Well, second, *Praise in Prayer*. The very way we are taught to close our prayer, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever,” is an expression of delight in God. We aren’t saying it reluctantly, but rather, with delight. Oh Lord, we seek these things for thine is the kingdom, the very kingdom we’re asking to come. And thine is the power, and there’s no power like yours. Your power is able to bring all of this to pass. And thine is the glory forever, which glory indeed is most glorious. You see, it’s an expression of delight. In effect, we’re praising him as well.

We're showing that we want only to promote him and his cause forever. In other words, true prayer finds its greatest delight in knowing that God's cause is being sought, and if he answers our prayer, that God's cause is being promoted.

It's right for us to be much in making our specific petitions known to God, everything brought to God. However, we should also be much in praising him. As the *Catechism* explains that when we pray, we are, "in our prayers, to praise him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to him." Notice, it doesn't say, "Yours *will be* the kingdom," or "Yours *will be* the power," or "Yours *will be* the glory," but, "Thine *is* the kingdom, and power, and glory for ever." We're ascribing it to him. It's his already, and so it is we acknowledge it with praise.

We can be impressed by men in this world who have authority—maybe a king, maybe a mayor. We treat them with respect, and we would count it a privilege to be favored by them. We do the same with men who have great power, and men who show themselves honorable and stir our hearts. Yet how much more with God, who reigns over all the kingdoms of the earth, who possesses all power, such that none is his equal, and indeed, who is most glorious. Yet, it's worth considering, this being so, are we much in praising him? It's right for us to come near with our requests. To do otherwise would be to sin. However, the one we come near in prayer is the glorious God who reigns over all. Surely then we should be much in praising him.

To help you with that, I encourage you to look at the great prayers of the Bible. We don't have time even to mention all of them, much less to look at all of them. And as you look through the Scriptures, and you come to extended prayers, you'll see that they're filled with many petitions, earnest petitions, specific petitions. But you'll also see that they're filled with many praises as well. Notice just two examples, for you are encouraged to search the Scriptures and see the same.

Nehemiah, when he was told of the afflictions that remained in Jerusalem, turned himself to the Lord to pray, and he did so with fasting, with earnestness, abstaining from food and drink so that he could more earnestly seek the Lord, humbling himself in seeking God. But notice Nehemiah 1, verse 5. Nehemiah tells us, when he records for us his prayer. We read, "And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments." And then he goes on to notice his petitions and lift them before the Lord. But you'll see that, in approaching God, he's ascribing praise to him. He's the great and the dreadful God. He's the God of heaven, the King over all the earth. He's the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy, and so on. And so, what's he doing? He's praising God. He's ascribing these glorious truths to God. Even though his soul is gripped by the miserable condition of Jerusalem, yet his soul was still mindful that God is glorious.

We see the same in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple. There's much for which he prays and petitions God. But notice, 2 Chronicles 6, verses 14 and 15. We read, "And said, O LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth; which keepest covenant, and shewest mercy unto thy servants, that walk before thee with all their hearts: thou which hast kept with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him; and spakest with thy mouth, and has fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day." Notice that Solomon is mindful, not only to ask blessings, which you'll see in the rest of that chapter, but he's also mindful to praise God. "There's no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth...faithful," and so on, and even faithful in the specific mercy which we here before us today.

And what you see both in Nehemiah and Solomon, you'll see through many prayers in the Scriptures. Well, God's people come with earnest and specific petitions, they also come with their praise. And the conclusion reminds us to do the same, that as we petition him for all of these things,

the full beauty and the spectrum of the things the Lord teaches us to pray for, we also come to praise him.

Well, third, *Assurance in Prayer*. The word “amen,” is one we hear and perhaps use regularly. Perhaps we close every prayer with it. Certainly, we read it in the Bible, and hear other people use it in their prayers. But it’s worth asking what it means. The word itself means “firm,” and thus, means “truly,” or “so let it be.” If something is firm, it’s fixed and immovable. It’s sure, dependable. The word itself is often translated “verily,” or “truly.” You can see this in the following examples. In Matthew 5, verse 18, Jesus says, “For verily, I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” There’s the word, “amen,” but it’s translated “verily.” So, in other words, we could say, “For amen, say unto you”—“Verily, surely, I say unto you.” The Scriptures will remain, Christ is telling us. Every mark of the Scriptures will be preserved till all be fulfilled. It’s sure. Notice Luke 23, verse 43, “And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” What an assurance it was to that thief dying on the cross next to Christ. Christ is saying, “Amen, truly, firmly, verily, I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Great assurance given. John 6:47, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” There’s that word. “Amen, amen, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” What a precious passage it is to see how much Christ is wanting to assure us that all who trust in him have everlasting life.

Now, we look at these to understand this word “amen.” When we see this word, we have this word of assurance, just as Christ used it so as to assure the people of what he was saying. He’s essentially saying, “It’s firm, it’s true, it’s certain. Well then, when we close our prayers with “amen,” we’re expressing assurance as well—sincerity. We’re both saying that it’s our desire, what we’ve just presented to you is truly our desire, surely our desire. We’re also expressing our assurance that God will faithfully do as he’s promised. And why would we have any assurance that God will do these things? You’ll remember 1 John 5, verses 14 and 15. We’ve made mention of this in several lessons. John writes, “This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” If we’re praying according to this prayer that Christ is teaching us, and if we’re asking these things which are according to his will, and we’re sincerely asking them as they are according to his will, well, may we not then embrace this promise that John gives us, “He heareth us”? And if we are assured that he hears us, shall we not be assured that he will answer according to his wisdom and grace? The assurance then to trust God in prayer is before us, and it’s found in God alone. Just as we take our encouragement from God only, so then, we’re able, with firm assurance, because of God only, to say, “Amen.” Remember, we have this assurance because he is faithful, and he is our faithful Father through Jesus Christ.

Well, this is the key to all, to be assured that we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. And may it be that he gives us this grace, and strengthens our assurance in him. But you’ll notice that in order to do this, we must have faith. Faith is not just being assured that this is true. It’s also trusting in him. There’s a personal reliance upon God. And so, the conclusion helps us to see, prayer is not just the right words spoken. It’s not just getting the right language down. It’s not hearing others use elegant phrases and then incorporating those into our prayers. It’s not even searching the Scriptures and taking phrases from them, though that’s helpful. It’s not even memorizing this prayer and reciting it, though that is helpful. But rather, true prayer is the seeking of God through Christ for things according to his will, with faith. If ever we’re going to pray, we must have faith, which is the gift of God. So true prayer is a gracious gift that God gives, and he giveth to us all.

Well, as we close, notice how true prayer both begins and ends with God. We draw our confidence from God by his grace—“Our Father which art in heaven.” We petition God according to his revealed will. And we also conclude with encouragement from and desires for him—“Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.” So here, prayer is seen to be this communing of our souls with God through Jesus Christ. What a blessed privilege prayer is. When we are given opportunities to pray, we should keep this in mind. Though we don’t see God with our physical eyes and our senses, yet we surely draw near to God through Christ to commune with the God of heaven and earth, that we may indeed enjoy his blessed and gracious presence, and to know the blood of Christ cleansing us and reconciling us to him. Oh, what assurance then we may have, as we ask for things according to his will.

There also some things for us to examine. We can ask ourselves first, “In my prayers, do I really seek God’s glory alone?” This is worth thinking about. We can pray the right things, but sometimes, twisted in them, is a desire for our glory. Well, this helps us remember, prayer is not seeking our glory, but God’s glory. Do I seek his glory alone?

Another thing to examine, second, “Do I praise God when I pray?” Oh, yes, I must come to him with specific requests, and God is pleased for us to bring those to him. But is it accurate that I also praise him? We shouldn’t be like, remember, those nine lepers healed by Christ, who did not return to give thanks. But rather, the one who, receiving mercy, comes back and gives thanks. And we also should not be those who pray much but praise little. But rather, as we pray, we should also praise, and be sure to remember God. To do that, we have to know God, and why he’s worthy of praise. So do I praise God when I pray?

And another thing to examine, third, do I pray confidently. Confidence, as the conclusion helps us see, is not something that we manufacture. It’s not a personality trait. Rather, confidence is a gracious exercise of faith. And for faith to be exercised, we both need to know the God to whom we’re praying; we must know him, as well, as reconciled through the blood of Christ; and we must also know that what we’re asking is for things agreeable to his will. When we have those three things—we know the God to whom we’re praying, we know that we’re reconciled to him by the blood of Christ, and what we’re asking is agreeable to his will—then we may say, “Amen, truly,” and with assurance, leave it with the Lord, who is faithful.

Well, not only are we at the end of our lesson, but we’re at the end of our lessons through the *Catechism*. And as we’re at the end of our lessons through the *Catechism*, I surely hope that your study has made you more familiar with the precious and saving truths of the Bible. What a helpful resource the *Catechism* is to aid us in our learning of the Scriptures. Always remember, the *Catechism* is a tool to help get the truths of the Bible into our minds, by the blessing of God; and by that blessing, not just into our minds, but into our hearts. I hope that you’ll be a lifelong student of these truths, because they’re the Bible’s truths.

If you haven’t done so, I hope that you’ll commit to memorizing these Questions and Answers. They’ll serve you well in all stages of life. If you learn from the Bible and truths of the Bible as a young person, it will carry on with you throughout your life, until you take your last breath in this world.

I’ve given you some assignments in various lessons, that as you go through life you might continue them. You’ll remember, one is that you’ll make a list of the attributes of God, and as you read the Bible, you pay attention to where those attributes are found and displayed, and you can document those, and you’ll start to see how the Bible is a revelation of God. Well, there are others as well, all of which you can continue to do all of your life. And as you do, I hope it makes you

know God better. But above all, I hope that by God's grace, you have come to see more clearly and experience more fully your chief end—to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. Remember, the only way you can do this is by his grace, as you receiving and rest upon Jesus Christ alone, as he is freely offered to us in the gospel. And may it be that the rest of your days in this life will be with faith in Christ strengthening you unto holiness. And it is my desire that you and I will experience that glorious truth at the resurrection, when believers, being raised up to glory shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity. Indeed, truly, amen! May God bless for Jesus' sake, and that to his glory alone.