

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to **GLORIFY GOD**,¹ and to **ENJOY HIM FOR EVER**.²

Proofs

¹ 1 Cor 10:31; ² Ps 73:25-28

Comments

The chief end of man refers to the chief purpose for which man is created. It is therefore, that which man ought to aim at or endeavour to obtain, as his chief good and happiness. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him both in this life and for eternity.

To glorify Him does not mean to give God any additional glory since he is eternally and infinitely perfect and glorious (Matt 5:48). What it means is to manifest God's glory in our lives: "that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9b). When we worship and acknowledge God in sincere praise and thanksgiving, we glorify him: "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me" (Ps. 50:23a; cf. Heb 13:5). Similarly, when we sincerely endeavour, in our actions to exalt God's name and to promote the interest of His kingdom in the world, we glorify Him. This, of course, requires a genuine, loving obedience to His Word at all points, at all times and in all situations (see 1 Cor 10:31).

To enjoy God, is to rest in God and to delight in Him. In this life, we enjoy God when we taste of His goodness (Ps 34:8) and experience His special love for us which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). This happens especially as we commune with Him in prayer, in the reading of His Word, in beholding His creation, and in contemplating His providence. Our full enjoyment of Him, however, awaits us in heaven when we are hindered by sin no more, and when we shall see Christ face to face: "in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps 16:11b; cf. Heb 4:9; 1 Cor 13:12; Phil 3:12).

Q2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him?

A. The **WORD OF GOD**,—which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,¹—is the **ONLY RULE** to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.²

Proofs

¹ 2 Tim 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*; Eph 2:20 *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.*

² 1 Jn 1:3-4 *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*

Comments

In Question 1, we are taught that the chief end of man is to glorify and enjoy God forever. But how are we to do so? Left to ourselves, there is no way we can be sure that what we do is acceptable to God at all, not to mention glorify Him. This question, therefore, teaches us where to find help and direction for attaining that end.

We are not to find help in the mere works of man whether ancient or modern—be it in religious writings such as the *Vedas* or the writings of Gautama or Mohammed; be it in the writings of philosophers such as Socrates or Confucius; or be it in the writings of psychologists such as Freud or Maslow. Neither are we to look to the mere traditions of the church for these are fallible (Matt 15:6-9).

The only rule that is sufficient to show us how we may serve God acceptably must come from God Himself, and it must come from Him *inerrantly* (without errors) and *infallibly* (incapable of mistake, perfect). This rule is wholly contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament alone, which is the verbally and plenary inspired Word of God. The books commonly called *Apocrypha* are not divinely inspired, and therefore are only on par with other human writings, and so not part of the inspired Scripture.

The Scripture is verbally inspired in that every sentence, every word, and in fact every jot and tittle in the original language is inspired by God (Matt 5:18). And it is plenary inspired in that it is wholly, not partially inspired of God.

It is to the Word of God, therefore that every believer must reverently go to find help and direction on how to glorify and enjoy God. Which also means that, writings based on the Word of God (including the *WCF* and catechisms), though helpful must be measured against the Scripture alone

Q3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach—**WHAT MAN IS TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD,**
— and **WHAT DUTY GOD REQUIRES OF MAN.**

Proofs

2 Tim 1:13 *Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.* 2 Tim 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; In 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me; Eccl 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*

Comments

This question, together with the first two questions form the introductory section of the *WSC*. In the previous question, we are taught that the Scriptures is the only rule sanctioned by God to teach us how we may glorify and enjoy Him. In this question, we are taught in a broad summary what the Scriptures specifically teach us in order to achieve that end, namely (1) what we are to believe concerning Him and (2) what we are to do which pleases Him. This does not mean that the Scriptures do not teach anything else (e.g. history or geography), but that the things which pertains to salvation is the principal emphasis of the Scripture. Other subjects found in the Scriptures, though bearing the stamp of divine authority, and are inerrant and infallible, are nevertheless not alike necessary and useful.

These two duties alone are explained fully and sufficiently in the Scriptures. It explains who God is, what He has done for us, and what He requires us to do, in order that it may be well with us now and forever more.

The questions in the catechism that follow are, accordingly, divided into 2 sections. The first section (Q. 1-38) covers what we are to believe concerning God and His works. The second section (Q. 39-107) covers what duties God requires of us.

Q4. What is God?

A. God is a **SPIRIT**,¹—*infinite*,² *eternal*,³ and *unchangeable*,⁴—in His being,⁵ wisdom,⁶ power,⁷ holiness,⁸ justice,⁹ goodness, and truth.¹⁰

Proofs

¹ John 4:24; ² Job 11:7–9; ³ Ps. 90:2; ⁴ James 1:17; ⁵ Ex 3:14; ⁶ Ps. 147:5; ⁷ Heb 1:3; ⁸ Rev. 4:8; ⁹ Rev. 15:4; ¹⁰ Ex 34:6–7.

Comments

This answer to this question, provides, perhaps the most sublime and succinct description of God ever to be penned. It teaches us firstly, that God is a Spirit, i.e. He does not have a physical body like us. When the Scriptures speaks of His arms, feet, eyes and ears (e.g. Nah 1:3; Isa 52:10; Ps 34:13), they must be taken to be figurative or anthropomorphic, i.e. describing God in a manner that we can understand. Since the incarnation, Jesus Christ has indeed taken on a human body so that he is fully God and fully man, but as God—the Second Person of the Trinity, He remains a Spirit with all the essential divine attributes remaining unchanged, pure and unmixed.

Secondly, this question teaches us that God is (1) *infinite*, i.e. without bounds in regards to his being and perfection (in other words, His transcendence, immensity and absolute perfection); (2) *eternal* i.e. having no beginning or end (which also implies His aseity or self-existence); and (3) *unchangeable* (or immutable), i.e. remaining always the same with no change whether for better or for worse. These three terms, we are to realise, serve two purpose here: (1) they denote the incommunicable attributes of God, i.e. attributes which we do not share with Him at all; and (2) they are adjectives to describe his communicable attributes as enumerated in the next seven terms.

And so thirdly, the question teaches us that the communicable attribute of God, i.e. the attributes which may be found in measure and degree in the creatures are wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth, all of which God possesses in infinite measure and perfection. Such is our God—a God transcendently wise, powerful, holy, just, good and true.

Q5. Are there more Gods than one?

A. There is but **ONE ONLY**, the Living and True God.

Proofs

Deut 6:4; Isa 45:5a; 1Thes 1:9.

Comments

We are here taught that (1) there is only one God; (2) He is the Living God; and (3) He is the True God.

The first proposition, which answers the catechism question directly, reminds us that in the history of mankind, many polytheistic religions have been invented, no doubt under satanic influence. Apart from Old Testament Judaism which was monotheistic, almost all other ancient civilizations worship more than one God. The Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Hindus, the Chinese, all have their pantheon of gods. It is interesting to note that as society progresses, polytheism is more and more discarded by the world. But instead of believing in monotheism as taught in the Bible, Satan has blinded the world to believe rather in atheism or pantheism, both of which are seriously in error not only from a biblical standpoint but from logical reasoning.

The second proposition negatively refutes idolatry—since idols are dead (Ps 115:4-7), and positively teaches us that God is the source of all life (Acts 17:28a, 1Tim 6:13).

The third proposition negatively reminds us that man has invented many false gods (1Cor 10:20) and positively teaches us that the LORD alone is the true God. “But the LORD is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting king . . . The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. . . . They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish” (Jer 10:10-15).

It is of course not sufficient for us to know that God is one. We must also know that He is triune, which the subject of the next question.

Q6. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There is 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.

Proofs

Deut 6:4 *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD*; Jer 10:10a *But the LORD is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting king*; Matt 28:19 *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*; 1Jn 5:7 *For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*

Comments

The Scripture not only teaches us that there is only one God (e.g. Deut 6:4), it also teaches us that there are three Persons in the Godhead. This is so because the Father is God (Isa 63:16); the Son is God (Jn 1:2; Isa 9:6; Rom 9:5; 1Tim 3:16 Phil 2:6; 1Jn 5:20 etc); the Holy Spirit is a person (Jn 14:26; Act 16:7; 5:3, 9; Eph 4:30 etc) and He is God (Ps 139:7-9; Heb 9:14; etc). Moreover, the Scripture clearly teaches us that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons. This is hinted in the OT with the use of the plural pronoun (e.g. Gen 1:26-27), but is most clearly seen in the baptism of Jesus (Matt 2:16-17) where we see Jesus being baptised, the Holy Spirit descending and the Father speaking from heaven at about the same time. Thus the Father is not the Son nor the Holy Spirit and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. This means that the popular illustrations used to teach the doctrine of the Trinity such as the 3 states of water or the father-son-uncle roles are simply heretical (an ancient heresy known as Sabellian modalism). There is simply illustrations suitable to explain the Trinity.

While we are unable to fully comprehend the Trinity, we may apprehend sufficiently to know that God is one in being or substance and three in person or subsistence. And since each person in the Godhead is equally God—equal in power and glory, each must be worship and honoured alike.

Q7. What are the decrees of God?

A. The decrees of God are **HIS ETERNAL PURPOSE**, according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory, He hath *fore-ordained* whatsoever comes to pass.

Proofs

Isa 40:13; Rom 8:28; Matt 10:29; Eph 1:3-4, 11; Rom 9:22-23

Comments

The decrees of God are His purposes, or what He has from eternity determined beforehand to do. The answer to this question tells us that whatsoever, i.e. everything that comes to pass has been unchangeably fore-ordained, i.e. pre-determined by God. In other words, nothing happens by chance. What ever happens, happens by the sovereign, providential outworking of God's decrees. Moreover, His decrees are not influenced by any external factors, at all. They are decreed according to His infinite wisdom and for His own glory.

God's decrees are sometimes apprehended under two categories: general and special. By His general decrees God determined all things and their actions and motion—not only the good actions, but those which from a temporal human standpoint may not appear good (Eph 1:11; Act 2:23; 4:27-28; Prov 16:4). Yet God is not the author of sin (Jas 1:13, 17; 1Jn 1:5), neither is man less responsible for his sin since God's decrees do not involve an external manipulation of the heart of sinners. Sinner sin out of their own evil inclinations and are therefore responsible for their actions (cf. Mk 14:21).

God's special decrees are his sovereign election and predestination of some men and angels unto life everlasting as well as the reprobation of others unto damnation. In this way, God makes all things work together for good to them that love Him (who have been fore-ordained indeed to love Him), and to demonstrate His justice against those who hate him (who have indeed been ordained unto damnation from the beginning). Through God's sovereign decrees, the elect are brought eventually to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and preserved unto the very end. The reprobate on the other hand are passed- by and left to perish in their own sin unto the praise of His own glory and His infinite justice (Rom 9:21-22).

Q8. How doth God execute His decrees?

A. God executeth His decrees in the works of **CREATION** and **PROVIDENCE**.

Proofs

Revelation 4:11 *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.; Daniel 4:35* *And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he 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?*

Comments

In the last question, the decrees of God are defined as “His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will.” The word ‘eternal’ tells us that the decrees were made in eternity, before anything else (apart from God) existed. In other words, the decrees are pre-temporal (before time even existed), since time as we understand it really begun with creation. In any case, ‘eventually’ God carries out His decrees, by translating them into the works of creation and providence. Notice the phrase “God executeth,” which tells us that God did not just decree but execute about the dictates of His decrees—for only He alone is able to do so. This distinguishes God decrees with the decrees of men, be they kings and sovereigns or otherwise, for in the decrees of man, the one who decrees relies on his subjects to execute his decrees, and frequently what is carried out is not what was decreed. Not do in God's decrees. He alone is all powerful, He alone is able to fulfill His decrees and He alone fulfills His decrees, and He fulfills it perfectly. “I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure . . . I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isa 46:9-11). In the works of creation God made all things according to his eternal plan by His infinite power and wisdom. In His work of providence where He sovereignly preserves and governs all things—animate and inanimate, according to His eternal purpose and counsel.

Q9. What is the work of creation.?

A. 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.

Proofs

Genesis 1:1-31 *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. . . . 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.* Hebrews 11:3 *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.* Psalm 33:6, 9: *By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.*

Comments

Subsequent to God's decrees, God began to create the world in which we live in. From this question, we learn several facts about this work of creation. Firstly, God created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), by the word of His power (by divine *fiat*). When man attempts to create anything, he will always begin with existing material, for out of nothing, nothing comes (*ex nihilo nihil fit*), but not so for God. He is the alone First Cause, He alone is able to bring something into existence when nothing existed. Secondly, we learn that God created all things in 6 days (Gen 1; Ex 20:11). This immediately refutes the theory of evolution that the world has been in existence for billions of years and that higher life forms evolved from lower life forms over millions of years. The Scripture teaches us that the life forms were created fully developed and according to their kind (Gen 1:11; 21). This allows for variations within each kind (e.g. different kinds of dogs), but does not allow for one kind to become another kind as taught in evolutionism. Thirdly, when the world was first created, it was very good. This again contradicts the evolutionistic notion that the world was never perfect, but always evolving. The Scripture teaches us that before the fall of man, the world was perfect for God had created it thus. Since the fall of man, as a consequence of sin, the world has been deteriorating rather than improving. This can be seen in the number of animals getting extinct, in the shortness of human life span (comparing with the average life-span before and immediately after the flood), as well as the environmental deterioration that the world has been experiencing such as global warming.

Q10. How did God create man?

A. God created man,—male and female,—**AFTER HIS OWN IMAGE**,—in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness,—with dominion over the creatures.

Proofs

Gen 1:27-28 *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 subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.* Eph 4:24 *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* Col 3:10 *And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.*

Comments

We are taught several important truths in this short statement. Firstly, God created man male and female. This is for their mutual help and encouragement (Gen 2:18) as well as for the propagation of mankind (Gen 1:28). Secondly, we learn that man is created in the image of God. This does not refer to the physical constitution of man for God is a spirit, but it refers to the moral attributes and the soul of man. The soul of man resembles God in possessing knowledge and reason, and in being righteous and holy. When he was first created, man knows God and His laws perfectly (cf. Rom 2:14-15), and is able to reason objectively without the influence of sin (noetic effect of sin). He was also righteous in his will, and has a natural disposition and ability to do good. He was holy in his affection, and so loved and delighted in God above all else. Finally, we learn that man as originally created was given dominion over all inferior creatures.

Q11. What are God's works of providence?

A. God's works of providence are, His most holy,¹ wise,² and powerful **PRESERVING**³ **AND GOVERNING** all His creatures and all their actions.⁴

Proofs

¹ Ps 145:17; ² Ps 104:24; Isa 28:29; ³ Heb 1:3; ⁴ Prov 16:9; Ps 103:19; Matt 10:29-30.

Comments

The word 'providence' comes from the Latin *provideo*, which is a compound word of two parts: *pro* meaning 'before' and *video* meaning 'see.' Thus God's "works of providence" speaks of His bringing to pass what He has decreed and so foreknown. He does so, according to this catechism, in two distinguishable activities.

Firstly, He preserve. This has two aspects: (1) He upholds and sustains the existence of all that He created or brought into existence (cf. Ps 119:89-90; Heb 1:3; Acts 17:28). Understand that nothing but God Himself is self-existent, i.e. if God stops upholding our existence, we return to non-existence. It is in God, "we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). (2) He provides what is necessary (such as air, water, food etc) for his creatures to continued living (cf. Ps 36:6; 145:15-16). Notice that the first aspect involves both inanimate (cf. WCF 5.1) as well as animate things, whereas the second generally refers to living things.

Secondly, He governs. This has to do with God directing all the motions of all that He has made, especially the actions His creatures (cf. Ps 103:19). Notice the pan-inclusive adjective 'all.' This means it include (1) all the natural motions of living and non-living things (cf. Prov 16:9; Acts 17:28; Matt 10:28-30); (2) all morally good actions (cf. Jn 15:5); (3) all morally evil or sinful actions (cf. Acts 2:23; Gen 45:5). Though the latter is not to be understood as accomplished by bare permission of God as if the sinning creatures are able to move without the providential enabling of God, yet God is not the author of sin. The sinner sins of his own evil inclination and therefore is wholly responsible.

God's work of providence is carried out perfectly according to His infinite holiness, wisdom and power (Ps 145:17; Ps 104:24; Isa 28:29).

The doctrine of providence should not only fill our hearts with awe to know that we are constantly dependant on God for our existence; but also fill us with gratitude and comfort to know that He cares for us and is able to keep us from all danger or to preserve us in tribulations if He chooses to bring us through them. It is with an understanding of the doctrine of providence, that we may exclaim with Paul, "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

Q12. What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created?

A. 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 pain of *death*.

Proofs

Genesis 2:16-17 *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: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely;* Galatians 3:12 *And the law is not of faith; but, the man that doeth them shall live in them.*

Comments

When God had created Adam and Eve, he established a probationary covenant with Adam, under which he and his posterity would live forever if he kept His Laws personally, perfectly and perpetually (Gal 3:12; Rom 10:5). The pledge of the eternal life which was promised them was the Tree of Life (WLC 20). The law which Adam (and Eve) had to keep Law refers to God Moral Law (in a pre-fall or supralapsarian form), which is inscribed in their hearts (Rom 2:14-15), they being created in the image of God. But as a concrete and representative test of his total obedience, God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil upon the penalty of death (Gen 2:16-17), which death refers both to physical and temporal death as well as spiritual and eternal death. Physical death refers to the separation of the soul from the body. It is temporal because the bodies of both believers and unbeliever will be raised at the resurrection—the bodies of believers unto honour and glory, the bodies of unbelievers unto dishonour and corruption. Spiritual death consists in (1) separation of the soul from God; (2) the lost of conformity to God's image; and (3) the prospect of eternal torment in hell under the wrath of God.

This covenant is known as the Covenant of Life, and is frequently called Covenant of Works (cf. WCF 7.2). This covenant was never abrogated though the Fall made it impossible for man who descent by ordinary generation from Adam to keep it.

When Christ lived in this world, He lived a life of perfect obedience; and as the Second Adam, He essentially obeyed the covenant on our behalf. His human righteousness (so obtained by His Active Obedience) is imputed on us who are His covenant children, just as His Passive Obedience on the Cross paid for the penalty of our sins.

Q13. Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?

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

Proofs

Genesis 3:6 *And when the woman 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, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.* Ecc 7:29 *Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.* Hos 6:7 *But they like men [or Adam] have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.*

Comments

In his famous book, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, the Scottish Puritan, Thomas Boston (1676-1732) tells us that the four states of human nature are: (1) Primitive Integrity; (2) Entire Depravity; (3) Begun Recovery; and (4) Consummate Happiness or Misery.

These four states, which are derived from the Scripture, corresponds to the four states of man in relation to sin enumerated by Augustine of Hippo: (1) able to sin, able not to sin (*posse peccare, posse non peccare*); (2) not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*); (3) able not to sin (*posse non peccare*); and (4) unable to sin (*non posse peccare*). The first state corresponds to the state of man in innocency, before the Fall; the second the state of the natural man after the Fall; the third the state of the regenerate man; and the fourth the glorified man.

It must be noted that in all four states, man is free to choose what to do or not to do according to his will. His will is free because it is not forced or compelled from without. However, his will is determined by his own moral inclinations. This means that while the glorified man will always choose to do good because his heart's inclination is always to glorify God; the natural fallen man will always do what is evil (in God's eyes), because his motives are never pure, and never to glorify God.

Before the Fall, man was able to choose to do either good or evil, his heart, and so his inclination and disposition, being innocent and not tainted by sin. But Adam's state was mutable and when Satan tempted Eve, and then through Eve, tempted him, he chose to sin against God by eating the forbidden fruit and so fell from the estate innocency.

Q14. What is sin?

A. Sin is any *want of conformity* unto,—or *transgression* of,—the **LAW OF GOD**.

Proofs

1 John 3:4 *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.* Cf. Gal 3:10, 12; Rom 3:23.

Comments

We are taught here that sin is not just a matter of doing what is socially unacceptable or unkind. Sin must be defined according to the Law of God. It has two aspects: positively, it is to do with transgression of the Law or a failure to obey the Law, sometimes denoted sin of commission; negatively, it has to do with a failure to meet up to the demands and require-ments of the Law or to “come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23b). This would include Original Sin (cf. WSC 18) and Sins of Omission.

The Law of God refers to His commandments, and may be classified into three classes, namely: (1) The Judicial Laws which was given to Israel as a body politic under the Old Covenant and so is not directly applicable to Christians under the New Covenant; (2) The Ceremonial Laws which are given to Israel as the church under-age and regulate the ordinances of types and shadows which points to Christ, and therefore abrogated with the coming and fulfillment of the anti-type; and (3) The Moral Laws which are perpetually and universally binding.

The Moral Law is summarised in the Ten Commandments, but is also inscribed in the heart of man, he being created in the image of God (Rom 2:15). Though, the Fall has rendered man's perception of the Law very dim, it is sufficient to render a man inexcusable even if he has never read the written Word.

Q15. What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?

A. The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created, was their **EATING THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT**.

Proofs

Gen 3:6, 12 *And when the woman 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, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. . . . And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.*

Comments

The question appears so straight forward that there hardly needs to be any comments: The sin by which our first parents fell, by which they also involved their entire posterity in sin was their disobedience to God's positive commandment to them not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

A few comments is helpful though. Firstly, it must be noted that the fruit itself is not intrinsically evil. Neither is there anything magical about it. It was probably just an ordinary fruit tree, and had God not issued a prohibition to Adam and Eve, eating of it would have been a matter of indifference. But since God issued the commandment to them to try their obedience, eating of the fruit became absolutely unlawful, so that when Adam and Eve ate of it, they were essentially rebelling against God. Secondly, if we think about it carefully, we will see that this sin involves much more than a simple breaking of a positive command. Thomas Vincent is especially helpful here in his enumeration of what sins were included with Adam and Eve's disobedience. He writes:

"The sins included in our first parents, eating the forbidden fruit were: (1) Rebellion against God their sovereign, who had expressly forbidden them to eat of this tree. (2) Treason, in conspiring with the devil, God's enemy, against God. (3) Ambition, in aspiring to a higher state, namely, to be as God. (4) Luxury, in indulging so much to please the sense of taste, which did inordinately desire this fruit. (5) Ingratitude to God, who had given them leave to eat of any tree of the garden besides. (6) Unbelief, in not giving credit to the threatening of death, but believing the devil, who said they should not die, rather than God, who told them they should surely die, did they eat of this fruit. (7) Murder, in bringing death, by this sin, upon themselves, and all their posterity. These, and many other sins, were included in this sin of our first parents, eating of the forbidden fruit; which did render it exceeding heinous in the sight of God."

Q16. Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?

A. 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.

Proofs

Gen 2:16-17; Rom 5:12, 18-19; 1 Cor 15:21-22.

Comments

Adam was no ordinary person when he was placed in the Garden of Eden. He was there on probation under a covenant of works on behalf of himself and his posterity. Thus, when Adam fell, all who descended from him by natural generation sinned in him and fell with him. They sin in him virtually and representatively. Virtually (or seminally), because all his posterity was in his loins. Levi is said to have given tithes to Melchizedek because "he was yet in the loins of his father [Abraham], when Melchizedek met him" (Heb 7:5-10). Representatively, because Adam was the common head of all mankind (by natural generation), and so was appointed by God to be the representative of all man (Isa 43:27; Rom 5:12). All men descending from him by ordinary generation (i.e. apart from Christ Jesus who was born of a virgin – Matt 1:18), are therefore accounted as sinners in the eye of God. This may appear, at first sight, to be unfair, but when we consider that today we do elect leaders to represent us too, and when our leaders declare war with a different country, we are at war too. Moreover, when we think about it, we see that God could not have elected a better representative for us—Adam being our first father, and Adam being yet in a state of innocency, able to choose to obey or to rebel. We therefore have to conclude that God is eminently fair.

Q17. Into what estate did the Fall bring mankind?

A. The Fall brought mankind into an estate of **SIN** and **MISERY**.

Proofs

Romans 5:12

Comments

When Adam and Eve were first placed in the Garden of Eden, they were in a state of righteousness. They were in constant communion with God and in a state of blessedness not mingled with sin. Had they not fallen into sin, their progenitors would no doubt have been brought into a world of righteousness and joy.

Adam, however, fell into sin (which is why it is referred to as the 'Fall'), and since he represented all mankind who would proceed from him by natural generation, all mankind since then are brought into an estate of sin and misery. In other words, all men descending from Adam by natural generation are born in sin, and are expected face much miseries in this life as a result of sin. In the next question, we shall look at the result of the fall in detail in the exposition of the next question. For now, let us realize that all sin, sicknesses, and tribulations in this life are all as the result of the Fall.

Q18. Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

A. 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.

Proofs

Rom 5:10-20; Eph 2:1-3; Jas1:14,15; Matt 15:19; Ps 51:5

Comments

This question addresses the extent of the sinfulness which was brought upon every individual descendant of Adam as a result of his Fall. This sinfulness consists of two parts which can be diagrammed for clarity thus:

I. Original Sin

a. Imputed Guilt of Adam

b. Inherited sin nature of Adam

i. want of ability and desire to do right

ii. positive inclination to sin

II. Actual Sins.

Notice that Original Sin does not refer to the sin of Adam or Eve in their eating of the forbidden fruit. Rather, it refers to the result of their sin on their posterity, which comprises two parts, namely: (1) guilt imputed or accounted-on since Adam was our representative; (2) sin nature inherited since we descend naturally from Adam. This sin nature is describe in the answer positively as a “want of original righteousness” and negatively as “the corruption of his whole nature.” It is because of this sin nature that actual sins springs from our heart.

Q 19. What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?

A. All mankind by their fall **LOST COMMUNION WITH GOD**,¹ are under His *wrath and curse*,² and so made liable to *all miseries in this life*,—to death itself,—and to the pains of *hell* for ever.³

Proofs

¹ Isa 59:2; Gen 3:8, 10, 24; ² Gen 3:17; Eph 2:2,3; Gal 3:10;

³ Ezk 18:4; Ps 9:17; Rom 6:23; Matt 25:41,46

Comments

The misery of the estate into which men fell comprise three part: (1) what he lost; (2) what he is brought under; and (3) what he is made liable to.

Firstly, man lost communion with God. This refers to the fact that fallen man is no longer able to have the gracious presence and favour of God together with the sweet fellowship that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1Jn 1:5); and is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13). For this reason when Adam & Eve fell, they hid themselves and tried to cover themselves. Because God is our chief good; and enjoyment or communion with God is our chief end and felicity, this loss is the greatest loss and misery.

Secondly, man is brought under God’s curse and wrath. Because of sin, man can no longer expect God’s favour and blessing. Rather he is subject to God’s curse and wrath (Eph 2:2-3).

Thirdly, man is made liable to (a) all miseries in this life (b) to physical death; and (c) to eternal torment in hell. The miseries in this life are of physical as well as spiritual nature. Physically, man is subject to sicknesses, pestilence, wars, calamities, accidents, broken relationships etc. Spiritually he is subjected to spiritual hardening and blindness so that he is easily led by Satan’s falsehood. Physical death as a liability on account of sin acts as a means to end the time of probation for man—as a kind of cut-off point before judgement (Heb 9:27). Note: because Christ who need not have died, having no sin, had died on behalf of believer, the believer’s death is no more to be taken as a liability for sin, but as a means to translate the soul to glory and a means to separate the soul from the body of sin until it is reunited with the body raised glorious and incorruptible on the last day.

As regards the pains of hell, note that all transgression against an infinite God is of infinite heinousness and so worthy of infinite, eternal punishment (See Jonathan Edwards, “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinner,” *Works* 1.669b). This punishment can be view from two angles: (1) the punishment of loss—i.e. of eternal banishment from the comfortable presence of God; and (2) the punishment of sense—i.e. of eternal torment of the conscience as it constantly beholds the face of an angry God (Heb 10:31, Mk 9:44—the worm may be taken figuratively to refer to the reproach of the conscience); and of eternal affliction of the body of death which is resurrected at the last day (Matt 25:41; Dan 12:12; Rev 20:13).

Q 20. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

A. God having, out of his mere good pleasure,—from all eternity,—elected some to everlasting life,¹—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**.²

Proofs

¹ Eph 1:4; ² Rom 3:20-22; Gal 3:21,22

Comments

This question teaches us about God’s provision for the salvation of fallen men. Under the first covenant, eternal life was offered on the basis of personal, perfect and perpetual obedience to the Law of God, but the entrance of sin makes it impossible for the natural man to obey any of God’s Law perfectly.

It would appear that man was then destined to perish in their sin and misery, except for the fact that as God did ordain the Fall, He also did elect some that they should not perish but have everlasting life. Note that this election is made out of God’s “mere good pleasure, from all eternity” or in other words, unconditionally. The Arminian teaching that election is based on God’s fore-knowing that a person will repent when the Gospel is preached has no basis in the Scripture, makes a mockery of the meaning of election, and denies the absolute sovereignty of God.

In order to effect the redemption of the elect, a second covenant, known in our confession as the Covenant of Grace was effected between the Persons of the Godhead, with Christ as the mediator of the Covenant and the representative of the elect. (This covenant was made in eternity past, even before the Covenant of Works was made with Adam; and it is frequently called the Covenant of Redemption, though the phraseology is usually applied by those who are supralapsarians and who would subsume the Covenant of Works under it).

The first covenant was made with Adam, the second covenant was made with Christ as the second Adam (1Cor 15:22, 45). Under this covenant, God “freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved [Mk 16:15, 16; Jn 3:16; Rom 10:6, 9; Gal 3:11], and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe [Ezk 36:26–27; Jn 6:44–45]” (WCF 7.3).

It should be noted that according to biblical chronology, the Covenant of Grace begun to be implemented in Gen 3:15 and is displayed both the Old and the New Testament, though *subordinate* covenants that manifest the eternal covenant, e.g. the Adamic Covenant (Gen 3:15); the Noahic (Gen 9); the Abrahamic (Gen 12, 15, 17); the Mosaic (Ex 19-20); the Davidic (2Sam 7:12-16); and the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:10-12; 10:16-17; Matt 26:28 etc). In all these subordinate covenants the object of faith is always Christ (see Acts 4:12; Gal 3:17), and carries the same theme “You shall be my people, I shall be your God.” (see Gen 3:15; Gen 9:9,11; Gen 17:7; Ex 6:7; 2Sam 7:24; Jer 31:33; 2Cor 6:16; Rev 21:3). This means that believers throughout the ages, were saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. The Jews under the Mosaic economy were not saved by obedience to the Law or by the sacrifices (as some old Dispensationalists

teach). The sacrificial system pointed to the Messiah, who was the real object of faith to the Jews of old.

Q 21. Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

A. The only Redeemer of God's elect is the **LORD JESUS CHRIST**,¹ who,—being the eternal *Son of God*,—**BECAME MAN**,² and so was, and continueth to be, *God and man* in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever.³

Proofs

¹ 1 Tim 2:5,6; ² Jn 1:14; Gal 4:4; ³ Rom 9:5; Lk 1:35; Col 2:9; Heb 7:24, 25

Comments

In our commentary of the last question, we had already seen that the Lord Jesus Christ was the mediator of the Covenant of Grace, and so the federal head of the elect. In this question, we are taught explicitly that Christ as such is therefore our Redeemer. We are also taught how He being the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Godhead, could become our representative, namely that he became man.

Before we examine the circumstances of the incarnation, it is instructive for us to understand the signification of the title and name ascribed to the Son of God, namely the "Lord Jesus Christ." Firstly, He is called 'Lord' because of his absolute, universal sovereignty and dominion. "He is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36). Secondly, He is called 'Jesus' because "He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). The name 'Jesus' is the Greek version of the Hebrew 'Joshua,' which means "Yahweh is Saviour." Thirdly, He is called "Christ" because He is anointed with the Holy Ghost by the Father (Acts 10:38; cf. Ps 45:7). The word "Christ" means "anointed one," and is equivalent to the Hebrew word "Messiah" (C.f. Dan 9:25-26, which is translated 'Christ' in the Septuagint).

Christ had to become man because: Firstly, only a man can represent another man by suffering his punishment on his behalf. Since the wages of sin is death, Christ became man to die and to shed his blood for those who are his (cf. Heb 9:22).

Secondly, He took on the human nature in order that He might be a high priest unto them to reconcile them to God (Heb 2:16-17).

But Christ had to remain God also because: Firstly, Christ has to suffer infinitely, since the offence of man against God is of infinite magnitude, God being infinite. Thus Paul tells us that the Church is purchased with God's own blood (Acts 20:28). Secondly, if Christ were a mere man, He could not have bore up under the weight of God's wrath that was heaped upon Him on account of the sins of the elect. Thirdly, since it was God who has been offended by man, in order that God may genuinely forgive man, God must take up the punishment upon Himself.

Christ therefore did not become man only. Rather, he took upon Himself a "true body, and a reasonable soul" (WSC 22), while retaining His deity. That is, Christ became the theanthropos, the God-Man, being fully God and fully man. Thus, though Christ is one person, he has two distinct natures (and therefore two wills), one human and one divine which are hypostatically united since the incarnation.

In this way, Christ "gave Himself a ransom" (1 Tim 2:6) by paying the price of His own blood for the elect. "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and

gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet 1:18, 19).

Q 22. How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?

A. Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to Himself **A TRUE BODY,¹**
AND A REASONABLE SOUL,² being conceived by the power of the *Holy Ghost*,
in the womb of the *Virgin Mary*,³ and born of her, yet without sin.⁴

Proofs

¹ Heb 2:14,16; 10:5; ² Matt 26:38; ³ Luke 1:27,31,35,42; Gal 4:4; ⁴ Heb 4:15; 7:26

Comments

In the last question, we were taught that Christ being the eternal Son of God became man so that He could be our representative. In this question we see *how* He did so. He did so by assuming a genuine human body and soul by His voluntary will: “Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me ... I come ... to do Thy will, O God” (Heb 10:5, 7). “He took on him the seed of Abraham” (Heb 2:16).

The fact that Christ has a genuine body is seen by the Scriptural testimony that He hungered (Lk 4:2); He thirsted (Jn 19:28); He was wearied (Jn 4:6); He perspired (Lk 22:44); and He had blood, flesh and bones (Jn 19:24; Lk 24:39). The fact that he had a rational human soul rather than as some claim, his divine nature supplied the place of the human soul, can be seen also from the Scriptures. In Matthew 26:38, for example, Christ refers to His soul being “exceeding sorrowful.” Indeed, when “Jesus wept” (Jn 11:35), it was a display of the emotion of His human soul since God is without human passions (WCF 2.1, Acts 14:15).

The birth of Christ was accomplished miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit so that: Firstly, Mary, though she was a virgin conceived and bore Jesus (Lk 1:34-35; Is 7:14; Matt 1:24-25). In this way, Adam’s guilt is not imputed on Jesus, since Adam is not the legal forefather of Jesus, or to put it in another, Jesus was not a child of Adam. (2) though Mary was a sinner herself, being a child of Adam, Christ does not inherit her sinful nature. Thus, by this miraculous arrangement, Christ was born without Original Sin (see WSC 18; cf. Heb 4:15).

This arrangement is necessary because in order that Christ may be our representative and substitutionary atonement, He must be: (1) a true man; and (2) without sin, original or actual.

Q 23. What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?

A. 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*.

Proofs

Acts 3:21-22; Deut 18:15-19; Heb 12:25; 2 Cor 13:3; Heb 5:5-7; 7:24-25;
Ps 2:6; Isa 9:6-7; Matt 21:5; Ps. 2:8-11

Comments

In questions 20-22, we were presented with the good news that sinners may be saved. In the next 6 questions, we shall be examining the way in which Christ our redeemer works out salvation for his people.

He does so, according to this question by discharging the duties of His threefold office as Prophet, Priest and King both while He was on Earth (in His estate of humiliation) and currently, in heaven (in His estate of exaltation).

It is interesting that the 3 offices of Christ are presented both in the New and Old Testament.

That Christ has the office of a Prophet is seen in Deut 18:15-19 where Moses prophesied that the LORD will raise up a Prophet “like unto him.” In the NT, in his sermon at Solomon’s Porch, Peter appealed to this prophesy as being fulfilled in Christ (Acts 3:22).

Similarly, Christ’s office of a Priest is prophesied in the messianic Psalm 110. In v. 4, David had written “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” In the NT, the author of Hebrews appeals to this verse (cf. Heb 5:6) to show how Christ could be a Priest to offer up himself (Heb 7:27), when He was born in the tribe of Judah rather than Levi.

The kingship of Christ is not only prophesied in Isa 9:6-7, but the messianic Ps 2:6-7, “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion . . . Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten thee.” In the NT, the kingship of Christ is affirmed in numerous places such as Matt 21:5 and Rev 17:14; 19:16.

Each of these offices will be discussed in the following weeks; but briefly, as a Prophet, Christ delivers us from our misery of ignorance; as a Priest, He delivers us from our guilt; and as a King, He frees us from our bondage to Satan.

Q 24. How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?

A. Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in *revealing* to us, by His Word and Spirit, **THE WILL OF GOD** for our salvation.

Proofs

Jn 1:18; 15:15; 20:31; 1 Pet 1:10-12.

Comments

A prophet is a man who declares the will of God to man. Here we are taught that Christ performs the office of a prophet by revealing to us what the will of God is for our salvation. In other words, Christ declares to us the whole counsel of God, or whatever God would have us know, believe and do to obtain salvation.

Although, under the Old Testament economy, Christ revealed the will of God in “divers manners” (Heb 1:1), it was always through His Word, revealed, spoken or written (1 Pet 1:10-11), and through the illuminating help of the Holy Spirit. Even where dreams and visions were used as channels of revelation, their interpretation and transmission (to others) are always given in words. Since Christ is the Word of God (Jn 1:1), these revelations may all be denoted the Word of Christ. Thus Peter speaks about the “Spirit of Christ” signifying to the prophets of old regarding His work of redemption (1 Pet 1:10-11).

During His earthly ministry, Christ spoke to His disciples as the Word incarnate: verbally and audibly, and by His manner of life. But to us who have the benefit of the completed canon of Scripture, Christ speaks to us by the *written* Word (e.g. Jn 20:31). Thus Paul says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16). Moreover, Christ, by His Spirit (i.e. the Holy Spirit whom He sends), illumines the Word to our understanding (cf. Jn 14:26).

Note that just as the Word is not efficacious unto salvation without the Spirit, so the Spirit does not reveal the will of God without the Word. He who is without the Spirit of Christ cannot understand unto salvation, the Word of Christ (1 Cor 2:14-16). And though the Spirit may indeed teach us the will of God without the Word, yet the Word being completed and sufficient for our salvation, the Spirit no longer reveals directly (cf. Rev 22:18-19).

Q 25. How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?

A. Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once *offering up of himself* A SACRIFICE to satisfy Divine justice,¹ and reconcile us to God,² and in *making continual intercession* for us.³

Proofs

¹ Heb 9:14,28; ² Heb 2:17; ³ Heb 7:24-25; 12:24,25

Comments

While a prophet is God's representative to men, a priest is a man who represents men to God by offering up sacrifices and making prayers on their behalf (Heb 5:1; 8:3). This is what Christ, as our priest, does for us. The author of Hebrews tells us that this was one of the chief reasons why Jesus took on the nature of man rather than of angels, for only as man can He be a merciful high priest (Heb 2:16-17). But how could Jesus be a priest when He is descended from Judah rather than Levi? The answer lies in the fact that He was anointed a priest in the order of Melchizedek with an oath (Heb 5:6; 7:15-17; cf. Ps 110:4). By design, the Melchizedek priesthood is already a higher priesthood than the Aaronic Priesthood since Abraham who is the ancestor of Levi gave tithes to Melchizedek (see Heb 7:1-10). But more than that, Jesus' priestly ministry is far superior to the ministry of the Aaronic Priests.

Firstly, He need not offer any sacrifice for Himself since He is without sin though He was in all points tempted like as we are (Heb 4:15; 7:27).

Secondly, rather than offering animal sacrifices which are but shadow and types which cannot take away sins (Heb 4:10), Jesus offered Himself, the antitype which all the OT sacrifices were pointing to (Heb 9:14, 28). In doing so, He not only propitiated the wrath of God by vicariously taking the punishment for sin that is due us upon Himself, but reconciles us to God (Heb 2:17; Eph 2:16). Notice how the catechism highlights that His offering is once for all rather than repeated (cf. Heb 9:26, 28; 10:10). This not only refutes the Roman doctrine of a sacrificial mass, but demonstrates the sufficiency of His atonement, He being both God and Man.

Thirdly, unlike the Aaronic priests, Jesus continues ever to make intercession for us (Heb 7:24-25; 12:24,25). Moreover, He does not intercede for us on earth as the Aaronic Priest would have, rather, He is exalted to the right hand of God the Father, and He intercedes for us there (Rom 8:34). What does he intercede for? As our advocate, He pleads with God that on account of the merit of His death our sins may be pardoned; our consciences quieted and our souls preserved: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). As our mediator, Christ beautifies our prayers by removing all impurities and sin, and then presenting them to the Father pleads that such as made in His name and in the will of God may be answered: "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14).

Q 26. How doth Christ execute the office of a king?

A. Christ executeth the office of a king, in **SUBDUING us to Himself**,¹ in **RULING** ² **AND DEFENDING** us,³ and in **RESTRAINING AND CONQUERING** all His and our enemies.⁴

Proofs

¹ Acts 15:14-16; ² Isa 33:22; ³ Isa 32:1,2; ⁴ 1 Cor 15:25; Ps 110 throughout

Comments

A king is the ruler of a kingdom. Christ is such a king. His kingship was early prophesied in the OT, when Jacob blessed Judah by saying: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen 49:10). Shiloh refers to the one to whom tribute belongs, i.e. an ultimate king. This prophecy was made a little more specific by Nathan the prophet in his delivery of God's promise to David: "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (2 Sam 7:12-13). Although this prophecy appears to refer directly to Solomon (cf. 1 Ch 28:6), it actually refers to him only as a type of Christ, for the New Testament tells us it refers to Christ (Heb 1:5b). Moreover, the fact that the kingdom will be forever suggests to us a King who will be eternal (cf. Isa 55:3; Acts 13:34). Thus David, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recognised that this King is his Lord: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies" (Ps 110:1-2).

Under the ministry of the writing prophets the prophesy of the coming king became more and more distinct. For example, Jeremiah calls Him "a righteous Branch" and "The LORD Our Righteousness" (Jer 23:5-6; cf. Acts 13:23). Isaiah is even more specific. He not only calls Him the Branch and Root of Jesse (Isa 11:1ff, 10; cf. Rom 15:12); but makes it clear that He is God, and to dwell among man, He would be born of a virgin: "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" (Isa 9:6-7; cf. Isa 7:14).

Under the NT, the kingship of Christ is unveiled completely and proclaimed openly. It becomes clear that His Kingdom is not an earthly, political one, but one in which His subjects are the elect or redeemed people of God (Matt 5:5-10; 6:33; 13:38; Lk 17:20; Jn 1:49; 3:3; 1 Cor 15:50 etc). This does not mean that Christ is not rightly the king of His and their enemies. He is (Ps 110:2), but His absolute dominion is not presently evident, and will one day become manifest (1 Cor 15:25; Phil 2:9-11; Rev 11:15 etc).

In the meantime, Christ executes His kingship in three ways. Firstly, He subdues us to Himself by making us willing to obey Him (Col 1:21; Ps 110:3; Acts 15:14-16). This,

He does so by effectually calling us by His Word and Spirit and then working in our heart a disposition to yield to Him the obedience He requires (Phil 2:13; Eph 3:16-19; 2 Cor 3:3). Secondly, He rules and defends us by giving us laws to guide and protect us (Isa 33:22; 32:1,2); and then to implement these laws. He appoints officers in the Church not only to proclaim the law but to exercise Church discipline where necessary (Matt 16:19). Thirdly, He currently restrains and finally puts down all who oppose us and Him, including Satan and the World (1Cor 15:25; Ps 110).

Q 27. Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

A. Christ's humiliation consisted in His *being born*, and that in a *low condition*,¹ *made under the law*,² undergoing the *miseries of this life*,³ the *wrath of God*,⁴ and the *cursed death of the CROSS*,⁵ in being *buried*,⁶ and *continuing under the power of death* for a time.⁷

Proofs

¹ Luke 2:7; ² Gal 4:4; ³ Heb 12:2,3; Isa 53:2,3; ⁴ Luke 22:44; Matt 27:46;
⁵ Phil.2:8; ⁶ 1 Cor 15:3,4; ⁷ Acts 2:24-27,31

Comments

There is a very popular hymn by Charles Wesley, "And Can it be That I should gain," which contains a very pietistic phrase which had often moved me to tears. This statement declares that Christ "emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race." Apart from the fact that this statement must have been intended by Wesley to teach universal atonement (though it can be sang with Calvinistic filters), it contains another pernicious error (though perhaps not intended), namely, that in the incarnation Christ, emptied Himself of His deity too! This idea is known as the kenosis theory and is derived from a false interpretation of Philippians 2:6-8. What then did Christ empty Himself of? Not his deity, else His death would not be sufficient for us all. Christ emptied Himself, rather of His position, glory and dignity. Christ was the Son of God, and very God Himself, but He "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men," and as such was made a vicarious sacrifice for us. Theologically, the process that Christ went through for our sakes is known as His humiliation. In this answer, we are taught that Christ humbled Himself in His birth, life and death.

Christ's humiliation in His birth comprises: (1) His being born, in the first place—though He is infinite and eternal; and (2) His being born in a low condition—not in a rich and regal family, but in a poor family with a stable for His nativity—though He is the eternal Son of God and owns the cattle upon a thousand hills.

Christ's humiliation in His life comprises: (1) His being made subject to the law—though He is the Law-Giver; and (2) His suffering the sorrows of this life—though He not only created the world, but upholds the universe. It should be noted that Christ's earthly sufferings was not a result of sin, but are the natural infirmities of the flesh, such as weariness, hunger, thirst, and the like (cf. Jn 4:6; Matt 4:2); and the affliction of the soul such as grief and sorrow: "He is a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).

Christ's humiliation in His death comprises: (1) His suffering an intense separation from His Father and enduring the infinite wrath of God's judgement on the sin of all the elect throughout the ages, which was imputed on Him—though He is eternally beloved of the Father; (2) His being crucified, a cruel, painful and lingering form of punishment reserved for the accursed criminals—though He did not sin at all; (3) His being buried and (4) His remaining in the grave for three days—though He raised Lazarus and others.

Q 28. Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?

A. Christ's exaltation consisteth in His *rising again from the dead* on the third day,¹ in *ascending up into heaven*,² in *sitting at the right hand of God the Father*,⁴ and in *coming to judge the world* at the last day.⁵

Proofs

¹ 1 Cor 15:4; ² Mark 16:19; ³ Eph 1:20; ⁴ Acts 1:11; Acts 17:31

Comments

In our last question, we studied the aspects of the humiliation of Christ. In this question, we are examining the steps in which Christ was exalted to a position of high dignity and glory with a Name that is above every name, i.e. His exaltation. 4 steps are involved:

1. His Resurrection. Firstly, it occurred on the 3rd day (in Jewish reckoning) after Jesus was buried (1 Cor 15:4). This is why Christians keep the Sabbath on the first day of the week (cf. Ps 118:22-24; Acts 4:10-11). Secondly, it involves the human soul of Christ reuniting with His body. When Christ died, His divine nature did not separate from his human nature, but His soul was separated from His body, the body being left behind and then buried in the tomb while the soul entered Paradise (Lk 23:43). At the resurrection, His soul was reunited with His body. Thirdly, the body that was raised was the same body that was laid in the tomb, but it was now healed of all the blows, stripes and wounds that it suffered and was no longer encumbered with the limitations of the earthly body, including mortality (Rom 6:9). Fourthly, His resurrection was testified by “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3) including 500 witnesses (1Cor 15:5-6). Fifthly, His resurrection fulfilled OT prophecies (1Cor 15:4; Isa 53:10; c.f. Ps 16:10 & Acts 2:31, 13:35). Sixthly, His Resurrection is necessary not only that He may be the captain of our salvation (Heb 2:10; 1Cor 15:17, 20), but that He may fulfil His Mediatorial office (cf. Ps 110:4; Heb 7:23-25). Seventhly, Christ Himself is the author of His own resurrection. He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:19; cf. Jn 10:17).

2. His Ascension. Firstly, it occurred forty days after His resurrection, during which time, He confirmed the faith of His disciples (Acts 1:3). Secondly, He ascended visibly in His physical body (Lk 24:50-51; Acts 1:9). Thirdly, He ascended in triumph as a glorious conqueror (Eph 4:8; Ps 47:5). Fourthly, He ascended that He might be glorified as God-Man with the original glory that He had (Jn 17:5). Fifthly, He ascended that He might, as head of the Church, take possession of heaven on behalf of His Church (Jn 14:2; Heb 6:20).

3. His Enthronement, or His sitting on the Right hand of the throne of God. Firstly, it must be noted that the phrase “the right hand of God” (Heb 1:3; Mk 16:19; Eph 1:20; cf. 1Pet 3:22) must be taken metaphorical-ly as meaning a position of highest majesty and honour (cf. Phil 2:9-10). Secondly, in that position, Christ is making continual intercession for us (Rom 8:24).

4. His Return. Firstly, Christ's return will be visible to all (Acts 1:11; Rev 1:7), glorious (Lk 9:26; Mark 13:26); and sudden (Matt 24:37-39; 1 Thes 5:2). Secondly,

His return will be on the very last day of this present world (2 Pet 3:10). Thirdly, He will come to judge the world (Acts 17:31; 2 Cor 5:10).

Q 29. How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ,¹ by the *effectual application* of it to us by **HIS HOLY SPIRIT**.²

Proofs

¹ Jn 1:11-12; ² Tit 3:5-6

Comments

The work of God in the redemption of man involves all three Persons of the Godhead. It is the specific work of God the Father to elect and to decree the salvation of the elect (cf. *WSC* 20). The specific work of the Son is to purchase redemption or to accomplish justification by His active obedience on behalf of the elect, and by His vicarious atonement on their behalf (cf. *WSC* 21-28). In this and the next question, we see that the proper work of the Holy Spirit is to apply, the benefits of redemption purchased by Christ to the elect.

It is important that we understand this threefold economic division in the work of redemption of the Triune God. An overemphasis on the decretive work of the Father leads to a one-sided doctrine of eternal justification that denies that there is a sense in which the elect are under the wrath of God prior to the organic application of redemption (see Eph 2:3). An overemphasis on the redemptive work of Christ in time and a failure to see that justification was already planned—sovereignly, irrevocably and immutably, and is therefore certain and in a sense actual from all eternity, will draw a sharp discontinuity between the Old and New Testament and give rise to a doctrine of salvation by works for Old Testament saints. An overemphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit's work in justification will give rise to an Arminian emphasis on faith and good works as the cause of justification,—which usually also give rise to the doctrine of resistible grace.

James Buchanan puts it well:

The one is the error of the Antinomians, who have spoken of Justification as being antecedent to, and independent of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and have identified it sometimes with God's eternal election,—at other times with the redeeming work of Christ,—as if there were no difference between an eternal purpose to save, and the execution of that purpose in time, or between the procuring of redemption, and the actual application of it to the souls of men. The other is the error of Popish writers, and some of their followers in the Protestant Church, who have spoken of Justification as dependent, not on the finished work of Christ alone, but on our personal obedience ... But such difficulties will be found to resolve themselves into a more general and profound question; and can only be effectually removed, by falling back on God's eternal purpose of mercy towards sinners, which includes equally their redemption by Christ, and their regeneration by the Holy Spirit" (*Doctrine of Justification*, BOT, 402-3).

What is involved in the application of redemption by the Holy Spirit will be discussed in the subsequent questions.

Q 30. How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working **FAITH** in us,¹ and thereby *uniting us to Christ* in our effectual calling.²

Proofs

¹ Eph 1:13,14; Jn 6:37,39; Eph 2:8; ² Eph 3:17; 1 Cor 1:9

Comments

In the last answer, we saw that the Holy Spirit is the One who applied the benefits of redemption purchased by Christ on behalf of the elect. In this answer, we see how this is done, namely: (1) By working faith in us; and (2) By uniting us to Christ.

How does the Holy Spirit work faith in us or give us the gift of faith (Eph 2:8)? Not by pouring faith into us. Faith, after all, is not an entity that can be transferred. Faith is trust and trust is personal, i.e. a person has faith in someone if he trusts in someone. If faith can be transferred in anyway, it is no longer personal but meaningless. Therefore, when the Scripture says that faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, it is referring to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Tit 3:5). In this work of regeneration, the Holy Spirit changes our hearts (Ezk 11:19-20) so that we find Christ irresistible. Notice that the faith that results is therefore strictly speaking our own when we exercise it—it becomes our own after it is given by the Holy Spirit. We note also that this work is a radical work rather than as the Arminians suggests, a mere assistance to improve the faith that is already in us naturally. Our Lord says it in no uncertain terms when He says, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3). Paul tells us that we "were by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3) and that "we were dead in sin" (Eph 2:5). We were enemies of God (Rom 5:10); who neither understood nor sought after God (Rom 3:11). In other words, by nature we cannot possibly love God nor trust him. The Arminian who objects by saying that since the demons have faith in that they believe too (Jas 2:19), and therefore the unregenerate can have faith too, only that the faith needs to be helped or augmented by a work of the Holy Spirit has totally failed to grasp what James is saying, namely that faith is not just a matter of intellectual belief. Saving faith, involves, rather, trust and love,—which love will result in good works (cf. Heb 6:10). Or, to put it theologically, saving faith or *fiducia* is of a totally different quality from *notitia* or *assensus*, which demons and false believers may indeed have.

The work of the Holy Spirit which unites us to Christ,—as our answer indicates,—is a result of faith responding to our effectual calling. The Holy Spirit's work of regeneration essentially plants spiritual ears and spiritual eyes (cf. 1 Cor 2:14) into our soul so that we recognise Christ (cf. Jn 10:26-27), and embrace Him wholeheartedly as our Saviour and Lord. In doing so, we are united with Him, i.e. joined together, and in a certain sense made one with Him (He is the Vine we are the branches; He is the Head, and as the Church, we are the body. Paul puts it this way: "He that is joined unto the Lord, is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17).

Q 31. What is effectual calling?

A. Effectual calling is the **WORK OF GOD'S SPIRIT**,¹ whereby,—convincing us of our *sin and misery*,² enlightening our minds in the *knowledge of Christ*,³ and *renewing our wills*,⁴—He doth persuade and enable us to *embrace JESUS CHRIST*, freely offered to us in the Gospel.⁵

Proofs

¹ 2 Tim1:9; 2 Thes 2:13,14; ² Acts 2:37; ³ Acts 26:18;

⁴ Ezk 36:26,27; ⁵ Jn 6:44,45; Phil 2:13

Comments

It is commonly understood that there are 2 ways by which God calls men to be saved—the external call of His Word or providence, and the internal call of His Spirit. The external call, so understood, is referred to in passages such as the Great Commission (Matt 28:19), and in the Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matt 22) where those who are called would not come. It is involved in the presentation of the Gospel to sinners, together with an earnest exhortation to repent and believe (trust) in Christ, in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

It should be noted, however, that while the presentation of the Gospel and the command to repent and believe is made to all,—elect and reprobate alike (cf. Matt 22:9),—strictly speaking the external call as a *gracious* act of God is made to the elect only. Calvin highlights this when he insists that “the preaching of the Gospel streams forth from the wellspring of election,” and that the preaching of the Gospel involves “the calling of the elect and the blinding and hardening of the wicked” (*ICR* 3.24.1). Then, explaining Matt 24:14, “many are called but few are chosen,” Calvin clarifies: “. . . there are two kinds of call, by which God invites all equally to himself through the outward preaching of the word—even those whom He holds it out as a savour of death (cf. 2 Cor 2:16), and as the occasion for severer condemnation. The other kind of call is special, which he deigns for the most part to give to the believers alone, while by inward illumination of His Spirit He causes the preached Word to dwell in their heart” (*ICR* 3.24.8). To put it in another way, there is really only one *gracious* and *saving* call, which is directed to the elect only, and this call comprises two parts—the external preaching (and reading) and the inward illumination. The external part of the call (which may loosely be called the external call) is heard by the reprobate also, but only as a savour unto death.

The outward aspect of the call, is, however, always ineffectual unless the Holy Spirit works a work of grace in the heart of the hearer (and contrary to the Arminian view, He does not always do so when the word is preached). But when he does so, the call invariably becomes effectual.

Thus, the inward aspect of the call is denominated the efficacious call. This call, according to our answer is designed to “persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel.” The Scripture refers to this work as ‘drawing’ the sinner unto Christ and as causing the sinner “both to will and to do of [God’s] good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). This work comprises three aspects: (1) Convincing us of our sin and misery—by pricking our heart or exciting our conscience as we hear the word, especially the law preached (Acts 2:37; Rom 3:20) and by persuading us of the dreadful wrath of God against

sin; (2) enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ—by opening our eyes to behold Christ and to be persuaded that He alone is willing and able to save (Jn 3:3; Acts 26:18; Jn 6:37; Heb 7:25); and (3) renewing our wills —by giving us a new disposition (Ezk 36:26-27) to find Christ irresistible. It may be noted that the first two aspects are the work of the Holy Spirit on the mind while the third aspect is the work of the Holy Spirit on the will (through the heart or disposition).

Q 32. What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?

A. They that are effectually called do in this life partake of **JUSTIFICATION**,¹ **ADOPTION**,² and **SANCTIFICATION**, and *the several benefits* which in this life do either accompany or flow from them.³

Proofs

¹ Rom 8:30; ² Eph 1:5; ³ 1 Cor 1:26, 30

Comments

In this question and the next 4, we shall be examining the benefits of salvation in this life. This will be followed by 2 questions on the benefits of salvation after this life.

These benefits may be seen as being part of what is called the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation), which may be formally defined as *the order in which the Holy Spirit applies the various benefits of the work of redemption to the hearts and lives of elect sinners*.

This order, it must be carefully noted, must not be understood in the purely temporal sense, as if each of the benefits of salvation is to be granted to the sinner in a definite sequence of time. For, firstly, when a sinner is united with Christ, he receives Christ in all his fullness, which means that he receives all the benefits of salvation. Secondly, the various benefits cannot really be ordered in time rigorously. For example, strictly speaking justification follows sanctification. But faith is really part of sanctification, and the Scripture says we are “justified by faith” (Rom 5:1 etc), which means that we cannot be justified (albeit subjectively), before sanctification has begun. Thus, when we talk about the *ordo salutis*, we must bear in mind that it is the *logical* order we are concerned with rather than the *temporal* order.

Although the *ordo salutis*, may in a sense be seen as purely speculative and without any real bearing on the Christian life, it does help us to understand clearly what the Scripture teaches regarding our salvation. It should be noted, though, that many solid Reformed theologians do differ in the way in which they view the order. The differences, however, are largely because of the way in which each of the benefits of salvation is named or conversely what is deemed to be included in a particularly denominated item. For example, the Westminster divines included regeneration under “Effectual Calling” (WCF 10), whereas hardly any modern theologian does that anymore.

Bearing all these in mind, and based on our understanding of the various benefits of salvation, we may see *ordo salutis* as: (1) regeneration; (2) efficacious call [or internal aspect of the gracious call. Note that external part of the call is not an operation on the heart]; (3) conversion, which includes: (a) evangelical repentance; and (b) saving faith; (4) subjective justification [in the conscience of the sinner. Note that the eternal, objective part of the justification is not included here as the *ordo salutis* refers only to the subjective benefits]; (5) adoption; (6) sanctification [see above]; (7) preservation and perseverance; and (8) glorification.

Q 33. What is justification?

A. Justification is *an act of God's free grace*, wherein he *pardoneth all our sins*,¹ and *accepteth us as righteous* in his sight,² only for the **RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST** imputed to us,³ and received by *faith* alone.⁴

Proofs

¹ Rom 3:24,25; Rom 4:6-8; ² 2 Cor 5:19,21; ³ Rom 5:17-19; ⁴ Gal 2:16; Phil 3:9

Comments

Justification refers to the pronouncing of a person as legally righteous and therefore not liable for condemnation.

We mentioned in our treatment of WSC 29 that there is a sense in which the justification of the elect occurred in eternity,—with the decree of redemption and in history,—when Christ completed His work of substitutionary atonement; and there is a sense in which it occurs in time, in the life of the elect. The first part of justification is objective, whereas the second part is subjective and occurs in the conscience of the elect sinner. It is this second, subjective aspect of justification that is given emphasis in our catechism because the elect are deemed “not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them” (WCF 11.4; cf. Col 1:21, 22; Gal 2:16).

Several points may be highlighted from the answer. First, it must be noted that it is an act of God’s free grace: “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:” (Rom 3:24). This means that we are justified not by our own works or righteousness, “otherwise grace is no more grace” (Rom 11:6).

Thus, secondly, when the Scripture speaks of the elect being “justified by faith” (Rom 3:28; 5:1), it does not mean that faith is the *meritorious* cause of justification. Rather, as the catechism states, Justification is “received by faith alone,” or in other words, faith is the *instrumental* cause of justification.

Thirdly, we note that it is received by faith *alone*. This refutes the Romish doctrine that we are justified by faith and works together. When James says that “by works a man is justified and not by faith only” he is not speaking of “justified” in the technical sense of the word, but in the sense of “proved to be true” (Lk 7:35). James is saying that good works proves that a Christian is for real. Which also means that a justified person will also receive sanctification in which righteousness is formed within us. Justification not accompanied by sanctification cannot be true.

Fourthly, we note that justification comprises two parts: pardon and acceptance. The pardoning of our sins was accomplished by Christ’s propitiatory atonement, i.e. His taking the punishment due us on Himself (2 Cor 5:21; Col 2:14). This is sometimes known as Christ’s passive obedience. Our being accepted as righteous is not only because our sins have been atoned for, but also because the righteousness of Christ—in His perfect keeping of the Law throughout His earthly ministry is imputed to us, He being our covenantal representative (Rom 5:17-19). We may say that Christ is the *meritorious* cause or ground of justification; and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness by grace is the *formal* cause of justification

Q 34. What is adoption?

A. Adoption is *an act of God's free grace*,¹ whereby we are *received into the number*,—and *have a right to all the privileges*—of the **SONS OF GOD**.²

Proofs

¹1 John 3:1; ² John 1:12; Rom 8:17

Comments

Adoption denotes the taking of a child who is a hitherto a stranger into a family, and treating him as a member of it.

Before our conversion, we were by nature the children of wrath and were strangers and foreigners of the household of God (Eph 2:3, 19). When we are translated into His kingdom, the Lord does not leave us to continue to live as aliens, or even as friends of the household of God. He makes us his children in two distinguishable acts. First he regenerates us so that we may be conformed to the image of His only begotten Son (Jas 1:18); secondly, He adopts us as His children.

Like justification, adoption is an act of God's free grace whereby we are granted privileges which we had not right to. It is so amazing that though we were enemies of God, we have not only been reconciled to Him, but made His children that John exclaimed, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 Jn 3:1a).

As the adoptive children of God, we are given the right to all the privileges of the sons of God such as: (1) Fatherly audience and response to our prayers—"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." (1 Jn 5:14-15; cf. Eph 3:12). (2) Inward assurance that we are the children of God, and therefore can be sure of His fatherly love and care. Paul says: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:" (Rom 8:15-16). (3) Fatherly pity in tribulation—Ps 103:13, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." (4) Fatherly protection through temporal and spiritual evil—"The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil" (Ps 121:7a; cf. Prov 14:26). (5) Fatherly provision for the needs of our bodies and souls—"your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things" (Matt 6:32b; cf. Ps 34:10). (6) Fatherly chastisement when we stray—"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb 12:6). (7) A sure title to the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. "And if children then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17; cf. 1 Pet 1:3-5).

Q 35. What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is *the work of God's free grace*,¹ whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the **IMAGE OF GOD**,² and are enabled more and more to *die unto sin*, and *live unto righteousness*.³

Proofs

¹2 Thes 2:13; ² Eph 4:23,24; ³ Rom 6:4,6; Rom 8:1

Comments

To a great majority of Christians, sanctification refers to the idea of spiritual renewal and the endowment of moral and spiritual qualities on man. Some have even equated sanctification with feeling spiritual. This, however, is not the Biblical idea. Rather, sanctification speaks of making a person holy; and holiness in this case is defined with respect to the degree in which a person is like God in His moral perfection.

It is described in our answer as a *work* rather than an *act* as with justification and adoption (*WSC* 33-34) because it is a continuous and gradual operation of God the Holy Spirit in the soul of the justified sinner. Paul tells us that we are chosen "to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit" (2 Thes 2:13). Paul is of course speaking of salvation as a process leading to our glorification at the end of this life's journey. It is called "the work of God's free grace" not only because it is the work of God from first to last, but also because we do not deserve it at all.

Positively, sanctification consists in our being "renewed in the whole man after the image of God." The word "renewed" is used to suggest that we are being restored to the state that Adam and Eve were in, when they were first created in the image of God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

Negatively, sanctification consists in our being "enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." In other words, we are more and more purified from the pollution of sin and made more and more to hate sin, while at the same time growing to love righteousness and finding it more and more in our nature to practise holiness.

A few things need to be highlighted about sanctification. (a) God and not man is the author of sanctification, but this does not mean that man is entirely passive in the process. He can and should co-operate with God in the work of sanctification by the diligent use of the means that God has placed at his disposal (e.g. 2 Cor 7:1). (b) Sanctification, unlike justification is not a legal act. It is a moral activity in which the sinner is made to conform more and more to the image of God. (c) It is usually a lengthy process that lasts a life-time without achieving perfection in this life. (d) It is completed at death in so far as the soul is concerned and at the resurrection in so far as the body is concerned (Phil 3:21).

Q 36. What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?

A. The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, *assurance of God's love, peace of conscience,*¹ *joy in the Holy Ghost,*² *increase of grace,*³ and *perseverance* therein to the end.⁴

Proofs

¹ Rom 5:1,2,5; ² Rom 14:17; ³ Prov. 4:18; ⁴ 1 Jn 5:13; 1 Pet. 1:5

Comments

In the last 4 questions, we have been examining the more *objective* benefits of salvation in this life, namely, justification, adoption and sanctification. In this question we are looking at the more *subjective* benefits of salvation in this life. These go along with or flow from the objective benefits.

Five such benefits are listed: (1) assurance of God's love—" . . . the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom 5:5). (2) Peace of conscience, or freedom from the sense of guilt and fear of condemnation—"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). (3) Joy in the Holy Ghost—"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" (Rom 15:13). (4) Increase of grace, i.e. increase in spiritual endowment—"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov 4:18). (5) Perseverance in the enjoyment of all these benefits to the end—"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" (Phil 1:6).

It should be noted that these subjective benefits form one of the basis of assurance of faith for the believer (cf. WCF 18.2). A professing believer who sees and experiences these benefits in his own life, may be reasonably assured that he is "in the faith" (2 Cor 13:5) and a planting of the Lord (Matt 15:13).

It is possible that some unjustified persons (false believers) may have presumptuous confidence of God's love, and even experience joy and peace of conscience (Heb 6:4). However, in such cases, the professors would usually show no credible evidence of growing in grace nor do they desire to grow. The Apostle John speaks of the regenerate as desiring to grow in holiness (1 Jn 3:1-10) and finding the commandments of God "not grievous" (1 Jn 5:3). Moreover, false believers will usually not persevere on in their profession of faith zealously to the end. "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" (1 Jn 2:19) says John.

Q 37. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

A. The *souls* of believers are at their death made *perfect in holiness*,¹ and do immediately **PASS INTO GLORY**;² and their *bodies*, being still *united to Christ*,³ do rest in their graves⁴ till the resurrection.⁵

Proofs

¹ Heb 12:23; ² 2 Cor 5:1,6,8; Phil. 1:23; Luke 23:43;
³ 1 Cor 6:15a; 1 Thess 4:14; ⁴ Isa 57:2; ⁵ Job 19:26,27

Comments

Having seen the blessing,—both objective and subjective,—which true believers receive from God in this life, we now proceed to look at the benefits which we shall receive when this life is ended. There are principally two benefits, one pertaining to our souls and the other pertaining to our bodies:

Firstly, our souls will be made perfect in holiness, i.e. made free from all pollution of sin and sinful tendencies (Rev 21:27), and so conformed to the image of Christ (Eph 4:13). That done, we shall be immediately taken into heaven. Absent from the body present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). So the Lord told the repentant thief, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." (Lk 23:43). There, we shall "behold the face of God in light and glory" (WLC 86; cf. 1 Jn 3:2; 1 Cor 13:12). Three things may be said about the glory which we will experience: (1) We will have a glorious eternal home (Jn 14:2); (2) We shall have for fellowship "an innumerable company of angels" and "the spirit of just men made perfect" (Heb 12:22-23); and (3) We shall have a blessed rest from all labour, pain, and sin (Heb 4:9; Rev 14:13).

Secondly, our bodies at death will not be forsaken. Though our bodies will be separated from our souls, they remain united with Christ. Paul suggests this fact when he says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?" (1 Cor 6:15a). Our bodies, as such, will rest in the grave in union with Christ till the Resurrection.

It may be asked how is it possible that we could be raised in the same body seeing that our bodies are not only constantly renewing itself (as old cells die and are replaced by new ones), but the body that dies would suffer decomposition, and may even be burned and scattered far and wide as in the case of the martyrs. The Scripture does not give us sufficient details to formulate a definite biochemical answer, nor is it necessary for us to have such an answer. It is enough that we be able to say with Job: "Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me" (Job 19:26-27). And it is consolation for us to know that while the body "is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." (1 Cor 15:42-44).

Q. 38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

A. At the resurrection, believers being *raised up in glory*,¹ shall be *openly acknowledged and acquitted* in the day of judgment,² and made perfectly blessed in the full **ENJOYING OF GOD**³ to all eternity.⁴

Proofs

¹ 1Cor 15:43; ² Matt 25:23; 10:32; ³ 1Jn 3:2; 1Cor 13:12; ⁴ 1Thes 4:17

Comments

We saw in our last question that the bodies of believers “being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.” This question deals with what happens at the Resurrection.

The Resurrection occurs at the “last day” (Jn 11:24; c.f. Dan 12:2). On that day, “the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air . . . ” (1 Thes 4:16-17a). Believers who are alive in that day will, in a moment, have their earthly bodies changed into a incorruptible, glorious body (1 Cor 15:52-53), but the bodies of those who have died will “by the Spirit of Christ, and by virtue of His resurrection as their head, . . . be raised in power, spiritual, incorruptible, and made like to His glorious body” (WLC 87). This glorious body is also known as a “spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44) and will be “incorruptible” (1Cor 15:52). It will be freed from all pain, defects, diseases and proneness to diseases. It will no more be a “vile body” (Phil 3:21).

Immediately after the resurrection, will be the general judgement of angels and men (WLC 88). At that time, “the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with him in the judging of reprobate angels and men” (WLC 90a). The righteous are acquitted, not because of their own righteousness, but because of the righteousness of Christ. Indeed, Christ Himself will not only be the judge (Jn 5:22), but He will also be our advocate (1Jn 2:1), He having paid the penalty for our sins.

After this, we “shall be received into heaven, where [we] shall be fully and for ever freed from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity” (WLC 90b).

Q. 39. What is the duty which God requireth of man?

A. The duty which God requireth of man, is **OBEDIENCE TO HIS REVEALED WILL**.¹

Proofs

¹ Eccl 12:13; Mic 6:8; 1 Sam 15:22

Comments

Thus far in our catechism, we have been looking at what man is to believe concerning God (cf. WSC 3). From here to the end of the catechism, we will be looking at what duty God requires of man.

Notice that the answer speaks about the Revealed Will of God, this for us refers generally to the Word of God, and specifically the Law of God. It is called the revealed will of God in contra-distinction to the secret will of God. But bear in mind that the meaning of ‘will’ in these two terms are not exactly synonymous. The secret will of God refers to God’s external decrees and involves His fore-ordaining whatsoever comes to pass (cf. WSC 7). The revealed will does not involve a foreordination. It refers to the laws that God has set for his creatures. We must also not confuse will with human desires. When we say that a man desires something, we are saying that he wishes for some-thing, though he may not have the power to get it. I may desire to preach like Spurgeon, but I know that unless something dramatic happens, I will not be able to. The same cannot be said of God. If He wishes (as we understand wishing in human terms) anything to happen, it will indeed happen, because it is within His power to make it happen. God is sovereign and His will cannot be frustrated. Therefore what is recorded as precepts in the Word of God, reflect men’s duty to God, rather than God’s desires. Though it may rightly be said that God is delighted (not increased in happiness since He is perfect) with men’s obedience to these precepts, it would be theologically untenable to say that He is saddened by their disobedience,—unless by it we mean no more than an anthropopathic expression which we may rightly use in common speech, though it ought not to enter our theological formula-tions and understanding of God. Jonathan Edwards, in his famed *Freedom of the Will*, refutes the Arminian notion that the acts of sin violate the sovereign will of God, and is therefore grievous to God. He writes:

The following things may be laid down as maxims of plain truth, and indisputable evidence.

1. That God is a perfectly happy Being, in the most absolute and highest sense possible.

2. That it will follow from hence, that God is free from every thing that is contrary to happiness; and so, that in strict propriety of speech, there is no such thing as any pain, grief, or trouble, in God.

3. When any intelligent being is really crossed and disappointed, and thing are contrary to what he truly desires, he is the less pleased, or has less pleasure, his pleasure and happiness is diminished, and he suffers what is disagreeable to him, or is the subject of something that is of a nature contrary to joy and happiness, even pain and grief. (*Works* 1.79)

Based on these maxims, Edwards applies *reductio ad absurdum* to his opponent's arguments, to show that if they are right then God would be "infinitely the most miserable of being."

All these, of course does not diminish the importance of obedience. The Lord God, our Creator and King has commanded us to obey Him. Disobedience is treason and rebellion. On the other hand, obedience tends greatly to God's glory and God is greatly delighted with our obedience. But remember that obedience is our duty. We must not expect to be rewarded for obedience (cf. Lk 17:10).

Q. 40. What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?

A. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was **THE MORAL LAW**.¹

Proofs

¹ Rom 2:14-15; 10:5

Comments

In our commentary on *WSC* 14 (see vol. 1, no. 14), we note that the Laws of God revealed to men can be classified into 3 categories, namely: (1) The Judicial Laws; (2) The Ceremonial Laws; and (3) The Moral Laws. Another way of understanding the categories of the Law of God is given by A. A. Hodge, in *The Confession of Faith*, p. 281. Hodge sees 4 categories in the Law: (1) Laws based on God's nature and character. These cannot change and are perpetually binding on all men because God cannot change; (2) Laws based on God's created order before the Fall, or Creation ordinance. These will remain valid and universal until the Second Coming of Christ. The doctrine of the covenant headship of husbands in marriages is one such creation ordinance. (3) Positive Laws. These Laws are based solely on the fact that God has commanded. The prohibition pertaining to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil falls into this category. There was nothing intrinsically evil about the forbidden fruit, but it was sin to eat it because God said so. (4) Laws based on unique and temporary circumstances, such as the situation of the nation of Israel. These Laws are invalidated once the circumstances are no longer existent. The ceremonial laws are abrogated because they were shadows of Christ, and Christ has appeared and completed His sacrifice. The civil laws pertaining to the land of Israel under the Old Covenant, such as the jubilee laws, the cities of refuge, etc., do not apply to Christians today.

The Moral Law of God falls under the first category. They are founded on God's character and nature, and so are universally and permanently binding on all men. But how can it be binding on all men when not everyone has read the Bible or heard an exposition of the Law? The answer is found in the 'proof-texts' of our answer, namely Romans 2:14–15. The Moral Law of God is etched into the conscience of all men, whether Jews or Gentiles, Christians or non-Christians. Man is created in the image of God, and therefore has a moral consciousness. This is what distinguishes men from animals.

Under the Covenant of Works, salvation may be obtained by perfect and persistent obedience to the Moral Law of God. However, since the Fall, this was no longer possible. All men, excepting the Lord Jesus Christ, are not only imputed with the guilt of Adam but do inherit the corruption of his nature.

What, then, is the purpose of the Law today? John Calvin gives us three: Firstly, the Law shows God's righteousness or the righteousness alone acceptable to God. And in so doing, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness (see *ICR* 2.7.6). In other words, it is like a *portrait*, drawing a picture of our Creator and His righteousness (cf. Rom 7:7), and also a *mirror*, displaying our unrighteousness (cf. Rom 3:20). Secondly, it restrains the unregenerate by its dire threats and compels them to Christ (see *ICR* 2.7.10–11). In other words, it is like a *leash*,

retraining sin (cf. Rom 2:14–15) and a tutor’s *rod* leading the unre-generate to seek Christ (cf. Gal 3:24). Thirdly, the Law shows believers the nature of the Lord’s will, confirms in them the understanding of it, and urges them on in well-doing (*ICR* 2.7.12). In this regard, it is like a *lamp* unto our feet and a light unto our path (Ps 119:105), as well as a *goad* to prod us on in our Christian walk (cf. Ecc 12:11). This third use is highlighted in our answer.

Q. 41. Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?
A. The Moral Law is summarily comprehended in **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**.¹

Proofs

¹ Deut 10:4; Matt 19:17

Comments

The Moral Law of God reflects the holy character of God and teaches us how we ought to act and think with regards to God and man. This Law was written in the heart of man, he being created in the image of God. But because of the fall, this knowledge was partly lost. It then became necessary for God to re-issue the Law. This, He did in the Ten Commandments or the Decalogue which, unlike all other of God’s commandments, was issued with a special and awesome introduction (Ex 19:16–22); was spoken directly to the people (Ex 20:1, 19); was personally inscribed by God Himself on two tablets of stone (Ex 24:12; 31:18; 32:16; 34:1, 28); and was alone placed inside the ark (Ex 25:16; Heb 9:4). The fact that such special dignity and honour are assigned to these commandments as distinct from all other commandments in the Old Testament indicates that they are of different nature from the other laws, they being alone perpetual and universal. Moreover when the content of the Decalogue is examined, it can be seen to have an apodictic character, i.e., it is general and applicable in all situations; unlike the Civil and Ceremonial Laws which are casuistic, i.e., are applicable only within specific situational, geographic or temporal boundaries.

The Ten Commandments are, furthermore, all encompassing, so that: (1) All the Laws in the Bible which are of moral or ethical character may be reduced to one or more of the precepts; (2) “Whatever sin is forbidden in any one precept, the contrary duty is commanded, and all sins of the same kind also are forbidden; and not only the outward act, together with the words and gestures tending thereunto, but also all the inward affections to sin, together with all causes, means, occasions, appearances, and whatever may be a provocation unto it, either in ourselves or others” (Thomas Vincent); (3) “Whatever duty is commanded, the contrary is forbidden; and all duties of the same kind are included, together with all suitable affections thereunto, as also the using all means appointed for help, quickening, and furtherance therein, and our endeavours in our places to help and further others in their obedience” (T. Vincent).

It is because of the special character of the Decalogue, that most Reformed catechisms contain an exposition of it, and it is a feature of Reformed theology that Christians are still obliged to keep the Decalogue because God is holy and we are commanded to be holy as He is holy (cf. 1 Pet 1:16), and because without holiness, no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14). Keeping the Law does not justify, but our sanctification involves our obedience to the Law. We must also remember that the duty to keep the Law is not legalism. Legalism arises only when the Law of God is ignored and human rules and regulations are set in place for Christians to follow. In other words, legalism usually arises out of antinomianism—a failure to give the Law of God its proper place and obedience.

Q. 42. What is the sum of the Ten Commandments?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹ Mk 12:30–31; Matt 22:37–40.

Comments

The Ten Commandments can be divided into two tables, the first table of four commandments pertains to our relationship with God, while the second table of six commandments pertains to our relationship with our fellow men. The duty required of us in the two tablets, moreover, may be summarised in one word, namely, love. We are to love the Lord, our God and our neighbour. The wordings in our answer comes from the Lord's answer to a scribe's query, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (Mk 12:28; see Mk 12:29–31).

The adverbial phrases, "with all thy heart," "with all thy soul," "with all thy mind," and "with all thy strength," emphasise our duty to love the Lord with our whole being. It is instructive to note that the reference to heart and mind speaks about the emotion and the intellect whereas the reference to soul and strength speaks about the spiritual and physical aspects of the person. We are not only to love the Lord with our intellect by seeking to know Him as He has revealed Himself in His Word; we are to love Him with our emotion and disposition by delighting in Him as our chief good. We are also to love and obey Him with soul or spirit; and with our body, i.e., with our physical powers and capabilities (cf. Rom 12:1–2).

The second part of the summary, namely, loving our neighbours as ourselves, is not understood in the same way by all Reformed theologians. Most believe that every man is our neighbour and cite Luke 10:29–37 as proof. However, a careful reading of the parable reveals that this is not what the Lord is teaching. In fact, the Lord did not answer the lawyer's question, "who is my neighbour" (v. 29). Instead, after relating the parable, He ask him, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" (v. 36). When the lawyer answered: "He that showed mercy on him" (v. 27); the Lord urged him: "Go, and do thou likewise." In essence, the Lord was telling him: "You should not be so concerned about who is your neighbour. Instead, you should make yourself a neighbour to others by helping them when they are in need without considering who they are."

Who then is the neighbour in our Lord's summary of the commandment? The fact that the Lord speaks about "neighbour" in contrast to "enemy" (Matt 5:43) suggests to us that our enemies are not our neighbours. Does this mean that we are not to love our enemies? Not at all, the Lord Himself makes it clear that we are to love our enemies: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt 5:43–44). The point is clear: we are to be neighbourly to our enemies too, and in so doing we make them our neighbours, and so the law of love applies. There are exceptional occasions, however, such

as during a situation of war when we cannot be neighbourly to our enemies. In such cases, the law of love is suspended. Thus, the use of deception during war is not a violation of the 9th commandment.

Note also, that we need not feel guilty if we are unable to love our enemies, or anyone in the street, in the same way that we love our family members or brethren in Christ. In fact, there is a sense in which we are to hate our enemies,—when they are the enemies of the Lord (cf. Ps 139:20–22). We are required only to love our enemies with a benevolent or compassionate love. The Lord makes this clear when He gives us the reason why we are to love our enemies: "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" (Matt 5:45). The Lord does not love everyone the same way as He loves His children. He loves all benevolently and sends the rain and sunshine on all. But He loves His children complacently with a special salvific love. Similarly, there are "two kinds of neighbours: one is the church and the other outside" (Gerstner). We should have a special love for fellow believers (cf. Gal 6:10), and a love of benevolence for others. In other words, though we are not expected to love our enemies or fellow men whom we do not know, in the same way as we are expected to love our brethren in Christ or our family members, we are always to gladly rally to help them when we know them to be in need of help. Remember that love is not just a sentimental feeling (cf. 1 Jn 3:18). Such a love should above all spur us to preach the Gospel to them, and to lead them to Christ that they may not perish in their sin.

Q. 43. What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?

A. 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.**¹

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:2, Deuteronomy 5:6

Comment

The preface of the Ten Commandments refers to the words which the LORD spoke in the ears of the children of Israel on Mount Sinai to introduce the ten articles of the Law. They were first spoken shortly after the Israelites were delivered from their bondage in Egypt, and was, later,—after the 40 years of wandering in the desert,—repeated by Moses to the new generation of Jews.

We shall see the significance of this preface in our next question, but for now, we note that it is applicable to us not only because it was spoken by God Himself as an introduction of His inviolable Moral Law, but also because the redemption of the Jews from Egypt is a type of our redemption from the bondage of sin and Satan (cf. Heb 4:1–3; Lk 1:68–75).

Q. 44. What doth the preface to the Ten Commandments teach us?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹Luke 1:74–75; 1 Peter 1:15–19.

Comments

The preface of the Ten Commandments proclaims the basis of the Lord's claim of our obedience to Him. Three reasons are set forth.

Firstly, we are bound to keep all His commandments, because He is the LORD. The title LORD (as distinguished from 'Lord' in the Authorised Version) translates the Hebrew name of God, Jehovah, or better *Yahweh* (hw:hÿð). The name *Yahweh* is derived from the Hebrew verb for "to be" in the second person, and thus meaning "he is" or "he will be." The corresponding first person is hw<h]a, (*ehyeh*), "I am." When Moses asked God what His name was, He answered, "I AM THAT I AM... Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you... The LORD [*i.e.*, '*HE IS*']... hath sent me unto you..." (Ex 3:14–15). The name *Yahweh* stresses the immutability, eternity and self-existence of God. It is also the Covenant name of God by which He endears Himself to His people. Thus He tells Moses to introduce Him to the children of Israel as "The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:15). As believers, we are the covenant people of God (Gal 3:29). Thus, although, the Moral Law of God is universally binding, believers have a special covenantal obligation to keep it.

Secondly, we are to keep the Law because He who gives us the Law is *our God*. As our God, He is our Creator and Sovereign, and so is to be worshipped, revered and obeyed. As our God, He is also our Judge, to whom we must one day give an account of our lives: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecc 12:13–14).

Thirdly, as believers, we are especially bound to keep God's Law because He is our *Redeemer*. The preface to the Ten Commandments refers to God's bringing the children of Israel "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex 20:2). This act of redemption is a type of God's redemption of His children out of sin and bondage of Satan (see Heb 3:7–4:3). Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, referred to God's promise to Abraham that He would bring His children out of Egypt (Lk 1:73; cf. Gen 15:13–16), and applied it as a promise of spiritual redemption: "That we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Lk 1:74–75). The Apostle Paul, similarly, reminds us: "Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 6:20). The Apostle Peter, in the same way, urges us to be holy as God is holy since we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:16, 18–19). Holiness involves obedience to God's Law.

These three reasons further teach us that we are to keep the Law of God with gratitude and love, not with slavish fear—for He is our covenant Lord, Creator and Redeemer.

Q. 45. What is the First Commandment?

A. The First Commandment is, **THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.**¹

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7.

Comments

When God first issued the Ten Commandments or Decalogue in written form to Moses, He inscribed it on two tablets of stone (Ex 31:18). Many modern scholars believe that all ten commandments were inscribed on each of the two tablets, so that the two tablets were duplicates rather than containing a different section of the Decalogue. This is in keeping with the ancient Near Eastern practice, wherein two covenanting parties would each keep a copy of the covenant stipulations in a safe and ‘sacred’ place. We can see how, in the case of the covenant that God made with Israel, both copies of the covenant stipulations were kept in the Ark or the Testimony (Ex 25:21–22).

Whatever the case, there appears to be a logical division in the Ten Commandments that prompts theologians to divide the Ten Commandments into two tables or sections—the first table dealing with our duty towards God and the second our duty towards men. The Jewish historian Josephus, according to the common agreement of his age, assigns five commandments to each table. Calvin (*ICR* 2.8.12) and our Confession (*WLC* 102, 122) favour dividing the commandments into four and six. Yet others, such as Luther and the Roman Catholic Church, assign three to the first table and seven to the second. But these who do, so subsume the 2nd Commandment (as we understand it) under the 1st Commandment and quite illogically divide the 10th Commandment into two: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house,” and “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, &c.” This makes it easy for the Roman Catholics at least to use images in their worship, for, after all, the 2nd Commandment, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, &c,” now refers to worshipping of other gods rather than the mode of worship of the Living and True God.

The First Commandment teaches us what is the only and proper object of our worship, namely God. In the subsequent questions, each of the commandments will be expounded by showing us firstly, what the commandment bids us to do; secondly, what it forbids us to do; and thirdly, what reasons or motives there may be for its observance.

Q. 46. What is required in the First Commandment?

A. The First Commandment requireth us to *know* and *acknowledge* God to be the only true God, and *our* God;¹ and to *worship* and *glorify* Him accordingly.²

Proofs

¹1 Chr 28:9; Deut 26:17; ²Matt 4:10; Ps 29:2.

Comments

The First Commandment is: “Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.” We note that although the phraseology is negative (as with most of the other commandments), the commandment does not only forbid but enjoins. Three things are especially enjoined in the First Commandment: (1) To know God; (2) To acknowledge God; and (3) To worship and glorify Him accordingly.

We are to know God in the sense that we are to believe that He exists, and that He has chosen to reveal Himself in the Holy Scriptures, and that He alone is the true God and our God.

We are to acknowledge God by affirming and declaring with our words and our lives that He is the only true God and that He is sovereign over us.

Accordingly, we are to worship and glorify Him as the only right object of divine worship and honour. The Larger Catechism Q. 104 expands on this duty very comprehensively. We are to glorify and worship Him by:

- (1) “thinking [Mal 3:16], meditating [Ps 63:6], remembering [Ecc1 12:1], highly esteeming [Ps 71:19], honouring [Mal 1:6], adoring [Isa 45:23], choosing [Jos 24:15, 22], loving [Deut 6:5], desiring [Ps 73:25], fearing of Him [Isa 8:13];”
- (2) “believing Him [Ex 14:31];”
- (3) “trusting [Isa 26:4], hoping [Ps 130:7], delighting [Ps 37:4], rejoicing in Him [Ps 32:11];”
- (4) “being zealous for Him [Rom 12:11; Num 25:11];”
- (5) “calling upon him, giving all praise and thanks [Phil 4:6], and yielding all obedience and submission to him with the whole man [Jer 7:23; Jas 4:7];”
- (6) “being careful in all things to please him [1 Jn 3:22], and sorrowful when in any thing he is offended [Jer 31:18; Ps 119:136]; and”
- (7) “walking humbly with him [Mic 6:8].”

In a word, we must worship and glorify God with all our mind, with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength.

Q. 47. What is forbidden in the First Commandment?

A. The First Commandment forbiddeth the *denying*,¹ or *not worshipping and glorifying* the true God as God,² and our God;³ and the giving of that worship and glory to *any other*, which is due to Him alone.⁴

Proofs

¹Psalms 14:1; ²Romans 1:21; ³Psalms 81:10–11; ⁴Romans 1:25.

Comments

Three things are forbidden in the First Commandment: (1) To deny God, which is atheism; (2) To fail to worship and glorify the true God as God and our God, which is impiety and rebellion; (3) To glorify or worship any other, which is idolatry and profanity.

The Larger Catechism expounds the answer beautifully (*WLC* 105): The sins forbidden in the first commandment, are, Atheism, in denying or not having a God [Ps 14:1; Eph 2:12]; Idolatry, in having or worshipping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God [Jer 2:27–28; 1 Thes 1:9]; the not having and avouching Him for God, and our God [Ps 81:11]; the omission or neglect of any thing due to him, required in this commandment [Isa 43:22–24]; ignorance [Jer 4:22; Hos 4:1, 6], forgetfulness [Jer 2:32], misapprehensions [Acts 17:23, 29], false opinions [Isa 40:18], unworthy and wicked thoughts of Him [Ps 50:21]; bold and curious searching into His secrets [Deut 29:29]; all profaneness [Tit 1:16; Heb 12:16], hatred of God [Rom 1:30]; self-love [2 Tim 3:2], self-seeking [Phil 2:21], and all other inordinate and immoderate setting of our mind, will, or affections upon other things, and taking them off from Him in whole or in part [1 Jn 2:15–16; 1 Sam 2:29; Col 3:2, 5]; vain credulity [1 Jn 4:1], unbelief [Heb 3:12], heresy [Gal 5:20; Tit 3:10], misbelief [Acts 26:9], distrust [Ps 78:22], despair [Gen 4:13], incorrigibility [Jer 5:3], and insensibility under judgments [Isa 42:25], hardness of heart [Rom 2:5], pride [Jer 13:15], presumption [Ps 19:13], carnal security [Zeph 1:12], tempting of God [Mt 4:7]; using unlawful means [Rom 3:8], and trusting in unlawful means [Jer 17:5]; carnal delights and joys [2 Tim 3:4]; corrupt, blind, and indiscreet zeal [Gal 4:17; Jn 16:2; Rom 10:2; Lk 9:54–55]; lukewarmness [Rev 3:16], and deadness in the things of God [Rev 3:1]; estranging ourselves, and apostatising from God [Ezk 14:5; Isa 1:4–5]; praying, or giving any religious worship, to saints, angels, or any other creatures [Rom 10:13–14; Hos 4:12; Acts 10:25–26; Rev 19:10; Mt 4:10; Col 2:18; Rom 1:25]; all compacts and consulting with the devil [Lev 20:6; 1 Sam 28:7, 11; 1 Chr 10:13–14], and hearkening to his suggestions [Acts 5:3]; making men the lords of our faith and conscience [2 Cor 1:24; Mt 23:9]; slighting and despising God and His commands [Deut 32:15; 2 Sam 12:9; Prov 13:13]; resisting and grieving of His Spirit [Acts 7:51; Eph 4:30], discontent and impatience at His dispensations, charging Him foolishly for the evils He inflicts on us [Ps 73:2–3, 13–15, 22; Job 1:22]; and ascribing the praise of any good we either are, have, or can do, to fortune [1 Sam 6:7–9], idols [Dan 5:23], ourselves [Deut 8:17; Dan 4:30], or any other creature [Hab 1:16].

Q. 48. What are we specially taught by these words “before me” in the First Commandment?

A. 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.**¹

Proofs

¹Romans 1:20–21; Psalm 44:20–21; Ezekiel 8:5–18.

Comments

The phrase “before me” is a most significant part of the First Commandment, yet, it is often overlooked when the First Commandment is recited. Our catechism, rightly, points out that the phrase speaks of God’s omniscience,— that God sees all things, including what goes on in the heart of man. It was in amazement of this thought that David wrote: “O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether” (Ps 139:1–4). This being the case, and since God is just and holy, He is much displeased with any manifestation of transgression against the first of His commandments.

John Calvin explains it best: “The phrase ... ‘before my face,’ (Heb. *lit*) makes the offence more heinous because God is provoked to jealousy as often as we substitute our own inventions in place of Him. This is like a shameless woman who brings in an adulterer before her husband’s very eyes to vex his mind the more” (*ICR* 2.8.16).

What should our response be to this doctrine? Calvin is again helpful: “God proclaim that whatever we undertake, whatever we attempt, whatever we make, come into His sight. Therefore let our conscience be clean even from the most secret thoughts of apostasy, if we wish our religion approved of the Lord. For the Lord requires that the glory of His divinity remain whole and uncorrupted not only in outward confession but in His own eyes, which gaze upon the most secret recesses of our hearts” (*ibid.*).

Q. 49. Which is the Second Commandment?

A. 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 shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.¹

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:4–6.

Comments

The First Commandment tells us whom we are to worship. The Second Commandment tells us how we are to worship. It tells us particularly that we must not make any visible representation of God, and that worship with such representations are reprehensible to Him, however sincere it may be. God is a spirit, and He must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. While violation of the First Commandment can hardly be committed by anyone but an unbeliever, there is a recorded history of violations of the Second—both in sacred history and in the history of the Church.

When Moses was delayed in coming down from Mount Sinai after receiving the Ten Commandments, Aaron made a golden calf and the people said: “[This] be thy [God], O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (Ex 32:4). The KJV has ‘these be thy gods’ because the Hebrew word *elohim* is plural. But then it is also the same word for ‘God’ in Exodus 32:11. There is such a thing as a majestic plural in the Hebrew, so that when God is referred to, the Scripture uses the same word for ‘gods’ (i.e., “mighty one”), only in the plural. So, since Aaron made only one calf, it is likely they meant “this be thy God.” In other words, Aaron was violating the Second, rather than the First Commandment. When the kingdom of Israel divided into two during the reign of Rehoboam, the king of the Northern tribes, Jeroboam set up two golden calves, one in Dan and the other at Bethel. And alluding to the words in Exodus 32:4, he said: “Behold thy [God], O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (1 Kgs 12:28). In other words, Jeroboam had not down-rightly denied that Jehovah is God and so had not violated the First Commandment. He broke, rather, the Second Commandment.

Beyond sacred history, we find that the Roman Catholic church and the Eastern Orthodox churches do continually violate this commandment. And they attempt to snuff out the voice of the Law by combining the Second Commandment with the First, and splitting the Tenth Commandment artificially.

Do Protestants break this commandment too? Most certainly. When we imagine in our minds how God looks like, we break this commandment in our minds. When we fail to worship God according to His revealed will, we also break the principle of this Law.

The commandment also teaches us that God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon their children. This does not mean that children will bear the guilt of their fathers. It means, rather, that bad fathers are punished by seeing the evils of their misconduct affecting their

children for three or four generations. A Mafia father, for example, will likely have Mafia children. Diligent fathers who bring up the children in the nurture and admonishment of the Lord will, on the other hand, be blessed with godly descendants.

Q. 50. What is required in the Second Commandment?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹Deuteronomy 32:46; Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:42.

Comments

While the First Commandment has to do with the proper object of worship, the Second Commandment has to do with the proper manner of worship.

Although the Second Commandment specifically forbids the use of images in worship (see *WSC* 51), it implicitly embodies the *Regulative Principle of Worship*, namely that in the worship of God, only what is sanctioned in the Word of God is permitted. It was in direct application of this commandment that the LORD gave specific instructions to Moses on how the altar of sacrifice should be built (Ex 20:22–26). Moses was not to take his initiative to build the altar according to what he thought best.

This Westminster regulative principle, it should be noted, differs from the principle employed by the Lutherans and Anglicans, which is, that whatever is not forbidden in the Word of God is permitted. *WCF* 21.1 puts it this way: “the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.”

What are the elements of worship sanctioned in the Word of God? *WCF* 21.5 enumerates for us: “The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear [Acts 15:21; Rev 1:3], the sound preaching [2 Tim 4:2] and conscionable [i.e., conscientious] hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence [Jas 1:22; Acts 10:33; Mt 13:19; Heb 4:2; Isa 66:2]: singing of psalms with grace in the heart [Col 3:16; Eph 5:19; Jas 5:13]; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God [Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23–29; Acts 2:42]: besides religious oaths [Deut 6:13; Neh 10:29] and vows [Isa 19:21; Eccl 5:4–5], solemn fastings [Joel 2:12; Esth 4:16; Mt 9:15; 1 Cor 7:5], and thanksgivings upon special occasions [Ps 107; Esth 9:22.], which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner [Heb 12:28].”

The Second Commandment therefore forbids the use of candles, incense and images of any sort, in the worship of God. Similarly, the use of puppet shows, dramas or musicals are also forbidden. This, of course, does not mean that Christians must not be involved in any of these activities. The restriction is only in the context of formal worship, whether private or public.

The Second Commandment, instead, bids us: (1) to adopt the way of worshipping God, appointed by Himself; (2) to adhere to it; (3) not to add to it; and (4) not to take from it (Roderick Lawson).

Q. 51. What is forbidden in the Second Commandment?

A. The Second Commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by *images*,¹
—or any other way not appointed in His Word.²

Proofs

¹Deuteronomy 4:15–19; Exodus 32:5, 8; ²Deuteronomy 12:31–32.

Comments

The wording of the Second Commandment lends itself to two common errors. The first error is that of seeing that the commandment involves forbidding all forms of art and photography. Hardly any one would hold to this interpretation today. God Himself commanded that the tabernacle was to be decorated with cherubim (Ex 26:1). The second is the error of seeing it only as forbidding idolatry, which is the worship of other gods. This is the error of the Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians and the Lutherans, who see this commandment as an extension of the First Commandment, forbidding the worship of other gods. The assumption is that other gods are worshipped with idols. On the other hand, the Westminster divines, following Calvin, would agree that this commandment forbids idolatry, but only with reference to the worship of the Living and True God. In other words, the commandment forbids the use of images of any form in the worship of God, and so by extension, the command forbids the worship of God by any means invented by man. The Lord condemns such worship as vain: “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mt 15:9). The Apostle Paul condemning the superstitious worship of the Colossians indicted them for “will-worship”: “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” (Col 2:23).

We live in a day when Christian worship has been shaped largely by culture and traditional norms—even in Protestant churches. A proper application of this commandment would be for us to examine each element of our worship in the light of the Scripture. If we are unable to support our practice with the Scripture, then our worship must be reformed. We must not cling on to our practices simply because we have been doing so for years. The Roman Catholic churches and Orthodox churches will have to repent of their use of images—whether three-dimensional or two-dimensional. Charismatic churches should consider if their worship is “done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40). Churches with female preachers should consider Paul’s injunction: “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim 2:12).

A further application of this commandment is that we may not create any images or pictures of God. Thus, Michelangelo’s famous picture of God creating Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel of Pope Julius II, is an abomination rather than a beautiful creation in the eyes of God. The picture debases God who is a spirit infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, and may be a cause of idolatrous worship.

What about pictures of Jesus Christ, since He is both God and man? Let Thomas Vincent answer: “It is not lawful... because His divine nature cannot be pictured at all; and because His body, as it is now glorified, cannot be pictured as it is; and because, if it do not stir up devotion, it is in vain; if it stir up devotion, it is a worshipping by an image or picture, and so a palpable breach of the second commandment.”

Q. 52. What are the reasons annexed to the Second Commandment?

A. The reasons annexed to the Second Commandment are, God’s *sovereignty* over us,¹—His *propriety* in us,²—and the *zeal* He hath to His own worship.³

Proofs

¹Psalms 95:2–3, 6; ²Psalms 45:11; ³Exodus 34:13–14.

Comments

The reasons annexed to the Second Commandment are found in the words: “for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God...” (Ex 20:5). Three things may be gleaned from this statement.

Firstly, it speaks of God’s sovereignty over us: “I the LORD.” As a sovereign King over us, God has the right to require us to worship Him in the manner that pleases Him. And since God is infinitely greater than us, it is impossible for us to know how to worship Him, unless He reveals to us how we should do so.

Secondly, the phrase, “thy God,” speaks of God’s propriety in us, or His ownership of us. As our Creator and Redeemer, God has every right to insist that our worship reflect a creaturely submission coupled with the gratitude of the redeemed. The Psalmist’s call to worship is based on this thought: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (Ps 95:6–7). Ironically, shortly after the Israelites came out of Egypt, Aaron made a golden calf, and consented with the people: “this be thy God [or gods]... which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (Ex 32:4). When the people worshipped the image, they not only denied that God was their Redeemer but also denied that He was their Creator, since they gave homage to a created thing. “They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. ... They forgot God their saviour” (Ps 106:19, 21).

Thirdly, it speaks of God’s zealotry for His own worship and institutions: “am a jealous God.” God is transcendently holy, and so He will not allow the inventions and devices of sinful men to intrude into His worship. While many churches today regard the mode of worship to be a secondary matter, God regards it a matter of grave importance. He calls those who violate His instruction of worship as “them that hate me” (Ex 20:5b). On the other hand, those who obey His commandment are said to be those who love Him.

Q. 53. Which is the Third Commandment?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:7.

Comments

This commandment teaches us how to treat the Name of God. But the word, “Name,” must not be understood only in its most obvious and basic meaning, though it is included. Rather, the Name of God would include God Himself (cf. Lev 24:16) and everything by which God is known, such as His names, titles, attributes, ordinances, Word and works. Thus Solomon speaks about building a house unto the Name of the LORD (1 Kgs 5:3, 5). Likewise the psalmist proclaimed: “According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness” (Ps 48:10). Then, in the Lord’s Prayer, we say: “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.” Clearly, in all these instances, “Name” refers to more than the nomenclatures pertaining to God.

To take the Name of God in vain is to use the Name of God frivolously, hypocritically, irreverently or superstitiously. We break this commandment, therefore, when we worship the living and true God (first commandment), in the right manner (second commandment), but with the wrong spirit. In other words, we break this commandment when we are merely going through the motion in our worship or when our thoughts wander while we are in worship. We break this commandment also when we think about God, speak about God, write about God or serve God, in a manner that diminishes His glory or portrays Him falsely. Indeed, since we bear the name of Christ, we break the commandment if our lives are not becoming of saints. Paul, speaking of those who dishonour God by breaking the law, warns them: “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you” (Rom 2:24).

Q. 54. What is required in the Third Commandment?

A. The Third Commandment requireth *the holy and reverend use* of God’s names,¹ titles,² attributes,³ ordinances,⁴ Word⁵ and works.⁶

Proofs

¹Matthew 6:9; Deuteronomy 28:58; ²Psalms 68:4; ³Revelation 15:3–4; ⁴Malachi 1:11, 14; ⁵Psalms 138:1–2; ⁶Job 36:24.

Comments

The third commandment requires us to refer to, speak of, think of, write of, or use all that God is known by or revealed Himself by, in a holy and reverent way. This includes the following:

- a. His names, such as: ‘God’, ‘the LORD’ or ‘Jehovah’ (i.e., the tetragramaton: *יהוה*), ‘I AM THAT I AM’ or ‘I AM,’ ‘Heavenly Father,’ ‘Jesus,’ ‘Emman-uel,’ or ‘Holy Spirit,’ etc.
- b. His titles, such as: ‘The Lord’ (in Heb., *Adonai*, Grk., *kurios*), ‘King of kings,’ ‘Christ,’ ‘Messiah,’ ‘Comforter,’ etc.
- c. His attributes, such as omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, holiness, justice, love, goodness and truth.
- d. His ordinances, such as prayer, preaching, and the sacraments.
- e. His Word, i.e., the Bible (Ps 138:1–2).
- f. His works, i.e., God’s creation and providence (Rev 15:3–4).

Christians, in other words, must live and worship with a constant awareness that God is sovereign—has created all things and is governing and directing all things, and so we must live with thanksgiving and praise rather than being negative and bitter about our lives. We must also know that He is omniscient—knowing our hearts, and so He requires that not only our actions, but our thoughts and intents, must glorify Him for who He is.

The first commandment has to do with the proper *object* of worship; the second commandment has to do with the *manner* of worship; but the third commandment has to do with the *spirit* of worship. The fourth commandment, on the other hand, has to do with the *proper day* of worship. The first commandment teaches us to love the *being* of God; the second, the *worship* of God; the third, the *Name* of God; and the fourth, the *day* of God.

Q. 55. What is forbidden in the Third Commandment?

A. The Third Commandment forbiddeth all *profaning* or *abusing* of any thing whereby God maketh Himself known.¹

Proofs

¹Malachi 1:6–7, 12; 2:2; 3:14.

Comments

In *WSC* 54, we noted that God is known by: (1) His names; (2) His titles; (4) His attributes; (5) His ordinances, (6) His Word and (7) His works. In this question, we are taught that the 3rd Commandment forbids any irreverent and wrong use of these things by which God makes Himself known. For example, the commandment forbids:

- (1) Using the Names of God as expletives. We are not only referring to the blasphemous use of the name and title of the Lord Jesus Christ as a swear word by vulgar and profane unbelievers. We are also referring to use of phrases such as “Oh my God!”, “God knows what!”, “Goodness gracious!”, etc.
- (2) Using the names and titles of the Lord as a meaningless and repetitious stopgap in the absence of verbal fluency.
- (3) Making of unnecessary or false oaths and vows (Eccl 5:4–5; Ps 15:4; Lev 19:12; cf. *WCF* 22).
- (4) Using God’s Name to backup falsehood (cf. Gen 27:20; 2 Sam 15:7; 1 Kgs 13:18).
- (5) Using God’s Name to backup carnal impulses. If you say “the Lord led me,” or “the Lord told me,” make sure you can give a chapter and verse in the Bible!
- (6) Complaining about God’s works of Providence—including the weather since it is God who sends the rain and the sunshine.
- (7) Attributing something absurd to God, such as in the Toronto ‘Blessing’ in which God the Holy Spirit is not only credited with causing the people to laugh uncontrollably or to make animal sounds, but also of converting the molar fillings of individuals prayed over, to gold!
- (8) Bad testimonies—by which those who profess to be Christians blaspheme the Name of God by their behaviour (2 Sam 12:14; Rom 2:24).
- (9) Being silent when hearing the Name of God blasphemed (Lev 5:1).
- (10) Worshipping God in the wrong spirit (Isa 29:13; Mal 1:6–7). Thus not only is wandering thoughts in worship forbidden, but the reading and singing without understanding is also a breaking of the 3rd Commandment.

Q. 56. What is the reason annexed to the Third Commandment?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹1 Samuel 2:12, 17, 22, 29; 3:13; Deuteronomy 28:58–59.

Comments

The Third Commandment forbids our taking the Name of the Lord our God in vain. Broadly, this means that it forbids any irreverent and wrong use of these things by which God makes Himself known, including His names and titles, His works of creation and providence, and His ordinances. It is not difficult to see that this commandment is far reaching and touches the conduct and attitude of men in almost every sphere. It is not difficult to see, also, how this commandment is so easily and frequently broken by godless men, that few people will take notice when they see someone breaking it. Moreover, in the history of man, civil authorities often comprise profane and wicked, or atheistic men, who themselves have no regard for the Name of God. Therefore, the breakage of the Third Commandment seldom incurs civil punishment unless it involves hurt to another person in society such as in the case of perjury.

It is for this reason, as far as we can tell, that the Lord adds an annex to this commandment: “For the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” Man may pronounce him guiltless that takes God’s Name in vain, but God is absolutely holy and just, and no transgression of His holy laws can be so insignificant as not to incur His righteous anger.

It is clear from Scriptures that God does sometimes punish the breakers of the Third Commandment with temporal judgements, viz.: “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance” (Deut 28:58–59). But if the Lord should withhold punishment in this life, yet, the offender will surely not escape the eternal wrath of God hereafter.

The genuine child of God, whose sins have already been paid for by Christ, may, due to remaining corruption, break this commandment. Of course, God will not punish the same offence for which Christ has already been punished. But the child of God must realise two things: firstly, God may sometimes chastise His children for their good. This chastisement is often brought about by the natural consequence of the sin committed. Secondly, any professing believer who takes the Name of God in vain habitually, quite obviously cannot be a true believer.

Q. 57. Which is the Fourth Commandment?

A. 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 man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, 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.¹

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:8–11.

Comments

The First Commandment has reference to the *object* of worship; the Second Commandment has reference to the *manner* or *mode* of worship; the Third Commandment has reference to the *spirit* or *attitude* of worship; but this Fourth Commandment has reference to the *time* of worship.

It teaches us that there is a day that is specially appointed as belonging to God, as other days may, in a sense, be said to be belonging to man. So, when the Commandment says, “Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work,” it does not mean that we must labour all six days, and that it is a sin not to do any work during the six days, or that those who have five-days work-week are sinning against God.

What it means is that the six days are days given unto us to manage according to our discretion. This may include doing the work required of our usual calling, the work of maintaining our homes, washing our clothes, recreation and entertainment, etc. Of course, as Christians, we would also like to spend part of the days in personal devotions, family worship and even corporate Christian activities. It is certainly not wrong to do so because we are allowed to determine what we should do with the six days, but neither is it sin, *per se*, if for example, we miss our morning devotion. As Christians, we ought to desire to worship God daily and regularly, personally and with our families. If you are a father of the family, you may sin by failing in your parental duty to lead your family to worship God, but we must not think that it is a sin, for example, to fail to have our devotion in the morning before we get to work. To think in this way is to think legalistically.

On the other hand, when the Commandment says, “the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work,” it is not saying that on the sabbath day we must not do anything at all. No, the emphasis is that the day belongs to God. We are to do on that day only what God commands us or allows us to do. Thus, the prophet Isaiah says:

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 (Isa 58:13–14; *emphasis mine*).

In other words, the Sabbath is not for us to determine what we should do. Our activities must be regulated by the fact that the day belongs to God, which is why only acts of piety, necessity and mercy are allowed on that day.

Q. 58. What is required in the Fourth Commandment?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹Deuteronomy 5:12–14.

Comments

Just as the Second Commandment is not only about the use of images, but about the manner of worship; so the Fourth Commandment is not only about the Sabbath but about “the keeping holy to God such set times as He hath appointed in His Word.” Under the Old Covenant, there was a number of annual feast days and religious days, such as the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Trumpets, and Pentecost. The church under-age was required to observe those days too and there were specific commands concerning them (e.g., in Leviticus 23 and Numbers 29). But these days were ceremonial and civil in nature, and with the coming of Christ, they are abrogated. The Sabbath day on the other hand is given as part of the Ten Commandments, which indicates that it is moral, perpetual and universal. Moreover, the institution of the weekly Sabbath dates back to the creation week, so that we have no doubt that it is not only for the Jews but for all mankind. We read:

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made (Gen 2:2–3).

The fact that God ‘sanctified’ the day even before Adam fell suggests that it is not a shadow or type to be fulfilled and abrogated by Christ in His incarnation, for Christ came to redeem sinners. But Adam was not yet a sinner when the day was set apart by God. The Sabbath, must therefore be made for the sake of all men that they may rest from their labours each week. God needs not rest, and neither does He need to take six days to create, but we are told in Scripture that He did so. Why? It must be to set a pattern for His highest creatures,—man,—to follow. This explains also why the Commandment requires that even non-Jews (strangers) must keep the Sabbath.

The Commandment to keep the Sabbath holy is a moral commandment; and a creation ordinance. It is not just for the Jews and it does not foreshadow Christ. With all these considerations, we have no doubt that today, “one whole day in seven” must continue to be kept “a holy Sabbath to Himself.” That is, one day in seven must be regarded,—by all men, but particularly by Christians who ought to know the Word of God,—as belonging to God.

As the Scriptures not only indicate the perpetuity of the Sabbath, and do not introduce any other feast days to be observed by Christians, we may deduce that all other holy days, such as those decreed by the Roman Catholic Church, ought not to be observed.

Q. 59. Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly Sabbath?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹Genesis 2:2–3; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2; Acts 20:7.

Comments

Seventh Day Adventists insist that Christians should observe the Sabbath on Saturday, like the Jews. Antinomians insist that the Lord’s Day and the Sabbath are different days: The Sabbath is Jewish and abrogated, and the Lord’s Day is not to be regulated by the Fourth Commandment. We have shown that the Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment is moral, perpetual and universal. But how would we respond to the Adventists and the Antinomians?

Our response is that the Lord’s Day is the Sabbath Day: the day has been changed from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week. We note, first of all, that the Fourth Commandment does not teach us that the Sabbath is to be observed on Saturday. It teaches us, rather, that one day in seven is to be observed as the Sabbath. The day of the Sabbath is to be indicated by God by a separate positive command. When the Sabbath was first instituted at the end of the Creation Week, God indicated that the last day of the week was to be the Sabbath, by ‘resting’ on the seventh day (Gen 2:3).

When the Jews were in captivity in Egypt the day, in order, was probably forgotten, because Egypt operated on a 10-day week. So, when the Lord brought the Jews out of Egypt, He indicated the day on which they were to observe the Sabbath (which had been forgotten), by a double portion of manna on the day before the Sabbath (Ex 16:23). This day was very probably the seventh day in order from the beginning of creation as the Fourth Commandment referred to God resting after His work of creation.

However, when the Fourth Commandment was repeated in the second giving of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy chapter 5, the reason appended for keeping the Sabbath was no more the creation, but redemption from Egypt (Deut 5:14–15). The redemption of the Jews from Egypt is of course a type of the redemption of the Church from the bondage of sin and Satan (Lk 1:68–75). This anticipated the next positive indication by God to change the day of the Sabbath to another day. This new day was prophesied in Psalm 118:22–24: “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” The day the rejected stone become head stone is the day of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord was raised on the first day of the week. His resurrection pointed to His resting from suffering works. The writer of Hebrews compares the redemptive rest of Christ with the creation rest of God to indicate not only a switch in the day when we

should observe the Sabbath, but a change in the main commemorative reason for keep the Sabbath: “For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works [of creation].... There remaineth therefore a rest [*sabbatismov~ (sabbatismos)*—‘sabbath rest’] to the people of God. For he [Christ] that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works [of Redemption], as God did from his [of creation]” (Heb 4:4, 9–10).

The Lord further confirmed that this should be the day to worship Him by appearing, after His resurrection, to His disciples always on the First Day of the week (e.g., Jn 20:1, 19, 26). The disciples began to worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1–2), and soon the day was known as the “Lord’s Day” (Rev 1:10).

It is to remind ourselves that the Lord’s Day is the same as the *sabbath day* referred to in the Fourth commandment, that we call it “the Christian Sabbath.”

Q. 60. How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?

A. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy **RESTING** all that day,¹ even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on *other days*;² and spending the whole time in the *public and private exercises of God’s worship*,³ except so much as is to be taken up in the works of **NECESSITY** and **MERCY**.⁴

Proofs

¹Ex 20:8, 10; 16:25–28; ²Neh 13:15–22; ³Lk 4:16; Acts 20:7; Ps 92 title; Isa 66:23; ⁴Mt 12:1–31.

Comments

The Sabbath is sanctified by God, in His appointing it to be holy, but it is to be sanctified by man, in his observing and keeping it as holy, i.e., as a day that belongs to God. Thomas Vincent has rightly observed that there are two parts to observing and keeping the Sabbath holy, namely: (1) by a holy resting; (2) by holy exercises.

Holy resting refers, not only, to ceasing from activities that are in themselves sinful, but also from worldly engagements, recreations and thoughts which on the other six days of the week are lawful and may even be our duty. In other words, we are not to find our own pleasure, do what we want, or speak as we like on the Sabbath Day (Isa 58:13).

There are some works in our particular callings which may seem to be most timely and advantageous on the Sabbath day, such as the operating of a retail shop or restaurant, for which business is especially ‘good’ on Sunday. Yet, it is our duty to rest from them, and to wholly refrain from them (cf. Neh 13:15–18). This is especially so if they are works for our own advantage, in which case whatever loss we may seem to sustain by such forbearance, we may “be sure it is not comparable to the loss of God’s favour, the wounding of our conscience and the loss of our souls forever, which will be the fruit of living in the breach of God’s law” (Thomas Vincent). We should however apply judicious judgement in the cases of the modern society where there are certain works that cannot be done on any other days without unbearable hardship to our employers, to those we work with, or to those we provide service for, as in the case of essential services such as medical care, emergency services and electricity generation. We may even add public transport in a city such as Singapore where private transportation is practically unaffordable for the average citizen. A rule of thumb is to distinguish between ‘want to’ and ‘have to.’

Holy exercises refer to participation in public and private acts of worship, as well as activities designed for the increase of our own or our brethren’s faith and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, such as Bible studies, singing of Psalms, reading of the Scripture and Christian literature, fellowship with the saints, writing of edifying letters, etc. These things are especially enjoined. Besides all these, the Lord’s exposition of the Sabbath principle in Matthew 12:1–12; and Luke 13:14–16, etc., teaches us that works of emergency, necessity and mercy, such as: eating, drinking, defending ourselves from enemies, quenching the fire of houses, visiting the sick, relieving the poor, feeding cattle and the like, are also allowable.

Q. 61. What is forbidden in the Fourth Commandment?

A. The Fourth Commandment forbiddeth the *omission or careless performance* of the duties required,¹ and the profaning the day by *idleness*,² or doing that which is in itself *sinful*,³ or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our *worldly* employments or recreations.⁴

Proofs

¹Ezk 22:26; Amos 8:5; Mal 1:13; ²Acts 20:7, 9; ³Ezk 23:38; ⁴Jer 17:24–26; Isa 58:13.

Comments

The sins forbidden in the Fourth Commandment may be classed as either sins of omission or sins of commission.

The sin of omission pertaining to the Sabbath day are of three sorts: (1) idleness, when we loiter away the day with vain thought and conversation, or when we spend more than the necessary amount of time sleeping,—which is in fact also a sin on other days (cf. Prov 6:10–11; Rom 12:11); (2) the neglecting of public or private exercise of God’s worship, and that either in whole or in part; such as when we forsake the assemblies of God’s people, or omit worshipping God in our families, or praying and seeking God in secret upon this day; and (3) careless performance of the duties required, such as when we are hypocritical, dull, dead, full of distractions, weariness, sleepy when attending upon ordinances, and when we regard the Sabbath day to be the most burdensome of all other days of the week unto us (cf. Mt 15:7–8; Amos 8:5; Mal 1:13).

The sins of commission pertaining to the Sabbath day are also of three sorts: (1) By doing that which is in itself sinful or tending to sin. For example, it would be unbecoming of saints to visit, on any day, places which are cesspools of iniquities or abounding with temptations for the child of God, such a casinos, pub and disco theatres. Visiting such places on the Sabbath day instead of attending to public worship of God would be doubly dishonouring to God. (2) By doing,—not by necessity,—works pertaining to our secular calling, even if it is done after having attended public worship in the morning. (3) By engaging or participating in carnal recreations or entertainments.

In summary, the Sabbath does not belong to us, to do as we like even though it is made for us. Our attitude towards the Sabbath must be that it belongs to God. We are, as such, forbidden on the Sabbath to think our own thoughts, speak our own words, do our own works, and find our own pleasure (Isa 58:13).

Let us therefore adequately prepare ourselves so that we may not be too tired on the Sabbath day to attend to the means of grace, or be tempted to try to complete our work or studies to prepare for Monday.

Q. 62. What are the reasons annexed to the Fourth Commandment?

A. The reasons annexed to the Fourth Commandment are,—God’s allowing us *six* days of the week for our own employments,¹ His challenging a special propriety in the *seventh*, His own *example*, and His *blessing* the Sabbath day.²

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:9; ²Exodus 20:11.

Comments

The reasons annexed to the Fourth Commandment are: “Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: . . . 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” (Ex 20:9–11).

Our catechism notes that four separate reasons are given to persuade us to observe the Sabbath. For those of us who are already persuaded that we should observe the Sabbath, these four reasons should become motivations to observe it unto the Lord the more strictly.

The first reason is that God has allowed us six days for our own employment. As our Creator, He has a right to take all our time for Himself, but He has required only one day in seven,—and that for our own physical and spiritual well-being. Nevertheless, as we are already given six days, which are sufficient for our own works, and any kind of needful recreations, we should not encroach on the Sabbath of the Lord.

The second reason is that God has set an example for us in resting Himself from His works of creation on the seventh day. Someone may object that God does not really rest since He is providentially governing the universe. True. But this is not the point. The point is that God needs not have taken six days to create. That He took six days and ceased His creative work on the seventh, could only be because He wanted to set a pattern for man to follow. Considering the length at which God undertook to show us the importance of the Sabbath, what ingratitude it would be if we fail to sanctify a Sabbath in imitation of Him.

The third reason attached to the Fourth Commandment is God’s blessing of the Sabbath, so that we may especially hope for His presence with us in the duties of the day and to receive blessings from Him upon ourselves.

The fourth reason is God’s hallowing the day, and so challenging a special protocol in the seventh day. He said: “But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God” (Ex 20:10). The Sabbath, being the Lord’s, which He has sanctified and set apart from common use, is to be employed in His worship; it is theft and sacrilege to alienate this day in whole or in part to our own use, any further than He has given us allowance.

Q. 63. Which is the Fifth Commandment?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:12.

Comments

Does the Fifth Commandment belong to the first table of the Law or to the second? There are some who believe that Moses was holding two tablets with a duplicate of the Ten Commandments in each tablet. This is based on the theory that the Mosaic Covenant parallels the suzerainty covenants in the Ancient Near Eastern culture. Such covenants were made between sovereign or conquering kings with the people who have been brought under subjection to them. The treaties or covenants were dictated on the terms of the sovereign and one copy was kept by each party. It is said that this was the case with the Ten Commandments. But in this case both tablets were laid in the ark because the ark represents the throne of God as well as the most sacred place of the people of Israel.

This theory may or may not be correct, and it should not affect our understanding of the Ten Commandments at all. For whether the Ten Commandments were divided into two tablets or was written in duplicate, we know that the Ten Commandments is indeed logically divided into two tables in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus Christ summarises the Law of God thus: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mt 22:37–40). When we look into the Ten Commandments, we discover that there are indeed two sections: one section pertaining to our duty towards God and the other pertaining to our duty towards man.

It may seem an idle question whether the Fifth Commandment is in the first table or the second, but this question has been often debated in the early Church. The Jews, such as Josephus and Philo, had the Fifth Commandment in the first table, and the Church Father Irenaeus followed their division. Such a division has the advantage of showing that the Fifth Commandment is about honouring the authorities that God has set in His place. But this division is unlikely since our Lord nowhere quotes directly from the first table of the Decalogue, and when He lists the second table, He includes the Fifth Commandment among the commandments that deals with our duty towards our neighbours (Mt 19:18–19).

In any case, the fact that any can even consider that the Fifth Commandment to have a place in the first table shows us how appropriate it is for it to head the second table before the Sixth Commandment. Left to man’s unaided wisdom, he would certainly put the Sixth Commandment as more important than the Fifth. But God knows best. The Fifth Commandment must be the first commandment relating to man, that a child must learn. If he does not learn to submit to lawful authority, he will never understand

the meaning of submission and obedience, and so it would be futile to teach him anything that is contrary to selfishness.

Q. 64. What is required in the Fifth Commandment?

A. The Fifth Commandment requireth the *preserving the honour*, and *performing the duties*, belonging to *every one* in their several places and relations, as superiors,¹ inferiors,² or equals.³

Proofs

¹Ephesians 5:21; ²1 Peter 2:17; ³Romans 12:10.

Comments

Many of us commonly think of the Fifth Commandment as only legislating our duty towards our parents. Our catechism teaches us that there is more to it. It teaches us that the Fifth Commandment is about the maintenance of society within its framework of functional superiority, subordination and equality. In a word, it teaches us our duty towards our neighbour depending on whether,—in a particular sphere, e.g., home, school, church, work place, or nation—he is our equal, our inferior or our superior. We speak about different spheres, or, in the words of our catechism: “several places and relations” because one may be superior to another in one sphere but inferior to him in another context. Thus it is possible that elder in a local church may be an employee, and therefore a subordinate, to a member of the church when at work.

Not all of us will immediately agree that the Fifth Commandment is as general as the Westminster divines have made it. Some of us may wonder how ‘father’ and ‘mother’ can be used to refer to anything else other than our parents. But we have good reasons to believe that this is how the Apostle Paul viewed the Fifth Commandment. For, Paul omits quoting the Fifth Commandment when he lists the commandments of the second table (Rom 13:9), because he had just expounded the Fifth Commandment when he taught about honouring all authorities set over us (Rom 13:1–7).

Some of us may have difficulty seeing how the commandment has anything to do with our duties towards our inferiors or equals. However, as the Scripture does teach us to submit to one another (Eph 5:21) and to honour one another (1 Pet 2:17 and Rom 12:10), we should be able to agree that the “general scope” (*WLC* 126) of the commandment is indeed as presented. And moreover, the Scripture does clearly teach our duties in our various places and relations. For example, the New Testament teaches fathers to honour their children by not exasperating them (Eph 6:4); wives to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22); husbands to love their wives (Eph 5:25); servants to obey their masters (Eph 6:5, Tit 2:9–10, 1 Pet 2:18–20); and masters to be kind and fair to their servants (Eph 6:9, Col 4:1); members of the church to submit to their elders (Heb 13:17); and elders to watch over the flock without lording over them (1 Pet 5:3).

In general, remember that this commandment has two aspects. One has to do with the honour of another person. To preserve the honour of a person is to show respect and not to think or speak deprecatingly about the person. The second aspect has to do with duties towards our inferiors, superiors or equal, which are required of us.

Q. 65. What is forbidden in the Fifth Commandment?

A. The Fifth Commandment forbiddeth the *neglecting of*, or *doing any thing against*, the honour and duty which belongeth to every one in their several places and relations.¹

Proofs

¹Matthew 15:4–6; Ezekiel 34:2–4; Romans 13:8.

Comments

Every one of us is set in various social spheres by God’s providence. A man may be simultaneously a father and husband at home, a member and deacon in church, a manager at work, a student at night class, a section commander in the army reserve, and a citizen of the nation. In each of these spheres, he has to relate to different people, some believers and some not. He is to relate to them according to his and their functional positions in the sphere. As a father, he has the responsibility of oversight over his children. He has the duty of bring them up in the fear and nurture of the Lord. As a husband, he has the duty of loving and leading his wife in temporal and spiritual matters. As a deacon in church, he has the duty to submit to the session of the church and to lead the members of the church in temporal and financial matters of the church. As a member in the church, he has the duty of exhorting, encouraging and praying with and for fellow members. As a manager at work, he has to report to his company chairman and submit to his instruction, while at the same time he has to direct the persons under him. As a student, he is responsible to be on time for his classes, to receive instructions from his teacher, and to hand in his assignments promptly. As a section commander in the reserve, he has to take commands from his platoon commander, and he is to command his section of men. As a citizen of the nation, he must respect and honour the government, obey all the civil laws and pay all taxes honestly.

The Fifth Commandment makes all these duties no longer optional, but mandatory. To neglect or to do anything contrary to these duties is sin. In addition, the Fifth Commandment forbids any thoughts, words or deeds which dishonour another, especially such as are set in authority over us. *WLC* 128 summarises most thoroughly:

The sins of inferiors against their superiors are, all neglect of the duties required toward them; envying at, contempt of, and rebellion against, their persons and places, in their lawful counsels, commands, and corrections; cursing, mocking, and all such refractory and scandalous carriage, as proves a shame and dishonour to them and their government.

Q. 66. What is the reason annexed to the Fifth Commandment?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹ Deuteronomy 5:16; Ephesians 6:2–3.

Comments

The Fifth Commandment is the first particular commandment which is attached with a promise to encourage all to keep it: "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Ex 20:12); "Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise)" (Eph 6:2).

It is true that there is a promise of God's showing mercy unto thousands, annexed unto the Second Commandment. But note that the promise there is not with respect to those who keep the commandment only, but with respect to those who love God; whereas here, the promise of long life is particularly applied unto the keepers of this Fifth Commandment.

We must remember that this promise of long life is not only about the bare continuance of life for a long time. A long life may be so accompanied with miseries that death may be more desirable. So, the answer to our catechism rightly includes in the promise, the blessing and prosperity of life in accordance to Paul's encouragement: "That it may be well with thee" (Eph 6:2–3).

It may be asked whether statistically, it is true that all who honour their parents live long and prosper upon the earth? Thomas Vincent answers most succinctly:

- (1) Many that honour their parents, and are faithful in all relative duties, do not attain long life and prosperity in the world, and that by virtue of this promise; and those that do otherwise, are many of them cut off in their youth, or in the midst of their days, and bring the curse of poverty and want upon themselves whilst they live: yet withal, we may observe that temporal promises and judgments were fulfilled more in the letter formerly in the Old Testament times, than in the latter gospel-days, wherein they are often exchanged into spiritual. (2) This promise is to be understood with this exception—so far as it may serve for God's glory and the real good of all those that keep this commandment; and oftentimes God is glorified, and they are benefited, when they are exercised with affliction, and God sees it best to take some of them home in their youth, or strength of their years, to Himself; to hide them from the miseries that befall them that survive, and, instead of long life on the earth, He giveth them eternal life in heaven [Ps 119:71; Isa 57:1; 1 Jn 2:25].

Q. 67. Which is the Sixth Commandment?

A. The Sixth Commandment is, **THOU SHALT NOT KILL.**¹

Proofs

¹ Exodus 20:13.

Comments

After the Fifth Commandment, the commandments in the second table of the Law are easy to remember, for they are ordered according to severity of transgression or, if you like, according to importance. Generally, it is more severe to murder than to commit adultery; it is more severe to commit adultery than to steal; it is more severe to steal than to bear false witness; and it is more severe to bear false witness than to covet what belongs to our neighbour. Of course, this order must not be taken absolutely, since there are occasions in which the breaking of a commandment lower down the list may be more severe than the breaking of a commandment higher up. For example, if the bearing of false witness involves destroying the honour of a person, it would certainly be more severe than stealing something that belongs to the person. Of course, we should also note that where false witnessing involves slander, the offender would also be breaking the Sixth Commandment by killing his character and honour. He may also be breaking the Eighth by stealing honour from him, such as in the case when a person bears false witness in order that his hearers may have a lower view of his victim, while they increase their opinion of him.

The Sixth Commandment is perhaps the most famous of the Ten Commandments. Anyone who knows of the Ten Commandments will almost without fail remember that such a commandment is in it whereas he may not remember any of the other commandments at all. It is most apt, therefore, for the Lord to use the Sixth Commandment, together with the Seventh Commandment, to demonstrate that we must not think of the Ten Commandments according to letter only. Thus, we are not to think that we have never broken the Sixth Commandment because we had never actually murdered a person. The Lord's teaching implies that we should also attempt to understand the spirit of all the other commandments if we are to walk according to the precepts of God. But we must bear in mind that knowing the spirit of the law does not give us any license to transgress the letter of the Law. To do so would be like saying: "The spirit of the Sixth Commandment forbids hatred and unjustified anger against our neighbour; therefore I may assist my neighbour to commit suicide (euthanasia) since there is no hatred and anger, but love involved."

Q. 68. What is required in the Sixth Commandment?

A. The Sixth Commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to *preserve* our own life,¹ and the life of others.²

Proofs

¹ Ephesians 5:28–29; ² 1 Kings 18:4.

Comments

The Sixth Commandment has to do with our own and others' lives. Therefore positively, the commandment requires us to make use of all lawful means to preserve our own life and the lives of others. Our answer emphasises the lawfulness of the endeavours because it is possible to be tempted to want to preserve our life by unlawful means. Suppose you are in the midst of a people who are hostile towards Christ, and you are threatened with death unless you renounce Christ. You may be tempted to do so, but it would be unlawful for you to preserve your life this way. In fact, saving our life this way is the way to lose our life and our souls forever: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Mt 16:25).

On the other hand, the lawful endeavours which we ought to use for the preservation of our life include: (1) Defence of ourselves with arms and weapons, against the violence of thieves and robbers that seek to murder us; (2) The nourishing and refreshing of our bodies in a sober and moderate use of meat, drink, and rest; (3) The moderate use of bodily exercise and recreations; (4) The use of doctors, medicine and medical advances for the removal of sickness and the recovery of health; and (5) The means of preventing outbreaks of disease, such as inoculation or disinfecting of buildings, etc.

In the case of the lives of others, the lawful endeavours include: (1) All peace time implementations to minimise death from accidents and violence; (2) Defence of nation during war time; (3) Distributing to the necessities of life to the poor and needy according to our ability; and (4) Forbearing of all wrongs, and withholding any action that may prove injurious unto any person who may have done wrong to us (Phil 2:15; Col 3:12).

Q. 69. What is forbidden in the Sixth Commandment?

A. The Sixth Commandment forbiddeth the *taking away* of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever *tendeth* thereunto.¹

Proofs

¹ Acts 16:28; Genesis 9:6.

Comments

In a word, the Sixth Commandment forbids suicide and murder.

In some cultures, such as the Japanese, suicide is sometimes counted as a virtue, and the part of a brave heroic spirit to maintain honour. But the law of God does not allow any such thing. Instead, it accounts such persons as self-murderers. Although some who are genuinely the children of God may, in a moment of weakness, kill themselves, yet suicide must never be regarded as a lawful course of action, because premeditated suicide would be a blatant disregard of the Sixth Commandment, for which there is no opportunity for repentance. The Apostle John tells us: "no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn 3:15) and that there are no murderers in heaven (Rev 21:8). Thus, Saul's suicide must be regarded as sinful. If we are in a similar situation, "we ought rather to submit ourselves to any abuses and tortures of others, which is their sin, than to lay violent hands on ourselves, and so die in a sin which there is no time nor place for repenting of afterwards" (Thomas Vincent).

In the case of the lives of others, it is lawful to kill: (1) In the execution of the just sentence of the public laws, especially on such as have been murderers (Num 35:30); (2) In lawful war (Jer 48:10); and (3) In necessary self-defence (Ex 22:2). In all other circumstances, killing another human life (unless by accident) is murder and forbidden by this commandment.

The Sixth Commandment also forbids anything that may tend towards murder including: (1) Hatred and unjustified anger. Thus our Lord teaches: "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Mt 5:22a); and the Apostle John says: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer" (1 Jn 3:15). (2) By neglecting or withholding the lawful and necessary means for the preservation of life; such as food, drink, sleep, clothes, needful recreations, medicine and the like.

Q. 70. Which is the Seventh Commandment?

A. The Seventh Commandment is, **THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.**¹

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:14.

Comments

The Seventh Commandment, together with the Sixth and Eighth Commandments, are commonly known to be in the Decalogue even by unbelievers. However, it is a commandment which has been most misunderstood, most vilified as antiquated, and most violated for the sake of money-making in the entertainment and literature industries.

While the Sixth Commandment forbids only murder (in thoughts, words or deeds) and not every kind of killing, the Seventh Commandment does not forbid only the act of adultery between a married person and another person not his or her spouse. Its scope is actually very wide, and forbids all forms of sexual immorality. The Lord Jesus says, “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” (Mt 5:27–28). The Lord was of course not renouncing the Commandment, but explaining that its scope is much wider, and its demands more rigorous than what is commonly understood.

We shall examine in more details what this Commandment enjoins and forbids when we comment on the next two questions. But for now, it is useful, I believe, for us to think for a moment how best this Commandment may be explained by parents to children who have yet to reach puberty. We must begin teaching the commandments as early as possible, but what do we say when our children ask: What does ‘adultery’ mean? My suggestion would be to teach this commandment with a ‘legalistic tint’ until they are ready to understand what immorality and purity mean. For example, we may say that it means, “a man and woman (or boy and girl) who are not husband and wife must not sleep together”; or especially for the girls, “your dress must not reveal too much”; or especially for the boys, “you must not touch a girl anywhere other than her arms”; etc.

Q. 71. What is required in the Seventh Commandment?

A. The Seventh Commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbour’s *chastity*, in heart, speech, and behaviour.¹

Proofs

¹1 Corinthians 7:2–3, 5, 34, 36; Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:2.

Comments

Just as the Sixth Commandment has to do with preserving our own and our neighbour’s life, the Seventh Commandment has to do with preserving our own and others’ chastity.

So, firstly, we must make every effort to keep ourselves unpolluted in our heart, speech and deeds. The Apostle Paul exhorts: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour” (1 Thes 4:3–4). We may do so, firstly, by not entertaining any lustful thoughts or fantasy in our hearts. Secondly, by turning our eyes away from anything which may provoke lust be it pornography on television, Internet, magazine, etc., or even a person of the opposite gender who is immodestly dressed. Learn the principle of guarding the eyes from Job: “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” (Job 31:1). Thirdly, by refusing to listen to anything immorally provoking, including some romantic songs. Fourthly, by avoiding all touches which may evoke unchaste desires (cf. 1 Cor 7:1).

At all times, but especially when faced with temptation, the child of God should remember that God sees all things: including the desires of our hearts (see Proverbs 5:20–21). And knowing our own weakness, let us learn to apply to the Lord to “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:13).

Secondly, as the Seventh Commandment requires our preserving the chastity of our neighbours, we must do all that is within our power to prevent the defilement of others. This includes the way in which we dress (1 Tim 2:9); the way we speak (Eph 4:29; 5:4); and the way we behave (cf. 1 Pet 3:1–2). For this purpose, the Apostle Paul instructs us that in a church we should treat older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with all purity (1 Tim 5:1–2).

Q. 72. What is forbidden in the Seventh Commandment?

A. The Seventh Commandment forbiddeth *all unchaste* thoughts, words, and actions.¹

Proofs

¹Matthew 15:19; 5:28; Ephesians 5:3–4.

Comments

The acts of unchastity, which are forbidden in the Seventh Commandment, include: (1) Fornication and adultery (Gal 5:19; Lev 19:20); (2) Incest (Lev 18:6); (3) Rape, and all forcing of any into the sin of uncleanness (Deut 22:25); and (4) Sodomy and homosexuality (Rom 1:24, 26–27). In fact, any kind of sexual gratification outside the bounds of legitimate marriage would be forbidden. The writer of Hebrews tells us: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb 13:4).

Naturally, as the actions are sinful, so, it would be sinful to indulge in any conversation, thoughts or fantasy on these themes. Pornography or anything that will evoke lust is as such forbidden under the Seventh Commandment.

It should be noted that among all the commandments in the second table of the Decalogue, the Seventh Commandment is the most frequently referred to in the New Testament. The word ‘fornication’ (*porneiva, porneia*) occurs 26 times, ‘commit fornication’ (*porneuvw, porneuō*) occurs 8 times, and ‘commit adultery’ (*moiceuvw, moicheuō*) occurs 11 times. This compares, for example, to ‘murder’ (*foneuvw, phoneuō*), 18 times; ‘bearing false witness’ (*yeudomarturiva, pseudomarturia*) twice, and ‘lying’ (*yeu`do~, pseudos*), 9 times. The reason for this emphasis is perhaps because: firstly, the temptation to break this Commandment can be particularly difficult to resist; secondly, because it is a very grievous sin that affect the entire being of a person. Paul says: “Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Cor 6:18b).

This is perhaps why the Apostle Paul specifically admonishes us to “Flee fornication” (1 Cor 6:18a). Heeding Paul’s injunction would require the child of God to avoid any situation or activity, which may give him or her occasion to be tempted to break the Seventh Commandment. This includes: being alone together with a member of the opposite gender who is not your spouse, for any reason other than waiting for someone else; drinking and being affected by alcohol (cf. Gen 19:33); wanton gestures and immodest attires (Isa 3:16; Prov 7:10, 13); immodest touching (cf. Gen 26:8–9a); reading lascivious books, beholding unchaste pictures, watching movies with immoral scenes or themes, etc.

Q. 73. Which is the Eighth Commandment?

A. The Eighth Commandment is, **THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.**¹

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:15.

Comments

The Eighth Commandment is another of those commandments that is commonly known to be in the Decalogue, even by unbelievers. Indeed, even those who have never heard about Christ or Christianity is likely also to know that it is wrong to steal. This is because the works of the moral law is written in the hearts of man created in the image of God (Rom 2:14–15): which is why man has a sense of morality whereas animals do not.

However, because of the corruption of nature, most people think of stealing only as referring to illegally possessing of money or property that belong to others. Like the other commandments, however, the Eighth Commandment has a greater scope than that. For example, habitual late-coming is a breaking of the Eighth Commandment, because it involves stealing the time of others. Similarly, when a person breaks the Sabbath by doing unnecessary work, he is actually stealing from God, because one day in seven belongs to the Lord and the only kinds of work permitted are those that God allows in His Word.

Nevertheless, it is true that the Eighth Commandment has a primary reference to private ownership, or the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and of others. This compares with the Fifth Commandment which has to do with human authorities; the Sixth Commandment which has to do with human life, the Seventh Commandment which has to do with the moral purity of man, the Ninth Commandment which has to do with the promotion of truth between man and man, and the Tenth Commandment which has to do with the heart and desires of man.

Thus, it is most helpful to teach children to observe the Eighth Commandment by getting them to honour the right of ownership of others. For example, children should be taught from young that they must not take other children’s toys without permission from the owners. In the same way, when a child picks up something that has been accidentally misplaced by another, he should be taught to return it if the owner can be found.

Q. 74. What is required in the Eighth Commandment?

A. The Eighth Commandment requireth the *lawful procuring and furthering* the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.¹

Proofs

¹ Genesis 30:30; 1 Timothy 5:8; Leviticus 25:35; Deuteronomy 22:1–5; Exodus 23:4–5; Genesis 47:14, 20.

Comments

We have already noted that the Eighth Commandment respects the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others. In simpler language, this means that the Eighth Commandment has to do with private ownership of property or things. The wording of the Commandment has to do with stealing, or dishonouring the right of ownership by others, of the things we steal. This includes things which God has providentially assigned to another and time which others have paid for, such as when we are being employed to do a certain work during a particular time.

But positively, since theft is forbidden, and we are to work for our possessions and daily bread (Eph 4:28; 2 Thes 3:10b), it follows that the Eighth Commandment requires the procuring and furthering of the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others by lawful means.

The lawful means by which we may acquire and maintain our own wealth and outward estate include: (1) a careful choice of a lawful and fit calling by which we may provide for ourselves and for those under our care (cf. Gen 2:15; 4:2; Mk 6:3; Acts 18:3; etc.); (2) diligence and industry in our particular calling that we gain the favour of our employees without compromising our faith (cf. Prov 10:4; 13:11); (3) prudence and discretion in managing our callings and outward estate to the best advantage (Ps 112:5; cf. Prov 2:11); by being frugal, not wasteful nor indulging in unnecessary luxuries (Prov 21:20; Jn 6:12); (4) moderate attempts to recover what rightly belong to us when they are wrongfully taken from us in any way; (5) seeking the Lord's blessing upon our every endeavour to provide our daily bread and acknowledging that all that we receive comes undeservedly from the Lord (Prov 10:22; Phil 4:6).

Now, in regards to our endeavour to procure and further the wealth and outward estate of others as taught by the Apostle Paul: "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth" (1 Cor 10:24), we ought, "in general, [to have] a public spirit, in seeking the good of the commonwealth above our own, and seeking others' private wealth and advantage, as well as our own" (Thomas Vincent).

Q. 75. What is forbidden in the Eighth Commandment?

A. The Eighth Commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth or may unjustly *hinder* our own or our neighbour's wealth or outward estate.¹

Proofs

¹ Proverbs 21:17; 23:20–21; 28:19; Ephesians 4:28.

Comments

The Eighth Commandment is so simply worded: "Thou shalt not steal." Everyone should understand that what the Commandment forbids is stealing. Why then does our Confession answer to what is forbidden in the Commandment with a sentence which is much harder to comprehend and swallow? What, after all, does it mean to "hinder our own or our neighbour's wealth or outward estate"? What does our being forbidden to steal have to do with our own wealth and outward estate? With these questions in mind, it may appear to some that the answer to this catechism question, as well as some others, is very contrived and go beyond Scripture and the plain sense of the commandments. However, we must remember the rules of interpretation of the Ten Commandments as given in *WLC* 99, especially, rule no. 6: "That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto." If we keep in mind this rule and the fact that the Eighth Commandment respects the private ownership of wealth, and the outward estate bestowed upon individuals by God, then we can better appreciate the generic statement of the divines. It simply says that the Eighth Commandment forbids anything that unlawfully acts against God's providential assignment of earthly wealth to anyone. When a person denies another of his rightful possession of anything we call it theft. We do not normally talk about stealing from ourselves, but when,—by our irresponsibility,—we squander away God's gracious provision of daily bread and temporal wealth to us, we do break the Eighth Commandment.

Some examples of theft that is forbidden would include: (1) Shoplifting; (2) All infringement of copyrights; (3) All withholding of wages from our employees without just cause (Lev 19:13; Prov 3:27); (4) Keeping something which we find in the streets though the owner's address is known, or that is significant enough for the owner to return to look for it, or will attempt to see if anyone has returned it at the Police station (Deut 22:1, 3); (5) Any form of extortion and oppression especially of the poor and afflicted (Mt 18:28–30; Prov 22:22–23; Ps 37:21); (6) Defrauding others in our buying, when we under-value that which we know to be good, or take an advantage of others' ignorance of the worth of their commodities (Prov 20:14); (7) Defrauding others in selling, when we praise that which we sell against our consciences in order to fetch a price greater than the worth of the product (Deut 25:13, 15; Prov 11:1; Mic 6:10–11); and (8) Abetting with thieves by receiving or knowingly purchasing stolen goods (Prov 29:24).

In respect to our own wealth, the Eighth Commandment forbids, for example, (1) Lavish or irresponsible spending of our substance (Lk 15:13; Prov 23:21; 21:17); (2) Idleness, sloth and indiscreet management of our callings, to our detriment (Prov

23:20–21; 24:30–34); (3) Bribery in the sale of public justice (Ex 23:8; Isa 1:23); and (4) Gambling and making use of any unwarrantable ways for the getting of money (cf. Acts 19:24), such as sale and publication of lewd magazines.

Q. 76. Which is the Ninth Commandment?

A. The Ninth Commandment is, **THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOUR.**¹

Proofs

¹Exodus 20:16.

Comments

If you ever ask a nominal Christian to list the Ten Commandments, it is likely that you will hear something like: “Thou shall not kill; Thou shall not steal; Thou shall not tell lies. . . .” “Thou shall not tell lies,” is of course not one of the Ten Commandments, but it is derived from the Ninth Commandment, and is the most well-known aspect of it. But the wordings of the Ninth Commandment inform us that it is not only to do with the maintenance of truth between men, but the maintenance of the good name of our fellow men. Indeed, an unprejudiced reading of the Commandment would draw the latter emphasis rather than the former.

Here is another good opportunity to stress the sixth rule of interpretation of the Ten Commandments, *viz.*: “That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto” (*WLC* 99). Most of us would have no difficulty accepting that “Thou shalt not bear false witness” may be more generally stated “Thou shalt not lie,” but yet we have difficulty accepting the traditional Reformed position that “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, &c.,” may be more generally stated as we “may not worship God in any other way than He has commanded in His Word” (cf. Heidelberg Cat., Q. 96; *WLC* 109; *WSC* 51). The reason, I believe, is because the worship of the church today is directly contrary to the old interpretation of the Second Commandment.

Of course, God’s hatred for lies is explicitly stated (e.g., Prov 6:16–17), and the connection between witness bearing and lying is implied in the Scripture: “A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies” (Prov 14:5). But isn’t God’s hatred for human invented will-worship also stated (1 Sam 15:23; Deut 12:30; Col 2:23), and the connection between idols and acceptable worship (cf. Heb 12:28–29; Deut 4:23–24) also implied in the Scriptures too?

Q. 77. What is required in the Ninth Commandment?

A. The Ninth Commandment requireth the maintaining and promoting of *truth* between man and man,¹ and of our own and our neighbour's *good name*,² especially in witness-bearing.³

Proofs

¹Zechariah 8:16; ²John 12; ³Proverbs 14:5, 25.

Comments

The Ninth Commandment specifically respects our own and our neighbours' good names, just as the Sixth Commandment has to do with our lives; the Seventh, our chastity; and the Eighth, our wealth and outward estate. But more generally, the Ninth Commandment requires the maintenance and promotion of truth between man and man.

The Ninth Commandment therefore firstly commands us to speak the truth to and of one another from our hearts (Zech 8:16; Eph 4:25). This, of course, does not mean that we must always say everything we know, but that whatever we say is truth, and intended to be taken as truth.

Secondly, it requires us in our references of our neighbours to others, to defend, maintain and promote their good names, especially in witness-bearing before the magistrate. We must as far as possible defend our neighbour's good name against any false report, even if we may find them at fault on other issues. We must maintain their good names by being most unwilling to reveal any faults and infirmities of them, except such as absolutely necessary for the prevention of the spread of falsehood and errors (1 Pet 4:8), after attempts at restoring them (Gal 6:1). We must promote their good names by speaking well of them as truthfully as we can, such as by acknowledging and emphasising their gifts and graces, in honour preferring them before ourselves (Rom 12:10).

Thirdly, we must not forget that the Ninth Commandment also requires us to defend our own good name, especially as we bear the name of Christ: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Prov 22:1; cf. Eccl 7:1; Mt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:12). We may especially defend our own good name by clearing ourselves from false aspersions with any reasonable means that do not dishonour the name of Christ (1 Cor 6:1; cf. Acts 24:10–13).

Q. 78. What is forbidden in the Ninth Commandment?

A. The Ninth Commandment forbiddeth whatsoever is *prejudicial* to truth, or *injurious* to our own or our neighbour's good name.¹

Proofs

¹1 Samuel 17:28; Leviticus 19:16; Psalm 15:3.

Comments

The Ninth Commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," forbids two things: (1) Whatsoever is prejudicial to truth—in other words, all forms of lying; and (2) Whatsoever is injurious to our own or our neighbour's good name.

In the first place, falsehood and lies can take many forms. In its most common form, lies are used to cover up wrongdoing. This is mischievous and tends to the hardening of the conscience. No Christian should ever be found engaging in such lies to protect his own reputation as it indicates unrepentance which, if not repented of, leads to death, for in heaven that will be found none "that maketh a lie." Whenever we give any excuse for wrongdoing, such as late-coming or failure to perform some duty, we must be careful to ensure that we do not give any wrong impression intended to minimise our guilt. Other kinds of lie include exaggeration or the invention of strange or false news to instil wonder, and what may be classified as "white-lies." Although lying may under certain condition,—such as when lives are threatened in war,—be justifiable (Josh 8:1–8; Judg 7; Josh 2:1–7; Heb 11:31; Jas 2:25; 1 Sam 16:1–2), we must never take it upon ourselves to judge whether a lie is harmless or not. We may think that telling someone we were unable to take the phone when we did not want to take it (knowing who was calling by caller ID) is harmless, but it is not, as it is a breaking of the Ninth Commandment.

In the second place, we may injure our own and our neighbour's good name by false-witnessing. In respect to our own good name, we injure not only by boasting and vain-glory (Prov 25:14; Mt 23:12), but also by false humility in which we deny the gifts and graces that God has given us (cf. Col 2:18). In respect to others, we may injure their names by perjury, or false swearing and false accusations (Zech 8:17; Prov 19:5); or by slander and back-biting (Ps 50:19–20; 2 Cor 12:20).

Q. 79. Which is the Tenth Commandment?

A. The Tenth Commandment is, **THOU SHALT NOT COVET** thy neighbour's *house*, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's *wife*, nor his *man-servant*, nor his *maid-servant*, nor his *ox*, nor his *ass*, nor *any thing* that is thy neighbour's.¹

Proofs

¹ Exodus 20:17.

Comments

The Papists and the Lutherans, in order to remove the commandment which regulates the manner of worship of the Living and True God, combines the First and Second Commandments together, and split the Tenth Commandment into two: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house" and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, &c." Luther explains, in his *Small Catechism*, that the Ninth Commandment means "We should fear and love God that we do not scheme to get our neighbour's inheritance or house or obtain it by false claims, but do all we can to help him keep it"; whereas the Tenth Commandment has to do with the fact that "We should fear and love God that we do not force or entice away from our neighbour his wife, workers or animals, but urge them to stay and do their duty." This division of the Decalogue is, however, artificial and clearly wrong. In the first place, the LORD does not distinguish between the inheritance or immovable property of our neighbour and what belongs to him by way of relationship as did Luther. He begins with the house and then end with the animals and the catch-all phrase "any thing that is thy neighbour's." How could one urge the animals and anything that belong to our neighbour "to stay and do their duty" is hard to imagine. In the second place, when the New Testament refers to the Decalogue, it refers to "Thou shalt not covet" as one commandment (see Rom 13:9; 7:7).

We have no doubt that the Protestant and Reformed enumeration of the Decalogue is correct. The worship of the Church has been greatly corrupted because of the eclipsing of the Second Commandment.

Although the Tenth Commandment is the last of the commandments in the Decalogue, it is not at all the least important of the commandments. In linking covetousness with idolatry (Col 3:5), the Apostle Paul is essentially saying that a breaker of the Tenth Commandment would inevitably also break the First Commandment. The Tenth Commandment, moreover, has the special distinction as being the commandment that causes the Apostle Paul to see his own sinfulness, and his need of Christ. He testified: "What shall we say then?... I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom 7:7). All the other commandments may be interpreted with an external focus, but not the Tenth Commandment. No one except the Lord Jesus Christ can claim to be able to fulfil this Commandment fully.

Q. 80. What is required in the Tenth Commandment?

A. The Tenth Commandment requireth full *contentment* with our own condition,¹ with a *right and charitable frame of spirit* toward our neighbour, and all that is his.²

Proofs

¹ Hebrews 13:5; 1 Timothy 6:6; ² Job 31:29; Romans 12:15; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.

Comments

Covetousness always begins with a discontentment with regards to our own estate, for it is when we are not satisfied with what we have, that we want to have what others have. A child who has a full stomach will not desire to have milk, though he may still take the bottle if it is offered to him. Now, it is true that even with a full stomach, the child may cry and therefore covet after an ice-cream when he sees his mummy eating an ice-cream. But this does not prove that covetousness had arisen though he was content, it only shows that the sight of his mummy eating ice-cream triggers the feelings of discontentment that he does not have what his mummy has. The same goes for the covetousness of the well-to-do, who seems to want more, the more they have. This wanting is a sure sign of discontentment.

The Tenth Commandment, therefore, rightly requires us to cultivate contentment in whatever estate the Lord assigns to us, be it a prosperous or necessitous condition (1 Tim 6:6; Phil 4:11–13; Heb 13:5). We may do so by: (1) being fully persuaded that God is right in His appointment of our outward estate (Rom 8:28); (2) not setting our trust upon our outward possession and position (Lk 12:15); (3) constantly reminding ourselves that we cannot bring anything out of this world (Job 1:21; 1 Tim 6:7–8). (4) endeavouring to lay up treasures in heaven (Mt 6:19–21); and (5) placing our chief happiness in God and things above (Ps 16:5–6).

The Tenth Commandment, moreover, requires that we have a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that are his. This means that we should be sympathetically concerned about our neighbour's welfare. We should rejoice with them when they rejoice and weep with them when they weep (Rom 12:10, 15); and we should provide help and relief whenever we can (Heb 13:3). To cultivate such a disposition, we may remind ourselves of God's laws constantly and seek to emulate Christ in His example (Eph 5:2).

Q. 81. What is forbidden in the Tenth Commandment?

A. The Tenth Commandment forbiddeth all *discontentment* with our own estate,¹ *envying or grieving* at the good of our neighbour,² and all *inordinate* motions and affections to any thing that is his.³

Proofs

¹1 Kings 21:4; Esther 5:13; 1 Corinthians 10:10; ²Galatians 5:26; James 3:14, 16; ³Romans 7:7–8; 13:9; Deuteronomy 5:21.

Comments

The Tenth Commandment, first of all, forbids all discontentment with our own estate. Discontentment with our own estate shows itself in our not being well pleased with our own present condition, in our murmuring and complaining of our condition, such as Ahab and Haman did (1 Kgs 21:3–4; Esth 5:11, 13). Such discontentment may arise from: (1) Our failure to believe God’s promise that His providential dealings with us is always for our good (Mt 10:29–31); and (2) Our self-love, pride and over-valuing ourselves, by which we think that we deserve better things and more from God than what He has apportioned to us. The child of God ought rather to remind himself of the goodness and mercy of God, and that by himself he deserves nothing but damnation for his sin.

Secondly, the Tenth Commandment forbids envy, by which we are “grieved at another’s good, when the parts and gifts of the mind, or strength and beauty of the body, or the wealth and outward prosperity, or the esteem and honour, or any good thing which another hath, more than ourselves” (Vincent). Envy is a form of heart-murder and as James says: “Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (Jas 3:16). Envy, as such, makes us unlike Christ but like the devil (1 Pet 2:1–2; 1 Jn 3:8; cf. Jn 8:44). The child of God ought, therefore, to guard his heart against envy by being fully persuaded of its evil, to repent of it, and to apply to Christ for help that he may grow in cordial love and charity (1 Jn 4:7).

The third sin which the Tenth Commandment forbids is all inordinate motions (deeds) and affections (feelings) towards any thing that is our neighbour’s. This is the most obvious sin forbidden in this Commandment. When we sin in this manner, we would, firstly, be guilty of uncharitableness and injustice towards our neighbour. We must remember that love as defined in the Scripture begins with the heart. We must never think that as long as we do not hurt anyone that we are not sinning against God and man. Secondly, by lusting after what belongs to our neighbour, we would at the same time be cultivating discontentment with regard to our own estate.

Q. 82. Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?

A. No *mere* man since the Fall is able in *this* life **PERFECTLY** to keep the commandments of God,¹ but doth *daily* break them in thought, word, and deed.²

Proofs

¹Ecclesiastes 7:20; 1 John 1:8, 10; Galatians 5:17; ²Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Romans 3:9–21; James 3:2–13.

Comments

To keep the commandments of God perfectly requires one with a nature that is perfectly holy, having no inclination to evil, to yield constant and uninterrupted obedience to all the commandments of God, whether in thought, word and deed.

Before the Fall, Adam, was such a person. His nature was mutable and he eventually fell, but he was created in righteousness (Ecc 7:29) and so was able to keep God’s commandments perfectly, to fulfil the condition of the Covenant of Works, which required perfect obedience. But since the Fall, no mere man is able to do this in this life (Ecc 7:20). Only the Lord Jesus Christ, who was fully God and fully man in one person, was able to keep the commandments perfectly though He was tempted at all points like as we are (Heb 4:15). He kept the commandments perfectly, that His righteousness might be imputed upon us; and then went to the Cross to pay the penalty for our sin, that we might be reconciled to God.

Because of what the Lord has done, however, all true believers, when they leave this present life, will be made perfect in heaven and will be enabled perfectly to obey God in whatsoever He shall require of them (cf. Heb 12:22–23).

Nevertheless, the saints on earth, having their hearts renovated, will desire to keep the commandments of God sincerely (cf. 2 Cor 1:12; Rom 7:23–24; 1 Jn 3:9), rather than taking delight and pleasure in sin as the unregenerate do. They ought to endeavour after perfection (Mt 5:48), and seek always to attain to higher and higher degrees of perfection, though they know that in this life they will never attain absolute perfection because of remaining corruption (Ps 130:3).

Q. 83. Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?

A. Some sins *in themselves*, and by reason of several *aggravations*, are **MORE HEINOUS** in the sight of God than others.¹

Proofs

¹Ezekiel 8:6, 13, 15; 1 John 5:16; Psalm 78:17, 32, 56.

Comments

Most of us will have no doubt that all sins are hateful, abominable and offensive to God, but many of us are surprised when told that all our sins are not equally heinous or hateful in God's sight. Yet, this is taught in the Scriptures, for the Lord Jesus upbraided "the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not" (Mt 11:20). He suggested that their condemnation on the day of Judgement would be more severe than for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom (Mt 11:22, 24; see also Luke 12:47–48). In other words, we may expect degrees of punishment in hell, which suggest to us that some sins are more heinous than others in God's sight.

Our catechism answer instructs us that some sins, in their own nature, are more heinous than others. For example, sins which are committed more immediately against God, or the first table of His Law, are more heinous in their own nature, than sins committed more immediately against man, or any precept of the second table. Thus blasphemy against God is more heinous, in its own nature, than speaking evil of our neighbour (1 Sam 2:25). Similarly, there appears to be a rough order of severity in the second table of the Law, by which we may know, for example, that murder is more heinous than adultery and adultery is more heinous than theft (Prov 6:30, 32).

Some sins are grievous not by their own nature, but by reason of several aggravations. For example, the same sins committed by those in authority, such as pastors and parents, are more heinous than when committed by children and ordinary members of the church (1 Kgs 14:16). Also, the sins of all who name the name of Christ are more heinous than the sins of the wicked and ungodly in the same kind, because the name of God is thereby more blasphemed, and the wicked are hereby more hardened in their sins (Rom 2:23–24).

Similarly, sins receive their aggravation also from the nature and quality of the offence. Thus a sin is more grievous (1) If the offence is clearly against the express letter of the law, in which case it is sin with the greatest boldness and presumption (Rom 1:32); (2) If it breaks forth in words and actions, reflecting a more public dishonour on God, and do greater injury to men, than if they were latent only in the thoughts; (3) If it is against conviction of conscience; and (4) If done deliberately, obstinately, and with delight, thus demonstrating a defiance to the Almighty God (Zec 7:11–12).

Q. 84. What doth every sin deserve?

A. Every sin deserveth God's **WRATH AND CURSE**, both in *this* life, and that which *is to come*.¹

Proofs

¹Ephesians 5:6; Galatians 3:10; Lamentations 3:39; Matthew 25:41.

Comments

In the previous question we saw that some sins "are more heinous in the sight of God than others." It is clear that this is a biblical doctrine, but it does not follow, as Romanism teaches, that there is such a distinction as *venial* sin and *mortal* sin. Mortal sin, they say, deserve eternal punishment, but venial sins are in their own nature so minor that they can be expiated in some temporary punishment in purgatory (see *Catechism of the [Roman] Catholic Church*, §1863).

The Apostle Paul teaches us that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Nowhere does he even hint that some sin do not deserve death. The fact is that, even the least sin, being committed against a God who is infinitely holy, just and perfect, must, on that account, be objectively infinite, and consequently deserve an infinite punishment (cf. 2 Thes 1:9). "Every sin, even the least... cannot be expiated but by the blood of Christ" (*WLC* 152), for "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb 9:22), and only the blood of Christ is sufficient to pay for our sin (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 1:18–19). Indeed, through faith and repentance in Christ, even the greatest sin can be pardoned (see next question). David sinned so grievously when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, yet he received pardon when he repented. Peter denied the Lord three times, and yet the Lord forgave him and restored him.

Believers, on account of our union with Christ, have the penalty of our sin paid in full when Christ took upon Himself God's wrath and curse which our sins deserve (cf. Rom 8:1, 33–34). Therefore we are not liable to any further punishment.

But such as are out of Christ may expect to experience God's wrath and curse both in this life in the form of temporal and spiritual judgements, as well as hereafter in the form of eternal damnation in hell. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31).

Q. 85. What doth God require of us,

that we may escape His wrath and curse due to us for sin?

A. To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us **FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST,—REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE,**¹—with the diligent use of all the **OUTWARD MEANS** whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of Redemption.²

Proofs

¹Acts 20:21; ²Proverbs 2:1–5; 8:33–36; Isaiah 55:3.

Comments

The Scripture is clear that nothing that we do can merit salvation since “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6); and, “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16). Why then does the answer teach us that God requires of us, faith, repentance, and a diligent use of all the outward means in order to escape the wrath and curse of God, due to us for sin? Are these not all our own deeds: our believing or exercise of faith, our turning away from sin and our making use of the means? Is our catechism teaching us salvation by works?

Certainly not! In the first place, we must not think that the pronoun “us” in the catechism is referring to unregenerate persons exclusively. Rather it refers to elect of God, but especially the regenerate, i.e., those who are conscious of the fact that their redemption has been purchased by Christ. In the second place, these duties are appointed and required by God of us, both as *means* of conveying and improving the salvation purchased, and as *evidences* of our interest in it, when conveyed. We may say that these duties are essentially instrumental, but not meritorious, causes of our salvation. In fact, faith and repentance are gifts of God (Eph 2:8; Acts 11:18), and the means are appointed of God (1 Cor 1:21) who also works in us both to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). They are gifts by which grace may be received by us.

However, as the exercise of these gifts must be effected by us, acting consciously, God com-mands us to perform them, that we may receive the benefits of redemption. This command is also given to the reprobate as the revealed will of God. But the reprobate will not comply.

By faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are united with Christ and demonstrate our reliance upon Him, His righteousness, and His propitiation on our behalf. Once a soul is regenerate, faith will never be completely quenched (Mt 12:20), yet the child of God must constantly be reminded of and renew his trust in Christ. True repentance, similarly, is required of God for the forgiveness of sin for it is not to His honour to pardon anyone who is still clinging on to his sin (Acts 3:19; 20:21). Again, the true child of God will not fail to repent, but since repentance is a conscious act of the soul, it is commanded of God for our conscious obedience. In the same way, God requires of us the diligent use of all outward means for our perseverance in the faith, for although He could save without means, yet it is His will to appoint means; and therefore we cannot expect the benefits of redemption and salvation to be communicated to us any other way (1 Cor 1:21).

Q. 86. What is Faith in Jesus Christ?

A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a *saving grace*,¹ whereby we **RECEIVE** and **REST UPON HIM ALONE** for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel.²

Proofs

¹Hebrews 10:39; ²John 1:12; Isaiah 26:3–4; Philippians 3:9; Galatians 2:16.

Comments

Those who teach baptismal regeneration, when charged with teaching salvation by works, will often respond by arguing that their requiring baptism for salvation is no different from our requiring faith. “Both believing and submitting oneself to be baptised,” they say, “are faith-works. They must not be categorised as work in the definition of the Scriptures.” This response is, however, based on an erroneous understanding of faith, which is promoted largely by Arminians and some Dispensationalists. The false view suggests that it is by our act of believing that we are born-again, and therefore faith precedes regeneration. If this is the case, then it is indeed true that faith is as much work as submitting oneself for baptism. But the Apostle Paul is very clear that it is not our faith that saves us. He says: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that [faith is] not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

Faith is an instrument of our salvation, which is God’s gift to us when we are regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit; it is not an exercise of our own free-will, whether assisted by grace or otherwise. Faith, we may say, follows (logically) our regeneration. This is why our catechism calls it a “saving grace,” it is a gift of God by His grace on the basis of what Christ has done for His elect (cf. 1 Cor 1:4; Eph 2:7; 4:7; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:9).

Faith is a gift of God through the renovation of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is given in our effectual call (*WSC* 31), and may be said to include not only spiritual eyes and ears, but spiritual hands to embrace and trust Jesus Christ and His perfect righteousness for our salvation.

We may think of saving faith as having three elements involving the mind, heart and will: (1) *Notitia*: An intellectual element or knowledge (Eph 1:7; etc.); (2) *Assensus*: An emotional element or believing (Jn 1:12; etc.); and (3) *Fiducia*: A volitional element or trusting and resting (Isa 26:3–4; etc.). Faith, in other words, comprises knowledge, belief and trust, by which we apply Christ and His benefits to ourselves. All three elements must be present. There can be no faith without knowledge, and belief without volitional-faith is dead (2 Pet 1:3; Jas 2:18–19).

Ordinarily, God works this grace of faith in the souls of His elect (Tit 1:1; Acts 13:48) as they hear the preaching of the Gospel, for the Apostle Paul tells us: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17; cf. 1 Cor 15:11). Note that since all men are dead in sin, none who hear the external call of the Gospel, can exercise saving faith except that the Spirit first changes the heart (Jn 3:3). When the heart is changed, then does the hearer realises his own insufficiency and wickedness, and the sufficiency, righteousness and loveliness of Christ. Where once he found sin irresistible, now he finds Christ irresistible, and so receives Him as Lord and rests on Him as his

Saviour (Jn 3:18; Rom 1:17), and so he is made a partaker of the promises purchased by Christ in the Covenant of Grace (Gal 3:22).

Q. 87. What is Repentance unto Life?

A. Repentance unto Life is a *saving grace*,¹ whereby a sinner,—out of a *true sense of his sin*,² and apprehension of the *mercy of God in Christ*,³—doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, **TURN FROM IT UNTO GOD**,⁴ with full purpose of, and endeavour after, *new obedience*.⁵

Proofs

¹Acts 11:18; ²Acts 2:37–38; ³Joel 2:12; Jeremiah 3:22; ⁴Jeremiah 31:18–19; Ezekiel 36:31; ⁵2 Corinthians 7:11.

Comments

While faith refers particularly to the act of embracing Christ and involves knowing, believing and trusting, repentance refers particularly to the act of turning away from sin and Satan unto God. Like faith, repentance unto life is a saving grace, or a gift of God wrought through the operation of the Holy Spirit upon our stony hearts (cf. Acts 11:18; Ezk 18:21; 36:26–27). As faith must be distinguished from blind conformity and dead knowledge, so evangelical repentance must be distinguished from the sorrow of the world which worketh death (2 Cor 7:10). Similarly, as faith must be exercised not just at the point of conversion but throughout our lifetime after our conversion, so repentance must be exercised throughout this life until our soul should be made perfect at death.

Although the answer in our catechism appears to focus particularly on the repentance of the sinner at the point of initial conversion, it must be noted that every word of it may be applied to the experience of a ‘mature’ Christian. Though there must be an initial faith and repentance unto life by which we are united to Christ, conversion which involves faith and repentance is a lifetime experience of the child of God. This is why the answer does not explicitly tell us what sin is involved in repentance unto life. The fact is every sin requires repentance unto life. At the point of initial conversion, the sin of unbelief and rebellion against God may be most prominent, but subsequently we may experience specific instances of disobedience, such as when David committed adultery and when Peter forsook the Lord. These specific transgressions, together with all other sin arising out of the remnant of our corrupt nature, must be repented of.

Two things are requisite for repentance unto life. *Firstly*, the sinner must have a true sight and sense of his sin. He must know the heinousness of his own sin and how hateful it is to God, so that he is pricked in the heart (cf. Acts 2:37) and actually feels grieved and troubled in the spirit to know that he is a sinner, and that sin greatly dishonours God (cf. Ps 51:3–4). *Secondly*, he must have an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, that He is ready to forgive and to be reconciled to penitent sinners. Without this second apprehension, the sinner will sink into despair and hopelessness rather than being drawn to God.

As true repentance involves a “full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience,” we may say that all who truly repent of their sin will never return unto the *practice* of it, so as to live in a course of sin, as before. This is why the Apostle John says:

“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him” (1 Jn 3:6). Nevertheless, some who have repented of a particular sin may, under severe temptation, fall into it again because of the remnant of the corrupt nature. But such as have the Spirit of Christ will not continue in the sin but will bitterly bewail the sin and return to the Lord.

Q. 88. What are the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of Redemption?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 2:42, 46–47.

Comments

The Lord Jesus Christ has purchased the benefits of salvation for His elect by way of His life and death. But these benefits must be put into our possessions. We learn from *WSC* 29, that “we are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by His Holy Spirit.” In other words, it is the Holy Spirit who directly applies the benefits purchased by Christ to our souls. However, the Scripture also teaches us that Christ has appointed for the Church, outward and ordinary means by which His benefits of redemption are communicated to the elect, for our salvation.

What is the relationship between the work of the Spirit and the use of means? Roman Catholicism teaches that the means, such the Word and the sacraments, always work grace *ex opere operato*, that is to say that they contain inherent power to communicate grace, when executed by a lawfully ordained priest. So baptism regenerates man *ex opere operato*, and the eucharist (their equivalent of the Lord’s Supper) raises the spiritual life of the partaker to a higher level, simply by his partaking of it. Accordingly, Roman Catholicism teaches that there is no salvation outside the church, seeing that the only way to communicate the benefits of salvation is through the ordinances of the church. On the other hand, there were the Anabaptists and mystics who stressed that God is absolutely free to communicate grace without any of the outward means. To them, the Word and sacraments (which they would call “ordinances”) are only symbolic and serve to indicate the immediate bestowal of grace by the Holy Spirit.

What is the Reformed position? The Reformed Church teaches rather that God usually or generally bestows grace mediately, i.e., through the means, but the means themselves have no inherent power to communicate grace. They must be accompanied by the operation of the Holy Spirit. In this way God is not bound to the means, and so He can, in extraordinary circumstances, work grace without the means, but ordinarily, He would require the means.

The appointed ordinances, such as the Word, prayer and sacraments, are the most usual means of salvation (including conversion, sanctification and glorification). Without using them we cannot ordinarily expect that any benefit of redemption should be communicated to us. Thus God can immediately regenerate an elect infant dying in infancy whether he is baptised or not, but He would require the use of the means in ordinary circumstances. Therefore in the case of an adult with normal mental capacity, we may say that out of the visible church “there is no ordinary possibility of

salvation” (*WCF* 25.2). But conversely, though it is “a great sin to condemn or neglect” to baptise our infants, “yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it” that we can say all infants who are not baptised are damned or that all infants who are baptised are regenerate (see *WCF* 28.5).

Q. 89. How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹Nehemiah 8:8; 1 Corinthians 14:24–25; Acts 26:18; Psalm 19:8; Acts 20:32; Romans 15:4;
2 Timothy 3:15–17; Romans 10:13–17; 1:16.

Comments

We have seen that the Reformed understanding of the means of grace is that though God bestows grace mediately, the means neither contain any power in and of themselves, nor are indispensable. Rather, they must be accompanied by the operation of the Holy Spirit in order to be effectual to the sinner. In the answer of this catechism, we see this to be true also in regards to the Word of God as a means of salvation.

The Word of God, we must remember, refers to what is inscripturated in the Old and New Testaments. By itself, of course, the Word has no power to save any. It must be conveyed to the ears and minds of the hearers by way of reading or preaching, and then conveyed to the heart by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Reading,—whether privately and personally, or publicly and audibly,—is an effective way of conveying the Word to our minds. Thus the Lord teaches us to “Search the scriptures” (Jn 5:39). However, effective as reading may be, the Scripture places even more emphasis on the preaching, rather than reading, of the Word as a means of grace. Thus the Apostle Paul charges Timothy: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim 4:2; cf. 1 Cor 1:21). This emphasis may appear surprising to us since we know that no ministers preach under inspiration today, and so no sermons are infallible or inerrant. Yet, the Holy Spirit is pleased to attend to the preaching of the Word and make the Word preached effectual unto the salvation of the hearers.

Note that the phrase “effectual unto salvation” does not only refer to unbelievers but to believers as well. The Word is made effectual unto salvation to sinners or unbelievers, to convince them of sin, and to convert them to Christ (1 Cor 14:24–25; Heb 4:12; Acts 2:37; Ps 19:7; Acts 2:41; etc.). On the other hand, for believers, the Word is effectual unto salvation, as it is a means of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:11–13; Acts 20:32).

The Word builds up holiness in believers by (1) Challenging us to greater conformity unto the image of God (2 Cor 3:18; 1 Pet 2:2); (2) Reproving, correcting, instructing in righteousness, that we may be useful instruments of the Lord (2 Tim 3:16–17); (3) Pulling down strongholds in the soul, and subduing all thoughts and affections unto the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:4–5); (4) Strengthening us against the temptations of the devil and the corruptions of our own hearts (Eph 6:13, 17; Ps 119:9); and (5) Establishing us in the truths of God against heresies and falsehoods (Rom 16:25; Eph 4:14).

On the other hand, the Word comforts by (1) Filling our minds with comforting thoughts such as the promises of pardon and eternal life (Isa 40:1–2); and (2) Conveying to the soul the most sweet and unutterable joy of the Holy Ghost (1 Thes 1:6).

Q. 90. How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?

A. That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with *diligence*,¹ *preparation*,² and *prayer*;³ receive it with *faith and love*,⁴ lay it up in our *hearts*,⁵ and practise it in our *lives*.⁶

Proofs

¹Proverbs 8:34; ²1 Peter 2:1–2; ³Psalms 119:18; ⁴Hebrews 4:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; ⁵Psalms 119:11; ⁶Luke 8:15; James 1:25.

Comments

It must be noted first of all that when the question refers to *reading*, it is referring particularly to the private reading of the Word for personal edification (cf. *WLC* 156). However, when it speaks about *hearing*, it refers especially to hearing of the Word preached, but it is no less applicable to the hearing of the Word read audibly. There is, of course, a difference between the two. The Word, if read accurately, is infallible; but preaching by fallible men is not infallible. Nevertheless, in so far as preaching is faithful to the Scripture, it is to be received as if they were spoken by Christ and therefore received with all readiness of mind as the Word of God (see Acts 17:11; cf. v. 13).

With this in mind, we see that the answer covers what is required of us before, during and after we receive the Word, whether by reading or hearing: that the Word may become effectual unto salvation. Before receiving the Word, two things are required, namely, preparation and prayer. We must prepare by considering the majesty of God and our own nothingness; and so we must pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit, as well as the effectual working of the Spirit unto our salvation.

During our reading and hearing of the Word, three things are required, namely, diligence, faith and love. Diligence requires us to incline our ears, and bend our minds, so that we may understand what we read and hear (Prov 2:1–2). Faith is required that we may believe all that is revealed to us. But love is particularly necessary so that we may delight ourselves in the Word.

Finally, after hearing or reading the Word read or preached, we must lay it up in our hearts (Ps 119:11), and practise it in our lives (Jas 1:22, 25), for otherwise what is read and heard only goes to harden us against sin and makes us the more guilty should we fall. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Ps 119:11).

We may add, for our consideration, that especially when hearing the Word preached, we should emulate the Bereans. Dr Luke tells us concerning them: “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” (Acts 17:11). Notice that the Bereans were commended for two things. First and foremost, they were commended for receiving the Word with all readiness of mind. Secondly, they were commended for searching the Scriptures daily to see if those things they were taught were so. As hearers of the Word, we must not emphasise on either of the two duties to the detriment of the other. For if we emphasise too much of receiving with all readiness

of mind, we will land up with the Romish idea of implicit faith, which receives everything presented to us by the minister. On the other hand, if we put too much emphasis on searching the Scripture and neglect receiving the Word with readiness of mind, we will land up with individualism and a spiritual pride that implicitly exalts our own interpretation above that of anyone else. Beloved, both extremes are dangerous.

Q. 91. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?

A. 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**,¹ and the **WORKING OF HIS SPIRIT** in them that by faith receive them.²

Proofs

¹ 1 Peter 3:21; Matthew 3:11; 1 Corinthians 3:6–7; ² 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Comments

This question is necessary on account of two errors of Rome. The first error teaches that sacraments act *ex opere operato* (i.e., by the very fact of the action being performed), and so have virtue and power in themselves as long as a lawfully ordained priest (or minister) administers them. The second error maintains that the efficacy of the sacraments depend on the intention of the priest (or minister) when he administers the sacraments, so that whether any benefit is withheld or conferred depends on his secret will or intention. Both of these two errors cannot be true. If sacraments act *ex opere operato*, and are dependant on the administrator, then we should expect Simon Magus to be regenerated when he was baptised by the Apostles. But this did not happen (see Acts 8:13, 20–21, 23).

Positively, on the other hand, the sacraments become effectual means of salvation firstly, by the blessing and presence of Christ, which do accompany the sacraments and other ordinances of His own institution (cf. Mt 18:20; 28:20); and secondly, by the working of the Spirit of Christ upon the souls of those who receive the sacraments by faith (cf. 1 Cor 12:13).

This doctrine ought not to be understood theoretically only, for knowing this doctrine ought to guard us against the superstitious notions that are sometimes entertained in fundamental churches, that the sacraments are ineffectual or tainted if they are administered by a minister who is perceived to be not separated enough from sin or from “sinful brethren.” It ought also to guard against an over-emphasis or a judgmental attitude on the outward actions pertaining to the administration of the sacraments. This may appear, for example, in severe criticisms against a minister who missed an action or said a wrong word in the administration of the Lord’s Supper. It appears also in the rejection of the validity of baptism by sprinkling and pouring by Baptists who insist that only immersion is valid.

Q. 92. What is a sacrament?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹ Genesis 17:7, 10; Exodus 12; 1 Corinthians 11:23, 26.

Comments

Although we have spoken about the efficacy of the sacraments, we have yet to define what is a sacrament. The term “sacrament” is not found in the Scriptures, and as a result, some have objected to its use. But the term is useful for two reasons: Firstly, there are two important ordinances of the Lord, namely baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which share some characteristics (as given in our answer), which are not present in the other ordinances such as worship, marriage, etc. Secondly, the original meaning of the term “sacrament” provides a fitting designation of these two ordinances.

The English term “sacrament” is derived from the Latin word *sacramentum*. This word was employed by the early Christian writers as synonymous with the scriptural term *mysterium* or mystery, and soon it was used to describe the Lord’s Supper and baptism. This was partly because, under the external symbols and rituals (i.e., sensible signs), the spiritual blessings and significance of the ordinances are veiled, and partly also because of the secrecy with which Christians under persecution were obliged to observe them.

More importantly, the word *sacramentum* was also used to designate a military oath, whereby generals obliged themselves to be faithful to their soldiers, and the soldiers engaged themselves to be faithful unto their generals. This second meaning of *sacramentum* is particularly appropriate and instructive, as a *sacrament* is a seal of the Covenant of Grace, whereby the Lord Jesus Christ obliges Himself to fulfil the promise of the Covenant unto all that are truly His; and conversely, by our receiving this seal, we oblige ourselves to be the Lord’s, and to be true and faithful unto Him.

Theologically, however, we understand a sacrament as having three uses, namely, signifying, sealing and applying Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant. To signify is to represent what is spiritual and invisible with what is visible to and discernible by our senses. To seal is to authenticate and ratify. Such as receive the sacrament by faith may have the assurance that they do actually receive the benefits signified by such regeneration, justification and sanctification. More than that, a sacrament is a means of grace by which God actually applies the benefits of the Covenant of Grace (by the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit) upon the hearts of all true believers receiving the sign by faith.

Q. 93. Which are the sacraments of the New Testament?

A. The sacraments of the New Testament are, *Baptism*,¹ and the *Lord’s Supper*.²

Proofs

¹ Matthew 28:19; ² Matthew 26:26–28.

Comments

We mentioned earlier that though the term “sacrament” does not occur in the Scriptures, yet it is fitting to describe baptism and the Lord’s Supper as sacraments in the New Testament because they both share the characteristics of signifying, sealing and applying Christ and the benefits of His redemption under the Covenant of Grace. In the Old Testament, two other ordinances share the same characteristics, namely, the circumcision and Passover. By the appointment of Christ, these two bloody ordinances gave way to the two bloodless New Testament sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, so that the two old sacraments retain their same significance while taking on a new mode of administration.

The sacraments of the Old Testament pointed to Christ to come, while the sacraments of the New Testament point to Christ who has already completed His work pertaining to His incarnation. Both circumcision and baptism are rites of initiation (cf. Gen 17:14; Acts 2:41). Both signify spiritual regeneration (cf. Deut 10:16; 30:6; Mt 3:11). Thus circumcision is to a Jew what baptism is to the New Testament Christian (Gal 3:27, 29; Col 2:10–12). In the same way, the Lord’s Supper supersedes the Passover when the Lord took the elements of the Passover and gave them new meaning (Mt 26:26–29); and so Paul speaks of Christ as our passover: “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7); and John refers to Christ as being the passover Lamb of God (Jn 1:29; 19:33; Ex 12:46).

The relationship between the Old Testament sacraments and the New Testament sacraments may be tabulated as follows:

ONE EVERLASTING COVENANT	
Genesis 17:7; Hebrews 13:20	
<i>The Old Testament Form</i>	<i>The New Testament Form</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Circumcision—Genesis 17:7 (Romans 4:11–13)</p> <p>Administered once to believers and their children, picturing cleansing from sin and covenant union in a bloody type.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Baptism—Acts 2:39 (Galatians 3:27–29, etc.)</p> <p>Administered once to believers and their children, picturing cleansing from sin and covenant union in a bloodless anti-type.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Passover—Exodus 12:43 (Exodus 12:3–17)</p> <p>Administered often to adult believers, picturing nurture in a bloody type.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Lord’s Supper—1 Corinthians 5:7 (1 Corinthians 11:23–34)</p> <p>Administered often to adult believers, picturing nurture in faith in a bloodless anti-type.</p>

Roman Catholicism has added to baptism and the Lord's Supper five other "sacraments," namely: confirmation, penance, ordination, marriage, and extreme unction. If we think about it carefully, though we make use of some of them (ordination, marriage, and confirmation or affirmation of faith), none of these shares the characteristics of the sacraments and therefore should not be regarded as such.

Q. 94. What is Baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the *washing with water*—in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,¹—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*.²

Proofs

¹ Matthew 28:19; ² Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:27.

Comments

Baptism is a sacrament in which spiritual realities are signified with a symbolic act of washing with water. Although the early church, based on the symbolic significance of the act, called baptism "the Bath," it is clear that no one, not even those who believe in immersion, would actually do any bathing or washing. In fact, we believe our Confession is correct that "dipping of the person into the water is not necessary, but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person" (*WCF* 28.3).

Although very broadly, baptism signifies cleansing from sin, it is instructive to note that the water used in baptism signifies two things, namely: the cleansing virtue of the blood of Christ (see Revelation 1:5) and Spirit of Christ (Tit 3:5). The blood of Christ cleanses meritoriously (1 Jn 1:7), whereas the Spirit of Christ cleanses efficaciously (Ezk 36:27). By the former, the guilt of sin is, at once, taken away in justification; by the latter, the blot and stain of it is gradually carried off in sanctification.

We can see how this twofold significance of the water of baptism relates to the three spiritual realities given in our catechism for which baptism is a sign and seal of, *viz.* (a) our ingrafting into Christ (Gal 3:27); (b) our partaking of the benefits of the Covenant of Grace; and (c) our engagement to be the Lord's.

In the first place, we are ingrafted into Christ when we are united unto Christ by faith, by which faith we are justified through the blood of Christ. We are ingrafted into Christ also when we are indwelt with the Spirit of Christ.

In the second place, the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, which are signified and sealed by baptism, are: (a) Admission into the visible church (Mt 28:19), which is really an ecclesiastical ratification of our ingrafting into Christ; (b) Remission of sins by Christ's blood (Acts 2:38), which is essentially justification through the blood of Christ; (c) Regeneration and sanctification by Christ's Spirit (Tit 3:5); (d) Adoption, together with our union unto Christ (Gal 3:26–27), which involves both reconciliation to the Father through the blood of Christ and indwelling of the Spirit of Christ to make us conformable unto Him; and (e) Resurrection to everlasting life (Rom 6:4–5), which is a benefit purchased by the blood of Christ, and ensured by our union with Christ through the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

In the third place, baptism signifies and seals our engagement to be the Lord's because by it we confess that we have died to sin (since our sins are covered by the blood of Christ, and we now have a hatred for sin because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) and so resolve to walk in newness of life (see Romans 6:4, 11–13).

It must be noted, finally, that not everyone who is baptised is regenerate and saved since there is a contrary example in Simon Magus (Acts 8:13, 23). Baptism is a seal of the reality of inward grace, both for the sake of the recipient and for the church. In the case of an adult, it must be affirmed that the seal is only valid for those who have truly put their trust in Christ. Nevertheless, though the seal may be obtained by delusion or fraud, the church must recognise the seal unless it be eventually proven to be “in the bond of iniquity.” And it must also be acknowledged that, in some cases, the baptised may be converted subsequently, in which case, the seal would still be valid as the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment when it is administered (see *WCF* 28.6). In the case of a child of the covenant, baptism is a seal unto his parents and the church that God has promised to save believers and their children (Acts 3:39; Rom 4:11).

Q. 95. To whom is Baptism to be administered?

A. 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;*¹ but the *infants of such as are members* of the visible church are to be baptised.²

Proofs

¹Acts 8:36–37; 2:38; ²Acts 2:38–39; Genesis 17:10 cf. Colossians 2:11–12; 1 Corinthians 7:14.

Comments

Since baptism is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace, it follows that only those who are members of the Visible Universal Church, i.e., those who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, may be baptised (Mk 16:15–16; Acts 8:36–37; 2:38). Unbelievers, as such, ought not to be baptised until, upon the preaching of the Gospel unto them, they repent and believe, and make profession of their faith and resolution of obedience. When they do so, they become members of the Visible Universal Church of Christ, and though there is a possibility that they may not in fact be members of the Invisible Universal Church, the local church has the warrant to treat them as such (seeing she cannot see the heart of anyone) and therefore she has the warrant to baptise them to ratify their membership in the visible Body of Christ.

Now, infants do not have the ability to profess faith, and yet our Catechism teaches us that they can be baptised. How is this so? In the first place, remember that baptism signifies not the faith of the person being baptised but the inward grace bestowed upon the person. Remember how the water of baptism symbolises the blood of Christ and the Spirit of Christ. It is an error to think of baptism merely as a means of declaring one’s faith publicly. Paul was baptised by Ananias before he joined the church (Acts 9:17, 26)! In the second place, the infants of Christians or believing parents, being visible church members, may and ought to be baptised. Just as all who profess faith (though not necessarily elect or regenerated) are to be regarded by the church as being members of the visible church and represented by Christ in the Covenant of Grace, so children of believers, though not necessarily elect or regenerated (since only “children of the promise” [Rom 9:8] are elect), are to be regarded by the church as members of the Visible Universal Church and represented by Christ in the Covenant of Grace. Peter makes this point in his inaugural sermon when he told the congregation: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39).

It was for the same reason that God commanded that infants of Jewish families, under the Old Testament, be circumcised (Gen 17:7, 10). Since the covenant under which they were circumcised is the same Covenant of Grace for which baptism is a sign and seal (see Galatians 3:29; Hebrews 6:17–18), and baptism has replaced circumcision as the rite of membership ratification in the church, it follows that New Covenant infants are to be baptised in infancy.

Although there is no clear statement in the New Testament that infants are to be baptised or were baptised, there is every indication that it was the practice in the early

church for: (1) the privilege of infant membership in the church, which was accorded to children of believers by circumcision, has never been repealed; (2) there are many records of household baptism in the New Testament (Acts 4:4; 16:15; 16:33; 1 Cor 1:16); (3) Paul points out that the Corinthians knew their infants to be holy (1 Cor 7:14). How did they know except that their infants were baptised just as the Jewish infants were regarded as holy because of circumcision.

Q. 96. What is the Lord's Supper?

A. 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.¹

Proofs

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; 10:16.

Comments

The Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the same night in which he was betrayed (1 Cor 11:23). He was actually eating the Passover meal with His disciples, when He gave a new significance to the bread and wine, which they used for the Passover. Taking the bread and breaking it, the Lord declared: "Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24). And then handing out the cup of wine, He said: "This cup is the new [covenant] in my blood [which is shed for you]: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:25; Lk 22:20).

When the church observes the Lord's Supper, she therefore shows forth the Lord's death (1 Cor 11:26). This is especially so since the breaking of the bread signifies the Lord's body which was broken, and the wine signifies the blood of Christ that was shed for the forgiveness of sin.

All branches of Christendom are agreed up to this point. But when it comes to the question of the significance of the sacrament, there are at least four different views.

Roman Catholicism holds to transubstantiation by which they believe that the bread and wine become the actual flesh and blood of Christ, after they are consecrated by the priests. Lutherans hold a modified form of transubstantiation, known as consubstantiation, by which it is believed that the flesh and blood of Christ are in, under and around, the bread and wine. If transubstantiation may be likened to changing water to wine, then consubstantiation may be likened to dissolving wine in water. These two views cannot be true, for the appearance and taste of the bread and wine remain unchanged even after they are consecrated, and moreover, common sense and reason would tell us that Christ's body and blood cannot be at multiple places at one time.

A third view, which was espoused by the Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli, held that the Supper is purely memorial. But this view suffers from the fact that the Apostle Paul not only calls the Lord's Supper, the communion of the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16), but teaches that anyone who partakes of it unworthily partakes judgment to himself (1 Cor 11:29). It appears then that the Lord's Supper is not merely a memorial.

For these reasons, John Calvin, and the Reformed Church, generally held to the spiritual presence view in which, though the bread and wine remain bread and wine,

there is a sacramental union between the bread and wine and the true body and blood of Christ, so that worthy receivers do really partake of the body and blood of Christ, with all its benefits—(1) not after a corporal and carnal manner, i.e., not by a physical ingesting of the body and blood of Christ (as would be the case in transubstantiation and consubstantiation); but (2) by faith and spiritually, so that the virtue and efficacy of Christ death is applied to them, and so they receive spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

Q. 97. What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper?

A. 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*,¹ of their *faith to feed upon Him*,² of their *repentance*,³ *love*,⁴ and *new obedience*,⁵ lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.⁶

Proofs

¹1 Corinthians 11:28–29; ²2 Corinthians 13:5; ³1 Corinthians 11:31; ⁴1 Corinthians 10:16–17;

⁵1 Corinthians 5:7–8; ⁶1 Corinthians 11:28–29.

Comments

This question arises particularly because the Apostle Paul explicitly refers to the fact that anyone, partaking of the Lord's Supper unworthily, eats and drinks damnation or judgment to himself (1 Cor 11:29). For this reason, Paul urges us to examine ourselves before coming to the table (1 Cor 11:28). To worthily partake of the Lord's Supper therefore refers to partaking with due preparation, by personal examination, and with suitable behaviour at the table so that through the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit, the Supper may be beneficial rather than detrimental to us.

What should we examine ourselves about in preparation to coming to the table? Paul does not indicate explicitly, but it can be deduced from the nature and significance of the Supper. Our catechism lists six important areas which we must consider.

First, we must examine ourselves regarding our knowledge to discern the Lord's body, which is represented by the bread. This would imply having a proper understanding of the significance of the Supper. We must not revere the elements because they are in no way transformed into the actual flesh and blood of Christ. Yet, it will not do for us to come with the attitude that it is purely memorial, for there is a sacramental union between the consecrated elements and the body and blood of Christ, so that partaking the Supper unworthily incurs God's wrath.

Secondly, we must examine ourselves as to whether we are truly in the faith (2 Cor 13:5), for otherwise we cannot have faith to apply Christ and feed upon Him, and so to draw virtue and spiritual nourishment from Him.

Thirdly, we must examine ourselves as to whether our repentance from sin is real. This is implied when Paul says: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Cor 11:31). As Christ died for our sins, and to rescue us from sin, it would be hypocritical for us to come to the table commemorating His death with particular sins unrepented of.

Fourthly, we must examine ourselves as to whether we truly love Christ, that we may come to the table with gratitude and thanksgiving.

And finally, we must examine ourselves whether we do desire new and sincere obedience to the Gospel. Paul says: "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:

Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:7–8). Because of the reference to the passover and the bread, it is very likely that the feast which Paul mentions refers primarily to the Lord’s Supper though it may have a wider (metaphorical) reference to the Christian life. It is more than likely that when he forbids us to eat with a professing brother involved in scandalous sin (1 Cor 5:11), he was referring particularly to the Lord’s Supper.

Q. 98. What is prayer?

A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God,¹ for things *agreeable to His will*,² in the name of **CHRIST**,³ with confession of *our sins*,⁴ and thankful acknowledgment of *His mercies*.⁵

Proofs

¹Psalm 62:8; ²1 John 5:14; ³John 16:23; ⁴Psalm 32:5–6; Daniel 9:4; ⁵Philippians 4:6.

Comments

Prayer is such a basic Christian exercise that many of us will find it hard to define it accurately. Our catechism gives a beautiful and instructive definition.

Prayer is, first of all, “an offering up of our desires,” i.e., it must overflow from our hearts (cf. Ps 62:8). Many pagan religions and pseudo Christian sects will include meaningless or unintelligible chants as prayer. But such utterances cannot be acceptable as prayer in the hearing of God, who warns us of the hypocrisy of such ‘prayers’: “this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me” (Isa 29:13).

Secondly, prayer must be “unto God,” i.e., prayer must be directed to God alone (cf. Ps 5:2–3). This means that we are not to direct our prayers to saints departed or alive, or to angels, or to any other creature. Prayer is a part of religious worship, and God alone is worthy of our worship (cf. Mt 4:10). Moreover, God alone is everywhere present to see us, and to hear our prayers (Ps 34:15), and He alone can answer our prayers by fulfilling our desires, and giving the things which we pray for (Ps 145:18–19).

Thirdly, prayer is “an offering up of our desires... for things... with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies.” This indicates that prayer principally consists in petition, but must be accompanied by confession (cf. Ps 32:5; Ps 51:4–5; Dan 9:8) and thanksgiving (Phil 4:6).

Fourthly, our petitions must only be “for things agreeable to [God’s] will.” This means that we may not ask God to fulfil our sinful desires (Jas 4:3), but may ask God for such things as are agreeable to His revealed will (1 Jn 5:14–16). We may, for example, pray for forgiveness of sin, for grace and strength to live the Christian life, for preservation in the faith, for deliverance from sin, and also for what temporal good things we may need for our earthly existence.

Fifthly, we must pray only “in the name of Christ” (cf. Jn 14:13–14). To pray in the name of Christ is not merely to mention the name of Christ with our lips in the conclusion, or any part of our prayers. It is rather to depend upon Christ alone for admittance and access unto God in prayer, for acceptance, audience, and a gracious answer unto our prayers (Eph 3:12). We may, of course, explicitly mention the name of Christ to indicate our reliance on Him, especially when we are praying in the hearing of others. Conversely, as we are not to pray to any other but God, we must not pray in the name of any other but Christ who alone is the perfect and acceptable

mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5; 1 Jn 2:1). Prayers in the name of angels, the 'virgin' Mary and other saints, are therefore idolatrous and abominable (cf. Col 2:18; Rev 19:10).

Q. 99. What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?

A. The *whole Word of God* is of use to direct us in prayer;¹ but the *special* rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught His disciples, commonly called

THE LORD'S PRAYER.²

Proofs

¹1 John 5:14; ²Matthew 6:9–13 cf. Luke 11:2–4.

Comments

In His great Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples on many subjects, including that of prayer. Apart from warning them against being ostentatious and repetitious in the prayer, He gave them a pattern of prayer to follow when He says:

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen (Mt 6:9–13).

The fact that the Lord did not intend this prayer to be used like a mantra as done in some circles is obvious, both from the fact that He had warned against vain repetitions (v. 7), and also from the fact that all other prayers in the Bible, including the Lord's prayers (e.g., Jn 17) were heartfelt outpouring of the soul. This is not to say that the Lord's Prayer cannot be recited as it is, if it is used with understanding. But it means that the Lord's Prayer is primarily given as a special rule or pattern for us to shape our prayers, especially as it pertains to the substance of our prayers.

Apart from the Lord's Prayer, it must be noted that the whole Word of God is generally useful to teach us how to pray in that it contains not only plenty of matter for prayer, but abounds with many heartfelt expressions which we may adopt in our own prayers. Indeed, there are many recorded prayers and manner of prayer which we may also emulate, such as the prayers of Eliezer (Gen 24:12); of Jacob (Gen 28:20–22; 32:9–12); of Gideon (Jdg 6:22, 36, 39); of Hannah (1 Sam 1:10; 2:1–10); of David (2 Sam 7:18–29; Psalm 51, etc.); of Solomon (1 Kgs 8:22–53); of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:2–4); of Jabez (1 Chr 4:10); of Ezra (Ezr 9:5–15); of Nehemiah (Neh 1:5–11; 2:4); of Jeremiah (Jer 32:16–25; etc.); of Daniel (Dan 9:3–19); of Jonah (Jon 2:1–9); of Habbakkuk (Hab 1:2–4; 12–13, etc.); of Paul (Eph 1:15–23, etc.); etc.

Q. 100. What doth the Preface of the Lord’s Prayer teach us?

A. The preface of the Lord’s Prayer—which is, **OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN**¹—teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy *reverence* and *confidence*, as children to a father, able and ready to help us;²—and that we should pray *with* and *for* others.³

Proofs

¹Matthew 6:9; ²Romans 8:15; Luke 11:13; ³Acts 12:5; 1 Timothy 2:1–2.

Comments

Three parts can be discerned from the Lord’s Prayer: the preface, the petitions, and the conclusion. The preface is in these words, “Our Father which art in heaven.” This phrase, as with every word in the Lord’s Prayer, is instructive for us.

These words, “Our Father,” teach us firstly, to draw near to God with delight and filial love, as would children to their fathers. Though God is high and transcendent, we must not approach Him with trembling as if He is a capricious tyrant. “For,” says Paul, “ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). Secondly, we ought to come to God in prayer confidently, believing in His all-sufficiency and His readiness to help us, for He is willing and “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph 3:20; cf. Mt 7:11). Thirdly, we must pray to God with and for others, He being a common Father unto all His people (Eph 6:18).

Now, we must carefully note that since the Lord teaches His disciples to pray by addressing God as “Our Father,” and Paul tells us that we can call God Father only because we have received the Spirit of adoption. It therefore follows that we may not call upon the Father together *with* unbelievers, though unbelievers should be urged to seek the Lord. It would as such be wrong for Christian children to recite the Lord’s Prayer together with their unbelieving classmates in school. Similarly, it would be wrong for a Christian to recite the Lord’s Prayer in a Roman Catholic church or in an ecumenical service.

Nevertheless, Christians must pray unto God, not only for other believers, but also *for* all men. That is, we must pray, not only for the Church in general (Ps 122:6), but also for the nation wherein we live. We must pray for the government (1 Tim 2:1–2), and we must pray not only for our friends, but also for our enemies (Mt 5:44).

But just in case, we are wont to approach our earthly fathers with disrespect or contemptuous familiarity, the words, “which art in heaven,” teach us to draw near unto God with all holy reverence. We must always remember that there is a great distance between God and us since God is not our earthly father, but our heavenly Father. Solomon puts it this way: “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” (Ecc 5:2).

In summary, the preface, “Our Father, which art in heaven,” teaches us that we must approach God with confident reverence. Confidence, because of the Spirit of adoption, as well as the mediatorship of Christ (Heb 4:15–16). Reverence, because we are mere men, while He is transcendent God.

Q. 101. What do we pray for in the First Petition?

A. In the First Petition—which is, **HALLOWED BE THY NAME**¹—we pray, That God would enable us and others to *glorify* Him in all that whereby He maketh Himself known;²—and that He would dispose all things to His own glory.³

Proofs

¹Matthew 6:9; ²Psalms 67:2–3; ³Psalms 83.

Comments

The name of God refers to all things whereby God is pleased to make Himself known. This includes God’s titles, attributes, ordinances, Word, and works (see *WSC* 54). To hallow God’s name is, therefore, to sanctify, honour and glorify God in all these things whereby He makes Himself known.

Accordingly, in this first petition, “Hallowed be thy name,” we pray (when we use the Lord’s Prayer as it is), and are taught by our Lord to pray (when we use the Prayer as a pattern of prayer), that God would glorify Himself. This little petition is often overlooked, and often reduced to a few (sometimes mechanical) statements ascribing praise and adoration to God in our prayers. But the fact is that the thought expressed in this petition ought to permeate every part of our prayers and life (*WSC* 1). In fact, we would venture to say that one of the distinguishing differences between the prayer of an unbeliever and the genuine child of God is that the latter is concerned for the glory of God, whereas the former cares only for his own benefits.

In any case, in terms of explicit statements of prayer, this first petition teaches us to petition God for following three things:

First, that God would glorify His own name, by magnifying Himself in the world, and by disposing all things for His own glory. It is true that whether we pray thus or not, all things must necessarily work out for the glory of God who created all things for His glory: “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36; cf. Rev 4:11; Isa 43:7; Ps 76:10; Rom 9:23). However, God’s name is the more greatly glorified when His children know that He is worthy and so petition Him to glorify His own name. Thus the Lord teaches us to pray that God will hallow His own name, and there are many godly examples of men praying that God will indeed magnify His own name. David, for example, prayed that the LORD would magnify His own name forever in the establishing of his kingdom (2 Sam 7:26). Elsewhere he prays imprecatorily: “Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD.... That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth” (Ps 83:16, 18).

Secondly, in this first petition, we pray and are taught to pray that God would enable us to hallow and glorify His name. More specifically, we may ask God to glorify His own name by enabling us to (a) confess and forsake our sins, which rob Him of His glory; (b) admire and adore Him in His glorious titles and attributes, and in His infinite excellences and perfections; (c) believe, love, and obey His Word; (d) observe and attend upon His worship and ordinances; (e) magnify Him in His works, and

make use of His creation for His glory; (f) endeavour to promote His honour and interest in our places and relations in all sincerity, diligence, zeal, and constancy; and finally, to (g) ensure that the chief design of our thoughts, words, and actions, may be the glory of God.

And *thirdly*, in this first petition, we pray and are taught to pray that God would enable others also thus to hallow and glorify His name (cf. Ps 67:1–3).

Q. 102. What do we pray for in the Second Petition?

A. In the Second Petition—which is, **THY KINGDOM COME**¹—we pray, That *Satan's* kingdom may be destroyed;² and that the *kingdom of Grace* may be advanced,³ ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it;⁴ and that the *kingdom of Glory* may be hastened.⁵

Proofs

¹Matthew 6:10; ²Psalms 68:1, 18; ³Revelation 12:10–11; ⁴2 Thessalonians 3:1; Romans 10:1; John 17:9, 20; ⁵Revelation 22:20.

Comments

Many debates have arisen out of the meaning of the term “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of Heaven” in the Scripture. Some insist that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are distinct, but that distinction does not bear up in the testimony of Scripture. Consider how Matthew records the Lord as saying: “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17; emphasis mine), whereas Mark records the Lord as saying: “the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mk 1:15; emphasis mine). It is obvious that the two terms are synonymous. But what exactly is the kingdom of God, or what exactly is the kingdom referred to in the Lord’s Prayer? The Larger Catechism (Q. 191) adduces to the kingship of Christ in every aspect and area of life in this life and the life to come. The Shorter Catechism makes specific reference to the kingdom of grace in this present world and the kingdom of glory in the world to come.

The kingdom of grace has to do with obedience and love to Christ. It was referred to by the Lord Himself when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come: “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17:20b–21).

The kingdom of glory has to do with the eternal kingdom of Christ or the consummation of the kingdom of Christ when He comes again as the victorious Judge and King. The Apostle Paul is speaking about the kingdom of glory when he says: “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” (1 Cor 6:9).

By the petition, “thy kingdom come,” the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray: *Firstly*, that the kingdom of Satan may be destroyed. This refers to the weakening and destruction of false religions, the subduing of anyone or any organisation which professes to be enemies of God’s kingdom, as well as destruction of sin and any power of, and inclination to, sin in ourselves and others (cf. Ps 68:1; 1 Jn 3:8).

Secondly, we are to pray that the kingdom of God’s grace might be advanced in the world, above all other kingdoms. In particular, we should pray that other sheep, whom Christ has, may be brought into the kingdom through the power and efficacy of the Spirit of Christ. And we should pray that those who have already been brought into it, including ourselves, will be kept in it and be more and more converted unto Christ, i.e.,

more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness by the strengthening and establishing work of the Holy Spirit. It is in this way that we must hope for more Christian influence or the propagation of Christian values in the world (cf. Isa 2:2; 2 Thes 3:1; Rom 10:1; 1 Pet 5:10).

Thirdly, we are to pray that Christ’s kingdom of glory may be hastened (cf. Rev 22:20; 1 Cor 16:22c). The coming of the kingdom of glory, which is, in other words, the second coming of Christ will only occur after the last number of the elect has been born and added into the kingdom of Grace (2 Pet 3:9). In thus praying for the hastening of the kingdom of glory, the church must therefore be busy engaging in the work of evangelism both to nurture our covenant children in the most holy faith, and to lead others into the kingdom.

Q. 103. What do we pray for in the Third petition?

A. In the Third petition—(which is, **THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN**¹)—

we pray, That God, by His grace, would make us able and willing to *know, obey, and submit to His will* in all things,² as the angels do in heaven.³

Proofs

¹Matthew 6:10; ²Psalms 67; 119:36; Matthew 26:39; 2 Samuel 15:25; Job 1:21; ³Psalms 103:20–21.

Comments

Reformed theology has traditionally spoken of the will of God under two categories: the secret or decretive will of God, and the revealed or perceptive will of God. If you think about it carefully, you will realise that these two categories really refer to two different things altogether. The decretive will of God is about what God has decreed and will bring to pass sovereignly. The revealed will of God, in terms of His written or spoken precepts, on the other hand, is God's rule of duty for man. This is why it can be that God has ordained everything including the sinful acts of men (i.e., the acts of men which are contrary to His revealed will), and yet remains consistent and not having two contrary wills. Knowing this fact will save us from much confusion and enable us to answer Arminians and Amyraldians who would posit a third category of the will of God, namely, the desire of God, or the desiderative will of God. These may say that since God's revealed will and secret will are often contrary, why can't it be that God desires everyone to be saved, but saves only the elect. We do not have any real quarrel with those who speak of God's desire in terms of His precepts in that He commands men without exception to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but the fact is that most who propound the desiderative will of God are speaking about the affection of God, and an emotional desire to save even the reprobate. This thought is most unworthy of God, and does make God possess two contrary wills: desiring something, but decreeing something else.

But if so much confusion had resulted from the dual sense of the word "will" (even in Calvin's days), why did the Reformers and Reformed theologians continue to use the word "will" both to speak about God's decree and His precepts? The answer is very simple: the Bible uses the same term to describe both categories of the will of God. And in some places, in the Scriptures, such as in the Lord's Prayer, it is possible that both categories are referred to in the same word.

Thus, our Catechism teaches us that when we pray: "Thy will be done in earth," we are praying that God, by His grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to His will in all things. This will of God refers primarily to the revealed will of God in His precepts (cf. Mt 7:21), and secondarily to His secret will which is revealed as it is unfolded in providence (cf. Rom 1:10).

It is not difficult to see what is involved in praying that God will make us willing to know, obey and submit to His perceptive will. We are praying that God will, by His providence and the effectual work of the Holy Spirit, incline our ears and our hearts so

that we are enabled not only to understand but to obey His Word, just as the angels do in heavens (cf. Ps 103:20–22).

On the other hand, praying that God will make us willing to know, obey and submit to His providentially revealed will would be to request that we would not only humbly acquiesce to God's revealed will, but have such compliance of our own will with the will of God, so as to thankfully accept God's merciful providences, and patiently submit unto His afflictive providences (cf. Lk 22:42; Acts 21:14; Job 1:21).

Q. 104. What do we pray for in the Fourth Petition?

A. In the Fourth Petition—which is, **GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD**¹—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.²

Proofs

¹Matthew 6:11; ²Proverbs 30:8–9; Genesis 28:20; 1 Timothy 4:4–5.

Comments

In teaching us to pray “Give us this day our daily bread,” it is obvious that the Lord is not referring literally to bread, or even to food only. Rather, He is teaching us to ask the heavenly Father to supply our outward provisions for our daily sustenance. This is in line with the Lord’s declaration: “I will abundantly bless her [i.e., the Church’s] provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread” (Ps 132:15).

But more than that, the Lord’s reference to “daily bread” teaches us that we should not be asking for luxuries or abundance, but only a competent portion of the good things of this life, such as God sees to be necessary and most convenient for us. Our attitude in petitioning for our daily necessities should be reflected in the beautiful prayer of Agur recorded for us in the book of Proverbs: “Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me” (Prov 30:8).

Indeed, we ought to realise that our heavenly Father knows our needs, and He does generally supply our necessities even without our asking (Mt 6:32).

However, we must learn nevertheless to ask because: *firstly*, the Lord Jesus teaches us to ask for them, and God is pleased when we do ask (cf. Mt 7:7–11). *Secondly*, God has promised only unto such as would ask Him that they should not want any good thing: “The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing” (Ps 34:10). *Thirdly*, when we ask aright for our daily outward provisions, we ask and obtain the blessing of God with them (cf. Ex 23:25). And *fourthly*, when we ask the Lord for our provision, we learn to see His providential hand in our lives, and learn to depend on Him and trust Him in all things.

Q. 105. What do we pray for in the Fifth Petition?

A. In the Fifth Petition—which is, **AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS**¹—we pray, That God, for Christ’s sake, would freely *pardon all our sins*;² which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by His grace we are enabled from the heart to *forgive others*.³

Proofs

¹Matthew 6:12; ²Psalms 51:1–2, 7, 9; Daniel 9:17–19; ³Luke 11:4; Matthew 18:35.

Comments

Most of us, who come from traditional churches, learn the Fifth Petition in the words, “And forgive us our *trespasses*, as we forgive *those who trespass against us*.” This is based on the Anglican Liturgy which is intended to interpret and clarify the words “debt” and “debtors” as given in Matthew 6:12, that they do not refer to monetary debts. But this rendering is unfortunate because it loses quite a lot of the richness of the word used by the Lord. In the first place, the word “debt” speaks of the fact that our sin against God makes us indebted to His justice. The wages of sin is eternal death (Rom 6:23). Our sins are violations of God’s holy laws and deserve His eternal punishment. In the second place, the word “debt” speaks of the fact that sin is a falling short of what is required of God, whether as it pertains to our duties towards Him or towards our fellow men. It involves not only a transgression of God’s laws, but omission to do good (cf. Jas 4:17). And “our debtors” would be those who owe us some good or owe us apologies and restitution for wrongs done.

Now, all our debts are sins against God. And we know that if we are in Christ, “we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:14). In other words, our debts have been paid in full by the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ who shed His blood on the Cross for our sakes. Why, then, does the Lord teach us to pray that God would forgive us our debts? The reason is that when we sin, we incur the fatherly displeasure and wrath of God, and therefore we need to seek His forgiveness afresh. And so, when we ask God to forgive our sins, we are asking that—(1) God will, for the sake of Christ, turn His fatherly displeasure from us; (2) He will not chastise us according as our deeds deserve (cf. Ps 130:3–4); and (3) He would restore unto us the joy of our salvation (Ps 51:12).

The Lord, moreover, teaches us to add the phrase: “as we forgive our debtors,” so that we may be encouraged to ask forgiveness from God. You see, we are by nature unforgiving, so that if our natures be not changed that we would genuinely forgive our debtors, then we can have no assurance that our own debts are forgiven of God (Mt 6:14). Thus, conversely, if we can honestly find it in our hearts to forgive others, then we can have the confidence to ask God for forgiveness, knowing that He will indeed forgive us.

Q. 106. What do we pray for in the Sixth Petition?

A. In the Sixth Petition—(which is, **AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL**¹)—we pray, That God would *either keep us from being tempted to sin,*² or *support and deliver us when we are tempted.*³

Proofs

¹Matthew 6:13; ²Matthew 26:41; ³2 Corinthians 12:7–8.

Comments

The Scripture clearly teaches us that God does not tempt us to sin (Jas 1:13), therefore when the Lord teaches us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” He could not possibly be teaching us that God does tempt us to sin, or that when we are tempted it is because God has positively led us towards sin. Yes, it is true that God is sovereign over all things, and ultimately even the occasions for our temptation are ordained of God, but we must never have any unworthy thoughts of God leading us to sin against Him. God may indeed try our faith as He did with Abraham; but it is always with high and noble designs which cannot be made the rule of our thoughts when we are tempted.

It is therefore best to think of this Sixth Petition as a request that God would keep us from being tempted into sin.

God may do so by restraining Satan (the great tempter of mankind) from assaulting us with his manifold temptations; or else He may restrain us from coming into those situations where temptations are waiting for us (Mt 26:41; Ps 19:13).

On the other hand, in praying, “Deliver us from evil,” we request, that when we are tempted by the devil, or the flesh, or the world, unto sin, that we may be supported and strengthened to resist and overcome the temptations, so as to be delivered, from falling into the evil of sin (Jas 4:7).

As we pray this prayer, we should also have the conviction and assurance that no temptation is ever so great that we cannot overcome it by God’s sufficient grace. Paul tells us:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Cor 10:13).

This verse has often been used to speak about trials and difficulties in the Christian life, but the context clearly indicate that the temptation that Paul speaks about is that of temptation to sin.

Therefore, none of us can excuse ourselves from any sin by saying: “I couldn’t help it.” But at the same time, we must take heed lest we fall (1 Cor 10:12), and so daily seek God’s grace to lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Q. 107. What doth the conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer teach us?

A. The conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer—(which is, **FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER, AMEN**¹)—teacheth us to take our encouragement in prayer from **GOD ONLY,**² and in our prayers to *praise* Him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to Him.³—And, in testimony of our *desire*, and *assurance* to be heard, we say, Amen.⁴

Proofs

¹Matthew 6:13; ²Daniel 9:4, 7–9, 16–19; ³1 Chronicles 29:10–13; ⁴1 Corinthians 14:16; Revelation 22:20–21.

Comments

The Lord’s Prayer concludes with the words, “For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen.” Three things may be said concerning this statement.

First, this conclusion teaches us that we can come confidently and expectantly to God in prayer, because the result or answer to our prayer is not dependant on ourselves or on our worthiness, but on God alone. God alone is He to whom belongs the Kingdom, that is, He alone is sovereign over all things and own all things. God alone is truly powerful or omnipotent. He alone can do all things. God alone is He to whom belongs glory for ever, and so He is pleased to magnify His own glory by hearing and answering the prayer of His own children. Thus when we come to prayer, we may have the confidence that God is able and willing to hear our prayers, and able and willing to answer our prayers according to His own will (cf. Eph 3:20–21).

Secondly, this conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer teaches us that, in our prayers to God, we should always praise Him, and ascribe kingdom, power, and glory unto Him. Notice this feature in David’s prayer when He said:

Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. 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.... Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name (1 Chr 29:10–11, 13).

Notice the same emphasis in Paul’s doxology: “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim 1:17).

Finally, the prayer ends with the word “Amen” to signify our desire and assurance to be heard. “Amen” means “so be it” or “so shall it be.” We must not take it merely as the final punctuation in our prayers so that it is devoid of meaning. Rather, we should say “Amen” only when we can agree to what has been prayed (see 1 Corinthians 14:16). Naturally, we should be able to agree with our own prayers, or the Lord’s Prayer, but when we are praying with others, and someone else is praying, we must especially take care not to simply say “Amen” when the prayer is concluded. If we did not hear the prayer or cannot agree to the petition being uttered, we should refrain from saying “Amen” lest we be guilty of vain hypocrisy.