

The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death

The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death

An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism

Volume 1: Lord's Days 1–26

by

Theodorus VanderGroe

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Edited by Joel R. Beeke



REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS and
DUTCH REFORMED TRANSLATION SOCIETY
Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death
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Reformation Heritage Books

2965 Leonard St. NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
616-977-0889 / Fax 616-285-3246
orders@heritagebooks.org
www.heritagebooks.org

Printed in the United States of America
16 17 18 19 20 21/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-1-60178-498-8

Reformation Heritage Books is deeply grateful to the Dutch Reformed Translation Society for its joining with us in this endeavor and its generous financial contribution toward the production of these volumes.

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Preface

Ever since the 1618–1619 Synod of Dort stipulated in Article 68 of its church order that “the Ministers everywhere shall briefly explain on Sunday, ordinarily in the afternoon sermon, the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the Catechism,” written expositions of the Heidelberg Catechism have been published regularly in the Netherlands—a practice that is continued until today.

Such sermonic expositions of the Heidelberg Catechism were also published during the Dutch Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*). Historically, this movement ran parallel to the Puritan movement of the British Isles. The theological and experiential kinship between these two movements is such that the men of the Dutch Further Reformation are often referred to as “Dutch Puritans.” In light of the great kinship between these two movements, church historians have recently coined the intelligent and experiential piety promoted by both movements as “North Sea Piety.”¹

Among the better known expositions of the Heidelberg Catechism by Dutch Further Reformation pastors, are those by Johannes VanderKemp (1664–1718) and Bernardus Smytegelt (1665–1739). The work of VanderKemp has been translated into English and was republished by Reformation Heritage Books in 1997 in two volumes, and a new edition of Smytegelt’s catechism exposition has recently been published in the Netherlands in two volumes (Zwijndrecht: De Roo Boeken, 2014). In addition to these works, Theodore VanderGroe’s *The Christian’s Only Comfort* is also one of the most prominent sermonic expositions of the Heidelberg Catechism dating from this period.

Theodore VanderGroe (1705–1784) was one of the most distinguished representatives of the Dutch Further Reformation. Scholars generally consider VanderGroe to be the last major representative of this movement.² After his

1. For an introduction of this movement, see pages xxix–liv in this volume.

2. For a biographical summary of VanderGroe’s life, see pages xiii–xxviii in this volume.

death, the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands continued its precipitous decline due largely to the pernicious influence of the Enlightenment.

In 1740, VanderGroe accepted a pastoral call to Kralingen, where he preached the whole counsel of God for the remaining forty-four years of his life. This included preaching through the Heidelberg Catechism numerous times. In both his expositional preaching of texts and his topical preaching of the catechism, VanderGroe proclaimed an unfettered gospel, but also warned against sin, worldliness, and divine judgment. He was a watchman on Zion's walls, heralding forth law and gospel, breaking down the work of man and building up the work of God, separating saving faith from false forms of faith. These themes permeated his preaching, often bringing him considerable opposition.

VanderGroe's exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism (*Des Christens eenigen troost in leven en sterven of Verklaring van den Heidelbergschen Catechismus*) is his *magnum opus*, and in some ways it was esteemed nearly as highly by the godly in the Netherlands as *The Christian's Reasonable Service* of Wilhelmus à Brakel.³ In his able exposition of the Heidelberg catechism, we find the unmistakable distinctives of the Dutch Further Reformation: it is steeped in Scripture; it is very pastoral; and it promotes a healthy form of spirituality. Like à Brakel, VanderGroe avoids a mystical strain that runs through some of the other late writers of the Dutch Further Reformation.

This is beautifully illustrated in VanderGroe's description of saving faith:

However weak or feeble faith may be, and however much it may be accompanied by strife, opposition, distrust, and carnal doubt, there will nevertheless always be, by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit, something in the heart of a Christian that constitutes the essence of true faith—all of which will not be found in an unbeliever. This continually prompts the believer, in spite of all doubt and opposition of flesh and blood, to lift up his heart by the power of the Holy Spirit and to approach God as His Father, doing so in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, relying continually upon His grace. He does so by trusting in God's immutable promises that He, in Christ, is to him a reconciled and gracious Father, and that for the sake of the sacrifice of Christ, He has most surely pardoned all his sins and will never be wroth with him again (Lord's Day 7, second sermon).

3. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 4 vols., trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999).

VanderGroe was a prolific author. Throughout his writings, he emphasized the need for the personal application of the three great truths expounded by the Heidelberg Catechism: conviction of sin, deliverance in Christ, and growth in sanctification.

By publishing the translation of VanderGroe's exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism, thereby making another primary Dutch Further Reformation writer accessible to the English-speaking public, we are continuing to redress the imbalance between English Puritans being available in Dutch and Dutch Further Reformation writers being available in English. We are hopeful that the availability of this work will stimulate the scholarly evaluation of the Dutch Further Reformation, as well as the significant historical and theological links between this movement and English Puritanism.

We are also hopeful that for all Reformed denominations that subscribe to the Heidelberg Catechism as one of their doctrinal standards, and may still adhere to the historic practice of its weekly sermonic exposition, this work may prove to be a valuable addition to the limited number of English expositions of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Most importantly, our desire is that God would be pleased to use this work to the glory of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the edification and comfort of His people, and the salvation of the lost. That, after all, was VanderGroe's objective in preaching these sermons. He therefore concluded this sermonic exposition with these words, "All thanksgiving and praise be to the Lord's great and glorious name, which is to be magnified to all eternity. He has given us the strength and the ability to complete this great task. If it may have added, in but a small measure, to the unveiling and magnification of His infinite glory, I will deem myself to be most blessed that He has called me to be a partaker of that salvation and that I have been given the privilege to proclaim among men the unsearchable riches of Christ, my Lord and savior."

—Joel R. Beeke and Bartel Elshout

Translator's Preface

My foremost desire is to acknowledge the Lord for having led me providentially to undertake this task, and for having enabled me to complete it. Had it not been for the illness of my late wife Joan, I probably would not have undertaken a task of this magnitude. Her illness made it necessary for me to retire from full-time pastoral ministry, and as an emeritus minister I needed to secure gainful employment to supplement my emeritus stipend. This led to my engagement as a free-lance translator for Reformation Heritage Books for the purpose of translating VanderGroe's exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism.

During my pastoral ministry, I greatly benefited from this exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism as I sought to prepare myself for the weekly sermonic exposition of this catechism in the churches I was privileged to serve: the Heritage Reformed churches of Jordan, Ontario (1998–2005), and Chilliwack, British Columbia (2005–2012). This prompted me to propose to Dr. Beeke and Reformation Heritage Books that we undertake the translation of this historic sermonic exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism. I was greatly encouraged by their endorsement of this proposal, and that subsequently the Dutch Reformed Translation Society also agreed to partially fund this project.

I wish to acknowledge the following individuals for their valuable assistance: *John Wesdyk* as my faithful and competent initial proofreader; *Rev. Cornelis Vogelaar* whose thorough familiarity with the men of the Dutch Further Reformation and the syntax of eighteenth-century Dutch proved most helpful in translating difficult and complicated passages; *Greg Bailey* whose editing skills have contributed significantly to the final linguistic quality of the translation; *Gary and Linda den Hollander* for their usual type-setting expertise; and, last but not least, my beloved friend for nearly half a century and my colleague in the ministry, *Dr. Joel Beeke*, who, with his vast editorial experience, has done a final editing of these volumes.

Also a very special word of thanks to *Frans Huisman* from the Netherlands. Mr. Huisman is a recognized scholar of the Dutch Further Reformation and is a member of the *Stichting Studie Nadere Reformatie (Society to Advance the Study of the Dutch Further Reformation)*, an organization that engages in and promotes the scholarly assessment of the Dutch Further Reformation. When Mr. Huisman learned that I would engage in the translation of this work, he wanted to make certain that I would have the best original copy at my disposal. He found such a copy at the library of the *Vrije Universiteit (Free University)* in Amsterdam, and scanned the entire original text for me. I am deeply grateful for his immensely helpful contribution.

Finally, I am also grateful to my late wife Joan (1949–2013) and my present wife Clarice for their encouragement and support throughout the entire translation project.

Since VanderGroe's Heidelberg Catechism sermons were recorded as he preached them, the following editorial adjustments needed to be made to achieve the linguistic quality that is requisite for written material:

- Very lengthy run-on sentences were divided into several shorter sentences;
- In every sermon, VanderGroe would repeatedly say, "If I had more time..."; "Due to time constraints..."; "For lack of time..."; etc. Nearly all of these statements have been eliminated;
- Most "beholds" and "beloveds" have been eliminated;
- Numerous redundancies and repetitions (permissible in the spoken word) have also been eliminated.

We believe that these editorial adjustments significantly enhance the readability of the English text.

Having said that, however, be assured that at every stage of the editorial project, I have consulted the original text to make sure that the English rendering remains true to the author's intent. I assume full responsibility for any remaining improprieties and deficiencies in the translation.

Finally, to God alone be the glory for the completion of this task. His ways are higher than our ways and are past finding out. As has been true for Wilhelm à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, it is according to His determinate counsel that also the work of this renowned Dutch Further Reformation writer should become available to the English-speaking world. May it please our sovereign God to crown this work with His gracious benediction.

—Bartel Elshout

Biographical Introduction

Theodorus VanderGroe (1705–1784) is the last notable representative of the Dutch Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*), a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pietistic movement that paralleled English Puritanism in many ways. The movement included such divines as Willem Teellinck (1579–1629), Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), Jodocus Lodensteyn (1620–1677), Jacobus Koelman (1631–1695), Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711), and Alexander Comrie (1706–1774). These men pursued a deeper form of piety and higher standard of practice than that which prevailed in the Reformed churches of their time and place, while maintaining the Reformed orthodoxy of the “Three Forms of Unity”: the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. VanderGroe is often called the *hekkensluiter* (“the one who closes the gate”), for after his death, the historic Reformed Church of the Netherlands declined further in both doctrine and spiritual life due to the influence of theological modernism and the Enlightenment, which prompted increasing secularization in Western Europe.

Life

Childhood and Education

Theodorus VanderGroe was born March 9, 1705, in the Dutch city of Zwammerdam. He was the second child of Ludovicus VanderGroe and Johanna Laats. Johanna came from a line of preachers, while Ludovicus was the first minister of a large family of contract lawyers or “notaries.” God blessed this marriage with three children, of whom two sons entered the gospel ministry. Theodore’s father passed away July 23, 1711 after suffering a long, debilitating illness, when Theodore was six years old.¹

1. T. Brienens, “Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784),” in *De Nadere Reformatie: schrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers*, ed. T. Brienens, K. Exalto, J. van Genderen, C. Graafland, and W. van ’t Spijker (’s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1986), 277. According to Theodorus’s sister Eva, the family grew up under “a dead, literal serving of the public religion,

Baptized as “Dirk,” VanderGroe adopted the Latinized Greek name Theodorus (“given by God”) after his theological studies at Leiden University, and would be known as such for the remainder of his life. He received a Latin education in his home town and matriculated or enrolled in Leiden University at age nineteen, in 1724. The family moved to Leiden, where Theodorus attended the lectures of Johannes à Marck (1656–1731; Church History); Taco Hajo van den Honert (1666–1740; Jewish Antiquity and Reformed Dogmatics), who was a Cartesian follower of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669);² and Albert Schultens (1686–1750; Hebrew). Theodorus especially loved the teaching of van den Honert. In his textbook, van den Honert reflected the influence of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), who argued for the strict interpretation of each part of Scripture according to its context in Scripture as a whole, pioneering the approach which today is called “biblical theology.” Later on, VanderGroe studied literature, church polity, and the creeds of the ancient church.³

Ministry

Having completed his theological education in January 1729, VanderGroe underwent his candidacy examination before the classis of Leiden, which he passed *cum laude*.⁴ This exam involved questions on Reformed dogmatics as well as knowledge of biblical languages, but particularly addressed the doctrinal soundness of a sermon preached by the student. VanderGroe ably expounded Deuteronomy 18:15, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken,” and was approved as a candidate for the ministry.

On August 14, 1729, VanderGroe received a pastoral call to Rijnsaterwoude, a small village in South Holland. He sustained his ordination or *peremptoir* examination in Alphen aan den Rijn, speaking on John 1:29, “Behold the Lamb

which did not seek nor ask for any inner truth.” Eva VanderGroe, *Bekeringsweg van Eva VanderGroe* (Houten: den Hertog, 1994), 3–4. Though Eva was critical of most ministers, she writes positively about godly church members who impressed her brother and contributed to his conversion and to his new emphasis on Reformed experiential preaching. See van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” in *Neerlands laatste ziener: Leven, werk en invloed van Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)*, ed. John Exalto and Fred van Lieburg (Rotterdam: Lindenberg Productions, 2007), 11.

2. The Cartesian movement strongly emphasized the rationality of faith, and did not appreciate Reformed experiential preaching.

3. Brienens, “Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784),” 277.

4. VanderGroe chose Leiden rather than Woerden, where he was a *filius classis* (son of the classis). He now became a candidate in sacred theology, becoming eligible to be called by the Reformed churches.

of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” VanderGroe commenced his ministry on March 19, 1730, and was ordained by J. Oosterland of Katwijk aan den Rijn, who had previously served as pastor of the church in Rijnsaterwoude. Oosterland preached on Titus 2:7–8, followed by the newly ordained VanderGroe, who preached on 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

Three years later, Theodorus’s brother, Simon Lodewijk VanderGroe, also entered the ministry in Soeterwoude. He was ordained by Theodorus, who preached on Acts 20:28.⁵ In 1740 Theodorus accepted a pastoral call to Kralingen, to succeed Cornelis Blom (1712–1780). VanderGroe himself wrote in Kralingen’s church minutes:

On July 10, 1740, I, Theodorus VanderGroe, have been installed here in Kralingen as minister of the gospel by Rev. Hermannus van Loo, pastor of Bergschenhoek, with the words of Revelation 2:10, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” In the afternoon I preached my inaugural sermon based on 2 Corinthians 2:16, “And who is sufficient for these things?”⁶

VanderGroe preached for forty-four years until his death in Kralingen, all the while enjoying a good relationship with his church and consistory.⁷ VanderGroe’s ministry consisted of preaching and teaching, writing treatises and letters, and, of course, making pastoral visits to the members of his congregation.

Remarkably, during his first years in ministry, Theodorus did not know the Lord personally.⁸ He came to saving faith in Christ only at the age of thirty during his first pastorate in 1735. His sister Eva wrote in her conversion account (*Bekeringsweg*) about a godly woman, Geertje Raaphorst, who had a life-changing effect on the lives of both Eva and Theodorus VanderGroe. Pressing upon VanderGroe the need for conversion, Geertje became an instrument of God to bring her pastor to the Lord.⁹ Upon his conversion, VanderGroe’s preaching and writing changed so remarkably that he confessed that prior to

5. Brienens, “Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784),” 278.

6. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 18.

7. A. W. C. van Dijk, *Die des nachts Zijn huis bewaakt: Theodorus van der Groe in zijn Leven en Werken* (Dordrecht: J. P. van den Tol, 1972), 50.

8. Teunis Brienens notes how some biographers posit that “at that time, he was still unconverted and was a stranger to grace and to God.” One even mentions that “he was extraordinarily faithful, and yet the pulpit of the old church in Rijnsaterwoude was occupied by a ‘dead road sign.’” Another says, that “he preached Christ to others, and directed sinners to Him as the only way of salvation. However, he did not know Christ personally, and was blind to the way in which the Lord leads His elect.” Brienens, “Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784),” 278.

9. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 23–24.

that time he had been “intellectually engaged with an imaginary Christ without having any [saving] knowledge of the Lord Jesus.”¹⁰ After his conversion, “death in Adam, man’s total depravity, and life [only] in Christ” became his primary themes.¹¹

Personal Life and Death

Theodorus VanderGroe was married at age forty-nine in 1754 to Johanna Bichon, whom he spoke of as “my beloved and faithful spouse.”¹² Johanna was the daughter of Claes Bichon, who was a significant leader in the East India Trading Company. As a married man, VanderGroe was often sick and had to lean heavily on God’s strength. In letters from his sickbed to friends, he wrote such outpourings of heart as these: “I feel I am merely a dead dog before God, but I lean on Christ and am carried by Him. All my guilt lies reconciled and satisfied through Christ. I cannot bring two words together to form a true prayer, but Christ is my all.”¹³

VanderGroe’s mother, Johanna Laats, passed away at age eighty-five in 1760 in Kralingen. Ten years later, his sister Eva passed away, followed two years later by Maria Schuytemakers, who had been the VanderGroes’ faithful housekeeper for over forty years. VanderGroe himself began to fail early in 1784 and died on June 24, 1784, after sustaining two weeks of intense illness. Six days after he died, he was buried in Kralingen. On July 4, Rev. Hoogstad of Bergschenhoek preached a memorial sermon for the Kralingen flock from Isaiah 57:2, “He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.”¹⁴

VanderGroe left behind a legacy of sermons, letters, and dogmatical and polemical writings, many of which were published long after his death. His wife, Johanna, died three months after him.

Ecclesiastical Controversies

During VanderGroe’s life and ministry, the Reformed Church of the Netherlands endured a period of prolonged strife. With the passing of the Reformation age, the church was challenged by the thinking of the Enlightenment, which

10. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 14.

11. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 26.

12. Brienens, “Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784),” 279.

13. Willem Westerbeke, *Theodorus VanderGroe: Leven en Leer* (Middelburg: Stichting de Gihonbron, 2016), 45.

14. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 39.

increasingly undermined the orthodoxy and piety of the national church. VanderGroe spoke out frequently against this doctrinal and moral decline. On the other hand, he was critical of others who said various requirements were necessary to fulfill before faith could be obtained. He said such preaching kept the gospel at a distance from convicted sinners and needy believers who lacked assurance of faith. VanderGroe's position often gave rise to intense polemical debates with colleagues and friends.

The Eswijler Booklet (1738–1740)

One of the most prominent conflicts was over the “booklet of Eswijler.” The booklet bore the title, *Zielseensame meditatie* (A Private Soul's Meditations), and was written by Jan Willemsz Eswijler (c. 1633–c. 1719). The booklet had become increasingly popular among churchgoers, and went through four editions in the 1730s alone. Many Reformed ministers were alarmed by this popularity and considered the allegedly “mystical light” contained in the booklet as a challenge to Reformed orthodoxy.¹⁵ After meeting on June 23, 1739, the Classis of Schieland, endorsed by the Synod of South Holland, declared the book harmful “due to all its erroneous sentiments, as well as its containing misleading Hattemistic [quietist or perfectionist], Spinozaic [anti-Trinitarian, naturalistic], and pietistic teaching manifested under an attractive veneer.”¹⁶ Fearing that this booklet would promote antinomianism and pantheism, it was officially condemned.¹⁷ VanderGroe, who was chairman of the committee that recommended this condemnation, did not agree with its decision.

The polemical debate that followed was led by Johannes du Vignon (1694–1762), who wrote a preface to Wilhelmus à Brakel's *Redelijke Godsdienst* (*The Christian's Reasonable Service*), in which du Vignon argued that the booklet of Eswijler was heretical. In response, Jacob Groenewegen (1707–1780) wrote a

15. Willem Westerbeke, *Theodorus VanderGroe: Leven en Leer*, 93. Eswijler spoke in this work of how “the Holy Spirit drew him out of legalistic labor to a restful trust on the certainty of God's promise.” He further mentioned that believers lack comfort because they judge themselves according to “the old, sin-decayed part of the believing human.” Instead, Eswijler argued, the believer should judge himself according to the new, spiritual man, freed by Christ from all the duties of the law and letter of God's Word. He only needs to pray, realizing his spiritual weakness, and wait on the Spirit's gifts of grace.

16. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 17. Several ministers, e.g., Jacob Groenewegen, who did regard the booklet as edifying and portraying God's free grace, were censured. This issue became a severe conflict between various groups of Rotterdam's ministers.

17. Willem Westerbeke, *Theodorus VanderGroe: Leven en Leer*, 93.

defense, *De roem van Godts vrije genade* (The Glory of God's Free Grace). He was censured due to his not obtaining the ecclesiastical approbation required to publish this book. Not long after that, two Rotterdam book publishers, Adrianus Douci Pieterszoon and Hendrik van Pelt, published some letters sent to them as *De Oude Orthodoxe Leer der Ware Gereformeerde Kerk* (The Old Orthodox Doctrine of the True Reformed Church), which dismantled the critical arguments of du Vignon and placed Eswijler's booklet within the historical and dogmatic framework of Reformed theology.¹⁸ This publication also dealt with assurance of faith as taught in the Heidelberg Catechism¹⁹ (a topic to be addressed below). Authorship of these letters was initially attributed to four Rotterdam merchants: Gerrit Costerman (1675–1758), Jacobus Vrolo (1693–1767), Adriaan van der Willigen (1694–1758), and Pieter van Westreenen (1701–1753). Not until 1756 was VanderGroe identified as the true author of this work.²⁰ The conflict died down when the Dutch government, fearing a church split, silenced the debate in 1740. All further publications and meetings regarding this booklet were officially forbidden, meaning that the church could not prosecute the matter further. The storm was stilled, at least for the present.²¹

Ecclesiastical Conflict in Rotterdam (1756–1757)

A second crucial conflict into which VanderGroe was drawn was a dispute between the city council and the Reformed Church of Rotterdam. At issue was the extent of government authority over ecclesiastical matters. At this time, the Reformed Church was required to ask the government's permission to implement any significant ecclesiastical decision, such as to hold additional church services, to resolve major ecclesiastical conflicts, or to adjudicate the calling of ministers.²²

In 1755 the consistory of Rotterdam requested the city council's permission to call two new preachers. Though permission was given, the city council urged the consistory to select ministers who hailed from the Rotterdam area, particularly Petrus Nieuwland (1722–1795) of Haarlem. This recommendation was regarded as an infringement on the right of free nomination by the church.²³ VanderGroe defended the right of free nomination in opposition to

18. Westerbeke, *Theodorus VanderGroe: Leven en Leer*, 90.

19. Brienens, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," 285.

20. Van Lieburg, "Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe," 17.

21. *Zielseensame meditatie* was reprinted in 1864 by J. J. H. Kemmer in Utrecht.

22. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 51.

23. Westerbeke, *Theodorus VanderGroe: Leven en Leer*, 162.

four other ministers led by Hermannus Bruining (1705–1801) and Petrus Hofstede (1716–1803).²⁴ Though the right of the church to nominate office-bearers was acknowledged in 1756, the city council persistently rejected the nominations until April 1756 and May 1757. The nomination of Petrus Nieuwland was never approved by the city council.²⁵

VanderGroe's role in this matter involved the republication of Gisbertus Voetius's classic church-order document (1637), regarding the procedure of calling ministers in the Reformed Church.²⁶ VanderGroe added an extensive preface in which he called for an end to this conflict and for the church to unite. Meanwhile, in May 1756, Jacobus Bosch wrote a defense titled *Het recht der Rotterdamse kerk* (The Rights of the Church in Rotterdam). VanderGroe, in turn, wrote an anonymous response titled *Klaere en grondige wederlegging van het nieuw verzonnen Hollandtsch kerkelijk beroepings-recht* (A Clear and Thorough Rebuttal of the Newly Invented Dutch Ecclesiastical Right to Call), published by former members of the Rotterdam church's consistory: Theodorus ten Bruggen, Cornelis van der Kemp, Adrianus Ham, Johannes du Vignon, Johannes Patijn, and Johannes Wilhelmus de Heyde.²⁷

Bruining and Hofstede of Rotterdam unmasked VanderGroe as the true author of the *Klaere en grondige wederlegging*, and published this information in the *Leidsche Courant* (Leiden Daily News) and in the *Boekzaal der geleerde wereld* (The Book Room of the Scholarly World), a monthly publication read by most Reformed ministers. In December, VanderGroe issued a condemnation of the activities of Bruining and Hofstede, evoking another publication in defense of Bruining and Hofstede. A series of writings were published under a satirical serial publication, titled *Kralingiana*, in which VanderGroe was the primary target of scorn and derision.²⁸ This assault was only one of many publications written against VanderGroe, in which people called him an antichrist, an Arian, a Donatist, and much more. Despite this abuse, VanderGroe became known as a "respected expert of Reformed church polity," and "a man who was

24. Regarding the call of ministers, a good example of the government's role is found in Theodorus's own calling. Before accepted, the government of the city of Kralingen, including the mayor of Rotterdam, had to give permission before a call could be made. Brienen, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," 279.

25. It should be pointed out that the city council's right to approve (or disapprove) such nominations was a provision of the Church Order of Dort of 1618–1619.

26. Van Lieburg, "Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe," 28.

27. Van Lieburg, "Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe," 29.

28. Van Lieburg, "Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe," 29.

unusually competent in ecclesiastical matters,” as stated by the church historian Annaeus Ypeij (1760–1837).²⁹

VanderGroe engaged in many other polemical debates during his ministry, including conflicts over the “new version” of the metrical Psalms (1773), vaccinations against chickenpox, the revival of Nijkerk (which he called the “Nijkerk Disturbances”),³⁰ and in general, “all other novelties” in church life.³¹

Ecclesiastical Controversy (1784)

Another ecclesiastical controversy broke out in the final year of VanderGroe’s life. In 1777, Jacobus le Sage ten Broek (1742–1823), who was a friend of Hofstede, was called to minister in Rotterdam. In 1782, Rev. Johannes Habbema (1733–1800), also from Rotterdam, accused ten Broek of preaching heterodox sentiments regarding the Reformed doctrine of the atonement. The issue was whether the vicarious nature of Christ’s suffering and death pertains to all the ways Christ suffered during His entire lifetime, or only to His death on the cross.³² Habbema believed the first position to be true, and ten Broek the latter. Ten Broek wrote a defense, *Zedige en vrijmoedige verantwoording* (A Moral and Bold Account), but eighteen members of the consistory of Rotterdam petitioned against ten Broek and his views. A committee of the classis was charged to investigate the matter. Ten Broek visited VanderGroe in Kralingen in January 1784, asking him to mediate in the conflict. VanderGroe assured ten Broek that he found no heterodoxy in ten Broek’s book of defense, and hoped to mediate between Habbema and ten Broek. However, resolving this conflict amiably proved impossible, and ten Broek declined to resolve the controversy through VanderGroe’s mediation. VanderGroe passed away two months later, and ten Broek’s views were found to be heterodox by sixteen of twenty-seven members of the Classis of Schieland in April 1784.³³

29. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 30.

30. VanderGroe condemned the Nijkerk Disturbances in his *Toetsteen der ware en valsche Genade* (Touchstone of True and False Grace), and later, around the time of his second volume of the *Toetsteen der ware en valsche Genade*, in a sermon preached on March 28, 1753, he called this “revival” the “wicked work of Satan,” and “a divine judgment upon the Reformed Church,” even though Groenewegen called it “a work of conviction and conversion of sinners” (Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 23).

31. Brienen, “Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784),” 279.

32. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 36.

33. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 38.

Theological Issues and Emphases

The Essence and Assurance of Faith (1742)

Several polemical debates shaped VanderGroe's theology and prompted his writings. The debate regarding assurance of faith had been evoked by the Eswijler controversy, and through these polemics, VanderGroe's public image changed. One of the questions being raised was if a true desire for a conscious knowledge of Christ as one's Savior was sufficient evidence of personal regeneration and salvation. Theologians such as the much loved Wilhelmus à Brakel responded affirmatively to this question. Many among the godly cherished his well-read *Christian's Reasonable Service*, where Brakel viewed the essence of faith as trust in God's promises and not as the full assurance of received grace.³⁴ Brakel asserted that assurance was a "fruit of faith," and would sometimes only be obtained after a struggle of some years. Many ministers subscribed to this view, including Jacob Groenewegen and Friedrich Lampe.

VanderGroe argued that assurance was inseparable from faith, that is, assurance is "of the essence" of true faith. Based on Question 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism, VanderGroe stated that faith was "a certain knowledge" and a "sure confidence" that "remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation" have been granted to the believer. Many new believers who lacked assurance of faith were discouraged by this view, and many critics responded. Geertje Raaphorst, who had been such a great blessing to VanderGroe, wrote on November 7, 1742: "That you posit assurance to be of the essence of faith grieves many upright, godly souls who have learned to distinguish in their hearts the essence of faith from the assurance of faith."³⁵

VanderGroe defended his views in an essay called *Beschrijvinge van het oprecht en ziel-zaligend Geloove* (Description of Upright and Soul-Saving Faith), which caused Jacob Groenewegen to declare that VanderGroe taught "a faith without spiritual exercises," which he regarded as an affront to the Spirit's work in young believers. VanderGroe then dealt with this issue in *Toetsteen der ware en valsche Genade* (Touchstone of True and False Grace), and in his Heidelberg Catechism sermons, printed here for the first time in English. Finally, he also wrote directly to Groenewegen to defend his understanding of faith and assurance, showing how it conformed to Eswijler's booklet.³⁶

34. Brienens, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," 286.

35. Van Lieburg, "Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe," 20.

36. Van Lieburg, "Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe," 20.

Shortly afterwards, a related matter created tension in the orthodox subculture of the Netherlands. This was the publication of an anonymous pamphlet against the so-called “Knabbenhouwers,”³⁷ a religious conventicle that met on Sunday evenings and held some extreme views regarding salvation. This group claimed that man is totally passive in knowing Jesus as personal Savior, and that the knowledge of sin and misery must lead the sinner to suicidal thoughts before he might attain to assurance of faith.³⁸ Though not immediately evident, later it became known that VanderGroe was the author of this pamphlet. VanderGroe had little patience for those who did not hold a biblical view of salvation and thus kept people from the welcoming arms of the Savior.

Justification (1758–1761)

VanderGroe also became involved in a controversy regarding the doctrine of justification in the late 1750s. The question was whether justification is from eternity and precedes the exercise of faith, or whether it occurs only upon the exercise of faith. VanderGroe supported the latter position, claiming justification upon the exercise of faith alone.³⁹ Brakel held the same position, asserting that the experience of true faith begins with regeneration, and making a distinction between God’s purpose in eternity and its execution in time. He wrote, “God decreed from eternity to justify, but his decree is not justification as such.”⁴⁰ VanderGroe agreed, and emphasized that justification was only possible upon a believing reception of the gospel. He further argued that “preparatory exercises did not necessarily have to be evidence of the new birth, for they were usually rooted in ‘legal’ human activity.”⁴¹

This debate developed in reaction to growing Arminianism within the Reformed Church. Twelve professors of theology, which included Johannes van den Honert and Johannes Jacobus Schultens of Leiden, attacked Alexander Comrie (1706–1774) who, to squelch Arminianism in the bud, taught that justification of believers had already occurred in eternity, and that the various stages in the spiritual life of the elect were the outworking of justification from eternity. This debate prompted VanderGroe to write a treatise on justification

37. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 20.

38. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 31.

39. Brienens, “Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784),” 279.

40. G. C. Berkouwer & L. B. Smedes, *Studies in Dogmatics: Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 152.

41. Brienens, “Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784),” 287.

in 1759 which he passed around among friends.⁴² In this treatise, he tried to calm the troubled waters by asserting that this sad and difficult controversy could only be settled if everyone would return to the authority and proper exegesis of Scripture and abide by the Reformed confessions. This manuscript was not published until 1978, when VanderGroe's privately owned manuscripts were finally printed.⁴³

Law and Gospel

During his lifetime, VanderGroe fought against doctrinal decay within the national church, fearing it would result in antinomianism and immorality. On the other hand, he warned against doctrinally orthodox ministers with legalistic tendencies. He spoke of them as "those who saw value for eternity in 'experiential tears, sighs and beggings,' who keep men away from Christ, and who build their religion on foundations of sand."⁴⁴ VanderGroe battled on both fronts and therefore pressed the need of gospel-centeredness, and the centrality of faith as expressed in Question 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism. He believed that faith empties the believer of self yet enables him to lay hold of Christ. This view of faith balanced VanderGroe's preaching between the just demands of the law and the gracious promises of the gospel.

In his sermons, VanderGroe strictly warned against the separation of law and gospel. He said that "the law, without adding the gospel is merely a dead, condemned letter, and the gospel without the law is merely a useless bandage."⁴⁵ For this reason he stood strongly against ministers who minimized the preaching of the law and its condemnation of sinners, and who stressed only the love of God. Yet mixing or confounding the law and the gospel was also a serious offense to VanderGroe, for it left poor souls stranded between a powerless law and a powerless gospel, leaving them unrepentant and uncomforted by Christ's grace.

Regarding Christ and salvation, VanderGroe said both should be offered to all. He urged on the one hand that we "open wide the way to Christ," while on the other hand, we "declare all unbelievers guilty for despising and rejecting

42. Brienens, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," 286.

43. Brienens, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," 286.

44. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 27.

45. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 121.

the Lord Jesus Christ, offered to them in the gospel. Their condemnation will be just.”⁴⁶

Publications

As a minister of the Word, VanderGroe was able, well educated, and well equipped. His personal library numbered at least 15,000 volumes and contained material from all fields of knowledge, including not only assorted versions of the Bible, commentaries, church fathers, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology, but also literature in the disciplines of law, medicine, philosophy, natural history, world history, linguistics, and literature.⁴⁷

Despite his extensive knowledge, VanderGroe did not publish much in the first years of his ministry. As we have seen, the book on old orthodox Reformed doctrine was not attributed to VanderGroe until 1756, and his *Beschrijvinge van het oprecht en ziel-zaligend Geloof* remained unpublished until the nineteenth century. Much of his writing in his early years was confined to prefaces for the works of other authors. However, in the later years of his ministry, VanderGroe became a prolific author, contributing extensively to the field of theology. His writings can be divided into prefaces, dogmatic and polemical treatises, sermons (including his major work on the Heidelberg Catechism), and letters.⁴⁸ Many were published posthumously.

Prefaces

The first published preface of VanderGroe was written for George Hutcheson’s two-volume *Practical Explanation of the Minor Prophets*, and a few years later, a preface for Hutcheson’s *Explanation of the Book of Job*, published by Abraham Kallewier in Leiden. Later he wrote prefaces for new publications of the works of Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, issued by VanPelt and Douci, who had become prominent figures in the eighteenth-century market for experiential

46. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 122, Brienens, “Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784),” 291. The full quote reads: “Begrijpen wij Gereformeerden deze zaak wel anders, als dat het aanbod van Christus en de zaligheid in het Evangelium algemeen geschiedt aan alle mensen, die onder het evangelium leven? Houden wij dit niet staande, aan de ene kant om alle verlegen zondaren de weg tot Christus wijd te openen? Aan de andere kant om alle ongelovigen in de schuld te stellen, dat zij de Heere Jezus Christus, Die haar in het Evangelie aangeboden wordt, versmaden en verwerpen, en dat alzo haar verdoemenis in die weg rechtvaardig zal zijn?”

47. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 34.

48. Categories made by Brienens, “Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784),” 280.

writings from Dutch, Scottish, and English divines.⁴⁹ Their publication of the sermons of the Erskines was very successful. The nine prefaces VanderGroe wrote between 1746 and 1755 were not merely introductory material to recommend a book, but mini-treatises regarding themes related to the book and expressing VanderGroe's own views.

Dogmatic and Polemical Treatises

The polemical writings of VanderGroe include his defense of the Eswijler booklet in his *De Oude Orthodoxe Leer der Ware Gereformeerde Kerk*. This treatise challenged the arguments of detractor du Vignon, and placed the Eswijler booklet within the tradition of Reformed orthodoxy. Later this work included an attachment which engaged the counter-arguments of the Groningen professor, Antonius Driessen.

The *Toetsteen der ware en valsche genade*, published by Douci and VanPelt in 1739–1740, focused on the theme of Word and Spirit. This three-volume work confronted the hypocrisy of mere outward Christian piety, and was based on the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism and the parable of the Pharisee and the publican.⁵⁰ In this polemic work, VanderGroe explained the differences between the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of true believers and the false religion of hypocrites and temporary believers. Though trying to avoid polemical overtones, VanderGroe clearly pointed out ideas which he found erroneous.⁵¹ He wrote this book in the form of a commentary, using the most relevant passages of the Heidelberg Catechism.⁵² In this treatise, he also argued against the revival, or what he called “disturbances” in *Nijkerk*. Though VanderGroe did not directly fight this “disturbance” in his *Toetssteen*, he clearly took the side of those who questioned the genuineness of this “revival” on biblical and doctrinal grounds.

VanderGroe summarized the essence of the conflict in his *Beschrijvinge van het oprecht en ziel-zaligend geloove*. This work focused on the need for the personal application of the three great truths expounded by the Heidelberg

49. Van Pelt and Douci became important publishers of pietistic and Puritan authors. They had close contact with Rev. Hugh Kennedy (1698–1764), the Erskine brothers (Ebenezer, 1680–1754 and Ralph, 1685–1752), with their first publication in 1740. Between 1753 and 1761, they published several theological treatises by Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine. VanderGroe became involved in the Erskine project, and also maintained contact with the Leiden printer, Kallewier, who published many theological works.

50. The treatise on the parable of the tax-collector has been published separately as well.

51. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 23.

52. Van Lieburg, “Een letterschat voor vromen: Het leven van Theodorus VanderGroe,” 23.

Catechism: conviction of sin, deliverance in Christ, and growth in sanctification. However, VanderGroe decided not to publish this book in his lifetime, and it was not printed until 1978.⁵³

A second major polemical writing is the Dutch translation of Gisbertus Voeitius's Latin work, *Schriftmatige en rekenkundige verhandeling over de kerkelijke macht* (Scriptural and Systematic Treatment of Church Order). VanderGroe's name was not directly attached to the work; instead it was attributed to the so-called *Liefhebber van waarheit en vrede* (A Lover of Truth and Peace). Later on the author was identified as VanderGroe himself.⁵⁴ Another treatise on church polity is VanderGroe's *Klaere en grondige wederlegging van het nieuw verzonnen Hollandtsch kerkelijk beroepings-recht*, which was a response to H. Bruinings and P. Hofstede (Rotterdam, 1756). Four additional publications of VanderGroe followed which all responded to the slanders of Bruinings and Hofstede.

Sermons

VanderGroe's major publications were his sermons. They include *De genezing van blinde Bartimeus* (The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus); a two-volume set of forty-eight sermons on the sufferings of Christ (*Acht-en-veertig predikatiën over het lijden van onzen Heere Jezus Christus*), which was published before VanderGroe's death; a volume of seventeen sermons on conversion (*De bekeering*); a three-volume sermonic exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism; sermons on the parable of the Pharisee and the publican; and two volumes of sermons for the national day of prayer (*Verzameling van zestien biddags-predikatiën; Veertien nagelatene biddags-predikatiën*), containing thirty sermons in all. These prayer day sermons express VanderGroe's concerns about the decay of the church and the increasing influence of the Enlightenment. Except for the set of sermons on the sufferings of Christ and one prayer day sermon, all of the sermons were published posthumously.⁵⁵

VanderGroe's treatise on the Heidelberg Catechism, *Des Christens eenigen troost in leven en sterven, of Verklaring van den Heidelbergschen Catechismus* (*The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death, or Explanation of the Heidelberg*

53. A possible reason for this delay is given by Brienens, who mentions the dogmatical conflict with Comrie regarding justification. When VanderGroe became more familiar with this subject, he had to acknowledge the similarities between Comrie and himself, and refrained from publishing his treatise. See Brienens, "Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784)," 280.

54. Westerbeke, *Theodorus VanderGroe: Leven en Leer*, 256.

55. Westerbeke, *Theodorus VanderGroe: Leven en Leer*, 258.

Catechism), expounds this confession sentence by sentence, and even phrase by phrase. It is VanderGroe's *magnum opus*, both in terms of its size and, in VanderGroe's own mind, its doctrinal value and importance. Written from a biblical, Reformed, doctrinal, and experiential perspective, it became esteemed nearly as highly by the godly in the Netherlands.

Like nearly all Dutch Further Reformation writers (and English Puritans), VanderGroe sharply distinguishes the converted and unconverted in the midst of the church. Living in a time when the number of converts was low and indifference among church members was high, VanderGroe's catechism sermons contain both great comforts for believers and powerful warnings to unbelievers. He also provides various pastoral applications to both groups, depending on the doctrine being treated. Repeatedly, he clearly articulates the Holy Spirit's ordinary way of saving sinners along the lines of the catechism's major outline—the experience of sin and misery as a hell-worthy sinner; of needing, taking refuge to, embracing, and knowing Jesus Christ by saving faith as the only deliverer; and of gratitude and sanctification as the fruit of such great deliverance.

Letters

Though VanderGroe wrote many pastoral letters, only a few dozen of them have been preserved and were published posthumously in 1838 in two volumes as *Brieven van Theodorus van der Groe* (Letters of Theodorus VanderGroe). In 1984, they appeared in one volume. In his will, VanderGroe stated that his widow would receive all letters written by himself, and by others to him.

One of these letters was a dedicatory epistle to Prince William IV, who was installed as regent by the Dutch provinces in May 1747. This letter appeared in both of the Hutcheson works and was likely written in October 1747. In this letter, VanderGroe spoke warmly of the loyalty among Reformed ministers to the family of Orange-Nassau. This emphasis addressed French political influence in the Netherlands, including the Roman Catholic religion, which was a threat to the Reformed Church. For VanderGroe, the promotion of Prince William IV as regent was a token of God's faithfulness to the Netherlands, and gave him hope for national repentance. VanderGroe's favor declined when William IV suffered defeat on the battlefield of Maastricht and Bergen op Zoom in 1747. He then realized that salvation must be expected from none but God alone.

Conclusion: The Last Seer of the Dutch Further Reformation

VanderGroe was given the honorific title of “the Netherlands’ Last Seer” (*Neerlands laatste ziener*), due to his prophetic warnings concerning God’s departure from the Netherlands. Seeing the church’s wandering from God and from orthodox Reformed theology caused him much grief. He said, “The light of God’s truth has exceedingly darkened amongst us, and shines but dimly on the candlestick. Our true Reformed doctrine is starting to stumble miserably in the streets.”⁵⁶ With pain in his heart, he warned that “we only have to wait for the time in which the Lord will depart from us forever.”⁵⁷ Considering VanderGroe’s life, preaching, and writings, Van Dijk justly wrote, “VanderGroe helped hear the thunder of the law, tried to break hardened hearts and alarm the hypocrites, but also strove to nurture a poor child in the arms of the Lord.”⁵⁸

—Joel R. Beeke and Marjolein de Blois

56. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 96.

57. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 97.

58. Van Dijk, *Theodorus van der Groe*, 30.

Introduction to the Dutch Further Reformation

(*Nadere Reformatie*)

The Dutch Reformation proper may be divided into four periods: the Lutheran period (1517–1526), the Sacramentarian phase (1526–1531), the Anabaptist movement (1531–1545),¹ and the most influential—the Calvinist infiltration.² From the outset of the Calvinist penetration into the Netherlands (southern Netherlands, c. 1545; northern, c. 1560), the movement showed greater strength than its persistent numerical inferiority might suggest. Nevertheless, the buds of Dutch Calvinism did not flower profusely until the seventeenth century, initiated by the Synod of Dort in particular (1618–1619), and intensified by the Dutch Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*), a primarily seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century movement, which may be dated from such early representatives as Jean Taffin (1528–1602)³ and Willem

1. Dutch Anabaptists continued to be martyred, however, until the 1570s in the Netherlands, despite the fact that the movement itself lost impetus by 1545. This chapter is revised and updated from Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Protestantism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 383–413.

2. Mention should also be made of the followers of Erasmus who precipitated the Dutch Further Reformation in a negative sense. Cf. W. Robert Godfrey, “The Dutch Reformed Response,” in *Discord, Dialogue, and Concord*, ed. Lewis W. Spitz and Wenzel Lohff (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 166–67. Godfrey also gives a succinct overview of the Calvinist aspect in “Calvin and Calvinism in the Netherlands,” in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982): 95–122. Cf. Walter Lagerwey, “The History of Calvinism in the Netherlands,” in *The Rise and Development of Calvinism*, ed. John Bratt, 63–102; Jerry D. van der Veen, “Adoption of Calvinism in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands” (B. S. T. thesis, Biblical Seminary in New York, 1951).

3. Taffin is often regarded as a precursor of the Dutch Further Reformation, due in part to his being a sixteenth-century Reformer, but S. van der Linde has argued persuasively that he should be regarded as the earliest representative of the Dutch Further Reformation (“Jean Taffin: eerste pleiter voor ‘Nadere Reformatie’ in Nederland,” *Theologia Reformata* 25 [1982]:6–29; *Jean Taffin. Hofprediker en raadsheer van Willem van Oranje* [Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1982]). Cf. C. C. Vogelaar, “Pioneers of the Second Reformation,” *The Banner of Truth* 52 (1986):150–51.

Teellinck (1579–1629),⁴ to its last brilliant lights, Alexander Comrie (1706–1774)⁵ and Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784).⁶

In this chapter, we introduce the Dutch Further Reformation by looking at the term *Nadere Reformatie*, the essence of the movement, and its assessment in secondary sources.

4. What William Perkins was to English Puritanism, Willem Teellinck was to the Dutch Further Reformation; hence these divines are often denominated as “the fathers” of these movements (Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*, 105–138).

5. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*, 281–320.

6. For a concise introduction to leading Further Reformation divines, see B. Glasius, ed., *Godgeleerd Nederland: Biographisch Woordenboek van Nederlandsche Godgeleerden*, 3 vols. (’s-Hertogenbosch: Gebr. Muller, 1851–1856); Sietse Douwes van Veen, *Voor tweehonderd jaren: Schetsen van het leven onzer Gereformeerde Vadersen*, 2nd ed. (Utrecht: Kemink & Zoon, 1905); J. P. de Bie and J. Loosjes, eds., *Biographisch Woordenboek der Protestantische Godgeleerden in Nederland*, 5 vols. (’s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1907–1943); *Christelijke Encyclopedie*, 6 vols., 2nd ed. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1959); K. Exalto, *Beleefd Geloof: Acht schetsen van gereformeerde theologen uit de 17e Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1974), and *De Kracht der Religie: Tien schetsen van Gereformeerde Oude Schrijvers uit de 17e en 18e Eeuw* (Urk: De Vuurtoren, 1976); H. Florijn, ed., *Hollandse Geloofshelden* (Utrecht: De Banier, 1981); W. van Gorsel, *De Ijver voor Zijn Huis: De Nadere Reformatie en haar belangrijkste vertegenwoordigers* (Groede: Pieters, 1981); C. J. Malan, *Die Nadere Reformatie* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir CHO, 1981); H. Florijn, *100 Portretten van Godgeleerden in Nederland uit de 16e, 17e, 18e Eeuw* (Utrecht: Den Hertog, 1982); D. Nauta, et al., *Biografisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme*, 4 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1978–1998); T. Brienens, et al., *De Nadere Reformatie. Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers* (’s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1986); T. Brienens, et al., *De Nadere Reformatie en het Gereformeerd Pietisme* (’s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1989); Joel R. Beeke, “Biographies of Dutch Second Reformation Divines,” *Banner of Truth* 54, 2 (1988) through 56, 3 (1990), a series of twenty-five articles representing the major divines of the movement; Willem J. op ’t Hof, ed., *Encyclopedie Nadere Reformatie*, 2 vols. (Utrecht: De Groot Goudriaan, 2015–2016). For bibliography of the Dutch Further Reformation, see P. L. Eggermont, “Bibliographie van het Nederlandse Pietisme in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw,” *Documentatieblad 18e eeuw* 3 (1969):17–31; W. van Gent, *Bibliotheek van oude schrijvers* (Rotterdam: Lindebergs, 1979); J. van der Haar, *Schatkamer van de Gereformeerde Theologie in Nederland (c. 1600–c. 1800): Bibliografisch Onderzoek* (Veenendaal: Antiquariaat Kool, 1987). Cf. F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 109–68, covering twelve Further Reformation divines in varying depth and quality; Cornelis Graafland, *De Zekerheid van het Geloof. Een onderzoek naar de geloofbeschouwing van enige vertegenwoordigers van reformatie en nadere reformatie* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1961), 138–244, concentrating on the doctrine of faith and assurance in fourteen Further Reformation theologians; Johannes de Boer, *De Verzegeling met de Heilige Geest volgens de opvatting van de Nadere Reformatie* (Rotterdam: Bronder, 1968), which examines the soteriological thought of fourteen Further Reformation divines.

The Term *Nadere Reformatie*

The term *Nadere Reformatie* poses a problem.⁷ There is no standard English translation of “nadere,” no doubt partly due to its inexactness, and perhaps also because the movement has been unaccountably ignored in English-speaking scholarship. Literally, “Nadere Reformatie” means a nearer, more intimate, or more precise Reformation. The intended emphasis lies on working out the initial Reformation more intimately in personal lives, in the church’s worship, and in society as a whole.

Translations of *Nadere Reformatie* inevitably express judgments of its significance. According to *Nadere Reformatie* scholars in the Netherlands, the most acceptable translation is “Further Reformation.” This is not altogether accurate, since “further” implies that the first Reformation did not proceed far enough, which was not the contention of the *Nadere Reformatie*. Rather, it sought to *apply* Reformation truths to daily life and “heart” experience. Providing, however, that “further” is understood in terms of further application of Reformed doctrine to all areas of life, this translation is probably the best to use.

Cornelis Graafland has suggested the terms “Continuing Reformation” or “Second Reformation.” But the term “continuing” has three disadvantages: It does not sufficiently distinguish the *Nadere Reformatie* from the Reformation proper; it is of recent usage in English;⁸ furthermore, it sounds awkward. “Second Reformation” is a weak translation, “misses the Dutch term’s emphasis on continuity,” and sounds too much like the Scottish Second Reformation.⁹ It does have a long pedigree, however, since “Second Reformation” was a term used by some of the Dutch divines of that era. For example, Jacobus Koelman (1632–1695), who had much contact with Scotland’s Second Reformation, spoke of the Dutch movement as a “second reformation” and a “second purging.”¹⁰

Others have dubbed the *Nadere Reformatie* descriptively as “Dutch Precisionism,” “Dutch Puritanism,” or “Dutch Pietism.” There are objections to each of these designations.

7. The term was used as early as Jean Taffin (1528–1602). Cf. L. F. Groenendijk, “De Oorsprong van de uitdrukking, ‘Nadere Reformatie,’” *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 9 (1985):128–34; S. van der Linde, “Jean Taffin: eerste pleiter voor ‘Nadere Reformatie’ in Nederland,” *Theologia Reformata* 25 (1982):7ff. Cf. W. van ’t Spijker, *De Nadere Reformatie en het Gereformeerd Pietisme*, 5ff.

8. Jonathan Neil Gerstner, *The Thousand Generation Covenant: Dutch Reformed Covenant Theology and Group Identity in Colonial South Africa, 1652–1814* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 75ff.

9. Gerstner, *Thousand Generation Covenant*, p. 75n.

10. *Christelijke Encyclopedie*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 5:128.

First, “Dutch Precisianism” is a pejorative rather than a constructive expression. It is the least acceptable representation of the *Nadere Reformatie*, since it attributes to the movement a legalistic (*wettisch*) tone which caricatures the whole. It is true that most Further Reformation divines promoted a strong negative ethic. Voetius, for example, forbade “such practices as visiting public houses, playing with dice, the wearing of luxurious clothes, dancing, drunkenness, revelry, smoking and the wearing of wigs.” Nevertheless, such “precisianism” was not an end in itself. Rather, it was cultivated “in the face of the alleged worldliness then prevailing” and “as a means of sustaining and developing individual faith and conduct against spiritual shallowness.”¹¹

Second, as for the term Dutch Puritanism, the *Nadere Reformatie* is in fact the Dutch counterpart to English Puritanism (and in some senses, to the Scottish Covenanters). The link between these movements is strong, historically and especially theologically.¹² Keith Sprunger has documented that during the seventeenth century there was an English-Scottish community of Puritan persuasion numbering tens of thousands in the Netherlands, at one point consisting of more than forty congregations and 350 ministers. The Dutch government allowed them to organize churches and form an English Classis within the Dutch Reformed church. Cornelis Pronk rightly notes: “The presence of so many English and Scottish Puritans was bound to have some influence upon the Dutch churches. Many Dutch Reformed ministers were impressed by the practical divinity of the English Puritans. They saw it as a healthy corrective to the dry intellectualistic sermonizing that was becoming the trend in their churches.”¹³ And Douglas MacMillan summarizes:

Both Puritans and Covenanters were to interact very intimately with religious life in the Netherlands. This linking...helps identify the point at which British and Dutch Calvinism had their closest contact. Both these great spiritual movements were concerned with Second Reformation issues and that concern was to shape the course of the 17th century in England and

11. Martin H. Prozesky, “The Emergence of Dutch Pietism,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 28 (1977):33.

12. For historical-theological connections between seventeenth-century English and Dutch Calvinism, see especially the writings of Keith Sprunger (*Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* [Leiden: Brill, 1982] and *The Learned Doctor William Ames: Dutch Backgrounds of English and American Puritanism* [Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972]). Cf. Douglas MacMillan, “The Connection between 17th Century British and Dutch Calvinism,” in *Not by Might nor by Power*, 1988 Westminster Conference papers, 22–31.

13. “The Dutch Puritans,” *Banner of Truth*, nos. 154–55 (July–August, 1976):3.

Scotland. Events there were, in turn, to reach deeply into the Netherlands, influencing its theology, deepening its spirituality, and linking it closely into the traumatic experiences of the British Church. We have to learn to look at the Second Reformation, not as a small, localized, Scottish, or even British, phenomenon but as a movement of international significance.¹⁴

The divines of these groups held each other in high esteem. They influenced and enriched each other through personal contact and especially a vast array of translated writings, particularly from English into Dutch.¹⁵ More Reformed theological books were printed in seventeenth-century Netherlands than in all other countries combined.¹⁶ These movements embraced similar ideals and bore similar roles: to foster biblical and God-glorifying experiential piety and ethical precision in the life of individuals, churches, and the entire nation. Only England, however, had an opportunity to work out these ideals in full, during the Cromwellian years.

Thus, despite similar outlooks, these parallel movements did have and would develop historically and theologically distinctive identities. To call the *Nadere Reformatie* “Dutch Puritanism” denies the endemic nature of the Dutch movement. Hendrikus Berkhof provides too simplistic an analysis when he states that the Further Reformation resulted merely from “the practical piety of the English Calvinists blowing over to the Netherlands.”¹⁷ Though English

14. “The Connection between 17th Century British and Dutch Calvinism,” in *Not by Might nor by Power*, 24. Willem Jan op ’t Hof also points out the influence of Dutch refugee congregations in England, noting that “it can be justifiably concluded that it is chiefly the Dutch congregations in England which are in the background of the Puritanization of spiritual life in the Netherlands” (*Engelse pietistische geschriften in het Nederlands, 1598–1622* [Rotterdam: Lindenberg, 1987], 639).

15. “From 1598 to 1622 a total of 114 editions were issued of a total of 60 translations. These 60 translations concern works by...twenty-two English authors.... Two authors are numerically preeminent among them: Cowper (18 editions of 10 translations) and Perkins (71 editions of 29 translations). Indeed, Perkins alone eclipses all the others taken together.... Auction catalogues show that Udemans possessed 20 Puritan books in Latin and 57 in English. Similarly, Voetius possessed 30 works in Latin and 270 in English.... A rough estimate for the period from 1623–1699 gives 260 new translations, 580 editions and 100 new translators. Compared to the first quarter of a century of translational activity there is a considerable increase.... The flow of translations continued unabated during the whole of the seventeenth century, which is amazing. For what one would have expected was for translations, after a period of taking firm root and of blossoming in the absence of similar originally Dutch writings, to become decreasingly popular by the middle of the century when the Dutch Pietistic writings began to appear in large numbers” (Op ’t Hof, *Engelse pietistische geschriften*, 636–37, 640, 645).

16. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism*, 307.

17. *Geschiedenis der Kerk* (Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, 1955), 228.

Puritanism was of *primary* influence on the *Nadere Reformatie*, as Willem Jan op 't Hof has ably emphasized (particularly in stressing the need for a personal, domestic, and congregational lifestyle of experimental and practical godliness),¹⁸ it was not an *exclusive* influence, for the Dutch movement was coupled with other non-English factors.¹⁹ In fact, in some respects the Dutch movement was more Puritan-Reformed than English Puritanism itself: "In England from an orthodox Reformed perspective, for all but a short period under Cromwell, there were always grossly unbiblical things to fight: the presence of bishops, superstitious rites in the Book of Common Prayer, vestments, etc. In the Netherlands none of these were present, and the task was all the more subtle. Defenders of the *status quo* were not so clearly unreformed as in England. In this context the true spirit of Puritanism came to the fore."²⁰

Despite similar emphases, English Puritanism and the *Nadere Reformatie* differed from each other in significant ways. Generally speaking, Dutch

18. Op 't Hof reaches the following conclusions: "First, the influence of Puritanism was largely embodied in writings, either in English or translated into Dutch. This is not to say that, secondly, the significance of personal contacts is to be underestimated. This applies both to Dutchmen in England and to Puritans in the Netherlands. Thirdly, the impact of Puritanism is nearly exclusively confined to exponents of the *Nadere Reformatie*. Fourthly, these men, Voetius and J. Koelman for instance, were no uncritical recipients of Puritan ideas. In the fifth place, in the course of the seventeenth century Puritan influence began to manifest itself in some new ways. In both Koelman and M. du Bois this is shown in the area of spiritual (auto)biography and in Koelman's case also in his resistance to fixed formularies. In the sixth place, most exponents of the *Nadere Reformatie* prove to have been substantially and in some cases even very decisively determined by the impact of Puritanism. In the seventh place, it was precisely the chief and the most influential exponents of the *Nadere Reformatie* who were most imbued with Puritanism. Finally, not only did Dutch devotional writers frankly confess their dependence on and orientation towards Puritans from England and Scotland, they also warmly recommended them and to the best of their ability promoted the reading of Puritan writings, which they also contributed significantly to by either undertaking translational activities themselves or stimulating others to do so. Having been nearly exclusively indebted to Puritanism for its rise and having been largely determined by it in its early period, the *Nadere Reformatie* during the whole of the seventeenth century remained exceedingly dependent on Puritanism. It is this dependence which explains why the large increase of *Nadere Reformatie* writings did not detract from the need of and the demand for Puritan works, either in English or translated into Dutch. The dependence was so great that the peak years of the *Nadere Reformatie*, 1650–1670, coincide with those of the Dutch translations of Puritan writings" (*Engelse pietistische geschriften*, 645–46; also, 583–97, 627–35). Cf. Cornelis Graafland, "De Invloed van het Puritanisme op het Ontstaan van het Gereformeerd Pietisme in Nederland," *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 7, 1 (1983):1–19. Graafland also details influences on preaching, the art of meditation, casuistry, covenanting, the administration of the Lord's Supper, and eschatology.

19. Graafland, "De Invloed van het Puritanisme op het Ontstaan van het Gereformeerd Pietisme in Nederland," *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 7 (1983):2, 15, 16.

20. Gerstner, *Thousand Generation Covenant*, 77–78.

Further Reformation divines were less interested in reforming the government and organization of the church (as long as the church was not controlled by the state) than were their English brethren. Theological emphases also varied at times; for example variations existed between these groups on the doctrine of assurance.²¹ The Dutch were more inclined to emphasize theology as a science, whereas the English emphasized the practical aspects of theology.²² These variations are not respected sufficiently when the Dutch movement is collapsed too fully into the English by the use of “Dutch Puritanism.”²³ As Jonathan Neil Gerstner concludes: “To notice a similar role between two movements does not imply that one is dependent on the other. Even if English thought had given the initial impetus to the Continuing Reformation, it does not follow that its success was not due to similar ideas present in the Netherlands.”²⁴

“Dutch Pietism” might appear at first to be an acceptable alternative to represent the *Nadere Reformatie*. Its usage has been widespread,²⁵ underscoring

21. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*, 369–70.

22. Pronk, “The Dutch Puritans,” *The Banner of Truth*, nos. 154–55 (July–August, 1976):6. Gerstner explains: “As orthodox Reformed in their doctrine as the English Puritans were, they were primarily pastors, not formal theologians. Thus one finds a remarkable scarcity of systematic theologies. Dutch Reformed thought, while retaining a strong emphasis on the pulpit, produced a remarkable number of theological works, the majority addressed to the average person. Catechism preaching was perhaps part of the reason, but it seems they possessed a greater tendency towards system building. So the Continuing Reformation pastor strove for his parishioner’s conversion, and at the same time to make him a dogmatician” (*Thousand Generation Covenant*, 78). Sprunger notes that Ames found the Dutch somewhat too intellectual and not sufficiently practical, and therefore promoted Puritan piety “in an effort to make Dutchmen into Puritans” (*The Learned Doctor Ames*, 260). Cf. Hugo Visscher, *Guilielmus Amesius, Zijn Leven en Werken* (Haarlem: J. M. Stap, 1894).

23. This term has been used more accurately to depict English-speaking Puritan churches in the Netherlands (cf. Douglas Campbell, *The Puritan in Holland, England and America*, 4th ed., 2 vols. [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1892]; Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism*; T. Brienen, *De prediking van de Nadere Reformatie* [Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1974]). Van der Linde prefers “English Puritanism in the Netherlands” to “Dutch Puritanism,” since the English Puritans in the Netherlands confined themselves largely to their own circles (cf. “Jean Taffin: eerste pleiter voor ‘Nadere Reformatie’ in Nederland,” *Theologia Reformata* 25 [1982]: 6ff.). Moreover, the problem of using “English Puritanism” is compounded by the complexities of defining Puritanism itself (Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*, 129–30n); cf. Randall Pederson, *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603–1689* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

24. *Thousand Generation Covenant*, 77.

25. “The word ‘Pietist’ originally indicated ‘an affected and indeed feigned kind of righteousness.’ So K. D. Schmidt, *Grundriss der Kirchengeschichte*, 5th ed., Göttingen 1967, 416. M. Schmidt reports that the term became established after J. Feller, Professor of Poetry at Leipzig, used it with favourable connotations in two popular verses in 1689. See M. Schmidt, ‘Pietismus’ in *Die Religion in geschichte and Gegenwart*, 3rd ed., Tübingen 1961, v. col. 374” (Prozesky, “The Emergence of Dutch Pietism,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 28 [1977]:29–37).

that the *Nadere Reformatie* was pietistic in many respects. Problems with this term, however, also exist. (1) Calling the Dutch movement Pietism suggests too strongly an intimate German connection.²⁶ Moreover, the *Nadere Reformatie* predates Spener's initial appeal for reform by nearly half a century and became a more extensive movement than German Pietism. (2) Pietism in German Lutheranism came to be regarded as being largely concerned with the believer's inner life rather than with transforming society, whereas most *Nadere Reformatie* divines were dedicated also to the latter.²⁷ (3) Pietism is usually regarded as a protest against rational Protestant scholastic theology and doctrinal precision, whereas many *Nadere Reformatie* divines were formulators of Reformed orthodoxy and meticulous doctrinal analysts:

Gisbertus Voetius is generally acknowledged as both the greatest Dutch Reformed scholastic theologian and one of the greatest representatives of the Continuing Reformation. Pietism as it would later develop would more and more show marked antipathy for all but the most simple doctrinal concepts.... Pietism was ready to embrace and work with all other believers who strove after a godly life, regardless of their confession. Zinzendorf tried to bring all churches together ignoring theological differences. The Continuing Reformation, on the contrary, was on the polemical forefront against theological errors, seeing the divisions within Protestantism as far from irrelevant. William Ames, one of the direct links between English Puritanism and the Dutch Continuing Reformation called Lutherans

26. Stoeffler (*The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, which attempts to define "Pietism" as embracing English Puritanism, the Dutch Further Reformation, and German Pietism, 1–23) and James Tanis (*Dutch Calvinistic Pietism in the Middle Colonies: A Study in the Life and Theology of Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967] and "The Heidelberg Catechism in the Hands of the Calvinistic Pietists," *Reformed Review* 24 [1970–71]:154–61) follow German church historians in using the term, "Dutch Pietism," notably Heinrich Heppe (*Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformierten Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande* [Leiden: Brill, 1879]) and Albrecht Ritschl (*Geschichte des Pietismus*, 3 vols. [Bonn: Marcus, 1880–1886]). For the influence of German Pietism on the Dutch Further Reformation, see Graafland, "De Gereformeerde Orthodoxie en het Pietisme in Nederland," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 19 (1965):466–79; J. Steven O'Malley, *Pilgrimage of Faith: The Legacy of the Otterbeins* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1973); Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*. Cf. Martin H. Prozesky, "The Emergence of Dutch Pietism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 28 (1977):28–37; Willem Balke, "Het Pietisme in Oostfriesland," *Theologia Reformata* 21 (1978):308–27.

27. S. van der Linde, *Vromen en Verlichten: Twee eeuwen Protestantse Geloofsbeleving 1650–1850* (Utrecht: Aartsbisshoppelijk Museum Utrecht, 1974), 2; Gerstner, *Thousand Generation Covenant*, 76.

heretics. When Pietism appeared on the continent, leaders of the Dutch Continuing Reformation like Wilhelmus à Brakel attacked the movement.²⁸

Confusing misconceptions arise when the term “Pietism” is used to describe the Further Reformation, for these terms represent distinct movements which vary in a number of important senses.²⁹ German Pietism, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Further Reformation had much in common. Each was rooted deeply in the sixteenth-century Reformation and longed for more thorough reform; yet each movement retained a distinct historical, theological, and spiritual character.³⁰

The Essence of the Dutch Further Reformation

Several additional factors also served to promote the emergence of the Dutch Further Reformation. After the Reformation in the Netherlands, strenuous efforts were made to replace the Roman Catholic Church with the Reformed Church as an inclusive people’s church (*volkskerk*). During the Reformation,

28. Gerstner, *Thousand Generation Covenant*, 76. According to Graafland, Dutch Further Reformation divines were united in emphasizing the importance of doctrine. Many of them (including even the Teellincks and the Brakels) viewed themselves as being free from “scholasticizing” in formulating doctrine, but nevertheless did frequently utilize scholastic terms and methodology, as is abundantly evident in Wilhelmus à Brakel’s *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* (4 vols.). Flexibility and variety in terms of scholastic methodology were welcomed. Unlike German Pietists, none of the Further Reformation divines would subscribe to today’s popular charges against Reformed scholasticism as being cold and irrelevant. Even Cocceius, known for his approach of biblical theology in a covenantal matrix, used a substantial amount of scholastic methodology. In fact, Gerstner subtitles the Voetian–Cocceian controversy, “The Battle of Two Scholastic Systems” (*Thousand Generation Covenant*, 68–75). Richard Muller’s conclusions relative to Reformed scholasticism (see Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*, 5n) hold true also for the Dutch Further Reformation divines. Cf. Charles McCoy, “The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius” (PhD dissertation, Yale, 1957); H. B. Visser, *De Geschiedenis van den Sabbatstrijd onder de Gereformeerden in de Zeventiende Eeuw* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1939); T. N. Hanekam, ed., *Ons Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (Kaapstad, 1952), 210; Prozesky, “The Emergence of Dutch Pietism,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 28 (1977):31ff.; H. Faulenbach, *Weg and Zell; der Erkenntnis Christi. Eine Untersuchung zur Theologie des Johannes Cocceius* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973); Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 113–15; C. Vogelaar, “The ‘Unknown’ Voetius Remembered,” *The Banner of Truth* 55 (1989):182–83.

29. “Deze termen suggereren een fundamentele eenheid, terwijl in werkelijkheid een zeer gedifferentieerde beweging voor ons staat met fundamentele verschillen in allerlei opzicht” (van der Linde, “Jean Taffin: eerste pleiter voor ‘Nadere Reformatie’ in Nederland,” *Theologia Reformata* 25 [1982]:7; see also 28n). Cf. C. Vogelaar, “The Second or ‘Further’ Reformation,” *The Banner of Truth* 52 (1986):40–41.

30. W. van ’t Spijker, “De Nadere Reformatie,” in *De Nadere Reformatie: Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers*, 6–16.

one-tenth of the population held membership in the Reformed church. By the end of the seventeenth century more than sixty percent of the Dutch population were members of the Reformed Church which possessed a “preferred status” (*bevoorrechte*) with the government.³¹ The church’s success in acquiring external growth, however, had dire consequences for spiritual life. Abraham Kuyper claimed that this additional fifty percent of the population which flooded into the church ruined its Reformed distinctiveness: “From that moment on it was impossible to maintain church discipline.”³² It became easy to confuse being anti-Catholic with being Reformed. Nominal church membership and loose living became fashionably acceptable. Spiritual and ethical sterility grew rampantly, particularly when combined with newfound prosperity. The United East-India Company, formed in 1602, and other Dutch industry ushered in a period of unparalleled affluence. The majority were inclined to live for this life rather than for the world to come. Moreover, the state increasingly interfered in church matters and church discipline.³³ The state controlled the universities where Reformed ministers were being trained under the increasing influence of Rationalism, particularly the philosophy of Descartes and Spinoza.

These spiritual, social, and intellectual conditions existed in sharp tension with historic Dutch Calvinism which was intrinsically oriented toward sound doctrine and piety. The Calvinism of the Canons of Dort stood in marked contrast to the spirit of the age. Moreover, the stipulations the Synod of Dort had laid down with regard to the supervision of pastors, professors, and theological writings were not being followed. All of these circumstances, combined with the influence of English Puritanism, German Pietism, the Genevan reform,³⁴

31. “While they were not really state churches, they were folk churches. In such a church the tendency always exists to become so closely identified with the prevailing culture that its message becomes little more than a lifeless reiteration of prevailing values. This was overwhelmingly the case in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands...during the seventeenth century. Preaching was largely a matter of setting forth correct theological dogmas and generally accepted middle class virtues.... Any attempt to move in the direction of the spirituality and ethics of the New Testament was decried as ‘precisianism’ or worse” (Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 115–16).

32. *E Voto Dordraceno* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1905), 3:215.

33. Jacobus Koelman, for example, “opposed governmental interference in church life on several fronts. He rejected the government’s right to call ministers and to select elders and deacons. He fought against its low view of Christian living and its lack of maintaining Christian discipline in conjunction with the administration of the sacraments. And he staunchly opposed the use of read forms and the observance of church feast days” (Joel R. Beeke, “Jacobus Koelman,” *The Banner of Truth* 55 [1989]:27).

34. Genevan input came particularly through Jean Taffin, who studied under Calvin and Beza, and whose views are similar to those of the Teellincks, who were primarily influenced

and native Dutch influences (e.g., medieval mysticism,³⁵ the *Devotio Moderna*, and Anabaptism³⁶—each of which emphasized sanctification), gave rise to the Dutch Further Reformation and its protest against the laxity of the age. Reflecting the concern of the Further Reformation, P. de Witte wrote, “Oh times, oh morals! What do parents do but bring up their children to become the prey of all kinds of seductive spirits, such as the papists, Anabaptists, Arminians, and libertines? Yes, even to become the booty of the devil, to be the heirs of eternal damnation and the firewood of hell.”³⁷

The Dutch Further Reformation was a movement that arose out of the ashes of the burning expectation which had moved the early Reformers. Also the early Further Reformation divines envisioned a theocratic society and an ideal church in which the bulk of the population would be involved in personal and communal renewal. Reference was frequently made to the unbreakableness of a “three-fold cord,” consisting of God, the Netherlands, and the House of Orange. But the vision that the Netherlands would yet become “the New Israel of the West” in society and church life proved to be an unattainable ideal. The post-Reformers lived to view the failure of that dream. They faced the painful reality that the majority of parishioners had not become more spiritual as a result of the Reformation. To their followers, many of whom found

by English Puritanism. Balke feels that op 't Hof minimizes Taffin's influence in order to emphasize the role of the Teellincks in the Further Reformation (W. J. op 't Hof, *De Bibliografie van Eewout Teellinck* [Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1988]; W. J. op 't Hof, C. A. de Niet, H. Uil, *Eewout Teellinck in handschriften* [Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1989]). Cf. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 116; van der Linde, “Jean Taffin: eerste pleiter voor ‘Nadere Reformatie’ in Nederland,” *Theologia Reformata* 25 (1982):6–29.

35. Graafland, “De invloed van het Puritanisme op het ontstaan van het Gereformeerd Pietisme in Nederland,” *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 7 (1983):11–12; op 't Hof, *Engelse pietistische geschriften*, 599–600, 640.

36. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 118ff. The *Devotio Moderna* was “a devotional movement of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries chiefly associated with the Brethren of the Common Life; their founder, Gerard Groote; and their best-known writer, Thomas à Kempis” (P. H. Davids, “Devotio Moderna,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Walter Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 317). Cf. R. R. Post, *The Modern Devotion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968); T. P. van Zip, *Gerard Groote, Ascetic and Reformer (1340–1384)* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963); Albert Hyma, *The Brethren of the Common Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950). With regard to Anabaptism, op 't Hof concludes that the Further Reformation “was one of the answers to the Anabaptist reproach that Reformed doctrine did not lead to sanctity of life” (*Engelse pietistische geschriften*, 640–41; cf. 606–607).

37. Dedication of his *Catechesatie over den Heidebergischen Catechismus* (which underwent thirty printings in the seventeenth century!), cited in W. Verboom, *De Catechese van de Reformatie en de Nadere Reformatie* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1986), 251.

conventicles (*gezelschappen*)³⁸ more spiritually edifying than formal worship, the church was no longer the communion of saints, but at best a very mixed multitude and at worst a “Babylon” or an “Egypt.” Jodocus van Lodenstein’s assessment of the Reformed church in his day is typical of that of later Further Reformation divines: “Babylon of Babylons, a thousand times worse than that of the Papacy because of the light that she had but did not rightly use.”³⁹ The church seems “more deformed than reformed,” he lamented. “There is no

38. In the Further Reformation a desire for intimate Christian fellowship led to the development of “gatherings of the godly” in private homes to expound the Scriptures and to speak about spiritual truths in relation to the experimental leadings of God with His people. These were called *gezelschappen* (literally, “fellowships”) in the Netherlands. “Fellowship,” however, does not fully convey the Dutch meaning of *gezelschap*. Consequently, *gezelschap* is usually translated as “conventicle,” the term ascribed to parallel meetings in Scotland. (In English Puritanism such meetings were known as conventicles and in German Pietism as *collegiae pietatis*.) Only in Scotland were conventicles more successful as a whole than in the Netherlands due largely to closer supervision by the presbytery on a long-term basis. In the Netherlands *gezelschappen* were also spiritually beneficial to many and were closely supervised for a time, but on occasion they turned into unsupervised, elitist groups which promoted critical assessment of sermons and highly introspective lifestyles (cf. van’t Spijker, “De Nadere Reformatie,” in *De Nadere Reformatie: Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers*, 14). Stoeffler notes that conventicles were accepted by Further Reformation divines “as legitimate in many places. Voetius had recommended them and various ecclesiastical bodies among the Reformed churches had passed legislation to regulate them. They had started out as private meetings presided over by the pastor and held either on Sunday afternoon or on a weekday evening. The activities included singing, the reading of Scripture, discussion of a portion of Scripture, discussion of the sermon, and prayer. Gradually, however, they came close to being *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*, or small churches within the territorial church. While membership in the latter was based upon baptism and confirmation, conversion was considered the basic condition for acceptability within the *ecclesiolae*. Thus the conventicle in Pietistic practice developed into a closely knit religious fellowship” (*The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 160). “The use of conventicles is instructive inasmuch as they were necessary adjuncts of the church where people could experience God in small group encounter. In these intimate fellowships discussion and other sharing was possible so that believers felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and were edified. Whereas the history of pietism has portrayed these ‘holy clubs’ as more bane than blessing, in the Netherlands, and also in the New World, they were often a creative instrument in the strengthening of personal relationships between God and his people and within the community as a whole. The ‘communion of saints’ is a necessity and, if the church in its ordinary ministry does not effect it, extraordinary measures must be taken. The use of conventicles was an extraordinary measure and one which proved its merit. When opened to all who desired to come, they became even more beneficial to the Christian community” (Osterhaven, “The Experiential Theology of Early Dutch Calvinism,” *Reformed Review* 27 [1974]:189). Cf. Joanne J. Jung, *Godly Conversation: Rediscovering the Puritan Practice of Conference* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

39. J. van Lodensteyn’s *Negen Predicaties*, ed. Evarardus van der Hooght (Rotterdam: Gebr. Hoge, n.d.), 197; cf. 152ff.

practicing of the truth, but a parroting of the words of the catechism is all that one finds among Reformed people.”⁴⁰

Another prominent Further Reformation divine, Bernardus Smytegelt, complained:

There are few converted preachers. Many of them are lazy idlers, vain fops.... Among external professors you will find much chaff and hardly a grain of wheat. There are heaps of external professors, and are they not indifferent and ungodly? What are they like in the families? Dear man! Do you not know how scarce pious parents are? How rare it is to find a godly mother or grandmother! How unusual to find a pious servant or maid! How unusual to find godliness among children as with Timothy!... How few are acquainted with the Bible! How few use the Bible regularly in the home! How few pray with each other, teach each other, and seek to lead each other toward heaven!⁴¹

Consequently, in opposition to sin and complacency, an urgent, zealous call went out for fresh personal, church,⁴² and societal reform: *The scriptural appeal for sanctification must be zealously pursued; Reformation doctrine must be lived*. S. van der Linde, a leading Dutch scholar on the Further Reformation, rightly affirms that the movement must not be equated with “non-dogmatical” (*ondogmatisch*) Christendom; rather, its goal was to join doctrine (*leer*) to the whole of daily life (*leven*): “The Further Reformation... is not at all a-dogmatic or anti-dogmatic. It only desires that dogma be experienced as spirit and life.”⁴³

The protest of the Further Reformation is not primarily against dogmatism as engendering a quenching of the Spirit, but much more against a certain *vitalism* as well as *secularism* whereby one observes the Spirit as being grieved.⁴⁴ Elsewhere van der Linde expands these concerns and notes: “The Further Reformation sides entirely with the Reformation and levels criticism not so much

40. Pieter Proost, *Jodocus van Lodenstein* (Amsterdam: J. Brandt en Zoon, 1880), 133–34.

41. *Des Christens Eenige Troost in Leven en Sterven, of Verklaringe over den Heidelbergschen Catechismus in LII Predicatie; Benevens V Belydenis-Predicatie* (Middelburg: Ottho en Pieter van Thol, Den Haag, en A. L. en M. H. Callenfels, 1747), 336.

42. For the ecclesiology of the Further Reformation, see S. van der Linde, *Opgang en voortgang der reformatie* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976), 189–200.

43. “De Godservaring bij W. Teellinck, D. G. à Brakel en A. Comrie,” *Theologia Reformata* 16 (1973):205.

44. S. van der Linde, “Het Werk van de Heilige Geest in de Gemeente: Een appreciatie van de Nadere Reformatie,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 10 (1956):3.

against the *reformata* (the church which is reformed), but rather against the *reformanda* (the church which needs to be reformed).⁴⁵

Moreover, though the Further Reformation is preeminently concerned with spiritual life (*geestelijk leven*) and experience (*bevindelijk*), so that a heavy accent falls on the practice of piety (*praxis pietatis; praktijk der godzaligheid*) and even on precision (*preciesheid*), there is notwithstanding an array of emphases: “In Voetius we have the church-organizer, in Ames a very original theologian, in Teellinck and à Brakel, divines of practical religion, and in Lodensteyn and Saldenus, the men of ‘mysticism,’ cross-bearing, and meditation upon the life to come.”⁴⁶

Despite diversity, however, van der Linde concludes that there is an underlying element of “precision” in the Further Reformation which is inseparable from a fervent desire to counteract prevailing impiety with a piety which “consciously consecrates all of life to God.”⁴⁷

Several attempts have been made to define the core of the Dutch Further Reformation as a logical development from and application of the Reformation proper.⁴⁸ Herman Witsius emphasized that the motto, “the Reformed church needs to be ever reforming” (*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*) applies only to the church’s life and not to doctrine since Reformation doctrine was established as foundational truth. Every Further Reformation divine was convinced he was following his Reformed forebears and upholding Reformed orthodoxy, although some pointed out defects in the Reformation era, usually centering around the fact that the Reformation divines were also sons of their time. For example, Teellinck gently chides the Reformers for being more

45. “De betekenis van de Nadere Reformatie voor Kerk en Theologie,” *Kerk en Theologie* 5 (1954):216.

46. S. van der Linde, “Het Werk van de Heilige Geest in de Gemeente: Een appreciatie van de Nadere Reformatie,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 10 (1956):218.

47. *Het Gereformeerde Protestantisme* (Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, 1957), 9.

48. Gerstner provides the following summary: “The movement viewed itself as a continuation of the first Reformation, indeed not as significant as the first one.... [Its] task was to apply these truths. Worship had to be purified so that only what was prescribed in God’s Word would stand. The State was constantly usurping the authority and even the material goods of the church. Above all the gospel must not be only intellectually understood, but people must be converted to saving faith through the preaching of the Word. They must also be instructed in the truths of God’s Word and brought more and more closely in communion with him ethically and devotionally. One’s time must be used for the glory of God. One’s work must be seen as a calling to glorify God and the Roman Catholic idea of ‘time-killing’ recreations had to be rejected. Thus this Continuing Reformation was seen as consistently applying the truths of the first” (*Thousand Generation Covenant*, 75–76). Cf. Joel R. Beeke, “‘Nadere Reformatie,’” in *Making Confession and Then...* by A. Hoogerland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 85–88.

concerned with the reformation of doctrine than of life, with justification than sanctification.⁴⁹

Consequently, Heinrich Heppe defines the Further Reformation as “a striving for the completion of the church reformation of the sixteenth century (as being a mere reform of doctrine) by way of a revival of piety or by a reformation of life.”⁵⁰ Johannes Hofmeyr concludes: “Although this movement also had other spiritual fathers, it can be contended that the central thrust of the Further Reformation (which involves a personal spiritual piety, an articulated ecclesiology and a theocratic outlook on society) is broadly derived from Calvin. It should therefore be regarded not as a correction but as a development of the Reformation.”⁵¹ J. van Genderen enlarges these concepts:

By this term, *Nadere Reformatie*, we mean a movement in the 17th century which was a reaction against dead orthodoxy and [the] secularization of Christianity in the Church of the Reformation and which insisted on the practice of faith. This may also be called a special form of Pietism, because the central idea is the “praxis pietatis.” The origin of the pietistic trend lies in England and the father of Puritan Pietism [who] was William Perkins. Via Willem Teellinck and Guilielmus Amesius a direct influence on a kindred movement in Holland ensued. To this movement belong the Teellincks, Voetius, van Lodenstein, Saldenus, the two Brakels, and especially also Witsius. This movement is not meant as a correction of the Reformation but as the consequence of it. The background of the conspicuous preciseness is the desire to serve God fully according to His will.⁵²

Cornelis Graafland, another leading Dutch scholar on the Further Reformation, refers to it as a movement “which turned against the generally poor conditions prevailing in the Reformed church...to achieve a radical and complete sanctification of all facets of life.” Graafland describes the movement as a “deepening and broadening of the sixteenth-century Reformation.”⁵³

49. Cornelis Graafland, “Kernen en contouren van de Nadere Reformatie,” in *De Nadere Reformatie: Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers*, 351–52.

50. *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformierten Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande*, 6.

51. “The Doctrine of Calvin as Transmitted in the South African Context by Among Others the *Oude Schrijvers*,” in *Calvinus Reformator: His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society*, 260.

52. *Herman Witsius: Bijdrage tot de Kennis der Gereformeerde Theologie* (’s-Gravenhage: Guido de Bres, 1953), 264; cf. 220–25 for an exposition of this summary.

53. “De Nadere Reformatie en haar culturele context,” in *Met het woord in de Tijd*, ed. L. Westland (’s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1985), 117–38.

Another attempt to express the heart of the Further Reformation is that of P. B. van der Watt,⁵⁴ which is paraphrased by Hofmeyr as follows:

[The Further Reformation] revolted against the unspiritual state of the nation, ministers, and congregations. They plead also for a personal commitment to Christ. The experienced and tested religion is to them of central importance. Although nothing is done to undermine the church, the office, the sacrament, and the covenant, they regard rebirth as the priority. They also assume a reasonably strong Puritan point of view. They plead for the observance of the Sabbath and the carrying out of the demands of the Lord. The church must be pure and should be cleansed of all that is unholy.

Finally, they had a high regard for the Scriptures and for the Heidelberg Catechism.⁵⁵

Finally, a definition of the Further Reformation was formulated in 1983 by the group of scholars responsible for *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie*:

This movement within the “Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk,” while opposing generally prevailing abuses and misconceptions and pursuing the broadening and progressive advancement of the sixteenth-century Reformation, urges and strives with prophetic zeal for both the inner experience of Reformed doctrine and personal sanctification, as well as the radical and total sanctification of all spheres of life.⁵⁶

Despite these somewhat oversimplified generalizations of the versatile Further Reformation, its complexity is not to be underestimated. Graafland points out that the Further Reformation had no organizational structure beyond a strong feeling of spiritual kinship existing among its divines. At times this led to small organized circles such as the so-called “Utrecht Circle” under the

54. *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, 1652–1824* (Pretoria: N. G. Kerkboekhandel, 1976), 1:83.

55. “The Doctrine of Calvin as Transmitted in the South African Context by Among Others the *Oude Schrijvers*,” in *Calvinus Reformator: His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society*, 262. Hofmeyr’s own pejorative assessment of the Further Reformation surfaces most strongly when he asserts that the writings of the “old writers” (*oude schrijvers*) reveal that “subjective experience is stressed...at the cost of objective truth and the truth of the Holy Spirit” (263). Derk Visser feels that most scholars of the Further Reformation give too much prominence to a small group of Reformed clergy and to the post-Dort decades: “For if the battle against the ‘-isms’ of the 1600s [e.g., Remonstrantism, Cartesianism, Cocceianism, Labadism] was fought without the aid of the *Heidelberg Catechism* and Ursinus’s *Exposition*, the *Heidelberg* had been the norm of correct doctrine before, though it continued to produce a large catechetical literature” (cf. the bibliography in Verboom, *De Catechese van de Reformatie en de Nadere Reformatie*, 356–66).

56. *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 7 (1983):109.

leadership of Voetius or to programs for action such as those promoted by Willem Teellinck and Jacobus Koelman. For the most part, however, each Further Reformation divine brought the message of the necessity of reform to his own parishioners. The contours of this call to reform naturally took on distinctive shapes in each locality and generation.⁵⁷

Due to this lack of organization and an increasing emphasis on internal, experiential life, the Further Reformation's initial call to action in every sphere of life diminished rapidly.⁵⁸ For example, in its earlier, so-called *classical* period, the Further Reformation strongly opposed a state-dominated church and worked strenuously for the church's independence. Due to opposition from both the government and citizens, however, the classical Further Reformation could not retain this position. Anabaptist tendencies toward isolation increased with time. Various sub-movements, such as the Labadists, tended to withdraw from civil and church affairs, and became separatists, but continued to bear substantial influence on the larger movement.⁵⁹ Though few Further Reformation pietists condoned separatism,⁶⁰ numerous conventicles (*gezelschappen*) were formed for the nourishing of spiritual life. Gradually the Further Reformation became increasingly reminiscent of the *Devotio Moderna* in its emphasis on thorough separation from the unredeemed world. This is exemplified in a comparison of Willem Teellinck and Wilhelmus Schortinghuis (1700–1750; renowned for his *Het Innige Christendom* [Inner Christianity]) as typical early and late representatives of the movement: “For Teellinck the experience of the heart remained central, but then as a center which penetrated a wide area, including not only the family and the congregation, but also the

57. Graafland, “Kernen en contouren van de Nadere Reformatie,” in *De Nadere Reformatie: Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers*, 350.

58. Balke is of the opinion that this spirit of religious-social activism only applies to the prologue of the Further Reformation. For the Further Reformation on mission work, see van der Linde, “De Nadere Reformatie en de zending,” *Theologia Reformata* 10 (1967):5–16.

59. The Labadists, followers of Jean de Labadie (1610–1674), promoted a Dutch separatistic sect in an attempt to establish “a congregation of the truly regenerate.” Their decidedly separatist ecclesiology precipitated a deep crisis in the Dutch church. Cf. Heppe, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformierten Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande*, 240–374; Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908), 1:194–268; Goeters, *Die Vorbereitung des Pietismus in der reformierten Kirche der Niederlande*, 139–286; Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 162–69; G. Frank, “Jean de Labadie, Labadists,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 6:390–91; C. Graafland, “De Nadere Reformatie en het Labadisme,” in *De Nadere Reformatie en het Gereformeed Pietisme*, 275–346.

60. Brakel issued strong warnings against separatistic pietists and their denigration of the church. The Further Reformation divines were church loyalists, not separatists, who sought to bring the apostate church back to God.

entire church and nation, politics inclusive. For Schortinghuis subjective experience is the fort to which the believer withdraws himself from the world and even from the congregation around him.”⁶¹

These differences must not be exaggerated, however, for Teellinck also displayed elements of internal withdrawal, as did other early Further Reformation proponents such as Koelman and Lodenstein,⁶² whereas VanderGroe, the last representative of the movement, strongly emphasized church and social life as a whole, including the political context.⁶³ Van der Linde concludes: “Most of those who can be considered representative of the Further Reformation, being promoters of a theocratic structure as far as the relationship between church and state are concerned, are open for that which is not so purely spiritual, such as the political state.”⁶⁴

Generally speaking, the complex Dutch Further Reformation focused on a variety of major themes. In summarizing the movement, Graafland addresses the following contours: election, regeneration, sanctification, the family and the congregation, the church, creation and natural theology, eschatology, and theocracy.⁶⁵ Through promoting a pious lifestyle and a theocratic concept of all social relationships based on family worship, the parish, and the church as a whole, the Further Reformation aimed to establish and enforce moral and spiritual discipline in all spheres of life. Further Reformation sermons addressed all of these mostly active themes, but simultaneously stressed the fall of Adam, the natural man’s inability to aspire to good, the absolute sovereignty of divine predestination and grace, dependence upon God, the necessity of adequate conviction of sin, the experience of conversion, and the simplicity of true worship.⁶⁶ C. Vogelaar’s summaries of the content of the preaching of Bernardus Smytegelt (1665–1739) and Johannes Beukelman (1704–1757), are typical particularly of the later period of the Further Reformation:

61. Graafland, “Kernen en contouren van de Nadere Reformatie,” 350. Cf. John Bolt, “The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck” (PhD dissertation, University of St. Michael’s College, 1982), 55.

62. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 144.

63. Graafland, “Kernen en contouren van de Nadere Reformatie,” 350–51.

64. “De Godservaring bij W. Teellinck, D. G. à Brakel en A. Comrie,” *Theologia Reformata* 16 (1973):198.

65. Graafland, “Kernen en contouren van de Nadere Reformatie,” 354–65.

66. The emphasis on personal experience frequently led to a decrease in communicant members, especially in the latter part of the Further Reformation (Willem Balke, “Het Pietisme in Oostfriesland,” *Theologia Reformata* 21 [1978]:324). Cf. Arie Blok, “The Heidelberg Catechism and the Dutch *Nadere Reformatie*,” 47ff.

In [Smytegelt's] sermons much emphasis was laid on the practice of godliness, on the holy duties of Christians, on the life of God's people and on the frames of their hearts, as well as their experiences of light and darkness, the leading and operation of the Holy Spirit, and giving instructions and directions to the godly.⁶⁷

In his sermons [Beukelman] applied the message to his hearers: revealing clearly the false, sandy foundations of the nominal Christians, proclaiming plainly our misery and total depravity, recommending especially the way of reconciliation with God in Christ, bringing the sincere invitations and callings of the gospel, encouraging the concerned souls of true seekers of God, showing unto the godly ones the causes for their little progress in faith and sanctification, and also giving the right means to make their calling and election sure—and to live in true sanctification in the fear of God's name and to His honor.⁶⁸

Thus, the preaching of the Further Reformation emphasized *experiential theology*, which M. Eugene Osterhaven has defined as “that broad stream of Reformed teaching which, accepting the creeds of the church, emphasized the new birth, the conversion, and the sanctification of the believer so that he might acquire an experiential or personal knowledge of Christ's saving grace.”⁶⁹ External religion, orthodox doctrine, sound theological propositions are all insufficient for salvation; feeling, experience, spiritual warfare, and genuine prayer are essential for faith and practice. The “head” knowledge of doctrine, albeit necessary, must be accompanied by the “heart” knowledge of scriptural experience: “There were some, of course, who carried the emphasis on feeling, on intense religious experience of an emotional nature, to dangerous lengths, but most Reformed pietists stopped far short of making that the norm. The norm is Scripture alone but, they held, as the Frisian Catechism put it, that ‘true faith demands an experiential knowledge, emerging from a conviction and an experiencing of God's Spirit, and conforming to the word of truth.’”⁷⁰

67. “Bernardus Smytegelt: Spiritual Advisor of God's Children,” *The Banner of Truth* 53 (1987):210. Smytegelt lists 296 marks of the godly life in preaching 145 sermons on Matthew 12:20–21 (*Het Gekrookte Riet*, 2 vols. [’s-Gravenhage: Ottho en Pieter van Thol, 1744]).

68. “Johannes Beukelman: A Clear Teacher of the Truth,” *The Banner of Truth* 53 (1987): 264–65.

69. “The Experiential Theology of Early Dutch Calvinism,” *Reformed Review* 27 (1974):180.

70. “The Experiential Theology of Early Dutch Calvinism,” *Reformed Review* 27 (1974): 183–84.

Assessment in Secondary Sources

The complexity of the Dutch Further Reformation is compounded by its assessment in secondary sources. The nineteenth-century theologians at Groningen were the first to make an effort to view the Further Reformation as a movement from a historical perspective. W. van 't Spijker shows, however, that these divines, such as P. Hofstede de Groot, differed little from the view of Ypeij and Dermout in their *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk* (History of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands). Neither Ypeij and Dermout nor the Groningen professors researched the movement from its primary sources, but tended to model the movement after their own ideals. In particular, the Groningen theologians viewed Thomas à Kempis, Wessel Gansfort, Willem Teellinck, Jodocus van Lodenstein, and others as their ideal.⁷¹ Later in the nineteenth century (1879), Heinrich Heppe published *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der reformirten Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande* (The History of Pietism and Mysticism in the Reformed Church, particularly in the Netherlands). The following decade Albrecht Ritschl's three-volume history of Pietism was published (*Geschichte des Pietismus, 1880–1886*). These works helped to establish the seminal issues involved in the Further Reformation and are still being discussed by scholars of the movement. Heppe concludes that the roots of Pietism are found in Puritanism, for he posits that the further reformation moved from English Puritanism to the Dutch Further Reformation to German Pietism. Ritschl placed Pietism in a broader framework of movements of reform present in the Western church since the Middle Ages, pointing particularly to Franciscan observances, the mystical theology of Bernard de Clairveaux, and the Anabaptists with regard to the Dutch Further Reformation.⁷²

Van 't Spijker views the 1911 work of W. Goeters (*Die Vorbereitung des Pietismus in der reformierten Kirche der Niederlande bis zur labadistischen Krisis 1670*; The Groundwork for Pietism in the Netherlands until the Labadistic Crisis in 1670) as a significant step forward in research on the Dutch Further Reformation in that he emphasized the need to study the divines of the movement on an individual basis. Goeters detected various streams of thought in the Further Reformation and avoided simplistic assessments as to their origins.

71. "Bronnen van de Nadere Reformatie," in *De Nadere Reformatie en het Gereformeerd Pietisme*, 6.

72. "Bronnen van de Nadere Reformatie," in *De Nadere Reformatie en het Gereformeerd Pietisme*, 7. Ritschl's conventional caricature of pietism (that it represents an individualistic, ascetic, and anti-cultural Christianity) is not a fully nuanced description of the Dutch Further Reformation—especially not in its earliest stage.

Moreover, in addition to theological and practical issues, he pointed to social and historical roots which paved the way for the movement. He also highlighted some important themes of the Further Reformation, such as the striving for an ideal church. In fact, he defined “the essence of this movement to be a striving of the visible church to approximate her essence (which is found in the invisible church) as much as possible.”⁷³

Much negative reaction against the Further Reformation can be traced to Abraham Kuyper and his emphasis on the church’s cultural mandate. Early in his ministry Kuyper was profoundly influenced by a simple, God-fearing woman of Further Reformation persuasion, Pietje Baltus, who emphasized the necessity of experimental conversion. Subsequently, however, he became troubled that the Christians among whom he labored had become too pietistic and sheltered due in part to a constant diet of reading the “old writers” (*oude schrijvers*), as experimentally oriented laymen were fond of calling Further Reformation authors. At times Kuyper disparagingly called the pietistic elements in the Dutch church, “Methodists,”⁷⁴ though he retained a strong element of piety in his devotional writings as well as respect for the Further Reformation divines.⁷⁵ Kuyper’s attempts to teach laymen to apply Christianity to all spheres of life led to a revival of Calvinism in the Netherlands. Many of his followers, however, frequently called neo-Calvinists, went far beyond Kuyper by rejecting nearly all semblances of piety and by “externalizing the gospel” in a flurry of kingdom-activity. Still today “the neo-Calvinists in the Netherlands on the whole are quite antagonistic toward the Further Reformation. They see it as an other-worldly, anti-cultural, and scholastic movement which has done the church more harm than good.”⁷⁶

Also reacting negatively to the Further Reformation are Otto Ritschl who views the Further Reformation as a falsification of the Reformation;⁷⁷ Theodor L. Haitjema who regards it as degeneration (*ontaarding*);⁷⁸ and Aart A. van Schelven who esteems it to be overly baptistic, spiritualistic, and influenced

73. “Bronnen van de Nadere Reformatie,” in *De Nadere Reformatie en het Gereformeerd Pietisme*, 7–9.

74. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, xii, 300.

75. Cf. *Het Calvinisme* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser); William Young, “Historic Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 36 (1973):48ff.

76. Pronk, *The Banner of Truth*, nos. 154–55 (July–August 1976):7–10.

77. *Dogmengeschiede des Protestantismus*, 1:180.

78. *Cultuurgeschiedenis van het Christendom* 3:337; cf. his *Prediking des Woords en bevinding* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1950).

by Semi-Pelagianism.⁷⁹ E. D. Kraan considers the Further Reformation to be too steeped in subjectivism,⁸⁰ while Rudolf Boon states that it “inclines to Anabaptism.”⁸¹ Teunis Brienens contrasts Reformation gospel preaching to Further Reformation preaching which speaks to various “soul conditions” among the hearers.⁸²

Positively, Hans Emil Weber,⁸³ Arie Vergunst,⁸⁴ James Tanis,⁸⁵ J. H. R. Verboom,⁸⁶ Jonathan Gerstner,⁸⁷ Willem Jan op ’t Hof⁸⁸ and others view it largely as a profitable outgrowth of Calvinism. Also Stoeffler’s assessment is largely positive and a most helpful, needed corrective:

[The Further Reformation] was by and large a thoroughly responsible, evangelical movement. On the personal level it emphasized love for God and man and a type of daily conduct based on what it regarded as the New Testament ethic. Its larger aim was the reformation of the visible Church according to the pattern of apostolic Christianity. Intellectually it was highly respectable in so far as practically all of its leaders had enjoyed the opportunity of excellent theological training. For that reason it had the support of the best minds of the day. Voetius, Essenius, Hoornbeek, and later such Coccejans as Witsius endorsed it enthusiastically.... [It] constituted a significant and influential party with the Reformed churches....

The coming of Pietism [i.e., the Further Reformation], like the rise of any reform movement which tends to challenge the established order of things,

79. “Het Zeeuwsche Mysticisme,” *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 17 (1916):141–62.

80. “De Heilige Geest en het na-reformatorische subjectivisme,” in *De Heilige Geest*, ed. J. H. Bavinck, et al. (Kampen: Kok, 1949), 228–63.

81. *Het probleem der christelijke gemeenschap, Oorsprong en ontwikkeling der congregationalistisch geordende kerken in Massachusetts* (Amsterdam: Stichting Universitaire Uitgaven, 1951), 164.

82. *De Prediking van de Nadere Reformatie* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1974). Brienens’s study, which exaggerates the weaknesses of Further Reformation preaching, remains the most thorough on the subject. Brienens asserts that Further Reformation preaching does not appeal to God’s promises nor takes His covenant seriously; rather, he claims that the stress is on the individual person by dividing and differentiating the listeners into various classifications. Though Calvin does not present the classification method of the Further Reformation divines, the reading of his sermons does not confirm Brienens’s dichotomizing of Calvin and the “old writers.”

83. *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus: Beiträge zur Forderung christlicher Theologie*, 2 vols. (Giitersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1937–51).

84. *Neem de wacht des Heeren waar* (Utrecht: Den Hertog, 1983), 232–36.

85. *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism in the Middle Colonies*, 4ff.

86. *Dr. Alexander Comrie, predikant van Woubrugge* (Utrecht: De Banier, 1964), 185ff.

87. *Thousand Generation Covenant*, 68–79.

88. “The Further Reformation is to be preferred above the Reformation in a variety of points” (*Engelse pietistische geschriften in het Nederlands, 1598–1622, stellingen no. 6*).

caused some strains and difficulties. At the end...however, the Reformed churches were the better for having made the necessary adjustments.⁸⁹

Still others provide mixed assessment, noting the evolving changes within the movement itself. This is particularly true of several Reformed scholars in the Netherlands (such as J. G. Woelderink, Arnold A. van Ruler, S. van der Linde, Cornelis Graafland, Willem Balke,⁹⁰ K. Exalto, W. van 't Spijker, J. van Genderen, and others) who have done considerable pioneer work on the Further Reformation. Generally speaking, these Dutch scholars have varying degrees of appreciation for the Dutch Further Reformation (particularly its classical period) though they feel that it was not as theologically rich as the Reformation proper. S. van der Linde and Cornelis Graafland affirm the early Dutch Further Reformation as embracing some positive characteristics, but see decay setting in largely through excessive introspection such that the movement failed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries “to combine breadth with depth.”⁹¹ Similarly, Hofmeyr asserts that “the classical phase of the Further Reformation shows definite links with Calvin, while the distance between Calvin and the stricter pietism of the later phase of the Further Reformation is much greater.”⁹² In a different vein, Prozesky concludes that “the movement as a whole underwent gradual change with its early precisianism losing ground to devotional and

89. *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 178–79.

90. Balke feels that the Further Reformation's theology was more irenic prior to the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), but that it became too rigid in “post-Dort” years. The Further Reformation depended too much on medieval philosophy and mysticism. Balke believes that this movement was in a different theological climate from Calvin, as can be evidenced by their promoting the syllogisms more than Calvin. Balke concludes: “Calvin would not permit himself to rigidly adhere to certain formulas, as is evident in his controversy with Caroli as well as in his contacts with Bullinger. His objective was to convey the message of Scripture as faithfully as possible. In doing so the *actus tradendi* is the *actus formulandi*. Time and again we must formulate anew and search to remain as close to the meaning of the Holy Scriptures as possible. Calvin did not want to be subordinate in any form or shape to any type of philosophy. Every attempt to find traces of Plato, Seneca, or Duns Scotus in his writings are to be rejected as incorrect interpretations. Calvin only desired to be a student of the Holy Scriptures” (personal correspondence; cf. “Calvin and the Theological Trends of His Time,” in *Calvinus Reformator His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society*, 48–68; “Calvijn en Luther,” in *Luther en het Gereformeerd Protestantisme* [’s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1983]).

91. Van der Linde, *Vromen en Verlichten* (Utrecht: Aartsbisschoppelijk Museum Utrecht, 1974), 2; cf. Graafland, “Het eigene van het Gereformeerd Pietisme in de 18e eeuw in onderscheid van de 17e eeuw,” *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 11 (1987):37–53.

92. “The Doctrine of Calvin as Transmitted in the South African Context by Among Others the *Oude Schrijvers*,” in *Calvinus Reformator: His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society*, 260.

on occasion mystical pursuits, besides also evolving or adapting its own typical institutions, such as conventicles, edificatory sermons, and Pietistic literature.”⁹³ Osterhaven discerns two streams in the Further Reformation:

The one stream emphasized mysticism, inwardness, felicity, prayer, spiritual elation, and joy in the Lord. Overworked words among these folk were *gelukzaligheid* and *godzaligheid*. . . . Involving the whole person, his intellect, feeling, and will, it is the ultimate blessing that God can give one in this life and the greatest proof that God is a gracious father to his children. The other stream was activist and laid stress on doing the will of the Lord. Here the law as an expression of God’s will was much to the fore and the practice of piety was conceived largely in thinking, saying, and doing what is right before the Lord. This latter emphasis. . . . came to be known as *Preciesen* in Dutch, or, as they were sometimes called by their opponents, *Fijnen*, sanctimonians, we might say. Whatever the emphasis, all pietists believed heartily in experiential theology and were known as *de ernstige*, the earnest, zealous Christians of their place and time. . . . In its better representatives, like Wilhelmus à Brakel, the experiential theology sought a healthy balance between mysticism and precisionism.⁹⁴

Van Ruler calls the movement as a whole a “legitimate experiment.”⁹⁵

The wide divergence of these opinions calls for further studies in the Dutch Further Reformation as a movement in its own generations. In future studies the Further Reformation should be evaluated in its distinct spiritual, theological, and political milieu. Too often the Further Reformation is judged by the Reformation proper, the latter being regarded as normative. Calvin is presented by A. Ritschl and others as an ideal and all differences from him (even in areas where his thinking is largely embryonic, such as covenant theology)⁹⁶ are prone to be considered in a negative light. The unfair conclusion is then reached that the Further Reformation is not a “further reformation” (*nadere reformatie*), but a “further deformation” (*verdere deformatie*).⁹⁷ It is our conviction that a more careful, objective study of the Further Reformation will yield

93. Martin H. Prozesky, “The Emergence of Dutch Pietism,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 28 (1977):37.

94. “The Experiential Theology of Early Dutch Calvinism,” *Reformed Review* 27 (1974):182.

95. “Licht-en schaduwzijden in de bevindelijkheid,” in *Theologisch Werk* (Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, 1971), 3:43–60.

96. Cf. Peter Lillback, “The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology” (PhD dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985).

97. Graafland, “Kernen en contouren van de Nadere Reformatie,” in *De Nadere Reformatie: Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers*, 352, 366.

the conclusion that these Dutch divines as a whole did not misread Calvin and the Reformers, but adapted the teaching of the early Reformers in a practical way to their own day.

Additional work also needs to be done on the influence of Phillip Jakob Spener, August Hermann Francke, Friedrich Adolph Lampe, Gerhard Tersteegen, and other German Pietists on the Dutch Further Reformation.⁹⁸ Monographs need to be written on several important Further Reformation divines who are either the subjects of outdated studies or who, as yet, have not been thoroughly studied.⁹⁹ Caricatures against the movement and the influence of Reformed scholastic orthodoxy need to be unveiled for what they are. Particularly needed are both primary and secondary sources published in English on the Further Reformation.¹⁰⁰ English and American Puritanism have received considerably more attention from Dutch writers than the Dutch Further Reformation has received from English writers. The Dutch Further Reformation divines deserve to be treated with the same scholarly care devoted to their Puritan counterparts. Such treatment will recognize that the long-term

98. Cf. Carter Lindberg, ed., *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); Edgar C. McKenzie, "British Devotional Literature and the Rise of German Pietism" (PhD dissertation, St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, 1984); F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

99. E.g., Theodorus à Brakel, Adrianus Hasius, Abraham Hellenbroek, Nicolaas Holtius, David Knibbe, Johannes à Marck, Gregorius Mees, Franciscus Ridderus, and Rippertus Sixtus.

100. As for primary sources, a series of eight volumes written by Dutch Further Reformation ministers under the rubric of Classics of Reformed Spirituality have been printed in recent years under the auspices of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society, some of which were first published by Baker Books, but all of which are now printed by Reformation Heritage Books: Jacobus Koelman, *The Duties of Parents*, trans. John Vriend, ed. M. Eugene Osterhaven (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2003); Jodocus van Lodenstein, *A Spiritual Appeal to Christ's Bride*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010); Guilelmus Saldenus and Wilhelmus à Brakel, *In Remembrance of Him: Profiting from the Lord's Supper*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012); Wilhelmus Schortinghuis, *Essential Truths in the Heart of a Christian*, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit W. Sheeres, ed. James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009); Jean Taffin, *The Marks of God's Children*, trans. Peter Y. De Jong, ed. James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2003); Willem Teellinck, *The Path of True Godliness*, trans. Annemie Godbehere, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006); Godefridus Udemans, *The Practice of Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. Annemie Godbehere, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012); Gisbertus Voetius and Johannes Hoornbeek, *Spiritual Desertion*, trans. John Vriend and Harry Boonstra, ed. M. Eugene Osterhaven (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2003). As for secondary sources, more work needs to be done like that of Arie de Reuver, *Sweet Communion: Trajectories of Spirituality from the Middle Ages through the Further Reformation*, trans. James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

influence of the Further Reformation has been seriously underestimated. An amplification of Stoeffler's reassessment is needed:

While the [Further Reformation] dream of reforming the Reformed never succeeded it could hardly be doubted that the perfectionistic ideals of this reform party brought about significant changes in the life of the Church. It was responsible for an emphasis upon effective, religiously significant preaching such as is seldom found in territorial churches, together with a similar emphasis upon pastoral work which is equally unusual under such surroundings. Many of the classes and synods began to stress catechization to a degree unknown since the early days of the Genevan reformation. Church discipline, which had been exercised almost solely with regard to faith and order, was oriented to include the daily conduct of church members. A devotional literature was created such as continental Protestantism had never known because its need had not been recognized. Family worship was encouraged and free prayer found a place along with printed prayers. In fact prayer was encouraged as perhaps never before within the Reformed churches. Even conventicles...were authorized by various ecclesiastical bodies. For the first time since the days of Geneva the Reformed churches knew of genuine religious awakenings such as the one at Friesland in 1672, where a group of pastors entered together upon an evangelistic venture with noticeable results. Last but not least the matter of training an effective ministry, interested in piety as well as doctrine and polity, was given serious attention. The result was the later development of theological seminaries.¹⁰¹

Finally, the influence of Further Reformation devotional writings and sermons from the eighteenth century until today remain substantial among the conservative, experimental Reformed in the Netherlands, South Africa,¹⁰² and North America. Today their writings are still being reprinted, and we trust that many more will be translated and printed in the next generation in English. The publication of Theodorus VanderGroe's Heidelberg Catechism sermons is another large step in the right direction.

—Joel R. Beeke

101. *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 178–79.

102. Hofmeyr, "The Doctrine of Calvin as Transmitted in the South African Context by Among Others the *Oude Schrijvers*," in *Calvinus Reformator: His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society*, 261–62; cf. Gerstner, *Thousand Generation Covenant*.

Man's Only Comfort

LORD'S DAY 1

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

—ROMANS 14:7–8

Question 1: What is thy only comfort in life and death?

Answer: That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.

Question 2: How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?

Answer: Three; the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance.

Among all the religions and philosophies to be found upon earth (with divine permission), the one that can yield comfort in the truest sense of the word and also fully comfort a man in the most wretched circumstances and sorrow, even in the hour of death, will unquestionably be true and superior. A religion that can accomplish this is of a much loftier origin than the vain and carnal intellect of man. It originates in God Himself. He is the quintessential fountain of all comfort and the well from which flows all peace and joy.

There is a very large number of religions in the world by which men seek to attain their supreme comfort and salvation. Alas, however, they are frequently altogether false, demonic, and carnal, because they do not have their origin in the eternal light, but rather, in eternal darkness. The comfort and peace they yield to man are entirely deceitful and spiritually corrupt. They all coalesce at the point where they leave man as he is by nature—thus allowing him to wallow in a pool of eternal wretchedness and misery from which he can never be delivered.

There is therefore but one true religion that originates in God, and the ultimate outcome of all its doctrines is that it causes man to look entirely outside of himself. It so humbles and brings him to an end in himself that he seeks and finds all his comfort and salvation by faith exclusively in communion with God in Christ.

Should you ask me what religion I am referring to, I would respond that it will be only such a religion as is purely derived from God's Holy Word—a religion that is both comprehended and articulated in our Heidelberg Catechism.

It is not our intent to demonstrate this at this time in great detail. My only desire is to say that the Catechism presents to us a religion in which all of its doctrines culminate in attributing nothing to man and everything to God. Consequently, it causes man completely to look away from the creature so that he seeks and finds his comfort, peace, and salvation exclusively in the triune God.

This truth is immediately confirmed with utmost clarity in the introduction to the Catechism as it is comprehended in Lord's Day 1. Here the instructor teaches what his sole objective and intent is throughout this entire Catechism—nothing less than to teach all men that they should sincerely seek their only peace, comfort, and salvation entirely outside of themselves in God through Christ. It is the instructor's intent, from and by means of the Word of God, to teach all and everyone regarding this magnificent salvation, as well as the way in which this salvation is to be obtained.

With this identical intent, we commence with the explanation and exposition of this Catechism, being hopeful that the Lord will equip us for this task by the power of His Holy Spirit, granting His blessing and illumination upon our ministry to the praise and glory of His great Name, and to the salvation of many souls—all in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

This first Lord's Day constitutes an excellent opening of and introduction to the Catechism, for the instructor addresses two questions that are of the greatest importance and applicability to all men:

1. What constitutes man's only peace and comfort in life and death (Question & Answer 1)?
2. What must every man know thoroughly to be a partaker of this comfort, and to live a godly life and die accordingly (Question & Answer 2)?

As pertaining to the first matter, we encounter there:

- a. the object of the instructor's inquiry: *Man's only comfort in life and death*, and
- b. the definition of man's comfort, and in what it specifically consists.

The instructor addresses a comfort that he designates more specifically as the *only* comfort for every individual human being *in both life and death*.

Comfort is the antidote to sorrow and misery, and thereby shields us from them. Its very essence is therefore the strengthening, satisfaction, and appeasement of man's heart in the face of any evil that may either already be oppressing him or that is imminent—an evil that causes him to be very fearful.

Such a comfort, or strengthening of the heart, comes about as a result of something that is truly and intrinsically good. It is a comfort that a man may already possess, or it consists of a certain and steadfast hope, and therefore is fully effective in rendering a man immune to the evil that either oppresses him or that he fears. It is such comfort that renders him happy both temporally and eternally.

This comfort therefore does not consist in a mere and vain imagination of the heart that enables a man to forget his troubles and misery for a season. Rather, it consists of the true possession of something that is genuinely and supremely good—something that shields a man against all evil pertaining to both soul and body. It delivers man from all evil completely and eternally.

If it does not achieve this, it cannot be designated as comfort. Rather, it is a deceit that is both blatant and carnal, and renders man even more wretched in his misery.

You readily understand that in addressing man's comfort, there is the presupposition of man's state of sorrow and misery—a state that necessitates such comfort. For if neither misery nor sorrow oppresses man, there is no need for

comfort and encouragement. David therefore speaks correctly of “my comfort in my affliction” (Ps. 119:50).

When, therefore, the instructor inquires here wherein man's only comfort consists, he presupposes that man in and of himself is a wretched creature who needs to be comforted and encouraged in regard to his misery from a source outside of himself. And truly, if we examine man from a spiritual perspective as to what he is in and of himself, we find him to be the most wretched, unhappy, and miserable of all God's creatures. Sin has made man inexpressibly wretched in both body and soul, and has cast him into a bottomless pit of eternal and inexpressible grief, misery, and want. It is due to sin that man has fully and eternally fallen from a life of glorious communion with Jehovah God, the only fountain of all salvation and of all that is good. He has provoked the most high God into becoming his enemy, and subjected himself to His curse and eternal wrath. Consequently, man now lies in the midst of eternal death. He is a child of the devil, a slave of hell, and subject to eternal perdition. He is by nature a complete enemy of God, being completely hostile to God and to His holiness and glory. To all eternity, he has neither the desire nor the ability to change. As a carnal being, he is entirely impotent in that regard—a matter we will have to address with you as we proceed with our exposition of the Catechism. Such is the bottomless pit of misery in which all men, in and of themselves, are to be found. They all have been exiled from God's communion, are subject to His curse and wrath, and are in bondage to the devil—and that eternally, without the least hope of being able to deliver themselves.

As long as man is left to himself by God, and as long as the Lord does not take hold of him in His grace to convert him, he remains insensitive to his wretched misery. There is neither any true sorrow nor contrition in his heart. Instead, he continues to live confidently and carelessly. He neither seeks a steadfast and certain comfort in connection with his misery nor desires to be delivered from it. Of such it is true what is written in Revelation 3:17, “Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” It is therefore entirely in vain to speak to such ones about comfort, since they are in no condition wherein they can truly be comforted. God first must impress upon the hearts of such persons that they are miserable before they will long for comfort.

Therefore, when the instructor speaks here of man's *only comfort*, it is abundantly clear that he has in mind only true believers, who, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, have received true self-knowledge as to the depth of their inability and misery. Such have become deeply troubled and sorrowful about this, and no longer are able to be at peace with themselves. Instead, being truly lost, wretched, and poor in spirit, they have looked outside of themselves and taken refuge only to the free grace of God in Christ Jesus for their comfort and deliverance.

So the instructor has in mind true believers who truly know themselves to be poor and wretched, and it is concerning them that he inquires into what their comfort consists in regard to such misery.

The instructor proceeds to describe this comfort in greater detail and formulates it as the only comfort in life and death. The essential characteristic of man's true comfort consists in the fact that it is singular in nature. It is *unique*; that is, there is but one object in which this true comfort can be sought and found: the all-sufficient God and His blessed communion. This is the only and highest good, and apart from this good there is none other in which a wretched sinner could find this true and essential comfort for his poor soul. The soul has miseries, needs, and desires that are infinite in dimension, and everything apart from God is finite and deficient.

Nothing but God alone can provide the soul with true and essential satisfaction, comfort, and encouragement. There is but one comfort for a poor and believing sinner. Only one Object can yield true and essential comfort. All comfort that is sought for and found outside of this Object is extremely harmful and vain. With Asaph, the soul of a believing sinner must here say to her God, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Ps. 73:25).

Concerning this only comfort, the instructor now begins more specifically to teach that man needs this comfort *both in life and in death*. This is certainly the case, for man is and always will remain in himself a completely poor, impotent, and wretched creature. Apart from God, there is nothing by which he can comfort and encourage himself. If he misses God and His precious grace, he will truly miss everything. He therefore has a continual need to seek and find comfort and refreshment for his manifold spiritual deficiencies and wretchedness outside of himself—and thus in God alone.

To perfect the salvation of His children, it pleases the Lord to lead them in this life along a pathway of cross-bearing and afflictions—both physically and spiritually. Here below they are in the church militant, and they must daily

learn to die to themselves in a way of struggle and cross-bearing. Many are the afflictions of the righteous (Ps. 34:19). The manner in which one is called to travel to heaven is a way that is filled with sharp thorns. No one should think otherwise, for Scripture states clearly that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). It is a general precept, to which there are no exceptions, that he who will follow Jesus must also deny himself and take up his cross (Matt. 16:24).

However, to be always of good courage, and to engage in battle with strength and a good hope, the struggling Christian must necessarily always have a steadfast comfort in this life. There must be something that is continually administered to him from heaven. It must be something that enables him in all strife and in all the sorrows of this world (which are manifold and occur relentlessly) to lift up, encourage, refresh, and comfort his heart, saying, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? . . . hope in God” (Ps. 43:5).

There must be something that, during his journey through this valley of Baca, will always be a well of refreshment upon which his weary soul can rely, such as a staff—something that renders him patient, gives him a good hope, and causes him to walk in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Ghost (Acts 9:31). The instructor is therefore correct when he speaks of a comfort *in life*.

However, he also speaks of a comfort *in dying*. If ever a poor and needy Christian will need comfort—and then an unusually steadfast and strong comfort—it will be in that hour when he departs into eternity; when he will be called upon to enter into the arena with his last enemy, which is death. In that hour, he must drink a cup that will be the most difficult and bitter of them all, because it will be the last one. Then, with Christ, he will enter Gethsemane, and from there go to Golgotha in order to die and to abandon the flesh forever.

Especially in this final battle God's children will need a very large measure of encouragement and comfort, so that they will not succumb, but will be entirely victorious in the Lord! Then they will need strength proportionate to the cross they must bear, so that they will joyfully be able to overcome the dark, fearful, and hostile components of death without suffering any harm or shipwreck in regard to their faith and salvation. It is therefore reasonable that the instructor addresses here not only the comfort of the Christian in life, but also in death.

It is time, however, that we address the matter itself in more detail, and inquire what essentially constitutes this only comfort of the Christian in life

and death, doing so in accordance with the explanation and exposition of our instructor.

In opening for us more specifically what constitutes the only comfort of a Christian in life and death, the instructor teaches us that it consists entirely in the fact that he, *with body and soul, both in life and death*, is not his own, but belongs to his faithful savior, Jesus Christ. All the doctrines presented to us here by the instructor will be explained to us sequentially in the Catechism. Therefore, with the Lord's help, we wish to explain these doctrines a bit further by a short and concise exposition.

The instructor states that the ground of this only comfort is to be found in being forever the *property* of Christ in both soul and body, both in life and death. Being a child of Adam, man is by nature one who has deserted God through sin, and consequently he belongs entirely to himself and lives entirely for the flesh, doing so entirely for his own benefit. He neither knows, serves, nor loves any god but himself, and as a result, he is entirely filled with darkness, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. He is without God and Christ in the world, and in this sense, he is spiritually dead and lives entirely in dead works, doing nothing else than bearing the fruits of death.

He also rejects all reasonable divine government and casts God's yoke entirely from his shoulders. His walk is that of a backsliding heifer (Hos. 4:16), in all things stretching out his hand against God and strengthening himself against the Almighty (Job 15:25), saying, "We are lords; we will come no more unto thee" (Jer. 2:31).

In this most wretched kingdom of self, all men, without distinction, live by nature, and they live therein to the fullest. Only the elect, and thus only believers, are delivered from this kingdom by a wondrous work of God's infinite wisdom, power, mercy, and grace in Christ Jesus. At the time of His choosing, they are delivered and translated into the kingdom of God and Christ. Initially, this happens by faith, regeneration, and conversion. This translation continues by ongoing "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13), which culminates in glorification and the complete redemption of body and soul.

The great work of salvation and redemption to be accomplished in the elect and in all believers is to deliver and strip them of self, and to make them the complete property of God the Lord—or (which is in essence the same) the complete property of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as mediator and redeemer. In this way, they are brought unto God.

This transpires by means of a voluntary surrender of self; that is, a willing denial of self by believers, culminating in a voluntary, complete, and unconditional surrender of self to the Lord Jesus, who brings this about by a faith that the Holy Spirit works in their hearts with great divine power, for it is by faith that the elect fully surrender and deny themselves, parting with all their vain wisdom, righteousness, and strength. They come as poor, naked, blind, and helpless sinners to the Lord Jesus, surrendering themselves fully to Him to be justified, sanctified, redeemed, and brought to God by Him alone. They do so with body and soul, for time and eternity.

In this manner, believers are united to Christ, Christ becomes theirs, and they become Christ's. The church testifies of this in Song of Solomon 2:16: "My beloved is mine, and I am his." By this voluntary surrender of themselves to Christ, believers become the property of Christ. This takes place:

First, fully, or, as the instructor states, both in body and soul. The apostle teaches this in 1 Corinthians 6:20: "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." They are united to Christ in body and soul, grafted into Him as branches into the vine. Both with body and soul they surrender themselves to Christ and, in so doing, give themselves fully to Him in order to live out of, through, and for Him. In response, Christ embraces them in body and soul, thereby redeeming, saving, appropriating, and governing them, doing so at the very outset and also continually.

Second, in such a manner that believers also become the people and property of Christ *forever*, both in life and death. Thus speaks the instructor, and also the apostle Paul, who teaches in our text, Romans 14:7–8: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." Believers do indeed surrender themselves to the Lord Jesus for time and eternity, and the Lord Jesus receives them for time and eternity as His subjects and property in order to save and sanctify them. He does so not only initially, but also continually, until they are fully delivered from sin and death. Nothing can therefore separate Christ and believers—neither sin, death, the devil, nor anything. They shall eternally remain united to Christ and be His property both in life and in death, as Paul teaches us in Romans 8:35, 39.

It is this doctrine that the instructor explains and expounds more particularly, showing what the Lord has done, and does, for believers. He not only purchases them, but also preserves, seals, and sanctifies them to be His property.

It is He who, *with His precious blood, has fully satisfied for all their sins, and delivered them from all the power of the devil.*

Concerning the first of these two truths, elect believers in themselves are entirely guilty before God because of sin, and they are eternally incapable of making any payment in regard to their debt. Consequently, they are fully and eternally subject to God's curse, wrath, and condemnation. The Lord Jesus, however, intervened as their surety and mediator by taking upon Himself all their sin and guilt, as well as the curse and punishment flowing from their sins. To accomplish this, He suffered and died on the cross, thereby fully satisfying the claims of the law on their behalf. They, in turn, embrace Christ by faith and by virtue of the efficacy of His perfect merits and obedience. Christ thus made full payment for all the sins of believers by His precious blood, while also purifying them according to 1 John 1:7; in this manner Christ purchased believers to become His property, for He purchased His congregation with the price of His blood (Acts 20:28).

Consequently, Christ also delivers His believers *from all the power of the devil.* The power of the devil refers to the devil's power manifested in his kingdom of darkness and death. Through the instrumentality of sin, he exercises dominion over the sinner, for sin is pure darkness and fills the entire soul with darkness. By this darkness of sin, Satan rules over the soul with total power and dominion. Christ, however, in uniting the believer to Himself, also takes away the darkness and death that, by nature and through sin, have dominion over him. He accomplishes this by paying for and purifying them of their sins by His blood. He grants them His Holy Spirit, illuminates their understanding, renews and transforms their will, and leads them into blessed communion with God, for He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). This is the way in which He delivers them from all the power of the devil, calling them "out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

The Lord Jesus thus robs *the strong man armed* of his vessels and destroys the works of the devil. He thereby demolishes his overpowering dominion in the soul, delivering His believers out of the clutches of the hellish lion and establishing His dominion in them by the law of His grace. In so doing, He reclaims them as His property in and by means of this way of deliverance, destroying "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

This, however, is not all, for the Lord Jesus, by His divine power and gracious dominion, also *preserves* His believers whom he has delivered from sin

and all the power of the devil, so *that without the will of their heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from their heads.*

In and of themselves, believers, though redeemed by Christ, will always remain a very poor, needy, defenseless, and impotent people, who in their own strength cannot remain standing against their mighty enemies: Satan, the world, and their own flesh. In light of the fact that they are His property, the Lord Jesus, with a most tender love, with the greatest care, and to the utmost of His power, sustains and preserves them against all their enemies. They are the apple of Christ's eye, His body, His flesh and blood. He is their compassionate savior, their head, their husband, and their Lord and king. It is a matter of honor for Him that His believers will not perish to all eternity and that no one will be able to pluck them out of His hands, but that, at His time, He will safely bring them into His Father's house, in which there are many mansions.

The Lord Jesus is therefore round about His believers as a wall of fire, preserving them continually and ceaselessly, so that not one hair can fall from their heads. What Peter writes is therefore applicable to every believer: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

Third, however, the Lord Jesus does even more, for *by His Holy Spirit, He also assures believers of eternal life* by causing them to experience and to enjoy in their souls the beginning aspects of eternal life. Furthermore, by the illumination and influence of His Holy Spirit, He assures them in a comforting manner (each at His time and manner) of being partakers of Himself and of eternal salvation, so that they are able to revel in the hope of God's glory through their Lord Jesus Christ and thus enjoy in their souls that peace of God that passes all understanding.

It is true that the Lord Jesus does not assure all believers in the same manner, measure, and time. Nevertheless, He grants to all believers the Holy Spirit as an earnest of their inheritance, thereby sealing them "unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). And at His time and manner, Christ grants to the weakest of believers a measure of assurance of the hope of salvation by a believing embrace of Himself.

Finally, according to the instructor, Christ accomplishes yet another work in His believers, consisting in this: *He makes them sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him*, for Christ not only has been made unto His believers the wisdom and righteousness of God, but also sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

It is therefore Christ who also brings them increasingly to God through sanctification of the Spirit by the sprinkling of His blood upon their souls and by imprinting His law and image upon them. Believers thereby are increasingly transformed and renewed in their minds, so that it becomes their inward delight, pleasure, and enjoyment to live entirely to their God and Father, and their faithful Lord and savior, Christ Jesus, by keeping His commandments and intensely hating all sin. In this manner, the Lord Jesus causes all His believers wholeheartedly to “depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2:19) so that they “delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22). This is the wholehearted desire of all believers, and this is their felicity and heaven upon earth.

Behold, beloved, all of this the Lord Jesus does and works without distinction in all His believers. All of this proves conclusively that they are entirely—in body and soul, in life and in death—His people and possession, and they will remain such forever, without ever being separated from His grace and love.

The Christian's comfort in life and death thus consists in belonging to God in Christ and in being so wrought upon unto salvation and eternal glory. How blessed are the souls who enjoy this delightful comfort, and who cannot find any comfort or peace for their immortal souls apart from this comfort!

This is therefore the only and true comfort which yields comfort in both life and death. This is that comfort that refreshes, uplifts, strengthens, and sanctifies the soul in all things, and unites her most intimately with God in Christ. Oh, to enjoy this comfort inwardly in a frequent, lively, experiential, and steadfast manner leaves us “neither...barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8), but causes us to grow progressively in the grace and knowledge of Him!

The instructor then proceeds in Question 2 to set before us what is required, truly and essentially, to acquire this blessed comfort, and to live and die accordingly. He states that we must have a true, thorough, spiritual, and experiential knowledge of three special and highly important truths.

First, we must know *how great our sins and miseries are*. How we are in need of having this truth discovered to us in a true and spiritual fashion, and that this be increasingly so! Its purpose is that we learn to conduct ourselves before the Lord as truly wretched and impotent sinners who are poor in spirit. Without it, we are unable to enjoy the least drop of the aforementioned comfort in our souls, and we remain entirely unfit and unsuited to receive it. It is the

knowledge of our sins and misery that constitutes the true basis from which all true comfort of the soul must proceed.

Since all unconverted and graceless people lack the least true knowledge of their sins and misery, and have no desire to acquire it, they live utterly void of this true and essential spiritual comfort, finding their comfort only in vain and insignificant things that they will lose completely at their deaths and that will leave them eternally bereft of any comfort.

Oh, how indescribably dreadful and wretched this will be for such people! Eternally, eternally they will sink away into a bottomless pit of sorrow, deprivation, and misery—and all of that without even a spark of comfort. May God, in His great and infinite mercy, impress this upon the souls of people to their salvation and deliverance in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, the initial means that culminates in a soul's reception of this true and genuine comfort is by knowing spiritually and experientially how great his sin and misery is.

Second, this by itself is, however, entirely insufficient, for the second matter or means whereby we receive this true comfort in our souls is by knowing *how we may be delivered from all our sins and miseries*. There must be a spiritual and experiential knowledge of the true means unto salvation and deliverance, being the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. This means that we must be called out of darkness into God's marvelous light, and be taught and instructed by the Lord God Himself regarding His adorable and wondrous way of saving lost, poor, accursed, and ungodly sinners—saving them freely out of pure sovereign grace in and through the crucified mediator, Christ Jesus.

Here we must wholeheartedly approve of this way of pure and sovereign grace, and embrace this way with all the inclinations of our heart. This means that by true experience we must have learned that “surely...in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory” (Isa. 45:24–25).

As long as we have no spiritual, experiential knowledge of this way of deliverance and salvation, we have no true knowledge of our sins and misery, and thus the true comfort of our souls remains entirely hidden from us.

Third, the instructor adds to this is that we must also know *how we are to express our gratitude to God for such deliverance*. This gratitude is nothing less than the life of sanctification—a spiritual living unto God—by the Lord's redeemed, whereby they, in Christ, are inwardly transformed into His image

and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they surrender themselves with soul and body to the Lord, offering themselves as a holy sacrifice of praise to Him in order to live entirely and exclusively to and for the Lord. To know and to enjoy this thoroughly, spiritually, and experientially is the third matter that is requisite for acquiring this true spiritual comfort.

Thus, we have considered briefly the way in which the true comfort of man's soul is acquired and how we can blessedly live and die accordingly. Oh, that we all might be increasingly taught of the Lord!

The instructor will now proceed to further explain and enlarge upon these three fundamental truths in the Catechism, so that, contingent upon the Lord's blessing, He might lead some to the actual enjoyment and embracing of this blessed spiritual comfort, while at the same time taking from them all false and deceitful foundations for comfort.

It is with that same purpose and objective that, by the Lord's grace, we will expound this Catechism from doctrine to doctrine and labor more abundantly than ever before among you in the ministry of the Word through preaching of the gospel of salvation. May some be saved by the use of these means.

To that end, may the Lord graciously grant His coveted blessing upon the spoken word and upon the entire work of our ministry, so that His great and holy name may be glorified among us and the kingdom of His Son be advanced in every way. May the Lord do so, and confirm our words. Amen.

The Knowledge of Misery

From the Law

LORD'S DAY 2

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

—ROMANS 3:20

Question 3: Whence knowest thou thy misery?

Answer: Out of the law of God.

Question 4: What doth the law of God require of us?

Answer: Christ teaches us that briefly, Matthew 22:37–40, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and the great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Question 5: Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?

Answer: In no wise; for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.

It is rather remarkable what is recorded regarding the cockatrice, the most venomous of all animals, that not only is he capable of killing a man by his mere appearance, but he also is capable of killing himself by merely beholding his appearance in a mirror. Beloved, we will presently not investigate whether such a story is true or false. It is sufficient for us to know that the cockatrice is a very poisonous, venomous animal. In Scripture, it is symbolic of sinful, ungodly men who not only are corrupted and poisoned by sin, but who also by their sinful venom contaminate, pollute, and even kill all who have fellowship with them. In Isaiah 59:5 we read regarding the ungodly, “They hatch cockatrice’ eggs, and weave the spider’s web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper.”

What is said regarding the cockatrice, namely, that it dies immediately upon beholding its appearance in a mirror, is equally true spiritually for a sinner. As soon as he, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, beholds his appearance as the transparent mirror of God's law is held before his eyes, he will surrender immediately and die entirely to himself. When viewing himself in this holy mirror of God's law, he will see himself as being so sinful and corrupt, so abominable and abhorrent, so despicable, repulsive, and worthy of condemnation, that it will be impossible for him to sustain himself. He will begin to abhor himself and relinquish any notion of personal virtue in which he had found delight earlier in life. He will sign his own death sentence and look outside of himself to seek his life and salvation only in the sovereign grace of the Lord Jesus.

Such is the transparency and influence of the mirror of God's law when it is effectually held before the eyes of the sinner—a mirror in which he beholds himself by divine illumination. It is this truth that the instructor will expound in this Lord's Day.

In the preceding Lord's Day, Question 2, the instructor summarized the entire content of Christian doctrine and comfort by these three prominent components:

1. the true knowledge of *our sins and miseries*,
2. the knowledge of the true way in which we may be *delivered* from them, and
3. the knowledge of true *gratitude* toward God for His gracious deliverance.

He will now proceed to expound and address each of these three components, beginning with the first: the true knowledge of *our sins and miseries*.

Beloved, this is an important and foundational truth of our doctrine—a truth of which we must truly have a sound knowledge. In regard to our natural state and condition, we must faithfully be taught how entirely wretched and miserable we have become through sin—so much so that we cannot take one step toward securing our salvation. In fact, we cannot even understand one truth of the Christian faith as long as we lack a true and spiritual knowledge of our sins and miseries.

Oh, that upon the preaching of the Word, it would please the Lord to work in our darkened souls with His Holy Spirit, thereby opening our eyes so that we might see indeed! Amen.

The instructor will use three Lord’s Days to address the subject of the knowledge of our sins and miseries. In this Lord’s Day, he will address the manner in which a Christian acquires the knowledge of his misery, namely, by the law of God. In Lord’s Day 3, he will address the fountain from which man’s misery proceeds: *the fall of our first parents* in Paradise, including its magnitude to a full extent. And then, in Lord’s Day 4, he will address our guilt, as well as the condemnation we are worthy of due to our sins and miseries.

Presently we will follow the instructor in considering the way in which we are led to a true knowledge of the misery that is inherently ours due to sin. The instructor will proceed as follows:

1. He will teach us how man generally acquires the knowledge of his misery, namely, out of the law of God.
2. He will then expound this in greater detail in his response to Questions 4 and 5, setting before us on the one hand the holy and perfect requirement of God’s law, and on the other hand man’s utter inability to fulfill the requirement of God’s law, being unable to do so even in the very least.

Regarding the first, we will focus upon man’s *misery*; regarding this, he testifies that we know our misery *from the law of God*.

By *misery*, nothing else is meant than man’s grievous and wretched state of sin and death. This is the state of all men by nature, being conceived and born therein. There is therefore no more miserable and wretched creature imaginable than a sinner in his natural state.

1. By virtue of sin, he is utterly estranged from God and lives in enmity toward his most exalted and holy creator—a creator in whose favor and fellowship all happiness and salvation are embodied. It is by virtue of his iniquities that there is a separation between God and the sinner (Isa. 59:2).

2. The sinner is subject to the fearful curse and wrath of the Most High God, who utterly hates sin and is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity (Hab. 1:13). He therefore threatens the sinner with His curse and wrath (Gal. 3:10).

3. In his natural state, man is also a slave of sin, and, due to his corrupt nature, can do nothing but sin and “drink iniquity like water.” He is therefore entirely abominable and filthy in God’s holy eyes (Job 15:16).

4. He is also utterly enslaved to Satan, the Prince of Darkness, who takes the sinner while in his natural state captive at his will (2 Tim. 2:26). Satan reigns

over him with utmost dominion, and therefore the sinner serves and obeys him with a heartfelt willingness, for he is of his father the devil, and the lusts of his father he will do (John 8:44).

5. Who would be able to enumerate all that pertains to this? Man in his natural state is one lump of misery, and nothing but wretchedness and misery are to be found in him. As a sinner, he is worthy of death and hell; he is so blind and impotent that to all eternity he cannot help himself in the least. He is rejected of God, being cast out in the open field and being polluted in his own blood to the loathing of his person—utterly helpless and hopeless, and beyond hope and deliverance. There is not even an eye that pities him to do any of these things to him (Ezek. 16:5).

Such is the condition of man by nature! This is the misery that all men have in common, and no one is exempt from it whether he is young or old, great or small, rich or poor. We are all born in such a most miserable and wretched condition, and we will live entirely in accord with this condition until the God of mercy looks down upon us by regenerating us and grafts us by faith into His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is this misery and wretchedness, common to all men, which the instructor here addresses, questioning everyone in particular regarding the *knowledge* of his misery by asking every professing Christian, “Whence knowest *thou* thy misery?”

There is a twofold knowledge of our misery: one is merely common and natural to man, while the other is specific and spiritual.

First, the *natural knowledge* of one's misery is nothing but a carnal and intellectual knowledge acquired by external instruction from God's Word. Hereby one knows in a general sense that he and all men are wretched as a result of sin, believing this truth in a historical manner, acquiescing to it intellectually, and confessing it. Such a person, however, has not been inwardly convinced of this truth by the powerful operation and irresistible application of the Holy Spirit, and therefore neither has a right impression of it nor is rightly affected by it. He has neither humbled himself before God in true contrition regarding his misery nor has a heartfelt yearning for salvation and redemption. Many have this kind of knowledge of their misery. It is a knowledge with which they will perish. Even the devil is thus acquainted with his misery, and knows that he is a very miserable and wretched creature, and yet there is not one drop of true sorrow and contrition in his heart.

Second, all such knowledge is very different from that which pertains to an internal and spiritual knowledge of misery wrought in the hearts of the elect by the Holy Spirit when He comes and convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgment. (John 16:8). This knowledge penetrates the heart of man and causes him to experience his sins and misery with great grief and sorrow. Consequently, such a person no longer will be at ease in his sins and misery, but on the contrary, as one who labors and is heavy laden, he will come to the Lord Jesus to find rest and deliverance in Him (Matt. 11:28). It is of such knowledge that the instructor is speaking, asking and examining the Christian *whence* or whereby he has acquired such knowledge.

By asking such a question, the instructor presupposes and teaches three things:

1. It is absolutely necessary that one have a right knowledge of his innate misery and that he be thoroughly convicted of it. And such is certainly the case! How shall a sinner ever be compelled to go to Christ and seek his deliverance and salvation in Him? How shall he ever yearn for God's favor, grace, and communion unless the painful experience of his neediness and wretchedness compel him to do so, moving him to be afflicted, to mourn, and to weep before God (James 4:9)? This confirms what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 9:12: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." This is why God emphatically exhorts men to acknowledge their sins and miseries, saying in Jeremiah 3:13, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God."

2. Man by nature is ignorant of his wretchedness and misery, and that such knowledge must proceed and be applied from a source external to himself. And so it is indeed! The misery of all men has reached such unfathomable heights by virtue of sin that they can neither recognize nor even know their misery. Instead, while living in the midst of their utmost wretchedness, they are satisfied and at peace, believing that all is well with them and that they are "rich and increased with goods" (Rev. 3:17). This is caused by the oppressive darkness that sin has imposed upon man's mind, so that his eyes are entirely closed, "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18).

Furthermore, there is the habitual inclination toward sin that completely invades, dulls, and hardens the heart of man. Man is born in such a sinful and wretched state; it completely permeates him. He is thus true to his own character and nature. He is fully accustomed to living in sin and without God, and therefore knows nothing better, thinking that thus it ought to be—which

is similar to the condition of those who have been born and raised in slavery, and have always lived as slaves. Such people are as satisfied in their pitiable and wretched state as others who enjoy their golden freedom. In light of this, it is absolutely necessary, beloved, that a poor and wretched person would be directed by a mighty hand to come to the knowledge of his misery. As the prodigal son, he needs to come to himself (Luke 15:17), and as Ephraim, he needs to be instructed (Jer. 31:19).

3. Every man must know his own misery, for he asks every professing Christian, "Whence knowest *thou thy* misery?" By virtue of his blindness and sinful inclination, man is naturally inclined to wander about in ignorance of himself, doing so with the illusion of being virtuous. Therefore, he focuses only on other people and observes their conduct, faults, and vices. He will speak of them slanderously and disdainfully, and meanwhile he completely overlooks who he is himself. He beholds the mote in his brother's eye, but does not consider the beam in his own eye (Matt. 7:3). He continually wants to teach, exhort, and admonish others, but never considers the words, "Physician, heal thyself" (Luke 4:23), and therefore he must be compelled to focus upon himself. Shall he ever be happy, he must say with David, "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Ps. 51:3).

We have thus made enough general observations regarding *the knowledge of our misery*.

Regarding this knowledge, the instructor makes further inquiry by asking everyone from *whence* he has acquired the knowledge of his misery, teaching us that the Christian acquires this *from the law of God*. We will not engage at this time in a thorough exposition of God's law. This will be discussed in detail at a later time. Let it suffice for now to affirm that the reference to the law of God should be understood as being a reference to the *moral law* of God. He gave this law to all men to be a rule and an unchangeable norm for the totality of their existence, both in regard to their life and walk. Since man is God's creature, who is sustained at every moment of his existence by God Himself, it is self-evident that man must exist entirely for the glory of God; that God, as his Lord and creator, must exercise absolute dominion over him; and that he should render all obedience and subjection unto Him.

To enable man thus to glorify and obey God, his majestic Lord and creator, God must necessarily reveal His holy will to man. He must prescribe to him a rule of conduct according to which man is to order his conduct both inwardly and outwardly, and this is indeed what God the Lord has done. He has made

known to man His holy will in a very clear and extensive manner—not only by the steadfast and innate light of nature, but especially in and by means of His Word. In this Word, He has prescribed very clearly what man is to do and what he is to refrain from doing, as expressed in Micah 6:8: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

The entire Word of God is filled with commandments and prohibitions, and we are to order our conduct accordingly in order to serve and glorify God. All these commandments and prohibitions taken together constitute the law of God, and God has comprehended and summarized all of them in ten prominent and major commandments. This therefore is the rule for our entire existence, our lives and all our activities—both inwardly and outwardly. This is that priceless, precious, holy, and perfect law of God, and man’s life and happiness consist in observing it.

According to the instructor, it is by this law of God that one becomes acquainted with his misery. But this is an accidental characteristic of the law of God. It has acquired and assumed this characteristic by man’s sin, for in terms of its inherent nature, it is the sole design of the law to be kept and obeyed. However, subsequent to man’s transgression of the law, it has assumed the function of serving as a mirror whereby man must acquaint himself with his sins and miseries.

The fact that the law has now assumed this function is clearly taught by Holy Scripture, for Paul says in the words of our text, “For by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20), and in Romans 7:7 he writes, “I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” This truth will now be further expounded by the instructor.

Since it is the instructor’s objective to teach us how we are to know our misery from the law of God, he proceeds as follows:

1. In Question 4, he sets before us the holy demands and contents of the law.
2. In Question 5, he addresses man’s complete impotence to fulfill the demands of the law, even to the least degree.

By way of lawful deduction, he thereby clearly defines and exposes man’s misery.

Regarding the first, the instructor asks in Question 4: “What doth the law of God require of us?” He then replies, “Christ teaches us that briefly, etc.” Here

the instructor, by using the words of the Savior, sets before us the brief and essential contents of the law, consisting of two great and prominent commandments that are the foundation stones upon which all God's commandments and prohibitions fully rest: *a perfect love for both God and our neighbor.*

First, God requires of all men first and foremost *that we love the Lord our God*, and this love consists in:

1. *knowing* Him;
2. *esteeming* Him above all else;
3. striving for intimate *fellowship* with Him and living accordingly;
4. *finding peace* in His blessed communion and forsaking fully ourselves and all things;
5. *fearing and obeying* Him, and refraining from doing whatever displeases Him;
6. *subjecting* ourselves fully to His government and conforming fully to His will;
7. *cleaving* to Him in all things, *believing* in Him, and *trusting in* and fully *relying upon* Him; and
8. *glorifying* and *magnifying* Him.

This is the essence of the pure and perfect love of God. This is a love whereby man forsakes himself and all things outside of God, and devotes himself fully to Him with all that he is and has. It means that he exists for God alone and cleaves inseparably to Him in order to serve, praise, and glorify Him only, doing all this without the least sinful thought or deviant inclination of the heart.

When God created man, he manifested pure holiness and perfection, and man is obligated to manifest that same pure holiness and perfection toward God. With less than that, man will not be able to please God, and therefore the law requires that we manifest such holy and perfect love toward God. It is our obligation to acknowledge and acquiesce wholeheartedly in this, and in soul and body we are to subject ourselves to it with perfect obedience. If, however, we transgress this law in the very least, even by one single sinful thought or evil desire of the heart, we at once will be guilty of the violation and transgression of God's perfectly holy law, thereby making ourselves worthy of eternal death and condemnation.

We thus observe what our obligation is toward God in regard to His law, and this law requires that we conduct ourselves toward the supreme majesty in

full conformity with it. The Savior teaches that this is *the first and great commandment* from which all other commandments of God are necessarily and principally derived.

Second, in tandem with this, we have another prominent and great commandment of the law, which, in terms of fortitude and holiness, is equal to the first commandment. It requires from us that, next to God, we are to *love our neighbor as ourselves*. We are to understand our neighbor to be our fellow human beings, who, with us, are made of one blood, regardless of ethnicity, language, or national affiliation, for God “hath made of one blood all nations of men” (Acts 17:26). God’s law requires of us that we love our neighbor as ourselves. This consists of:

- fulfilling all our obligations—both general and specific—toward our neighbor, doing so perfectly and in very deed;
- esteeming, loving, honoring, serving, and helping him, thereby promoting and taking to heart his temporal and eternal well-being; and
- doing so without ever shortchanging our neighbor in the least or mistreating him in either thoughts, words, or deeds.

This is what love toward our neighbor consists in, and this love is a necessary consequence and fruit of love toward God, for he who loves and delights in God perfectly cannot possibly hate his neighbor, “because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 5:5). This fills the entire heart with pure love, and causes it to be ignited and to burn with a glowing love—so much so that such a soul will completely “walk in love” (Eph. 5:2). Thus, someone who truly loves God will necessarily also love his neighbor and will wholeheartedly desist from all hatred toward him. Scripture therefore says in 1 John 4:20, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”

The law requires of us that we love God and our neighbor perfectly. This constitutes the essence of perfect holiness. In so doing, we fulfill the law, for “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10). All that God requires of man and commands him to do is comprehended in this summary.

Is this not a most extraordinary summary? When the instructor will subsequently expound the law of the Ten Commandments for us, all that is included in love toward God and our neighbor will become evident, for if we are truly to love God and our neighbor, then the entire law of God and its full ramifications must be observed and practiced in a most spiritual and exacting manner. The smallest

transgression of any of God's commandments, although it may consist of only a single inclination of the heart, is a grievous departure from and a violation of God's law which requires us to love God and our neighbor. This will immediately render us worthy of eternal death, for "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

How perfectly good, holy, and righteous we ought to live in accordance with God's law! If, however, the case is not so with us, we are then the most wretched and miserable of all sinners. Our state will then be a most grievous one, regardless of what thoughts and imaginations we may cherish regarding our virtuousness. We must therefore either keep God's law perfectly, or and otherwise, by its least transgression, we will immediately descend into an abyss of indescribable misery and wretchedness.

Let us therefore now consider the actual state of ourselves and of all men by nature. The instructor asks in Question 5, "Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?" That is, "Are you able to keep the law as you ought to and without the least transgression?" He prompts the pupil to respond by saying, "In no wise; for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor." In so doing, the instructor briefly sets before us the natural state and disposition of all men as they have been fully corrupted by sin. In our nature, we all have become completely wicked and ungodly, so that we are now completely inclined *to hate God and our neighbor*, and to banish fully from our hearts all true love and obedience.

We are conceived and born in this ungodly, wicked, and corrupt state, and we continue to live in it until a merciful God powerfully regenerates us by His Holy Spirit, thereby completely renewing and transforming our nature in Christ Jesus. This is a truth that is most certain and infallible, even if only a few of us rightly and emphatically believe it.

The Lord teaches us this truth very clearly in His Holy Word. In Romans 8:7, with application being made to all men, we read that "the carnal mind is enmity against God, etc.," and in Romans 1:30, Paul refers to the heathen as "haters of God." Such we all are by nature prior to regeneration. In Romans 5:10, we are taught that "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." However, this natural hatred and hostility of ours is manifested not only toward God, but also toward our neighbor. Paul testifies regarding all men in their natural state that "we ourselves also were sometimes...hateful, and hating one another" (Titus 3:3).

This is the scriptural truth that we wholeheartedly confess in our Reformed churches. It is, however, a truth that we will not be able to comprehend and understand unless, by the saving conviction of the Holy Spirit, the eyes of

one’s understanding will be enlightened (Eph. 1:18) and one will truly be made acquainted with himself. A person will then experience, and clearly see regarding himself, that what is written in Scripture is true in his life. He will experientially become aware of his hostile disposition toward God and his neighbor, causing him to grieve and to sigh, and he will therefore abhor and condemn himself, exclaiming: “Woe unto me, that I am such a wicked enemy of God, and such a vile hater of my neighbor. Oh, what a wretched and vile sinner I am. There is nothing good that dwells within me.”

The root and cause of this natural hatred toward God and our neighbor is to be found in the fact that man, by virtue of sin, has fully departed from God, and has become entirely pre-occupied with himself. Consequently, man lives entirely for himself and is irreversibly in bondage to himself, so that he knows, cleaves unto, and loves only himself. From this it follows that in all things he seeks himself and that which pleases him. He orders his conduct entirely according to his own desire and will, and thus knows and serves no other god but himself.

As long as man lives for himself, so long will it be impossible for him to love, cleave unto, and serve the Lord. Instead, with his whole heart, he will necessarily hate and reject the Lord and His holiness, saying, as the fool has said “in his heart, There is no God” (Ps. 14:1). And since he hates God, he must of necessity also hate his neighbor, for love to my neighbor must entirely flow from the love of God.

Such is the natural state and disposition of all of us. Our hearts have become so wicked and perverse as a result of sin that not even one trace or spark of true love for God and our neighbor can be found in us. Oh, what a pitiable and wretched state this is, and how pervasive and dreadful is this corruption! If only we would have a proper view, impression, and sense of it. How deeply we would then humble ourselves before God! How deeply we would be ashamed of ourselves! We would then greatly abhor ourselves and cry out, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

Having considered all this, it will finally become clear—that is, if we have eyes to see it—how man becomes acquainted with his misery from the law of God. This is the primary subject that the instructor wishes to bring before us in this Lord’s Day. Such acquaintance comes about as follows: God the Lord, by the penetrating light of His Spirit, illuminates and opens man’s darkened understanding, and by way of this illumination confronts man with His holy law, compelling him to take careful notice of it. He causes him to see and clearly to observe what perfect holiness, that is, what perfect love toward God and

his neighbor, the law requires of man; how entirely good and appropriate this requirement of the law is; and how fully and completely every man, as God's creature, is obligated to keep and to obey this law perfectly.

Subsequently, God causes a man to come to himself, causing him to see clearly how in his activity, life, and conversation he is entirely incompatible with this holy law of God; how he is obligated to love God and his neighbor perfectly; and how, to the contrary, he is entirely and fully inclined to hate both.

Such a man then immediately sees that:

1. He is a *sinner*, and thus a violator and transgressor of God's law.
2. He is a very *great* sinner, who has transgressed the entire law of God, having never kept a single commandment or even attempted to keep it.
3. He is an *ungodly* sinner, who, in the innermost core of his heart, has only been evil and corrupt from the days of his youth.
4. He is a very *guilty* sinner, who has fully subjected himself to God's curse, and is therefore worthy of eternal death and condemnation to the highest degree. For the law, having been so fully transgressed, "worketh wrath" (Rom. 4:15), accuses the sinner of being guilty and worthy of punishment before God, stops his mouth, and pronounces the curse upon the sinner (Gal. 3:10).
5. He is an entirely *impotent* sinner, who is incapable ever of rendering what God requires and thereby is unable to atone for and remove his guilt; yes, he is also incapable ever of changing his evil and corrupt nature; and therefore he is incapable of keeping God's holy and perfect law even to the least degree.

In this way, man, by means of the law of God, becomes acquainted with his misery, and finding himself to be utterly lost in sin, he will thus entirely lose the life of his hand (Isa. 57:10). As a poor and contrite sinner, he will fall at the feet of God and the Lord Jesus, taking refuge alone in His infinite sovereign grace and mercy, crying out with the disciples, "Lord [Jesus], save us: we perish" (Matt. 8:25).

Behold, beloved, the blessed and precious use of the law in man's conversion! In this manner all the elect and all believers become acquainted with their sins and miseries by way of the law of God. This is true not only in their initial conversion or being united to Christ, but it also occurs daily during the entire course of their lives—and increasingly so.

As far as we ourselves are concerned, if only we would be so blessed as to have learned to know our misery rightly and spiritually out of the law of God. But sadly how many still are among us who have never made use of God’s law for this purpose and still are living in great ignorance of their sins and miseries!

Examine yourselves therefore as to whether God has ever, by way of His law, truly opened your eyes.

1. Have you ever truly and quietly taken inventory of this law? Have you ever truly perceived its holy and perfect demands? Have you ever truly acknowledged that you are fully obligated to keep and observe this law perfectly, and that you are worthy of eternal death should you transgress it in the least?

2. Have you ever truly seen how shamefully and dreadfully you have violated and transgressed this law of God? How ungodly and utterly corrupt your nature and disposition are? How fully you hate God and your neighbor, so that you can do nothing other than sin against the Lord?

3. Have you ever been confronted by God regarding your guilt and your hell-worthiness? Have you ever seen that you have dreadfully provoked the most high God by your sins, and that you are subject to the curse of the law—that you have eternally forfeited life and heaven, and are worthy of hell?

4. Have you ever been perplexed and grieved in your heart regarding your misery? Have your sins ever become a burden to you too heavy to bear? Have you ever exclaimed in bitter sorrow, “Woe is me that I have sinned so grievously and have subjected myself to such woeful perdition”? Have you ever become truly displeased with yourself, so that you could not find any good in yourself, but, rather, had to sign your own death sentence—even in regard to your very best duties and works?

5. Have you ever truly despaired of yourself, so that you completely had to cease and desist from your side; that you had to declare yourself to be without hope and incapable of contributing anything to your salvation; and that in yourself you are eternally lost?

6. Have you ever beheld the Lord Jesus in the precious promises of the gospel? Have you ever seen Him in His fullness, all-sufficiency, indispensability, and willingness to deliver and save you? Did He ever offer Himself to your soul, calling you to turn unto Him?

7. Have you ever, with your whole heart, surrendered yourself to the Lord Jesus and taken hold of Him as the only horn and rock of your salvation, in order that through Him, out of pure grace, you might be justified, sanctified, and

redeemed eternally? Have you ever, with Paul, suffered the loss of all things, and counted them but dung, that you might be found in the Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:8)?

Oh, that the God of all mercy would truly convict the hearts of men and arrest them, so that they would see their true condition! He who has never experienced all these things in truth will also not know his misery out of the law of God. Such a person will still be a blind sinner who lives his life entirely apart from the Lord Jesus. And if he were to die, he would be eternally lost, regardless of the good thoughts he may have regarding himself and his spiritual state. We must arrive at this point if we are ever to be saved. May the Lord impress this on the hearts of some, causing them immediately to come to themselves so that they will acknowledge their misery and earnestly seek after a means to be saved! And you, upon whom God has bestowed the grace of having been discovered to who you are, and who have been united to Jesus by a true faith—oh, that:

First, you would truly recognize the magnitude of your happiness, and being amazed regarding this, you would sink away in humility and worship, crying out, “Who am I that the Lord has been pleased to open my blind eyes, causing me to see who I am?”

Second, you would frequently magnify and exalt the sovereign grace of God that has been bestowed upon you! It was indeed the Lord who first sought after you when you lived peacefully in your sin; who granted you His Spirit, whereby He gave you self-knowledge and stripped you of all that was of self; and who then led you to Jesus. Otherwise you would have eternally remained focused upon yourself, and never would have sought the Lord Jesus and His grace.

Third, you would daily make proper use of God's law, so that you would increasingly become acquainted with your misery. This is absolutely necessary, so that you would increasingly loathe yourself and look to the Lord Jesus alone for all your righteousness, holiness, comfort, and salvation. To that end, may the Lord continue to enlighten your darkened understanding and unveil to you the holiness and spirituality of His law, thereby causing you to see the sin and corruption that remains in you, and may He experientially lead you increasingly to the Lord Jesus, so that you might grow up in Him, your head, and be increasingly established in Him—to the praise and glory of God's sovereign grace. Amen.

The Origin of Man's Misery

LORD'S DAY 3

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

—ECCLESIASTES 7:9

Question 6: Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?

Answer: By no means; but God created man good, and after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him.

Question 7: Whence then proceeds this depravity of human nature?

Answer: From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise; hence our nature is become so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin.

Question 8: Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?

Answer: Indeed we are except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.

The history recorded in 2 Samuel 15–18 is very grievous. It is the history of Absalom, David's son, who by his dreadful disobedience toward his father plunged himself into the greatest and most lamentable misery. In Absalom's history, we find a very vivid illustration of the most grievous fall into sin by our first father, Adam. Out of his loins, all men upon earth have come forth, and by virtue of his transgression, they have all become and are accounted as sinners before God.

Let us now consider this in greater detail:

1. Absalom was a man of remarkable physical beauty. Second Samuel 14:25 says regarding him: “But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.” Such was also true of Adam, our original father. He was the most beautiful human being who ever walked upon the face of the earth, having been created by God as a completely upright and perfect man, void of the least blemish in body and soul.

2. Absalom was also a very blessed and highly privileged man, for he was the son of David, the great and famous king of Israel, and was greatly loved and cherished by his father. Adam was also a very blessed man of extraordinary prominence, for he was the son of the most high king and Lord of heaven and earth. In Luke 3:38, he is therefore expressly referred to as the *son of God*. He too was greatly loved by God, who exalted him to be a ruler over all creation, having dominion over the fish of the sea, etc.

3. Absalom was unable to persevere in this exalted and happy state. He was not at all satisfied with it and took up arms against his own father. He rebelled against him and sought to take from him his kingdom, life, and possessions. Adam was also not satisfied with the great happiness and prominence he enjoyed, for he desired to be equal with God, his creator and Father—yes, even to be exalted above Him. Therefore, at the instigation of the devil, he too took up arms against God, began to rebel against Him, and sought to rob Him of His majesty, power, and kingdom. He himself sought to lay claim to all of this, thereby to place himself upon God's throne. Oh, dreadful wickedness!

4. As a consequence of his disobedience and rebellion, Absalom plunged himself into a very grievous pit of misery. He fled from his father's home, and his hair became entangled in an oak tree. There he remained hanging, and he also lost his life. This is similar to what took place in Adam's life, spiritually speaking. By his disobedience and brazen rebellion against God, he too subjected himself to the most grievous misery as pertaining to both soul and body. He also lost his life by means of a tree, namely, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—a tree located in Paradise, the eating from which God had forbidden. He too became entangled in this tree, for by his eating of its fruit, this tree became to him a tree of death and perdition.

5. Finally, while hanging on the oak tree, Absalom was impaled by Joab with three arrows, and consequently died. Likewise, Adam, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and clinging to it with his heart, was killed by Satan, the “hellish Joab,” who thrust three arrows deeply into Adam's heart: the

arrows of intellectual blindness, corruption of the will, and perversion of his desires and affections.

By these three wretched arrows, Satan so pierced and impaled Adam's heart at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that he, with all his descendants, fell into a state of physical, spiritual, and eternal death. God had threatened this to be the just punishment upon sin, as Paul teaches in Romans 5:12: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

This great and most weighty truth we must now set before you in greater detail. We are at the point where the instructor is dealing with the first means by which man can become the recipient of true comfort in life and death, namely, a true knowledge of his sins and miseries. In order to explain this, he has, in the previous Lord's Day, addressed the manner in which man is led to a true knowledge of his misery by way of the law of God.

In this Lord's Day, he proceeds to address the fountain or origin of man's misery, finding its very deepest origin to be the disobedience of our first parents in Paradise. This again is a matter of the utmost importance and prominence, for without a true, thorough, and spiritual knowledge of this, we will neither ever be truly conscious of nor discern and experience our misery. Here we find the origin and root of all evil and the plague of our leprosy, and unless we grasp this spiritually and experientially, it will be eternally impossible that we "Ethiopians" will be able to change our skin. Instead, after having fully exerted ourselves to the utmost, along with the Pharisees we shall be nothing more than "whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27).

May the Lord be pleased to illuminate us by His Holy Spirit, and lead us into the truth we are now to consider, doing so for His name's sake. Amen.

In this Lord's Day, the instructor expounds two extraordinarily great and important truths for us:

1. He addresses the fountain, the root, or the origin of man's misery (Questions 6 and 7).
2. He addresses the magnitude, depth, and full extent of this misery—all of which is that man, as to his character and nature, must necessarily be completely transformed and thus be born again (Question 8).

The instructor addresses the first matter as follows:

- a. He demonstrates where one ought not to look for the origin and root of man's misery—not in God's creation, for God created man entirely upright, holy, and according to His image (Question 6).
- b. He then demonstrates where we must look for the fountain and root of this misery, namely, in man's fall, etc. (Question 7).

In regard to the first, the instructor's objective is to defend fully the holy, merciful, and righteous God against carnal reasoning that is utterly hostile to Him, and against all the hellish darkness that opposes this pure, undefiled, and eternal light by suspecting and accusing Him of being the fountain and cause of human wickedness, vileness, ungodliness, and unholiness.

The instructor does this by asking his pupil, "Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?" The instructor hereby presupposes that God has created man. He is therefore man's origin and maker, and man derives his being and existence entirely from God, in whom he lives, moves, and has his being (Acts 17:28). This is a truth that no one of the Christian faith would contradict—except in practice. Though they all profess to know God as their maker and creator, most of them yet deny Him in their works, serving such that in essence are no gods. Nevertheless, this truth is self-vindicating by virtue of its inherent divine and eternal power. The instructor will expound this in greater detail in Lord's Day 9, where, by way of the Apostles' Creed, he will focus on God the Father as the almighty creator, and therefore we shall speak no more about it at this time.

We must now consider in greater detail how God has generated and created man. The instructor describes man here as being utterly miserable and wretched—as being *wicked and perverse*. God's Word also describes the natural man like this. Among many references, let me here mention but a few: "An evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. 12:35); "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

Not only does God's Word describe man as entirely wicked, but also as entirely perverse. Peter refers to mankind as "this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40), and Solomon teaches and testifies in Proverbs 21:8 that "the way of man is froward and strange," frequently referring to sinners as froward.

When referring to the wickedness and perversion of man, we are to understand nothing other than the unholiness, ungodliness, and natural hostility of man toward God and his neighbor. The instructor addressed this in the

previous Lord's Day when he set before us how entirely incompatible man is by nature to the holy law of God.

The instructor now inquires as to the origin of man's wickedness and perversion. From whence proceeds this wickedness and perversion? Has God created man so wicked and perverse? The easiest and most convenient way for the flesh would be to look for the cause of this innate wickedness and perversion outside of ourselves, and thus in God. In so doing, however, one slanders the Holy One of Israel by positing that He created man so wicked and perverse. The enmity of the flesh against God has reached such heights that in their hearts men not only deem their holy and pure creator to be the author or origin of their wickedness and perversion, but they also dare to declare this openly and unashamedly before the entire world. O unbelieving and perverse generation! Is this not commonly said among you, thereby to cover up your evil and wickedness, "We are human beings; we did not make ourselves"? What does this convey but that He who made you is the cause of your wickedness?

Let it be known, however, that God will once again cause this evil and abominable proverb, whereby His holy name is slandered, to come to naught, saying, "I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel" (Ezek. 12:23).

Let us now listen to what the instructor teaches from the Word of God regarding the creation of man. Having refuted the notion that God has made man so wicked and perverse, he proceeds to teach us that "God created man good, and after His own image, etc." Here we encounter two matters that now need to be fleshed out further:

1. The instructor teaches how God created man.
2. The instructor then sets before us the happiness of man by virtue of his creation and by the enjoyment of communion with God.

The instructor thus teaches first of all that *God created man good*. This doctrine is grounded entirely in Holy Scripture. The Holy Spirit testifies in Genesis 1:31, "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." And in our text we hear Solomon testify, "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright" (Eccl. 7:29). The inherent goodness of a matter commonly consists of nothing other than its close conformity and likeness to its origin. In this instance, it is God alone who is good and is the overflowing fountain of good, for "there is none good but one, that is, God" (Matt. 19:17). Therefore, the more something conforms to God, the more inherent goodness

it will possess. On the contrary, the more anything deviates from God, and thus from its original design, the more evil it will be.

Concerning all created beings, we are to distinguish between two dimensions of goodness: a *natural* and a *moral* goodness. All irrational creatures were entirely gifted with a natural goodness when God created them. The natural conformity to their holy, wise, almighty, and merciful creator was such, so to speak, that they were overspread with His glory as with a garment. Every creature displayed God's infinite greatness and glory—as in an image or painting. This still is true concerning the creation today—that is, if only we behold it with a spiritual eye, for “the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3).

However, only the rational creature, that is, man, was endowed with a natural and moral goodness, so that naturally and spiritually he was entirely good, being conformed to God, his maker. The instructor teaches this by saying that God created man after His image, etc. This truth is also clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures, for Moses testifies (not to mention other passages), “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him” (Gen. 1:27).

To have a correct understanding of God's image and in what it consists, we must have a correct knowledge of God. Our understanding must be purged of all carnality and be illuminated by a pure, holy, spiritual, and eternal light, without which we have not the least understanding of God—however much we may be able to speak of Him with a natural intellect, even to the amazement of those who hear us.

Let me now proceed to speak of God and who He is. What I have to say, however, will be infinitely inferior as to who He is as an absolutely perfect, incomprehensible, and inexpressibly great being. He is a pure, holy, eternal, infinite, perfect, and blessed Spirit who only loves, enjoys, and glorifies Himself in a most holy and utterly perfect manner—a Spirit who fully knows Himself, and “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things” (Rom. 11:36).

It is according to His most holy and most glorious image that God has created man—an image consisting of three components. This communicates three things:

1. Since God is an eternal and absolutely perfect Spirit, He also created man with a rational and immortal spirit or soul, and, by means of this spirit, equipped him above all creatures to live in intimate fellowship and communion with Himself, his creator. Thereto man received a rational intellect, enabling him to know God, and a rational will, enabling him to embrace and love Him—and thus to enjoy Him and be most intimately united to Him. There could not

possibly be such an intimate union with God apart from such a rational and immortal spirit, since God is, as we have heard, a pure, eternal, and most perfect Spirit.

2. The fact that God created man after His image also implies that He not only has gifted man above all creatures with a rational and immortal spirit, but also that He has bestowed upon man a spirit that is wise, holy, pure, and perfect—just as He is a perfect, infinite Spirit who is pure and holy in the fullest sense. As a result, man was compatible with God and intimately united to Him. He possessed perfect *righteousness* and *holiness*, enabling him perfectly to know, love, serve, and glorify God, his creator, without either departing from Him in the least or sinning against Him—not even with a single thought or inclination of the heart. While in this state, man enjoyed God perfectly, and he was filled and satisfied with God and His holy image to such an extent that he did not seek after anything apart from God. Rather, the entire purpose of his existence and all his delight, enjoyment, and pleasure were in God alone, in serving and obeying Him in true holiness.

3. The fact that God created man after His image is also revealed by His having appointed man to have *dominion* over all other creatures—over the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and the animals of the field. In this, he reflects God, the supreme Lord and king of all creation, to whom everything must fully submit. God appointed man to be lord and king over His entire creation, and, as God's vice-regent, everything therefore had to submit itself to him (cf. Gen. 1:23).

Behold, in this manner, God created man after His image, and according to the instructor, He did so “that [man] might rightly know God his creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him.” This blessedness of man was an immediate and necessary consequence of having been created in the image of God in the manner we have here set before you. While man was thus privileged to bear God's holy and pure image, an image that had been impressed upon him in creation, it follows that:

First, man was capable of *knowing God* intellectually and spiritually, having God, in His incomprehensible and glorious virtues and perfections, always before his eyes and finding his delight most gloriously in beholding this infinite and all-sufficient being. Man was thus able to do so without having to resort to a source outside of himself to acquire such knowledge of God. This pure and eternal light, without any trace of darkness, shone clearly within man's soul and fully preoccupied, filled, and illuminated his mind. Consequently, man needed

to do nothing other than follow this light, to be fully illuminated by it, and to rely completely upon it, and, as a child of light, to walk in that light.

Second, man, with his entire soul, embraced God as being this eternal light that shone so clearly within him, and therefore he *loved Him heartily*. Man, being fully illuminated in his mind by God's holy and eternal light, saw and beheld therefore such indescribable preciousness, beauty, holiness, and glory in God, beholding in Him such fullness and all-sufficiency, that his entire heart was engaged toward Him in a love of utmost purity. He was therefore fully inclined to embrace such a most blessed and all-glorious being, and be intimately united to Him. Consequently, he wanted neither to offend Him in any way nor to cleave to or desire anything outside of Him, because in this enjoyment and embracing of God, man found all his delight, salvation, and blessedness. Consequently, he loved God with his entire heart and said, "I will love thee, O LORD, my strength" (Ps. 18:1).

Third, being in such a state, this holy man, according to the instructor, would necessarily *live with God in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him*. God is an eternal, infinite, and immutable Spirit, and the spirit of man in its essence was also created to be eternal and immortal. Therefore, the blessed and intimate spiritual union between God and man, barring any woeful external event, would necessarily also continue to exist eternally and immutably, and man, of necessity and by virtue of that union, would consequently continue to know, love, enjoy, and glorify God eternally and perfectly. This was the blessedness that man would be capable of enjoying eternally and in accordance with his finiteness.

Behold, beloved, in this fashion God initially created man. Therefore, it is obvious that God in no wise created man so wicked and perverse as he now exists through sin, and thus it follows that the origin of this wickedness is in no wise to be found in God.

Having shown us how the fountain and root of man's misery, wickedness, and perverseness are not to be sought for in God, who created man good, according to His image, holy, and righteous, the instructor now proceeds to teach us where we must actually seek for the fountain and root of our misery, for he now asks his pupil, "Whence then proceeds this depravity of human nature?" and immediately he prompts him to answer, "From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise."

We have here two matters to be considered:

1. What is the essence of this fall and disobedience?

2. How are the fall and disobedience of our first parents the true fountain and root of the misery, wickedness, and perverseness of all men?

Regarding the first, everyone is sufficiently acquainted intellectually with the fact that God brought forth the entire human race upon earth by way of these two people; that our first parents fell in Paradise; and that they were disobedient toward God, their king and creator, by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is described in great detail in the first three chapters of Genesis, and we will therefore not enlarge upon this further. We will make only a few explanatory remarks.

Adam and Eve were a blessed and holy people indeed, having been created good and upright by the Lord God, who created them in His image. However, they remained in this blessed state and this intimate union with God for only a very short time. From a source outside of themselves, a wretched event overtook them and instantaneously and fully drew them away from God—albeit not outside of God's eternal counsel and very wise government. This caused them to focus entirely upon themselves, and as to their souls, they utterly lost God and His blessed image. As a consequence of this event, they, being instigated by the subtle temptation of the devil, deliberately and voluntarily engaged in vile rebellion and disobedience toward God, transgressing the holy command He had given them, accompanied with a promise unto life and the threat of death. It was the woman who permitted herself to be tempted by the serpent to be disobedient, and the man permitted himself to be tempted by the woman.

Thus, they both ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, thereby transgressing God's command, upon which they both immediately died spiritually. Consequently, their souls were bereft of the blessed and glorious image of God with which they had been gifted and according to which they had been created. The reason for the loss of God's image was their willful departure from God. By virtue of their disobedience, they cast God's yoke and His blessed rule entirely from their shoulders, and thereby exchanged the service of God for the service of self and Satan. They aligned themselves with these alien lords and simultaneously turned away from God, who was their lawful Lord and king. By virtue of this departure from God, they expelled God, with His holy and glorious image, from their souls, extinguishing that image so completely that nothing remained in their souls except some wretched remains.

Simultaneously, our first parents, having thus deprived themselves of God's image, became entirely unholy and ungodly, for God had departed from

them—or, better said, they had so entirely departed from God that they no longer knew, loved, served, or glorified Him. In their nature, they had instead become entirely hostile toward God—children of wrath, servants of Satan and sin, dreadfully disobedient, and unsuited for any good work.

Such was the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise! God, according to His supreme wisdom, directed and permitted this to occur, so that the entire world would be guilty before Him, and the riches and glory of His grace would thereby be unveiled unto all who believe in Christ Jesus.

The instructor here identifies this fall and disobedience of our first parents as the fountain and root of all of man's misery, wretchedness, wickedness, and perverseness, teaching that "hence our nature is become so corrupt, that we are all conceived and born in sin." It is taught plainly and clearly in Scripture that all men are thus *conceived and born in sin*, and thereby have become entirely corrupt, wicked, unholy, and ungodly from birth. We will confirm this by a small selection of passages from Holy Writ. In Psalm 51:5, David, a man after God's heart, testifies concerning himself, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." In Isaiah 48:8, it is said to the house of Jacob, "For I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb." And in Genesis 8:21, God Himself testifies that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Consequently, all men enter the world with a character and nature that is entirely unholy and ungodly.

We inherit this sinful corruption, unholiness, and natural ungodliness from our first parents, and thus by virtue of their fall and disobedience, all this corruption is transmitted to us. There are two special channels or methods by which this occurs: 1) by the imputation of guilt and 2) by inheriting the pollution of their sin and ungodliness.

Concerning the first, the corruption, unholiness, and ungodliness of all men have their origin in the imputation of Adam's sin and disobedience. God therefore considers them as having sinned in and with their patriarch Adam, and as having transgressed His holy command.

Nothing is taught so plainly in Scripture as this truth, and as proof, we will quote a few passages. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12); that is, by the man Adam, we have all sinned. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one [that is, Christ] shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). And we read in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

The basis for the imputation of Adam's disobedience is to be found in the fact that God established the covenant of works with Adam—a covenant that Adam transgressed. The Lord entered into this covenant with Adam as the patriarch of the entire human race. This human race, so to speak, was in his loins, so that when Adam sinned, the entire world also sinned in him and fell away from God. We would be able to demonstrate and expound this at great length, doing so from the Holy Scriptures.

The other channel through which our innate corruption and unholiness, proceeding from the fall and disobedience of our first parents, is transmitted to us is by our inheriting of the pollution of their corruption—a corruption that cleaves to us.

We have heard how ungodly and unholy our first parents became by their disobedience toward God and by their fall from God, and how they thereby lost His image in their souls. Since all men have proceeded from them and have their origin in them as a stem and branch has in a tree, they must necessarily also be as corrupt, unholy, and ungodly as they were, for as the roots are, so must be the branches. The Holy Scriptures therefore teach clearly, "And Adam...begat a son in his own likeness, after his image" (Gen. 5:3). The apostle teaches in 1 Corinthians 15:49, "And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." The Savior plainly teaches in John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." And Job testifies in Job 14:4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one."

Given the nature of man's sinfulness, this would be absolutely impossible, for a cause cannot bestow a greater measure of perfection upon its effect than that which it possesses inherently. Since, however, all men are of an entirely corrupt, unholy, and ungodly stock, it follows that they are therefore entirely corrupt, unholy, and ungodly.

We have thus sufficiently set before you what is the fountain and root of man's misery. And this is indeed the primary truth the instructor intended to expound and address in this Lord's Day.

He then proceeds to show us briefly what the depth, magnitude, and extent of man's natural misery is, teaching us in Question 8 that we and all men by nature are *so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness...except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God*. It is this fact that we are incapable of doing any good and are inclined to all wickedness that defines the measure and infinite depth of our corruption and that of all mankind.

We need to note here that there is a twofold goodness: one that is natural and one that is spiritual.

1. *Natural goodness* is something that man can perform in his natural state by virtue of the general influences of God's Spirit and providence, and the highest level it can achieve is but hypocrisy.

2. *Spiritual goodness* is the result of the renewing and saving grace of the Holy Spirit, and it is the latter, and thus a true and saving goodness, which the instructor has here in mind. The Holy Scriptures teach this very clearly and abundantly, and we will confirm it by quoting a few passages. Paul writes in Romans 5:6, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly"; in Romans 8:7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God"; in Romans 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not"; and in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."

When we view this matter in a spiritual light, all will become very clear—for the same reasons stated earlier. As we have seen, that which is truly good consists entirely in holiness and conformity to God. Since, however, man has deprived himself of God's image by sin, his nature is entirely unholy and ungodly. Consequently, it is impossible for him to love God and His holiness. Instead, he completely hates and opposes them. Man is thus necessarily an enemy of all that is good, and a servant of evil. The instructor therefore teaches that man must be "regenerated by the Spirit of God."

This doctrine also is founded entirely upon Holy Scripture. In John 3:3, we read that the Savior speaks to Nicodemus (oh, that this would truly be heard by men!), saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This means that man cannot be a holy and obedient subject of God. He is incapable of knowing, embracing, serving, and glorifying God as his king. Instead, he continually rebels against God, rejects His government, rids his shoulders of His yoke, and fully cleaves to and serves sin and Satan.

This regeneration, however, is nothing less than a complete re-creation, renewal, and transformation of man, as well as of his disposition, his propensities, his character, and his nature. In their totality, men are set free from the bondage of sin and death, become subject to God, and are made subservient to His righteousness. By this regeneration, man, in essence, is converted to God and made an entirely new creature, for "if any man be in Christ, he is a new

creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). Believers are therefore also referred to as “newborn babes” (1 Peter 2:2), and are said to “have put on the new man” (Col. 3:10) and to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

This regeneration, or blessed renewal of man, is purely spiritual in nature and has its origin in God. It is therefore said of believers that they are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). The Holy Spirit is the author of this new birth, and the instructor states that it is through Him that we are born again. Earlier, we considered the words of the Savior, who said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In Titus 3:5, the apostle joins these two, saying, “He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost,” and in this manner believers are purified from their sins, for it is the Holy Spirit, being the Spirit of faith, who leads the elect to Christ. He unites them to Christ and causes them to embrace and receive Him unto justification and sanctification. In so doing, He renews, sanctifies, and regenerates believers in Christ, causes Christ to dwell in their hearts by faith, and raises them with Christ unto a new life.

If any man is to be truly holy, if he is to be inclined toward good, and if he is to depart from all ungodliness, then such a spiritual renewal and regeneration must specifically occur. Without regeneration, man remains an unholy enemy of God, “wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness.” A man may externally transform himself by work-oriented and legalistic principles, and have an outward appearance of purity. He may deceive people, and even the godly, with his appearance of virtue and godliness. Inwardly, however, he remains entirely ungodly, unholy, and a servant of unrighteousness. Like a snake, he may change his external skin, but he retains the nature of a snake—as is true for all hypocrites and the mockers of our day. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” (Jer. 13:23).

A complete renewal and transformation of man's character and nature must therefore occur. The Holy Spirit must regenerate and re-create him, for without it, man will eternally remain what he is: unholy, ungodly, impotent, “being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Titus 1:16). All this makes it clear what the unfathomable depth, magnitude, and extent of man's misery is by virtue of sin—a misery to which he has become subject as a result of “the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise.”

Thus, we have opened up this subject for you. In the following Lord's Day, the instructor will deal with the worthiness of punishment and condemnation that proceeds from man's misery.

The Lord is able, by His Spirit, to apply to your hearts all that has been dealt with and explained. He is able to sanctify you by these truths, so that you may be wrought upon unto salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, must receive honor, praise, and thanksgiving to all eternity. Amen.

God's Wrath and Avenging Justice

LORD'S DAY 4

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

—ROMANS 1:18

Question 9: Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in His law that which he cannot perform?

Answer: Not at all; for God made man capable of performing it; but man, by the instigation of the devil, and his own wilful disobedience, deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts.

Question 10: Will God suffer such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?

Answer: By no means; but is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in His just judgment temporally and eternally, as He hath declared, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

Question 11: Is not God then also merciful?

Answer: God is indeed merciful, but also just; therefore His justice requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul.

When God the Lord, in the days of old, gave His holy law on Mount Sinai to the children of Israel, and through them to all men, He did so in a most glorious, awe-inspiring, and unusual manner. We read of this in Exodus 19:16–18: "There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.... And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the

LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.”

They who insist on applying all of this only to the economy of the Old Testament, maintaining that its grievous bondage is particularly described in this history, are, in our opinion, self-deceived, and in their blindness and deeply imbibed carnal prejudice, they also deceive others. The true reason why God gave His holy law in such an awe-inspiring manner and accompanied it with such unusual signs was to give the Israelites, and all men throughout all periods and ages of the world's existence, a clear display of His infinite holiness and avenging justice as lawgiver. He would have men know what they are to expect from Him if they do not keep this law in a perfectly holy and righteous manner, and how His fearful wrath would be poured out upon mankind as a fire that would consume all who oppose this law—a fire that would smoke and burn into the deepest recesses of hell.

Thus, these unusual and awe-inspiring signs were equivalent to a majestic proclamation and public declaration to the whole world regarding Jehovah's spotless holiness and infinite justice. This means that all sinners and transgressors of the law must necessarily be subjected to God's wrath, curse, and condemnation, for God, by His infinite holiness, will be to all sinners a devouring fire and everlasting burnings with whom no one can dwell (Isa. 33:14). In Revelation 4:5, the throne upon which God is seated and from which He reigns is therefore portrayed as a throne from which proceed “lightnings and thunders and voices,” signifying to us that “righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne” (Ps. 97:2).

It is this truth that we wish to bring to your attention in greater detail.

The instructor is engaged in expounding for us the first thing that needs to be known in order to secure true comfort and peace for the soul, namely, a true and spiritual knowledge of one's misery. Therefore, he first showed us the way or manner in which one acquires a true knowledge of his misery out of and by means of the law of God. This occurs when, illuminated by spiritual light, one sees himself in the law as in a mirror.

In Lord's Day 3, the instructor subsequently dealt with the true fountain and origin of our misery: the fall and disobedience of our first parents. He also addressed the infinite depth, magnitude, and extent of our misery—all being of such a nature that man, as to his character and nature, must be completely transformed and reborn in order to be capable of any good.

He then proceeds in this Lord's Day to deal with the truth that our misery renders us worthy of punishment and condemnation. This is a necessary consequence of the spotless holiness and avenging justice of God, which demand that God's wrath, curse, and punishment be executed upon all sinners and transgressors of the law. God is just in His pronouncement that they who do such things are worthy of death.

In order that we would rightly deal with this weighty and essential doctrine of our most holy faith, may the Lord lead us by the illumination of His Holy Spirit so that our reflection upon and consideration of this truth may be beneficial and a blessing to our souls. Amen.

Since this Lord's Day consists of three distinct questions and answers, it encompasses three specific matters:

1. The instructor shows and affirms that God, irrespective of man's wretchedness and complete inability to do any good, has a right to require of man that he obey His law (Question and Answer 9).
2. He therefore concludes that God's wrath and avenging justice must be executed upon all sinners and transgressors of His holy law (Question and Answer 10).
3. He further vindicates the justice of God by refuting an objection that is raised to render its claims null and void by appealing to God's grace and mercy (Question and Answer 11).

Concerning the first, the foundation of the entire work of salvation and of the sinner's redemption in the gospel way consists in this: man, in spite of his wretchedness and carnal impotence due to sin, remains fully indebted to the claims of the law. Man is subject to the law, which threatens death and condemnation to the transgressor, demanding that it be perfectly obeyed.

Since this doctrine is such a fundamental truth of our most holy faith, the instructor feels compelled first to affirm this truth, doing so by phrasing the question in the form of an objection: "Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in His law that which he cannot perform?" The carnal mind, "which is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7) because it is completely shrouded in darkness, reasons as follows: since man, by sin, has become incapable of keeping and obeying God's holy law perfectly (as we have clearly shown in the two previous Lord's Days), God cannot justly require such perfect obedience from an impotent sinner.

The reason for this erroneous opinion of the carnal mind proceeds from ignorance regarding God and His essential and immutable holiness. The world, being ignorant of who God is in His wisdom, denies God and puts Him on the same level as an insignificant and finite creature. We know that among men, the following rule is observed: one cannot obligate someone to do that which is completely beyond his capacity. Legal scholars tell us that *one cannot be obliged to perform that which he cannot possibly achieve*. But having said this, the rule is not entirely applicable among men in regard to guilt that has been incurred morally. For though a debtor may be incapable of paying his debt, he is nevertheless obligated to its payment, and his inability in this respect in no wise absolves him from prosecution by his creditors.

In the instance before us, it is the carnal flesh that disputes God's sacred right to require of sinful man, irrespective of his absolute impotence, that he render perfect obedience to His law. This hostile inclination toward God is so deeply embedded in our flesh that we are all by nature completely preoccupied with it, and only when we become spiritual and learn to discern all things (1 Cor. 2:15) are we capable of judging in a right manner.

From this wretched fountain and abyss of eternal darkness proceed all objections from those who oppose our most holy religion and slander the truth of the gospel. This is particularly true for three major heretical sects: the Socinians, the Papists, and the Arminians. All three have their origin in hellish darkness and overthrow entirely the foundation of eternal salvation, so that we must say of them what is written in Isaiah 59:5: "They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper."

The instructor defends God's sacred justice from their assault and that of all God's enemies, for upon the question, "Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in His law that which he cannot perform?" he replies, "Not at all." That is rightfully so, for God cannot possibly be guilty of injustice toward His creature, man. He neither has nor can have an absolute obligation toward man, either to do something or to refrain from doing it, for He is man's absolute and sovereign Lord. Furthermore, God cannot do injustice to man, for He is perfectly and infinitely good and holy. "Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity" (Job 34:10).

The instructor explains this matter in greater detail, showing us that God does not do the least injustice to man by requiring from the impotent sinner

perfect obedience to the law, “for God made man capable of performing it.” Here he affirms two things:

1. God created man in such a way that he was capable of obeying His holy law perfectly. We deliberately expounded this truth in great detail in the previous Lord's Day, when, according to the instructor, we observed how God initially created man in His image, and thus good and holy. Consequently, man knew God, his creator, perfectly, loved Him wholeheartedly, and was thus fit to “live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him.” Therefore, we need neither repeat nor address these matters here, but only mention these truths as already having been proven and addressed.

2. Man, having thus been created by God as good, holy, and perfect, “by the instigation of the devil, and his own willful disobedience, deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts.” In the previous Lord's Day, we also addressed this truth and deliberately expounded it at great length, in accordance with that which the instructor taught us. We considered how our first parents, Adam and Eve, permitted themselves in Paradise to be tempted by the devil to transgress God's command; how they willfully departed from God; and how, by this willful departure and disobedience, they robbed not only themselves but also their entire posterity of God's image. Thereby they plunged themselves into a bottomless pit of extreme and eternal misery, as well as spiritual impotence. Consequently, all men are by nature utterly ungodly and unholy, and thus eternally incapable of keeping God's law.

These matters, having already been proven and explained, we wish again to set before you, building one truth upon another. With the instructor, we thus conclude that God, by requiring the strictest and perfect observance of His law from the impotent sinner, does him no injustice—not even in the least sense of the word. When in the beginning God created man, He granted him the ability to serve and obey Him in the perfection of holiness. However, in lending an ear to the devil, man willfully departed from God, His king and creator, thereby rendering himself and all his descendants completely and eternally incapable of serving and rendering obedience unto God. Nevertheless, God, as man's creator and natural king, retains His right to require perfect obedience and subjection of man—even though man, by virtue of his carnal flesh, is entirely incapable of this. For man's impotence, caused by his own deliberate disobedience toward God, cannot deprive God in the least of His holy claim upon man, for He is his sovereign Lord, creator, and sustainer.

There are those who posit that God's holy majesty was blemished and destroyed by man's impotence and disobedience. To foster such an idea is a most abominable blasphemy proceeding from the carnal mind. From the argumentation of the instructor, it is very evident that God, by virtue of His holiness and supremacy, retains the unalterable right to require perfect obedience and subjection of the impotent sinner. Consequently, He does no injustice at all by continually requiring the impotent sinner to obey perfectly and by threatening him with eternal death and condemnation upon his failure to do so.

Beloved, the Holy Scriptures teach us this truth everywhere most clearly and emphatically as foundational for the entire work of salvation and the redemption of the sinner. Listen and hear how emphatically the apostle Paul makes this assertion: "But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man.) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?" (Rom. 3:5–6). We will then consider how sinners are described in Matthew 18:24–35. There we read the parable in which a servant owes his master ten thousand talents. Whereas the servant has no means to pay the king, the king commands that he, his wife, his children, and all that he possesses be sold and given in payment of his debt.

Having sufficiently addressed and affirmed this matter, the following question still needs to be answered: If man is entirely and eternally incapable of obeying God's holy law in the flesh, what then motivates God to be so strict in requiring obedience from man, threatening eternal death and condemnation upon failure to do so? We will respond briefly by saying that it is God's sole objective to make man thereby acquainted with his impotence and misery. (The instructor will deal with this doctrine separately in Question 115.) God's objective in so acquainting man with his impotence and misery is to humble him and lead him to look entirely outside of himself, so that he will seek for all his righteousness and strength in the Lord Jesus.

God requires the impossible observance of His holy law from all men as rigorously as He does so that He may thereby introduce the gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ, and set free the elect from the bondage of the law. By nature, they are all subject to that law as to a schoolmaster—that is, until "after that faith is come" (Gal. 3:24–25), so that thereby they are brought under grace (Rom. 6:14).

We have addressed this first main heading sufficiently, and will now proceed to deal with the second main heading, dealing with the exercise of God's holy, avenging, and punitive justice toward sin and the sinner.

Having dealt thus far with the right knowledge, origin, and nature of man's misery, the instructor now proceeds to address the doctrinal consequences of the innate misery of all men, namely, that it renders them worthy of punishment and condemnation. He asks his pupil in Question 10, "Will God suffer such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?" and then prompts him to answer, "By no means; but is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in His just judgment temporally and eternally."

In speaking of man's misery due to sin, the instructor refers to it as disobedience toward and rebellion against God—and rightfully so. The sin of our first parents and the sin of all men consists in this: they have all fully departed from God and have become completely disobedient toward Him, casting His yoke and dominion entirely from their shoulders. In so doing, they have altogether become "abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Titus 1:16).

The instructor now inquires whether God will allow such disobedience and rebellion *to go unpunished*. There is nothing carnal man is more inclined to think than that God, rather than punishing sin and disobedience, will readily overlook and pardon them. This erroneous notion proceeds from man's natural darkness and profound ignorance of God. This is most harmful and detrimental to the soul, for it causes men to lose completely all reverence for God, as well as for His holiness and His justice. It causes him to live on carelessly and fearlessly in his sin and ungodliness, saying, as is written in Psalm 94:7, "The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it."

Therefore, when sinners hear the words of the curse, they nevertheless bless themselves in their hearts, "saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart" (Deut. 29:19). Hear, however, what the holy God says to all sinners: "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes" (Ps. 50:21). It is this avenging and punitive justice of the holy God that the instructor here addresses in particular, teaching us that God "is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins."

Three things come to the foreground in regard to what the instructor here teaches us:

1. God's dreadful wrath toward sin;
2. the consequences of God's wrath, namely, the punishment of the sinner;
3. the holy sentence of the law, according to which God executes this punishment.

In regard to the first, we will consider the objects of God's wrath, and then the wrath of God itself.

The objects of God's wrath are both *original and actual sins*. By original sin, nothing else is to be understood but the imputation of Adam's guilt to, and the inheritance of the pollution of his sin by, all his descendants. We considered this at length in the previous Lord's Day, showing from the Holy Scriptures how by imputation all men have sinned in and with their ancestor Adam, and how, as a result, the character and nature of men have become so corrupt that they are now all conceived and born in sin, and thus they are utterly unholy and ungodly.

In addition to man's original sin, we must also consider his actual sins, which he commits personally in thoughts, words, and deeds, doing so as a result of his natural corruption and innate ungodliness and unholiness. Since man comes into the world in such an unholy, ungodly, and corrupt condition, he can do nothing except sin. As an evil tree can bring forth only evil fruit, so man, being naturally sinful, can do nothing but commit sinful deeds.

The instructor here teaches that God "is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins." By the *wrath of God*, we are to understand nothing other than God's holy displeasure toward sin and sinners, so that He infinitely hates sin and sinners, and is entirely opposed to them. God is an infinitely holy being who loves Himself and His marvelous virtues and glory in the purest and most perfect sense, and therefore it is impossible for Him to do anything other than infinitely hate and abhor sin, as it is entirely contrary to His holiness. It is therefore said of God that He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13). In Psalm 5:5–6, the Lord's people address Him in the following manner: "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Ps. 5:4–5).

Given God's infinite hatred toward sin, it follows that it provokes Him to *wrath*, for "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). This wrath of God is most dreadful and fearful for the sinner, and therefore our instructor teaches us that God is *terribly displeased* with our

sins. Nothing is more dreadful than the *wrath* of God, for since God is infinite, His wrath is infinite as well. When, therefore, this wrath in all its fury descends upon the sinner, it results in his eternal perdition in both body and soul.

It is true that an unconverted and careless sinner has little or no fear for the wrath of God. He thinks very lightly of it, and does not permit himself to be persuaded by the terror of the Lord to believe and to seek the favor of God. This proceeds from carnal darkness and ignorance of God. All men are therefore, by nature, foolish practical atheists who say in their hearts, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1).

However, those who have been called out of darkness to the knowledge of God and to His wondrous light have a little understanding regarding the wrath of God, causing them to exclaim with Paul, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). They tremble and shudder when considering the displeasure of the most high God, viewing it as a most dreadful calamity and the source of all misery and wretchedness. A lively impression of the wrath of God is already sufficient to cause them to melt away. My friends, when God is provoked to wrath, then all creation must tremble before Him as a leaf. He "removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger, which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble" (Job 9:5–6).

Oh, unconverted sinners, it is my sincere desire that God would experientially and spiritually acquaint you with His holy and dreadful wrath, so that you would confess with the man of God, "God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies" (Nah. 1:2)!

According to the instructor, God manifests His holy wrath toward our original and actual sins, for His holy name is maligned and dishonored by both. Sinners rebel against God by their original and actual sins. They are disobedient to Him, resist Him with exalted weapons of war, and do violence upon and demolish God's sovereign dominion. God must therefore necessarily be terribly displeased with both and be opposed to sinners with a dreadful fury.

It is thus abundantly clear that all men, by virtue of their original and actual sins, are by nature subject to the wrath of God, and are therefore "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). All the redeemed of the Lord know how miserable and wretched a state this is, for their understanding has in some measure been enlightened.

What, however, are the consequences of this wrath of God? The instructor teaches that God, being terribly displeased with our original and actual sins, will therefore “punish them in His just judgment temporally and eternally.” Even among men, the execution of vengeance and punishment are in consequence of anger, hatred, and wrath. Solomon therefore says in Proverbs 16:14, “The wrath of a king is as messengers of death.”

How much more applicable this is to the infinitely exalted, holy, and just God! For God hates sin as being entirely in conflict with His holiness. He is therefore terribly provoked by sin, and must necessarily fully oppose it. He must cause the sinner to feel His hatred and terrible wrath, not only by hiding from the sinner His blessed all-sufficiency—thereby depriving him entirely of the greatest good, namely, communion with God—but also by bringing upon the sinner the most dreadful of evils, as well as infinite punishments and judgments. It flows out of God's holy nature and avenging justice that He must utterly cause to perish His vile enemy and opponent, for He cannot permit evil to go unpunished.

The instructor therefore correctly teaches here that God will punish our original and actual sins *both temporally and eternally*. God punishes sin *temporally* with all manner of general and specific maladies of both soul and body, pouring out His just wrath upon sinners. God's Word, and sooner or later our experience, yields thousands upon thousands of examples of what God does; and when we consider this rightly and reflect upon it, we clearly observe God's hatred and wrath toward sin.

The nature of sinful men, however, is that their dreadful hardness of heart and perseverance in sin is such that they neither acknowledge nor feel God's manifold punishments and judgments. As Scripture teaches, the more they are stricken, the more they revolt (Isa. 1:5).

However, due to His holiness and spotless righteousness, God will not only punish sin temporally, but also *eternally*. He is an eternally living and unchangeable God, and thus if the sinner is not converted during this life, he will eternally and unchangeably remain God's enemy and will continue to sin against Him. God must therefore of necessity continue to punish the sinner as being His enemy eternally, doing so with the most severe punishments and judgments in soul and body. The Holy Scriptures teach this very clearly and abundantly, describing for us the punishments of the damned and ungodly as an “eternal fire” (Matt. 25:46) “where their worm dieth not” (Mark 9:44) and as a smoke of torment that ascends forever and ever (Rev. 14:11).

We will not say any more about the eternal punishment upon sin, it being a dreadful subject. We only wish to add what the apostle Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 1:8–9: “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”

God will thus punish sin temporally and eternally, doing so with the highest degree of fairness and justice by executing, as the instructor states, a *just judgment*. God is a righteous judge (Ps. 7:12), and “the judgment of God is according to truth” (Rom. 2:2)—a judgment that rests upon the threat and curse of His holy law. This law He gave to man for his instruction and as a rule of conduct, and He delights to be served and honored by man in conformity to and consistent with His majesty and holiness. The instructor teaches that God will punish sin temporally and eternally, “as he hath declared, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them” (Gal. 3:10).

When God gave His holy law to man, He accompanied it with this curse—a curse we find pronounced in Deuteronomy 27:26, where the Lord says, “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.” In Galatians 3:10, the passage quoted here by the instructor, the apostle Paul quotes this passage as to its intent and effect.

It is here that you hear God, in conformity to His supreme holiness and justice, pronounce the curse and condemnation upon every transgressor of His holy law. This means that God's immutable truth and holiness now demand that the threatened curse and condemnation be executed immediately upon the sinner who transgresses God's law. It thus follows clearly that God must punish sin temporally and eternally. He has declared and threatened this plainly in His Word, and His holiness, justice, and truth require it. Balaam testified that “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Num. 23:19).

Thus all men, due to their original and actual sins, are subject to the curse and wrath of God, as well as to all temporal and eternal punishments.

The instructor, having opened up for us the truth regarding God's avenging and punitive justice toward sin and the sinner, now further affirms it by responding to an objection derived from God's grace and mercy by asking his pupil, “Is not

God then also merciful?" and then prompting him to answer, "God is indeed merciful, but also just, etc."

This objection, here articulated and countered by the instructor, is again a fraudulent and deceitful argument of the flesh. The carnal man, who does not know God due to his innate ignorance, and consequently has no understanding regarding the intimate and essential relationship between God's holy and glorious attributes, separates these attributes one from the other. He subscribes to some of God's attributes while rejecting others, and in so doing the carnal and natural man subscribes to a God of his own liking who conforms to his foolish imagination. He subscribes to a God who is only gracious, compassionate, merciful, and longsuffering, but who is not at all holy, truthful, just, etc., and thereby he constructs a God according to his own liking and will. Of such a God, the carnal man has nothing or little to fear, for He is only merciful and gracious, and He very readily forgives sin. This gives a man all the latitude he desires, so that he can live and conduct himself according to the desires of his heart.

Oh, wretched ignorance of God! How many a sinner, traversing upon this pathway, will perish eternally!

If, however, we desire to lend an ear to good teaching and instruction, the instructor will provide this for us, saying that *God is indeed merciful, but also just*. Both these attributes, justice and mercy, are inseparably united in God's being, and may therefore in no wise be separated. If we separate them, we then deny who God is, and we fabricate a worthless idol. In the Holy Scriptures, God is never set before us in any way but as a God who is both just and merciful. Nearly every page of the Bible teaches this. Listen only to one passage, Exodus 34:6–7, where God declares His glory: "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation."

We are not to think of God in any other way than the description Moses here gives of Him: He is abundant in grace, longsuffering, and mercy, but He is also a God who will by no means clear the guilty, but will always severely punish sin both temporally and eternally. Thus, God's mercy cannot be in conflict with His holiness and justice, nor can it function in such a fashion that it would eradicate or in any way be detrimental to His holiness and justice. Rather, they must coexist in God in a most intimate manner.

Thus, God's justice, according to the instructor, "requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul."

We already have proven this in Question 10, and it could be enlarged upon and proven even more precisely and powerfully. This being the case, God's avenging and punitive justice can in no wise be nullified by His mercy and grace, but rather, must fully coexist with it. If, therefore, we wish to trust in God's mercy, a means first must be found by which the claims of God's inflexible holiness and justice can be satisfied on our behalf. This means that we must endure the punishment for our sins either ourselves or by another. Thus, what God's law requires must be paid to the very last penny before we can in the least measure find grace and mercy with God the Lord. It is abundantly evident that the argument of God being merciful in no wise can be used to diminish His avenging and punitive justice.

The instructor has in this Lord's Day taught us clearly that man in his natural misery is worthy of punishment and condemnation. He has caused us to see that, as sinners, we are by nature fully subject to the fearful wrath and curse of God, and that on account of our sins, are worthy of being punished with the severest punishments in body and soul, both temporally and eternally.

From this we conclude that men in their natural state are inexpressibly wretched, being children of wrath, accursed lawbreakers, enemies of God, and enslaved to eternal death and condemnation. If we further consider what we have dealt with in the previous two Lord's Days, it will all sufficiently yield clear and powerful evidence of our natural misery due to sin.

Oh, that we ourselves would have a true, spiritual, and experiential knowledge of all the truths that have been expounded! How happy we then would be! For this would be subservient to acquiring this glorious comfort and blessed peace of soul of which the instructor has spoken in the first Lord's Day. Unless we possess and enjoy this comfort, we must necessarily perish forever.

We exhort you all to be engaged most earnestly in acquiring a right knowledge of your sins and miseries. Most people are entirely blind, careless, and insensitive in this regard, thinking with the Laodiceans that they are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," not knowing that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). The result of this is that one neither conducts himself as a wretched one before God nor yearns for salvation and deliverance, and consequently completely rejects and despises the grace of God and the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, for

they being whole have no need of a physician. Oh, what shall it be when they become acquainted with and feel their misery—doing so, however, when it is eternally too late and when there shall no longer be any healing for them!

Though sinners may live peacefully and carelessly, their wretched misery is thereby not diminished in the least. Oh, no, they remain subject to the wrath of God, to the curse of the law, and to eternal condemnation! And the less they believe this, the more their misery will be confirmed and sealed by their unbelief. Therefore, don't flatter yourselves any longer. When God curses and threatens you due to your sins, telling you that He will temporally and eternally punish you, then bless yourselves no longer in your heart by saying, "I shall have peace!" You should know, according to Holy Scripture, that when you will say, "Peace and safety," then sudden destruction will come upon you (1 Thess. 5:3).

Therefore, if you desire to flee the wrath of God, turn to the Lord without delay. Permit yourselves to be convicted of your sins and wretched misery. Take refuge to the Lord Jesus! Pray earnestly to Him for His Spirit, so that He may open your eyes and convince you of your sins, so that you may thus find salvation and deliverance in the Lord Jesus.

Let me conclude with the words of the Gospel writer John, and may the Lord impress it upon all of our hearts: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). Amen.

General Observations Regarding the Mediator

LORD'S DAY 5

None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever).

—PSALM 49:7–8

Question 12: Since then, by the righteous judgment of God, we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, is there no way by which we may escape that punishment, and be again received into favor?

Answer: God will have His justice satisfied, and therefore we must make this full satisfaction, either by ourselves or by another.

Question 13: Can we ourselves then make this satisfaction?

Answer: By no means; but on the contrary we daily increase our debt.

Question 14: Can there be found anywhere one, who is a mere creature, able to satisfy for us?

Answer: None; for, first, God will not punish any other creature for the sin which man hath committed; and further, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin, so as to deliver others from it.

Question 15: What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?

Answer: For one who is very man, and perfectly righteous; and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God.

The content of Leviticus 16 is worthy of our consideration, for there we read how, in the Old Testament dispensation, the high priest would annually enter the Holy of Holies on the great Day of Atonement. On that Day of Atonement,

the high priest was required to enter the sanctuary, being clothed with holy garments, and after having washed himself with water, he would carry with him the blood of the slain sacrificial animals. As we can read in Moses's account, with that blood he would make atonement for his personal sins, as well as for those of his family and the entire nation.

Regarding the high priest's entry into the sanctuary, we only wish to say with the words of Paul that these things are an allegory (Gal. 4:24). God hereby, in a very clear and lively manner, portrayed to His believing people during the Old Testament the spiritual benefits and mysteries of the covenant of grace. This will be evident when we consider the following:

First, the high priest had to enter the sanctuary on behalf of the people to make atonement for their sins. They, however, had to remain at a great distance from the sanctuary. This vividly displayed to believing Israelites that, due to their sins, they were fully and eternally excluded from the true sanctuary of heaven as well as from blessed communion with God. It was therefore necessary that the true high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, would enter the heavenly sanctuary on their behalf, in order to make atonement for all their sins with God the Father.

Second, before approaching God in the sanctuary to make atonement for sin, the high priest had to wash and purify his body with water, typifying the true mediator and high priest, Christ Jesus, who had to be completely holy and free from all sin in order to make atonement for sin. Paul teaches this in Hebrews 7:26, saying, "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."

Finally, the high priest, in order to make atonement for sin, had to enter the sanctuary with the blood of the slain sacrificial animals. Hereby he foreshadowed how the true high priest, Christ, would once enter the sanctuary to make an everlasting atonement for all the sins of His elect, and thus of all believers, doing so not with strange blood, but rather, with His own blood.

The instructor's great objective and goal is to show all men the way in which they, in life and in death, can attain to a blessed comfort and peace for their souls. To this end, he teaches us that one essentially needs a true, thorough, spiritual, and experiential knowledge of the following three essential matters: 1) the magnitude of our sins and misery; 2) the true way of salvation, or the true means of deliverance; and 3) how one who has been delivered and set free by the Lord should show gratitude and live unto God.

The instructor addressed the first of these three matters in the previous three Lord's Days. There he instructed us regarding the true knowledge of the

origin and magnitude of the misery that, due to sin, is natural to us and all men—misery that renders us worthy of damnation. Having concluded this, he now proceeds to address with extensive detail the means unto eternal deliverance, as well as the way in which a poor and wretched sinner, worthy of being accursed and damned, may be delivered from his sins and miseries, and be saved. In addressing this great and essential matter, the instructor does so in a very appropriate and suitable order, dealing first with the necessity of a mediator and redeemer who might deliver the fallen sinner from his misery, then focusing on the indispensable prerequisites that must be found in Him in order to accomplish this great work. These matters the instructor addresses in this and the subsequent Lord’s Day.

May the Lord grant us the indispensable light of the Holy Spirit so that we may rightly consider these truths to our salvation. Amen.

The subject matter addressed by the instructor in this Lord’s Day can readily be reduced to two main topics:

1. He points out that there is a possible way in which a fallen sinner might be delivered from his misery, provided that the sinner satisfies the claims of God’s holy and avenging justice (Question 12).
2. He then investigates how and by whom this indispensable satisfaction of God’s justice is to be rendered (Questions 13–15).

Regarding the first, the instructor asks his pupil, “Since then, by the righteous judgment of God, we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, is there no way by which we may escape that punishment, and be again received into favor?”

In the previous Lord’s Day, the instructor demonstrated clearly—and we addressed it extensively—that all men by nature and by virtue of their sins, ungodliness, and unholiness are subject to God’s curse and wrath, and are justly deserving of all temporal and eternal punishment. We considered furthermore that God, by virtue of His holiness, justice, and truth, can do no otherwise but punish the sinner temporally and eternally for his original and actual sins.

He now proceeds and investigates whether there is a way or means whereby the sinner, worthy of being accursed, punished, and condemned, may escape this well-deserved punishment and condemnation, and be again received into favor by a holy and just God whom he has greatly provoked by his sins—and then in such a way that he may be reconciled to God, and, instead of punishment, curse, and wrath, receive from Him again all love, favor, and grace. The essence of salvation for a poor and wretched sinner does indeed consist in *the*

hostile relationship between himself and God due to sin being entirely resolved so that he is eternally reconciled with his God and intimately united to Him.

In order, however, for this ever to take place—for the ungodly sinner who is worthy of being punished, accursed, and condemned ever to be a partaker of so great a salvation—a means must necessarily be found and a way must be opened whereby such reconciliation and reunion of the sinner with God, and God with the sinner, can take place. The instructor here is inquiring regarding such a blessed means by asking, “Is there no way?”

Beloved, this is a question of the greatest weight and import—a question that every sinner should ask himself in all seriousness, following the example of the jailor who asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Were we here to consult with our natural reason, divorced from the revealed Word of God, we would have little or nothing to say to the instructor in response to this question. When, with our rational minds, we focus on the grace, the loving-kindness, and the mercy of God, as well as His power and wisdom, it appears that there must necessarily be a way or means whereby we can be reconciled with and united to God. It appears incomprehensible and inconsistent with God’s loving-kindness that He would indiscriminately permit all men to perish eternally. If, however, we focus on the holiness, justice, and truth of God, it appears to our natural reason that there is absolutely no way that a sinner can be reconciled and reunited to God. In regard to this great mystery, our reason is therefore utterly befuddled and deficient.

Consequently, this entire doctrine can only be known by and deduced from the instruction and revelation of God’s Holy Word, and this the instructor does with great specificity. When inquiring whether there is such a way of deliverance, a way in which the sinner can be reconciled and reunited with God, he prompts his pupil to respond, “God will have His justice satisfied: and therefore we must make this full satisfaction, either by ourselves, or by another.”

In dealing with this weighty matter, the instructor proceeds very carefully, and this is most fitting. By not immediately revealing that there is a means of deliverance for the sinner, and even less what this means is, he leads us first of all to the root of the matter. He demonstrates to us what the essential requirements are for such a means whereby the sinner is reconciled and reunited to God, saying, “God will have His justice satisfied: and therefore we must make this full satisfaction, either by ourselves, or by another.”

The instructor hereby establishes two truths:

1. God will have His justice satisfied, this being a requirement that must be met fully.
2. It thus follows that the sinner must fully appease and satisfy the claim of God's justice either by himself or by another.

Regarding the first, we are to consider God's justice as such, as well as the manner in which God will have His justice satisfied.

By God's justice, we are to understand nothing other than this holy and most perfect attribute of God's adorable being, which moves Him to deal with His rational creature, man, in complete conformity to His holiness and supremacy. He can neither forsake nor deny either of these, and God must therefore be considered in a twofold relationship toward man as being subject to His justice. He must be viewed:

- a. as man's creator, sustainer, and sovereign king and Lord; and
- b. as man's supreme, holy, and righteous judge.

As creator and supreme Lord, God demands of His creature, man, that in soul and body he be perfectly obedient and subject to all of His commandments—all in accordance with the prescribed rule of the holy and perfect law He has given to man. As the supreme judge, God assesses man's obedience and determines whether all his deeds and actions are in perfect conformity to the prescribed rule of His holy law. He consequently requites man according to his works, rewarding him when his works are good and punishing him when they are evil.

We will now perceive that, in essence, God's justice demands and requires two things of every man:

1. perfect inward and outward obedience to the entire law, without the least deviation or transgression; and
2. subjection to and the experience of supreme punishment, both temporally and eternally, if he is guilty of even the least act of disobedience or transgression of the law—something of which all men are guilty.

We addressed and expounded both of these matters extensively in the previous Lord's Day, namely, that God unrelentingly demands compliance with both of these matters. This He does as a necessary consequence of His infinite holiness and justice, and thus we perceive what God's justice actually consists of.

Regarding this justice, the instructor teaches that "God will have His justice satisfied." This means that all men are required to render complete satisfaction, and they are to do so without the least possible compromise. This satisfaction therefore consists of the following:

First, since we have sinned against God, our king and Lord, and have fully transgressed His holy law, we are subject to and must endure His infinite wrath, His just curse, and all of the temporal and eternal punishment we have brought upon ourselves. This we are deserving of by virtue of our sins. God will thus be holy and just when He judges, and be pure and upright in His judgments.

Second, we are obligated to render to God, as our creator and sovereign Lord, an obedience that is absolutely perfect and holy. We are to serve Him in soul and body according to the prescribed rule of the holy law He has given us, and we are to do so without the least deviation or transgression.

Only in this way can we satisfy the holy claim of God's justice, and with less than that we will not be able to make such satisfaction. The instructor here posits that God demands of all men an absolute and perfect satisfaction of His justice. And because of His infinite holiness and justice, He can neither compromise this requirement in the least nor absolve man of it in any way. If we were to expect God to do so, we would require Him to obliterate His holy attributes and thereby deny Himself, and then He no longer would be a holy and righteous God.

The religion of the Socinians, who teach that God, by virtue of sovereign supremacy, can set aside His holy justice in order to be gracious to the impotent sinner and pardon his sins without the necessity of any satisfaction, is therefore an abominable blasphemy. It is an atheistic religion that has its origin in the eternal darkness of hell. However, the origin of this accursed and demonic religion is by nature deeply rooted in all of our hearts, and only the eternal light of God can eradicate it from within us.

We have thus shown and explained what it means that "God will have His justice satisfied" and wherein this satisfaction of God's justice essentially consists.

The instructor therefore concludes that we must make this full satisfaction to the justice of God "either by ourselves, or by another." He who is capable of sound and spiritual judgment, and thus capable of proper discernment, will recognize immediately that the instructor's conclusion is entirely reasonable, lawful, and irrefutable, for if God's justice indeed requires such satisfaction as has been set before us, it will be self-evident that we owe to God such a

satisfaction. However, the instructor teaches here that we are to render unto God a *full* satisfaction, meaning that we must perfectly and completely pay unto God our debt of ten thousand talents, without the least possibility that it be diminished in any way, and that we must therefore suffer all deserved punishment due to our sins both temporally and eternally. Furthermore, we are obliged to serve and obey God perfectly, doing so in accordance with what He has prescribed in His holy law and without the least transgression.

Therefore, to introduce the notion, as the Socinians do, that by way of a so-called gracious assessment God accepts the deficient and partial obedience of man as being a perfect and complete obedience—or the notion that we do our best to serve and obey God to the utmost of our ability, as unconverted and blind Reformed people are inclined to think, believing that thereby they have made satisfaction—is at bottom nothing but a grievous mocking of God and a blatant denial of His holy and glorious majesty.

We must *fully* and completely satisfy the justice of God. He is the great judge of all the earth, whose judgment is just and according to truth, and who, due to their sins, will deliver all men to his servant, who will cast them into the prison. He will say to them, “Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing” (Matt. 5:25–26).

How then are we to satisfy God's justice fully? The instructor teaches us here that we are to do this “either by ourselves, or by another.” To satisfy God's justice by ourselves means that we personally, by our own strength and wisdom, and without anyone's counsel or assistance, bear the wrath, curse, punishment, and condemnation due to our sins, and do so temporally and eternally. It also means that we serve, obey, and glorify God perfectly and with flawless holiness according to what is prescribed in His holy law, doing so without ever being guilty of the least transgression in thoughts, words, or deeds.

If, however, we find ourselves both incapable and impotent to do so, then there is another way for us in which God's justice can be satisfied and full payment made. That way is that this is accomplished in us *by means of another*; that is, by one taking our place who is both capable and powerful. In other words, since this is entirely unattainable by ourselves, we cease and desist, and give the matter entirely into the hands of this other person, who, as our surety, fully assumes our guilt and fully satisfies God's holy justice. He would then endure the wrath, the curse, and the punishment of God that we deserve, and render to God the perfect service and obedience we are obliged to render Him as our

king and creator. This means that we are to be entirely passive, allowing this other person to satisfy God's justice fully on our behalf.

It is truly a great and infinite privilege for us and all other men that God can receive payment of the debt we owe Him *by another*. In His infinite wisdom, power, and loving-kindness, God has so accommodated poor and needy men that another making payment for their indebtedness to His justice will satisfy Him. He has done so specifically by way of His own Son, whom He gives to that end to be a surety and redeemer—all of which we will consider subsequently.

God could do this without relenting His justice or denying Himself or His attributes in the least. Even among men, the validity of suretyship is recognized—one man making full payment for the debts of another. It is even possible in some cases that one man can endure suffering and punishment on behalf of another—and even subject himself to death. Paul indicates this when he writes in Romans 5:7, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.”

It is thus evident that we must fully satisfy God's justice “either by ourselves, or by another” if there is to be any means for us to be reconciled with this holy and righteous God, and to be eternally united with Him in peace, favor, love, and grace.

Having demonstrated that it is possible for a sinner to be delivered and reconciled with God, provided that God's justice be fully satisfied on behalf of the sinner, the instructor now proceeds to inquire how and by whom this requisite satisfaction of God's justice is to be made. It must be made either 1) by sinful man himself; 2) by a creature other than man; or 3) by someone other than man or any other creature.

The instructor first inquires whether sinful man himself is capable and equipped to render the required satisfaction of God's justice. He therefore asks his pupil in Question 13, “Can we ourselves then make this satisfaction?” then prompts him to answer, “By no means; but on the contrary we daily increase our debt.” Here the instructor teaches that man, in and of himself, is entirely ill-equipped and incapable fully to satisfy God's justice in a manner as we have articulated in an earlier Lord's Day. Man is also ill-equipped and incapable of paying his debt either by fully enduring his well-deserved punishment or by rendering perfect obedience to God with soul and body.

This truth is evident from the Holy Scriptures, as well as from the very nature of the case.

1. The Holy Scriptures teach in many places that man, being a sinner, can in no wise by himself either bring about His reconciliation with God or pay his debt to this exalted majesty. Only consider a few passages. Job 9:2–3 speaks of man’s impotence: “But how should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand.” In Matthew 16:26, the Savior asks, “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” And Paul teaches in Galatians 3:10, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.”

2. Man’s impotence is equally clear by considering the very nature of the case. If we consider once more the debt man owes to God’s holy justice, it will immediately be evident that he is entirely incapable of paying it.

- a. As we have seen, man must temporally and eternally endure God’s infinite wrath, curse, and punishment due upon his sins. If, however, the sinner must eternally endure God’s wrath and punishment, how could he then ever deliver himself? For whatever is eternal will never end.
- b. Furthermore, sinful man must render unto God a perfect obedience, without the least transgression of the precepts of God’s holy law. Already in the previous Lord’s Days, the instructor has shown very emphatically that sinful man is entirely incapable of accomplishing this obedience. In Question 5, the instructor taught us that we are prone by nature to hate God and our neighbor, rendering us entirely incapable of keeping God’s law. In Question 8, he showed that we are “so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness...except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.”

To this the instructor adds that “we daily increase our debt.” This follows from the truths that have already been articulated, for whoever is “wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness,” and “prone by nature to hate God and [his] neighbor,” can do nothing but sin against God and transgress His holy law, thereby necessarily increasing his debt daily.

God’s Word therefore testifies regarding sinners that they drink iniquity like water (Job 15:16), and that after their hard and impenitent hearts they treasure up unto themselves “wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5). Even God’s regenerated children, believers who no longer live after the flesh but after the Spirit, “in many things...offend all” (James 3:2). They must therefore cry out, “But we are all as an unclean

thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa. 64:6).

How evident it is that as sinful human beings we are entirely ill-equipped and incapable of rendering even the very least satisfaction to the holy claims of God's justice!

The instructor therefore now turns his focus away from man, recognizing that the matter cannot be resolved by man. In Question 14, he therefore inquires whether the required satisfaction of God's holy justice can be secured by a creature other than man, doing so by asking his pupil, “Can there be found anywhere, one, who is a mere creature, able to satisfy for us?” In referring to “a mere creature,” the instructor has in mind a finite creature that is dependent upon God and owes all of its inherent power and glory to God.

Regarding such “a mere creature,” whatever its capacity might be, the instructor also denies its ability to render satisfaction to God's justice in the place of and on behalf of sinful man. The reason for this denial is obvious. In addition to the arguments advanced by the instructor, it is also evident that if a mere creature could make payment to God for man's guilt, it must necessarily be either a living creature or an inanimate object. By inanimate objects such as gold and silver, man cannot possibly render satisfaction to God's justice, for God fully owns such creatures, and man has no claim upon them other than what God permits. Peter therefore teaches us clearly that we were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, from our vain conversation (1 Peter 1:18; cf. Matt. 16:26).

It must therefore necessarily be a *living* creature that must satisfy God's justice on our behalf. Such a living creature, in turn, must necessarily be either *rational* or *irrational*. In the case of *irrational* creatures, such as bulls, calves, goats, sheep, etc., they are not at all capable of satisfying God's justice on man's behalf. Such satisfaction demands infinite power and infinite worthiness, and such qualities and requisites cannot be found in any creature—much less in an irrational creature. Therefore, even the blind heathen have easily been able to conclude with their darkened understandings that God cannot possibly be satisfied with the sacrifices of irrational animals. The pagan philosopher Cato therefore said, “Since you yourself are guilty, why would a sacrificial animal then have to die on your behalf?” Another philosopher expressed in song that the gods take no delight in the sacrifice of animals.

Now hear, however, what God's Word teaches regarding this. Paul states clearly in Hebrews 10:4, “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of

goats should take away sins.” In Psalm 40:6, Christ says to God His Father, “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire...burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.” And in Micah 6:6–7 we read, “Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?”

Therefore, only one conclusion remains: If a mere creature is going to satisfy God's justice, it must necessarily be a *rational* creature, and there are no rational creatures other than *angels* and *men*. Men are, however, incapable of making satisfaction for others, for, as we already have shown, they are utterly incapable of making satisfaction for themselves. In Psalm 49:7–8 we read, “None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever).”

Therefore, no other option remains but that we would look toward the angels in heaven. But however holy and perfect these spirits may be; however valiant these creatures of God may be; and however much they are sent forth to be of service to those who shall inherit salvation, they are nevertheless incapable of fully satisfying God's justice on our behalf. The reason for this is that they not only are merely finite creatures, but they also are creatures who have a nature that differs from the men on whose behalf satisfaction has to be made.

The instructor now focuses on this, teaching that no mere creature is capable of satisfying God's justice on our behalf, for two reasons:

1. *God will not punish in another creature the guilt that man has incurred.* This is self-evident, for it is man who has sinned against God in body and soul, and thus man is worthy of God's punishment. Consequently, it is man who must be punished in both body and soul, for God gave unto man His law to be obeyed with soul and body, and therefore man must obey the law with soul and body. The holy angels, however, have nothing in common with a human body, and all other creatures who are neither angels nor men have nothing in common with a human soul. Angels or other creatures are incapable of satisfying God's justice on man's behalf.

2. *“No mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin, so as to deliver others from it.”* The wrath of God against sin is eternal and infinite, and therefore he who would be fully capable of bearing this wrath and delivering others from it must necessarily be equipped with infinite power and ability. However, mere creatures—also including the holy angels—have finite natures, and therefore only have finite powers and abilities. Consequently, they

cannot possibly endure fully the infinite wrath of God against sin, but rather, they would have to endure it eternally without ever being able to escape from it. Much less could they endure this wrath on behalf of other creatures.

It is therefore as obvious as the noonday sun that neither in heaven nor on earth is a creature to be found that in any measure is capable of satisfying the holy claims of God's justice on behalf of sinful men. We therefore are eternally denied all help and deliverance in ourselves or by another creature.

Thereupon, having turned away fully from all solutions external to God as being "cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13), the instructor finally asks his pupil in Question 15, "What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?"; that is, what sort of a mediator and deliverer must he be who is capable of reconciling and reuniting us, sinners, to God by his mediation and intervention? Who is capable of eternally delivering us from all our misery and able to save us? Hereupon the pupil answers by describing such a mediator and deliverer in general terms, saying, "For one who is very man, and perfectly righteous; and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God."

The instructor posits that there are two essential prerequisites this person must have to render him capable of making satisfaction for us, and thus able to deliver us and reconcile us to God.

1. He must be as we are; that is, he must *truly* be human, having a human soul united to a human body. He must, however, also be a *righteous* man who is completely holy and perfect, and thus without any sin or corruption.
2. He must, however, also be more powerful than all creatures; that is, he must *truly* be God—not a so-called god, but He who in His essence is the Most High and true God Himself, "who is over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. 9:5).

He must necessarily fulfill these two requirements in order to be capable of delivering us, as mediator, from our sins, and reconciling and reuniting us to God. He must be truly God and truly a righteous man, and He must be so in the union of His person. None other but such a mediator would be capable of executing this great work of our salvation and redemption. In the next Lord's Day, the instructor not only shows this at length, but he will also sustain his arguments with powerful and weighty reasons.

Thus, we have in some detail not only expounded for you the instructor's preliminary investigation regarding the mediate cause of the deliverance of the

sinner from his innate misery, but also his concern for the eternal salvation and deliverance of the sinner. How desirable it would therefore be if together we would show as great a concern and diligence to be saved and to be reconciled to God; that we all would have a spiritual knowledge and sensitivity regarding our sins, our misery, and our utter helplessness; and that consequently we all would seek for such a suitable mediator and deliverer in order to be saved and redeemed!

Sadly, however, many among us have little or no concern regarding the one thing needful. The reasons for this are:

Many in this regard live peacefully and carelessly, neither knowing their misery nor seeking for deliverance, whose entire concerns, anxieties, and restlessness are related to the vain things of this world and the things of this brief and transient life.

Others, by virtue of repeatedly hearing preaching, instruction, and admonition, are at times slightly stirred within and have some concern regarding the matters that pertain to salvation. However, there is no effect upon their souls, and they are neither truly troubled nor concerned. Such stirrings occur spasmodically, after which they rapidly vanish.

There are others whose lost state and profound wretchedness have never truly and spiritually been uncovered to them. They think that all is well with them because they do not live a life of public ungodliness and vanity. Instead, they live quiet, moral, and civil lives, wrongly imagining that they are therefore good Christians, and that the Lord Jesus, whom they do not know at all as He must be known unto salvation, will save them when they die.

There are others who believe that they can be reconciled to God and satisfy His justice by performing some external duties and maintaining an appearance of godliness. They trust entirely in this without any willingness to be convinced either of how worthy they are of condemnation or how ungodly and impotent they are.

Finally, there are also those among us to whom their sins and miseries have been uncovered and revealed in a greater measure so that they must acquiesce that they are in a wretched state that will result in their eternal perdition if they remain in it. Such are at times greatly troubled. Nevertheless, since they are blind and stubborn with regard to the fact that their state is utter lostness, they refuse to be persuaded and convinced to seek their salvation and deliverance entirely outside of themselves in the mediator and deliverer, Christ Jesus. They are neither willing nor able to part with sin, but rather, they continue in

sustaining themselves with good intentions that one day they will undertake this, and thus manage to work out their salvation in their own strength and by their own wisdom.

How exceedingly wretched are all such people, for they remain subject to the wrath and curse of God, and must, by themselves, render satisfaction to God's justice. They will not permit this to be accomplished by another, namely, by the Lord Jesus Christ, whom they, until this very moment, continue to spurn and reject. Oh, that today by this sermon there would be some whose eyes would be opened, and that their sinful state of utter impotence and lost condition would truly be uncovered and bound upon their hearts! Oh, that we would hear such ones cry out: "It is beyond hope! I can no longer sustain my own life! I cannot pay unto God my debt! I cannot pay the required ransom to Him, for the redemption of my soul 'is precious, and it ceaseth for ever.'"

It is my desire that God, according to His great mercy, would be pleased to work such a conviction here among many more of us by His Word and Spirit. As I conclude, I would say to you all with the Savior, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). Amen.

The Mediator, Jesus Christ

LORD'S DAY 6

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

—1 TIMOTHY 2:5–6

Question 16: Why must he be very man, and also perfectly righteous?

Answer: Because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which hath sinned, should likewise make satisfaction for sin; and one, who is himself a sinner, cannot satisfy for others.

Question 17: Why must he in one person be also very God?

Answer: That he might by the power of his Godhead sustain in his human nature the burden of God's wrath; and might obtain for, and restore to us, righteousness and life.

Question 18: Who then is that Mediator, who is in one person both very God, and a real righteous man?

Answer: Our Lord Jesus Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

Question 19: Whence knowest thou this?

Answer: From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly, has fulfilled it by His only begotten Son.

Exodus 27:1–2 is worthy of our consideration, for there God commands Moses to construct the altar of burnt offering and to overlay it with brass (or copper). It was the Lord's will that Moses would overlay this wooden altar with copper—that is, cover it completely with copper plates—not merely for decorative purposes, but also to protect it against the intensity of the fire. In order that burnt offerings would be consumed upon this altar, a great and intense fire had to be stoked continually, and it was therefore necessary that the altar be overlaid with heavy plates of copper.

Every component of Israel's religion was typological in nature, and this was also true for this altar of burnt offering. It was a lively representation of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the great and only mediator between God and man. The apostle Paul, a man highly illuminated, teaches this clearly in Hebrews 13:10, where he describes the Lord Jesus as follows: "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle."

Israel's altar of burnt offering had to consist of two materials: wood and copper. The wood was to be decorated by the copper, which also served as protection against the intensity and heat of the fire. This vividly signified and foreshadowed the two natures of the Lord Jesus Christ: His human nature and His divine nature. The one was signified by the wood and the other by the copper. As the wood was a fragile substance that was incapable of withstanding the intensity and ferocity of the fire being stoked upon that altar, in like manner, the human nature of the mediator, Christ Jesus, could not possibly endure the intensity and heat of the fire of God's wrath that would be ignited against Him as mediator for the sins of the elect. That fire would have fully consumed His human nature, and therefore He had to be fully clothed, so to speak, with the enduring copper of His divinity. This enabled Him to endure and withstand the ignited fire of God's provoked wrath against the sins of the elect.

These matters are set before us in greater detail by our Christian instructor in this sixth Lord's Day. Being engaged in opening for us the way in which the sinner can be saved and be delivered from his misery, he showed us in the previous Lord's Day:

1. how it is absolutely essential that God's holy and avenging justice be satisfied in order to deliver the sinner from his misery; and
2. how the sinner as well as all mere creatures are completely and eternally incapable of satisfying this divine justice, and therefore, a mediator and deliverer is required "who is very man, and perfectly

righteous; and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God.”

In this Lord's Day, the instructor proceeds to explain and affirm in more detail the latter truth, doing so in the following order:

1. He focuses on those essential requisites of the mediator and deliverer of sinners that he merely stated factually in Question 15, addressing and confirming them in greater detail in Questions 16 and 17.
2. He unveils to us in Question 18 who this mediator and deliverer of sinners is, who truly possesses such requisites and qualifications, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. He then unveils to us in Question 19 the grounds upon which we can know with certainty that there is none other but He who is the true mediator and deliverer of sinners.

May the Lord be pleased, by the illumination of His Holy Spirit, to open up for us these truths and to sanctify them to the souls of all. Amen.

Regarding the first matter, the instructor has not only taught us that in order for the sinner to be delivered from his misery, he needs a mediator and deliverer who satisfies for him the holy claims of God's justice, but also that in order to accomplish this, the mediator must necessarily possess both of these marvelous requisites that are not to be found in any mere creature:

1. The mediator must be “very man, and perfectly righteous.”
2. He must simultaneously be “more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God.”

The instructor now focuses on each requisite individually, and affirms the first specifically by inquiring as to why the mediator and deliverer must be “very man, and perfectly righteous,” giving the following reason: “Because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which hath sinned, should likewise make satisfaction for sin; and one, who is himself a sinner, cannot satisfy for others.” Thus, as the question is twofold, so is the answer. The first component of the question stresses the genuineness of the mediator's human nature, whereas the second focuses upon His holiness and righteousness.

Regarding the first, the mediator and savior who is to deliver the sinner from his misery must be, according to the instructor, “very man.” He must

have a truly human body and soul, “because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which hath sinned, should likewise make satisfaction for sin.” They who have sinned against God and transgressed His holy law are men. They have sinned against God in body and soul, for in both aspects they are duty-bound to obey and subject themselves to God as their king and creator. Consequently, in both body and soul they have brought upon themselves the curse and the wrath of God, and are worthy of being punished accordingly both temporally and eternally.

It is therefore abundantly evident that to satisfy God's justice on behalf of guilty sinners, the mediator necessarily must be very man who possesses the two components that constitute man: body and soul. Otherwise, He would not be able to satisfy God's justice for men who have sinned. As we have just observed, this satisfaction consists in two distinct components:

1. There must be a subjection to God's wrath, curse, and punishment, and this must occur in both body and soul, as well as both temporally and eternally.
2. There must be a rendering of a perfectly holy service and flawless obedience in body and soul, and this must be accomplished in harmony with the precepts of God's holy law, and without the least deviation and transgression.

It is clear that a mediator and deliverer who will satisfy the claims of God's holy justice on behalf of the impotent sinner must necessarily have a truly human soul and must possess a human body—and he must thus be *very man*. The nature of the satisfaction to be made to God's justice on behalf of sinful man absolutely requires it, and therefore, as far as God is concerned, none but He who is very man can be our surety, mediator, and deliverer.

Everywhere in Scripture, this fundamental truth is therefore taught clearly and compellingly. In Romans 5:19, we read, “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous”; that is, of the man Jesus Christ, of whom the apostle spoke earlier in verse 15. In Hebrews 5:1, the apostle teaches that “every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God,” and then he subsequently applies this to the great high priest, the Lord Jesus. This he teaches clearly in Hebrews 2:17, saying, “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

Yes, the apostle teaches clearly in verse 11 of the same chapter that “both he that sanctifieth [that is, Christ] and they who are sanctified [that is, believers] are all of one [alluding to the first fruits of the Old Testament]: for which cause he [that is, Christ] is not ashamed to call them brethren.”

God therefore caused this truth regarding the human nature of the mediator to be proclaimed to believers from the foundation of the world. He introduced Him to our first parents as *the Seed of the woman* (Gen. 3:15). Subsequently, God made this truth known to believers much more clearly and powerfully by shadows and types, as well as by prophecy. Consider especially this clear prophecy: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). The name Immanuel means “God with us”; that is, God and man in one person.

All this makes it very clear that He who is to be the mediator and deliverer of impotent and guilty sinners in order to satisfy God's holy justice and thereby reconcile and unite them to God must necessarily be very man.

Having now sufficiently addressed the first component of the instructor's proposition, we proceed to consider the second component, in which the instructor inquires as to why the mediator and deliverer of sinners must not only be truly human, but must also be a *righteous* man. By a righteous man, we are to understand a holy and sinless man, who, as to his nature, is entirely innocent, unblemished, and righteous, existing in intimate union with and in conformity to God—and, thus, as holy and righteous as were our first parents prior to the fall. Such a righteous and holy person the mediator must also be to render Him capable of satisfying God's holy justice on behalf of the impotent sinner, so that thereby He may deliver him from his misery.

The instructor gives as a reason for this that “one, who is himself a sinner, cannot satisfy for others.” The reason for this is simple, clear, and compelling. He who is to satisfy and placate God's holy justice on behalf of impotent sinners, must, as we have already shown in the previous Lord's Day, not only endure God's curse, wrath, and judgment temporally and eternally, but he must also render to God a service that is completely perfect; that is, a holy obedience that is in harmony with the precepts of His holy law, without there being the least deviation or transgression. How would the mediator be capable of serving God thus in complete holiness and perfection except He be one whose nature is perfectly holy and righteous? For he who is a sinner will be, to all eternity, incapable of rendering perfect obedience to God either for himself or for others.

It is therefore as clear as the noonday sun that a mediator who, on our behalf as impotent sinners, is to render perfect obedience and be capable of fully satisfying God's justice must necessarily be not only truly human, but also a holy and righteous man. This truth is also taught very plainly and transparently in Holy Scripture. In Hebrews 7:26, we read, "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." In 1 Peter 3:18, it is said regarding the mediator, "... the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God," and in 2 Corinthians 5:21, we read, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Hear also how the mediator Himself speaks regarding His holiness and righteousness in Psalm 40:8: "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." We cannot now quote all the passages in the Old Testament in which God by way of many types and prophecies bore witness to this mediator and made Him known.

Having addressed the second component of the instructor's proposition, we have affirmed the entire proposition: a mediator who is capable of satisfying the claims of God's holy justice for us impotent sinners, and who delivers us from our misery, must necessarily "be very man, and also perfectly righteous." In Question 15, the instructor teaches that this is the first requisite that must be found in one who is to be our mediator and deliverer.

Nevertheless, this requisite, in and of itself, is by no means sufficient, for though someone were to "be very man, and also perfectly righteous," he would nevertheless be incapable not only of satisfying God's holy justice, but also of reconciling and uniting us to God. Therefore, he must possess another quality to render him capable of accomplishing so great a task. According to what the instructor teaches in Question 15, He must also be "more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God." In Question 17, the instructor inquires as to what the essential requisite must be for one who is to be our mediator and deliverer when he asks, "Why must he in one person be also very God?" He then gives the reason: "That he might by the power of his Godhead sustain in his human nature the burden of God's wrath; and might obtain for, and restore to us, righteousness and life."

The instructor here gives two reasons why our mediator and deliverer must also have a divine nature in addition to His genuine and righteous human nature. In Lord's Day 4, we addressed the wrath of God, considering that God "is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in His just judgment temporally and eternally." We then observed how

men in their natural state and due to their sins are subject to God's wrath, and that, as children of wrath, they are compelled to endure this wrath eternally. If we, impotent sinners, are ever to be delivered from the dreadful wrath of God and all of its consequences (all temporal and eternal punishments), then there must be a mediator who will take our place and who, on our behalf, will subject Himself fully to the comprehensive wrath of God. He must be "wounded for our transgressions" and be "bruised for our iniquities." "The chastisement of our peace" must be upon Him, and "with his stripes" we are to be healed (Isa. 53:5).

According to the instructor, it is this chastisement and wrath of God that this mediator and deliverer must bear in His humanity and on our behalf; that is, in His human soul and body. As we have seen, it is in the human nature that payment for sin must be made, for it is the human nature that has sinned. However, how would the mediator be capable of bearing God's wrath on our behalf if He were merely a man? He would then be no more than a finite creature and would possess nothing more than finite strength and capabilities. God's wrath, however, is a burden of infinite proportion, of which we must exclaim with Moses, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" (Ps. 90:11). Regarding this, the instructor taught us in Question 14 that no one "who is a mere creature, [is] able to satisfy for us... [because] no mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin, so as to deliver others from it."

According to the instructor, it is therefore now evident that a mediator who is capable of bearing in His humanity and on our behalf the eternal and infinite wrath of God to which we have provoked Him by our sins must necessarily do so by virtue of His divinity. This means that such a mediator must possess divine power and infinite capacity proportionate to the infinite burden of God's wrath that He is to bear on our behalf. If, however, He is to possess such divine power and infinite capacity, He must necessarily also be the true, infinite, and omnipotent God Himself, for God will not communicate His honor and attributes to another. These He retains exclusively for Himself, so that He will be able to say, "I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. 45:22), and thus it clearly follows that our mediator and deliverer must also be very God.

The instructor then advances another reason as to why the mediator must necessarily be God, namely, that He "might obtain for, and restore to us, righteousness and life." Because of our sins, we are eternally devoid of both, and in this regard, we, and all people, are entirely poor and naked before God. We are dead in sins and trespasses, and "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags," so

that we have no possibility of any standing before God. We must therefore have a mediator and deliverer who not only merits for us the life and righteousness that we have lost, but who also restores that life and righteousness.

In order to merit both, He must perfectly—that is, inwardly and outwardly—keep the entire law of God, doing so in conformity to the promise of the law: “The man that doeth them shall live in them” (Gal. 3:12). If, however, the mediator were merely a man, how would he be capable of meriting and acquiring righteousness and life for us and for all believers? He would then be capable of keeping the holy law of God perfectly for himself, but he would not at all be capable of doing this on our behalf and that of the entire elect world he desired to deliver. The measure of service and holy obedience to be rendered by the mediator toward God must be commensurate to the debt incurred by the entire elect world, so that they might all “be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

If the mediator is to accomplish this, He must necessarily possess a power and worthiness that is of infinite dimension, enabling Him to merit life and righteousness for all believers, and to render obedience unto God on behalf of them all. He must therefore necessarily be the true and infinite God, thereby enabling Him to sanctify and save them all, and to appear before God on their behalf, saying, “Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom” (Job 33:24).

This, however, is not all. Not only must the mediator *merit* righteousness and life for us by His obedience, but according to the instructor, He must above all *restore* righteousness and life to us by the very act of *applying* it to us. Thereby He makes us partakers of the life He has merited for us. It is therefore required of Him that He possess a divine and omnipotent Spirit by whose power He can so conquer, illuminate, and work in the elect that by the obedience of faith they surrender themselves fully to Him, denying themselves and taking hold of His strength and righteousness (Isa. 27:5). And thus in Him, they are “quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).

For all of them, He must:

- a. deliver them from the power of Satan;
- b. by way of true contrition, humble them before God and strip them of everything;
- c. unite them to Himself by a true faith;

- d. deliver them from the guilt of sin, etc., and make them partakers of peace and reconciliation, thereby enabling them also actually to enjoy both;
- e. sanctify and renew them;
- f. powerfully preserve and protect them;
- g. govern them by His Spirit and providence;
- h. as both their root and head, carry, sustain, and establish them; and
- i. at last fully redeem and glorify them in both their death and resurrection.

Must a mediator who is capable of doing all these things not be God the Almighty Himself? If the mediator were not truly God, but merely a man, how would He then be capable of restoring to the elect the righteousness and life He has merited for them? He would in no wise be capable of having such dominion over their souls so that by faith they might be fully transformed, be united to Him, be raised from the death of sin, and be made alive.

It is therefore again as clear as the noonday sun that our mediator and deliverer must be the true and most high God. Throughout the Holy Scriptures, He is therefore presented as such—as, for instance, in Isaiah 45:22. There He Himself addresses sinners, saying, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else,” and in Jeremiah 23:6, He is referred to as “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

The instructor has thus clearly shown and proven what he merely posited in Question 15, namely, that He who as our mediator and deliverer must satisfy God's justice and deliver us from our misery must not only be a true and righteous man, but He must also be very God—and all of this in the unity of His person.

Having thus far considered this matter in general terms, doing so by way of preparation, the instructor now proceeds to inquire as to who in particular this mediator and deliverer might be. In Question 18, he asks, “Who then is that Mediator, who is in one person both very God, and a real righteous man?” It is of the utmost importance for us and for all men that we have a true and thorough knowledge of the person of this precious mediator and deliverer. We must know not only whether there truly is such a mediator and deliverer, but also who He is, so that by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we would believe in Him and

put our trust in Him. The instructor therefore now teaches us that this mediator is none other than *our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Two matters are to be considered:

1. the identification of the person of the mediator, and
2. a more detailed description of His person.

Regarding the identity of the person of this great mediator and deliverer, the instructor declares that it is our Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone is acquainted with the letter of this truth, and no one would deliberately contradict it. Even the devil himself concurs with it, making a public profession of his faith, saying, "Thou Jesus of Nazareth?... I know thee who thou art, the Holy one of God" (Mark 1:24). It is therefore not necessary that we engage ourselves in proving this truth in detail.

Something must be said, however, regarding this most worthy and blessed person. The instructor will subsequently discourse of Him in great detail when expounding the Apostles' Creed, doing so from Lord's Days 10 through 19. Among other things, he will then explain to us why He is Jesus and the Christ, as well as the Lord of all believers, and why He is named as such. We will therefore now proceed without any further explanation.

We need to consider briefly, however, the further description given here regarding the blessed person of the Lord Jesus Christ, namely, that He is the one "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." The instructor, having extracted his Catechism entirely from the Holy Scriptures, composing it primarily by using the very words of Scripture, has also derived this description of the mediator Jesus from the Holy Scriptures. You will find this in 1 Corinthians 1:30, where the apostle addresses believers as follows: "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

Paul has here in mind the three mediatorial offices of the Lord Jesus, and how the Father has given Him to believers to be prophet, priest, and king. The Lord Jesus Christ, as mediator, must necessarily hold these three offices so that He may deliver us, sinners, and bring us unto God.

The Father has given Him to believers *unto wisdom*, so that, as prophet, and by His Holy Spirit, He may teach and instruct us, who are blind sinners, for in Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). These treasures of spiritual wisdom He communicates to all believers, giving them His Word and Holy Spirit. Thereby He opens their blind eyes and initially

and progressively illuminates their darkened understandings, so that believers increasingly are confronted with their deep misery and impotence, while at the same time being endowed with knowledge of God and His holy truth. God thus grants His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to blind sinners unto wisdom, and to be unto them their chief teacher and prophet. God thus shines into the hearts of all believers by way of this sun of righteousness, “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

However, not only does the Father give them this mediator, His Son, unto wisdom, but He also gives Him to believing sinners unto *righteousness*; that is, to be a faithful and great high priest. The Father does so not only in order that Christ might satisfy fully His holy justice, bearing the punishment of their sins and obeying God on their behalf, but also to apply the merits of His active and passive obedience, and to make them partakers thereof by faith. They consequently are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24), and the instructor will specifically focus on this doctrine in Lord's Days 23 and 24.

The Father furthermore also grants His Son, Jesus Christ, to believers unto *sanctification*, so that, by His Holy Spirit, He may sanctify, regenerate, and convert them, renewing and transforming their nature and character more and more, and thereby conform them to God's image. For that very purpose, the Lord Jesus gave Himself for His believers, “that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

Finally, God the Father has also given Him unto *redemption*, so that believers might be fully redeemed from all their misery—initially by way of regeneration and conversion, furthermore by continual sanctification proceeding from faith and the Holy Spirit, and finally to perfection by the glorification of both soul and body. The Holy Scriptures therefore refer to Him especially as the savior and redeemer of believers.

Behold, in order to accomplish this complete work of salvation in poor, blind, and naked sinners, who are worthy of being accursed and damned, God has *given* His Son, Jesus Christ, unto them. The Lord Jesus is therefore a sovereign and gracious gift of God the Father—a gift that He, by virtue of His infinite love and incomprehensible mercy, offers and gives to sinners. Christ is therefore called *God's gift* (John 4:10), so that whoever needs the Lord Jesus and desires to have Him as his prophet, priest, and king may freely receive and

embrace Him. For indeed, the Father offers Him to all, and out of pure love and grace grants Him freely unto us.

This Lord Jesus Christ is now this great and blessed mediator who simultaneously is very God and one who is a true and righteous man. He is therefore fully capable, and has been consecrated as such, and thus has become “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9). “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

The instructor expounds this truth in greater detail for us in Question 19. There he inquires as to the certainty of this truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is this all-sufficient mediator and savior of sinners. We know this “from the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, etc.”

By *the holy gospel*—called *holy* because it has its origin in a holy God, and because it contains holy truths and serves the purpose of sanctifying sinners—we are to understand the eternal purpose and adorable counsel of God’s grace to deliver and save freely ungodly, accursed, and impotent sinners in and through the crucified mediator, Jesus Christ, to the glory of His grace. This holy gospel whereby “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor. 5:19), would never have been known by sinful men if God had purposed merely to keep this sealed within His heart. Since, however, it is to man’s utmost benefit to be made acquainted with this blessed gospel in order to be able to embrace it, God Himself has therefore proclaimed it unto man. And, according to the instructor, He did so *first in Paradise*, as can be observed in the giving of the mother of all promises made to the Seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15.¹

However, the revelation of this gospel was not limited to this original promise, for according to the instructor, God thereafter caused it to be proclaimed by holy patriarchs and prophets. This the apostle Paul teaches in Hebrews 1:1, where he writes, “God... at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.” From this have proceeded all those gospel prophecies and revelations regarding the mediator, Christ, that are to be found so abundantly in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament—of

1. In the Dutch tradition, the first gospel promise (protoevangelium) of Genesis 3:15 is often referred to as the “mother promise,” since God here promises that the seed and savior of sinners shall be born from a mother, that is, of the seed of Eve, the first mother.

which the Messiah Himself testifies in Psalm 40:7, "In the volume of the book it is written of me."

The instructor teaches furthermore that God has visually portrayed this precious gospel regarding salvation for sinners in Christ as "represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law." As we know, the entire external worship of the Old Testament consisted in "sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law." Together they constituted clear shadows and types of the gospel of salvation, that is, of the spiritual kingdom of the Lord Jesus as it especially functions in and among believers in the New Testament. Paul² teaches this in Hebrews 10:1, saying, "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things," as well as in Romans 10:4, testifying that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

Both passages quoted above refer to the ceremonial law of the Old Testament and the eternally binding moral law. Christ, however, is declared in His gospel to be the end or the aim of both, so that the law functions for believers as their schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ (Gal. 3:24).

However, the revelation of the gospel of salvation was not limited to this. God, who in earlier times had caused it to be proclaimed to the believing fathers, has lastly "fulfilled it by His only begotten Son." He sent Christ, His Son, into the world in the fullness of time to accomplish the salvation of the elect both passively and actively, so that thereupon He would be exalted to be the ruler, the king, and the savior of His people.

Thus, the instructor posits that by means of this holy and precious gospel, a gospel that God Himself has revealed to the world and at His time brought to fruition, believers may know with certainty that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true mediator and deliverer to whom all the ends of the earth must turn in order to be saved (Isa. 45:22). In so doing, the instructor has identified and unveiled the one mediator, who, on behalf of guilty and impotent sinners such as we are, is capable and all-sufficient to satisfy God's justice and to deliver us from all our misery, into which, by our sins, we have sunk as into a bottomless pit.

However, the mere knowledge that there is such a mediator and deliverer for us will be of no help to us if we do not truly and personally turn unto Him and His redemption. As impotent sinners, we need to surrender ourselves fully unto Him for salvation, thereby securing true union and communion with

2. Like most Reformers and Dutch Further Reformation writers, VanderGroe assumes that Paul is the author of Hebrews.

Him by faith, and the instructor will explicitly focus on this great truth in the following Lord's Day.

We will know that the Word that has been preached to us today has borne fruit in us if

1. we truly are desirous to know whether we are partakers of and have communion with the mediator Christ Jesus whom we have preached to you; and
2. we then investigate and seek to affirm that this is so upon good and essential grounds of sanctified experience; that is, as wrought by the Spirit and in accordance with God's Word.

If we are to be saved and thus be delivered from our temporal and eternal misery and be reconciled to God, we all need this mediator and deliverer. It is only in the proffering and unveiling of this holy gospel that He will be given to us unto wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. As poor, blind, naked, hell-worthy, and impotent sinners, we are all called and invited by the gospel to come unto Him, and it is the command and counsel of God that we shall come to Him and receive Him as the free and gracious gift of God's eternal and infinite love, so that through Him we may be reconciled with God.

As servants of God, we exhort and beseech all those among us who have not yet done so—who have not yet in truth and with their whole heart believed in the mediator, Christ Jesus, and who live for themselves and apart from communion with Him—not to persevere in your disobedience and unbelief, and not to continue upon this pathway. If you do, you will exclude yourselves eternally from the salvation and redemption that is to be found in Christ Jesus. Oh, that all such would awaken from their sleep of carelessness and carnal security and arise from the dead, so that Christ shall give them light (Eph. 5:14)!

We have been sent by God to preach Christ Jesus among you and to proclaim to you salvation and reconciliation with God through Him. We are the witnesses and ambassadors of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that by the preached Word we may proclaim and offer Him to you as mediator and deliverer—as a prophet to teach you; as a high priest to make atonement for all your sins before God; and as a king to sanctify and transform you.

Oh, dear friends, regardless of what sort of persons you may be, do not despise and reject this glorious gift of God's sovereign grace any longer! Instead, acknowledge your spiritual poverty, blindness, nakedness, and hell-worthy impotence. Oh, that in all earnestness you would now become perplexed and

distressed, and that you would consider yourselves as being in a bottomless pit of eternal wretchedness and misery; that you would open your heart for the great and all-sufficient mediator, Christ Jesus; and that you would surrender to Him so that He, out of free grace alone, might save and redeem you!

And you who have believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, with heart and soul be more intimately and tenderly united to this your savior, as well as to His salvation and grace! Abide in Him, and daily make use of Him unto wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and, in so doing, grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. “To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).

Saving Faith (1)

LORD'S DAY 7

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

—JOHN 3:36

Question 20: Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?

Answer: No; only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits by a true faith.

Question 21: What is true faith?

Answer: True faith is not only a *certain* knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart, that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

Question 22: What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?

Answer: All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us.

Question 23: What are these articles?

Answer:

- I. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;
- II. And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord;
- III. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary;
- IV. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell;
- V. The third day He arose again from the dead;

- VI. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
 - VII. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead;
 - VIII. I believe in the Holy Ghost;
 - IX. I believe an holy catholic church; the communion of saints;
 - X. The forgiveness of sins;
 - XI. The resurrection of the body;
 - XII. And the life everlasting. Amen.
-

Among the ceremonial laws of Israel, we find a command of the Lord pertaining to the sin offering. In Leviticus 6:26–27, we read that only “the priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: in the holy place shall it be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation”; and that none but he that was holy could “touch the flesh thereof.” In this way, the divine mysteries regarding the way of salvation were clearly revealed to the people of Israel.

First, this sin offering typified the Lord Jesus Christ, our great and blessed savior, who once, in the fullness of time, would be sacrificed on the cross for the sins of all believers, and thus for all His elect, in order to blot out and eternally atone for their sins. This already has occurred, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).

Second, the fact that they who were unholy could not eat the flesh of this sin offering and were not even permitted to touch it signified that unbelieving or unholy men who continue in their sin and unbelief have no saving interest in the Lord Jesus and His sacrifice. Thus we conclude that all men will not be saved and delivered indiscriminately by Christ.

Third, as only those priests who were holy and performed the sacrifice for sin could touch its flesh and eat it in the Holy Place, so likewise only true believers, the elect, are by faith truly partakers of the Lord Jesus and His sacrifice for sin. They “are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9). By virtue of the grace of the Lord Jesus, with His flesh and blood and by the operation of the Holy Spirit, they are nourished and refreshed unto their eternal salvation and deliverance.

We will not now elaborate any further, for in this Lord's Day, the instructor addresses the very weighty doctrine of faith. No sooner has he dealt with the one mediator between God and man, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who of God has been made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and

redemption (1 Cor. 1:30), then he proceeds to point out to us that all unrepentant and unbelieving men shall not be delivered and saved by Him from their wretched state of sin. Rather, only they will be saved who truly repent and believe, and who, in forsaking all, take refuge to none other but this great mediator, Christ Jesus, and put all their trust in Him and His sacrifice on the cross. Subsequently, he will expound and describe faith itself, whereby alone the poor elect sinner can be a partaker of Christ and His divinely appointed sacrifice for sin.

These truly are matters and truths of the greatest significance, and our eternal salvation hinges on a right knowledge of them. Oh, that by the grace of the Holy Spirit we would all truly understand their weightiness, and that with humble and contrite hearts we would be desirous to be instructed from God’s Holy Word regarding these divine truths by which alone we can be delivered and saved! To that end, may the Lord grant unto us His divine grace, so that we may dispense with our own wisdom regarding these divine truths, fully renounce all prejudice against them, and receive as a child the holy mysteries of His kingdom.

The instructor addresses three distinct matters in this Lord’s Day:

1. In Question 20, he shows who truly are delivered and saved from their wretched state of sin by the only mediator between God and man—only true believers.
2. In Question 21, he proceeds to address in greater detail the essential nature of true faith, by which alone we become partakers of Christ and eternal salvation.
3. Finally, in Questions 22 and 23, he sets before us the objects of faith; that is, all those holy and divine truths that every Christian, by the power of the Holy Spirit, must truly know and believe with his heart.

The instructor addresses the first matter by asking the question, “Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?” From the Holy Scriptures, he already has clearly and sufficiently taught that all men perished in Adam, and that by his and their own sins, they are now subject to the curse and wrath of God. Therefore, men now lie in the midst of eternal death and condemnation, and are thus without any hope of being delivered either by themselves or by any other creature in heaven or earth. The instructor subsequently set before us how God in His infinite grace and mercy, and for our comfort and

eternal salvation, has given His own Son, Jesus Christ, to be a savior and deliverer—and how, in the promises of the holy gospel, He has been “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

However, this already having been established and revealed to us in the holy gospel, God causes to be proclaimed to us that there is nothing the corrupt intellect of man—an intellect fully darkened by sin and increasingly blinded by Satan—more readily does than carelessly and erroneously trust in the mere external proclamation of the gospel. Such a man considers it to be sufficient unto salvation that he has intellectually comprehended the gospel, and therefore, he has truly believed and will certainly procure eternal salvation and deliverance through Christ and by God's grace. This is the lamentable and wretched faith of almost all our Reformed lip confessors, who stake their immortal souls on such a faith and thus enter into eternity with a mere intellectual and superficial affirmation that Christ is their savior and that they will certainly be delivered and saved by Him.

Sadly, the majority of them will not discover their grievous error and dreadful self-deceit until, being actually in hell, they then find it to be eternally impossible for them to retrace their steps and to restore what is amiss.

Thus one and the same divine gospel is to the true believer “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16) and a “savour of life unto life,” whereas to others it is a “savour of death unto death,” culminating in eternal death and condemnation (2 Cor. 2:16). These others will come to such an end because they never hear nor receive that divine gospel with a true, active, living, and contrite faith, but merely with a faith that is dead, imaginary, and feigned. Therefore, to them the gospel is as a snare in which they are held captive by the devil, culminating in their eternal perdition.

It is absolutely essential that by way of clear and sound instruction from God's Holy Word, we engage a poor and blind world that so readily entrusts its eternal salvation to such vain deceit, and give to it a clear exposition of the truth regarding saving faith. May it please the Lord in His infinite mercy to render this instruction useful and that it would function as eye salve in order that sinners might see.

The instructor therefore asks such a question, responding briefly and to the point by saying, “No,” and thereby is as much as saying that though all men hear the gospel of God's grace and presume Christ to be their redeemer and savior, not all who are “perished in Adam” will be saved by Him. Only they will be saved “who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits by a true faith.”

The instructor here sets before us two essential requirements to be met by all who are to be delivered from their sins by the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus be saved by Him.

They must be “ingrafted into Him...by a true faith,” and by the Spirit they must be most intimately united to Him, so that they are in Christ, and Christ, in return, dwells in their hearts by faith (Eph. 3:17). The Scriptures teach this truth very clearly, as, for instance, in Romans 11:24. There the apostle says regarding the believing Romans that they were “cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature,” this being the state of sin and death in Adam, and that they were grafted “contrary to nature into a good olive tree,” that is, Christ. In Romans 6:5, he teaches how believers by the ingrafting of faith “have been planted together” with Christ.

The Lord Jesus Himself teaches this truth emphatically in John 15:1–4, saying that He is the true Vine and that believers are His branches, having been ingrafted into Him by faith. For them to bear fruit by the active and spiritual exercise of their faith, they must continually abide in Him who is their vine, stem, and root.

This grafting of believers into Christ consists essentially in an internal and intimate spiritual union of the hearts of all true believers to the Lord Jesus, their precious head and savior. This union, established from the very outset, continually grows and will endure eternally by the power of true faith—a faith that the Holy Spirit works and strengthens in their hearts through the gospel. Faith causes a poor and lost sinner to look completely outside of himself, forsaking all that is of himself, and to turn to the Lord Jesus to find in Him, out of free grace, his entire deliverance and salvation. By faith, a poor sinner surrenders himself with body and soul into the hands of Christ and continues to rest upon Him and to rely upon Him alone. In so doing, he wholeheartedly and willingly, so to speak, is incorporated into the Lord Jesus and is thereby eternally grafted into Him.

A believing sinner no longer exists independently, living his own life. Instead, he entirely, internally, and with his whole heart is now dependent upon the Lord Jesus, just as a member of the body is dependent upon the head. He now lives only “by the faith of the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20) and finds his entire life in Christ. By faith, he continually clings to Him in the inner man, and thereby becomes spiritually one with Him, for “he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17).

Oh, blessed ingrafting into the Lord Jesus! A poor sinner cannot be elevated to a higher state of glory and happiness than to be united to Christ by faith and to be betrothed unto Him forever (Hos. 2:19)! This is then the first requisite for all who are truly delivered from their sins by the Lord Jesus, and thus have been delivered from their damnable state in Adam.

The instructor now adds a second or different requisite in regard to such individuals, namely, that they must receive all the benefits of Christ by a true faith. By this we understand all the holy and marvelous benefits of the covenant that Christ has merited for all His true believers by His bitter suffering and dying, as well as by His righteousness. These benefits are the knowledge, the favor, the Spirit, and the grace of God; the forgiveness of sins and sanctification; all peace, comfort, joy, protection, and sealing graces; and hereafter a perfect and eternal redemption and salvation.

Christ, by His blood, has merited all these precious and delightful benefits for poor and hell-worthy sinners. These He presents clearly to the poor sinner in the promises of the holy gospel, purely out of free grace, offering all of them freely to him unto his eternal salvation, saying: "Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

It is the Holy Spirit who works faith in the heart of a poor, elect sinner, and, as we have heard earlier, by that faith he is truly ingrafted into Christ. As soon as this occurs, however, the needy and contrite sinner immediately and humbly appropriates in all sincerity, as with a strong hand, all these promised and offered benefits of Christ—benefits that, because of the grace of God in Christ, are granted to him unto his salvation. He perceives how very much he needs not only all of these benefits unto his eternal salvation, but also that he cannot possibly be deprived of even one of them. This causes such a needy soul, by the secret and inner operation of the Holy Spirit, to yearn and pant greatly for these benefits "as the hart panteth after the water brooks" (Ps. 42:1). Such a soul does not rest until, in his heart, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he has taken hold of Christ to such an extent that he may have received all of these promised benefits out of His own hand, and appropriated them by faith for his own heart, so that, by faith, he may truly have become a partaker of Christ and all His benefits.

These two matters must necessarily be found in all sinners who have the Lord Jesus as their savior, and who by Him are delivered from their sins and their perdition in Adam, and are saved forever. Whatever possessions a person may have, if he does not possess these matters, he is neither a partaker of

Christ nor is delivered and saved by Him, irrespective of how much he may claim regarding Christ and boast of his Christianity and his happiness. This is an eternal and incontrovertible truth, and God will judge us according to this, His gospel. Therefore, there is no other way for all of us except to do what the apostle so urgently exhorts us to do: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor. 13:5).

That faith alone is able to save us—a faith that is genuine and upright—and it is this faith that the Holy Spirit works and strengthens in the hearts of the elect by means of the gospel, for “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6). It is indeed true that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,” but He did so in order that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Only such true and upright believers are saved by Christ, and in no wise are any saved who are merely nominal or counterfeit believers, for “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12). We may therefore give a poor and perplexed sinner no other counsel than by saying to him: “Your misery and condemnation are so great that all creatures in heaven or on earth will not be able to help you. Only the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son, is able to do so. He is for you the only redeemer, deliverer, and savior, and therefore, believe! Believe in Him, ‘and thou shalt be saved’ (Acts 16:31).” This is the testimony of the Holy Scriptures in Mark 16:16: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

There is nothing more essential for us than that by God’s grace we acquire a genuine knowledge of this true saving faith. How we need to understand wherein this truly consists, so that we may earnestly compare ourselves with it and investigate whether we, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, exercise such faith and thereby are partakers of Christ and His salvation! Our instructor therefore immediately proceeds to provide us with a very sound, clear, and complete description of this true faith that alone can deliver and save us. He asks, “What is true faith?”

The instructor thus asks and inquires regarding the nature of true faith. We will never be able to explain correctly what the instructor teaches regarding faith until we carefully consider the essence of the matter after which he inquires. He expresses himself and his view in the clearest of terms. He does not merely

ask in general terms what faith is, or how people of the world define faith. He does not ask what faith is in its perfection, or what measure of perfection some of God's children may possess. Nor does he ask what is the quintessence of faith, which we must always be striving after and pursuing. No, the matter is much simpler than that, for the instructor asks only what *true* faith is—the faith whereby one becomes a partaker of Christ and receives all Christ's benefits unto salvation. He therefore now desires to describe for us and to acquaint us with true faith—a faith that we, by the grace of God, must all possess in our hearts if we are to be saved by the Lord Jesus.

Come, therefore, and let us now learn from our Christian instructor, for in this Catechism he teaches us nothing other than the pure and unadulterated truth that God has so very clearly revealed unto us in His Holy Word.

The instructor now proceeds to describe for us this true faith by which alone we can be delivered and saved. He begins by positing that this "*true* faith is not only a *certain* knowledge." Please note that he repeats the matter once more, namely, by referring to faith as *true* faith. He is not accustomed to do this with other aspects of doctrine, and he therefore wants us to take special note of the fact that he has no other intention than to describe the simple essence of faith—and, thus, this true faith whereby we are ingrafted into the Lord Jesus Christ and receive Him and all His benefits.

The historic Reformed Church, on the basis of God's Word, has always defined saving faith in the manner in which the instructor is here describing it. Our old ministers may have used some different vocabulary, but when it comes to the essence of faith, their descriptions of faith are in exact agreement with the description given by the Catechism. There is no issue in this world about which you will be able to find greater unanimous agreement than in the descriptions that the old Reformed divines were accustomed to give of saving faith. It has always been the view of the historic Reformed Church that the Catechism's description of faith is correct, orthodox, and true in all its details, and that true saving faith, as to its essential power and nature, is described extraordinarily well. We must therefore steadfastly adhere to this as being the established rule of Christian doctrine, so that we will not depart from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus.

We should not even entertain the notion that somewhere in this Catechism something is taught that is evil or erroneous, and thus in conflict with the eternal truth of God's Holy Word. The famous National Synod of Dort (1618–1619) examined this Catechism word for word, and with unanimity approved and

confirmed it to be an established and irrevocable doctrinal standard of the Reformed faith. Furthermore, the government, being a truly Christian government and being the guardian of the church,¹ published an express declaration that is to be read annually in all consistories. In this declaration, they with utmost gravity commissioned and ordered all ministers in the Netherlands to conform their entire ministry to the Catechism and the other doctrinal standards, and to carefully see to it that they neither teach nor write anything that would contradict these doctrinal standards. A certain renowned old minister among us has therefore rightly said that this Catechism has always been the death knell for all who were hankering after change.

Therefore, in our Reformed churches, we may teach nothing other than this true faith. It is the nature of this faith that is so clearly and expressly set before us in this seventh Lord’s Day—and generally throughout the entire Catechism. This, and this alone, is the old, true, and established Reformed faith. No minister or any member may deviate even a hair’s breadth from the established formulation of this doctrine. Whatever we say, teach, or write about the true nature of faith must fully agree with this, and we may not change one jot or tittle when it comes to defining the nature of faith.

Let us now contemplate and consider in greater detail this weighty matter, which is of such import in regard to our eternal salvation. Our Christian instructor posits that the essence of true faith consists of two components, namely, a *certain knowledge* and an *assured confidence*. True faith does not consist of any other matters than these two, and these two matters constitute the essential nature of true saving faith.²

Beloved, it was our original intention to deal with this doctrine of faith in one sermon—as we have been accustomed to do. It has been our experience, however, that in this regard, “a man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps” (Prov. 16:9). What moves us to do otherwise has been, on the one hand, the great ignorance that generally prevails among our Reformed people regarding the pure doctrine of this divinely wrought faith, and on the

1. This needs to be understood in its historical context. The famous Synod of Dort (1618–1619) convened with the full support of the Dutch government, and this government therefore endorsed all the decisions made by this synod. The Dutch government ruled that all ministers in the Netherlands had to abide by these decisions and adhere unconditionally to the doctrinal standards adopted by this synod. This ruling was still in force during Rev. VanderGroe’s lifetime (1705–1784).

2. Some Reformed divines added assent (or agreement) as a third constituent element of faith. Others felt that assent was sufficiently implied in the elements of knowledge and confidence (or trust). There were no essential differences among the Reformed on this point.

other hand, the need, by God's grace, to deal with this doctrine thoroughly, for its importance and weightiness are inexpressibly great. Since faith consists of two components, we will also devote two sermons to it, and address each component separately.

A true faith therefore consists first of all in a *certain knowledge* that the Holy Spirit, by means of the Word, works in the soul of man. The instructor addresses this by saying that "true faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His word..." It is an established truth that if one actually is to believe something with his heart, he first must thoroughly grasp its truth with his mind, for that which we do not know we cannot possibly receive and believe as truth in our hearts. Much less is one able to trust in something he does not know and expect to benefit by it.

This is also true in regard to divine truths. Man will never be capable of believing anything regarding God, Christ, heaven, and salvation unless, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, he truly comprehends these truths with his intellect. Contrary to what the Roman Catholic Church teaches, a faith that is void of knowledge is nothing other than a dead and vain faith that is not worthy of the name faith, and much less worthy of being designated as true and saving faith. The Holy Scriptures therefore often speak of saving faith in terms of *knowledge*, or as a *knowing* of God, of Christ, and the things of salvation. Knowledge functions as the foundation of faith, and if one removes that foundation, there is no longer any faith. Paul therefore writes in Romans 10:14, 17: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? [that is, whom they do not know by hearing] and how shall they hear [that is, how shall they acquire this knowledge] without a preacher?... So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

What sort of knowledge regarding God, Christ, and the matters of salvation is requisite for a true faith? The instructor posits that this consists in a *certain knowledge*; that is, a steadfast, certain, and thorough knowledge regarding matters that are tried and true, and concerning which one can neither be deceived nor misled. True faith cannot possibly be satisfied with an obscure and confused grasp of matters or with a flighty or doubtful opinion. True and upright faith generally never issues forth from such knowledge. For an upright faith, it is absolutely essential that it be anchored in a certain and assured knowledge of God, of Christ, and of the things of salvation. When the intellect beholds all of this clearly, and if the heart is fully convinced of its essence and truthfulness,

such knowledge will then remain firmly anchored no matter how continually and frequently all the powers of darkness and despair make their assault upon it.

The essence of such knowledge must be such as the apostle expresses in Romans 14:14: "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself." No matter how much his unbelieving flesh continually doubted this, he nevertheless always remained persuaded of it by the Lord Jesus, as well as by the power of the Holy Spirit, who always dwelled in him to illuminate and strengthen him. Such a certain and assured knowledge of divine truths regarding faith the apostle attributes to all believers without distinction, saying, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). This must be true for all believers, and not merely in reference to this one aspect of divine truth to which the apostle is specifically referring. Rather, this is true in general for the entire truth of God as it has been revealed in the holy gospel of salvation.

This is the gospel that Paul, in the name of Christ, preached everywhere in the churches, for so he testifies in 2 Timothy 4:17: "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known"; that is, regarding the truth of Christ and the holy gospel that he had preached to all. Regarding this truth and doctrine of Christ, all Christians must be fully assured, in order that by a true faith they can receive it in their hearts unto salvation. Read attentively what the same holy apostle writes to the believing Colossians in chapter 2:2. In verse 1, he testifies of the great conflict he had for them. And to what end did he endure such conflict? "That [your] hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ."

Behold, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, they already were fully assured in their understanding, for this was requisite for an upright faith. What they were lacking, however, was the riches of the full assurance of understanding, for their knowledge of the mystery of God, of the Father, and of Christ was still so very feeble and weak, and beset with so much carnal darkness and despair. It was therefore essential that by the grace of the Holy Spirit they would increasingly progress and grow in this full assurance of their understanding; that is, in that certain knowledge of the mystery of God, of the Father, and of Christ. The apostle's great struggle and labor regarding these believers was not to exhort them to be fully assured in their understanding, for they already possessed this. Rather, it was his objective to lead them to all the riches of the full assurance of understanding; that is, to an abundant growth and increase of the same. It is

like someone who truly possesses gold, silver, and other possessions, but who is now engaged to extract all the riches or great abundance inherent in them—which is what earthly minded people are engaged in doing.

And thus, it is abundantly clear from God's Holy Word that *such a certain knowledge* undoubtedly belongs to a *true* faith—a certain knowledge of God, of Christ, and of the entire truth of the holy gospel. With the whole heart, one embraces all these truths together as being true, and knows and understands them as being certain.

Someone perhaps would nevertheless wish to ask whether a believer, who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, possesses in his heart this certain and assured knowledge of the truth of the gospel, no longer has inner doubts regarding its truth and once and for all with an assured faith embraces and receives the entire Word of God as being true. I would also like to ask such a person whether a believer is truly a *holy* person, and whether the Holy Scriptures say regarding all true believers, "But ye are . . . an holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). If, however, this is true, does it mean that a believing and holy person is absolutely free from sin? Because he is a holy person, is he now also completely free from all sin? This is obviously not the case! In one person, he is concurrently holy and sinful. However, neither is his holiness sin nor his sin holiness, for a true believer in his relationship toward God must be viewed in a twofold manner: according to the spirit and according to the flesh. According to the spirit, he is holy, but according to the flesh, he is a sinful man. Since he will always consist of spirit and flesh until his death, he will always, until his death, be both a holy and sinful person.

The apostle teaches this very clearly in Romans 7:14–25. He says concerning this in Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." However, this is equally true in regard to the matter we have under consideration. The true believer, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, possesses in his innermost soul a certain and assured knowledge of God, of Christ, and of the truth of the gospel that he "hath heard, and hath learned of the Father," for "it is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God" (John 6:45).

Now whatever the Lord God Himself teaches a man by His Word and Spirit, of that such a man will acquire in his heart a certain and assured knowledge, and then such a knowledge as no human instruction can ever yield. Nevertheless, for the believer, there is always the presence of his sinful and corrupt flesh, which is completely filled with darkness, unbelief, doubt, wickedness,

and enmity toward God. These two always coexist very intimately, and in the person of the believer they are engaged in a relentless battle with each other. Thus, a true believer, in the very core of his heart, it being the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit who continually illuminates the heart, has always a certain and assured knowledge of God and of the heavenly truth regarding Christ, always believing the latter in uprightness.

However, he does not possess this *knowledge* and that *faith* without many doubts and much carnal darkness that yet reside in him. He is continually and repeatedly under assault by both, and until his death, he will never be free of them. But this does not mean that this certain knowledge is equivalent either to doubt or to darkness, and vice versa, this darkness and doubtful disposition is not equivalent to this certain knowledge. Rather, these are two distinct matters within the believer, and they proceed from two entirely different principles, namely, flesh and spirit. These two will always be warring against each other, and the strongest of the two will prevail.

Here, however, the instructor is addressing only this *certain knowledge* that belongs to the essence of true faith, and he does so exclusively without speaking of the carnal darkness and doubt that are also to be found in the believer. How would he be able to speak of this when his sole intention is to formulate for us the true nature and disposition of *true* faith, and not the nature and disposition of *doubt*? Doubt is something entirely different from faith. Doubt is always the exact opposite of faith, and it is always an enemy and persecutor of faith. How could the instructor presently address this when he only desires to address what true faith is?

The fact that this is not observed and understood is the actual cause of so many misconceptions regarding the Catechism's description of faith, and of the thousands of erroneous views regarding it that ruminate in the minds of men. All of this will be resolved at once when, by the Lord's own illumination, we understand this matter correctly, namely, that the instructor is describing for us only what the essence of true faith is, and that faith is the exact opposite of darkness, uncertainty, and doubt. All of these are frequently found in the heart of a poor believer, so that he is frequently and very grievously assaulted and plagued by them, and will be greatly opposed by them during his entire lifetime. According to God's adorable and sovereign good pleasure, the one will experience this more than another and will not be delivered from it, except by the strengthening and increasing fortitude of his faith—a faith that by the grace of the Holy Spirit is securely lodged in the inner core of his heart.

Beloved, we deemed it necessary to clarify this for you as much as is possible, for we regretfully live in a time when our Reformed people generally suffer from very poor vision, and therefore cannot see from afar. We must therefore bring these divine truths, so to speak, directly before their eyes, and then, as with a finger, point them out to them. All who in some small measure ought to be able to see correctly may yet prove to be worse off than those who exclaim, "We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night" (Isa. 59:10).

Having considered that a certain and assured knowledge of God, of Christ, and of the truth of the holy gospel belongs to the essence of true faith, let us now proceed to hear what the nature of this knowledge is, and how the heart of a true believer, by the power of the Holy Spirit, must be exercised with it unto salvation. The instructor states that "true faith is...a *certain* knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His word." This is not to be understood as if faith consists in a general and extensive knowledge of all that is recorded in the Bible—as if one would have to be intellectually capable of comprehending all of Scripture with utmost clarity and certainty, and in that manner hold it all for truth.

This certainly is not the meaning! It is much simpler and easier than that. At bottom, it means nothing other than that true faith necessarily requires such knowledge of God as He, by the gospel, has revealed Himself in Christ His Son. This causes us to believe with certainty in our hearts that all of this together, whether known or unknown, is completely true—that is, all that the Lord, by the inspiration of His Spirit and through the service of holy men, has been pleased to reveal unto us. Thus, everything written in the entire Word of God is completely and eternally true, and therefore worthy of all acceptance (1 Tim. 1:15). In short, the knowledge of faith in its essence is as Paul expresses it to the Thessalonians: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13).

When, by the grace of God, a man has been so illuminated and changed, and with all reverence, love, and esteem truly receives and embraces that same Word as God's Word, he no longer considers and views the full extent of the preached and the entire written Word as a mere human word and testimony—which he essentially always does as long as he continues to be unconverted and unbelieving at heart. In his innermost heart, such a man truly esteems the

Word of God for what it is, and when he truly believes all that is revealed and written in that Word of God and that it is comprehensively and completely true, it is then that he has received the *certain knowledge* of God of which the instructor speaks here, which is one of the essential components of faith.

What, then, is this certain knowledge of faith? Beloved, it is nothing other than a pure heavenly light regarding the knowledge of God in Christ, which is ignited or created in the darkness of man's dead heart by the Holy Spirit through the gospel and its proclamation. The apostle teaches this when he writes, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

It is by that divine and spiritual light, shining in his dark heart, that the poor sinner who believes acquires for himself a clear knowledge of God the Lord that he had never perceived in the past, so that he never truly loved or feared Him. Viewing the Lord thus in His majestic glory, such a poor sinner also becomes acquainted with Him as being true and omnipotent. He is *true* as the one who cannot possibly either lie or be deceitful in all that He has revealed so extensively to us men in His Holy Word. He is *almighty* as the one who certainly can and will do what He has said in regard to what He has promised and threatened in His Word.

Such a soul then begins to tremble earnestly before God's Word, as the Lord says, "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:2). By the power of the Holy Spirit, he now has a certain knowledge, a deep impression, and an inner conviction in his heart that he can never fully lose again, no matter how wretched he again may become. He is convicted that Holy Scripture is God's own and true Word, by which He speaks to man with a variety of suitable means. Furthermore, he is convicted that the entire truth of the gospel that unveils the way of deliverance for sinners and eternal salvation proceeds entirely from God, and that the true and almighty God is the sole author of it. This causes him to embrace the entire truth of God with the highest love and esteem, and he makes a believing use of this for himself by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit.

This is that divine and spiritual knowledge of faith of which the Holy Scriptures speak so frequently, and of which we read in Isaiah 53:11: "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." Whoever receives this certain and assured knowledge of God and His holy truth, by His Spirit, in the heart, is also

the recipient of eternal life, for “this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

According to the instructor, this certain knowledge in the heart of a poor, elect sinner is the first component of a true faith, whereby man becomes a partaker of Christ and will eternally be saved by Him. Yes, this certain knowledge is the foundation of faith in the heart. Without this knowledge, faith, or a believing trusting of our spirit upon God in Christ, will never function or exist for even one moment in the heart of man. Today there is much counterfeit, deceitful, and ungodly faith among men, for this knowledge of God is lacking, and that clear heavenly light has never been ignited in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Oh, must it not be said of many and be exclaimed loudly what Paul said of some, that they “have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame” (1 Cor. 15:34). May such truly become perplexed and ashamed. They want to be considered as Christians and true believers, and yet they neither know God nor believe His Holy Word and gospel truth. This is very evident from the fact that all their activity amounts only to this: they want to satisfy and reconcile themselves to God by their own doings, efforts, sighs, tears, and a hundredfold stirrings of their spirit. All of this is aimed at trying to move God to be gracious in Christ, as though He is a hard taskmaster with whom poor sinners have to beg for grace even for many years before He might be pleased to grant it to them.

What are such human stirrings other than darkness and unbelief, whereby to all eternity such souls will not obtain salvation? What else is such sighing, attempting, and groveling from man's side but the subtle manifestation of the covenant of works, whereby such a man still fully orders his life? However, if such poor people would receive this certain knowledge in their souls by the Holy Spirit—the knowledge we have considered as being one of the components and the foundation of true faith—and if by means of that certain knowledge they, in their hearts, would “hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His word,” they would also inwardly be persuaded by the operation of the Holy Spirit of the truth of the holy gospel. That gospel declares how God, out of eternal mercy and His infinite and sovereign grace, can grant and offer His own Son, Christ Jesus, as a complete savior to poor sinners who are truly willing and desirous for salvation. He thereby testifies that eternal life is to be found in His Son, and that this eternal life will be theirs if they are but willing to have and receive freely His Son with believing hearts as their complete savior.

As soon as they would truly believe this with a certain divine knowledge, they would immediately cease and desist in their hearts with all such

unbelieving wrestling and groveling from their side. They would immediately let go of their own way of trying to persuade God to be merciful, now viewing it as being entirely erroneous and unbelieving. They would then see and truly believe by this certain knowledge and by the light of the holy gospel that God is a God of infinite grace and mercy, who “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32). Perceiving God’s true and infinite mercy by the light of faith, they would then immediately turn fully to the Lord Jesus, the promised mediator and deliverer. As poor lost sinners, they would permit themselves to be drawn to Him with “cords of a man, with bands of love” (Hos. 11:4), and immediately and with true hearts, would proceed to the other component of true faith, namely, to that *assured confidence* that the instructor will subsequently address. It is that assured confidence “that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.” This other component of true faith we will, if it may please the Lord, address in a subsequent sermon.

May the blind eyes of men now see the eminent preciousness of this genuine and true faith as the Catechism here describes. May they dispense with all other forms of faith as being broken cisterns, in order to secure this pearl of great value. May the Lord, by His Spirit, stir up and work in the hearts of poor sinners, causing them to “forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding” (Prov. 9:6), to buy of Him “gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Rev. 3:18). That old and tried Reformed faith has always proven to be not only good, but also imperishable in the hearts of those thousands upon thousands of martyrs and holy believers as they were surrounded by flames while bound to the stake. Amen! And may the Lord grant this to us also.

Saving Faith (2)

LORD'S DAY 7

In whom [Christ Jesus, our Lord] we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

—EPHESIANS 3:12

Question 20: Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?

Answer: No; only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits by a true faith.

Question 21: What is true faith?

Answer: True faith is not only a *certain* knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart, that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

Question 22: What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?

Answer: All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us.

Question 23: What are these articles?

Answer:

- I. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;
- II. And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord;
- III. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary;
- IV. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell;
- V. The third day He arose again from the dead;

- VI. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
 - VII. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead;
 - VIII. I believe in the Holy Ghost;
 - IX. I believe an holy catholic church; the communion of saints;
 - X. The forgiveness of sins;
 - XI. The resurrection of the body;
 - XII. And the life everlasting. Amen.
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Before we proceed with the exposition of the subject matter set before us in the Catechism, we must first expound for you briefly the text that has been read in your hearing. You will immediately observe that the apostle here addressed the believing congregation of the Lord at Ephesus, addressing all believing Christians without distinction, and thus both weak and strong believers. It would be entirely absurd if someone were to interpret this to mean that Paul wrote his epistle only to the fully assured Christians among the Ephesians, and that he completely bypassed all struggling and weak Christians who were in darkness regarding their spiritual state—who were thus most in need of his comfort and counsel—considering them not even worthy of being acknowledged and not even remotely referring to them.

We also should not be of the opinion that the entire Ephesian congregation consisted only of strong and assured Christians, and that concerned Christians whose faith was but feeble were not found among them—as if Paul could have known with certainty that such was the case. It is abundantly clear that the very opposite was true.

The church of Christ always and everywhere consists of both weak and strong believers; of children, young men, and fathers in Christ. Though the apostle had been absent from Ephesus for a considerable period, he did not launch a special investigation regarding the spiritual state of every believer in Ephesus. At that point in time, he was a prisoner in Rome for the gospel's sake, and only by way of the testimony of others did he hear of the spiritual state of the believers at Ephesus—and then only in general terms. He says as much in Ephesians 1:15: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you." He considered the majority of the Ephesians to be feeble and weak in the faith, and he therefore wrote to them in Ephesians 3:14–17, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...that he would grant you, according to the

riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.”

It is therefore quite evident that Paul addresses all true believers in general, without making any distinction between strong or weak believers. What is he saying regarding all believers? He testifies that in the Lord Jesus, they all “have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.” In order to arrive at a correct and concise interpretation of these words, we need but consult the marginal notes,¹ which correctly define the essence of the matter. When we combine the various notes concerning each individual word of our text, the thrust of these notes is essentially this:

All true believers have, in and through the Lord Jesus, boldness as children to address God as their Father, and may rejoice in anticipation of the glory of God. In Christ and by the Holy Spirit, they all have access to God the Father, and are as it were taken by the hand and led to Him. Yes, by faith, they may also have confidence in God; that is, by faith in Christ as their mediator, they may believe and trust in God, and have free access to Him.

All of this surely belongs to the essence of true faith. However weak or feeble faith may be, and however much it may be accompanied by strife, opposition, distrust, and carnal doubt, there will nevertheless always be, by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit, something in the heart of a Christian that constitutes the essence of true faith—all of which will not be found in an unbeliever. This continually prompts the believer, in spite of all doubt and opposition of flesh and blood, to lift up his heart by the power of the Holy Spirit and to approach God as His Father, doing so in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, relying continually upon His grace. He does so by trusting in God’s immutable promises that He, in Christ, is to him a reconciled and gracious Father, and that for the sake of the sacrifice of Christ, He has most surely pardoned all his sins and will never be wroth with him again.²

1. These are the marginal notes of the translators of the *Statenvertaling*, the Dutch translation of the Bible commissioned by the Synod of Dort (1618–1619)—a translation of similar status and caliber as the English King James Version.

2. VanderGroe’s emphasis here on embracing God as a reconciled and gracious Father even when faith may be weak or feeble is related to a mid-eighteenth century debate among Dutch theologians about the relationship of faith and assurance. Whereas VanderGroe taught that assurance is an essential element of faith that believers possessed, Wilhelmus à Brakel regarded assurance as a fruit of faith, and taught that “refuge-taking faith”—that is, hungering and thirsting after Christ and His righteousness—is the essence of faith. Alexander Comrie took a mediating position, agreeing with VanderGroe that assurance belongs to the essence of faith, while also agreeing with Brakel that many believers do not always possess conscious

A believing Christian here exclaims from the bottom of his heart and with utmost sincerity, (albeit often as a stammering young child who is just beginning to talk): “Abba, my Father! I believe and I trust that Thou art my gracious Father and that, for the sake of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, Thou wilt never again hold me, a poor sinner, accountable for my sins. I trust in Thy divine word and in Thine own promises, for Thou art the God who canst neither lie nor deceive.”

Behold, true faith will never permit itself to be robbed of this assured confidence upon God's grace, albeit that through grievous assaults and carnal strife, true faith can at times—and sometimes for lengthy periods—be greatly suppressed, weakened, and obscured. The latter is often caused by sin and by living a life of careless world-conformity. However, this can never in any way change the essential nature of true faith. Faith in its essence will always remain the same. It will always be characterized by this assured confidence regarding God's mercy and His immutable promises of the gracious pardon of sins in Christ, and consequently this confidence will always function as one of its most essential ingredients.

A faith that lacks this assured confidence is a dead and inactive faith. The apostle therefore writes in Hebrews 3:6 that we are the house of Christ, and that we will always remain the permanent residence of His Spirit, “if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (that is, the end of our lives). Unbelief can never erase this entirely from our hearts, for could it do so, we would lose faith itself, by which alone we can be saved and redeemed.

However, as our faithful and merciful high priest, Christ is moved with great compassion toward our weakness. He knows that we are incapable of preserving our faith when it is assailed by and subjected to the grievous assaults of the flesh and of Satan. Therefore, He has prayed for us that our faith fail not, and that we will retain our boldness and assured confidence of faith until the end. Poor believing souls, you can rest in this and fully rely upon it, for “faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24).

After this preamble, having already shed much light on the matter of faith, we will now, in dependence on the Lord's gracious blessing, proceed to address the great mystery of faith, and thus resume where we left off in our previous discourse. The Catechism, in conformity to what the old Reformed Church has always customarily taught, posits very correctly that true faith consists in two components: *a certain or assured knowledge and an assured confidence*. In the

confirmation of their salvation in Christ though they do possess faith that takes refuge in Christ and hungers and thirsts for His righteousness.

previous sermon, we addressed the first component. We considered in detail from God's Holy Word that true faith, by which alone we are ingrafted into the Lord Jesus, must necessarily and essentially consist in an assured knowledge of God, which the Holy Spirit works and strengthens in our hearts through the proclamation of the holy gospel. Hereby our hearts are engaged to believe in the truth of God's Holy Word, "whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His word."

We considered that this assured knowledge of God whereby we believe the truth of His Holy Word with the heart is not only partially the foundation of true saving faith, but rather, that such knowledge constitutes its innermost foundation, and without it there can never spring forth in the heart of man a true faith or assured confidence. A faith that is neither accompanied by a certain and assured knowledge of God, nor founded upon the truth of His Holy Word as upon an immovable foundation, is a false, vain, and counterfeit faith. Oh, that this would be understood by all of us, and that the Lord would enable us truly to understand it!

Let us therefore posit, as we have previously done, that this matter is securely and eternally anchored in the heart of the believing sinner, and that through the operation of the Holy Spirit and by means of the gospel, he acquires an assured knowledge of God and a steadfast faith in the revealed truth of His Holy Word—even though at times it is clouded by much doubt, carnal darkness, and satanic assaults. On the basis of this foundation, we will now proceed to consider how a believing sinner, by virtue of his assured and believing knowledge of God and His holy truth, also, by the power of the Holy Spirit, necessarily manifests an assured confidence in his heart toward God and toward the immutable promises of His holy gospel.

In some measure, we will seek to unfold this weighty matter incrementally, and to present it as clearly as man's intellect can comprehend, endeavoring to do so with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is our heartfelt desire regarding this weighty matter pertaining to eternal salvation that we would be correctly understood and comprehended by all Christians. May the subtle prejudices and malicious insinuations of many against the unadulterated truth as it is in Christ, whereby in our days Satan seeks to gain the advantage, thus be fully eradicated from the hearts of men. May we "all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13), for there is truly but "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).

Therefore, the premise, affirmed as an eternal truth, remains that a poor sinner who truly believes unto salvation has, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, an assured knowledge of God, whereby, in his innermost heart, he truly believes and holds “for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word.” We must be unyielding in our adherence to this foundational truth, and always keep it in view if we are to understand well what this confidence of faith is that will now be addressed by the instructor.

The first question is this: What is it that the Lord God reveals in His Holy Word that, the moment the poor sinner truly and sincerely believes, yields to him such a steadfast and assured confidence, and causes him to embrace in his heart “that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits?” This is the other component of faith, and when joined to the first component, constitutes that true faith whereby we are ingrafted into the Lord Jesus and receive all His benefits unto our salvation and eternal redemption—all of which the instructor has previously taught.

This is a question of the greatest weight and import, and on its answer hinges our entire and correct understanding of the mystery of faith. He who fails to understand the matter addressed in this question will always remain in darkness and think erroneously regarding the true doctrine of faith. No one but the Lord God alone is able to cure his blindness by giving to him a faith that remains beyond his grasp unless he truly has received it in his heart, for faith is “the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8), and “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:14).

Let us then consider not only what it is that the Lord God reveals very clearly in His Holy Word to the believing sinner unto his salvation and eternal redemption, but also what that sinner, by virtue of this assured knowledge and by the power of the Holy Spirit, wholeheartedly holds for truth and believes with conviction.

By His Holy Word, the Lord God reveals to the poor believer that he, no less than all men, is a great sinner who has grievously transgressed all His commandments, and that he has never kept a single one of them. He furthermore reveals to him that since his youth and conception, he has had a nature that is inclined to all sin and wickedness, and therefore he is neither capable of loving God as his supreme king and as his creator nor of rendering Him the honor He is worthy to receive. The Lord also reveals to him that he will moreover be held accountable for Adam’s transgression as being the cause of the corruption

of his nature and character. The Word declares to him, "You are this sinner, you are this ungodly man, you are this abominable and vile man, and you are this enemy of God."

This poor man believes this divine testimony, and he views himself, along with all men, as such an abominable and wretched sinner. He says: "Yes, Lord, I am such a one. 'I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me' (Ps. 51:5). It is true, O Lord, my God, that I have so grievously dishonored, maligned, and offended Thee, my pure and holy maker, and that I am still inclined to do so. Lord, it is true what Thou dost say and reveal regarding me in Thy Holy Word, and I neither can nor will conceal it from Thee."

He confesses this before the Lord regarding himself with a heartbreaking shame, sorrow, and very deep contrition. He smites his hip and melts away in tears of contrition, for his heart is utterly perplexed and wounded. He is distraught and abhors himself, crying out, "O Lord, if Thou wouldest contend with me, a poor sinner, I will be incapable of answering Thee one of a thousand questions" (Job 9:3).

By His Holy Word, the Lord furthermore reveals to such a poor sinner that He is an infinite, holy, and righteous God who is terribly displeased with sin and the sinner, and must necessarily punish the sinner temporally and eternally, thereby subjecting him to His eternal wrath. The Lord reveals to him that he, along with all other men, is fully separated from Him and His blessed communion, that he is a child of wrath who is subjected to the curse of the law, and, with all the world, is guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).

The poor sinner also believes all this by virtue of this assured knowledge regarding God, a knowledge wrought in his heart by the Holy Spirit. He is deeply distraught about his wretched misery, and his heart is very broken by it. He views himself as nothing but a truly hell-worthy, guilty, and accursed sinner before God; as a slave of hell and of Satan who is worthy of eternal death and condemnation; and therefore as one who is not worthy of the least manifestation of God's grace. It grieves him deeply that he has so provoked the Lord his God to wrath by his sins. Oh, he cannot express in words how this grieves and pains him in his heart! He exclaims, "O Lord, my God, 'rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure' (Ps. 6:1), for "if thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3).

By means of His Word, the Lord God also reveals to the poor but believing sinner that in himself he is an utterly destitute, wretched, impotent, and lost sinner who neither can contribute anything to his deliverance and salvation

nor find the least help with any creature in heaven or on earth. Without Christ, and apart from God's grace, he is but a sinner who will die and perish eternally. All of this such a poor sinner believes by this assured knowledge of God and of His holy truth. He perceives himself as being truly destitute, wretched, utterly impotent, and profoundly miserable. He sees that all his "righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6), and that in no wise can he sustain his life or obtain counsel and help from any creature. With a fully broken and contrite heart, he exclaims that it is beyond hope for him, and that in himself he is fully and eternally "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Apart from and without Christ, he must eternally perish.

Therefore, consider with what conviction a true believing sinner thus far believes with his heart and holds for truth all that God reveals unto him in His Holy Word and impresses on his heart by the operation of the Holy Spirit. However, this by no means is everything!

The Lord God reveals in His Holy Word to this poor believing sinner that He, the Lord, is a God of infinite grace, loving-kindness, and tender mercy. This is the very essence of His nature. As truly as He, the Lord, lives and is the omnipotent God, He absolutely has no pleasure or delight in the death of wicked and perishing sinners (Ezek. 33:11). On the contrary! The salvation and redemption of the world is a matter of inexpressible concern to Him, and from His side, He desires to enter into a covenant of peace with all contrite sinners whose true and upright desire is to return unto the Lord their God in the way of repentance. To that end, the Lord God offers His peace and grace to all sinners who live under the proclamation of the gospel, calling loudly to them, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isa. 45:22).

This poor believing sinner also believes this, and by virtue of this assured knowledge, wrought so deeply in his heart by the Holy Spirit, he holds it for truth in the innermost recesses of his heart. Oh, how he now sees the Lord before him with the eye of faith! By virtue of the transparent light of the gospel kindled in his soul, he now sees Him as a God of infinite loving-kindness and mercy, who absolutely has no pleasure in the death of a single ungodly sinner, and he perceives therefore that He also does not desire the death of the ungodly, poor, and contrite sinner. Rather, by the gospel, He causes peace, grace, and mercy to be proclaimed to him as well as to all other poor sinners. His loving-kindness and eternal love for men is so great, and is revealed as such in the gospel, that He does not exclude a single sinner—not even the most wicked of all sinners.

Oh, what glad tidings these are for the poor, contrite, and believing sinner! What a delight it is for him to hear this! How exceedingly precious and refreshing is the sweet language of the gospel to him when He hears God proclaim loudly to the world, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" (Ezek. 18:23)! It is as if the Lord desires to say, "How could it possibly occur to Me that I, the Lord, who am so full of grace and mercy, would permit a poor and wretched sinner to die and perish when My right hand can deliver and save him if he will but come to Me?"

Oh, the sweet and infinite mercy of God—the eternal God, who is full of love and grace! A poor and perplexed sinner, who truly believes with his heart in this incomprehensible mercy of God, must therefore echo the words of the LORD, who, when He in His glory passed before Moses, said, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6).³ However, this also is not yet all!

The gospel unveils to the poor, contrite, and believing sinner even more glorious things. We must now take careful notice of how the instructor sets before us the other component of faith, for we will proceed to open the true fountain from which this *assured confidence* of faith, as it pertains to salvation and the forgiveness of sins, necessarily and most certainly issues forth in the heart of the believing sinner by the operation of the Holy Spirit. God also reveals very clearly to him in His Word in what way and by whom He manifests His infinite grace and mercy to all poor sinners, namely, by means of His beloved and only begotten Son, Christ Jesus, in whom He is well pleased, for He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

God testifies in His Word regarding His Son that eternal life for a poor and dead sinner is to be found in Him (1 John 5:11), that He has exalted His Son "with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31), and that He "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him [that is, that whoever receives Him by a true faith as his only and complete savior] should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

To the poor sinner who believes in God's Holy Word and gospel, God reveals how He formerly caused His Son to be lifted up on the cross as the surety and savior of all contrite and believing sinners. He reveals to him how His Son

3. In the original, VanderGroe attributes these words to Moses. The context clearly affirms, however, that the Lord Himself uttered these words. In the translation, the sentence has been restructured and reworded to reflect this.

“hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18), and how He “was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor. 5:19).

If this were not sufficient to persuade the poor sinner of the Lord's good will and favorable inclination to deliver and save him by His own Son, He reveals very clearly in His Holy Word and gospel to the poor believing sinner (directing him therein by the illumination of His Spirit), how He offers and gives His Son, Christ Jesus, as a deliverer and savior, doing so graciously, generally, indiscriminately, and thus to all poor and willing sinners. To all of them He presents Christ, whom He “hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Rom. 3:25).

Moreover, He reveals to him how with and through His Son He also graciously promises and offers to him the complete pardon of all his sins. Paul proclaimed this to the Jews, saying, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 13:38); that is, it is granted and offered to us, and with an upright faith we are but to receive this grace of God through Christ as it is unveiled to us in the promises of the holy gospel. Therefore, Christ, giving one of His final commands when He was about to ascend from earth to heaven, commissioned His disciples “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

The Lord also reveals how, in addition to the forgiveness of sins, He will graciously bestow upon him all the other benefits of salvation that have been merited by Christ if he will but sincerely believe by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ will then immediately be made unto him “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). Thus, in order for the poor sinner to be eternally reconciled with God and receive from Him complete salvation and eternal life, he needs to do nothing but believe in uprightness of heart, and to open his heart widely to Christ and to God's grace. By a true faith, he is but to receive and freely embrace this offered mediator with all His merits and the benefits of salvation, as the gracious gift of God's eternal love and unfathomable mercy.

This offer of the gospel is made in general terms and to all poor sinners who truly need such a surety and savior, and all His salvific benefits. Christ most tenderly calls poor sinners to Himself, earnestly inviting them by saying, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”

(Matt. 11:28), “and let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

It is in this and in no other way that God's gospel is most transparently articulated throughout His Holy Word. In His gospel, God has revealed *no other gospel* and no other way of salvation than has been declared unto us. In this gospel, the Lord God makes the sure and trustworthy promise to all poor sinners that He will grant them the Lord Jesus, His Son, as a complete savior and deliverer, and that for His sake, He will graciously forgive all their sins. He promises furthermore that He will embrace them as His reconciled children and as the certain heirs of eternal life; that He will always graciously and for Christ's sake provide all things necessary for their salvation; and that He will continually embrace them with eternal love. All these blessings will be theirs if they, with a true faith, will receive them all, and will fully trust and rely upon God's promise of salvation. This means that in the forsaking of themselves and all creatures, and by relying upon sovereign grace, they surrender themselves fully to Him in Christ.

This is the true and eternal gospel of God, and He reveals it as such in His Holy Word. This gospel He causes to be proclaimed throughout the world, and as ministers of the gospel, we are to proclaim it as such to the ends of the world, for “though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

This true, spiritual, and believing knowledge of the holy and divine gospel is the foundation of true faith. Never to all eternity shall a poor sinner, by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit, receive a true faith unto salvation in his innermost heart unless the Spirit first enables him in some measure to understand truly and clearly this gospel of God's grace, and truly believe it in his heart. When, however, there is true faith in the heart of a sinner, he wholeheartedly believes this all-encompassing divine gospel, a gospel so clearly and transparently articulated in God's Word. It is by means of this assured knowledge of God, wrought by the Holy Spirit in his soul, that he unreservedly holds “for truth all that God has revealed to us in His word.”

As soon as the poor sinner truly and assuredly knows and comprehends this divine gospel in his heart, and in reliance upon God's testimony in His Word truly believes it to be a sure and undoubted truth, he then necessarily and by the operation of the Holy Spirit exercises this *assured confidence* of faith toward God and Christ, doing so upon the foundation of the gospel promises.

He has a very pure and fervent love and esteem for this precious divine gospel in Christ, and considers it as the only and sure way unto his eternal salvation and redemption—all by God's grace and through the Lord Jesus. He sees infinite beauty and preciousness in that blessed gospel of God's grace. A poor believer finds in this gospel all his salvation and all his desire (2 Sam. 23:5). He praises, magnifies, and adores it, and cannot marvel sufficiently that the Lord God in His eternal wisdom and unfathomable love for sinners has conceived such an unfathomable and wondrous way of salvation for poor, ungodly, and hell-worthy sinners.

Oh, that gospel is now so beautiful and infinitely precious to him that he completely loses sight of all the preciousness of earthly things! For him, it "is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15). To him, the gospel is a joyous proclamation; it is a message from a far country that is as water to a weary soul.

The poor believing sinner has a very fervent desire after the precious grace of God that is unveiled and promised in the holy gospel. Oh, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, he fully turns to this gospel with his heavy-laden soul and forsakes all other means and ways of salvation. It cannot be expressed in words how in his innermost heart he pants and yearns for God's grace, for the forgiveness of sins, and for the righteousness and eternal salvation to be found in Christ Jesus. His entire heart hungers and thirsts after this. He cannot be without this grace of God in Christ Jesus a moment longer. No, he must have it, and otherwise he will certainly perish in his sins and succumb under the burden of God's wrath. He no longer is able to bear being without Christ, for he has now truly become one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and such are declared blessed by Christ (Matt. 5:6).

By the almighty and powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, this poor believer widely and fully opens his heart and soars as upon eagle's wings on the sure promises of the holy gospel, soaring as it were from earth to heaven. In so doing, he receives and embraces by a true faith the grace of God offered to him, firmly takes hold of the Lord Jesus Christ, and believingly applies and appropriates these benefits—the forgiveness of all his sins, righteousness, and eternal salvation—doing all of this by grace and for the sake of Christ's merits. He appropriates them as certainly as he sees before his eyes and believes with his heart that these benefits are freely granted and offered to him in God's holy gospel.

The poor believing sinner proceeds in this as follows: by the secret operation of the Holy Spirit, he says in his heart to God (in this or in a similar manner): “O Lord, my God and my rock, since it is the manifestation of Thy eternal love and unfathomable mercy to reveal from the beginning of the world and by means of the holy gospel:

- that Thou hast given Thy only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to all poor and contrite sinners to be a complete savior and deliverer;
- that for them Thou hast lifted Him up on the cross;
- that Thou dost grant sinners the forgiveness of all their sins and graciously bestow righteousness and eternal salvation upon them in Christ's name; and
- that it is Thy will that all men shall believe this Thy divine grace, wholeheartedly and willingly receive it, and put all their trust in it for both life and death, promising eternal life to those who do, and the punishment of eternal damnation to those who refuse—

considering all this, I thus come to Thee, O Lord, my God, as a poor, contrite sinner by the operation of Thy Holy Spirit. With a holy trembling, I cast myself at the feet of Thy divine mercy, leaning upon Thy sure promises. With my whole heart, I receive Thy Son, Jesus Christ, as my complete surety, savior, king, and deliverer. I am earnestly and readily prepared to embrace this Thy great and unfathomable mercy, that Thou, for the sake of the merits of Thy beloved Son, dost fully forgive all my sins, graciously granting me, a poor, wretched sinner, this eternal righteousness and salvation. O Lord, my gracious God and Father, I do not in any wise desire that I should doubt these sure promises, but rather, believe them assuredly, steadfastly, and with my whole heart, putting all my trust in them in both life and death. In these promises alone, and thus in nothing other either in heaven or earth, do I wish to find all my comfort and salvation. And so I cry out to Thee with my whole heart, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever” (Ps. 74:25–26).

The poor sinner who thus believes with his heart adds the following to this, saying: “O Lord, my God, since I, a poor and needy sinner, am still so weak in this my faith, and am continually tempted by Satan to doubt and distrust Thy grace, and since I lack the inner resources to resist, I thus pray and beseech Thee, O Lord, my gracious God, that Thou wouldst continually strengthen,

help, and sustain me by the power of Thy Holy Spirit. I shall then neither capitulate nor succumb, but rather, forcefully resist Satan and my unbelieving flesh, and conduct myself always courageously and steadfastly in this blessed battle of faith. By Thy grace, I shall then finally joyfully prevail over all these doubts of the flesh and all the assaults of Satan, so that to the very end I may hold fast the liberty and the triumphant hope that Thou dost grant unto me. Therefore, behold, O Lord, my God, as a poor sinner, I fully believe and trust Thy grace, and therefore, help Thou continually my unbelief!”

Behold, beloved, this is the other component of true faith, which the Catechism formulates as an “assured confidence... that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.” The instructor correctly refers to this as an *assured confidence*. This does not mean that the believer always possesses an assured and steadfast confidence of his salvation, and that he is never subject to any darkness, unbelief, turmoil, or carnal doubt. This is certainly not so, for all true believers daily and until the end of their lives experience the contrary, and many frequently have a very feeble faith and are full of inner turmoil and doubt. Sometimes such believers even die in such a sad state, and with Elijah they ascend into heaven as in a whirlwind.⁴

When, however, the instructor designates the other component of faith as an assured confidence, he is thereby defining this confidence as to its essence, and thus in reference to its true and proper subject. The subject of this assured confidence is the soul of the believer, which is also referred to as the *new man*, and is alone the subject and residence of true faith. The flesh cannot be the residence of faith, for it consists by its very nature in nothing but darkness and unbelief, and some are therefore entirely in error when they say that the essence of faith differs from how it actually functions in its subject. This suggests that the entire person of the believer is the subject of faith, but that is clearly not so, for the spirit of the new man as it resides in the believer is ultimately the only subject of faith. The flesh, or the old man, as it functions in the same believer, is the subject of doubt and unbelief. Thus, the believer always believes as to his spirit and always doubts as to the flesh. Whenever by the grace of God the spiritual man has the upper hand, faith will at that moment be victorious over unbelief. When, however, due to the power of sin, the assaults of Satan, and the

4. This should not be understood as if Elijah ascended to heaven full of inner turmoil and doubt. Rather, the author wishes to focus on the whirlwind as being symbolic of the inner turmoil and doubt that can afflict a weak but true believer even at the hour of death.

absence of the activity and influence of God's grace the flesh prevails at another occasion over the spirit, unbelief will at that moment prevail over faith, and it will be stronger than faith. Such poor souls are then desirous to believe, and yet they are incapable of doing so. This is according to Scripture, which says, "Ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17), "for what I would [that is, to believe fully and at all times, and to be fully assured of my salvation and of God's grace—and thus to be free of all doubt], that do I not; but what I hate [that is, to be unbelieving and doubtful regarding my salvation in Christ], that do I" (Rom. 7:15).

There is, however, never the least variation in the essential nature of true faith, for faith will eternally and forever remain faith and never be anything other than faith—even if it were to be accompanied by thousands of unbelieving doubts of the flesh. Gold remains gold, even if it were to be mixed with and be buried by a very large amount of soil, for gold is not soil and soil is not gold. Fire remains fire, even though it were to be buried deeply under ashes so that one could hardly find a trace of it or detect a small glimmer of its activity. Light also remains light, regardless of how much it is intermixed with darkness and gloom. Light and darkness will always remain distinctly different as to their essence. Two substances that are directly opposite to each other, or two extremes, can be intermingled in one common subject, but they will never intermix, for then they no longer would retain their distinction.

All these analogies are equally true for faith, for faith can coexist with unbelief in one and the same person of the believer, and thus in one common subject. However, as to its character and nature, faith will always remain distinguished from unbelief as being its extreme opposite. True faith is and remains always what the instructor defines it to be: an assured confidence. There are three reasons for this:

1. This confidence of faith rests immovably upon God's sure and infallible promises. A house that is built upon a rock-solid and immovable foundation is a house that is steadfast and secure. However, this confidence of faith is also steadfast and sure, because it rests upon such a steadfast and immovable foundation, namely, God's promises—yes, upon the God who has promised.

2. This confidence of faith is also an assured confidence because it is a steadfast and essential matter that is deeply and permanently impressed upon the heart of the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit. It in no wise is a fleeting and deceitful imagination of the mind, such as is found in all counterfeit and temporal believers. Scripture says regarding them: "Whose hope shall be cut

off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand: he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure" (Job 8:14–15).

3. This confidence of faith is also an assured confidence because by the power of the Holy Spirit it will always be unmovably sure and steadfast against all the assaults and temptations of Satan, the world, and our evil flesh. Faith will resist them all and will endure all violence. It will never fully succumb, regardless of how much it may at times be weakened by grievous upheavals or by the secret and insidious power of unbelief.

Thus, faith is analogous to pure gold that resolutely opposes the power and ferocity of the fire; or to a tree that is traumatized greatly by the wind while being shaken back and forth, but which will never be fully torn loose from its immovable root. For "they that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever" (Ps. 125:1). Behold, these are the reasons why the instructor rightfully defines faith as an assured confidence.

The instructor now proceeds to address the objects of faith, namely, the divine truths of the holy gospel, by asking, "What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?" He then answers by saying, "All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us." He then immediately quotes the old, common Apostles' Creed, in which all these precious and divine truths and promises are briefly summarized. Since the truths articulated in this confession are clear and will be addressed in subsequent Lord's Days, we will presently not do so.

We have thus in two sermons set before you the pure and sound doctrine of faith, and, with God's help, we have considered and elaborated in some detail what is its essence. The two matters we have addressed, this certain knowledge and this assured confidence, constitute a true faith whereby we are grafted into Christ "and receive all His benefits." And all they, and they alone, who by the grace of God truly possess this true faith in their hearts, however weak and feeble it may be, and who wholeheartedly hate and abhor all sorts of faith that fundamentally differ from this true faith, are as graciously saved by Christ as they would have perished in Adam.

Only by this faith are we truly partakers of the great mediator, Christ Jesus, and of all the benefits of salvation that have been secured by Him for us poor sinners. This is that true and most holy faith "which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). This is the faith that since Paradise has always been found among the people of God and by which all the saints have gone to heaven. He who possesses that faith is most assuredly saved and will once hear from the

mouth of the Lord Jesus, “Thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace” (Luke 8:48). However, he who possesses not that faith in the hour of death will most certainly and as truly as the Lord lives receive no grace and be eternally damned.

Now that I have been privileged to proclaim this faith to the world, I will not bemoan myself and be concerned what people will either say or think of me. As my Lord Jesus and as all His holy servants, I would rather continue my earthly journey during my remaining days “by evil report and good report” (2 Cor. 6:8). As a poor creature, I cannot add anything more to this, and I therefore surrender this faith, along with the Catechism and the entire Holy Scriptures, into the hands of Him who “sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,” from whence “He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

Next Lord’s Day, if it may please the Lord, we hope to preach about the apostle’s counsel to the perplexed jailor, saying, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). We will then apply the doctrine of faith more closely to the hearts of the congregation.⁵

I will now end my discourse with a passionate exhortation to all of the Lord’s believing people, and may the Lord truly bind it upon all of their hearts: “Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness!” (Ps. 97:12). Amen! So be it!

5. VanderGroe here refers to a sermon he preached on the following Sunday—a sermon, however, that is not included in this exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Division of the Apostles' Creed and the Trinity

LORD'S DAY 8

*For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word,
and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*

—1 JOHN 5:7

Question 24: How are these articles divided?

Answer: Into three parts; the first is of God the Father and our creation; the second of God the Son and our redemption; the third of God the Holy Ghost, and our sanctification.

Question 25: Since there is but one divine essence, why speakest thou of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?

Answer: Because God hath so revealed Himself in His Word, that these three distinct persons are the one only true and eternal God.

There is a rather unusual account of the famous pagan philosopher Simonides being asked by King Hiero as to what or who God is. Simonides asked that he be given a day to consider this question before giving his answer. After this day had transpired, he asked for another day, and then repeatedly he made the same request. When the king finally asked him why he repeatedly requested an extension for such a long period of time, he responded that the more he considered within himself what or who God is, the more obscure the matter became to him, and the more difficult it became to answer the question.

We believe fully that this astute pagan spoke the truth, for having no more at his disposal than a very small remnant of light yielded by a darkened intellect, it was absolutely impossible for him to have a truly spiritual and correct understanding regarding the infinite and most glorious divine being. The more he agonized and made use of the obscure glimmer of light yielded by his

intellect, the more he became aware of his blindness and profound ignorance concerning God. The most brilliant among the pagans have certainly not been ashamed to confess openly to the world their ignorance pertaining to God. The Athenians therefore inscribed these words in one of their temples: "To the unknown God" (Acts 17:23).

If God is again to be truly and savingly known by us insignificant and sinful human beings, who through sin have lost all knowledge of Him, He must necessarily reveal and make Himself known to us both by means of His Word and His Holy Spirit. In His Word, God reveals and makes Himself known as He is, as an infinite, most holy, most glorious, and most blessed God, who is one in His essence, subsisting in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In this Lord's Day, the instructor addresses the doctrine of this triune and most exalted divine being.

In the previous Lord's Day, the instructor set before us in what a true saving faith consists—a faith that unites us with Christ, the mediator, and a faith that makes us partakers of His salvation and redemption. The instructor then taught that one of the requisites of this faith is a true knowledge of, and a heartfelt acquiescence in, all the gospel promises and salvific truths that are summarized for us in the articles of our Christian faith. We will follow the instructor as he now proceeds to expound each of these in detail—articles that encompass the most prominent and foundational doctrines of Christianity, and which need to be known in a true and saving manner.

Oh, that it would please the Lord, by the powerful operation of His Holy Spirit, to instruct us regarding all these spiritual truths, so that we may understand them in a right manner unto our salvation! May these truths also sanctify us inwardly, so that we might serve and glorify this triune God who is worthy to be known, loved, served, and praised by us to all eternity. Amen.

This Lord's Day sets before us two main truths for our consideration:

1. The instructor gives a brief summary and a useful division of the twelve articles of faith (Question 24).
2. He addresses the doctrine of the triune God as the most exalted object of faith displayed and set before us in these twelve articles, doing so in such a manner as He must be known by us unto salvation (Question 25).

Regarding these twelve articles of faith, we desire to set before you some general observations, then follow the instructor in addressing their essential content

and division. We can state briefly that these articles encompass a straightforward and concise summary of the most fundamental doctrines of our most holy faith. Without a true knowledge of, acquiescence in, and spiritual submission to these truths, no one can either be saved or have any communion with God. This compendium of foundational divine truths is very old, and was early on in use in the Christian church as a common confession of faith whereby Christians distinguished themselves from Jews, pagans, and all other heretics. No one was therefore considered to be a true Christian unless he openly confessed, heartily subscribed to, and believed these twelve articles of faith. Consequently, they were designated as the *Symbolum Apostolicum*; that is, the apostolic symbol or motto whereby all who embraced the doctrine of the apostles and disciples of our Savior were known and distinguished from all heretics. Similarly, no one today is considered a Christian unless he wholeheartedly confesses and believes these twelve articles of faith.

It is uncertain when exactly this apostolic confession was initially composed. It is, however, most probable that this confession was initially very brief, consisting only in these few words: "I believe in God the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost." As history progressed, however, and as errors and heresies emerged, this confession was expanded into the twelve articles as we have them today.

Having made these brief and general observations regarding the twelve articles of faith by way of preface, we will now proceed to consider their essential content and division. The instructor teaches that these articles are conveniently divided "into three parts; the first of God the Father, and our creation; the second of God the Son, and our redemption; the third of God the Holy Ghost, and our sanctification."

The object of faith, as it is addressed in these twelve articles, is God, who is the most worthy, most glorious, and most holy majesty, "whom to know is life eternal" (John 17:3). This is now the time and place to speak in some detail about God. However, beloved, no sooner do I perceive the necessity of this than I am very perplexed as to how I can suitably say something that in some measure will do justice to the infinite greatness and glory of this majestic being. I am often grieved about my great ignorance of God. How blessed I would be, and what an entirely different radiance would emanate from me, my doctrine, and my life, if I were to be illuminated more by this eternal and inaccessible light that shines so brilliantly in that place where there is no need of either the

sun or the moon! I dare not deny that my soul would rather receive a glimmer of that light than all the glitter, glory, and luster of the world.

I will now attempt to make mention with a few feeble words something of who God is. Oh, that my soul would tremble in doing so, and that His name would be to me both marvelous and awe-inspiring! God is a pure, holy, eternal, infinite, supremely perfect, and supremely blessed spirit, who is of one essence, subsisting in three persons. These three persons know, love, enjoy, and glorify Themselves and all that is within Them in a most holy and perfect manner. It is of Them, through Them, and to Them that all things exist, and to Them therefore be all the praise, honor, glory, wisdom, majesty, dominion, and power to all eternity. Behold, I can give you nothing other than this inferior and imperfect summary of Jehovah God, and happy is he who may have even a small measure of such knowledge!

The fact that there is such a God as we have mentioned, our theologians have proven very clearly, powerfully, and in numerous ways from both nature and from the Holy Scriptures. However, the best and only teacher who rightly can declare this to us is Jehovah God Himself, who must necessarily reveal Himself to us in Christ and by His Holy Spirit, saying, "Behold me, behold me!" (Isa. 65:1). The most scientific, clearest, and irrefutable proofs that there is a God are not suited in the least to enable us properly to acknowledge and believe this truth. By the inner power and operation of the remaining light of reason in our souls, we can easily be persuaded that there is a God, and thus confess this truth in general terms. However, who God is, and what is the manner of His existence, no tongue or writings of any creature are able to teach us.

This is a wisdom that is fully hidden from the wise and prudent of this world. Though they may greet each other with lofty and vain titles, none are capable of knowing God as He is except they who are pure in heart. They, and they alone, have seen God, and will see Him eternally (Matt. 5:8). The reason for this is to be found in the fact that we are all by nature practical atheists or God-deniers who do not know God and live entirely "without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). In this state, whatever we say about, think of, read about, and hear about God, we do as the Athenians did, namely, in regard to *an unknown God*. We are in such a state because not a single beam of His saving light and glory has ever illuminated our darkened understandings.

Therefore, if we are to believe rightly that there is a God, and who He is, we must not turn either to philosophers or theologians, but rather, we must turn to God Himself and to Him who is His express image, Jesus Christ. It is He who

is in the bosom of the Father, and He has come “to the Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:13). Therefore, either in heaven or on earth, there is no other way whereby we may become acquainted with God and perceive a glimmer of His glory except through Jesus Christ. The Holy Scriptures clearly teach this truth in John 1:18, where we read, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” In 2 Corinthians 4:6, we read, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” It is this specific truth that we now wish to articulate in reference to the most high God.

We will therefore turn again to the instructor, who teaches that the Apostles' Creed in its twelve articles addresses the doctrine of God the Father, of God the Son, and of God the Holy Spirit. In the next question, the instructor will set before us how God has revealed Himself in His Word as a triune God. Therefore, at this point, we wish only to draw your attention to two things:

1. the name of each of the glorious and adorable divine persons whereby They are distinguished from each other; and
2. the specific extrinsic work that is ascribed to each of these persons.

Regarding the name of each divine person, it has pleased the triune God to reveal them frequently in His Word. The first person within the glorious Godhead calls Himself *Father*, the second person calls Himself *Son*, and the third person calls Himself *Holy Spirit*. These are the names by which They have revealed Themselves in the Holy Scriptures, and by means of these names, we distinguish these divine persons from each other. The essence and magnitude of these names are rooted in the divine being of God.

The first person is denominated as *Father*, because from all eternity He has generated the second person of the Trinity in a manner that is infinitely glorious and for us is entirely incomprehensible. “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26).

The second person is denominated as *Son*, because He has thus been generated by the Father. The instructor will specifically address this exalted mystery in Lord's Day 13.

The third person is denominated as *Holy Spirit*, because He proceeds or is breathed forth from the Father and the Son in a manner that is infinitely glorious and for us is incomprehensible. And if it may please God, we will

consider this great mystery in greater detail in Lord's Day 20, which specifically addresses the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

We will now consider the extrinsic work that is ascribed to each divine person. In the Apostles' Creed, the work of *our creation* is ascribed to the Father, the work of *our redemption* is ascribed to the Son, and the work of *our sanctification* is ascribed to the Holy Ghost. All the extrinsic works of God that pertain to His elect and believing people consist in essence in this threefold omnipotent activity: they pertain to their *creation*, that is, their conception and preservation; their *redemption* from the state of sin and eternal perdition into which they have fallen by their willful disobedience; and their *sanctification*.

These three activities are entirely the work of Jehovah, the triune God. He creates, He redeems, and He sanctifies His believing people without them contributing, or being able to contribute, anything. In this respect, they are entirely passive before God, for by Him they are created, by Him they are redeemed, and by Him they are sanctified. It is God "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11) and who is "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28), so that "if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (Gal. 6:3).

How is this threefold work of God executed? It is certain that this work in its essence is the work of Jehovah, the triune God, and that all three of the divine persons are equally engaged in it from eternity and within the context of time. We can thus say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit create, redeem, and sanctify man, for since there is but one supreme divine being, one person cannot be engaged apart from the others. Therefore, They all work concurrently and simultaneously by Their common power and eternal Godhead. Nevertheless, since there is a personal and essential distinction between the three glorious divine persons, each engages Himself also personally in His extrinsic work in accordance with the divine economy to which, in order to demonstrate Their exalted glory, the three divine persons have eternally and mutually agreed.

It is the Father who specifically engages in the great work of *creation* and preservation. The Son does so in regard to the great work of *redemption*, and the Holy Spirit does so in regard to the great work of *sanctification*. In the Holy Scriptures, these great works are distinctly attributed to these three glorious persons. In this divine economy, the Father reveals Himself as the eternal

fountain and wellspring of the Godhead, working to His glory in and by His Son, and together with Him in and by the Holy Spirit.

Any attempt, as do the foolish philosophers of the world, to penetrate more deeply with our finite minds into the manner and nature of this divine manner of operation would be an abominable and ungodly attempt to be as God, and thus a despicable device of the devil. Our eyes are entirely too weak to look directly into this eternal and infinite sun. The faintest glimmer proceeding from this sun would render us blind and cause us to exclaim with Zophar the Naamathite: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" (Job 11:7–8).

God dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. 6:17), and whoever sees but a glimmer of this light must perish at once, and while dying, must cry out with Agur, "What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" (Prov. 30:4). Let us rather experience the blessing of a dying life, and sink away deeply into our misery and insignificance. Let us give Jehovah the glory due to His name as did the righteous Job, vying with one another to confess, "Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?" (Job 26:14).

This triune God is the focal point of the twelve articles of faith, and they address this matter in a suitable and orderly fashion. They address:

1. God the Father and our creation;
2. God the Son and our redemption; and
3. God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.

All of this will be clear when this is expounded for us.

Having seen how the twelve articles of faith are conveniently divided and what their essential contents are, we will follow the instructor as he proceeds to consider more closely the object of these articles, the triune God.

In order to find suitable matter for instruction, the instructor deduces the one question from the other, saying, "Since there is but one only divine essence, why speakest thou of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?" That there is "but one only divine essence" is a truth confirmed very clearly by natural reason as well as by the revelation of God's Holy Word. This truth is so generally acknowledged and externally confessed by all that it seems entirely unnecessary to present even the least evidence for its support. Therefore, we have no other intention but to

confirm it with a few passages of Scripture: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4). In Isaiah 44:6, we have this testimony: "Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." In Isaiah 45:22b, the Lord also says, "I am God, and there is none else," and in 1 Corinthians 8:4, the apostle teaches that "we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one."

However, as well as we may be capable of articulating this great and eternal truth, and no matter how fully and readily we confess this truth outwardly, yet there is no truth that in reality people believe less than the truth that there is but one God. Since by nature we are all practical atheists, denying within us the one true God as much as we possibly can, we act little differently from the blind heathen, doing "service unto them which by nature are no gods" (Gal. 4:8). We all confess to believe in a God, and yet we would have to be utterly blind not to acknowledge that the apostle describes our state in Titus 1:16: "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." By nature, we know no god but ourselves, "whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil. 3:19). Yes, in proportion to creatures unto which we cleave outside of ourselves, cleaving to creatures apart from God, we are serving and worshiping many gods, exclaiming in our hearts with the idolatrous Israelites, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4). If only we would confess with deep shame and self-condemnation that we by nature are all such fools who say in their hearts, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1).

Therefore, in order to confess and believe rightly that there is "but one only divine essence," nothing less is necessary than that this God, by His own light, reveals Himself to us and continually presents Himself as such to our souls. This is the only means whereby we can be gradually delivered from our deep-rooted practical atheism and acquaint ourselves with the eternal and true God (Job 22:21).

Meanwhile, the instructor uses this truth to craft an objection to it regarding the unity of God's being, saying, "Since there is but one only divine essence, etc." The pupil responds to this proposition as follows: "Because God hath so revealed Himself in His word, that these three distinct persons are the one only true and eternal God." As the instructor here deals with the wondrous mystery of the holy trinity of the divine being, he very wisely and piously excludes all

the natural argumentation of the human mind, appealing solely to the revealed Word of God, which so clearly teaches us this glorious and unfathomable mystery. We must therefore believe it by the divine authority of that Word and its powerful effect upon our souls, without attempting to comprehend it with our finite minds.

The instructor teaches that God in His Word has revealed two things regarding Himself:

1. there are three distinct persons within His divine being; and
2. these three distinct persons constitute “the one only true and eternal God.”

Regarding the first, we generally understand a *person* to be a rational and independent entity, gifted with an intellect and a will. In the highest and most perfect sense of the word, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are persons, that is, rational and independent entities. In Hebrews 1:3, Paul teaches clearly that the Father is such a person, for there he calls Christ the express image of His Father's person. The Son teaches and confirms that He Himself is also such a person, saying in John 5:26, “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.” The Socinians may brazenly and unashamedly deny this, but the Holy Scriptures teach very clearly that the Holy Spirit is also such a person, for the two attributes of a person are there ascribed to Him, namely, an intellect and a will. In 1 Corinthians 2:10, Paul speaks of the Spirit's infinite mind, saying, “For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” This searching of the Spirit is the activity of an infinite and most perfect intellect. Regarding the Spirit's will, the same apostle writes in 1 Corinthians 12:11, “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” It is thus very obvious that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, and that each of Them is revealed as such in the Holy Scriptures.

The instructor continues by teaching that Jehovah God has revealed Himself as such in His Word. There we are taught that three *distinct* persons subsist within the divine being, each truly distinguished, the one from the other. This is not true as to Their essence, for we have seen that there is but one divine being; but rather, this pertains to the manner of Their subsistence and to Their works. The Father is therefore another, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another—albeit that all three persons partake of one and the same glorious

divine essence, and thus They have this essence, so to speak, in common with one another.

Yet each adorable divine person has personal characteristics that distinguish Him from the other persons. The personal distinctive of the Father is that He generates the Son, and together with the Son, He causes the Holy Spirit to proceed from Him. The personal distinctive of the Son is that He is begotten of the Father, and together with the Father, He also causes the Holy Spirit to proceed from Him. The personal distinctive of the Holy Spirit is that He proceeds from both the Father and from the Son.

Behold, we thus observe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are personally distinguished one from another, but in no wise can we comprehend with our weak and finite minds the manner and nature of this personal distinction. Nevertheless, against the old Sabellians and other heretics, we must maintain and believe this because God has revealed Himself as such in His Holy Word. The Word of God distinguishes throughout between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and it ascribes to each person His unique subsistence and activity. Consider only these two passages: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1 John 5:7), and "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16). Here we truly encounter three distinct divine persons: the Son praying the Father for the Holy Spirit.

This first statement of the instructor is therefore entirely true. Within this glorious divine being subsist three clearly distinguishable persons, and God has revealed Himself as such in His Word.

However, the instructor proceeds by positing as a divinely revealed truth in God's Word that these three distinct persons are "the one only true and eternal God." This truth does not require an elaborate proof, for every true believer has God's testimony regarding this in his heart, it having been wrought by the Holy Spirit. Since, however, the Socinians and other deceptive heretics so openly oppose this eternal truth, and others, such as the Remonstrants, are entirely indifferent about it, we maintain that only they who are truly born again will truly believe this great truth, and therefore we wish to confirm it by addressing it briefly.

That the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together are the one only true and eternal God is abundantly clear from all the foregoing. We have demonstrated and proven from the Holy Scriptures that there is but one divine being,

and that three distinct persons subsist within this divine being. It is therefore self-evident that these three distinct persons are three divine persons, and together They constitute the one only true and eternal God. Furthermore, the Holy Scriptures clearly and pointedly describe each individual person as the only true and eternal God, and therefore only a devilish unbelief and blindness of mind would prevent us from embracing and acknowledging this eternal truth.

First, regarding the person of the Father, no one would deliberately deny that throughout the Holy Scriptures He is set before us as the one true and eternal God, and we will therefore not pursue the proof of His glorious divinity any further.

Second, no less clearly and pointedly do the Holy Scriptures set before us and confirm the divinity of the Son, for:

- a. Names throughout Scripture are pointedly and emphatically attributed to Him that none but the true God can bear. He is referred to as Jehovah or LORD in Jeremiah 23:6, and this exalted name is never attributed to anyone other than God, for this is His magnificent memorial name (Hos. 12:6). He is denominated as “the mighty God” (Isa. 9:6), and Paul testifies so gloriously regarding the Son that He “is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom. 9:5; cf. 1 John 5:20).
- b. All the glorious attributes and perfect virtues of God are repeatedly attributed to the Son. He is referred to as being *eternal* (Isa. 9:6), for He is denominated there as the “eternal Father.” Micah 5:2 testifies regarding Him that His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,” and in Matthew 18:20, we see Him as *omnipresent*, for He promises there, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” We are also told that He is *omniscient*, for Peter says to Him, “Lord, thou knowest all things” (John 21:17), and that He is *omnipotent*, for He declares of Himself in Revelation 1:8, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”
- c. Throughout the Holy Scriptures, we read of the Son that He receives the same divine honor as does His Father, and that He is to be obeyed and served just as His Father. Listen to how pointedly He Himself teaches this in John 5:22–23: “For the Father judgeth

no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.” And Paul writes of Him in Philippians 2:10, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.” We must therefore also be baptized in His name as much as we are to be baptized in the name of the Father, for we are to acknowledge Him as our most high God and king as much as we do the Father.

- d. Above all, the Holy Scriptures testify of the Son of God that He performs the same glorious, divine, and almighty works as does His Father. This is true for the great work of the creation of heaven and earth, which was accomplished by Him, for the psalmist testifies in Psalm 33:6, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made.” John clearly confirms this at the beginning of his Gospel. The Son also colabors with His Father in upholding all creation, for He Himself testifies in John 5:17, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” Paul testifies regarding the Son in Hebrews 1:3 that He upholds “all things by the word of his power.” Furthermore, consider all the divine miracles He performed while He sojourned on earth—works that no one other than the true God could have done, for it is God “who alone doeth great wonders” (Ps. 136:4).

Behold, all of this—which is but a small sampling of what God’s Word testifies regarding this—confirms the eternal Godhead of the Son so clearly that when the Holy Spirit confirms God’s testimony in our hearts, there will not be the least doubt about it.

Finally, as to the person of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures speak with no less clarity and fortitude regarding Him and His eternal Godhead as they do regarding the Godhead of the Father and the Son. Presently we shall only make mention of this without further affirming the doctrine, for in Lord’s Day 20, the instructor will specifically address the divinity of the Holy Spirit, where he teaches that the Holy Spirit “is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son.” At that time, we will consider this truth in greater detail, and therefore not address it here any further.

It is thus evident from all these things that God has revealed Himself in His Word as the triune God—as a God one in essence and subsisting in three persons. Beyond this, we must not endeavor to penetrate this infinite mystery with our finite understandings. Instead, we must be persuaded by the testimony that

God has given and revealed regarding Himself in His Word, so that we may wholeheartedly embrace this mystery by a true faith, knowing that God's testimony is true and that only God is able to bear witness to Himself.

Without believing this mystery of the Trinity, we cannot be saved, and it is therefore utterly ungodly, damning, and atheistic to maintain with the Remonstrants that it is not absolutely necessary to believe that God is a triune God. If it is not necessary unto salvation to believe that God is a triune God, then it is also not necessary unto salvation to believe that there is a God. For he who believes that God is who He is must acknowledge and embrace Him as He is, namely, one in essence and three in persons. Otherwise, such a person will deny the true God and believe an idol that is a fabrication of his own imagination—an idol that is a nonentity in this world.

Therefore, he who does not wholeheartedly believe and confess that God is a triune God has never seen nor known God. He is a public denier of God, because He fully denies the true triune God, and apart from Him, there is no God. He is one who is openly wicked and entirely estranged from God and His blessed communion, for we can have communion only with a God who is triune. Our approach unto God the Father must take place in and through God the Son as the only way to the Father; and unto God the Son we must be brought and led by God the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he who does not wholeheartedly believe in a triune God is guilty of not accepting the testimony that God has given of Himself, but rather, he makes God to be a liar, denies Him, and neither can have communion with Him to all eternity nor enter into the kingdom of God.

It is my judgment that we have now dealt sufficiently with this truth regarding God and His holy triune being. Oh, that the Lord would reveal Himself to the souls of men and cause them to see His glory to the end that they may be changed from glory to glory according to that same image (2 Cor. 3:18). To this end, it is necessary that:

1. We allow ourselves to be persuaded of our deep ignorance and great estrangement from God, and that we would thus desire the eye salve of the Holy Spirit from the Lord Jesus, who makes the blind to see.
2. By the illumination of the Spirit of the Lord, we would allow ourselves to be shown:
 - a. how spiritually impotent we are;

- b. how God is a pure and eternal light and that we are nothing but darkness in ourselves; and
 - c. how we therefore do not know God unless He Himself, as the eternal light, in and through Christ, shines upon our souls with the beams of His divine glory, and thereby opens and illuminates our dark eyes.
3. We allow ourselves to be persuaded by the Spirit of faith to acknowledge the necessity, the all-sufficiency, and the willingness of the Lord Jesus to make us acquainted with God, for He is the image of the invisible God, the brightness of His glory, and has been given and sent from the bosom of the Father to reveal that eternal light to us.
 4. Finally, by completely and willingly forsaking all our own wisdom, as impotent and blind sinners, we cast ourselves at the feet of the Lord Jesus in order to be illuminated by His light, and by faith in that light, to wait for Him as watchers for the morning.

This is the only way whereby we can attain to this blessed knowledge of God. May the Lord teach these truths to our hearts by His Holy Spirit. Amen.

Creation

LORD'S DAY 9

Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.

—NEHEMIAH 9:6

Question 26: What believest thou when thou sayest, “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth?”

Answer: That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (who of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them; who likewise upholds and governs the same by His eternal counsel and providence) is for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father; on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body; and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father.

Great and glorious things are being said in our text regarding the Lord God by the mouth of the Jewish priests and Levites. As they are speaking and praying:

1. They declare God's greatness by saying, “Thou, even thou, art LORD alone”; that is, He alone is the exalted, awe-inspiring, holy, and glorious God who has no equal either in heaven or earth, and who alone reigns with infinite majesty.
2. They acknowledge this exalted and lofty God as being the only fountain, creator, and maker, who by His mighty hand and infinite wisdom made and brought forth all things that exist in heaven, upon earth, and in the sea. All things solely came into existence,

and do exist, by His divine will, and thus are “of him, through him, and to him” (Rom. 11:36).

3. They acknowledge Jehovah God to be the sole sustainer and governor of the entire creation, who continually and powerfully upholds and sustains the existence of all things.
4. They render honor to this exalted and glorious God with divine worship and confidence, testifying that “the host of heaven worshippeth thee.” By so doing, these heavenly hosts are an example to us frail and insignificant human beings, teaching us that we are to honor, fear, and worship this exalted and holy God, and that we are to trust in His great name.
5. They desire to be bound fully and eternally to such a great and glorious God, to be to Him a people and possession, and to deem and acknowledge Him to be their God, creator, Father, and king.

Thus, all the great and glorious things expressed in this text coalesce in the first article of our Apostles' Creed. In two Lord's Days, the instructor will now proceed to explain and expound this article for us: “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.”

As he expounds this article in this Lord's Day, he will address faith in God the Father as creator, and in the Lord's Day that follows, he will address faith in Him as sustainer, governor, and ruler of heaven and earth.

Presently, and with God's help, we will consider the first of these two matters. We shall:

1. expound the words that God is “God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”; and
2. consider what it means thus to believe in God the Father.

In the previous Lord's Day, we considered God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. At that time, we observed how these three distinct persons are the one true and eternal God. We must now consider in particular God the Father as the “Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” The instructor explains these words briefly and pointedly, saying, “The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them; [and] likewise upholds and governs the same by His eternal counsel and providence.”

Regarding these words, we first wish to make the general observation that both the Apostles' Creed and the Holy Scriptures attribute first and foremost

to God the Father the work of creation and the preservation of heaven and earth. However, this is not to be understood and interpreted as if the Son and the Holy Spirit are completely excluded from this work. Since there is but one simple divine being, subsisting in three distinct persons or independent entities, one divine person can neither do nor work anything apart from the other persons. The Holy Scriptures therefore expressly attribute the works of creation and preservation also to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, these works are preeminently attributed to God the Father by virtue of the economic arrangement made eternally between the three most worthy divine persons regarding Their extrinsic works. As we observed of this economy in the previous Lord’s Day, the works of creation and preservation specifically and preeminently are attributed to God the Father, the work of redemption to God the Son, and the work of sanctification to God the Holy Spirit.

This having been established and comprehended, we will now proceed to consider how God the Father is the “Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,” considering:

1. the objects that God has created and sustains; and
2. His omnipotent creation and preservation of those objects.

The objects of God’s creation and preservation are here designated as *heaven and earth*. In the Holy Scriptures, this expression is generally used as a designation for all of creation, consisting of all great and small creatures. Moses thus begins the book of creation by saying, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). By “the heaven” is understood all that God created and fashioned above and beyond the earth, such as the atmosphere, the firmament (the realm of the stars), and the supreme heaven, referred to as the heaven of heavens or the third heaven. By “the earth” we understand the planet that God created as a habitation for mankind, encompassing all things here upon the earth that have been created to be used by men, such as the seas, rivers, other large bodies of water, and whatever belongs to its substance and extent. These two, heaven and earth, are the two greatest and most awe-inspiring masterpieces of God’s infinite power and wisdom, and without exception they contain everything that exists external to or apart from Jehovah God. In his explanation, the instructor therefore describes it as “heaven and earth, with all that is in them”; that is, all that is to be found comprehensively in the extended realm of heaven and earth.

We know that there are many creatures that occupy heaven and earth.

1. In regard to the heavens, we find the atmosphere not only occupied by birds and all flying creatures, but also containing clouds, air vapor, etc. In the firmament or astronomical space, we find astonishing masterpieces of Jehovah's infinite wisdom and power, such as the sun, the moon, the planets, and an innumerable multitude of larger and smaller stars. In the third heaven, or the heaven of heavens, there is that large and innumerable multitude of holy and spotless angels, with the glorified spirits of deceased believers, as well as the glorified bodies of those children of God whom He translated from this earth to Himself into heaven with body and soul (e.g., Enoch and Elijah). All these creatures are referred to in the Holy Scriptures as *the hosts of heaven*.
2. As the heavens are filled with glorious creatures, this is also true for the other component of creation, the earth. Upon its surface dwells not only the entire human race, which God created to dwell upon the face of the earth, but we also find there the animal kingdom, consisting of thousands of different animals, as well as an incomprehensible multitude of all manner of inanimate creatures, such as herbs, plants, trees, and other vegetation. We find the earth occupied throughout by thousands upon thousands of animate and inanimate creatures. In the waters, we find a large variety and an innumerable multitude of both great and small fish.

Thus, we observe that both heaven and earth are filled with God's creatures, and the instructor therefore correctly speaks of heaven and earth "with all that is in them," thereby adopting the language of Scripture, which speaks in like fashion when the disciples pray, "Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is" (Acts 4:24).

If we were to focus specifically upon this great and glorious creation, consisting of heaven and earth and all that in them is, and if we were thus to open this great book of nature, and if the Lord were to illuminate us, we would abundantly understand and perceive how creation reveals Jehovah's "eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20). We would find that all of creation is adorned and enveloped with infinite luster and divine glory, so that with the psalmist we would exclaim with deep adoration and amazement: "O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches" (Ps. 104:24). Since, however, there would be no end to such exploration,

we will therefore not proceed to do so, but will rather shift from creation to the great creator and His omnipotent mode of operation.

God the Father is, so to speak, the eternal fountainhead of the Godhead, who in the economy of God's extrinsic works represents and maintains in His person the infinite glory, majesty, and luster of the Godhead. We will therefore consider Him here as the creator and designer of heaven and earth, "and all that in them is." Christ thus refers to His Father as "Lord of heaven and earth" (Matt. 11:25), and the apostle Paul speaks of the Father as the fountain and origin of all things, saying, "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him" (1 Cor. 8:6).

The Apostles' Creed emphatically states that the Lord is the *almighty* creator, whose power and ability are infinite, for whom nothing is impossible, and who can do whatever pleases Him. Elihu therefore says regarding God, "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment" (Job 37:23). The Apostles' Creed posits emphatically that God the Father is an almighty creator, thereby indicating that His work, the creation of heaven and the earth, is a work of infinite power and might, and thus no finite creature is entirely capable either of participating in or cooperating in this work.

It is therefore wicked and God-dishonoring to posit with the Socinians and Papists that God, if He so wills, can transfer the power to create to a creature, and that in the creation of heaven and earth, He did so by giving the holy angels the power, together with Himself, to create the world. This would mean that Jehovah God was not the sole creator of the heaven and earth, but that also the angels were engaged therein. By so doing, the Papists think they have a strong case for the abominable and worthless sacrifice of their Mass. They claim that the priests who administer the Mass produce the true body and blood of Christ by the transubstantiation of bread and wine, for God is said to have bestowed this power upon them as He allegedly gave the power of creation to the angels. The Socinians believe that by way of such a proposition they can fully demolish our proof that the Godhead of the Son and of the Holy Spirit can be affirmed from the work of creation, as the Holy Scriptures clearly attribute this work both to the Son and to the Spirit.

Both Socinians and Papists thereby demonstrate that they neither know God nor His almighty works, and such propositions therefore proceed entirely from the devil, the father of lies, in whom there is no truth. If only they would lend an ear to what the Holy Scriptures have to say, they would receive clear instruction that Jehovah alone is the God who created the world and that no

one was capable of helping Him therein, but rather, that He attributes the entire work of creation exclusively to Himself, saying, "I will not give my glory unto another" (Isa. 48:11).

Let us give heed to but a few passages from the Word of God. "I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone [that is, I alone]; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself" (Isa. 44:24). Behold, God clearly says here that He *alone* created heaven and earth, and that He did so entirely by Himself without being assisted therein by anyone else or by any creature. Job 9:8 testifies the same regarding God, namely, that He "alone spreadeth out the heavens." God attributes the creation of heaven and earth to Himself as a distinctive of His divine majesty and glory, distinguishing Himself thereby from all idols, whom He designates as "the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth" (Jer. 10:11). Furthermore, there is not a single passage in the entire Bible in which the work of creation is attributed to anyone other than Jehovah God.

What a vile thing it therefore is to obscure God's glory so shamefully! Oh, all who love the Lord will be grieved thereby and exclaim, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever" (Rom. 11:36). It is therefore confirmed as an eternal truth that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is the "Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth...with all that is in them."

The instructor teaches that God "of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them." Although it is true that the actual words that He made all things "of nothing" are not recorded in Holy Scripture, this truth is nevertheless taught clearly, for Paul writes in Romans 4:17 that "God...calleth those things which be not as though they were." The same apostle testifies in Hebrews 11:3, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen [that is, all that has been created and presently exists] were not made of things which do appear"; that is, these things do not have their origin in tangible matter, but rather, came forth out of invisible nothingness. In Proverbs 8:26, Christ testifies that He was brought forth "while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world"; that is, when nothing existed external to God, and when not even the smallest particle of created matter existed.

Moreover, the fact that God created heaven and earth, "with all that is in them," is evident even from the Hebrew word that has been translated "to create," which essentially means as much as God calling into existence by the

exercise of His omnipotent will something that previously did not exist. This therefore indicates that God created all things in no other fashion than by the word of His power, that is, by the exercise of His omnipotent will. Thereby He simply spoke into existence matter that did not previously exist, causing it to appear before Him precisely in such a manner as He willed it. The Holy Scriptures therefore state plainly regarding God that “he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9). In order to make creatures that previously did not exist, God only needed to issue a verbal command that such creatures be there in His presence in the manner and state pleasing to Him.

Jehovah God engaged in this work when He created or brought forth all of creation, merely calling it into being in a manner as pleased Him. The entire world as it currently exists came into being by a single command of His omnipotent will. We only need to read what Moses recorded in Genesis 1 regarding the entire work of creation, and we will see there that God created every creature merely by issuing a command, and thereupon it existed immediately in harmony with His command. Moses writes: “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.... And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so” (Gen. 1:3–7).

Thus, in the creation of heaven and earth, and all that is in them, we have an affirmation of the infinite power of God. Oh, how inexpressible are the greatness and glory of Jehovah! Who is a God like unto Him? How everything ought to bow down before this infinite majesty, who brought forth the entire creation out of nothing by a single word of His command! Here we behold—and if only we would see it!—from whence our being and our existence proceed, namely, from nothing other than the command of Jehovah. For if God were merely to speak the words, “Let there be nothing,” we, along with the entire heavens, earth, and all that in them is, would completely vanish, and not a single speck of dust of the entire creation would remain. Everything would revert to the state of nothingness that existed before we and everything came forth, and nothing would exist other than God.

Therefore, foolish creature, neither glory any longer in yourself nor imagine yourself to be something, for whatever you are, you are by the word of Jehovah's power, who upholds “all things by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3). It was by a single word of His command that you and all creation came into existence, and by a single word of His command He could eternally annihilate you. If men

would only recognize that they are merely such insignificant dust! They would not be so arrogant, but rather, they would deeply humble themselves in the dust before God their maker and exclaim, "We are but worms, specks of dust, and as nothing!"

Behold, thus Jehovah God created and fashioned out of nothing the heavens, the earth, and all that is therein. We do not want to debate any longer with those, such as the Socinians and many old heretics, who challenge this truth. The debating of these truths and their defense is in our judgment better suited for the schools and special catechism classes than for the pulpit. In the pulpit, we must expound the truth in all simplicity, confirm it from the Holy Scriptures, and bind it upon the hearts of men. We believe that this yields much more edification than engaging in extensive debates and refuting all manner of errors that militate against our doctrine.

Having considered how God "of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them," we could also proceed to discuss the manner in which He created everything out of nothing—how He did this in an orderly fashion during six successive days, and what He created in each day until He fully completed all His work in the manner as we now see and observe it. Since, however, neither the instructor nor the Apostles' Creed makes any specific mention of this, and since we want to proceed as they do, we will not address the specifics of the work of creation. Rather, we wish to direct you to the account of Moses, the man of God, in Genesis 1 and 2, so that you might read these chapters and thus be instructed further regarding God's six-day creation. Moses there describes for us how God created everything from day to day and how He completed His work in six days. Then, upon the seventh day, God rested from the work He had finished, and therefore He blessed and sanctified this seventh day so that men would emulate His example, resting also upon the seventh day from their labors after having labored for six days, doing so unto the Lord.

And thus, I now say with Moses, "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (Gen. 2:4).

Therefore, all that presently exists owes its existence and origin entirely to God. It then clearly follows according to this article of faith that Jehovah God is "the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth," who has brought forth the entire creation to His own honor and glory. In so doing, the Lord had no other objective than to reveal Himself and to communicate to others a glimmer of His blessedness. He was moved to do so by virtue of His infinite loving-kindness,

creating a world He did not need for Himself to be an instrument of His divine glory, having “made all things for himself” (Prov. 16:4).

However, does this first article of faith encompass something more than the work of creation? It most certainly does! The creation of all things necessarily also requires the sustenance and government of all things by the same mighty hand that created them. In the absence of this, all creation would instantly revert to its previous state of nothingness. In his explanation of this first article, the instructor therefore also addresses the preservation and government of all that has been created, saying “that the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... likewise upholds and governs the same by His eternal counsel and providence.” Thus, Jehovah, God the Father, is not merely held before us as the almighty creator, but also as the almighty sustainer and governor of “heaven and earth, with all that is in them.” Since, however, the instructor will in the next Lord's Day specifically address God's preservation and government of His creation, we will presently not address this any further.

We have hereby sufficiently enlarged upon the words of the Apostles' Creed that God the Father is the “Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,” and we will now briefly consider what it means to *believe* in this God the Father, “Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.”

This we will do by following the explanation of our instructor, who teaches that by confessing we believe in God the Father, Almighty, we thereby acknowledge we believe that this God is “for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father; on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt, but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body.”

The instructor here teaches two things, namely, that he who believes in “God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and of earth,” necessarily:

1. appropriates this God to be his God and Father in Christ; and
2. by faith, trusts in this God, surrendering himself fully to Him with soul and body.

Regarding the first, he who wholeheartedly believes in God the Father appropriates by faith that God, for the sake of Christ, His Son, is his God and his Father, with whom, in Christ, he is spiritually and eternally united. The believer exercises such faith upon good grounds and according to the Holy Scriptures. Beloved, do not expect from us that we will presently expound in great detail how God in Christ and by faith becomes the God and Father of the elect sinner,

as well as all that is comprehended in this. Along with the instructor, we are accustomed to address this truth in greater detail when we expound the address of prayer, "Our Father, which art in heaven..."

Let it presently suffice that in His Holy Word and gospel, God offers to us sinners, who by nature are entirely excluded from fellowship with Him, to be our gracious God and Father upon our believing in and being united to His Son, Jesus Christ. To all eternity, God can neither be united to us sinners as *sinner*s, nor can He be our God and Father. His holiness and justice will in no wise permit this, as this same God hates sin and all workers of iniquity (Ps. 5:5). Moreover, He "is terribly displeased with [them]... and will punish them in His just judgment temporally and eternally." This has been addressed and proven abundantly in the first section of the Catechism. Here, however, God draws near to us sinners and shows us the way and the means whereby He is willing to bring us into a reconciled relationship with Himself and eternally to become our gracious God and Father. This way is to be found in His Son, Jesus Christ. In Him, God has provided all the fullness, the all-sufficiency, and the suitability to deliver us ungodly, accursed, and impotent sinners from our sins, and to justify, sanctify, and transform us. It is His Son whom God gives to us, along with His complete all-sufficiency, so that we believe in Him unto salvation, receive Him and His righteousness and strength, and surrender ourselves fully to Him, so that thereby we may through Him be reconciled to and reunited with God.

He who thus truly receives the Lord Jesus by faith and believes in Him no longer remains before God as a sinner who is worthy of the curse and damnation, but rather, in and through Christ, he is delivered from all his sins and consequently becomes a partaker of union and communion with God in Christ. God approaches him in His infinite loving-kindness, love, and grace, and in Christ, His Son, He declares Himself willing to be his God and gracious Father eternally, and to be this with all that He is and has. By His Word and His Spirit, He speaks to such a soul as the father did to his eldest son, saying, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Luke 15:31).

Upon this gracious declaration by God in Christ to the soul, the believer receives such a measure of spiritual strength and liberty to appropriate God as a gracious God and merciful Father, to receive Him as such by faith, and to embrace Him with a heartfelt love. It is the unique nature and character of true justifying and saving faith that it appropriates God in Christ in the application of His all-sufficiency, saying: "My God! My Father!" It is the essence of spiritual life thus to have communion with God in Christ by faith, and to appropriate

God in the totality of His blessed all-sufficiency. All God's children are experientially acquainted with this to a greater or lesser degree.

The covenant established by God with His elect consists in this, that He will be their God, and they shall be His people (Jer. 31:33). When, therefore, in this article of faith, we have a child of God confessing that he believes in God the Father, then first of all he acknowledges thereby that he receives by faith this God and almighty creator in and through Christ Jesus, His Son. He embraces and considers Him to be his God and Father, and he desires to love, serve, and glorify Him as Father, as well as cleave to Him and fully forsake all that is outside of Him.

From this proceeds, in the second place, such a confidence as proposed by the instructor, saying, "On whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt, but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body." We read regarding God, "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee" (Ps. 9:11); that is, those who know God in His majesty, power, loving-kindness, and all-sufficiency.—and thus as the God who, in Christ, has revealed Himself to the souls of His favored ones. Such will also trust in this God and surrender themselves to Him with soul and body.

Beloved, it cannot be any different, for they who may know God in His glory in and through His Son, Christ Jesus, personally embrace Him with all that He is and has. As we observed earlier, they appropriate God in all His glory, all-sufficiency, and blessedness, saying in their hearts with a greater or lesser measure of faith: "My God! My Father!"

For such a people, God, with all that He is and is capable of performing, is entirely engaged for their good. His power, wisdom, goodness, veracity, faithfulness, righteousness, grace, and mercy, are all engaged for their benefit. In short, God is their God, and therefore they also interact with God as such, surrendering themselves to Him with soul and body. According to the instructor, they fully trust Him to provide them "with all things necessary," so that they will never lack what they need—neither as to their temporal needs nor their spiritual needs. For when the Lord is a man's God and Father, He does not cease to provide him with all his needs for body and soul. He continually cares for him in His favor, love, and grace—even as a king cares for his subjects and as a father cares for his children. These two benefits therefore always and inseparably coalesce: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps. 23:1).

Oh, they who have experienced this can attest to the fact that if a soul ever beholds God in Christ and embraces Him as his God and Father, he loses himself in Him! He willingly surrenders to God with an intimate and steadfast confidence that temporally, eternally, and abundantly He will provide for all his needs in soul and body, and he never will lack anything.

Furthermore, a believing child of God also has confidence that He “will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage.” The Lord’s favored ones know that their blessed portion is not to be found in this life, but that through many tribulations and evils, in regard both to body and soul, they must enter the kingdom of God—and that daily their old man must be mortified and subdued by trials and cross-bearing. Therefore, they expect nothing other than that, in this vale of tears; they will always bear the scars of the cross of Christ in their flesh and will have to be subjected to a daily crucifixion and mortification of flesh and blood.

However, rather than being very grieved about this and being in doubt about the loving-kindness of their God and Father, they instead encourage themselves by the lively power of their faith. They trust that their God and gracious Father will never chastise them in all their adversities for any other reason than that He loves them (Prov. 3:12). Consequently, “He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage.” He will thereby increasingly promote their salvation, so that no matter what may have befallen or shall befall them, they fully endorse by faith that “all things [by the love of God and in regard to their eternal calling unto salvation] must work together for good” (Rom. 8:28).

According to the instructor, the basis upon which God’s children are able to believe and trust so steadfastly in their gracious God and Father is, on the one hand, that “He is able to do it, being Almighty God.” Faith sees and acknowledges God’s infinite power. It embraces and takes hold of Him as the great and omnipotent creator of heaven and earth, to whom belong all power and might—whose power and kingdom encompass all things. Consequently, a child of God quietly leans by faith upon this almighty God and creator as one would lean upon an immovable rock, entrusting himself, as we have seen earlier, to His power with body and soul for time and eternity.

On the other hand, this foundation of God’s omnipotence alone would not be sufficient to prompt the soul to trust God fully. According to the instructor, there must yet be another ground: that God will care for such a soul “being a faithful Father.” God discloses and reveals Himself to His favorites not only in

regard to His omnipotence, but also, as we have seen, in regard to His willingness to be helpful and gracious to them. He has filled His entire Word with the most compelling affirmations and promises to His favorites, all of which boil down to this: that in Christ, He is to them a God of salvation in the most comprehensive sense of the word. He therefore fully pities them “like as a father pitieth his children” (Ps. 103:13). Faith beholds and embraces all of these divine promises, and looks to God Himself as “being a faithful Father” who will never fail to vindicate these promises but will fulfill them all.

The soul of a believer thus casts itself fully upon God's omnipotence, grace, and faithfulness, and he surrenders himself fully to Him, leaning upon and trusting in Him. This is indeed the essence of what it means to “believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.”

We have hereby sufficiently expounded this first article of faith. We desire to conclude with the wish and prayer that by His Word and Holy Spirit, God, for the first time or by renewal, would continue to build up and strengthen the precious faith of all His elect in Him, and that He would do so to the perfection of their eternal salvation in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The Providence of God (1)

LORD'S DAY 10

Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

—JOHN 5:17

Question 27: What dost thou mean by the providence of God?

Answer: The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.

In 1 Chronicles 26:26–27, we read of a certain man, Shelomith, who, with his brothers, had been appointed by King David to oversee the treasures of the holy things that David and his princes had obtained as bounty in battle and then subsequently had set apart for the maintenance of the house of the Lord.

During his reign, David had accumulated a vast quantity of treasures and had made numerous preparations to build unto the Lord a beautiful house or temple. However, we also find recorded there how he and his princes gleaned and set aside other treasures to be used to maintain the house of the Lord upon its completion. We observe therein that David was prudent, for not only did he look after the construction of the temple, but he also looked after its daily maintenance. Since this maintenance would annually require great expenditures, he wanted to be certain that all the necessary funds would be available. Indeed, it is not sufficient merely to construct large buildings, but rather, great care needs to be exercised, work is to be done, and funds need to be spent to prevent their complete decay in but a few short years.

The same care that needs to be exercised toward human projects and buildings must also be exercised toward the great and infinitely glorious construct

of heaven and earth, and all that is in them, which Jehovah God created in the beginning and brought forth out of nothing. This majestic creation therefore also requires divine preservation, cooperation, and government. The same power and wisdom that brought it into existence must also daily support and sustain it if its continued existence is to be secured.

Being presently engaged in expounding the first article of the Apostles' Creed, the instructor therefore immediately transitions from the great work of the creation of heaven, earth, and all that is in them, as accomplished by Jehovah God, the Father and almighty creator, to His divine providence, by which He preserves, sustains, and governs all that He has created with infinite power and wisdom. With God's help and His gracious sustenance, we will again follow our instructor, doing so with the prayerful desire that the Lord may bless our exposition. Amen.

The instructor follows this order:

1. He addresses the doctrine of God's providence in Question 27.
2. He shows in Question 28 the marvelous profit yielded to all believers by the proper and suitable use of this doctrine.

Regarding the doctrine of God's providence, we wish to consider:

1. the meaning of the word *providence*; and
2. the matter itself in greater detail.

The instructor here refers to the *providence of God*. The word providence is derived from the Latin word *provideo*, which means "to see ahead of time." This simply means that matters are viewed and known in advance before they actually occur or appear. The word providence, as to its root meaning, therefore simply means a seeing or knowing ahead of time what will transpire. If, therefore, we were to consider only the actual and literal meaning of the word, providence should be understood to refer only to God's foreknowledge as it is expressed in Acts 15:18: "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."

However, we must here consider the word providence not merely in its literal sense, but rather, as to its essential meaning. We will then observe how it can be suitably used to signify God's omnipotent preservation and government of His entire creation. In Holy Scripture, God's providence also encompasses the ideas of caring for, directing, and similar activities. For instance, in Genesis 22:8, we read that Abraham said to his son Isaac, "God will provide himself a

lamb for a burnt offering”; that is, He will arrange for it, and supply it. From this text, the use of the word providence has been initiated, expressing that activity whereby God preserves, governs, and directs all that He has created. We therefore also wish to adhere to the use of this word, since a more suitable word than this cannot be found.

Having considered the word providence, let us now proceed to consider the matter itself. The instructor briefly and concisely defines God's providence as “the almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures.” We are to consider here:

1. the subject, namely, “the almighty and everywhere present power of God”; and
2. what is being said regarding this subject, namely, that thereby God “as it were by His hand...upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures.”

By *the power of God*, we are simply to understand the glorious and infinite virtue of God whereby He does and accomplishes all things according to His good pleasure. By His power, God so involves Himself in all that He has created that He thereby not only sustains it in its essence, existence, and activity, but also completely governs and directs it. God has an omnipotent will, so that in all His activities He but speaks and it is done, and He commands and it stands fast (Ps. 33:9). By virtue of this omnipotent will of God, all things live, move, and have their being (Acts 17:28), so that there is not the least amount of energy in the creature apart from God. Rather, all the natural and spiritual energy that is inherent in the creature is nothing less than the immediate influence of God's power in the creature, without which all that exists would be absolutely void of all strength and energy. Therefore, all strength proceeds entirely from God, of whom it is said in Isaiah 40:26, “Behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.”

The Savior teaches this when He commands us to pray “for thine is the... power...” (Matt. 6:13). Thereby we confess and acknowledge that whatever power there may be, it originates, so to speak, in God's bosom, and thus proceeds from Him to the creature. Oh, that people would rightly acknowledge this truth, for then immediately they would die to themselves at the feet of God,

and all darkness of the soul would be swallowed up by eternal light. They would sing loudly with the psalmist, "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God!" (Ps. 62:11).

However, the instructor in speaking of God's power, describes it more explicitly as to its magnitude and glory, defining it as "the almighty and everywhere present power of God."

God's power is *almighty*, for since God is infinite, it cannot be either restricted or resisted by any other power. Therefore, God can and will do and accomplish all things as He wills. Job therefore says to God, "I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee" (Job 42:2), and in Psalm 115:3, we read, "Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

God's power is also *everywhere present*; that is, it operates everywhere and is infused into all that has been created. We recognize, in harmony with its nature and function, that there is power in every creature, and this power so permeates the entire creature that the creature cannot function without it. Since, however, we have seen that all power is divine power, it is self-evident that also God's power is everywhere present and is operative and inherent in all creation. The Holy Scriptures teach this, for Paul testifies in Acts 17:27–28, "Though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being." In Jeremiah 23:23–24, we read: "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD."

In what manner, then, is this "almighty and everywhere present power of God" exercised? The instructor testifies that God "upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures." The objects of God's omnipotent providence, heaven, earth, and all creatures, without exception encompass all creation and all that exists external to God's being. In the previous Lord's Day, the instructor taught that God created heaven and the earth, and all that is therein. God is operative in His almighty and everywhere present power in regard to the totality of His creation, and thereby, "as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures."

The instructor defines God's providence as consisting of two works or activities of God, albeit that they are in essence but one single act of God's omnipotent will whereby He *sustains* and *governs* all things. However, this definition would become even clearer and more precise by including a third component to God's omnipotent will, namely, His *cooperation* in all creation,

whereby, by His almighty and everywhere present power, He cooperates in all acts, movements, and activities of His creatures. Consequently, God's providence in essence consists of a threefold almighty exercise of His power whereby He sustains, cooperates with, and governs all creation.

This definition of God's providence harmonizes with Holy Scripture, and specifically with what Paul says in Acts 17:28: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being." It appears that Paul has in mind this threefold distinction within God's providence, so that we could read this sentence as follows: "We *live* in God, that is, by His direction or government; we *move* in Him, that is, by His cooperation; and we *have our being* in Him, that is, by His powerful preservation."

According to this definition of God's providence, we wish to insert the following words into the instructor's explanation, and read it as though he said, "Whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds, *cooperates with*, and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures." In order to expound this doctrine in greater detail, we will briefly and specifically deal with each activity of God's providence.

The first act of God's providence is the *preservation* or conservation of heaven and earth, as well as of all creatures. This preservation is simply God's almighty and everywhere present power whereby He preserves all that He has created and "whereby, as it were by His hand," He preserves the essence and existence He has given it in creation, so that it cannot possibly revert to its state preceding creation. By the exercise of His omnipotent will, God brought forth the entire creation out of nothing, causing it to exist as it presently does. However, how did God bring creation into existence? Was it in such a manner that thereafter it would continue to exist of its own internal power? Most certainly not! We have already seen that a creature has no inherent power, for all power found in the creature is a continual outflow of the power of God that is operative in the creature. It is therefore evident that if the creation is to continue as it was created and to retain its essential nature, this can occur only by the power of God, which must immediately be furnished to His creation by Him and that proceeds from Him.

God's almighty and everywhere present power must therefore continually sustain and preserve the world and all that is created upon it as to its essence and existence. The Holy Scriptures teach this, for instance, in Job 24:7, where we read that God "hangeeth the earth upon nothing." This means that God has established the world and all of creation in such a fashion that it is sustained

and supported solely by His almighty power without any other source of support. God has thus built His entire creation on no other foundation than His own eternal and omnipotent power. Everything rests, stands, and leans upon this power, and God Himself is therefore the foundation of the world! He carries it upon His shoulders, as pagans have portrayed their mythical Atlas as carrying a round world upon his shoulders and holding it firmly with both his hands. In like manner, God, so to speak, carries the entire creation upon the shoulders of His eternal omnipotence and holds everything together with His strong hand, so that it neither decays nor returns to its state preceding creation.

The Holy Scriptures therefore commonly speak of God's powerful preservation of the entire creation. Paul testifies in Hebrews 1:3 that He upholds "all things by the word of his power." In Colossians 1:17, he writes, "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." In Job 12:10, we read, "In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind," and in Job 6:9, he expresses the desire "that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off!"

Such is the manner in which God sustains His entire creation by His almighty and everywhere present power. He upholds it as with His mighty hand, so that immovably and unchangeably it continues to exist in its essence and mode of existence as it was originally created. In this manner, He continually preserves man and beast (Ps. 33:6)—yes, He preserves¹ all creation (Neh. 9:6). This means that God's preservation is in essence a continual renewal and repetition of creation, for it requires the same almighty power and strength of God as did the original creation. Therefore, the only essential difference between creation and God's preservation is that *creation* pertained to matter that did not as yet exist, whereas *preservation* pertains to matter that already exists.

We have thus considered the first act of God's providence, and we will now proceed to consider the second act, namely, God's cooperation in all that He has created.

The second act of God's providence is His *cooperation* in all that He has created. The instructor includes this act as a component of God's government, but we shall consider it separately. This act of cooperation in God's providence must be understood as the almighty and everywhere present power of God whereby He, as the original and supreme cause of all things, infuses that power into, and

1. The Dutch rendering of Nehemiah 9:6 differs from the KJV rendering. In Dutch, we read, "Gij maakt die allen levend," and the literal translation would be, "Thou makest them all alive."

cooperates in all the movements, deeds, and activities of the creature. He ceaselessly perpetuates this movement and activity in His creatures by the influence of His secret divine power, and so He governs and controls all things so that His creatures can neither move nor be engaged in any manner other than as God wills regarding such movements and engagements. The creature is therefore in all specific motions and activities completely dependent upon God, and without His power and will, he cannot do so much as stir himself, not even in the least.

This act of God's providence is distinguished from the previous act of preservation in that God's *preservation* pertains only to the essence and existence of the creature—something in which God, as we have seen, is continually engaged, bearing and sustaining His creature. God's cooperation, however, pertains to the motion and activity of the creature, for God not only continually sustains him, but, as we have seen earlier, by His secret power He also continually perpetuates his existence. He particularly, as the original and supreme cause, completely governs and directs His creature in harmony with His will, so that both in body and soul, the creature will function in dependence upon God, in and through God, and according to the will of God. According to His counsel and sovereign will, He is the sole operator in the creature, since there is not even the least power in the creature to resist this will of God.

Both reason and the Holy Scriptures reveal very clearly that there is such divine cooperation in all creatures that move and are active. Even reason affirms that if God were not to cooperate in His creatures, they in their motions and activities would then be independent from God. The notion of such independence is utterly absurd and absolutely impossible, for no one is independent and no one functions independently. Only God is independent, for He is not superseded by anyone.

It is equally evident from the Holy Scriptures that not one body is capable of either living or moving apart from God's cooperation, for Paul teaches in Acts 17:28, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being." In Jeremiah 10:23, we read, "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

That a created spirit can neither function nor think, except by powerful divine cooperation, Paul teaches clearly, saying, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5). Regarding the willing of our spirit, he writes, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Behold,

it is thus evident that God, by His almighty and everywhere present power, not only sustains “as it were by His hand” all creation, but also continually and ceaselessly cooperates in His entire creation.

Now follows the third act of God's providence, consisting in God's government and direction of His entire creation by His almighty and everywhere present power. This *government* or direction by God is simply the act of His omnipotent will whereby, by way of preservation and cooperation, He completely directs and governs His entire creation not only according to His supreme wisdom and eternal counsel, but also to His honor and glory. The psalmist speaks of this divine government in Psalm 135:6, saying, “Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.” God therefore is said to rule over His entire creation according to what He declares in Isaiah 14:24: “Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.”

Behold, beloved, the essence of God's providence therefore is that God, by His almighty and everywhere present power, and as it were by His hand, continually preserves, cooperates in, and fully governs and directs everything in heaven and on earth, and thus also all creatures, doing so to His honor and glory. This providence of Jehovah God encompasses the entire creation to such an extent that nothing in this world either can be or is excluded therefrom. The instructor addresses this, setting before us a complete listing of specific objects pertaining to God's daily providence, and thus we will briefly examine each aspect thereof.

The instructor tells us that God's providence is extended to:

1. “Herbs and grass.” The Holy Scriptures affirm this in Psalm 104:14, where it is said regarding God, “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth.”
2. “Rain and drought.” In Psalm 135:7, the psalmist testifies that God's providence extends to rain, saying, “He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasuries” (Jer. 14:22; Ps. 65:11; etc.). God's providence also pertains to seasons of drought. Moses admonishes the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 11:17, saying that they should beware of provoking the Lord to wrath, lest “the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there

be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit” (Deut. 27:23; 1 Kings 17; Joel 1).

3. “Fruitful and barren years.” Paul teaches that God’s providence pertains to *fruitful* years when he says regarding God in Acts 14:17, “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons.” The fact that God’s providence also pertains to *barren* seasons and years is not only confirmed by the Egyptian seven-year famine during Joseph’s reign, but also by what occurred during the time of Elijah, of which the prophet says, “The LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years” (2 Kings 8:1).
4. “Food and drink.” In Psalm 104:15, the psalmist teaches that God’s providence also pertains to this, saying that God brings forth “wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.” Consider also what we read in Psalm 145:15–16: “The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing” (Matt. 6:25–26).
5. “Health and sickness.” Both are very apparent in the wonderful healing of King Hezekiah (Isaiah 38) and from what is written regarding God in Job 5:18: “For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole.”
6. “Riches and poverty.” This is evident not only from Agur’s prayer in Proverbs 30:8, “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me,” but also from the Song of Hannah, “The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up” (1 Sam. 2:7), and from Proverbs 22:2, “The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all.” Job also acknowledges this in Job 1:21, when he says, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD,” and in Psalm 127:2, we read, “So he giveth his beloved sleep.”²

Where would the instructor end if he were to enumerate every particular instance? He therefore concludes that “all things come, not by chance, but by

2. The Dutch rendering differs from the KJV. The literal translation of the Dutch reads as follows: “And so he giveth it to his beloved in their sleep.” The Dutch rendering is a more accurate translation of the original Hebrew, and it expresses the idea that even while God’s beloved are sleeping, He is actively engaged in providing for their needs.

His fatherly hand.” This pertains even to the most insignificant things, such as the birds of the air, for not even a small sparrow falls to the earth contrary to His will and providence (Matt. 10:29). It also pertains to the fish in the water, whether great or small, as is evident from the wondrous catch of fish by the disciples (John 21:6). God’s providence even pertains to lice, as we observe from the grievous plague of the lice in Egypt. It pertains to worms, as is shown in regard to proud Herod, who, as a manifestation of God’s wrath toward him, was eaten alive by them (Acts 12:23). It pertains to flowers and lilies of the field, as we read in Matthew 6:28–29.

Not only does God’s providence pertain to the most minute and insignificant things, but it also pertains to accidental occurrences—events that to us appear to occur by chance. God’s hand is most certainly engaged in such events, doing and working all things. We observe this in the manner in which He provided a burnt offering for Abraham (Genesis 22) and in the case of a hapless manslayer who was chopping wood in the forest (Ex. 21:13). Yes, it even pertains to the casting of the lot, which to our perception appears to be purely a matter of chance. However, Solomon teaches in Proverbs 16:33 that “the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.”

God’s providence also pertains to all the voluntary deeds and actions of men, wherein they, though they are acting voluntarily and without compulsion, are nevertheless entirely dependent upon God’s providence, since God, as the first and supreme cause, works all things in them. It may appear to be contradictory that man acts of his own free will in all his actions and that he nevertheless acts entirely dependent upon God, who is at work in him and so governs and directs him that he does only what God wills him to do. However strange this may appear to be, it is nevertheless completely true and is taught plainly in Holy Scripture. Regarding kings, who because of their lofty position appear to be least dependent upon God, Solomon nevertheless testifies, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1). We find an example of this regarding Cyrus, king of Persia, of whom we read in 2 Chronicles 36:22, “The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.” In other words, God inclined him voluntarily to issue a command that the Jewish people not only would be permitted to depart to their country, but that they also were permitted to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Paul testifies in Philippians 2:13, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” God inclines and molds our will, and He

ignites a desire within us whereby, without feeling in the least compelled to do so, we engage ourselves voluntarily in all that we do.

However difficult it may be to grasp this truth, and however many may contradict it, it is nevertheless true in the fullest sense of the word, for it is plainly taught in the Holy Scriptures. It is also perfectly clear from a rational perspective. If man in his voluntary actions were not entirely dependent upon God, he would then be independent from God. Not only is such a notion utterly absurd, but it is also absolutely impossible, for as we have seen, there is no power other than that which proceeds from God.

Finally, God's almighty and everywhere present power also pertains to man's *sinful* deeds and activities, for these also cannot possibly be committed independently from God. However, as to the manner in which God's providence pertains to sin without God in the very least being the author of sin, I must readily admit that it is very difficult to have a correct understanding regarding this doctrine. This is particularly true for the unsanctified and the natural man, who neither knows God nor receives the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Nevertheless, it is true in the fullest sense of the word that God in all things is operative in man, and that man is therefore fully dependent upon God as to his strength and activities. Nevertheless, there is not even the remotest possibility that God could be the author of sin, for He is infinitely holy and hates sin with an infinite hatred. I am fully convinced that all who know God will, with Elihu, exclaim regarding Him, "Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding; far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity" (Job 34:10).

Do not expect that we will debate this matter in great detail. Let it suffice to say in regard to this matter that we need spiritual simplicity and a sanctified mind that has been cleansed from all carnality. If one desires to delve deeply into this matter with a carnal mind, he is in danger of plunging himself into a bottomless pit of hellish darkness and grievous atheism. The higher one climbs regarding this, the steeper and more perilous this cliff becomes. People wish to know where the actual location of hell is, but I have here discovered a hell and an abyss of eternal darkness that is known to but few. When reflecting upon this matter, it is here that I find the devil with his eternal chains whereby he brings the world into bondage—a devil who, with all his angels, is bound and kept until the judgment of the great day.

I neither may nor can say anything more about this matter, but I would rather pray to God that He would protect all of His own against the subtle delusion of the devil and the bottomless depths of carnality, “against the rulers of the darkness of this world, [and] against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12).

However, we may safely believe that God’s providence operates in a three-fold manner in regard to sin, namely, by *permitting* it, by *restricting* it, and by *governing* it.

1. God *permits* sin to be committed, for we read regarding the heathen that “in times past [He] suffered all nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16). When, however, God does not permit the commission of sin, He then prevents its commission and refrains man from sin. God therefore said to King Abimelech, “I also withheld thee from sinning against me” (Gen. 20:6).

2. God *restricts* the commission of sin by hemming it in and determining how far it is to proceed. God thus restricted the devil as to how far in his wickedness he could proceed against the godly Job (Job 1:12), and we read clearly in Acts 4:27–28 how “both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together [against the Lord Jesus], for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

3. Finally, God *governs* all evil and sin, and by His permission and determination, He causes the outcome of sin to be to the glory of His Name and to the benefit of His favored ones. Solomon testifies in Proverbs 16:4, “The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.” God thus hardened the heart of Pharaoh and stirred him up to sin against Him. But why did God do this? He had no other purpose but as we read: “Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth” (Rom. 9:17). This was also true for the sin committed by the brothers of Joseph against him, for Joseph said to them, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

God’s providence pertains to all things without exception—even to the sinful deeds of men. And with this we believe we have adequately addressed this great and important doctrine.

It now remains to speak a few words as to how faith functions in reference to God’s providence, and what the precious benefits are that the believer derives therefrom by means of his faith. The instructor inquires in Question 28, asking,

“What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?” He responds by saying, “That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.”

Here we encounter as it were a collection of very precious advantages and practical truths proceeding from God's providence. Since, however, the doctrine itself has yielded such an abundant measure of matter for consideration, we presently lack the time to consider in an appropriate manner the beneficial and practical implications of this doctrine. It is therefore our intention, if it may please the Lord, to address this in a subsequent sermon.

In conclusion, let me say that everything proposed by the instructor in Question 28 pertains only to true believers, who, as we have shown in the previous Lord's Day, sincerely believe in *God the Father, Almighty*, etc. They are such as receive, embrace, and deem God, in and through Christ, to be their covenant God and gracious Father, having surrendered themselves fully to Him in soul and body, and for time and eternity. They thus belong to this people, of whom it is testified in Psalm 33:12, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.”

They who are the children and covenant people of God, by means of the inherent power of their faith, derive from God's providence such instruction and profit as has been articulated by the instructor. They are thereby instructed to be *patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and confident in the future*. With God's help, we will address this matter in greater detail and then seek to bind it upon your hearts.

Oh, that with great earnestness we would all endeavor to have this great and glorious God, who preserves, engages, and governs the entire creation by His almighty and everywhere present power, to be our God, Father, and king in Christ Jesus! That we would all endeavor to have a personal covenant relationship with Him, so that His divine providence would be fully to our benefit and that we would put all our trust in Him and nevermore waver.

In His gospel, God offers Himself to all of us through Christ His Son, and He is willing to be unto us a God of full and complete salvation, both now and eternally hereafter. If only we would acknowledge, embrace, and believe this wholeheartedly, and open our souls to God, thus allowing Him to enter with

all His blessed all-sufficiency, so that eternally we would live out of our union to Him in Christ!

May the Lord so work in His own by His eternal power and grace in Christ Jesus, to whom, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honor, praise, and adoration to all eternity. Amen.

The Providence of God (2)

LORD'S DAY 10

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

—1 PETER 4:19

Question 28: What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?

Answer: That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.

The words of the apostle Peter, read to you as our text, encompass the very delightful, precious, and comforting duty of believers to be patient and persevering in all their justly deserved adversities and tribulations that befall them here upon earth according to the will of God. It is an exhortation that they grow not slack in faith and sanctification, but rather, that they cast all their burdens upon the Lord their God and “commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.” Both in nature and in grace, He will not forsake His creature and the work of His hands, but rather, He will faithfully sustain, preserve, and protect them, and graciously provide all that is needed for time and eternity.

Beloved, it is not our intention to give a detailed exposition of these precious words of the apostle, but only to use them as a foundation for the subject matter that we presently wish to consider with you: the practical and beneficial truths implied by the doctrine of God's providence, as addressed in the previous question of this Lord's Day of the Catechism. However, given the richness of this subject matter, we could then only address these benefits briefly, and

therefore we postponed our exposition of these benefits to a future occasion—an occasion the Lord in His mercy is now pleased to grant us.

With the help of the Lord, and by His grace, we desire to examine in greater detail and to expound for you Question and Answer 28 of the Catechism. Herein the instructor posits what instruction and benefit a believer receives from his faith in the providence of God, “whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds” His creation, infusing it with His almighty and everywhere present power. In so doing, He governs and directs all things in such a manner that nothing, not even the most insignificant event, transpires by chance, but rather, by His power and according to His will.

In light of this, the instructor asks in Question 28, “What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?,” to which he responds, “That we may be patient in adversity, etc.”

The instructor extracts from the doctrine of God's providence a twofold instruction that is both beneficial and comforting for the believing child of God. The one component pertains to the present, whereas the other pertains to the future.

Before we consider the particulars, we must first grasp the real intent of what the instructor is saying. He does not teach here that this beneficial and comforting doctrine of God's providence is applicable indiscriminately to all men, and thus also to all sinners who live apart from God. Rather, it is applicable only to God's children, the true believers, for this is evident from the previous question, which is intimately connected to the present question. Here the instructor, by this confession of faith, leads God's people to embrace the truth that God, “the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,” is, for the sake of Christ His Son, their God and their Father on whom they rely so entirely, etc.

The instructor is here speaking of such true believers who embrace this God, the creator of heaven and earth, as their God and Father in Christ, and fully trust in Him. It is regarding them of whom he testifies that God's providence is subservient to make them “patient in adversity, etc.” And indeed, how shall an unbeliever who still lives in sin, and thus without God and without Christ, make use of the doctrine of God's providence to his comfort and encouragement? How should he surrender himself with a humble and childlike confidence to God and His gracious and all-encompassing providence? Since he still lives entirely unto himself and apart from God and His blessed communion, it means that as yet he does not acknowledge God for who He is. How would he truly be able to trust God? The Scriptures say, “And they that know

thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee" (Ps. 9:10).

Therefore, the blind, unbelieving, and natural man, who lives apart from God and His communion, cannot extract the least benefit from God's providence, nor can he secure any true comfort from it. Although he sees, acknowledges, and believes in God's providence, and desires to comfort and sustain himself by it, he cannot do so. When he is called upon to be patient, he can do so only compulsively, having no other option but to say with the unholy men of this world: "What can we do about it? It is God's will that it be so, and thus we have to suffer whether we like it or not."

An unconverted person in his adversity therefore submits himself to a *fatum stoicum*, that is, to an inescapable destiny that has been determined regarding him. That destiny, in spite of all efforts to the contrary, he cannot escape, saying, "There is nothing I can do about it. This is how it has to be." It would indeed be an amazing thing if a natural and unbelieving person were able to use God's providence for his benefit and encouragement in all his trials, for he is opposed to God and God is opposed to him. This means that if he does not repent, God's entire providence will be subservient to his eternal perdition and damnation.

It is therefore self-evident that all the comfort and benefit to be derived from God's providence is the exclusive privilege of God's beloved people and children, true believers, who by faith are intimately and eternally united and bound to God in Christ, and of whom God declares, "And they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:20).

It is of them that the instructor is speaking here, showing what precious instructions and blessed benefit they may derive from the providence of their God and heavenly Father regarding:

1. their present state; and
2. their future state.

Regarding their present state, God's believing children derive instructions and benefits by means of the active power and exercise of their faith, namely:

1. they are patient in all adversity; and
2. they are thankful in all prosperity.

As to the first, God's providence teaches and enables believers to be patient in all adversity. God's children, while in this world, are almost always led in ways of adversity and tribulations, and are thereby led by God unto salvation.

This is a truth clearly and abundantly taught in the Holy Scriptures—and it is also compellingly confirmed by the experience of all the saints. In Psalm 34:19, we read of the Lord Jesus and His people, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous,” and in John 16:33, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” No sooner does a believer come to the Lord Jesus by faith than he is immediately enrolled in His school of affliction, and there he hears the following instruction: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).

The Lord's apostles did not teach anything different from this. We read of Paul and Barnabas, that they traveled throughout the region, “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

It is true that the enemies of the church at that time initiated severe persecution and manifold tribulations toward her, from which we, by God's grace, are still exempt. However, regarding the specific state of a believer, our present situation is still the same as has always been true for the people of God. The rule that Paul sets before us in 2 Timothy 3:12 will therefore not readily be changed: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” This has been true from the beginning and will remain so until the Lord Jesus will have “put all things under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:27).

However, this is not applicable to impenitent sinners, for they are the “men of the world, which have their portion in this life” (Ps. 17:14). Frequently they enjoy great prosperity and temporal blessings while here on earth; that is, they are exempt from the special crosses and adversities of God's children. “They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men” (Ps. 73:5).

However, this is entirely different in regard to God's devout children, for they must necessarily be led by God in ways of manifold crosses and adversities if they are to be saved and be delivered from sin and the flesh. Their entire salvation consists, on the one hand, of the mortification of both the flesh and their earthly members, with which they must contend continually, and on the other hand, of their intimate union with God in Christ by faith. If, however, their flesh is to be continually crucified, mortified, and subdued, and if they are to be increasingly prepared and rendered fit “to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12), this cannot be achieved in any other way than by a way of adversity and cross-bearing. Our flesh will never be mortified and subdued in any way but one in which pain, sorrow, and adversity are keenly felt. This is the reason for all the adversities and tribulations that God's children

encounter in this vale of tears—the one experiencing this to a greater and the other to a lesser degree.

Rather than lamenting about the state of God's children, murmuring against God, or discouragement because of adversity, God's providence yields the opposite: His children are patient in all their adversity. They are quiet, submissive, and patient, permitting God to execute His supremely wise and adorable counsel regarding them, being at peace with His actions and government.

Faith extracts a wondrous strength from God's providence:

First, God's children may know hereby, and believe with certainty, that all the adversities to which they are subjected, even those that are frequently caused by their own sins, are sent to them by their merciful God and heavenly Father, and that nothing takes place outside of His holy will and divine command. Regarding this, the prophet says, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6).

Second, God's children may know with certainty that their heavenly Father and gracious God subjects them to all their adversity for no other reason than to promote their well-being and salvation—though they may not be able to understand the manner in which He accomplishes those matters. They may, commensurate with the grace given them, trust with a greater or lesser degree of strength and peace of heart that God is their God, and that in Christ they are reconciled with Him, and therefore He no longer harbors any hatred or wrath toward them because of their sins. Rather, in His fatherly favor and grace, He but chastises them through adversity, for He loves them and knows what is best for them. They may therefore have full confidence "that all things work together for good to them" (Rom. 8:28).

Third, God's children may also be confident that in His time and in His providence, God will remove all adversity when it is no longer needed, and that in the meantime, He will not impose any more adversity upon them than they are able to bear. The apostle strengthens and comforts believers accordingly when he writes, "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 is then the first benefit a child of God may extract from God's providence.

The instructor adds another benefit God's children derive from the gracious providence of their God, namely, that they are "thankful in prosperity." Besides

sending adversity, God also frequently grants His children much prosperity and happiness—not only for the soul, but also for the body. This is so when they enjoy health, quietness, and peace; when they are blessed in their temporal profession or trade; and occasionally when riches, honor, prestige, prosperity, etc. are their portion. However, such temporal prosperity is often very detrimental to God's children and causes them to forget God by cleaving with their hearts to the vain dust of this world—as David experienced in Psalm 119:25. Agur, the man of God, was very fearful of this, praying to the Lord not only that He would give him no poverty, but also that He would give him no riches, “lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD?” (Prov. 30:9).

God's providence, therefore, by His grace, is primarily a means whereby He sanctifies to the souls of believers the prosperity He grants and bestows upon them in His benevolent care, and thereby leads them to Himself and His communion. It teaches them that all the blessings they may enjoy proceed to them from the hand of the Lord, and that in and of themselves, they are entirely incapable and powerless to secure even the least blessing. They thus learn that the Lord alone is the fountain, creator, and giver of all these things, and that if it were to please Him, He could take all things from them in a moment. In short, God's providence causes His people to see and acknowledge daily and every single moment that they receive all the blessings for both soul and body from Jehovah God alone. They observe that God, as a faithful Father, continually cares for them, and that in every conceivable way, and at times abundantly, He is continually engaged in providing for all their needs according to both soul and body.

The more God's children may see this, the more they will be led to end in their God and to glorify Him with their hearts and mouths. No one would believe this except they who have experienced how the good providence of God, when applied to the heart, leads us to praise and magnify the Lord. It causes us to acknowledge that we are entirely dependent upon Him, and that all we have proceeds every moment from His benevolent and gracious hand, causing the soul to exclaim at times, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever!” (Rom. 11:36). God's children are thus wrought upon and in some measure are enabled “in every thing [to] give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning [them]” (1 Thess. 5:18).

The instructor posits this as being the second benefit that issues forth from the doctrine of God's providence in regard to the present. He then proceeds to

address the great benefit we may derive from the doctrine of God’s providence in regard to the future.

The instructor thus proceeds from the present to the future, teaching that the providence of God also yields the benefit “that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love.”

The instructor teaches two things here:

1. the steadfast trust that, by virtue of His gracious providence, God’s children may put in His immutable love in regard to the future; and
2. the foundation upon which such a trust is founded, namely, that “all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.”

Regarding the first, faith in God’s providence also prompts believers to put their full trust in the Lord and in His love regarding all things that are yet to come. There is nothing of which we are so ignorant as that which is yet to come. Our daily experience consists of all that the Lord causes us to encounter. However, we do not have the least certainty and knowledge as to what will be encountered and experienced by us in future days, and how we will then fare in body and soul. In His adorable wisdom, the Lord has hidden this from us and all other men, and no one but the Lord can reveal something of it to us. The carnal mind, however, being utterly hostile toward God, is entirely inclined not only to dabble in that which pertains to the future, but it even, so to speak, takes matters out of God’s hands and places them into its own hands. From this proceeds all the anxiety of carnal men regarding those future events with which they are preoccupied and in which they run ahead of the Lord. In Matthew 6, the Savior earnestly admonishes His people not to do so. There He stipulates that believers should not at all give in to unbelieving anxiety about the future—not even about tomorrow. On the one hand, their concern and anxiety are entirely unnecessary, for they cannot thereby add one cubit to their stature. On the other hand, since God is their heavenly Father and, by His good and gracious providence, cares for them, He will continue to do so until the very end.

When the doctrine of providence is bound upon the hearts of God’s children, it is a powerful and most suitable means to keep them from succumbing to unbelieving anxiety about all that is yet future for them and fully hidden from them. It motivates them to cast all their cares and concerns upon the Lord

their God and gracious Father, having the confidence that, as the instructor puts it, no creature shall separate them from His love.

The reason for God's people having such strong confidence in the Lord's providence is rooted in the fact that God is their God, that they are His beloved in Christ, and that God in His love is eternally immutable. It thus follows that they shall eternally remain secure in God's love and that nothing shall ever be able to separate them from that love (Rom. 8:39). Faith rests securely upon the immovable foundation that God is immutable in His love, and the soul that knows God and is united to Him exercises such faith very readily and by His grace. Thus, God's people consider specifically how their God and Father, who is utterly faithful and immutable in His love toward them, by His eternal power and providence, preserves, engages, and governs all things. We considered this in our previous sermon.

All of this causes the Lord's people to see and acknowledge clearly that their beloved God and Father fully cares for them, that He will immovably and immutably continue to do so, that He has fully engaged Himself to preserve, protect, sustain, defend, and govern them, and that He will never fail to do so, given that His grace and love toward them are immutable. All of this cannot but cause God's children to cease being anxious about whatever is still before them, and to conduct themselves, as Peter exhorts them in 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

Oh, it cannot be expressed in words what peace of soul and strong confidence in God it engenders when God's providence is thus rightly considered by us! The soul is then set free from all anxiety and needless apprehension by which, until now, it has been so much tossed to and fro. God then works in His children and takes away all anxiety and concern. They surrender themselves to the Lord with inner delight, joy, and heartfelt willingness, saying with Father Abraham regarding all that is yet to come, "Jehovah-Jireh," that is, "the LORD shall provide" (Gen. 22:14). And with that truth, they are at peace and rest in and upon the Lord, conducting themselves as a weaned child with Him, and letting themselves be treated by Him as pleases Him.

What a precious and fitting disposition this is for God's children, for then the Lord is supremely glorified by them, and they receive and enjoy most from the Lord! Blessed are the children of God who may enjoy this in a great measure and so commit their way unto the Lord and trust in Him. They then in all things continually wait upon the Lord, and their souls are at peace.

However, as has been stated earlier, if someone truly is to make use of God's providence in such fashion and derive from it this precious and glorious benefit, he must be united with God in Christ. He must have grounds for trusting that the Lord is His God and His gracious Father, in whose love he is truly comprehended and from which he cannot be separated by any creature to all eternity. If someone may thus call God *his* God, and may have such confidence regarding God's love for himself, then the truth "that nothing shall separate us from His love" can very readily be embraced and retained by faith. For as faith yields to God's children many other compelling reasons to trust in this truth, so His providence also yields a solid foundation for their confidence, for according to the instructor, it also teaches them that "all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move." We clearly confirmed this when we expounded the doctrine of God's providence. We then observed that there is no power other than that which proceeds from God, and that God's power alone sustains, engages, governs, and directs the entire creation and all creatures. It is thus God the Lord alone who, as the original and supreme cause of all things, does and works all things, and the creature is therefore entirely and fully dependent upon Him.

Beloved, if this were not so, God could then not be the absolute Lord and king of the world. Furthermore, it would then be impossible for believers to have this *complete confidence in Him and His immutable love*, of which we have spoken, for here below, God's children are fully surrounded by their most bitter and mortal enemies. Satan, the world, their own flesh, and all of depraved humanity conspire to bring about their ruin and oppose them as much as darkness opposes light, for God's children know of no better friendship than with God alone and all that proceeds from Him. Therefore, if creatures were in the least measure independent from God as to their power, they would surely engage all their energy to bring about the ruin of the Lord's people, and would endeavor to separate them eternally from God and His love. The devil would not rest until he had utterly destroyed God's kingdom.

Reality, however, is entirely different. By virtue of God's providence, God's children now acknowledge that "all creatures [without distinction], are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move." They perceive that their God and Father is king and the sovereign Lord and governor of all creatures. Therefore, with great joy they sing, "The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength" (Ps. 93:1).

Consequently, they fear no creature, however strong and mighty God has made such creatures to be. They know that such creatures cannot possibly use their power to their detriment and harm, and they cannot exercise this power any more or less than permitted and decreed by God. This causes all fear of the creature to vanish completely, for God is seated upon the throne of His glory. The soul takes hold of both God's eternal and immutable love, as well as His providence, and fully and securely rests in them, exclaiming, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

Behold, dear reader, so great, precious, and glorious is the benefit that the believer derives from the doctrine of God's providence; that is, when by faith he considers it rightly and, by God's grace, appropriates and makes use of it as such!

We believe that we have hereby sufficiently expounded this doctrine as articulated by the instructor. If I had more time at my disposal, I would not only be able to confirm conclusively the sin of an unregenerate world and its atheistic conduct toward God's providence, but I would also address the sin of God's people—and thus of true believers. We will, however, but briefly address the root from which this proceeds with the one as well as the other.

You who are natural and graceless men do not derive any strength, comfort, and benefit from the Lord's providence, but rather, in all things, you are living your life in an atheistic and unbelieving manner, as though there were no divine providence. All of this is evident from your conduct. This proceeds from the fact that you neither know God the Lord nor are united to Him by faith in the Lord Jesus. You should have heard this sufficiently from our sermon; that is, if you truly noted what was said. Therefore, if ever you are to be cured from your damnable and wretched deficiency, and are to derive true benefit, strength, and comfort from God's providence, do not continue any longer to live apart from God. Instead, "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20)—and do so without any further delay! Submit yourselves to being taught regarding the counsel of God's grace, whereby He, in Christ His Son, is willing to be eternally reconciled with and united to hell-worthy, ungodly, and impotent sinners, not imputing their sins unto them, but rather, receiving them in grace and becoming to them a God of full salvation. Oh, that you would become acquainted with this grace of God in Christ, and wholeheartedly approve of, receive, and embrace it, so that God may become your portion! You would then become the recipient of all the benefits of His precious providence that have been set before you.

As far as God's people and children are concerned, there are two things we want to set before them, and oh, that the Lord would bless what is said to their souls!

1. If they are to derive such proper benefit, strength, and advantage from God's providence as we have instructed you, they must endeavor to ascertain and be increasingly assured by faith that God is their portion. It is an incontrovertible truth that the better one is acquainted with the fact that God is his portion, the more fervently one is able to derive benefit from God's providence. All God's children must therefore give diligence to make their calling and election sure, for when they do these things, they shall never fall (2 Peter 1:10).

2. The other matter regarding which we desire to exhort the Lord's people is that by grace they would acquaint themselves with the Lord and engage in much spiritual communion with Him in Christ, for the more communion one has with someone, the better one becomes acquainted with his person, work, and capability, and the more one is united and knit to him.

May both these matters be achieved in God's children, and may they by faith in the Lord Jesus abound in this. Oh, they would certainly be a much more attractive and glorious people than is presently the case! This most gracious and glorious providence of Jehovah would then be known, worshiped, embraced, and praised to a far greater extent. May the Lord, by His grace and by His power, thus work in the hearts of His people, doing so in Christ Jesus, to whom, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honor, praise, and worship to all eternity. Amen.

The Name Jesus (1)

LORD'S DAY 11

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

—MATTHEW 1:21

Question 29: Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is a Savior?

Answer: Because He saveth us, and delivereth us from our sins; and likewise, because we ought not to seek, neither can find salvation in any other.

Question 30: Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

Answer: They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these two things must be true, that either Jesus is not a complete Savior; or that they, who by a true faith receive this Savior, must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation.

When, on a given occasion, the disciples of the Lord Jesus became very anxious and troubled because of His impending departure, He addressed them, saying, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1). The Savior here placed Himself in juxtaposition with His heavenly Father. It was His desire that His disciples would believe in Him in like manner as they believed in God the Father. The reason for this is that believing in the Father is necessarily and inseparably connected with believing in the Son, and there can be no faith in one without also believing in the other. He who savingly believes in God the Father can do so in no other way but by the Son. The Father neither reveals Himself to sinners nor presents Himself to them in any way but through His Son, so that they might embrace Him by faith. It is therefore self-evident that to believe in God the Father, one must in the same

manner believe in God the Son, for he who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father. It is therefore appropriate that both the Apostles' Creed and our Christian instructor proceed immediately from faith in God the Father to faith in God the Son, for in the articles of our faith, we read, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son." The instructor follows this order and therefore proceeds in several Lord's Days to address this most precious object of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, dwelling on His names, natures, states, and offices. All these are set before us in the Apostles' Creed for the instruction, comfort, and encouragement of all true believers.

In this Lord's Day, the instructor deals exclusively with the name Jesus—a name that is precious, delightful, and most lovely, and is as ointment poured forth (Song 1:3), giving forth a most pleasant, delightful, and pervasive aroma. It is a name that is above every name, a name that is valued and greatly loved by God's children above all else, and a name they continually take upon their lips. It therefore greatly troubles and grieves them that this name and its efficacy are so little known, and that so few bow the knee before this name. With God's help and grace, we now wish to consider in more detail this glorious and most precious name, Jesus, and open up for you the efficacy of His name. Oh, that the Spirit of the Lord would accompany such preaching to ignite our ice-cold souls and set them aflame with love for the name of Jesus, and that He Himself would pour forth His name as oil, so that the spiritual virgins would embrace and love Him!

Dear reader, let us now address the subject matter at hand, and we will then observe that in the Apostles' Creed, the Lord Jesus is set before us in a fourfold designation, namely, as *Jesus*, as *Christ*, as *God's only-begotten Son*, and as the *Lord* of believers. The instructor will address each of these names respectively.

Presently we will follow the instructor in:

1. considering and expounding for you the name Jesus and its precious efficacy; and
2. observing how true saving faith engages itself regarding that name and its efficacy.

Regarding the first, it is so well known from the Holy Scriptures that the second person of the adorable and most worthy divine being bears the name of Jesus that no further proof is necessary. This name was given to Him by His parents at His circumcision—not as a matter of personal choice, but rather upon

the express command of God, who communicated this to them by way of an angel from heaven (Matt. 1:21; Luke 1:31). We know that the saints of old gave meaningful names to their children. They were names that encompassed matters of great importance, whether it was the expectation of a great blessing that would issue forth from or by such children, or a special occasion that occurred at the birth of these children. Only consider what Moses reports in regard to the birth of the first man, and you will find such to be the case. Not only did men choose and delight to give their children such meaningful names, but God the Lord Himself at times determined in a singular fashion to give His people such meaningful names, or to change their names accordingly, as He did with Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, etc.

However, if there was ever a person by whose name Jehovah God would communicate something, it was His beloved Son, the great savior, Jesus Christ. When He became flesh that He might deliver and save the world, He necessarily had to have a name by which His people could call and know Him, and which would make known to the world His person and His salvation. God therefore gave Him the name Jesus—a name of Hebrew origin that means as much as savior, redeemer, or deliverer. There is a Hebrew verb that means to *save* or to *deliver*, and the name Jehoshua, which means deliverer or savior, is derived from it. The slightly shorter form is Joschuah, which was the name given to him who typified the savior, namely, Prince Joshua (Num. 13:16). He was indeed a true Joschuah, that is, a savior or deliverer of the people of Israel, for he led the people into the land of Canaan, and under his direction all their enemies were defeated.

This name Joschuah has been translated into Greek and, consistent with this language, changed into Jesus. This was then translated into Latin as Jesus. It is thus evident that the name Jesus is derived from the Hebrew name Joschuah, which designates a redeemer, deliverer, or savior. The angel clearly indicated that this was the meaning of His name when he spoke to Joseph in a dream: “And thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

The instructor here inquires about the meaning of the name Jesus by asking, “Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, Savior?” to which he replies, “Because He saveth us, and delivereth us from our sins.” Before we proceed, we must remind you that the instructor is referring only to God's people, and thus to true believers who receive and embrace the Lord Jesus with a genuine faith as their only, all-sufficient, and willing savior. Thus, they are truly partakers of

His salvation, grace, and redemption. Since not all men receive and acknowledge the Lord Jesus to be their savior and redeemer truly and with all their hearts, He consequently does not save all men. He saves only His elect, believing people, and the angel of the Lord states this emphatically when he says, "And thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Concerning this people, the instructor says that the Lord Jesus *saves* them, and that He *delivers them from their sins*. He then gives two reasons why the Son of God is called Jesus or Savior:

1. He saves His believing people and delivers them from their sins.
2. Salvation is not to be sought or found with anyone other than with Him.

The Son of God is thus called Jesus or Savior because He *saves* believers and *delivers them from their sins*. When the instructor speaks thus, one ought not think that he is making a distinction between *saving* sinners and *delivering them from their sins*, but he views them as one and the same. He is merely expanding the meaning of the word *savior*, thereby teaching us that in saving us, Jesus delivers us from our sins.

The natural, unregenerate man has not the slightest notion in what salvation consists; however, he nevertheless has a certain idea or notion that conforms to his unsanctified judgment and carnal mind. He is of the opinion that salvation consists in being delivered from hellish punishment and condemnation, and in being translated into heaven and into a state of joy and glory—thus being delivered from all sorrow and misery. Natural men think that the Lord Jesus, by His obedience, passion, and death, has merited and secured this sort of salvation for them, and believe that after their death they will enjoy such a salvation. Some even greatly long for and can speak of this with a great deal of emotion—especially when everything on earth is not going well for them and life becomes difficult and sorrowful. Such is the notion of the graceless men of this world, and they view the Lord Jesus as a redeemer and savior who will deliver and save them in this way.

How crude, unholy, carnal, and pitiful are such thoughts regarding the Lord Jesus and His salvation, but how efficient is the devil in keeping a blind world captive in this snare, linking small and great, young and old, as well as learned and unlearned men to these chains of darkness! By giving them a sweet and delightful perception of such a counterfeit salvation and savior, he causes them to descend into the eternal and most dreadful perdition of hell. It is therefore

necessary that men be made aware of such devilish deceit, and that they be instructed by God's Word and Spirit regarding the genuine salvation of the Lord Jesus. This would awaken them from their dream and slumber to perceive and sense how grievous their wretched state is, and they might then begin to seek for true salvation.

In addressing the true salvation of the Lord Jesus, the instructor teaches that it consists exclusively in *saving* His believing people and in *delivering them from their sins*. The angel of the Lord gave such instruction, saying, "For he [that is, Jesus] shall save his people from their sins." The true salvation of the Lord Jesus thus consists in this: He saves His people from their sins and from all that is related to sin. He also has fellowship with them, whereby they become holy and are spiritually and most intimately united to God, thereby dying to sin in order to live unto God, and to serve and obey Him "in newness of spirit" (Rom. 7:6).

To expound this a bit further, you should know, beloved (and let the Lord Himself teach you this), that sin in its essence is grievous rebellion and abominable disobedience toward God. This causes man to divorce himself from God's majestic dominion, thereby willfully casting His yoke from his shoulder, shamefully despising and transgressing His holy law, indulging in his own evil lust, and doing his own evil will. There is no more abominable monster or tyrant than *sin*, and Holy Scripture therefore compares it to the vilest and most abominable things.

In the state of rectitude in which God created man, sin was unknown, and man served, obeyed, loved, and glorified God perfectly in body and soul. Man enjoyed a most intimate friendship and union with God—just as the holy angels have, who serve God in perfect harmony with their spiritual nature and know of no sin. This state of holiness, obedience, and union with God constituted the blissful state of a humanity that had been created in uprightness. Man neither knew nor enjoyed any other salvation, and he never would have enjoyed any other salvation.

However, through sin, man deprived himself fully and eternally of this salvation, holiness, and union with God. Through willful disobedience, he and all his descendants fully departed from God, his majestic and holy creator. Rather than the holy service and love of God, man chose the service and love of Satan, himself, and a vain world. By virtue of man's willful departure from God and his rejection of God and His holy service, humanity fully and eternally deprived itself of God, of His image, and of His blessed communion. Mankind thus cast itself into an ungodly and unholy state in which men live utterly

to themselves, living without and apart from God, "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). Yes, they are now "dead in sins" (Eph. 2:5a).

Man has thus become a *sinner* as to his nature and character; that is, he has become utterly unholy and an enemy of God. With all of his natural propensities, man is as fully hostile to God as darkness is hostile to light and as death is hostile to life. This nature and character of man is such, however, that to all eternity he cannot change either of them in the least. Rather, man is now doomed to remain fully what he is: an unholy, dead, and carnal sinner. The spirit, power, and life of God have fully departed from man through sin, and thus, all that remains of man is nothing but carnal flesh or a *body of death* (Rom. 7:24).

Chemistry teaches us that when the spirit, power, and life depart from the body, nothing remains of it but matter or flesh that is dead and will be cast away. And thus, man, having deprived himself of the life and Spirit of God, is now entirely carnal. In Genesis 6:3, the Lord says regarding this, "My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh." Paul writes in Romans 8:7 regarding this flesh that it is utterly hostile toward God, saying, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

Having thus become utterly carnal and unholy through sin, man has thereby been fully and eternally deprived of all salvation, and is therefore utterly wretched. He is void of God and of His Spirit, and in this state he is the object of God's holy wrath, abhorrence, anger, curse, and condemnation. Consequently, God must fully engage Himself with all His infinite power and holiness toward man's eternal perdition. We have already addressed this in the first part of the Catechism by expounding and confirming these truths from the Holy Scriptures.

This is the true state of all men by nature. By virtue of sin, the entire human race has become indescribably miserable, ungodly, unholy, and wretched, and everything has now become nothing but flesh. This is the valley full of barren and dead bones, concerning which Ezekiel prophesied by saying, "There was no breath in them" (Ezek. 37:8). In this sinful, ungodly, dead, and carnal state, the entire human race would have to remain eternally.

However, this was not the will of the eternally living Jehovah. Moved by the inner compassion of His heart and without any external influences, the

Lord engaged in an eternal and sovereign counsel of salvation and redemption in Christ Jesus, His Son, regarding this wretched and dead humanity. Moved by infinite love, mercy, and grace, He decreed to redeem and eternally to save a certain portion of humanity. Since, however, the engagement of the entire fullness of the Godhead is required unto the accomplishment of this work of salvation and redemption, Jehovah God laid the entire work of salvation fully and exclusively upon the shoulders of His Son, Jesus Christ, giving Him the assistance and support of His eternal and divine Spirit, enabling Him to accomplish this work. In so doing, the Lord Jesus was appointed by His Father to be the savior, liberator, deliverer, and redeemer of an unholy, ungodly, dead, and yet eternally elected humanity. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The Lord Jesus executes and carries out this great office and work in all His elect who have been given to Him by His Father, so that He might redeem and save them. It is for them that He came into the world in the fullness of time and, as their appointed surety, assumed their lowly human nature. In that nature, He took upon Himself their sins, their ungodliness, the curse and wrath due them, and all that they owed unto God. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, we read, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (Isaiah 53). He suffered and died the death of the cross for their sins, so that He would eternally deliver them from sin, the curse, wrath, hell, and damnation—as the Holy Scriptures teach in 1 Peter 3:18: “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh.”

Furthermore, as the substitute for His dead and unholy elect, He also rendered all righteousness and obedience to God's law on their behalf. He thereby secured for them from God both eternal life and the Spirit of life, of which they, as we have considered, have become fully destitute through sin. Paul confirms this in Romans 5:19, saying, “For as by one man's disobedience [that is, Adam's disobedience] many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one [that is, Christ] shall many be made righteous.” Since Christ, as surety, accomplished and merited this for the elect, He in time applies this merited salvation to His elect, and by faith makes them partakers thereof in soul and body. We will now expound this for you in greater detail.

To consider further how the Lord Jesus personally and in actuality saves and delivers His elect people from their sins, we shall, by God's grace, inquire

briefly concerning this matter, for it would take us too far if we were to consider fully and extensively the entire work of faith and conversion. Consider therefore, beloved, that the Lord Jesus, in saving His own, finds them in such a state of sin, unholiness, ungodliness, death, and impotence—as we have taught you regarding all humanity. The Lord Jesus must deliver His believing people from this state and thus save them by returning them to God and restoring them unto a state of perfect holiness and blessedness, such as existed when God created man. The Lord Jesus not only must fully deliver them from sin and all that cleaves to them due to sin, but also must sanctify them fully. He must perfectly restore God's image in their souls and draw them fully away from themselves and from the bondage of sin and death, causing them again to surrender fully to God as their lawful Lord and king.

Therefore, the work of the Lord Jesus in saving His people essentially consists in this: He must remove and subdue in them all that makes them wretched and that fully separates them from God and from His blessed communion, namely, sin. He must deliver them from sin, and not until He has fully done so will He have fully saved them. Believers, in their natural state, were chained to sin by two unbreakable bonds, namely, by the guilt and pollution of sin (or spiritual deadness), for “the sting of death is sin” (1 Cor. 15:56). It is through both of these—guilt and spiritual death—that sin has by nature dominion over all men and excludes them eternally from God's communion. If, therefore, the Lord Jesus is truly to save His own, He must fully free and deliver them from the *guilt* and *pollution* of sin (or spiritual deadness). This He does in very deed:

He delivers His believing people from the *guilt* and the punishment of sin. He does this by His Word and Spirit, whereby He works a true faith in them, causing them entirely to look away from self and to come to Him as poor, naked, blind, and impotent sinners, enabling them to take hold of His offered strength and righteousness. He thereupon applies to them His holy suffering and death, as well as His perfect obedience to the law, and clothes them with His perfect righteousness as with a garment and robe (Isa. 61:10). The Lord Jesus thus becomes *the Lord their righteousness* (Jer. 23:6) for all His elect and believing people. By faith, His perfect merits, righteousness, and obedience are imputed and bestowed upon them by God the Father, who then views and considers them as being fully in Christ. He considers them, so to speak, as being found in Christ Himself (Phil. 3:9); as if they themselves had fully endured the wrath of God, the curse of the law, and all punishment and condemnation

due to their sins, and had fully and perfectly served, loved, and obeyed Him in conformity to His holy law.

God the Father, thus viewing and considering believers to be who they are in Christ Jesus, His Son, justifies them as such from their sins. He declares them to be fully innocent and sinless in the Lord Jesus, not seeing in them the least guilt or transgression. Consequently, He fully relinquishes His curse and wrath against them. As an act of infinite love and grace, He, with His Son, the Lord Jesus, receives them as His children and as heirs of His eternal glory. This is that divine and gracious justification of all elect believers that the instructor will address more, specifically in Lord's Days 23 and 24. We will therefore not speak of this any further.

This is the manner in which the Lord Jesus delivers His believing people from all *guilt*, as well as from the resulting punishment of sin. He thereby reconciles and unites them to God, and He does so continually. His justified and sanctified believers still sin daily on account of their weakness, and thus continually incur new guilt with God, and repeatedly and by renewal are deserving of God's wrath, curse, and punishment. He therefore enables them by faith to appropriate continually His blood and His obedience unto the removal of both their sins and their guilt and punishment. In so doing, they continually have and obtain "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7).

In this manner, the Lord Jesus saves His people and delivers them from the guilt and punishment of their sins, so that there is "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

However, this is not all, for the Lord Jesus also delivers His people, and thus saves them, from the *pollution* of sin and from spiritual death. As we have already considered, they also by nature are estranged from God and His blessed communion, and we have observed that the Lord Jesus has merited for them the Spirit of life. He therefore sends this Spirit into their hearts through the instrumentality of faith, and by His power and operation, resurrects and quickens them from the death of sin. Christ has not merely been made unto His elect believers the righteousness of God, but He has also been made unto them "sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). Believers are not only "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus," but they are also "sanctified...by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

This justification they receive from their head and savior, Jesus, by His Holy Spirit. This transpires as follows: the Lord Jesus, having united His believers to

Himself by means of a true faith, leads them, as we have seen, to being justified by God. Thereby He reconciles them with and unites them to God, and causes them to know, embrace, love, enjoy, serve, and glorify Him. Hereby sin and the flesh are mortified in the believer, and the Spirit of life comes and breathes upon them, enlightens them, stirs them, and enlivens them. This Spirit comes to sanctify, renew, regenerate, and re-create them fully in Christ Jesus. Hereby the image and life of God, having departed from them through sin, in principle are restored in their souls, and by faith the Lord Jesus is formed in them (Gal. 4:19). Consequently, believers now die to sin and the flesh. They do not have the least fellowship with sin, and hate it in the innermost and deepest recesses of their hearts. They now delight only in true holiness, consisting in a willing obedience and the keeping of all God's commandments. By the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, there is a denial both of self and of all the works of the flesh. In a new obedience, they submit themselves to God to serve and obey Him, and to be entirely dependent upon Him in all things.

In this manner, the Lord Jesus delivers His people, and He does so also today. He saves them from the pollution and deadness of sin by renewing, changing, regenerating, and converting them fully. They in very deed "put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and [are] renewed in the spirit of [their] mind; and...put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24).

It should, however, be noted that the Lord Jesus does not immediately sanctify and deliver His people fully from the deadness of sin. The Lord initially does this in regeneration and at the commencement of conversion. Step by step, He continues this work of sanctification, salvation, and quickening by increasingly mortifying the works of the flesh and their members which are upon the earth. Increasingly, He abides in them by His image and His Spirit, and thereby they daily increase and make progress in their sanctification.

Finally, at death, their sanctification is completely perfected by virtue of the complete mortification of the flesh, that is, the body of this death. As to his soul, the believer then already has enjoyed a perfect salvation,¹ and that perfection will be even more complete when, on the last day, the body that has perished shall be perfectly saved. The Lord Jesus will then, in a spiritual fashion, resurrect and quicken it from the dust of the earth, so that His believing

1. VanderGroe is referring here to the intermediate state, when the believer's body is in the grave but his soul is sanctified perfectly and in heaven with Christ.

people may enjoy with both soul and body an eternal and complete salvation. They will then be fully satisfied when they awake with His likeness (Ps. 17:15).

When all of this has been accomplished, the Lord Jesus will then have fully saved His people and will have fully delivered them from their sins. Everything will then again exist in that holy and perfect state in which God created it, and will remain so eternally. In Acts 3:21, the apostle Peter refers to this as the “restitution of all things,” and until that time, the heavens must receive the Lord Jesus Christ and be, so to speak, His residence. However, as He promised at His ascension, He will then (at the restitution of all things) return to the earth in great glory to take eternally to Himself His sanctified and redeemed people.

Dear reader, we do not have to say anything more to you regarding this matter. You have seen in summary how the Lord Jesus saves His people and delivers them from their sins. This is the salvation and redemption that is in Christ Jesus, of which the Holy Scriptures testify repeatedly in such a glorious and abundant manner, and of which few people have a true knowledge. By this salvation, the Lord Jesus restores all that has been ruined by sin, and thereby restores all things unto God, from whom His entire creation had departed. Paul speaks of this as “the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph. 1:9–10).

He is called Jesus, that is, deliverer or savior, because of this great work of salvation and redemption that He fully and completely accomplishes in His people. How fitting is this name for Him, and how perfectly it suits Him! All of this has been sufficiently demonstrated. After having discussed this subject extensively and thoroughly, our task would be complete were it not for the fact that the instructor adds something more to it, and we will therefore briefly address this also.

The instructor continues by saying, “We ought not to seek, neither can find salvation in any other.” This should be abundantly clear from all that we have considered thus far, and also from Lord's Days 5 and 6. The instructor, and we with him, have shown and proven extensively at that time that outside of the mediator, Christ Jesus, there is no creature either in heaven or on earth capable of delivering us from our misery and of bringing us again to God. We will therefore not add anything to this other than to affirm this truth by two powerful passages from the Holy Scriptures. We find the one in Acts 4:12, where Peter

testifies regarding the Lord Jesus, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” The other passage is 1 Timothy 2:5–6, where Paul teaches that “there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all.”

The instructor thus posits the evidence that salvation can neither be sought nor found apart from Christ, but that He is the only savior and redeemer of sinners. He therefore appropriately bears the name Jesus or Savior.

In order to affirm this truth even further, the instructor proceeds to ask his pupil in Question 30, “Do such then believe in Jesus the only Saviour, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?” The instructor’s primary focus here is upon the Papists, the Socinians, and all Pelagians who are external to our Reformed church. Whereas they confess with the mouth that they believe the Lord Jesus Christ to be the only savior, they nevertheless, in deed and in reality, do not at all seek their salvation in Him alone. Rather, they look within and to the creature, as do all who are outside of the true church, seeking to obtain some measure of salvation either by themselves or by other creatures—and thus apart from the Lord Jesus. Since these wrong and erroneous sentiments will be addressed by the Catechism, we will presently not do so for time’s sake.

However, besides the aforementioned, the instructor also generally has in view all unbelieving and graceless men in our church, who, though they confess outwardly to believe in the Lord Jesus alone in order to obtain salvation from Him alone, nevertheless in reality seek their salvation either in the creature or in themselves. They attempt to work out their salvation by their own wisdom, by their own righteousness, and by their own inherent power—and thus apart from Christ. By far the greatest part of those who confess the truth among us are subject to such wretched blindness and erroneous views. May God yet be gracious to them and uncover to them who they are.

Regarding them all, the instructor asks whether “such then believe in Jesus the only Savior?” and responds by saying, “No, they do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior.” Dear reader, this is so true! All deny this only savior, Jesus Christ (whether within or outside of the church), who have not been spiritually convicted of their impotence and lost state within themselves because of sin and of the vanity and helplessness of the creature. They also deny this only savior, Jesus Christ, who have not clearly seen and acknowledged that righteousness and strength

is to be found in the Lord Jesus alone, and that He alone can bring the sinner to God. All those therefore who have not denied themselves and all things, and embraced and received the Lord Jesus by a true faith, putting their trust in Him and Him alone—they all, whether within or outside of the church, however much they may pretend that their faith is in the Lord Jesus, and however much they may inwardly imagine regarding this, nevertheless, through their blindness and unbelief, deny this only savior, Jesus Christ. They do not acknowledge Him as being the only one who is mighty, willing, and all-sufficient to deliver and to save them. They will not come to Him (John 5:40), and in their hearts they will not fully forsake everything outside of Jesus. They will not count all to be but dung in order that they might win Christ (Phil. 3:8).

Rather, they close their hearts fully to Him, and thus reject Him in very deed—however much they may honor and confess Him with their mouths. The instructor proceeds by saying, “For one of these two things must be true, that either Jesus is not a complete Savior or that they, who by a true faith receive this Savior, must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation.” These words of the instructor are undoubtedly true, for we esteem the Lord Jesus either to be the only and complete savior or to be an incomplete savior.

If, therefore, we are still seeking salvation in either the creature, ourselves, or any other place, it is self-evident that we do not consider the Lord Jesus to be a complete savior, thereby denying Him in very deed. If, however, we desire to confess the Lord Jesus to be a complete savior who “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb. 7:25), it is self-evident that we must fully and eternally cease to trust either in ourselves or any creature. By faith, we must then put our trust in the Lord Jesus alone as our complete and all-sufficient savior, continually expecting all our light, righteousness, strength, peace, comfort, and salvation from Him alone. We must then submit ourselves solely and absolutely to none other but to Him as the king and master of our souls, so that He might sanctify, save, and deliver us from sin.

This further confirms that the Lord Jesus alone is the true, complete, and sole savior of sinners, and therefore He is fully qualified and authorized to bear the name Jesus or Savior.

We hereby judge to have said enough regarding this most precious and most glorious name Jesus. Who of us, having by God's grace understood in some measure the essence of these matters, must not exclaim and confess with the apostle regarding the Lord Jesus what is written in Philippians 2:9–11: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is

above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”?

Having dealt sufficiently with the precious name Jesus, let us now consider with a few brief words how the faith of a Christian is exercised regarding this name. By way of the Apostles' Creed, we confess to believe in the name Jesus. In essence, this means that we acknowledge, embrace, and appropriate the Lord Jesus as the only true and complete savior. It means that with all our deficiency, misery, and impotence, we surrender ourselves fully and eternally in order to be delivered and saved by Him alone—and this in the manner as we have set before you in this sermon. This is indeed how faith functions when it is genuine. It receives the Lord Jesus fully and exclusively as this all-sufficient savior of sinners. It forsakes and rejects all that is not Jesus, and considers all things as dung, having but one desire: that as poor and miserable as the soul may be, to be found in the Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:9). Such faith therefore ceaselessly cleaves to the Lord Jesus. Such faith follows Him, rests in Him, and entirely depends upon Him as the fountain of life and salvation.

It is by means of such faith that the Lord Jesus delivers and saves His people from their sins. This is what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus—something we all confess to do, but only a few do in truth and with uprightness of heart.

Oh, that it would please the Lord Jesus so to arrest our attention regarding the expounded and preached Word that we would most earnestly examine ourselves regarding the genuineness of our faith in Him, and that our desire would be for “truth in the inward parts” (Ps. 51:6). May it be that the many self-deceived counterfeit believers among us would truly be convicted regarding their error, deficiency, and wretchedness. May those who truly believe be assured of the genuineness of their faith and of their blessed portion in the Lord Jesus, and thus be further established in their faith.

May it therefore please the Lord graciously to bless this preached Word and, by His Holy Spirit, further to apply it to the hearts of men, doing so for *Jesus's* sake! Amen.

The Name Jesus (2)

LORD'S DAY 11

And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

—1 JOHN 4:14

Question 29: Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is a Savior?

Answer: Because He saveth us, and delivereth us from our sins; and likewise, because we ought not to seek, neither can find salvation in any other.

Question 30: Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

Answer: They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these two things must be true, that either Jesus is not a complete Savior; or that they, who by a true faith receive this Savior, must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation.

Prince Joshua is one of the most illustrious and noteworthy examples in the Old Testament of the Lord Jesus. Also, by him, the Lord Jesus and His redemptive and saving work have been made known to the world. God gave Joshua to the people of Israel to be their savior and deliverer, so that he would lead them out of the desert into the land of Canaan—the land that had been promised to their fathers. By the government and direction of this prince, the Lord led the children of Israel into the typical rest of the land of Canaan and delivered them out of the hands of their enemies. All this we learn in great detail from the sacred book of Joshua.

By way of this earthly Prince Joshua, the savior and deliverer of the people of Israel, the life of the antitypical captain of the Lord's Host, the great Lord Jesus Christ, is depicted. Joshua typified Him as the mighty redeemer, deliverer,

and savior of the spiritual Israel, the elect and believing people of God. By His great power, He will deliver them out of the wretched and shameful wilderness of sin and eternal perdition and out of the strong hand of all their enemies. He will lead them into the spiritual heavenly Canaan, and thus into true rest and blessed fellowship with God. He will do so initially here upon earth and perfectly hereafter in eternal glory.

The Lord Jesus is the greater Joshua, the deliverer and savior whom God the Father has sent forth unto us to deliver and to save the world from the wilderness of sin, death, and condemnation. The apostle testifies in our text, saying, "We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

By way of the Catechism, we considered on the previous Lord's Day the precious and priceless name Jesus. The exposition of this name yielded such an abundance of matter that there was no time to consider all of this personally and to apply it to our hearts. Since, however, the appropriation of these truths is of the utmost essence and importance for our eternal souls, and since we are to embrace and yield to them fully if we are to be saved, it is our intention, God graciously sustaining us, to expound the name Jesus in such a manner that we would appropriate and put into practice what that name sets forth. As a suitable foundation for this, we will therefore expound the words of our text in all their preciousness. May the Lord bless our preaching to that end. Amen.

In the chapter containing our text, it is the objective of the apostle John to stir up believers to exercise holy and spiritual love toward one another, and to that end, he sets before them the love of God. That love of God is so powerfully displayed in the fact that, in order to save and deliver the elect, God sent into the world the chief object of His love, His Son, the Lord Jesus, to *save* the world and deliver it from sin. This he expresses in our text, saying, "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

In these words, two matters are set before us for consideration:

1. the precious benefit and grace of God of which the apostle is speaking here, consisting in the fact that "the Father sent the Son, etc."; and
2. the certainty and infallibility of this truth, for the apostle had seen and testified of it, and thereby guarantees the absolute certainty of it.

Regarding the first, John testifies “that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.” We must here consider:

1. the Father's *sending* of His Son; and
2. the purpose for which He sent Him, namely, to be *the savior of the world*.

Regarding the Father's sending, it should be noted that He sent His Son into the world in the fullness of time to save the elect and to deliver them from their sins—as we will soon consider (in Lord's Day 14). God the Lord decreed from eternity that He would deliver and save the elect out of mere grace, and that He would do so in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son. To accomplish this, His Son had to assume a true human nature and be sent to this earth in the flesh, so that in His human nature, He would suffer and die for all His elect and render full obedience to the law on their behalf.

God promised this immediately in Paradise, introducing the Lord Jesus, His Son, to our first parents as *the Seed of the woman* (Gen. 3:15), causing them, by faith, to behold Him as such unto their salvation. At regular intervals, God repeated this promise to the believing fathers, revealing it to them with increasing clarity. He did so by many types, foreshadowing this precious coming of His Son in the flesh, and the faith of these fathers was thereby sustained, nourished, and strengthened. This continued until the long-awaited time arrived when God's promise was fulfilled, and when God the Father did in fact send His Son into the world as the long-awaited redeemer and savior of His people. The Father caused Him to assume a human nature through His conception by the Holy Ghost and being born of the virgin Mary, so that in His human nature, He could accomplish the great work of redemption for His believing people and achieve the work of their eternal redemption here upon earth. The majority among us will be sufficiently acquainted with this truth.

The incarnation of the Lord Jesus and His manifestation in the flesh is set before us in various ways in the Holy Scriptures. In regard to the Son of God, this incarnation is referred to as His *coming*, as His *going forth*, as Him *being revealed*, and as His *appearance*, etc. However, in regard to God the Father, it is generally referred to as the *sending* of His Son. In the Old Testament, this great divine benefit was already referred to as such, for instance, in Isaiah 19:20, “He shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them.” It is the Lord Jesus Himself who exclaims in Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the

mEEK; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.”

The gospel of the New Testament speaks much more clearly and abundantly about the sending of the Lord Jesus, as, for instance, in John 3:17, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” In Romans 8:3, Paul writes, “God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,” and the apostle John speaks in like manner when he testifies that “the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.”

All this confirms that the Savior's incarnation and manifestation in the flesh was indeed primarily the work of God the Father. Moved by infinite and eternal love for the salvation and redemption of an elect world, He was willing to give and to send forth in the fullness of time His worthy and beloved Son, Jesus—the Son in whom was all His joy and delight, and in whom He was well pleased. He did so in order that He could deliver the world through His Son and save it from sin. The apostle addresses this more specifically in verses 9 and 10: “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

We will not consider the Father's sending of His Son in the flesh in greater detail, although much more could be said about it that would unveil God's infinite greatness and glory in the sending of His Son. We would rather consider briefly to what end the Father sent Him.

Our apostle teaches us that the Father sent His Son into the world *to be the savior of the world*. This can be understood and interpreted in a twofold manner:

First, in a general sense; that is, insofar as He is generally offered and presented as savior and redeemer to the entire world. It also means that all sinners who hear the gospel preached are called to come to the Lord Jesus. Sinners who are laboring and heavy laden by their sins may, with their hearts, freely come to Him as their savior, who purely out of grace is freely granted to them by God. Wherever the gospel is preached, the Lord Jesus is in that sense a *savior* for the whole world. He calls to Himself all who labor and are heavy laden (Matt. 11:28), promising them all, without distinction, that “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Every poor and perplexed sinner may then come to Him as freely as people go to a doctor. Such a doctor will be the doctor

of the entire community—not because he will truly and actually heal everyone in that community, but because he is the servant of all the people without distinction. Whoever is ill may call upon him.

Second, in a very special and even more powerful sense, the Lord Jesus is designated here as the *savior* of the world, that is, of the elect and believing world, for the elect and true believers are dispersed among all nations and localities of the world. Everywhere and among all peoples, the Lord has His own, whom He calls efficaciously unto fellowship with Himself, by the word of the gospel and by the operation of the Holy Spirit. This was not so during the Old Testament era. The Lord Jesus was then not the *savior of the world*, for during that era He only bestowed His grace upon the Jewish people, and it was among them that He had His believing church or congregation. However, during the present New Testament era, He is without distinction the *savior of the world*; that is, of all believers who are dispersed throughout all the parts and localities of the world. Paul says in Acts 17:26, “And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” The people of the Lord Jesus, whom He saves and delivers from their sins, are a congregation or assembly whom He calls and gathers out of the whole world. John displays it as such for us in Revelation 7:9, saying, “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.” It was therefore already prophesied regarding the church of the New Testament, “I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there” (Ps. 87:4).

The elect are designated also as the world because all believers saved by the Lord Jesus represent the best and most noble segment of the world population, and together constitute a world as such, distinguished from the great world of the ungodly, which fully lies in wickedness and is justly rejected by God due to its unbelief. Oh, what would this world be if there were not in it some pious and godly people? It could no longer continue to exist. The godly are the props of this world, and for their sakes, God upholds and spares the world. When righteous Noah and his family left the world behind him upon entering the ark, that world was immediately deluged by the waters of the flood.

Third, believers and the elect are also designated as the *world* in contradistinction to the good and evil angels that do not belong to this world. The *good*

angels do not stand in need of the Lord Jesus Christ to be their savior, because they have steadfastly preserved the state in which God originally created them, and they never have sinned. Regarding the *evil angels*, who are now devils in hell, they are wretched spirits eternally and fully excluded from the redemption and salvation of the Lord Jesus. It was never His will that He should be their savior. Oh, no, “for verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham” (Heb. 2:16); that is, all true believers who in secret and according to the spirit of Abraham, the father of all the faithful, have been born again.

Behold, such are the reasons why the elect, and thus all believers, are generally referred to as *the world* in the Holy Scriptures, and we are therefore not to interpret this word *world* as referring to all men, head for head. The Lord Jesus is obviously not the savior of the entire world, for all men would then necessarily have to be saved. However, that not a single human being would go lost is entirely contrary to the Word of God, which teaches throughout that there are but few who are elect, that there are few who genuinely believe in the Lord Jesus, and that there are thus few who are saved and delivered by Him from their sins.

The apostle here testifies that the Father sent His Son to be the savior of this believing and elect world. As her only savior and deliverer, He was sent by the Father not only to deliver her from her sins and thus to save her from this state of utmost and extreme wretchedness to which she has been subjected through sin, but also to restore her to God and into His blessed communion.

This past Lord's Day, we considered this extensively with you, showing you the manner in which the Lord Jesus saves the elect and delivers them from their sins, and that salvation is to be neither sought nor found with anyone other than Him. The Son of God is fully authorized and entitled to bear this most precious name Jesus or Savior.

Beloved, do not expect me to address again the work of salvation as it is accomplished by the Lord Jesus. We will let rest what we have addressed earlier and speak only a few words about the reason why the Lord Jesus in our text is referred to as the *savior of the world*. This occurs because:

First, the salvation enjoyed by this elect world issues forth completely and exclusively from Him alone. He has merited this for that world and has achieved it by His sacred passion and death, as well as by His perfect and sweet obedience to God's law. By His Holy Spirit, He also applies this salvation to His

elect, working in them, strengthening them, and building them up in the faith. Consequently, they initially and by renewal receive, embrace, and appropriate this salvation of the Lord Jesus. Thus, believers contribute nothing at all to their salvation, but rather, as entirely poor, blind, naked, and utterly impotent sinners, they are redeemed, delivered, and saved by the Lord Jesus.

Christ is the author of the entire salvation of poor and wretched sinners. There is neither salvation nor redemption in any other, but in Him alone, and therefore believers sing regarding Him, "He that is our God is the God of salvation" (Ps. 68:20). This was also prophesied regarding Him: "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us" (Isa. 25:9). He is therefore referred to as the "horn of salvation" that God "hath raised up...for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began" (Luke 1:69-70).

Second, the salvation He accomplishes for this elect and believing world is supremely precious, great, and glorious, for their redemption is neither insignificant nor inferior, but rather, most glorious and significant. He delivers them from an infinite misery that can neither be described with a pen or expressed in words, nor can it be comprehended with a finite mind. Without Him, they would have to remain in this misery forever. Notwithstanding, He bestows upon them an infinite blessedness, consisting in everlasting communion with, and the enjoyment of, the triune God in all His glory.

This salvation is entirely incomprehensible and inconceivable for us! It is therefore written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). It is a salvation that is entirely inexpressible! Paul, who in some special measure had tasted, seen, heard, and experienced it in the third heaven, had to exclaim that he "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12:4). The entire soul is filled and enraptured by it, and human language with all its vocabulary is as it were swallowed up in the supreme experience of this inexpressible salvation.

Third, He saves the world fully and eternally, and Paul therefore testifies regarding Him that "he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25). He will not permit the least sin or measure of wretchedness to remain in His people. Rather, incrementally He will deliver them from this, and finally, completely at death and at the resurrection of the deceased body. He will thus save them fully and completely, restoring man to what he was prior to the fall. Yes, He will make His people even more infinitely

blessed, because their salvation is everlasting; that is, they can neither fall away from God nor be separated from His blessed communion to all eternity. He will thus establish them in their dwelling place, and they shall never again vacate it as once they did.

Paul testifies thereof in Hebrews 5:9, saying, "He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." He therefore describes the salvation of believers as "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17), and Peter refers to this salvation as "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4).

Such are the reasons why the Lord Jesus is referred to in our text as *the savior of the world*. It was for this purpose that God the Father sent His Son and caused Him to come into the world. The apostle John knew this with complete certainty, for he writes, "We have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (1 John 1:3).

Since the apostle John wants to affirm the infallibility and certainty of this truth "that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world," he adds to this, "And we have seen it, and bear witness." He is primarily referring to himself, using the customary plural form. In order that you might understand what he is saying, you need to know that of all the apostles of the Lord, John lived the longest. When he wrote this epistle, he was already very advanced in age, and therefore repeatedly refers to believers as *his children*—something we do not often read in the other apostolic epistles.

Given that he was very old means that he had beheld the Lord Jesus Himself in the flesh and had lived in fellowship with Him. John was one of the most tenderly beloved of all Jesus's apostles. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved and who had lain in His bosom at the Last Supper (John 13:23). In Matthew 17, we read that he beheld Him in His glory on the mountain; in Matthew 26, we read that he beheld Him in His suffering in the garden of Gethsemane; in John 19, we read that he beheld Him in His dying; and we also read that he beheld Him in His resurrection and ascension. As a result of his intimate fellowship and relationship with the Lord Jesus, John acquired a very extensive and spiritual knowledge of the Savior and of His salvation. He was consequently the one who could best testify to others regarding Him, and do so with utmost assurance. He therefore emphatically appeals to this at the beginning of this epistle, saying, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we

have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1 John 1:1–3).

John knew and saw the Lord Jesus, the great savior of the world, not only physically while in the flesh. However great a happiness and privilege this may have been for John, it was nevertheless a rather small and insignificant matter that would have yielded but little advantage to the apostle. Judas, the traitor, also saw in the flesh the savior of the world, but it would have been a thousand times better for him if he had never beheld Him with his eyes. They who crucified the Lord Jesus, and a great many others, also saw Him here in this world. However, through their blindness and unbelief, they did not receive the least benefit from Him.

Holy John, however, did not merely see the savior of the world with his physical eyes, but learned to know and to behold Him with spiritual eyes. He was one of the Lord's apostles upon whom the Holy Spirit was poured out so abundantly on the day of Pentecost. The Lord Jesus revealed Himself in a very special manner and granted to him a large measure of light and knowledge regarding His glory. John could therefore lay claim to having a twofold knowledge of the Lord Jesus, the savior of the world, saying, "And we have seen and do testify..."

It is this knowledge that moved John to speak in our text, teaching that no one can truly witness of the Lord and His salvation unless He has seen, beheld, and known Him spiritually, and unless the Lord Jesus has revealed Himself to his soul with His precious salvation.

Therefore, the wretchedness of the speaking and preaching of so many about the Lord Jesus and His salvation is because their eyes never have beheld Him. The Lord Jesus has never revealed Himself to them in His eminent preciousness, and thus all that they have to say regarding the Lord Jesus and His salvation proceeds merely from a natural, non-experiential, and unholy knowledge. It is a knowledge regarding the Lord Jesus that is but intellectual—a knowledge they have acquired from a diligent study of the Holy Scriptures.

No one can truly bear witness regarding the Lord Jesus or truly proclaim His salvation to others except that by the light of Christ he has become acquainted with Him experientially and has beheld Him by faith. They who are most suited for this are they who most intimately commune with the Lord Jesus by faith,

and who, as His greatly beloved disciples, are most privileged to taste of His love and to experience His grace. They are best equipped to say with John, "And we have seen and do testify."

This constitutes the preeminent meaning of the words of the apostle, and it confirms first and foremost the great truth that all the salvation and redemption of a poor and hell-worthy sinner is to be found entirely and exclusively in the Lord Jesus. Furthermore, it also confirms that if we are to be the partakers and beneficiaries of this salvation, we must be truly united to Him with a genuine faith, seeking for our salvation entirely outside of ourselves, and thus in Him alone.

It is by no means sufficient:

1. To hear, know, and believe in general terms that the Lord Jesus is the savior of the world, and that He delivers, redeems, and saves sinners. Oh, no! Such a general faith cannot at all deliver and save us, for the devils and the ungodly also believe it without truly turning to the Lord Jesus in order to be saved.
2. Simply to assume and stubbornly to maintain and imagine, without foundation, that the Lord Jesus is also our savior and that He will also deliver and save us. We must therefore believe in the Lord Jesus with our hearts and utterly forsake all that is of ourselves, so that we might be found in Him alone, and be "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

Oh, my beloved reader, if ever there is a matter in this world that is weighty and in which we all have a vested interest, it is that we may know, behold, and witness in truth that the Lord Jesus, who in general terms is the savior of the world, is very specifically also our savior, and that by a true faith we are eternally united to Him! This is the one thing needful upon which our entire salvation and all of our blessedness depend. Regardless of what we may possess, if the Lord Jesus is not our savior and if by faith He does not dwell in our hearts, we truly have nothing. Rather, we are utterly destitute and supremely wretched. No conviction, no concern, no knowledge of spiritual matters, no fellowship with the godly, and no external performance of religious duties can save and deliver us from our sins if the Lord Jesus is not our portion and we lack true faith. One may have been baptized in his youth, reverently partaken of the Lord's Supper, and never neglected to partake thereof. However, my friends, this will aggravate our judgment and condemnation if our hearts have not yet become knit to the Lord Jesus, and if we have not yet, by true faith, with

a ready willingness and in the power of the Holy Spirit, received Him within our hearts to be our supreme savior.

My beloved readers, let us therefore humbly beseech the Lord for light and for His Spirit, and be most earnest in our self-examination regarding this crucial matter. Let us consider whether the Lord Jesus, the great savior of the world, is truly also our savior, and whether we wholeheartedly believe in Him. We are to do this because:

1. God's Word earnestly commands us to do so (2 Cor. 13:5).
2. The Lord's Supper demands this of us, to which the Lord continually invites all poor, contrite, and believing sinners.
3. Our spiritual state demands it, so that in a matter of such great importance we would not miserably deceive ourselves by satisfying ourselves with an imaginary Christ and an imaginary heaven, as so many thousands of carefree lip believers and blind, nominal Christians do.

Oh, that the Lord would truly bind upon our hearts the weightiness of this duty, and that no one would either neglect or disregard this necessary self-examination! To that end, we find in the Holy Scriptures good and clear marks that must necessarily be found in us if the Lord Jesus truly is our savior—marks by which, by the grace of God, we can be convinced and assured that we are found in Him. For everyone's instruction, we therefore wish to set before you a few of these marks. Oh, that everyone who truly cares about the eternal salvation of his soul would in the power of the Holy Spirit submit himself to this, and earnestly and carefully examine himself, so that with God's help and His enabling grace, he would acquire a true knowledge of his state.

First, he who truly knows the Lord Jesus to be his savior has been convicted by the Holy Spirit of his sins, misery, and wretchedness. He has learned to know himself as one who is an utterly unholy, ungodly, abominable, and hell-worthy sinner, who is fully subject to the wrath of God, to the curse of the law, and to the power and dominion of sin and Satan. He is greatly concerned, troubled, perplexed, and distraught due to this view and knowledge of his wretched state. He has acquired a lively knowledge and experience of his spiritual impotence. He has learned to see himself as utterly lost due to sin, being entirely "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). He consequently utterly despairs that there is any salvation to be found

within himself, and being entirely perplexed and desirous of salvation, begins to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

Whoever has not truly had such spiritual conviction of his wretched and utterly lost state (we are here not prescribing what the measure or time-frame should be, that is, how deep or long this should be, but we are only considering the essence of the matter) is yet entirely outside of the Lord Jesus, the savior of the world, and deceives himself in everything that he imagines or appropriates regarding Him and His salvation. Such have never been ready for the grace and salvation of the Lord Jesus, and have never, as a truly perplexed and diseased soul, looked unto this physician.

Second, he who truly knows the Lord Jesus to be his savior has, with the apostle, also *seen* Him—not with his physical eyes, but rather, with the spiritual eyes of his soul. The Lord Jesus, by His Word and Spirit, and thus by divine illumination, has made Himself known to his soul in His absolute necessity, complete all-sufficiency, and sweet willingness to save lost sinners—not only generally speaking, but also to save them in particular from their wretched condition and to save them from their sins. He has personally seen the Lord Jesus to be such a savior, and he can thus testify of Him and His salvation. The sun of righteousness has arisen upon him, and with the bright rays of His grace, He has begun to shine tenderly, sweetly, and warmly upon his darkened soul, and thereby he has "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He then acknowledges that until now his soul was deprived of that blessed light and had always been completely disinterested in this most precious savior. He would therefore not have been able to know Him to all eternity, much less receive and embrace Him, if He, by His own light, had not displayed and revealed Himself in His beauty and most delightful glory. Therefore, whoever has not received such a spiritual revelation of the Lord Jesus in his soul (and again, we are focusing here on the root and essence of the matter, without prescribing a specific measure, time, or manner) cannot possibly have received by faith the Lord Jesus as his savior, and is therefore still utterly estranged from Him, His salvation, and His communion.

Third, he who knows the Lord Jesus to be His savior, having received and embraced Him by a true faith, no longer is able to sustain himself and find life within himself. He has fully and eternally dispensed with all his own wisdom, righteousness, and strength, and has come to the Lord Jesus as an entirely poor, blind, naked, destitute, lost, and impotent sinner. He has come as one who is utterly accursed and ungodly, and has cast himself fully and entirely upon

Him as upon the only Rock of salvation and complete redemption. He, in all his wretchedness, hell-worthiness, and misery, has surrendered himself willingly, unconditionally, and eternally to the Lord Jesus to be delivered, saved, and sanctified by and through Him purely out of free and sovereign grace. All such have committed themselves eternally to the Lord Jesus to be His sole and exclusive property and have fully relinquished all claims to themselves.

Finally, he for whom it is true that the Lord Jesus is His savior also continually makes use of Him in order to be delivered from his sins. Having become a new creature in Christ, it is sin to which he is now most averse and utterly abhors. Since such a soul has learned experientially and continues to learn daily that the Lord Jesus saves His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), and that He alone does so, he continually turns to the Lord Jesus with the burden of his sin. He longs for Him, waits upon Him, takes hold of Him, clings to Him, and follows Him, and does so commensurate with the measure of grace and strength bestowed upon him by the Lord. Yes, such a person greatly esteems the Lord Jesus as his savior, for “unto you therefore which believe he is precious” (1 Peter 2:7). Such a person has a very great reverence and esteem for Him, and by faith with complete willingness surrenders himself to His service. As he esteems the Lord Jesus, so he esteems His commandments, finding a great reward and salvation in the keeping of them. It is his heartfelt wish, delight, and desire to commit himself publicly to the Lord Jesus and to confess His name before the entire world. Therefore, when he finds himself to be in great bondage to the fear of men, it is a matter of inner grief and sorrow for him. He aligns himself publicly with the Lord Jesus, and desires to join himself to His true people. He has acquired an inward love and esteem for them, for they are the temples of the Lord Jesus in whom He dwells with His image, love, grace, light, and Spirit, and to whom He has also revealed Himself.

All the matters we have enumerated for you must truly and essentially be found in us if we are able to lay claim to the Lord Jesus being our savior. Oh, the majority among us ought to examine themselves most earnestly! If the Lord would graciously expose them for who they are, they would soon discover that they are still utterly estranged from the Lord Jesus and that they continue to live apart from Him, for themselves, and in their sins.

Dear people, please take all of this to heart! Have you never experienced the matters we have set before you? Are they not truly found in you? Oh, neither flatter nor deceive yourselves any longer with the false illusion that the

Lord Jesus is already your redeemer and savior! No longer refer to Him as *my* or *our* savior, for we hereby declare to you that no matter what sort of special frame you may be in and whatever you may possess, the Lord Jesus is not yet your portion, and you are not in any measure a partaker of His salvation and redemption. On the contrary, you are still in a state of indescribable wretchedness and you are still subject to the wrath of God and to the curse of the law. Your souls are still entirely unreceptive to the only savior, Christ Jesus. You are still utterly destitute of this precious and delightful salvation, and if you were to die in this condition, you would most certainly be destined for a most dreadful perdition and eternal damnation.

What is the cause of all this? It proceeds from:

1. *Your carelessness*, being neither willing to take seriously your interest in Christ and your eternal salvation nor to examine yourselves in regard to this matter.
2. *Your hardness of heart*, resisting and opposing in your hearts all the means whereby the Lord continually exposes, convicts, and admonishes you.
3. *Your carelessness and inattention*, not being willing to make the effort, by the Lord's grace, to give heed to the word of salvation that is continually set before you and proclaimed to you.
4. *Your lack of zeal and desire*, causing you to neglect so shamelessly and irresponsibly the means of grace. You fail to make an earnest attempt to be diligent and steadfast in attending upon the preached Word and catechism instruction, and you also fail to read and search God's Word ceaselessly and diligently in your homes—all of which, by the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit, would make you wise unto salvation.
5. *Your earthly mindedness and world conformity*, as a result of which you are almost always and solely engaged in and concerned about the things of this temporal and vain life. You are not seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33).
6. *Your ignorance and unwillingness* to permit yourself to be instructed in the way of salvation, regardless of the wonderful opportunities you have for this and whatever means are offered you.
7. *Your desire to sin*. You are willing neither to part with your old life of sin nor to be saved by the Lord Jesus and to be delivered from your

- sins. You would rather risk your body, soul, and all else, and perish eternally, than to part with your cherished sins and with the world.
8. *Your deceitful heart* and your strong inclination toward self-deception. You are entirely inclined to feed your soul with ashes, to flatter yourself with deceitful imaginations, and to build upon false, vain, and illusionary foundations.
 9. *Your pride and spiritual arrogance*. You think and imagine yourself to be rich, and increased with goods, having no need of anything.
 10. *Your unwillingness and stubbornness*, being unwilling to permit yourself to be persuaded either regarding your sins and your utter wretchedness or of the precious grace, ability, all-sufficiency, and willingness of the Lord Jesus to save you. Being either unable or unwilling to believe this, you therefore completely harden and close your hearts for the Lord Jesus, being unwilling to receive Him with His salvation and grace.

Behold, all of you who are still without the Lord Jesus: These are some of the reasons why He is not your savior, why you do not know Him, why you have never beheld Him and His salvation nor experienced it, and you are therefore neither able to testify of Him nor to speak of Him out of genuine spiritual experience.

Oh, that by God's merciful grace these matters would cause you to be truly exposed as to who you are, the result being that you no longer can remain indifferent regarding so precious a savior and so precious a salvation—all of which are still proclaimed and offered to you! Oh, that soundly sleeping sinners would hereby be awakened; that the careless and worldly minded would become troubled; that hardened sinners would be made tender; that the self-deceived would be exposed; and that hostile enemies would be cast down!

Oh, that the Lord Jesus, the savior of the world, would presently convict men of their sins and hell-worthiness, and by His power, break open the doors of so many stony and impervious hearts, causing all heights to be cast down before Him!

If it may please the Lord, it is our intent to address the subject matter regarding the savior, Christ Jesus, at a subsequent occasion, and to bind this even more upon the hearts of men. May those who love the Lord Jesus and His salvation wish and pray with me that the Lord would bless what has been said. Amen.

The Name Christ

LORD'S DAY 12

We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

—JOHN 1:41

Question 31: Why is He called Christ, that is anointed?

Answer: Because He is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; and to be our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body, has redeemed us, and makes continual intercession with the Father for us; and also to be our eternal King, who governs us by His word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation, He has purchased for us.

Question 32: But why art thou called a Christian?

Answer: Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him; and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards reign with Him eternally, over all creatures.

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1). Thus the apostle posits here that the essence of believing that Jesus is the Christ is to acknowledge, receive, and embrace the Lord Jesus sincerely and wholeheartedly as the true Christ or Messiah. It means that one believes that Christ has been appointed and anointed by the Father to be the only and supreme prophet, priest, and king of all elect and believing sinners in order to save and deliver them from their sins.

With the Lord's help and sustaining grace, we wish to expound and consider for you in greater detail this blessed and glorious truth. In conformity to the Apostles' Creed, the instructor, after having first dealt with the name Jesus, now proceeds to consider the name Christ. Beloved, this is a name that is equally as magnificent and precious as the name Jesus—a name that the Savior reveals and declares to the world with an equal measure of His fullness, blessedness, and glory.

May our consideration of this name and our meditation upon it be blessed to our souls by the grace of God, so that we would initially and continually be united to the Lord Jesus in faith and love. May the Lord grant it out of His eternal and compassionate grace! Amen.

We must proceed to consider two matters:

1. the efficacy and meaning of the name Christ; and
2. how the Christian interacts with this name by faith.

Regarding the first, the Holy Scriptures abundantly reveal that the Son of God is not only called Jesus, but He is also called Christ. God has given Him that name to reveal to us His blessed person and His mediatorial administration unto the salvation of sinners. This name is derived from a Greek word that means "I anoint." The literal meaning of the name Christ is therefore "the anointed one" or "one who has been anointed." It is therefore identical in meaning to the Hebrew word *Maschiah* or *Messiah*. Also, this name refers to one who has been anointed with oil. This is evident in the words of our text, for Andrew said to his brother Simon, "We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ."

In ancient times, this name Christ or messiah was an illustrious badge of honor, given only to such men as had been externally anointed with oil to hold the lofty offices of king, priest, or prophet. Such men were designated as *anointed ones* or *the Lord's anointed*, and they were consequently highly esteemed by their people. Beloved, do not expect from us a detailed consideration of the external anointing of people and of objects. We only wish to note that the practice of anointing was in use among the people of God at a very early date. This was already practiced by the patriarch Jacob, who anointed the stone upon which he had slept at Bethel (Gen. 28:18). Thereafter, God the Lord instituted the anointing as a ceremony among His people Israel, and commanded Moses to compound a holy anointing oil (Ex. 30:23ff.). He was also commanded to keep this oil in a vessel in the sanctuary for the purpose of

anointing holy objects and holy persons, thereby setting them apart from the common people for God's service.

With this holy oil, the following were anointed:

1. The *priests*, and especially the *high priest*, whose anointing was much more elaborate and glorious than that of the common priests. We thus read that Moses, upon God's command, anointed Aaron and his sons with holy oil to be priests (Lev. 8:12, 30).
2. The *kings* of the people of Israel. Many examples of this are recorded in Scripture, and they were therefore designated as the Lord's anointed. We often encounter them as such in the Word of God.
3. The *prophets*. Their anointing is not as clearly articulated as that of priests and kings. Nevertheless, we believe that they too were anointed with holy oil, because:
 - a. they also are expressly referred to as *anointed ones* in Scripture; and
 - b. we read clearly in 1 Kings 19:16 that God gave Elijah this command: "And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room." We believe, therefore, that upon God's command, also the prophets of old were anointed with holy oil.

The reason for this external anointing of priests, kings, and prophets was threefold:

1. To indicate and make known that those persons who were thus anointed to be priests, kings, and prophets had been elected and called by God to these celebrated offices, and that they in no wise usurped these offices to themselves.
2. To indicate that God would also anoint them internally, and thus in their hearts, with His Holy Spirit, so that by such spiritual anointing they would not only be equipped to engage in their lofty and illustrious offices, but that they would also be a sweet savor among their people. It was also an affirmation that He would protect and preserve them, saying, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (Ps. 105:15). This oil with which they were anointed was symbolic of the Holy Spirit.
3. To typify the spiritual anointing of the Lord Jesus and of His believers.

It is this latter truth that we now wish to consider, that is, the divine and spiritual anointing of the Lord Jesus and of His believers.

In regard to the Lord Jesus, it was He who was depicted and foreshadowed as the one appointed by the Father, who also anointed Him by His Holy Spirit to be unto believers their prophet, high priest, and king. It would be by the execution of these three offices that He would save them from their sins. To accomplish this, He came into the world in the fullness of time and took upon Himself the human nature. The Lord Jesus is therefore called the *Anointed One* par excellence, and by virtue of this the *Messiah*. Hannah was the first person to designate Him as such, for in 1 Samuel 2:10, she testifies of God the Father that He shall “exalt the horn of his anointed.” David speaks concerning Him in Psalm 2:2, saying with prophetic foresight that “the kings of the earth [would] set themselves, and the rulers [would] take counsel together, against the LORD, and *against his anointed*.” The prophetic word speaks repeatedly of this divine and glorious anointing of the Messiah, such as in Psalm 45:7, where His believing people jubilate regarding Him: “Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” These fellows are the people of the Messiah, and thus believers, who are partakers of His spiritual anointing, and of all His blessedness, grace, and glory. The Lord Jesus Himself speaks of this in Proverbs 8:23: “I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.”¹

The offices, or the glorious ministrations, to which the Lord Jesus had been anointed from eternity were those three He would have to execute and administer to deliver His people and to save them from their sins. He had been anointed by His Father:

To be a *prophet* to His believing people, so that they who were utterly blind and darkened in their understanding would be illuminated by His Word and Spirit, and thereby both God and the way of salvation would be made known to them. It is in Isaiah 61:1 that we meet Him in person as the most exalted redemptive prophet, proclaiming to the world, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” Moses also prophesied concerning Him: “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a

1. The literal rendering of the Dutch *Statenvertaling* is, “I have been anointed from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.”

Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken” (Deut. 18:15).

To be a *high priest* to His people, so that by His sacrifice and intercession, atonement for all their sins could be made before God, thereby meriting for them all grace and all salvation. The prophet David spoke of Him as such in Psalm 110:4, saying, “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”

To be a *king* of His believing people in order to cleanse them from their sins, to govern them by His Word and Spirit, and to protect and preserve them. David introduces God the Father as such, saying regarding His Son in Psalm 2:6, “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”²

You will thus understand why, in the Old Testament, the Son of God most prominently bore the name of Messiah or Anointed One, and how already then He was revealed to believers in all three of His mediatorial offices.

However, all that the prophets of old prophesied and testified regarding the Messiah has been fulfilled in the Lord Jesus to the fullest extent of the word. He was that Messiah or the Christ in whom the prophets of the Old Testament believed and of whom they spoke in such glorious terms. All of His people who have ever entered this world have acknowledged, received, and esteemed Him as such. In our text, Andrew said, “We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:41), and Peter said to Him, “We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:69).

We have hereby sufficiently expounded the literal meaning of the name Christ, and it is therefore time for us to return to our instructor to learn more specifically what the glorious content of this name is.

The instructor says that the Lord Jesus is called Christ, that is, the Anointed, “because He is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, etc.” We therefore wish to consider:

1. the three mediatorial offices of the Lord Jesus, which He administers unto the salvation of His people; and
2. how He has been appointed to these offices by His Father and how He has been anointed for these offices by the Holy Spirit.

2. Again, the Dutch *Statenvertaling* clearly refers to Christ being anointed by His Father. The literal rendering of the Dutch text is, “Yet have I *anointed* my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”

It will then be fully evident that the Lord Jesus bears the name of Christ or Anointed One with utmost propriety.

Regarding the three offices or administrations of the Lord Jesus, it should be noted that the first office that the Lord Jesus executes or administers unto the salvation of His people is that of *prophet*, for the instructor teaches us that God the Father has ordained Him “to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption.”

The *prophets* of the Old Testament, by whom the Lord Jesus was depicted and foreshadowed in His exalted prophetic ministry, were holy men who had been called and equipped by God to instruct and teach the people regarding His secret counsel and divine will. Three things were required of them in their ministry:

1. They were obligated to teach the people God's hidden counsel and will, or the way of salvation, and therefore were duty-bound to make known faithfully the mysteries they had heard from God regarding both the present and the future.
2. They had to affirm their doctrine and instruction with a holy and godly walk, and, if necessary, even to seal it with their blood and death.
3. If necessary, they had to affirm for the people their teaching and revelations also by miracles, distinguishing themselves thereby from false prophets. It was as such a holy prophet, and then as the most exalted and greatest prophet of all prophets, that the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to the world—and He still daily reveals Himself as such to all His believing people.

The Scriptures of the New Testament reveal to us that during the days of His flesh, the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to the world for us sinners as such a great and illustrious prophet. The people who heard His doctrine and saw His miracles received and acknowledged Him as such. We read in Luke 7:16 that when Jesus resurrected a dead man who was already being carried to the grave, all the people who were present glorified God and exclaimed in unison, “A great prophet is risen up among us; and...God hath visited his people.” In John 6:14, it is recounted to us how the people saw the miracle of the Savior breaking the bread, and they said, “This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.”

The Lord was especially recognized and acknowledged as such by His apostles, His disciples, and all His true believers, whose hearts He had internally illuminated by His Word and Spirit, and who heard Him as being the truth and wisdom of God. The apostle Peter declared the Lord Jesus to be as such to the Jews of Jerusalem, declaring Him to be that great prophet of whom Moses had prophesied. It was Him they had to hear, or else their souls “would be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:22–23).

Let us now briefly consider how the Lord Jesus, according to the testimony of the Gospels, sojourned in this world as the great prophet and teacher from God, and how He not only thereby emulated the prophets who had typified Him in the Old Testament, but also infinitely exceeded them in power and glory.

As the chief prophet and teacher of righteousness, the Lord Jesus, according to our instructor, “has fully revealed to [men] the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption,” having personally taught and instructed them regarding this. By “the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption,” the instructor is simply referring to the eternal, adorable, and wondrous way of God’s sovereign grace whereby He has eternally purposed and decreed within Himself to deliver lost, ungodly, hell worthy, and impotent sinners from their wretched state of sin, and to save them freely and bring them eternally into fellowship with Himself in and by means of the Lord Jesus, His Son—all to the glory and magnification of His righteousness and grace.

The instructor correctly designates this counsel and will of God regarding the salvation of sinners as God’s *secret* counsel and will. This decree had been hidden exclusively in the heart of God, for God purposed this counsel of redemption in eternity and according to His good pleasure. Paul testifies of this in Ephesians 1:9–10: “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” Since God purposed His counsel regarding the redemption of sinners eternally within Himself, there was no one other than God who had even the least knowledge of this, for “the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11), and they are even “things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12).

Therefore, if we blind sinners, who have completely departed from God and lack even the least knowledge regarding our own wretched state, are ever to acquire any true knowledge of the counsel and will of God regarding our

redemption, then only if it pleases God to reveal it to us will this occur. However, since God, as a pure Spirit, could not interact with carnal men about our redemption, it was necessary that He would speak to us through His incarnate Son. He sent Him to us as a teacher and prophet to make known the manner of our salvation and redemption as God had eternally purposed within Himself. He would make this known to us distinctly and spiritually, so that by the power and operation of God within us, we would receive, approve of, and wholeheartedly embrace and embark upon this way of salvation. Only the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, as He was manifested in the flesh, was qualified to do so, for as the Son He is the only one who knows the Father. He alone beholds the Father from whose bosom He proceeds, so that only He, with the Holy Ghost, can know all that pertains to God and all that is eternally hidden in the heart of God. Therefore, He alone could make this known to the world by His Word and Spirit, as it is written, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18).

By the promises made to the fathers in the Old Testament, His people therefore expected Him to come into the world as such. This is evident from what the Samaritan woman said to Him: "I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things" (John 4:25). And as was expected of Him, so it also transpired.

That which one looked forward to regarding the Lord Jesus as the promised chief teacher and prophet, did also occur in history. He did come forth from the Father; He did come into the world; He did assume the human nature; and He did make known to the world the secret will and counsel of God regarding the redemption of the elect. By Himself, as well as by His disciples and apostles, He taught and revealed this gospel of salvation everywhere. He taught and revealed that God was now, in and through Him, "reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19); that all salvation and grace could be secured only in and through Him; that God now justifies lost sinners freely in His blood; and that He redeems and sanctifies them by His Spirit. In a word, the Lord Jesus has made known to His believing people all things that He heard of His Father (John 15:15). According to the instructor, He has *fully* revealed to them God's secret counsel and will regarding their redemption, teaching and making known to them all that they need to know and believe unto salvation. Therefore, He frequently refers to Himself as "the Light of the world," testifying that "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

However, not only did the incarnate Lord Jesus as prophet teach the way of salvation, as did the prophets before Him, but He also affirmed His doctrine by a holy and completely impeccable walk, thereby testifying that He and His doctrine truly proceeded from God. He “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). By His example, He taught believers how they, in the Spirit, are to walk in a manner that is pleasing to God. Yes, we know that He has even affirmed His doctrine by His blood and death.

As the chief prophet sent of God, the Lord Jesus, in order to reveal Himself to the world, also affirmed His doctrine by manifold divine signs and miracles, which no one either before or after Him performed in that manner. Nicodemus therefore said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2).

Behold, beloved, in this manner the Lord Jesus administered and executed His prophetic office in the flesh while He sojourned here on earth.

However, this aspect of His ministry by itself would not have been sufficient. Therefore, He also executes His prophetic office daily in the hearts of His elect by His Word and Spirit, for He has been given unto them by His Father *unto wisdom* (1 Cor. 1:30). We would be able to say a great deal about this if it were our intent to focus specifically on this matter, but time restraints will not permit us to do so. Therefore, we desire to say briefly only that believers who are utter darkness in themselves must by faith receive all their light for the first time and by renewal from the Lord Jesus—even from moment to moment. He is the teacher at whose feet they must ceaselessly sit in order to be instructed by Him regarding the way of salvation. He is the sun of righteousness who must continually enlighten their blind and darkened souls, and they cannot be without this light for a single moment. Without it, they would walk in darkness, for in Him alone “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). However, time will not permit us to address this any further.

It is thus evident that the Lord Jesus, in the words of the instructor, is the great and chief prophet and teacher to reveal “to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption.” All the prophets that preceded Him were but faint shadows of Him to reveal Him to the world. He alone is the teacher and prophet into whose lips grace has been poured (Ps. 45:2).

We will now proceed to the second mediatorial office of the Lord Jesus that He administers unto the redemption and salvation of His people: the office of *High*

priest. It is true, according to the instructor, that He, “by the one sacrifice of His body, has redeemed us, and makes continual intercession with the Father for us.” Paul therefore refers to Him in Hebrews 2:17 as “a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” There are other passages in the Holy Scriptures where the Lord Jesus is also revealed as such.

The preeminent work of the high priest in the Old Testament, as a type of the Lord Jesus, consisted in these two activities:

1. He had to sacrifice on behalf of the people, and by these sacrifices make atonement for them in the sanctuary.
2. He had to intercede for and bless the people.

Both are fully efficacious and accomplished in the Lord Jesus.

The elect, due to their sins and ungodliness, are utterly guilty and hell-worthy before God, and fully alienated from His fellowship. Therefore, if they are to be restored unto God and to be eternally reconciled and united to Him, there must be the intervention of a mediator or high priest acceptable to God, who, on their behalf and through the eternal Spirit, would offer Himself without spot to God (Heb. 9:14). He would have to be a high priest who fully would take upon Himself all their sin and ungodliness, as well as their accompanying guilt. He would also have to take upon Himself the wrath, curse, and condemnation due to them, and in so doing, make full satisfaction to the demands of God's holy and inflexible justice. Furthermore, on their behalf, He would have to render perfect obedience to the law, and thereby merit a perfect righteousness unto salvation and eternal life. This would be a righteousness that would render them acceptable to God's infinite holiness, so that they might be “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

The Lord Jesus is this only, great, and precious high priest, who has secured all these benefits for His believing people, for, according to the instructor, He has redeemed them “by the one sacrifice of His body.” As the great high priest of His elect and believing people, the Lord Jesus offered on their behalf to God His Father His own body (that is, His human nature). He did so by way of His active and passive obedience and the shedding of His blood, so that thereby He could secure salvation and eternal redemption for them.

Throughout the Holy Scriptures, this sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is spoken of in such glorious terms, and by way of all the typical sacrifices prescribed by the law, it is vividly depicted to believers. Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 5:2,

saying that Christ “hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” In Hebrews 9:26, he testifies regarding the Lord Jesus, “But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

This sacrifice of the Lord Jesus occurred only once, when He sojourned upon earth, and therefore never can be repeated by Him in a manner as transpired in the Old Testament regarding the ceremonial sacrifices, for they had to be repeated yearly and even daily. However, the singular sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is and remains sufficient unto the salvation and redemption of all His believing people from the beginning unto the end of the world. According to the instructor, He has redeemed them “by the one sacrifice of His body.” The Holy Scriptures teach this very explicitly, for Paul testifies that the Lord Jesus “by one offering . . . hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14).

Therefore, to be delivered from all their sins and be eternally saved, believers have no need of anything other than this singular sacrifice of the blood and body of the Lord Jesus. The moment they embrace this by a true faith, they are fully delivered and justified from all their sins. This continues to be valid and true when they again fall into sin and incur new guilt before God. Then, by faith, they must take renewed refuge to the same and singular sacrifice of the body of Christ, so that by grace they may have their sins forgiven and blotted out by God. In that sense, the Lord Jesus continually and by renewal makes atonement for the sins of believers with the Father. Consequently, He continually secures atonement and redemption for believers from His Father and then applies it to their hearts by the Spirit of faith. The Lord Jesus thus redeems believers “by the one sacrifice of His body,” and believers continually have need of the Lord Jesus and His sacrifice, for apart from this sacrifice, they cannot obtain the forgiveness of one single sin by God.

The instructor continues by saying that the Lord Jesus, as the great high priest, also “makes continual intercession with the Father for” His believing people. This, too, was the work of the high priest in the Old Testament; that is, whenever he performed a sacrifice, he would then pray for and bless the people. This is also the work of the great high priest, Christ Jesus, who never ceases to intercede with His Father on behalf of His believing people, in order that they may receive all the grace, salvation, and redemption they continually stand in need of. Paul expresses this in Romans 8:34, saying that Christ “is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” In Hebrews

7:25, he writes, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

This continual intercession of the Lord Jesus on behalf of all His believing people is absolutely essential. Since of themselves they are unholy sinners, worthy of being accursed and condemned, they therefore as such can neither ever have any communion with God nor either desire or receive any grace from Him. On the contrary, God does not hear sinners, but rather, by virtue of His holiness, He is to them as a consuming fire. If believers are therefore to approach unto God and have any fellowship with Him, and if they are to desire and receive anything conducive to their salvation, they must then continually go to the Father through the Lord Jesus. He, and He alone, is "the way... [and] no man cometh unto the Father, but by" Him (John 14:6). He must continually intercede for them with the Father, and they must continually and in all things take hold of the Lord Jesus by faith as their intercessor with the Father, committing all their prayers into His hands and casting them upon Him as upon the golden Altar of Incense that stands before the throne. Their praying must therefore be entirely in His name, and they are then consequently continually blessed by the Father "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

Finally, we must speak of *His kingly office*, of which we read abundantly and profusely in the Word of God. Since much time has expired, we will not prove this with specific texts, other than what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:25, saying, "For he must reign [as King], till he hath put all enemies under his feet." The instructor designates Him as the *eternal king* of believers, for His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall never be interrupted nor undermined to all eternity. In Revelation 11:15, we read of Him, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

According to the instructor, this kingly office of the Lord Jesus Christ consists in the following:

First, He governs His believing people *by His Word and Spirit*. As king, the Lord Jesus takes hold of the souls of believers and subjects them to Himself. He does this initially in regeneration and conversion, when He raises them from being dead in sins; when He makes them alive by the Spirit of life, which He has merited for them and sends forth into their hearts; and when He so sanctifies and renews them internally that they fully subject themselves to Him as their eternal king. They then surrender themselves in body and soul in order that

they may fully and continually be governed and wrought upon by His Word and Spirit, and thus be inclined to serve and obey His heavenly Father. In that service, believers find their sole delight, and their heartfelt inclination is to forsake the service of sin fully and eternally.

In this manner, the Lord Jesus, as king, initially conquers His believing people at the time of regeneration and conversion, subjecting them to His Word and Spirit, erecting His throne and establishing His throne, dominion, and kingdom in their souls. Believers are then “delivered...from the power of darkness, and...translated...into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col 1:13). Having thus made believers subjects of God and Himself, the Lord Jesus subsequently continually governs them and reveals to them His will and good pleasure *by His Word and Spirit*, continually sanctifying them so that they do His will and obey Him. Believers are thus continually wrought upon by the Lord Jesus through His Word and Spirit, and thereby rendered fit unto all obedience, and thus made “perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:17).

Second, the Lord Jesus, as king, “defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation.” Believers could not continue in the state of redemption and grace for one single moment—on the one hand, due to the great violence and power of their spiritual enemies, and on the other hand, due to their weakness and to being absolutely powerless in and of themselves. Therefore, it is the Lord Jesus, who, as their head and king, ceaselessly protects and guards them. He so defends and preserves them that not only shall they never return to the service of sin and to the dominion of Satan from which they have been delivered, but they will be increasingly sanctified, delivered, and inwardly submissive to God and the Lamb—and therefore increasingly ready to serve Them. The Lord Jesus Himself thus testifies of His people by way of the analogy of a vineyard, saying in Isaiah 27:3, “I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” (Read also John 10:27–28 and many other passages of God's Word.)

We have thus considered what constitutes the *kingly* office of the Lord Jesus. Behold, beloved, the Lord Jesus administers these offices simultaneously; that is, He is the chief prophet, the only high priest, and the eternal king of all His believing people.

However, what enables the Lord Jesus to administer His three most worthy mediatorial offices in such a fashion? The instructor teaches this in the beginning of his question and answer, saying, “Because He is ordained of God the

Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost.” The Father elected and appointed His Son to engage in this work, and abundantly poured out His Holy Spirit upon Him, so that He would be the prophet, high priest, and king of the elect. It is He “who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30), “for him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27), and “God hath made that same Jesus...both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Regarding these three offices of the Lord Jesus, it is also applicable what Paul says regarding His high priestly office: “And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee” (Heb. 5:4–5).

This anointing and appointing of the Father occurred:

- from all eternity;
- at the incarnation of the Savior;
- at His baptism in the Jordan River; and
- after His ascension.

All of this could be shown and elaborated upon in greater detail. It is because of all the above that the Lord Jesus in the full sense of the word and emphatically is called *Christ* or the *Anointed One*. I believe that we have hereby sufficiently explained and expounded this glorious name.

In Question 32, the instructor transitions from the Lord Jesus as head to believers who are His members, inquiring and declaring why Christians are named after Him by also being designated as *anointed ones*. However, since we no longer have time to address this, we will, if it may please the Lord, address it separately in the future.

It now remains to address the exercise of faith of the Christian regarding the name Christ, for in our creed we confess that we believe in Him *as the Christ*. This means, in essence, that with upright and sincere heart, the Christian acknowledges the Lord Jesus to be the Christ, receiving Him as his chief prophet, as his only high priest, and as his eternal king. It means that he fully and eternally surrenders himself to Him, thereby renouncing all personal wisdom, righteousness, and strength. The Christian thus is taught, justified, and sanctified by Him alone, and thereby, by faith, receives all his light, peace, strength, and salvation continually and exclusively from Him alone.

Behold, if the soul does this in truth, she then receives the Lord Jesus as the *true Christ*, and believes and acknowledges that Jesus is the Christ. This affirms that she is born of God, and *that* faith will, in turn, save her.

Dear reader, it is my concluding wish that the Lord would daily exercise this precious faith by His Word and Spirit in the hearts of all His elect, and that He would continue to build up and strengthen this faith in His already sanctified people. Amen, so be it!

The Prophetic Office of the Christian

LORD'S DAY 12

Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.

—PSALM 105:15

Question 31: Why is He called Christ, that is anointed?

Answer: Because He is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; and to be our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body, has redeemed us, and makes continual intercession with the Father for us; and also to be our eternal King, who governs us by His word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation, He has purchased for us.

Question 32: But why art thou called a Christian?

Answer: Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him; and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards reign with Him eternally, over all creatures.

In the words of our text, the Lord God reveals Himself as the God who appropriately designates and powerfully protects His elect people and servants as a people whom He has called to His blessed service. They are those whom He abundantly has anointed with His Holy Spirit, and He therefore refers to them as *His anointed* and *His prophets*. Beloved, we are certainly to understand these anointed ones and prophets of the Lord as first having reference to the holy patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for this psalm specifically refers to

them. However, beyond that, we are to understand these words as a general and comprehensive reference to all of God's believing and godly servants whom it pleases the Lord to call to His holy service. He anoints them with and pours out upon them His Holy Spirit. God's Word is comprehensive in its meaning, and by accommodation or application, its meaning is extensive. Our text therefore refers to all of the Lord's anointed ones and prophets at all times and in all localities of the world.

The Lord therefore preserves and grants equal protection to His people, always saying regarding them, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." Among them we must number:

1. All the holy men of God and prophets of the Old Testament, by whom the Lord, in an extraordinary manner, revealed His divine counsel and mysteries to the world.

2. All ambassadors and servants of God of the New Testament, by whom God causes His Word to be proclaimed everywhere unto the salvation of the elect. This includes all the godly shepherds and teachers of the church. Paul speaks of them in Ephesians 4:11–12, saying, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

All these servants of the Lord enjoy His special protection, and He forbids the world to treat them with even the least measure of contempt or insult, saying of them, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

3. All of whom David testifies in this text but who have not yet been identified, who are also the recipients of the Lord's grace and special protection. The designation *the Lord's anointed* and *prophets* is to be understood as referring to all true believers and children of God who dwell in this world—all upon whom the Lord has bestowed His grace and Holy Spirit, and who thereby have been regenerated and converted, and have been united to Christ by a true faith. Therefore, they are all called to the blessed service of God, as well as to magnify Him and His great name among men. The Lord has also anointed them to be His servants and His spiritual prophets, by whom it pleases Him everywhere to declare His name, His truth, and His holy attributes.

This is taught throughout Scripture, for the Lord says regarding His converted and believing people, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise" (Isa. 43:21). In 1 Peter 2:9, it is testified regarding all who are truly converted and believe, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal

priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

It is our present intention to focus your attention in more detail upon this *prophetic* office of all true believers.

Beloved, we are presently engaged in considering the precious name *Christian*—a name borne by all true believers by their union with the Lord Jesus *Christ*, their head and king. The description the Catechism gives of this name in Question 32 indicates that there are two matters that define its essential efficacy and meaning. It consists:

1. in being truly united with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and being partakers of His holy and spiritual anointing; and
2. in the administration of the three very illustrious and glorious offices of *prophets*, *priests*, and *kings*. God has vested all true Christians with these offices, and to that end, they have been united by faith to Christ their head and made partakers of His anointing.

We considered the first of these two matters in our previous sermon, and we determined that no one can be a *Christian* unless he is a true member of Christ by faith, and thus a partaker of His anointing. We will therefore now proceed to consider the three precious and spiritual offices in which, by their true union with Christ, all true Christian believers are engaged as they imitate Christ their head. We will first consider the *prophetic* office of all true believers. May the Lord grant to you an attentive heart, and may He by His Holy Spirit impress it upon your hearts to the end that everyone would examine himself with true earnestness. Amen.

We will set these matters before you in the following order:

1. We will prove clearly that all true believers are designated in God’s Word as being spiritual *prophets*.
2. We will then consider this holy office in greater detail.

The first spiritual administration that constitutes being a true Christian is that of *prophet*. God appoints all of His elect and believing people to be prophets, so that they may imitate Christ their Lord and head. All true believers are called by God to engage in this office, and in Christ their head and king, they are all graciously anointed with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they all, without distinction, engage in this office, doing so incrementally and principally here on earth, and hereafter they will do so eternally in heaven with complete perfection. If

someone is thus a true Christian, he must be engaged in this prophetic office, and he must truly be a holy and spiritual prophet.

We will first prove and demonstrate to you from the Holy Scriptures that this is so, and to that end, we will select a few passages out of many. Give heed to this, and search out and read these texts yourselves in your Bible.

In Joel 2:28, God promises that He will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh; that is, upon all His believing people. Thus, *being a partaker of the anointing of Christ*, as the instructor expresses it, is equivalent to the outpouring of the Spirit, the consequence of which is that sons and daughters prophesy. Take note that as soon as believers receive the Holy Spirit from God or, to say the same, become partakers of Christ's anointing, they immediately become prophets and "prophesy," irrespective of how unfit and void of wisdom they may previously have been, and irrespective of whether they were but *sons* and *daughters*, and thus young in years.

We also read of this in the New Testament, for Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:9, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part." Note again that the apostle indiscriminately testifies with these words regarding all believers, saying that in this life they "prophesy in part." Thus, they are all prophets. Also consider 1 Corinthians 14:37, where the same apostle writes regarding believers, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." In verse 39, he admonishes and exhorts believers to be faithful in the exercise of their prophetic office and to strive for the latter, saying, "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy." We will not quote any other passages, although there are many more to be found in the Word of God.

Beloved, consider therefore that all true, believing Christians must be holy and spiritual prophets, and that they must all prophesy here in this world. Thus, when some Christians who fear the Lord are gathered together and are praising and magnifying God, one may say of them what we read in 1 Samuel 19:20: "They saw the company of the prophets prophesying."

Many of you know that also today there are truly "prophets" among us, for God has His people everywhere. Every Christian must therefore be such a prophet and must be zealous to "prophesy" always and in all places. It is equally true, however, that in our evil age, there are very few true prophets among us. In our day, men have almost universally begun to mock with the most sacred mysteries of our faith. Our ministers, and all who desire to prophesy, are made out to be troublemakers, Quakers, spiritualists, hairsplitters, and spiritual

imposters, and their testimony is directly contradicted. One would therefore be inclined to lament with the psalmist: "We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?" (Ps. 74:9–10).

Nevertheless, you will thus perceive from the Bible that every true and believing Christian is set before us as a prophet, and that they are all truly called to prophesy, or they would not be Christians.

However, as we consider in more detail the nature and character of this prophetic ministry of all true believers, you need to recognize that believers are not in all aspects like unto the extraordinary prophets of the Old and New Testaments. God called them to this great office in an extraordinary manner, and they were thus set apart from their fellow believers. They received from God extraordinary visions, revelations, and the gift of prophecy, and they confirmed their prophetic ministry by miracles. Such extraordinary prophets the Lord no longer sends among us—not because He no longer can do so, but because it no longer pleases Him to do so.

Today, all true, believing Christians are prophets, for their spiritual state is such that they are internally united to God in Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, they all receive from God a common prophetic ministry. Therefore, not only is there a great resemblance and likeness between them and the extraordinary prophets of the Old and New Testaments, but in some measure they also resemble their head, Christ, the great prophet whom they must all hear. We will set this truth before you in two main thoughts.

In ancient times, the extraordinary prophets received from God their revelations by the operation of the Holy Spirit. God made known to them the holy mysteries of His divine counsel and will, doing so not mediately, by means of His written Word, but immediately, without and apart from this Word. All of these prophets were therefore divines in the true sense of the word, for God Himself taught and educated them regarding His truth.

This is still true for all genuine and believing Christians. By means of the written Word, they are all taught by God Himself, and thus by His Holy Spirit. Thereby they receive the revelation of the mystery of faith from God Himself by His Word and Spirit. In and of themselves, believers are utterly blind and their understandings are darkened. As natural men, they do not receive "the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14). When, however, the Lord Jesus reveals Himself to their souls with His salvation and His holy mysteries, and when by

means of the written Word He opens the eyes of their darkened understanding, He teaches and instructs them regarding the true way of salvation. As the great sun of righteousness, He sheds light upon the dark world of their souls, transforming them from children of darkness (which they once were with all their unsanctified head knowledge) into children of light.

Just as God raised up a prophet, the Lord Jesus, from among Israel's brethren, the Lord Jesus likewise comes to His elect and believing people to make them wise unto salvation. God the Father, by His Son, calls His own to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called [them] out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9), and He speaks to them "by His Son" (Heb. 1:1), teaching them the mystery of His divine counsel and will. The Holy Spirit here proceeds from the Father and from the Son, and as the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge of the truth, works powerfully by means of the Word in the understanding of believers. Thereby, He illuminates their souls so that by Him they are guided "into all truth" (John 16:13), and consequently they now know the truth and are made free by the truth (John 8:32).

This is how the triune God Himself, by means of His Word, presently teaches and instructs believers as His true and spiritual prophets from the very beginning, continually, and ultimately with complete perfection at the hour of death. As they read and search the Word that is continually before them, it sets before them the truth of the holy mysteries of God's counsel and will regarding the salvation of sinners. Then the Holy Spirit, by His powerful and heavenly operation, opens their hearts for the Word and its hidden truths. He illuminates their darkened understanding and leads them continually and increasingly into the truth, sanctifying them in the truth of the Word, for the Word is truth. The Spirit is therefore explicitly referred to as "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph. 1:17). The Lord Himself thus instructs and teaches believers regarding the truth.

There are occasions when they are led so deeply into the holy mysteries of God that the manner in which it occurs differs little from what the prophets of the Old and New Testaments experienced. By means of clear, powerful, and lively emotions of ecstasy and delight wrought by the Spirit, their souls can for a season be lifted heavenward, enveloped and illumined by divine and heavenly light, deeply affecting, filling, and surrounding them by the heavenly glow and warmth of God's grace. By the triune God, they can be so elevated above all that is earthly and visible that they enjoy and taste what "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath

prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Such an experience is, however, very special and extraordinary, and not all of God's children either enjoy this in such a measure or do so at all times. This is only the portion of some, and then sometimes only upon their deathbeds or at other special, extraordinary times and occasions.

However, that which we addressed first, namely, the ordinary instruction proceeding from God's Word and by the Holy Spirit, is enjoyed by all true believers without distinction, albeit not always in either the same manner or the same measure, for "all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12:11). This is therefore the spiritual instruction that all true, believing Christians receive from God Himself, and thereby they are appointed by Him as holy prophets and are set apart from the world.

Consider how the Holy Scriptures speak of this. In Isaiah 54:13, it is prophesied regarding this that "all thy children shall be taught of the LORD," and in John 6:45, we read, "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." In 1 John 2:20, 27, it is referred to as having "an unction from the Holy One," whereby they "know all things," so that they have no need "that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth."

This is the first aspect of that which all true Christians, without exception, are partakers of, and which equips them to be spiritual prophets of the most high God. The other aspect that of old belonged to the extraordinary office of prophet consisted in the fact that these holy men of God not only were so taught and instructed by God in an extraordinary manner regarding His holy will and secret counsel, but they were also obligated to reveal and proclaim to men what they themselves had learned from God, thereby instructing them regarding the counsel of God and the way of salvation. Thus, they were to proclaim God's praises to the world in both word and deed, and, if necessary, to confirm their doctrine and confession even by the shedding of their blood or by death itself. In so doing, God would be magnified and glorified by them in all things.

This, however, also applies to all true, believing Christians, for God has called and appointed them to this as His spiritual prophets. As we have heard, He has anointed them with His Holy Spirit so that they prophesy; that is, they declare His holy praises throughout and to all the world, teaching and instructing others regarding the way of salvation. Every Christian, in proportion to the grace and gifts received from the Lord, is therefore called to proclaim the

unsearchable riches of Christ among men, so that the aroma of His knowledge permeates all places. Prophesying in its essence consists in teaching and instructing others regarding the way of salvation, and in proclaiming God's counsel and perfections to the world. This is taught clearly by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:3-4: "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.... He that prophesieth edifieth the church."

Thus, the prophetic office of all true, believing Christians is that they must proclaim continually and ceaselessly the grace and perfections of God and of Christ their savior. By the grace of God, they are to be committed to this to the utmost of their power, knowing that the Lord will continually grant them grace, gifts, and talents to that end. They are to do this:

1. *Orally*. That is, they are to teach all men by word and doctrine, admonishing all men and exhorting them to fear God. The apostle admonishes us to do so in Colossians 3:16, saying, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

In many places in the Word of the Lord, we are exhorted to teach and admonish each other, and thus the duty of all believing Christians is to commit themselves fully to do this by God's grace. As spiritual prophets of the Lord, they must avail themselves of every opportunity to exhort, teach, and instruct their neighbors regarding the ways of the Lord. They are called everywhere to proclaim the name and the praises of the Lord, so that God will be glorified and their neighbor be saved and edified.

Every believing Christian has received from the Lord some talents or gifts to be thus engaged, and is therefore obligated to use them for God's service and to aim for further increase. Oh, that this would be truly acknowledged and believed by many who are called Christians, so that they would demonstrate that they are spiritual prophets who deem it to be their task to instruct and exhort others.

2. By their *walk*. That is, the people of God, and thus true Christians, must continually and ceaselessly prophesy in this manner: by a godly life and walk that is both holy and exemplary. They are called to walk worthy of the calling with which God has called them, letting their light, upon the Savior's command, shine before all men, "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). The prophesying of believers to the world with their godly walk and conversation is exceedingly effective and

essential, for thereby they make visible to all the holiness and divine efficacy of the doctrine of Christ. By so doing, they bear public witness to this doctrine that it is worthy of being received and embraced by all with an upright heart. There is no more efficacious manner of prophesying imaginable than when by faith and in uprightness it is practiced by a holy and godly conversation. By grace, others will be greatly strengthened in their faith, continually edified, and stimulated in the practice of godliness. Sinners and nominal believers are thereby frequently awakened from a state of carelessness and world conformity, are convinced of their hell-worthiness, and, by God's grace, are led to true conversion and to an unfeigned faith.

It is ever true what is expressed in a well-known proverb, that admonitions will arouse us, but exemplary conduct will attract us. Throughout the Holy Scriptures, God's children are therefore earnestly exhorted to conduct themselves in a holy, godly, and exemplary manner. Whoever is accustomed to a diligent reading of God's Word finds an abundance of such exhortations. However, all true and believing Christians are called to prophesy continually not only by their word and conversation, but also by following the example of their great teacher, Christ, and of His holy prophets. When necessity and God's will demand it, they are to prophesy:

3. By their *death* and the *shedding of their blood*. They prophesy in their death when, as they are dying, they confess the name of Christ steadfastly and by God's grace until the very end. Their deathbeds are then transformed into pulpits from which they openly prophesy to all and everyone by instructing, admonishing, and comforting them. God often enables His children to prophesy most extensively and most powerfully upon their deathbeds, and in so doing, they conclude their lives in the service of their God and their beloved savior.

If it be the will of God, God's children must also prophesy by the shedding of their blood; that is, during times of public persecution, when, because of their sound confession, they are persecuted and put to death by the enemies of the truth. They must then, by the grace of God, not count their lives dear, but rather, willingly sacrifice them for the sake of the truth and for the name of Jesus. Many martyrs and holy blood witnesses have preceded them in doing this, who, by the power of God, joyfully received the martyr's crown. For Christ's sake, they permitted their blood to be shed, and in so doing, they publicly glorified God by their death by strengthening the faith of many, as well as encouraging others to believe. It is a well-known fact that the blood of

martyrs has always been the seed of Christ's church, for the church is thereby powerfully built up and proliferated.

God's Word abundantly admonishes and exhorts true believers to prophesy in this way. The Lord Jesus therefore says to believers, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10), and in Luke 14:26, He says, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

The *prophesying* of all true, believing Christians consists in what we have set before you. The instructor, in conformity to the Holy Scriptures, comprehends all of this in these simple words: "that so I may confess His name." The Savior declares in Matthew 10:32, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven," and we hereby see how all true, believing Christians are spiritual prophets, and that this prophetic office and its administration belong to the very essence of Christianity. Without it, no one can claim to be a Christian, no matter how much a person may appropriate that title, trust in it, and boast of it.

Behold, beloved, we have set before you in some detail how all true Christians engage in a holy prophetic ministry and have been anointed by God with His Holy Spirit. They must therefore, in very deed, prove themselves to be such holy prophets. When all of this is not found in truth in a person, he is not a true Christian, although he may be referred to as such, and even thinks highly of his Christianity.

Oh, that God would give all of us eyes to examine ourselves, and that with great earnestness we would endeavor to examine ourselves whether we are indeed such holy *prophets* and such true Christians.

1. Oh, people who are void of this knowledge, can you indeed be such holy prophets? Though some of you are members of our Christian church, is it true that you are nevertheless so unexercised and destitute of God's truth that you are not in the least fit to prophesy; that is, to admonish and instruct your neighbor, and to declare God's praises in the congregation? Rather than being Christian prophets who have been taught and instructed by God's Spirit in your hearts, you have not even an intellectual knowledge of God's Word and its truth, and most have not even a desire to be taught and instructed therein.

Oh, wretched men! Wretched Christians! Woe unto you if you thus continue in your ignorance! God says of you in His Word, "The ox knoweth his

owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider” (Isa. 1:3).

2. Can you truly be Christian prophets when you possess nothing more than an external, natural, and intellectual knowledge of divine truths—a knowledge that you have casually or intermittently acquired, of which you can speak a little, and of which you are also very proud? Such natural knowledge puffs up (1 Cor. 8:1), causing one to think to be someone of great importance who greatly excels others. Perhaps you even think that you understand God’s truths better than your ministers. You therefore take it upon yourself to censure and criticize their sermons, even though you have never been taught inwardly in your hearts by the Holy Spirit. Instead, spiritually you still are utterly blind, and have never in your hearts become acquainted experientially with the true essence and efficacy of a single divine truth. Yes, you may even frequently despise and contradict this internal and spiritual instruction of God’s Spirit, of which God’s Word speaks so abundantly, being of the opinion that it is a mere fantasy and fanaticism, speaking “evil of those things which they know not” (Jude 10).

Oh, my friends, I can only look upon such with intense and heartfelt pity, and it is my heartfelt hope and wish that the Lord Jesus would give them eye salve so that they would see (Rev. 3:18).

3. Can you truly be spiritual prophets if you are not at all engaged during the day in prophesying to the edification of your neighbor? You almost never speak earnestly and consistently of God and divine truths, and you make no effort at all to teach God’s Word and truth to those with whom you interact daily—those who dwell either within your home or outside of your home. You neither stir them up nor exhort them to fear the Lord, but the contrary is true. In your gatherings, you speak only of vain and earthly things, of nothing other than the base things of this world. You are ashamed to speak of spiritual matters in a godly manner, and to admonish and instruct others regarding them. You are fearful that in so doing, you will lose the favor and esteem of men, and that you will be considered a religious zealot. You also do not delight to hear others speak of the things of God, considering it to be grievous and a nuisance. You would rather spend your time in worldly discourse in which you can participate.

Oh, wretched people! What evidence is there that God has anointed you with His Holy Spirit, and that He has transformed you into spiritual prophets and true Christians? Oh, that you would see that you are utterly bereft of all of this.

4. Can you be true prophets if you are accustomed to speak so disparagingly of all spiritual prophesying by Christians within the congregation? Are you of the opinion that this is only the task of ministers, and that individual Christians and uneducated members of the congregation may not engage themselves as such? Do you have the audacity to mock with and to despise those prophetic exercises among us, displaying publicly that you consider it beneath yourself to participate, and that you would rather prevent others from participating as well? Instead, you should thank God sincerely that He has raised up such individual Christians whose desire it is to prophesy openly to the edification and salvation of their neighbors. You ought diligently to frequent such gatherings, praising and recommending them to others.

We instructed you earlier that such activity is founded upon the Word of God, and that all Christians are earnestly commanded by the Lord to be engaged as such. Is there anyone who would dare to contradict this?

Oh, friends, you may think or speak of this as you please, but I believe that when you will be upon your deathbeds and your consciences are awakened, you will then cry out, "Oh, if only I had heeded the exhortations of my minister, and if only I had not opposed him so much!"

I also know what negative opinions some have of a minister being found among such common Christians as they engage in their prophetic exercises, as if this were beneath their status and dignity. However, dear reader, I must say something in this regard. When King David solemnly brought the ark of the Lord into the city, he temporarily laid aside his royal garments and ornaments, and while wearing a sober garment, he walked among the common people before the ark, leaping happily and praising the Lord. His haughty wife then despised and mocked him, being of the opinion that it was unbecoming for him as king to stoop to the level of the common people and dubious women. Hear, however, how he responded to her, and we wish to respond likewise: "And David said unto Michal, It was before the LORD, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel: therefore will I play before the LORD. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour" (2 Sam. 6:21–22).

5. Can you also be true Christians and spiritual prophets of the Lord if you in the least measure do not prophesy with your walk to the honor of God's name and to the edification and benefit of your neighbor? What is the walk of

the vast majority of our nominal Christians? Oh, that the Lord would cause people to see by the discovering light of His Spirit that the walk of many is:

- a. Entirely *worldly and vain*. They live completely as worldly people do, and they subscribe to worldly morals and customs, indulging in pride and in pomp, as well as in worldly entertainment and pleasures. Their entire walk confirms that the world is their God, and they think of nothing other than the things of this world.
- b. Entirely *irreligious*. Their lives are characterized by a complete neglect of public and special religious obligations.
- c. Very *vexing* and *offensive*. They engage in the practice of public sin and ungodliness, and never manifest any contrition or sorrow of heart regarding this.

How few are there whose walk is entirely edifying, exemplary, and godly, and who, by the grace of God, make every effort to glorify God, to edify their neighbor, and to prophesy with their walk!

Oh, that men only would be willing to take all of this into serious consideration, and that the Lord would open their eyes to that end! We are laying all these matters before you so that you will truly examine yourselves. Many will perceive that though they are called Christians, everything that constitutes true Christians is lacking in them. May the Lord grant:

1. That you would perceive how great your privilege is that He invests so much in the uncovering and conversion of your poor souls! Those who have died in their sins have no such privilege.
2. That you would consider this, meditate upon it, and allow yourselves to be convicted of your misery and deficiency!

Regarding you, true, believing Christians, who have been called and appointed by the Lord to be spiritual prophets:

1. That the Lord would but give you light to acknowledge your blessed state and glorious office. With Peter, we say to you, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

2. That the Lord would also, by His light, unveil to you how entirely unfruitful you are in the exercise of your prophetic ministry, and that He would also

unveil to you how neglectful, careless, sluggish, lackluster, and unspiritual you are in the service of the Lord to which you have nevertheless fully committed and surrendered yourself, so that you will find all your delight and salvation in Him. Oh, if we focus on today's Christianity, then how great is the decline in zeal and godliness! Are you able to observe Christians as being the servants and prophets of the most high God, and that they have been anointed by the Holy Spirit to engage in that office? This is indeed not the case, for:

- a. No effort is made to engage in the work of prophesying. One does not strive to do so, and there is no pursuit of the best gifts, the gift of prophecy being the greatest.
- b. In this respect, Christians are almost completely conformed to this world. When they are in the world, they act as the world, they dialogue with the world, and they speak of the world. Generally speaking, they neither have the heart nor the desire to take a stand for God and His cause.
- c. So many are ashamed and manifest the fear of man. One is fearful of displeasing worldly people, and therefore dares not deal with them according to light and duty. Instead, one is unfaithful to Christ and one's confession, being fearful of being hated, reviled, slandered, and mocked. Oh, miserable and wretched Christianity! How greatly the Lord Jesus is presently dishonored by His own! How feeble is their commitment to Him and to His cause! Oh, if only we would truly perceive this!
- d. Even if it occurs that one does prophesy by speaking a word of edification to others, how lukewarm, lackluster, and unspiritual is the manner in which it is done! How often it is done with a lack of impression and reverence! What darkness, blindness, and foolishness are manifested in such prophesying.
- e. What lack of fire and zeal there is in the heart. The prophesying that is done among us is so intellectual, cold, and heartless. How quickly are we empty and exhausted! This only confirms that we are nothing but empty and depleted, confirming that we are but dry fountains that can be pumped empty in but a moment.

What else is the cause of this grievous deficiency than that we live at such great distance from the pulsating artery of Christ's Spirit and grace? That is indeed the problem. This inexpressible lack of the Spirit renders us so very

empty, barren, and fruitless. Oh, that the Lord Jesus would uncover who we are and give us eye salve! We then would:

1. be deeply ashamed and humble ourselves before the Lord regarding our guilt and lack of spirituality;
2. earnestly run to that fountain filled with the blood and grace of Jesus, so that we might repeatedly be washed and cleansed in it; and
3. cast ourselves fully at the feet of our chief prophet and teacher, and by praying earnestly and believingly, we would prevail upon Him to grant us light, the Spirit, and life.

We would thus truly learn to prophesy and to be faithful to our spiritual state, office, and gifts. May the Lord grant this to us! Amen.

The Priestly Office of the Christian

LORD'S DAY 12

But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God.

—ISAIAH 61:6

Question 31: Why is He called Christ, that is anointed?

Answer: Because He is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; and to be our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body, has redeemed us, and makes continual intercession with the Father for us; and also to be our eternal King, who governs us by His word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation, He has purchased for us.

Question 32: But why art thou called a Christian?

Answer: Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him; and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards reign with Him eternally, over all creatures.

Concerning the ministry of shadows instituted by God in the Old Testament, there was not only a high priest, but there also were other or common priests who were subordinate to the high priest and colabored with him as their common head in the service of the temple. The high priest typified the Lord Jesus, the great and true high priest of His believing people, who by one offering has perfected forever all who are saved and sanctified by Him (Heb. 10:14). The other, common priests, who were fully subordinate to the high priest, typified

God's children, and thus true believers. The high priest Jesus Christ is their head, upon whom they fully rely and under whose auspices they administer a spiritual priesthood. With God's help and gracious blessing, we will open up this truth in greater detail.

We are presently engaged in considering the name Christian—a name we all bear in conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ, for we claim and confess that He is our head and king, and since our youth we have all been designated as Christians.

In Question 32, the instructor teaches that in order to bear this name in truth, we not only must be truly united to the Lord Jesus by faith and be partakers of His spiritual anointing, but we also must be one with Him in the administration of three very precious, holy, and glorious offices. All Christians, and thus all believers, are called by God to exercise these offices in Christ their head, being anointed and qualified by the Holy Spirit to that end; that is, they are called to be prophets, priests, and kings.

By way of these three offices, true Christians are completely set apart from a world that “lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). Without the true exercise and actual administration of these three holy and spiritual offices, no one can be a Christian, although he may be referred to as such, for it is not merely the name, but one's actions that give someone his identity.

In our previous sermons, we addressed the spiritual union of all believers with Christ their head and their being partakers of His holy anointing. We then considered the prophetic office of believers and observed how all true Christians, according to the Holy Scriptures, must be holy and spiritual prophets, who, by His Word and Spirit, are taught and instructed by God Himself in the way of salvation. We considered furthermore that they must walk among men as such prophets of the most high God, and that continually and everywhere, they must by God's grace prophesy before the world and glorify God both in word and deed.

In like manner, we now wish to focus your attention upon the priestly office of true Christians or believers. According to God's Word, they not only are called to be spiritual and holy prophets, but they are also called to be spiritual and holy *priests*, who, according to the teaching of the instructor in Question 32, must present themselves “a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him.”

To correctly address this holy ministry of God's people, which displays true Christianity, we will say nothing more or less than what God teaches regarding this in His Holy Word. Oh, would that men laid aside their blind prejudices and

yielded up and submitted themselves to God’s Holy Word! The Holy Scriptures say, regarding those who refuse to hearken to God’s Word and testimony, but oppose it, that they do so because there is no light in them, and that they shall therefore be driven to eternal darkness (Isa. 8:20–22). May the Lord, by His Spirit, impress this upon the hearts of men, and may He, for His holy name’s sake, make me, His servant, fit for the preaching of His Word.

We will consider these matters in the following order:

1. We will show from God’s Word that all believers, and thus all true Christians, are all appointed to a holy *priestly* ministry, and must accordingly be spiritual *priests*.
2. We will take a more in-depth look at this priestly office, and consider the character and nature of this holy ministry.

That all true Christians, and thus all believers, are spiritual priests, and are set before us in the Holy Scriptures as such, is confirmed by several passages that we will set before you, and we exhort you to consider and read them attentively.

Let us first consider Isaiah 61:6, which is a prophecy regarding God’s people, that is, the believers of the New Testament era. Here they are addressed as priests: “But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God.” Consider carefully, beloved, that all believers are here designated as priests of the Lord. This is not a meaningless title, but rather, they are so called because they really and truly are spiritual priests who conduct themselves accordingly.

Consider also 1 Peter 2:9, where the apostle addresses believers, saying, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” The entire body of believers is here set before us as a royal priesthood, for every member of this body is a spiritual priest.

Consider also Revelation 1:6, a doxology wherein the people of God, the true believers, are set before us to the glory of their precious redeemer and savior, who “hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.” Let us now turn to Revelation 20:6, where it is prophesied regarding the Lord’s believing people that in the last days “they shall be priests of God and of Christ.”

These quoted passages of the Word of God make it incontrovertibly clear that every believing and true Christian is a holy and spiritual priest who is appointed to a truly priestly ministry. Without it, he can in no wise be a true

Christian, however much he may wish to be designated as such, and erroneously boasts and trusts that he is.

Dear reader, consider therefore carefully that all who wish to be Christians must, according to God's Word, also be spiritual priests. You must therefore, by the grace of God, manifest yourself as such, and otherwise, you have no right to bear the name Christian, and you may not be designated as such. This is therefore an obvious truth that cannot be controverted by anyone who believes God's Word.

Let us now proceed to consider more carefully the nature and character of this priestly ministry of all believers, as well as what God's Word sets before us as the requisites of such a ministry. Consider all of this diligently, for I will not make a single claim unless I can prove it doctrinally and literally from the Bible.

Do not think that God's true and believing people are priests in the same fashion as were the typological priests of the Old Testament. Do not think that this is so by any means, for following the death of the Lord Jesus, who is the true high priest, there neither can nor may be any physical priests in the literal sense of the word as they functioned during the Old Testament dispensation. Christ, "by one offering...hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14), and in so doing, He has eternally fulfilled and abolished the entire Levitical ceremonial priesthood.

Moreover, this priesthood of true Christians is of an entirely different nature than that of Levi in the Old Testament. It is far more excellent and glorious, for this ministry is not according to the letter, but rather, according to the Spirit. Believers are designated as priests in the same manner as they were designated as prophets in a previous sermon. According to their internal state of grace, and by virtue of their genuine union with God in Christ, they receive from the Holy Spirit a holy and spiritual ministry that shows a great resemblance to the typological priestly ministry of the Old Testament. Therefore, they also resemble in some measure their great and true high priest, Christ, and accordingly, they are therefore called Christians.

Let us provide you with some clarity regarding this truth.

The priests of the Old Testament had to be completely perfect and flawless as to each member of their bodies, and therefore, they could not contain a single blemish. The Lord God expressly commanded this in Leviticus 21:17: "Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God."

This is also true for God's people, the true Christians. As holy and spiritual priests, if they are to be permitted to execute the high and holy office of being spiritual priests, they must be completely perfect and holy, and thus free of the least sin or imperfection. This is true for all true believers. By their union by faith with the Lord Jesus, they are all completely holy and perfect *in Him*, for it is *in Christ* that they, by justification and sanctification, are absolved and delivered from all their sins, so that before God they neither have the least sin nor are able to commit any.

Consider that the Holy Scriptures teach this, for in Colossians 2:10, Paul says to all believers, "And ye are complete in him, which is the head." In Christ, believers are born again unto being *new creatures*, created after God's image in true righteousness and holiness, and to the extent that they are thus born again, renewed, and re-created in Christ, believers no longer can sin, for as to their renewal and rebirth in Christ, they are no longer under the law but under grace, and have thus died to sin in order to live unto God in the Spirit. The apostle John testifies of this in 1 John 3:9, saying, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

Nevertheless, believers are, and will remain in this life, always in bondage to a body of sin and death, and consequently they sin daily and every moment. This in no way takes away from the fact that in Christ they are completely perfect, holy, and just, and according to their renewed and regenerated inner man, sin no longer has dominion over them. The apostle teaches this in Romans 6:14, saying, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

Thus all believers, that is, all true Christians, are spiritual priests unto the Lord, and in Christ they are completely holy and perfect, and therefore without any sin or spiritual blemish. According to the testimony that Christ Himself gives of them, they are free from even the least blemish, for He says in Song of Solomon 4:7, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." In the Holy Scriptures, they therefore bear the name perfect ones. Paul says regarding all true Christians and believers, "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect" (1 Cor. 2:6). In Philippians 3:15, he says to God's people, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded," and in Colossians 1:28, he testifies, "...warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

The priests of the Old Testament alone enjoyed the privilege of appearing before the countenance of the Lord in the sanctuary, there to perform their holy ministry. None of the common people were admitted, for upon the penalty of death, the Lord expressly forbade them to enter. The Lord's command to Moses in Numbers 3:10 was, "And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death." The priests were therefore called the *Cohanim*, that is, servants of God, or those who *approach* unto God, for they were daily obliged to draw near unto the Lord. Read what is written regarding this in Exodus 19:22, for God there says, "And let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves."

This is true spiritually as well in regard to all true and believing Christians. They all, without distinction, are privileged and called to draw near unto God as holy priests in order to serve Him in His sanctuary. They all, by faith and repentance, are called out of darkness into God's marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

They are united to Christ by faith, and for all of them, He is the way in and by whom they draw near to God to know Him and to enjoy true fellowship with Him (John 14:6). Prior to their conversion and their union with Christ, they were utter strangers of this divine life. They were and continued to live entirely without God in the world. When, however, the Lord Jesus, by His grace, was pleased to reveal Himself to them by His Word and Spirit, He sweetly conquered their souls and brought them fully out of a state of alienation to follow Him. Having thus been united to Him by faith, they who were utterly alienated from God were by Him brought near to God and His blessed communion. Paul speaks thus to believers in Ephesians 2:13, saying, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

In and through the Lord Jesus, they have been translated into a state of friendship and communion with God—the God toward whom they formerly were hostile and of whose glory they were ignorant. However, in Christ, who is God's express image (Heb. 1:3), they now spiritually behold, know, cherish, enjoy, serve, and glorify this God, doing so continually by drawing near unto Him in His sanctuary to have communion with Him through the blood of Christ. Paul teaches this clearly in Hebrews 10:9, saying to God's believing people, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus..." In Hebrews 4:16, he admonishes and exhorts believers as spiritual priests to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that [they] may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

This drawing near unto God in Christ in order to have communion with Him is what David has in mind when he testifies regarding the Lord's believing people and their salvation, "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts" (Ps. 65:4). Asaph refers to this in Psalm 73:18, saying, "But it is good for me to draw near to God." This could also be translated, "It is good for me to be near unto God"; that is, as a holy and spiritual priest, it is good for me to draw near unto God.

It is therefore God Himself who, in Christ Jesus, has chosen and appointed all believers, and thus all true Christians, to be spiritual priests so that they continually draw near to Him in His sanctuary. Only believers, as holy and spiritual priests, enjoy such a glorious portion and privilege, and they do so in distinction from an unholy, unrepentant, and unbelieving world that dwells in the kingdom of darkness, in utter alienation from God. For this world, there is neither any drawing near unto God at all, nor is it able to do so. In light of His infinite holiness and justice, God is, outside of Christ, for all sinners a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29) and everlasting burnings (Isa. 33:14) with whom no one can dwell. As long as men continue to live for themselves and apart from Christ, there will remain the greatest possible separation between God and their souls, and they will remain utterly "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them" (Eph. 4:18).

When the priests of the Old Testament thus drew near to God, they were also obliged to engage in the ministry of His sanctuary, doing so daily and without ceasing, day and night. In Numbers 18:7, we read regarding the Lord's command to Aaron, "Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the veil; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift."

All true Christians are holy and spiritual priests also in this sense. They are thus not only to draw near unto God continually, but also, in Christ and by His Spirit, to serve Him ceaselessly in soul and body, keeping their charge in His house and sanctuary. Therefore, we read throughout the Holy Scriptures of the service of believers, whereby they, in the Spirit, ceaselessly serve and obey their Lord. Paul therefore says to believers in Philippians 3:3, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus." Revelation 7:14–15 testifies of God's people that they "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," and that they are "before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple." Believers are therefore emphatically referred to as the ministers of God, as, for instance, in the passage

quoted earlier: "But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God" (Isa. 61:6). In John 12:26, the Lord Jesus says regarding His believing people, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be."

Believers perform their ministry entirely in the Spirit and through Christ, and it consists in a holy submission and obedience to God and His commandments that is both internal and external. They are continually equipped for this by the Holy Spirit, and continually they draw by faith from the Lord Jesus all their strength, grace, and light. Only in such a holy and spiritual ministry unto God do believers find all their salvation. This constitutes all their delight, all their salvation, and all their desire, and whatever militates against this, they hate with a very intense, sincere, and spiritual hatred. They know of no other joy or delight than that which they find "in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). As to the root of the matter, they persevere therein steadfastly and unchangeably, for they have surrendered themselves fully to this holy ministry of God in Christ Jesus. As spiritual priests, they have fully and eternally committed themselves to do nothing other throughout all eternity than to serve the triune God, and to forsake fully the service of the world, sin, and Satan. They continually say with the psalmist, and it remains their abiding choice, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4). Paul very earnestly admonishes believing Christians to be thus engaged, saying, "My beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

The priests of the Old Testament had to be continually engaged in bringing sacrifices to the Lord in the sanctuary. As taught in the Holy Scriptures, and particularly in the books of Moses, they had to perform all the sacrifices required by the law, and this was their most prominent task and service before the face of the Lord. This is again identical to the spiritual calling of all Christians. Their work and ministry consists pre-eminently and entirely in that, as holy and spiritual priests, they ceaselessly sacrifice unto the Lord their God, for the apostle Peter teaches in 1 Peter 2:5 that he desires them to be "built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

Let us now consider what these sacrifices are that believers, as holy and spiritual priests, offer up continually unto the Lord. If you desire to have this affirmed in detail from the Word of God, listen attentively!

1. God's children sacrifice themselves fully with soul and body unto God the Lord by surrendering themselves fully and eternally to Him, that is, by committing themselves to His service—or, to use the language of the instructor, to “present [themselves] a living sacrifice of thankfulness to [the Lord].” In 2 Corinthians 8:5, Paul testifies regarding the people of Macedonia that they “first gave their own selves to the Lord.” He also exhorts the believing Romans that they are to present their bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).

2. As often as they receive grace from the Lord, they offer up unto Him a meek and humble heart, and a spirit that is broken and contrite due to their sins. Such is the testimony of David, the man after God's heart: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17).

3. Being continually equipped for this by His Spirit, they also continually offer unto the Lord their God external and internal sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving for the benefits, grace, and blessings they uninterruptedly receive from Him. The hearts of the Lord's people are frequently stirred up to acknowledge, praise, and glorify their God. There are holy and spiritual stirrings within them that thus motivate them to say with the psalmist: “Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High.... Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me” (Ps. 50:14, 23).

4. Believing and true Christians, as spiritual priests, also ceaselessly bring unto the Lord the sacrifices of fervent supplications and prayers, with which they continually appear before the throne of grace. Christ functions here as the Altar of Incense, upon which believers continually offer their prayers (Rev. 8:3). David testifies of this in Psalm 141:2. Here a believing child of God says, “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”

5. As spiritual priests and according to their means, believers also bring sacrifices of all manner of works of charity and generosity, especially to the poor members of Christ's body. Paul exhorts the people of the Lord to do so in Hebrews 13:16, saying, “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

6. Yes, what is even greater is that believing and true Christians, when a good confession of faith and the name of Jesus are at stake, by the grace of their God and savior also willingly offer up their blood and life to the Lord. Paul testifies of this regarding himself: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6).

Finally, the priests of the Old Testament were also obliged to pray for the people, and upon God's command, they were also to bless the people by the laying on of hands. All true, believing Christians are holy and spiritual priests also in this respect. It does by no means suffice to offer up prayers and supplications for themselves and their own needs, but they also continually are under obligation to do so for others.

1. They must do so for their fellow believers and Christians, as Paul exhorts the Ephesians, saying that they are to watch "thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (6:18).

2. They must continually pray for their governments, for all in authority who have been placed over them, and for all people without distinction. Hear how earnestly the same apostle exhorts the people of God to do so: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

3. As spiritual priests, believers must also continually pray for their enemies and persecutors, for they are commanded to do so by their Lord and savior: "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. 5:44).

4. God's children, and thus believers, must as spiritual priests continually and ceaselessly bless each and every person by wishing and desiring that God's blessing and grace would be their portion, thereby manifesting their love for everyone's salvation, as well as their spiritual and temporal well-being. Solomon testifies regarding God's people, "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Prov. 11:25). God's children are emphatically and earnestly exhorted to do so in Romans 12:14: "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not"; and in 1 Peter 3:9: "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." Paul also testifies

this regarding himself: "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it" (1 Cor. 4:12).

Dear reader, you have observed—that we all by the light received from the Lord would see it!—how all true and believing Christians have been vested with a holy and a priestly ministry, and that they all are spiritual priests of the most high God, as well as what constitutes this priestly ministry. We have extracted every component of our presentation from the Word of God and have said nothing for which we did not provide emphatic proofs from Scripture. No arguments can be advanced against this—except we deliberately wish to contradict God, His Holy Word, and the eternal truth. But if anyone were to engage himself in doing this, he would thereby seal his own perdition, and his damnation would be just.

All that we have addressed and brought into focus in both this and our previous sermon belongs to the essence of being a true and believing Christian. If these matters are therefore not truly, essentially, and fundamentally found in a person, he cannot be a Christian, however much he may be called a Christian and boasts of and puts his trust in this mere title. That which Paul once said regarding the Jews in Romans 2:28–29, we must also say regarding Christians: "For he is not a [Christian], which is one outwardly"; that is, he who bears this name publicly and is considered to be such. "But he is a [Christian], which is one inwardly"; that is, he that possesses the power and truth of Christianity in his heart, "whose praise is not of men, but of God."

However, in what we have considered today, it is a matter of specific concern for me that you, my readers, all consider yourselves to be Christians, and wish to be viewed and acknowledged as such. You cannot tolerate being shown from God's Word, from your state, and from your conversation that before God you are not truly a Christian, and that you must first repent and believe in order to become Christians, and that otherwise you must eternally go lost.

We do very much want to consider and acknowledge you to be Christians. Nevertheless, all that we have proven and demonstrated from the Word of God as being the essence of a true Christian, both previously as well as in this sermon, truly has to function and be found in you. You must indeed be such Christians as they are depicted and described for us in the Bible. If, however, your life is not such, and if, as to the root of the matter, you do not prove yourself to be such a person in word and deed, you are only a Christian in name and by no means one in reality. After all, how would it benefit you if you had the

name that you live and are nevertheless utterly dead? Such was the testimony of the Lord Jesus regarding the congregation of Sardis: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. 3:1).

Therefore, tell me once more regarding the hope that is in you, and give an account of it before God's omniscient eye. You who wish to be called Christians, are you all truthfully and in very deed such holy and spiritual priests as we have abundantly and clearly shown you from the Word of God? We have shown you that all true Christians are to be such priests in imitation of Christ their head and great high priest, for as Christians, they are named after Him. Are all the elements of this spiritual priesthood that we have identified in our preaching today also truly to be found in all of you? Can others by your conversation truly determine that you are such holy and spiritual priests unto the Lord, and can we also say truthfully to you what Peter said to the Christians of his day: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood"? Is this glorious and blessed promise also applicable to you: "But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God" (Isa. 61:6)?

First, are you thus completely holy and perfect in Christ Jesus, having been truly united to Him by faith? Have you truly become new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), having been born again as incorruptible seed "by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23)? Is there no longer any sin or unrighteousness that has dominion over you, but have you all in Christ and by His grace died unto sin in order to live unto God? Is this evident from your entire conduct and conversation?

Second, have you truly drawn near unto God as holy and spiritual priests? Have you learned to know, cherish, serve, and glorify this most exalted and eternal Jehovah as He is in Christ, His express image? Is your life characterized by a very intimate friendship with your God in and through Christ, and thus by a holy and spiritual union? Have you chosen and embraced Him as your portion to all eternity? Do you thus, by faith, continually maintain fellowship with the Lord, and are you able to say with Asaph, "But it is good for me to draw near to God" (Ps. 73:28)? Is the opposite also true, namely, that it is your greatest grief and sorrow to live in alienation from God and from the Lord Jesus?

Third, do you therefore find all your desire, joy, and delight exclusively in the service of the triune God? Is this service, more than anything else, supremely delightful and precious to you? Do you find all your spiritual bliss by glorifying no one but God and in keeping all of His commandments, and to that end, do you continually submit yourself to the work of the Holy Spirit, who thereby

enables you to do so? Do you have a heartfelt hatred to all that pertains to the service of the world and of sin, and do you desire increasingly to deny yourself in all things in order to live unto God alone?

Fourth, as spiritual priests, are you engaged daily in bringing all the holy sacrifices? Are you by grace thus continually offering yourself with soul and body unto the Lord? Are you continually bringing Him the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit? Is it your joy and delight continually to render unto Him the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for all His grace and benefits; to engage in heartfelt prayer, fervent supplications, and the giving of holy alms; and to do the works of love? Yes, would you consider yourself to be supremely blessed if you were even to be permitted to give your life unto the Lord as a sacrifice, and to shed your blood for Him and His holy name?

Finally, do you belong to those who as spiritual priests continually and ceaselessly pray for others? Are you continually praying and supplicating on behalf of God's people, for your minister, for my sacred ministry, for the unconverted among us and in all other places, for your government, for the nation, and for the church? Are you also praying for your enemies and for those who hate and persecute you? Is it true that you neither curse nor speak harshly to anyone, but rather, that your heart and mouth are continually filled with words of blessing? Are you always engaged in seeking the salvation and well-being of your fellow human beings?

Beloved, what is your reply to all of this? You need to respond before the Lord. If all these fruits are not truly to be found in you and rooted in your hearts, you are then by no means holy and spiritual priests, nor are you servants of the Lord, and consequently you are not true Christians. You may bear this name, and boast and trust in it, foolishly imagining that you are good Christians and that you will be saved. However, in the end, you will most certainly be deceived. Neither the name of Christian nor your stubborn notion that you are good Christians will be able to help you in the least, for all of these things are but vain fig leaves and broken reeds that will not render you the least advantage or protection "in the time of your tribulation" (Judg. 10:14).

May it please the Lord to impress this sermon with power upon the hearts of men so that, thereby truly being confronted with themselves, they would in a timely fashion become aware of their wretched self-deceit and earnestly begin to yearn to become true Christians.

As far as you are concerned, true believers, may you endeavor by the Spirit, merited by the grace of Jesus:

1. To acquaint yourselves truly as to what your spiritual state and priestly office is, for this is absolutely essential. It is, after all, not sufficient to believe only in general terms that one is a Christian, but rather, one must correctly comprehend all that this encompasses. Ignorance regarding this is exceedingly harmful. Satan is engaged to keep God's children blind regarding this and to make them doubt their grace continually, thereby rendering them entirely unfit to perform their duties as spiritual priests. Therefore, seek to obtain true knowledge regarding your holy office. To that end, read God's Word frequently with quiet and spiritual attention, and pray much for the illumination of the Spirit of the Lord.

2. To strive to acquire a true and thorough knowledge of your utter wretchedness before the Lord. You will then learn how very little you are inclined to abide in His holy temple and to serve Him there; how little you have learned regarding the fulfillment of the obligations of this, your spiritual office; and how little you are earnestly engaged in doing so and in laboring daily to achieve this. Do not rest until you are convicted of this to such a degree that you would humble yourselves before the Lord your God with holy shame and true spiritual contrition. Would that you might confess to Him your utter wretchedness and that you would make much use of His precious grace in Christ unto the pardon and sanctification of your souls.

3. To strive also to acquire a true knowledge as to the only way you can be priests unto the Lord, that is, by being united to the Lord Jesus and by the anointing of His Holy Spirit. That will teach you that there is nothing in yourself, and that you are unable to do anything of yourself, but that you can do so alone in Christ, your head and savior. He says regarding this, "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Therefore:

- learn to acknowledge Him spiritually as your great high priest who has shed His precious blood for you, and "that is passed into the heavens" (Heb. 4:14) to anoint you continually to be spiritual priests; and
- learn to cleave unto Him by faith and daily to make use of His grace.

May the Lord grant grace unto His people and give them a heart to pray much against this unholy, careless, and nominal Christianity that lives among us. May it all be to the end that nominal Christians would obtain of Him repentance unto life. Amen.

The Kingly Office of the Christian

LORD'S DAY 12

And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.

—REVELATION 1:6a

Question 32: But why art thou called a Christian?

Answer: Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him: and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life: and afterwards reign with Him eternally, over all creatures.

A most remarkable matter is recorded in Revelation 4:10, where we read of the twenty-four elders in heaven who cast their crowns before the throne. Whoever these twenty-four elders may be, one thing is certain: we are to consider them as elect believers who, here upon earth, were holy servants of God for the benefit of His people and who, presently in heaven, have been perfectly glorified to all eternity. We are told regarding these blessed and holy souls that they cast their crowns before the throne. This throne represents God in His infinite majesty and glory, by which He rules and governs as the supreme king of heaven and earth. It is before this throne, before this exalted and holy God, that the twenty-four elders cast their crowns. We know that crowns signify royal majesty and glory, for they are worn upon the heads only of the kings and princes of this earth. These crowns are thus symbolic of the royal majesty, power, magnificence, and glory with which the twenty-four elders have been vested in heaven, and in that capacity, they rule with God as kings to all eternity. These crowns, symbolizing their royal power and glory, they cast fully and with the utmost willingness before Jehovah God, thereby affirming that they received this power and glory exclusively from Him. It is therefore their delight

to return this power and glory to Him, thereby acknowledging that in and of themselves they neither possess anything nor have any capabilities. Rather, it all testifies of God's glory, honor, and power.

Consider, however, that as the twenty-four elders in heaven are wearing crowns upon their heads as symbols of the royal majesty, power, and glory they have received from God, likewise all believers here upon earth, even the least among them, have been vested and called by God to this lofty and glorious position of honor. As holy and spiritual kings, they are to wear crowns of divine and eternal glory, and like the twenty-four elders, they are to cast their crowns before God's throne while here upon earth. With God's help and by His grace, we wish to consider and expound for you in greater detail this most glorious and precious truth.

On several occasions, we have preached about the precious name of Christian—a name by which we are all called and by which we permit ourselves to be identified with the savior, Jesus Christ. In our exposition, we are following the instructor's answer to Question 32 of the Catechism, in which two matters are addressed that belong to the essence of being a true and believing Christian:

1. There is by faith an internal bond of fellowship with the Lord Jesus and His spiritual anointing.
2. There is the administration or execution of these three holy and glorious offices, that is, of being spiritual prophets, priests, and kings. All true and believing Christians are united as such by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His holy anointing.

In our first sermon, we addressed this spiritual and true union of believers with Christ and His anointing. In our second sermon, we addressed the prophetic office, and in our third sermon, the priestly office of all true, believing Christians. It now remains in our fourth sermon to address in detail for you the *kingly* office of believers; that is, this illustrious, holy, and glorious ministry of being spiritual kings—an office to which all true and believing Christians have also been called and appointed by God in Christ their head.

Oh, that the Lord would deem me worthy and would grant grace to address you in such a manner that you would be stirred up and motivated to aspire most earnestly after such a blessed and glorious ministry, and that you would turn to the great King Jesus to receive this royal crown from His gracious hand!

We will:

1. demonstrate from clear passages of Scripture that all true and believing Christians are set before us as spiritual kings; and
2. consider their illustrious kingly office in greater detail, doing so entirely from the Word of God.

Regarding the first, we can observe in several passages that God's believing people are described and set before us as spiritual kings. In Revelation 1:6, believers unitedly praise and glorify the Savior, saying that He "hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father." The same is expressed in Revelation 5:10. Here, believers also praise the Lord Jesus, saying, "[Thou]...hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." Consider also the testimony of Psalm 45:9 regarding the Lord Jesus and His believing people: "Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir." Behold, every believer is set before us here as a spiritual king who stands at the right hand of the great King Jesus.

Consider also the glorious testimony of the prophet Isaiah, in which he addresses God's people, and thus all true believers, saying, "Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God" (Isa. 62:3). In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter says to the Lord's people, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood."

Behold, dear reader, all these passages of God's Word affirm clearly that believing Christians are spiritual kings who have been vested with a holy royal ministry and dignity by which they are fully distinguished from all other men of this world. Beloved, is this not very special? Have the majority of you ever considered that kings and queens are presently to be found everywhere among us? Have you considered that there are others, such wretched and insignificant people who are despised as such by the world, but who, if they fear God and serve Him in truth, are persons who, by God's grace, are much more prominent, renowned, and illustrious than the greatest sovereigns, monarchs, and kings of the world? And yet, this is the truth according to God's Word. Therefore, whenever you have the privilege of encountering or addressing a child of God, a true Christian, however wretched, poor, insignificant, or unpretentious such a person may be by worldly standards, you are in the presence of a monarch or a king of the entire world, whom even the greatest kings and monarchs of the world must serve. This is indeed the Lord's promise to His children: "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee" (Isa. 60:10).

Most of you indeed have not truly recognized God's children for what they are, or you would have deeply respected them long ago and magnified the glory of the Lord that rests upon them. You would have received every one of them into your homes in the name of the Lord Jesus with the greatest love and esteem, and would have said to them what Laban said to the servant of Abraham: "Come in, thou blessed of the LORD; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house" (Gen. 24:31).

Let us consider and examine in more detail the illustrious regal glory of all true believers. No one should entertain the notion that all true Christians are kings in the same sense as is true for the monarchs and kings of this earth. This is not what is meant in the least. But pertaining to true Christians, it is true for them as was true for their great King Christ, their head, who said regarding Himself, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Likewise, the kingdom of all true Christians and believers is also not of this world. If their kingdom were of this world, and if they were such kings as are the kings of this world, then with all their greatness and glory they would be as wretched and miserable as they are now supremely blissful and eternally blessed and happy. Rather, as to its worthiness and glory, the royal office of true believers infinitely exceeds that of the kings of the earth, for this royal office is entirely spiritual, heavenly, and everlasting.

Believers are holy and spiritual kings in like fashion as they are prophets and priests, namely, by their internal state of grace. Through the Holy Spirit, and by their union with God in Christ, they have been vested with a ministry and worthiness that shows a strong resemblance not only between them and the kings of the earth, but also between them and their great king and head, the Lord Jesus Christ. We will now expound this truth in greater detail from the Word of God.

First, customarily, the kings of the earth are of very prominent descent. There have been some kings who were of very low and common descent, such as Saul, David, and others. Nevertheless, kings are generally of royal and prominent descent, whereby they greatly excel other men. However, believers infinitely excel the kings and monarchs of this world, for they are all of such high, divine, and heavenly descent that they neither truly know nor understand a thousandth part of their excellent glory and descent. The Holy Scriptures testify thus regarding believers, declaring that they "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). The greatest

king of this world is but a wretched worm of the earth, born of insignificant dust and ashes. However, true Christians have their origin and descent entirely in the adorable triune God, of whom, through whom, and unto whom are all things.

Oh, eternal, incomprehensible, and glorious truth! Their birth and descent proceed from the heart and bosom of Jehovah God, the Father, by the operation of the Holy Spirit and in the Lord Jesus Christ. By this exalted, divine, holy, and heavenly descent, believers have Jehovah God, the creator and king of heaven and the earth, as their Father. By the Spirit of adoption, who dwells in them and testifies with their spirits that they are the children of God, they cry out, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). However, just as believers thus acknowledge God, the supreme King of heaven and earth, to be their Father, God likewise acknowledges them also as His children, as His sons and daughters, saying regarding them: "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?" (Jer. 31:20).

Given their divine and heavenly descent, consider what glorious names are given to all God's children in the Holy Scriptures! They are referred to as the king's daughters (Ps. 45:13) and the daughters of a prince (Song 7:1). By virtue of this holy and heavenly descent from God, all believers are most intimately related to the only begotten Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who upon His garments and thigh bears the name "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16). He is therefore not ashamed to call them His brethren (Heb. 2:11), to "be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29), and to acknowledge them as His sisters, His bride, His beloved, and His friends. All of this could be demonstrated and affirmed by numerous passages of Holy Scripture.

Furthermore, God's children, by having been spiritually begotten of God, are most intimately related to all the holy kings and queens who are in heaven before God's throne: the holy angels, the four beasts, the twenty-four elders, and all the spirits of the just made perfect. These are all to be considered as the generation and spiritual kinship of believers, as they are all their true brothers and sisters in the Spirit. Consider how clearly the apostle Paul teaches this in Hebrews 12:22–23, presenting God's believing people in their glory and most precious bliss, saying, "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn." All believers, as holy and spiritual kings, are members of a most illustrious family, and are of a descent that is most exalted, divine, and heavenly.

Second, the kings of the earth are generally not only of lofty and exalted descent, but they also have a character that is lofty and dignified. True kings must be elevated above the common people by their character as well as by lofty descent. They must excel their fellow men as the sun excels the stars. They must do so in all manner of royal virtues, such as being of a noble disposition, godly, wise, good, righteous, and generous. The land whose king differs from this is to be pitied. The wise Solomon therefore says, "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child.... Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles" (Eccl. 10:16–17). The king's lofty descent and all his noble and royal virtues shine forth in such a manner that the nation and its subjects should expect nothing but good.

Let us now apply this to God's true, believing people. How truly applicable this is to them. They are the beloved recipients of God's grace by their holy, lofty, royal, and divine descent, even as kings excel the world in all true virtue and holiness. If we were now to consider every single one of the holy virtues and propensities of God's people as the Holy Scriptures set them before us, I would be unable to achieve this within the allotted hour. Let me therefore briefly say that the Lord's true and believing people are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Consequently, they are, in the essence of their hearts, gifted with all true heavenly virtue and spiritual holiness, so that flowing from their love for virtue, they are as noble kings entirely elevated above all that is of this earth. Since here on earth they already despise all vice and carnal vanity, they lead lives that are oriented toward heaven.

Paul therefore writes regarding believers that "our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). The entire pathway of a believer is nothing other than, and cannot be anything other than, a continual progression and increase from virtue to virtue and from strength to strength (Ps. 84:7). Since God has called them to glory and virtue (2 Pet 1:3), it must therefore necessarily be that while the entire world wallows ever more deeply in vice, God's believing people, on the contrary, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, are obligated to exercise themselves increasingly in royal and heavenly virtues. They who have been sanctified then continue to be sanctified, so that "if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise," they "think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

It is because of this royal nobility and holy virtuousness, and thus because of this divine, spiritual, and excellent nature of believers, distinguishing them from the world as much as light is distinct from darkness, that the Lord Jesus

rightfully compares them to the extraordinary, noble, and royal horses of Pharaoh's chariots (Song 1:9). Believers are depicted even more gloriously in Zechariah 10:3, for there they are set forth "as his goodly horse in the battle"; that is, as the parade horses of the majesty and glory of God, the great king.

Oh, how glorious are these matters! What mortal eyes can behold them and what tongue can articulate them? This, however, is not all that is to be said. Let us, therefore, proceed to consider the particulars of the royal dignity and ministry of believers.

Third, the kings of this earth are by their lofty descent and royal character also adorned with dignity, luster, majesty, and glory. By earthly standards, there is no greater glory or luster than that of kings, for they are an earthly reflection of the glory and luster of God as the supreme king among men, and by virtue of their majesty and glory are greatly distinguished from all other men. The Holy Scriptures therefore make such abundant mention of the glory of kings. Consider Revelation 21:24, for there we read that the kings of the earth "do bring their glory and honour into it," that is, into the city of God, the New Jerusalem. Regarding the great King Solomon, we read in Matthew 6:28–29, "Consider the lilies of the field...even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

If, however, we apply all of this to God's true, believing people, we must testify that all of the luster, splendor, majesty, and glory of earthly monarchs and kings as compared to theirs is no more than dust, ashes, and dung. If we now proceeded to consider in detail the glory of God's believing children, and if the Lord were to give us sufficient light, we would not know where to end. We would lose ourselves in the glory of believers as in a bottomless and immeasurable ocean. The Holy Scriptures bear such abundant testimony to this glory of believers that in saying but a little of it, we would not even know where to begin and where to end. Therefore, for lack of time, we will merely say a word in general regarding this matter, for God the Lord Himself testifies of this when He addresses His believing people, saying, "And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezek. 16:14). Beloved, what a glory is this indeed for God's people, and thus for true Christianity! It is "a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it" (Rev. 2:17). It is a glory of which we cannot see a thing except in the light of the shining Morning Star and the sun of righteousness. This light is therefore fully obscured for the entire world, and God's people, the sister and bride of the Lord Jesus, are "a garden

inclosed... a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (Song 4:12). To the world at large, God’s children, by their talk and walk display some brilliant beams of this glory by which “the king’s daughter is all glorious within” (Ps. 45:13).

The world, however, being entirely blind and unholy, neither sees nor knows anything of this, but has a very low esteem for God’s people, and greatly hates and despises them. The Holy Scriptures testify of this, saying: “The just upright man is laughed to scorn. He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease” (Job 12:4–5). Believers herein resemble the Lord Jesus, their savior and head, of whom it is written: “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:2–3). Nevertheless, however much this stone was despised and rejected by the builders, it was unto God chosen and precious, and the Lord delighted Himself in Him.

Such is true for all genuine believers. If you wish to hear how glorious they are in God’s eyes, and how God values them, read Psalm 16:3, for there we read that He calls them “the saints that are in the earth... the excellent, in whom is all my delight.” In Daniel 7:18, they are described as “the saints of the most High,” and Solomon describes the Lord’s people, the righteous, as being “more excellent than his neighbour” (Prov. 12:26).

Fourth, the kings of this earth are very rich and wealthy, transcending their subjects greatly in that regard. They possess extensive plots of land, have great possessions, treasures, jewels, palaces, and elaborate gardens—similar to what Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes regarding his royal riches and great wealth.

However, as to such riches, all believing Christians can truly and emphatically be called spiritual kings, for their riches and royal wealth in the Lord their God are so great that all the riches and wealth of earthly kings are, in comparison, truly nothing more than a piece of dust on a scale and a drop in a bucket. Believers have the entire triune God as their treasure, portion, and highest good (Ps. 73:25–26), and this is true eternally in regard to His infinite all-sufficiency, fullness, and glory. They may comprehensively claim as their property the Lord Jesus and His unsearchable riches, fullness, and inexhaustible salvation and grace.

How infinitely rich and how inexpressibly mighty is the Lord Jesus! How eternally full and all-sufficient He is for His own, for He is truly their only Lord and the heir of all things! Consider what He says regarding Himself and how He presents Himself to His believing people: “Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than

fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver” (Prov. 8:18–19). However, this infinitely wealthy Lord Jesus is the eternal, full, and unrestricted portion of believers, for they are His sister, wife, and bride. He is that better portion that they have chosen together with Mary, and that portion will not be taken from them to all eternity. It thus follows that if believers have God in Christ as their portion and their highest good, they are indescribably rich and mighty in God and in Christ their savior, for they are consequently designated as “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17).

Being such heirs transforms men into true owners and possessors in God of all that is in heaven above and upon earth beneath, with no exceptions. Paul testifies of this in 1 Corinthians 3:21–22, saying to believers: “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours.” These are the treasures that God’s children gather unto themselves—treasures “where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt. 6:20). The apostle James writes concerning this: “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (James 2:5). This is the gold that is tried in the fire, and the Lord Jesus counsels everyone to buy this gold from Him, “that thou mayest be rich” (Rev. 3:18).

Fifth, the kings of the earth do battle against their enemies and oppose them with all their might. If they are courageous kings, they prove themselves to be brave, steadfast, and fearless in battle, and they do not rest until they have fully subdued and conquered all their enemies.

In like manner, all true Christians are together spiritual kings, for the instructor teaches us that believers are to fight against sin and Satan with a free and good conscience. How much is there also to be said about this! God’s children, and thus all believers, as long as they live here on earth, are surrounded by a large multitude of mighty and implacable enemies with whom they never can enter into a peace treaty. Rather, they must intensely and relentlessly do battle against them until their last breath. Their entire lifetime they are to be engaged in this battle, doing so entirely by the power of Christ. In submission to Him and through Him they do battle. He continually teaches their fingers to war and equips them with the weaponry of the Spirit, and enables them also to use it. As their great general, Christ continually leads them as His soldiers into battle, calling out to them, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate” (Luke 13:24a)

and "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called" (1 Tim. 6:12).

God's believing children not only "wrestle...against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). The instructor teaches that their entire lifetime they battle against *sin* and *Satan*. *Sin* is their mortal and implacable enemy. This enemy is near them, lives in them, cleaves to them, and gives them no rest day or night. Rather, as a cruel tyrant, he aims to have complete dominion over them. Since they have died to sin through the death of Christ, they can no longer permit sin to reign in their mortal bodies, "so that they should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Rom. 6:12). They must necessarily always be at war with sin and engage in an intense battle with it until it has been fully subdued and mortified.

The *devil*, being God's enemy, is and remains to all eternity the mortal and implacable enemy of believers, for his kingdom and power are as opposed to God's kingdom and power as darkness is to light. Believers therefore never enjoy a moment's rest in their battle against this enemy, for Satan ceaselessly causes mayhem in every conceivable way to facilitate their demise and destruction. As their opponent, he opposes them in all things; and he continually, "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

As kings, believers are ceaselessly to do battle and war against this cruel enemy and implacable opponent, for they "are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). Against him and his fiery darts, they continually are to use the shield of faith and their entire spiritual armor (Eph. 6:13–15). Although they often lose much of what is theirs in this battle, God's people must be all the more brave toward their enemies, and be that much stronger in the strength of His might. It is written of them in Zechariah 10:5, "And they shall be as mighty men, which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle: and they shall fight, because the LORD is with them." This warfare against their enemies must last until God's children arrive at the point where Paul was when he exclaimed: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. 4:7–8).

Finally, the kings of this earth not only war against their enemies, but they also prevail against them and triumph over them with great joy, and will one day reign over them and their entire kingdoms. Again, in like manner, true and

believing Christians are spiritual kings who, according to the instructor, will “afterwards reign with Him eternally, over all creatures.”

As they do battle with spiritual weapons in their hands, believers, as spiritual kings, prevail over their enemies, and by the grace of God, they increasingly obtain the advantage over them. In and by the might of the Lord, they increasingly mortify sin and its lusts, as well as their “members which are upon the earth” (Col. 3:5), “which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). In addition to prevailing against sin, they also increasingly prevail against the world that lieth in sin, for the apostle John writes, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). As they prevail against sin and the world, they also increasingly prevail against their great and chief enemy, Satan, for it is written regarding God’s believing people that “the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:10–11).

In proportion to believers prevailing against their enemies in the Lord, they also already rule over them as kings, for God appoints them here already to be “princes in all the earth” (Ps. 45:16), and the Lord causes them “to triumph in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14). They already rule here over their enemies. The apostle testifies of this in Romans 5:17: “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.” God’s children themselves therefore testify, “[Thou] hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10).

However, the Lord’s people may anticipate a much greater glory and salvation after this life, for they all have the promise that “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom. 16:20). They will therefore completely prevail against their enemies, and will thus be more than conquerors in the Lord. They will fully acquiesce with the apostle in exclaiming: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54–57).

According to the instructor, believers will, with Christ, fully reign over all creatures, for He promises this in Revelation 3:21: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” This sitting upon Christ’s throne and this reigning over all creatures with Him will, according to the instructor, endure

to all eternity. Scripture speaks of this in Revelation 22:5, testifying regarding believers that “they shall reign for ever and ever.”

Behold, beloved, we wish to communicate this to you regarding the kingly office of believers. All that we have preached relative to this must truly be found in us if we are to be considered true and upright Christians, for it is not the mere name and the stubborn persistence of our imagination that makes us Christians, but only when the power and truth of all these matters are to be found in us. If we miss all of this, it proves clearly that we are not Christians—however much we may have paraded this name from our youth, and however much we may have wrongly boasted and trusted that we are such.

A Christian must necessarily possess four matters or he cannot be a true Christian:

1. By faith, he must be a member of Christ, and thus also be a partaker of His holy and spiritual anointing.
2. He must truly be a spiritual prophet.
3. He must truly be a spiritual priest.
4. He must truly be a spiritual king.

By way of four distinct sermons or discourses, we, being graciously sustained by the Lord, have set before you from the Word of God these four matters, and have addressed and explained them thoroughly.

If, however, one willfully despises all of this convicting instruction from God's Word and continues to boast in the mere name of being a Christian and of having the external privileges of Christianity, thus making his boast of and putting his trust entirely in the flesh, he will most certainly thereby run to his own perdition. He will then at last discover his fateful delusion—an awareness that will eternally be too late. It is therefore our wish that it would please God to use the Word we have preached to open the eyes of self-deceived sinners and to work repentance in them, so that they may obtain from Him that “white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Rev. 2:17). May they with Agrippa not almost be Christians, but may they become Christians in the complete and full sense of the word.

Amen; that is, may it be thus by the merciful grace of our God and savior, Christ Jesus, to whom, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all praise and thanksgiving forever and ever (Rev. 7:12).

The Eternal Sonship of Generation of Jesus

LORD'S DAY 13

Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

—PSALM 2:7

Question 33: Why is Christ called the only begotten Son of God, since we are also the children of God?

Answer: Because Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God; but we are children adopted of God, by grace, for His sake.

Question 34: Wherefore callest thou Him our Lord?

Answer: Because He hath redeemed us, both soul and body, from all our sins, not with gold or silver, but with His precious blood, and hath delivered us from all the power of the devil; and thus hath made us His own property.

When the savior, Christ Jesus, sought to convince the Jewish people of their grievous hardness of heart and their unbelief in regard to Him, among other things, He said to them, “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here” (Matt. 12:42). The Savior here teaches regarding Himself that He is greater than Solomon, meaning that He is superior—more worthy, mighty, and glorious than Solomon. Solomon was the greatest, most glorious, and most blessed of all the kings of Israel, and yet the Lord Jesus in all His humility and insignificance during His sojourn upon earth was greater, yes infinitely greater, than was Solomon in his external splendor. The difference between these two, the one being a representation of the other, is indescribably great. Let us consider this difference from two vantage points.

1. Solomon was merely an insignificant son of man. He was the son of a king who had been taken from the flock and promoted to the throne of Israel. The Lord Jesus, on the contrary, was the true and only begotten Son of the eternally living and most high God. From eternity, He has been in the bosom of the Father and is united to Him in a most intimate and essential manner, so that He and the Father are one (John 10:30).

2. Solomon was merely an insignificant earthly king who reigned over the people of Israel for but a short time. However, the Lord Jesus is He who "hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16). He is the great Lord and king of His people, over whom He reigns eternally by His power and grace. All believers eternally worship Him as their great God and savior, and since He is their supreme Lord, they bow before Him in all willingness and submission, fully and eternally surrendering themselves to Him, both with body and soul.

We wish to consider, with God's gracious assistance, some of these matters in greater detail. In his exposition of the Apostles' Creed, the instructor first dealt with God the Father and our creation before he proceeded to deal with God the Son and the redemption of believers in and through Him. In the two previous Lord's Days, exposition was given regarding the precious names of the savior, Jesus and Christ, as well as the name Christian—the name by which believers in the Lord Jesus are named after Him, their head and king.

By means of and in harmony with the Apostles' Creed, the instructor proceeds in this Lord's Day to present to us the savior, Jesus, in His delightful glory as God's only begotten Son and the Lord, head, and king of all believers. By God's grace and the illumination of the Spirit, we wish to consider this in greater detail. To that end, may this precious Lord Jesus reveal Himself unto us, that our eyes would behold this most precious king in His beauty, the only fountain of life, and so we may be strengthened by Him according to the inner man. Amen.

We must consider:

1. that the Lord Jesus is *the only begotten Son of God*, and that He is also the *Lord* of all believers, for He is presented to us as such in this universal confession of faith; and
2. what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus as the only begotten Son of God and our Lord.

Regarding the first proposition, we will consider the Lord Jesus as:

1. *God’s only begotten Son*; and
2. *our Lord*.

The instructor inquires regarding the first of these matters in Question 33: “Why is Christ called the only begotten Son of God, since we are also the children of God?” He then presents this argument: “Because Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God; but we are children adopted of God, by grace, for His sake.”

It is well known and an incontrovertible truth that throughout the Holy Scriptures, the Lord Jesus is revealed to us as the *Son of God*. We have the clear and unmistakable witness of God the Father Himself fully assuring us of this truth in Psalm 2:7, where we hear the Father speaking to the Son, saying, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” At the occasion of the baptism of the Savior in the Jordan, we hear the glorious and exalted voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). In similar fashion, the Scriptures in their entirety speak of the Lord Jesus as being the Son of God.

However, God’s Word does not identify the Savior as merely being God’s Son, but specifically and explicitly refers to Him as God’s only begotten Son. He is referred to as such in Romans 8:32, where Paul writes to believers that God “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.” He is also denominated as God’s only begotten Son when the apostle testifies in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The reason for Christ, as God’s Son, being denominated God’s *only begotten* Son is to be found in the fact that He “is the *eternal* and *natural* Son of God.” By the grace of God and with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we now wish to explain and expound in greater detail this great and supremely glorious truth, and we will endeavor to do so in simplicity and brevity.

First of all, we need to impress upon you that the doctrine we presently are considering is a most sublime and holy mystery of faith. It is a doctrine found only in the Word of God—a doctrine we cannot know truly and correctly, even in small measure, but by the powerful illumination and instruction of the Holy Spirit. Here we must utterly set aside our unholy, carnal, and natural understandings, and, as wretched, blind, and ignorant people, must take our places at the feet of the great prophet and teacher, the Lord Jesus, so that

He would reveal Himself and make Himself known unto us. Whereas the Lord Jesus reveals Himself as such in His Holy Word, we nevertheless, by just this mere revelation, cannot know Him as He must truly and spiritually be known by us unto salvation. Spiritually, we are completely blind, and therefore we cannot truly understand spiritual matters except by the ministry and illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit. It is by this ministry that the Lord Jesus must reveal Himself to us, thereby spiritually enabling us to behold His glory. He promises this blessing to all who believe in Him and love Him, saying, "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21).

If we are to have the least measure of true and spiritual knowledge and understanding regarding the Lord Jesus and His eternal generation by and of the Father, we shall attain to it only by this efficacious and hidden revelation that the Lord Jesus must give to our souls by His Word and Holy Spirit. Oh, that men would truly believe this, for the Lord Jesus teaches it so clearly that it cannot be expressed more transparently than as we read in Luke 10:32. There the Lord Jesus says, "No man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him."

Take note, beloved, that no one (however wise, clever, experienced, and learned he may be) can know either who the Son is or who the Father is except they to whom the Son has been pleased to reveal it. What shall we then say regarding the Son and His eternal generation proceeding from the Father? We will not be able to say anything unless we have first sat as blind and foolish souls at His feet and acquired this knowledge from Him; that is, unless by familiar communion with Him and by faith we have gained some knowledge and understanding of Him and of His glory.

This truth, revealed to babes, is neither understood by the wise and the prudent nor learned by men of this world, because God, by His secret judgment, has hidden it from them. Such believe that they are wise and have always been wise. Therefore, the way in which one, as a foolish creature, is taught by the Lord Jesus and is granted spiritual wisdom is as a book that is sealed with seven seals to our expositors, biblical scholars, and learned men. This explains why, sooner or later, erroneous and vain notions surface among men regarding the eternal generation of God's Son, for they who claimed to be wise in this world and were deemed to be wise by men were in reality foolish, and they spoke of this sublime and divine mystery with their unsanctified foolishness and carnal

wisdom. Whatever they said regarding this mystery is nothing other than a concoction of lies and unrighteousness.

Given the great weightiness of this matter, we will briefly address it. Normally when in the pulpit, we are loath to address all manner of religious error and, as appears to be fashionable today, of disputing it with much ado, thereby filling the heads of the hearers with wind. May it please the Lord graciously to reform our so-called Reformed Church from these and many other deficiencies.

Beloved, you should know that they who espouse erroneous views regarding the divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus, and who, by virtue of their carnal flesh, have completely departed from the way of truth, are especially the following: the old Arians, the Socinians, and the followers of the deposed Professor Roell. When they proceed to explain this divine and sublime generation, they all profess to believe that the Lord Jesus is called *the Son of God* by virtue of being generated by God the Father, but they do not permit themselves to be taught by the Word of God and by the Holy Spirit. Rather, by their darkened, unsanctified, and carnal understandings, they proceed to declare utterly erroneous matters regarding this divine mystery which ought to cause them to tremble. Regarding them, it is fulfilled what Paul writes of the Gentiles, saying, "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21).

Let us consider briefly what these blind leaders of the blind have taught others regarding this matter, and still teach by way of their followers.

The famous and pernicious heretic Arius, with the Arians who are his followers, taught that the Lord Jesus is called the Son of God, that is, He is God's first or only born Son, because in the beginning the Father created Him before all other creatures as His first and most prominent creature. Therefore, they consider the Son of God merely to be a creature, albeit the firstborn, or, as they twist Colossians 1:15 to mean, He is "the firstborn of every creature."

The Socinians have ideas that are even more erroneous and wicked. They teach that the Lord Jesus did not exist prior to His physical birth from the Virgin Mary or prior to His holy conception within her. Rather, they teach that He is called the Son of God for various reasons:

1. because of His wondrous conception in and birth by Mary;
2. because God sent Him into the world in a most glorious manner to be a great prophet to prescribe to men a new law and to teach the true way of salvation by His words and deeds;

3. because God simultaneously appointed Him to be our high priest here on earth; and
4. because God raised Him from the dead, received Him into heaven, and caused Him to sit at His right hand.

These are the various ways in which the Socinians understand the generation of God's Son, and for these reasons, they thus teach that He is called the Son of God.

Let us now finally consider the erroneous sentiments of Professor Roell regarding the divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus—sentiments that caused a great deal of turmoil in our churches. This man, as some have mistakenly accused him, did not teach anything regarding the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ that was even remotely in agreement with the Arians or Socinians. His error pertained only to the manner of the Savior's eternal and divine Sonship. Regarding this, he believed and taught the following: the only reason why the Lord Jesus is called the Son of God is that He is of one essence with the Father; that is, He is of the same eternal divine essence, so that, in this sense, He is one with the Father. However, it was subsequently pointed out to him that the Son being co-essential with the Father is not a sufficient argument for His divine Sonship and cannot distinguish the Son from the Father, for the Holy Spirit is as much of one essence with the Father as is the Son. Since, for the identical reason, the Spirit would then also have to be acknowledged as the Son of the Father, Professor Roell subsequently added some reasons why the Lord Jesus is, and is named, the Son of the Father, namely, because He was eternally ordained and appointed by the Father to be the mediator and redeemer of the elect. In the fullness of time, He was manifested as such in the flesh, having been sent by the Father, and subsequently was raised from the dead and exalted into heaven. Christ being co-essential with the Father, Professor Roell understood the afore-said to constitute the divine and eternal generation of the Son. He believed that in this way only could one better understand and maintain the Godhead of Christ over against the Arians and Socinians, rather than positing that by a true, essential, and divine generation, He entirely came forth from the Father. Roell believed that because of the latter, one would be compelled to conclude that the Father, having generated the Son as taught by the Reformed Church, would necessarily be superior, older, and more perfect than the Son who is thus generated by Him, but this would fully undermine and nullify the divinity of the Lord Jesus.

These are some of the erroneous notions regarding the exalted, divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus. Our intent is not at all to refute each of these errors in particular, and time constraints would not permit us to do so. Let it suffice to say in general terms that the divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus and His eternal generation proceeding from the Father (a reality in the fullest sense of the word!) is fully overthrown by these suggested and erroneous propositions. If they were true, the Lord Jesus would not remain the true, real, natural, and essential Son of God who is revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. He would then be only the Son of God in name, but not in truth and in essence.

We would be able to demonstrate to you at length that all the explanations given of the divine Sonship of the Savior cannot, even in the least, establish Him to be the essential Son of the living God. However, the Holy Scriptures demand something entirely different, namely, a true and divine generation, or a true and essential generation of the Son by the Father. By virtue of its divine glory and supreme perfection, this truth is entirely impenetrable and incomprehensible for our finite minds, so that we cannot possibly either grasp or understand what this generation means in chronological terms, or what is meant by the words that the Son's "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2b).

We will therefore lay aside all these vain and erroneous teachings of men and briefly, with God's help and grace, attempt to present the truth of this matter from the Word of God insofar as we may receive any insight therein.

Therefore, to consider briefly what God has revealed to us in His Holy Word pertaining to the exalted, holy, and divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus, you should know, dear reader (and may the Lord teach you regarding this) that the Lord Jesus is the true, real, natural, and essential Son of the living God, who is of one essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Since He is eternally and continually generated of the Father as to His origin, the Son therefore deems and acknowledges His Father to be the eternal source, fountain, and bosom of His divine life. He Himself testifies of this, saying, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26).

The Lord Jesus frequently testifies in His Word that He is, proceeds, does, and works all things in, out of, from, through, and unto the Father—all of which could be proven from many passages of Scripture. When we take all of this into consideration, it clearly teaches and informs us that the Lord Jesus is

the Son of the Father, and that His subsistence proceeds entirely in, from, out of, and through the Father.

However, in order that we insignificant creatures, with our feeble and finite understandings, would understand this in some measure, God, in His infinite mercy and grace, condescends and deals with us at a primitive human level. He therefore reveals and expounds this supreme mystery regarding His divine being by the use of human expressions and the description of human matters that we can readily grasp and comprehend.

He presents this essential subsistence of His Son in, of, from, and through the Father by using the analogy of a human birth or generation. He thereby teaches that His Son has His life and independent subsistence by and of the Father just as a human son by birth or generation derives his life and existence in human fashion from, of, and by his father who generated him.

Consider the testimony of the Holy Scriptures regarding this truth. In Psalm 2:7, we hear God the Father speak to His Son regarding this, saying, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." In Proverbs 8:22–24, we read the Son's description of His eternal and divine generation of and from the Father, saying: "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water."

As we saw earlier, the Lord Jesus is therefore denominated as the firstborn and only begotten Son of God. All of this teaches that Christ Jesus is the true, natural, real, and essential Son of God, and that from eternity to eternity, His divine subsistence is of, from, and through the Father. This divine generation of the Son therefore belongs fully to God's essence and cannot in any way be considered in distinction from it. It is therefore entirely erroneous to believe that this adorable and exalted divine generation was a passing and terminal divine act; that is, as if God generated His Son in eternity and no longer generates Him today. No, beloved, this exalted divine generation is an intrinsic act of God that belongs to the essence of His divine being, by which the Son has His divine life and subsistence unceasingly and to all eternity in, out of, and from the Father. The Father therefore unceasingly generates the Son and gives Him to have life within Himself, and the Son is unceasingly generated by the Father, thereby enabling Him to have life within Himself.

In this manner, the Lord Jesus is the *only begotten Son of God*, for He has thus been generated by the Father and is ceaselessly generated by Him. This is

that most exalted, holy, and glorious mystery regarding the infinite and most perfect being of God, of which God's children here on earth comprehend only a small part, and not more than the utmost fringe of this infinite truth. Those among men who have received the greatest measure of light must with fear and trembling worship this eternally incomprehensible dimension of God's infinite glory, exclaiming with Agur, the man of God, "What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" (Prov. 30:4), and with Isaiah, "Who shall declare his generation?" (Isa. 53:8).

The only way truly to learn something of this great and most holy mystery is to walk spiritually and by faith with God in Christ, so that we may acquaint ourselves with the Lord and engage in continual communion with Him. God thus reveals Himself to the souls of His beloved, causing them "with open face [to behold] as in a glass the glory of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). However, for all the wise men of this world, and to restrain all carnal and holy men, God has "placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24).

We have sufficiently addressed the divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus and His eternal, incomprehensible generation proceeding from His Father, and why He is called the Son of God. Having considered specifically that He is the natural and only begotten Son of God—the name given to Him in the Apostles' Creed—we must now consider the remark the instructor makes in connection with this. He asks, "Why is Christ called the only begotten Son of God, since we are also the children of God?" to which he replies, "Because Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God; but we are children adopted of God, by grace, for His sake." That all believers without distinction are God's children, and thus sons and daughters of the Most High, and that God is the spiritual Father of them all, are truths we find taught throughout Scripture. From among many passages, let us consider a few. In Jeremiah 31:20, the Lord God asks regarding His believing, elect people: "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?" In John 1:12, we read regarding all believers, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." In John 20:17, the Lord Jesus says to His believing people, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." However, given that all believers are thus God's children, His sons and daughters, and that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is also their Father, there is nevertheless a very significant and essential difference. As we saw earlier, according to the instructor, the Lord Jesus is the eternal, natural, and only begotten Son of

God, whereas believers have only been adopted as God's children for His sake and by grace. The Holy Spirit, in Christ, causes them to be born again and to be renewed, and throughout Scripture, we read abundantly of this gracious adoption of believers, and thus of their being born again of God. However, the Catechism addresses this truth on various other occasions, and we therefore will not consider it any further at this time.

The Lord Jesus thus is and remains in truth the only *begotten Son* of the living God, albeit that all true believers are, for Christ's sake, also the children of God by both gracious adoption and by spiritually having been born again of God. We have thus sufficiently considered this great and weighty article of faith.

We will now proceed to consider briefly the other article of faith that follows in the Apostles' Creed and the Catechism, namely, that the Lord Jesus not only is the only begotten Son of God, but that He is also *the Lord* of all believers. We confess that we believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, our Lord. Throughout Holy Scripture, we find references to the fact that the Lord Jesus is the Lord of all believers, and is received, considered, and acknowledged by them as such. Let us consider a few passages. In John 13:13, the Savior says to His apostles, and thus to all believers, "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am." In Acts 2:36, the apostle Peter teaches the Jewish people regarding Jesus, "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." In Philippians 2:11, Paul testifies and teaches that God has highly exalted the Lord Jesus, so "that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The letter of this truth cannot be contradicted by anyone, for everyone addresses the Savior as "Lord, Lord." However, only they who are truly converted, and thus true believers, do so in truth. All others do it but feignedly and externally with their lips, for they are carnal and natural men who have not the Spirit. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12:3). The Lord Jesus therefore says unto many, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Beloved, it is indeed true that the Lord Jesus, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is the natural Lord of heaven and earth, and thus of all men and creatures without distinction, and therefore "He hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16).

In a very special way, however, the Lord Jesus is the Lord of His elect and believing people, because, according to the instructor, “He hath redeemed us, both soul and body, from all our sins, not with gold or silver, but with His precious blood, and hath delivered us from all the power of the devil; and thus hath made us His own property.”

The instructor teaches here that there are three things the Lord does for all His believing people, in consequence of which He becomes the Lord of them all:

1. He redeems them from all their sins and purchases their freedom.
2. He delivers them from the power of the devil.
3. He makes them to be His property.

We shall briefly consider these matters.

The Lord Jesus redeems His elect believers *from all their sins*, doing so not with silver or gold, but rather, with His precious blood. This truth is taught abundantly throughout the entire Word of God. In 1 Peter 1:18–19, the apostle says to believers, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ.” In Acts 20:28, Paul teaches that Christ “hath purchased [the church of God] with his own blood.” In Revelation 5:9, believers magnify their precious savior for His grace toward them: “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.” God’s believing children are therefore also denominated as “the ransomed of the LORD” (Isa. 35:10), and Paul reminds them, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20).

This purchasing or buying by the Lord Jesus simply means that He fully delivers all who believe in Him and saves them from all their sins by His precious blood. We considered this in great detail when we expounded the name Jesus for you in Lord’s Day 11, and we will therefore not address this matter again.

According to the instructor, the second thing the Lord Jesus does for His believing people is that He delivers them from *all the power of the devil*. Through sin, believers are by nature in the kingdom of Satan and in complete bondage to his power and abuse. To all eternity, they will never be able to deliver themselves from this bondage or contribute anything to their deliverance. This is so

because “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44a).

However, regarding the savior, Jesus, the Son of God, it is revealed that “for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). At His time, He therefore delivers them from “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). The Lord Jesus accomplishes this deliverance for His believing elect:

1. As soon as He unites them to Himself by faith and by His grace, delivering them from their sins and converting them. Then Satan's dominion unravels, for believers then depart from his kingdom of darkness, forsake his dominion, and are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13).

2. By delivering them continually from all the power of the devil by increasingly sanctifying them, delivering them from sin, and forming His and His Father's image in them. In so doing, He increasingly destroys the works of the devil.

3. By delivering them fully from all the power of the devil by glorifying their souls and bodies; that is, when “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom. 16:20). By thus purchasing His believing people by His blood, He delivers them from all their sins and from all the power of the devil.

Consequently, and according to the instructor, the Lord Jesus makes them His property. With body and soul, He brings them into subjection to Himself and establishes His kingdom of grace in their hearts, governing them by His Word and Spirit. As a result, believers are Christ's and belong to Him (1 Cor. 3:23), for Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). The Lord Jesus is thus the Lord and king of His believing people, and therefore they rightfully call Him their Lord.

With the Lord's gracious support, we have considered and expounded for all of you these two great truths.

We will conclude by considering how faith is exercised toward the doctrines we have considered, as well as toward the person or the object of these truths, for in this article of faith we make a spiritual confession that we believe “in Jesus Christ, [God's] only begotten Son, our Lord.” May our confession indeed be in truth, for such a confession encompasses things that are neither to be found in the world nor in the unconverted, even though they confess and pretend to possess them. This *believing* is nothing other than a true acknowledgment,

reception, and embracing of the Lord Jesus as being the only begotten Son of God, with a complete committing of and surrendering of ourselves, with body and soul, to Him as such. The following pertains to such believing in Him:

1. The Lord Jesus, by His Word and Spirit, must have revealed Himself to our souls as the only begotten Son of the living God, and also as the great king, Lord, and savior to whom the Father has given all power to save and to deliver us eternally from sin.

2. Having been inwardly illuminated by the Lord Jesus, we must acknowledge and deem Him not only to be God's only begotten Son, whose subsistence is in, out of, from, and through the Father, but also to be the great Lord and king, who is powerful, all-sufficient, and willing to redeem us to the uttermost by His precious blood from all the power of the devil.

3. We must also fully open our hearts for the Lord Jesus by a true faith, yield to Him as the only begotten Son of God and the great Lord and king who is mighty and willing to deliver us, and surrender ourselves to Him fully and willingly with body and soul, submitting ourselves into His hands. In so doing, we should fully forsake ourselves and all other strength, and by faith take our refuge fully and solely in the Lord Jesus, the only begotten Son of God.

4. To this faith also belongs that we hold the Lord Jesus in the highest esteem as being God's only begotten Son and our Lord, loving Him sincerely and tenderly. We must surrender ourselves fully to Him, follow and cleave to Him steadfastly, and put all our trust in Him as our king and Lord, waiting by faith always in all things upon Him.

This is what it means to "believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord." It is now my wish and prayer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that He would continue to draw all His elect to His only begotten Son, so "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10–11). Amen.

Jesus Conceived by the Holy Ghost and Born of the Virgin Mary (1)

LORD'S DAY 14

*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son,
made of a woman, made under the law.*

—GALATIANS 4:4

Question 35: What is the meaning of these words, "He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary"?

Answer: That God's eternal Son, who is, and continueth true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted.

Question 36: What profit dost thou receive by Christ's holy conception and nativity?

Answer: That He is our Mediator, and with His innocence and perfect holiness, covers in the sight of God, my sins, wherein I was conceived and brought forth.

The tabernacle, the features of which are described in Exodus 24, was the most prominent of all the shadows and types of the Old Testament by which it pleased God to lead His elect people to faith in the Messiah. This tabernacle, built in full conformity to God's command and precept, most notably had a twofold appearance, namely, external and internal. Externally and visually, the tabernacle was so lowly and modest, one would never have viewed it as being the tent or dwelling place of the great God of heaven and earth. It was completely covered with modest and unattractive coverings, consisting of goats' hair, of rams' skins dyed red, and of badgers' skin. On the inside, however, this tent was beautiful and glorious, for its fine gold, silver, blue velvet, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen were to be seen everywhere, and the glory of God resided within the sanctuary and filled it.

This tabernacle was, first and foremost, a vivid representation of the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom was prophesied that in the New Testament dispensation He would “be for a sanctuary” (Isa. 8:14) unto His believing people. In John 1:14, the evangelist testifies, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” and according to the Greek original text, this could be expressed with the words “and *tabernacled* among us.” Let us briefly consider the similarities between Christ and the tabernacle.

1. As the tabernacle externally was only a very modest, lowly, and unattractive structure, void of any comeliness or glory, likewise the Lord Jesus, according to His human nature, was externally a poor, lowly, and uncomely person. According to Isaiah 53:2–3: “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men.”

2. The tabernacle was nevertheless very illustrious and glorious within, for God Himself dwelt there with His glory. This was also true for the Lord Jesus, for within Him dwelt “all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9), and He was thus completely filled with God’s glory. Having seen this tabernacle (that is, Christ) from within, John testified the same regarding Him: “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

3. As the external and internal aspects of the tabernacle were intimately united so that they constituted one single building, so it is also with the Lord Jesus. His external, humble humanity and His internal, exalted, and illustrious divinity are so intimately united that they constitute the one single person of the mediator between God and man.

4. Finally, by means of the tabernacle, erected in the midst of the children of Israel at His initiative, God maintained in earlier days a most intimate communion with this people, thereby communicating His grace and glory to them. Likewise, through Christ, the true tabernacle not made with hands, God maintains very intimate fellowship and communion with all true Israelites; that is, with all believers. He erected this true tabernacle among them when He caused His Son to be born in the flesh, thereby bestowing upon them all grace, righteousness, salvation, and glory.

With the help and by the grace of God, we wish to expound this glorious and precious truth in greater detail for you.

In our previous sermon, we considered the Lord Jesus Christ, the true anti-type of the tabernacle, from within in His exalted and divine splendor and

glory, as being *the only begotten Son of God* and the *Lord* of all believers. Today we will observe Him from without in His humble and self-effacing humanity, which He assumed at a precise moment in history for His believing people. The Apostles' Creed proceeds by setting Him before us as the one who "was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."

To address this in an orderly manner, we will fully follow our instructor and consider:

1. how the Lord Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost and was born of the Virgin Mary (Question 35); and
2. how the faith of God's children is exercised regarding these most precious truths, and what blessed benefits they derive from this by faith (Question 36).

Regarding the first, we have two doctrines to consider in greater detail:

1. The Savior's conception by the Holy Ghost.
2. The Savior's birth of the Virgin Mary.

The instructor merges both doctrines into Question 35 and explains them jointly and briefly by teaching that they signify the following: "God's eternal Son, who is, and continueth true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted."

The explanation of these great divine truths is so compact, concise, objective, and spiritual that the deep spiritual wisdom of our instructor shines forth clearly and powerfully. Oh, that we would presently have in our churches such eminent divines as the authors of the Catechism have been, and that we would experience once again the former days of our fathers, marked by simplicity and spirituality! It seems, however, that by virtue of God's hidden and unsearchable judgment, the darkness of a new-fangled, counterfeit erudition envelops the earth, and that darkness is upon the nations. Only the Lord knows where all of this will end. However, beloved, we have heard God's command, and still hear it daily, as expressed in Jeremiah 6:16: "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

We will therefore again willingly pursue these old paths, and thus the good way that is set before us in God's Word, and taught nowhere as clearly as in

our precious Heidelberg Catechism. In expounding the doctrine of the Savior's holy conception and birth, the Catechism teaches two things:

1. "God's eternal Son, who is, and continueth true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost."
2. "[He did so] that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted."

Regarding the first of these two, there are four distinct matters that come to the fore:

- a. the person who here is spoken of: "God's eternal Son, who is, and continueth true and eternal God";
- b. the work He engages in: taking "upon Him the very nature of man";
- c. the subject from whom He assumed this nature: "of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary"; and
- d. the means whereby He accomplished this: "by the operation of the Holy Ghost."

In all brevity and simplicity, and with the gracious help of God, we will now address each of these matters.

The person being addressed here is the Lord Jesus, "God's eternal Son, who is, and continueth true and eternal God." In our previous discourse, we considered in great detail that the Lord Jesus is *God's eternal Son*. We will not address this matter again, considering this truth to have been sufficiently expounded and proved. The instructor now proceeds to posit that our Lord Jesus Christ not only is God's eternal Son, but that He also is the true and eternal God Himself. This truth also requires no further proof or exposition, for we addressed this in detail in Lord's Day 8, Question 25, where we are taught that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost "are the one only true and eternal God." We therefore consider that this truth has also been proved and expounded.

We only wish to say and teach here, in conformity to God's Word and consistent with the teaching of our instructor, that the Lord Jesus, prior to His conception in and His birth of the Virgin Mary, has been from everlasting God's eternal Son and the true and eternal God Himself. Thus, He came into this world as God, and by assuming our lowly human nature, He most intimately united Himself to it. Holy Scripture declares this in 1 Timothy 3:16,

saying, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." Philipians 2:6–7 testifies regarding the Lord Jesus that He "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."

Furthermore, it should also be noted that the instructor here posits that the Lord Jesus not only was true and eternal God prior to His incarnation, but that He also is and remains true and eternal God in and subsequent to His incarnation. Thus, in and by means of His incarnation, He by no means set aside His exalted divine nature, but rather, He retained it and united it most intimately to His humanity, thereby becoming both God and man in the unity of His person. We need such a mediator and redeemer in order to be saved by Him, as we have clearly proven and taught in Lord's Days 5 and 6.

Having sufficiently addressed the person of the mediator, let us now proceed to consider what is said regarding Him. The instructor teaches that He "took upon Him the very nature of man." By His human nature, we are to understand nothing other than the two parts that constitute a human being, namely, a rational human soul gifted with an intellect and a will, and a physical human body, both of which are intimately united to one another. Behold, this is the human nature with which all men, without distinction, are gifted by God at their birth. The Lord Jesus, God's eternal Son, truly assumed such a human nature, for the instructor emphatically teaches that He took upon Himself *a true human nature*. Thus, He did not merely have the appearance of humanity, thereby seeming to be a man while in actuality He was not—a notion that some old heretics tried to foist upon the world. That would be an exceedingly ungodly and wretched doctrine, and thereby the entire foundation of salvation would be utterly overthrown, for if the Lord Jesus had not assumed a true human nature, He could not have been the savior and redeemer of sinners. No one could then have been saved by Him, for the mediator between God and us sinners must of necessity "be very man, and also perfectly righteous," as has been abundantly shown and proven in Lord's Day 6. The instructor therefore correctly teaches here that the Lord Jesus took upon Himself a *true* human nature. The Holy Scriptures teach this with utmost clarity in Hebrews 2:17, saying, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren."

Regarding this true human nature, the instructor testifies and teaches that the savior, Jesus, *took this nature upon Himself*. The instructor here uses the language of the Holy Spirit as it is recorded in His Word, teaching us that the Lord

Jesus took upon Himself the human nature. Paul addresses this in Philippians 2:7, saying that He “took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” This teaches two things:

1. Prior to His incarnation, the Lord Jesus, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, was only God, and thereupon He united to His exalted divine nature also the lowly human nature. In so doing, He became God and man in the unity of His person, thus becoming the true Immanuel, God with us.

2. This assumption of the human nature reveals on the one hand the divine power of the Lord Jesus, whereby He took upon Himself the human nature and united it to His Godhead. The incarnation of Christ is therefore not only the work of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, but it is also His own work in which He fully cooperated. On the other hand, consider the great willingness of the Lord Jesus to humble Himself so deeply. He did so to the glory of God His Father, and to the salvation and redemption of all His elect, who from eternity were given to Him by the Father.

However, what object did the Lord Jesus choose for the purpose of taking upon Himself the human nature? The instructor, in accordance with God's Word and the Apostles' Creed, teaches that He took the human nature upon Himself “of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary.” If the Lord Jesus was to assume a true human nature, it could not occur in any way but by a true human birth, so that “as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise [that is, in the same manner] took part of the same” (Heb. 2:14). Children are partakers of flesh and blood by way of a genuine human birth. Therefore, in order to become a partaker of our flesh and blood, God's eternal Son, and thus the eternally living God (oh, supreme and adorable mystery!), also had to undergo a genuine human birth, so that He would thereby become the *Son of man*. He therefore in His Word customarily presents Himself to us by using this most precious name. To accomplish this, there also had to be a woman of whom the great and eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus, would be born, and through whom He would take upon Himself the human nature. He was destined to be the Seed of the woman, for in Paradise, at the dawn of history, He was already revealed as such to our first parents (Gen. 3:15). Paul therefore emphatically testifies of Him that He was “made of a woman,” and that woman was Mary, the most blessed mother and virgin, who from all eternity and by God's grace, was chosen from among all the women of this world to bring forth from her flesh and blood the great savior, the redeemer and surety of all His elect. This woman

did not have a greater measure of holiness, worthiness, or merit than other women. On the contrary, God's eternal, free, and sovereign grace alone called and honored her to be so greatly favored! In her holy doxology, she therefore gives all honor alone to her beloved God and savior, and she magnifies Him for having "regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (Luke 1:48).

According to our instructor and our creed, Mary was a virgin. She herself teaches and testifies accordingly, saying to the angel who had come to bring her the news regarding the birth of the Savior, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34). It is also confirmed by Joseph, her espoused husband, in his behavior toward her, and from the angel's appearance to him in a dream, all of which is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Mary had to be a virgin, for it was prophesied regarding her by the prophet Isaiah, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). God had wisely pre-ordained this so that by way of the birth of His beloved Son, He could perform a great and glorious miracle that had never occurred since the beginning of the world, nor would ever occur thereafter. In Jeremiah 31:22, we read of this: "The LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man."

What, then, can we say regarding the Virgin Mary? The instructor testifies that the Son of God "took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary"; that is, from the physical substance of her flesh and blood. Anyone who knows how children are conceived in the mother's body, and how they are subsequently carried and nourished within her until the moment of birth, will readily understand that from the moment of conception, the child receives its substance entirely from the flesh and blood of the mother.

All of this was true for the Lord Jesus, who was conceived in the body of the Virgin Mary by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit. He secured His growth and obtained His entire physical substance and personality from the physical substance of Mary's flesh and blood. The Lord Jesus thereby became a genuine man and a true child and son of Mary, being like unto us, the children of men, in all things, sin excepted. It was in this fashion that the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, assumed our lowly human nature, and humbled Himself so deeply that He became a member of our human society. Oh, the eternal, incomprehensible, and adorable miracle of God's matchless greatness and glory!

This is how the Lord Jesus took on Himself the *seed of Abraham*, in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). He was thus "made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3), and Mary, of

whose womb He was the fruit, belonged to the seed of David (Luke 1:42). God thereby fulfilled the promise He made to David under oath “that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne” (Acts 2:30).

It is, however, necessary for us to consider in more detail the source from which this great mystery issued forth.

Having considered how God's eternal Son took upon Himself the true human nature from the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, we must consider briefly the manner in which He initiated this conception. The instructor tells us that He did so “by the operation of the Holy Ghost.” We read in the Apostles' Creed regarding the savior, “[He] was conceived by the Holy Ghost.” This is also the teaching of Holy Scripture, where in Matthew 1:20 it is written that the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.” The essence of this is that the Lord Jesus, according to His human nature, was not conceived in the Virgin Mary through the instrumentality of a man, as is true for all human procreation. Rather, He was conceived by the holy, divine, and almighty operation of the Holy Spirit, and it was thus communicated to Mary that she would be impregnated with the holy humanity of the Lord Jesus in such a manner as is recorded in Luke 1:35: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.”

We read in Acts 17:21 regarding the Athenians that they “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.” Also today there is an abundance of such people among us, who in their preaching and writings deviate “from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). It is always their objective to tell people something new regarding the truths of God's Word, earning thereby a reputation in the world for great wisdom and erudition. This will never fail to be successful, for the world is blind and delights to hear something new. There is a parallel here with our clothing: people must always have something new, whereas otherwise it will not be delightful. Such men have begun to teach and to delude the world regarding the conception of the Lord Jesus by the Holy Ghost. They would have men believe that the mention of the Holy Ghost, by and of whom God's Son was conceived, has no reference to the third person in the Holy Trinity—which generally has never been maintained until now—but rather refers to the divine nature of the Lord Jesus Himself, which on one occasion is referred to in Holy Scripture as “the spirit of holiness” (Rom. 1:4).

This peculiar sentiment is dressed up and presented by various appealing arguments so that it readily persuades inexperienced pupils who are fully enamored by the words of their master. They then subsequently present this as the great profundity of the day and fill their pulpits with this new doctrine everywhere, this being an expedient way to introduce into the world numerous erroneous sentiments and concepts.

As far as we are concerned, however, we fully reject such sentiments as being erroneous and in conflict with God's Word. In Scripture, the simple designation of *Holy Spirit* always refers to the third person in the divine Trinity, and never otherwise. He who deviates from this deviates from the Holy Word of God and pretends to be wise beyond what is written. Due to time restrictions, I will not engage in rebuttal of this irrational and erroneous sentiment, albeit that we would very readily be able to refute from the Word of God every single component of this entirely erroneous construct.

It is therefore the third person of the divine Trinity, the Holy Spirit, by and of whom the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, was conceived in the virgin mother Mary. The reason for such a holy, divine, and most glorious conception was that the savior had to be born as one who would be completely holy and without any sin or sinful corruption. As has been clearly shown in Lord's Day 6, the savior not only had to be genuinely human, but also had to be a real righteous man. The Lord Jesus would not have been able to meet these qualifications had He been conceived in Mary through the instrumentality of a man. He would then have derived His conception from a sinful, corrupt, and unholy seed, and He would then necessarily have been entirely sinful in His nature and character. Such is true for all of us who have been born of blood, of the will of the flesh, and of the will of man (John 1:13), for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6). Job therefore asks the general question, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" To his own question, he answers, "Not one" (Job 14:4). David, having been conceived of a sinful seed and through human instrumentality, confesses and acknowledges regarding himself, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5).

It was therefore absolutely essential that the Lord Jesus, being born of the Virgin Mary, be born not by the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God by the almighty operation of the Holy Spirit. He thus assumed the human nature in an entirely holy manner.

We deem it entirely unnecessary and inappropriate to investigate this matter any further and to reason at length about the almighty and secret operation

of the Holy Spirit in the body of the Virgin Mary for the purpose of generating the human nature of the savior. These are matters that cause godly souls to tremble. Let it suffice to say in general that God the Holy Spirit, the power of the Highest, came upon the Virgin Mary in a special manner, overshadowing her and moving upon her as He “moved upon the face of the waters” at creation (Gen. 1:2). By His divine and almighty operation, He thus impregnated the Virgin Mary in a holy manner, laying the groundwork for the savior’s human nature within her womb, causing this embryo that proceeded from her flesh and blood to increase in a holy manner and to develop fully until the Holy Spirit finally, and at His time, opened Mary’s womb. The savior was therefore born of her in an entirely holy and pure manner. Consequently, that which was born of Mary was emphatically referred to as “that holy thing which shall be born of thee” (Luke 1:35). The birth of the savior from the Virgin Mary was entirely the work of the Holy Spirit, and the instructor therefore teaches correctly that God’s eternal Son took upon Himself the human nature from her flesh and blood “by the operation of the Holy Ghost.”

By thus taking upon Himself the true human nature from the Virgin Mary, the Lord Jesus became the qualified savior that we sinners need to deliver us from our sins and to reconcile and unite us eternally to God. By this act, the Lord Jesus became God and man in the unity of His person, and we, and as many as the Lord is pleased to enable to behold in some measure this most eminent mystery of godliness with the spiritual eye of faith, must sink away in utmost amazement, and with the holy apostle exclaim in adoration, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16).

When it is given to us to engage in such holy and spiritual worship, and in such sinking away into the bottomless depth of God’s unsearchable wisdom, power, grace, etc., it is far better, blessed, and profitable for our souls than to dispute at length with Nestorius and Eutychus about the true manner and the adorable union of the two natures of Christ. Neither one nor the other correctly understood this matter, for they were both too wise to know anything of God and the savior Jesus Christ. Nestorius taught that the two united natures of Christ are two special and distinct persons, and the other taught, to the contrary, that the two natures of Christ were united in such a fashion that they were melted together so that this union resulted in one single and intermixed nature. Both men departed from the truth and taught vanity, deceit, and dishonesty.

The simple truth is that Christ, by way of His incarnation, born of the Virgin Mary, became God and man in the unity of one person. The divine and human natures are thus united in one person, so that by the union of these two natures, God and man, having been fully and eternally separated through sin, could again be eternally and fully reunited. To behold this spiritually, and to believe it with the heart in all simplicity, is sufficient unto salvation.

Let us, however, yet consider briefly what the end or purpose was as to why the Lord Jesus, God's eternal Son, took upon Himself the human nature in the manner we observed earlier. According to the instructor, this took place so that thereby "He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren [i.e. believers] in all things, sin excepted." The manner in which the Lord Jesus by His birth of the Virgin Mary became the true seed of David, as God promised, we have already briefly addressed in our discourse.

We would add to this only that the Lord Jesus, having been born of Mary, is generally set before us in the New Testament Scriptures as the genuine seed of David according to the flesh. Paul teaches in Romans 1:3 that Christ "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh," and he earnestly admonishes his son Timothy always to "remember that Jesus Christ [was] of the seed of David" (2 Tim. 2:8). The Lord Jesus was therefore also called *the Son of David*. The blind men worshiped Him as such, saying, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us" (Matt. 9:27). David is consequently called His father, for the angel foretold to Mary, "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32).

The Lord Jesus took upon Himself the human nature from the Virgin Mary, so that according to God's promises, He would be the true seed of David. He also did this so that "He might also be...like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted." This had to occur in the Lord Jesus as the mediator and redeemer of His believing people, for as explained in Lord's Day 6, He "must...be very man, and also perfectly righteous." As *true* man, He had to be like unto His believing people in all things (Heb. 2:17). As *righteous* man, He nevertheless had to be perfectly holy, and without sin or any sinful corruption. In that sense, He had to differ completely from His brethren, and thus on the one hand He was like unto them, and on the other hand He was completely unlike them. Paul therefore rightly teaches of Him in Hebrews 4:15, saying, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Therefore, in order for the Lord Jesus, as the mediator of His elect and believing people, to be a true man and a righteous man, He took upon Himself, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, the human nature from the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary. Hereby we have sufficiently dealt with this great and precious doctrine.

However, of what benefit would the intellectual consideration of, and reflection upon, this doctrine of the incarnation of the savior be, if we did not appropriate it spiritually with a true and genuine faith; that is, if we merely engaged in an intellectual reflection upon this truth? Our souls would then be fully deprived of all the blessed advantage and benefit of this precious and soul-sanctifying truth.

The instructor therefore proceeds in Question 36 to apply the inward efficacy and exercise of the truth that has been considered to the heart of all true believers when he asks, "What profit dost thou receive by Christ's holy conception and nativity?" He responds by saying, "He is our Mediator; and with His innocence and perfect holiness, covers in the sight of God, my sins, wherein I was conceived and brought forth."

True and genuine faith, which the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the elect and continually sustains and strengthens in them by the renewed influence of His grace, has a receptive, embracing, and appropriating efficacy, whereby it renders all divine truths beneficial, thereby permitting itself to be engaged, wrought upon, and governed unto salvation. Faith functions as such toward the blessed and precious incarnation of the Lord Jesus as it spiritually acquiesces in this truth and receives it with an upright and fervent inclination of the heart. It thus believes in the Lord Jesus as having been conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. This occurs in the following manner:

First, a believing Christian, by the illuminating grace of the Spirit of the Lord, views himself as one who, in the words of the instructor, has been conceived and born in sin. By virtue of his sins and unholiness, he is utterly estranged from God and is fully subject to God's eternal wrath, curse, and condemnation. He does not find within himself the least righteousness or strength before God. A believing Christian then considers himself to be utterly unholy, ungodly, hell-worthy, and impotent before God, and thus utterly lost in himself. This drives him entirely outside of himself and causes him fully to forsake and deny himself.

Second, by the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit, a believing Christian looks entirely away from himself and beholds with the eye of faith the Lord Jesus Christ as having been born of the Virgin Mary entirely holy and innocent

by the operation of the Holy Spirit. A believing Christian fully embraces by faith this Lord Jesus Christ, with His immaculate conception and holy birth, as He presents and offers Himself in the gospel. The Holy Spirit binds this offer upon the heart, and the believer then fully appropriates the Lord Jesus, being fully satisfied that He, according to our instructor, “with His innocence and perfect holiness, covers in the sight of God, my sins, wherein I was conceived and brought forth.” His heart fully reaches out for this, and he is in full agreement with this. He does not wish to be eternally saved in any other way, and he thus fully surrenders himself to the Lord Jesus.

Third, according to the instructor, the believer deems Him to be *his* mediator, redeemer, savior, head, and king, in whom alone all his righteousness and strength is to be found. He takes hold of Him, and by faith he continually puts his trust in Him, cleaving to Him, following Him in all things, and always waiting upon Him for all things until he has received a complete salvation through Christ.

In this way saving faith extracts from the holy conception and incarnation of the Lord Jesus soul-saving strength and benefit. The heart thereby is inwardly and continually sanctified, strengthened, and enlivened. If it may please the Lord, we will address in greater detail in a subsequent discourse this precious spiritual practice and glorious benefit in regard to the savior's incarnation, at which time we will then bind it upon your hearts as the great mystery of godliness. May the Lord, by grace and in Christ Jesus, grant His divine benediction upon this sermon. Amen.

Jesus Conceived by the Holy Ghost and Born of the Virgin Mary (2)

LORD'S DAY 14

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.

—1 TIMOTHY 3:16a

Question 35: What is the meaning of these words, “He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary”?

Answer: That God's eternal Son, who is, and continueth true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted.

Question 36: What profit dost thou receive by Christ's holy conception and nativity?

Answer: That He is our Mediator, and with His innocence and perfect holiness, covers in the sight of God, my sins, wherein I was conceived and brought forth.

In Exodus 16:10, we read that the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud after the high priest Aaron addressed the congregation of the children of Israel, who had murmured against the Lord. This glory of the Lord was God Himself. It is, however, specifically Christ, the Son of God, who is the glory of the Lord, for the Father displays His glory to the world through Him. Paul therefore addresses the glory of Christ by saying that Christ “is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). This glory of the Lord appeared or was manifested to the people of Israel in the cloud. This cloud was a representation of the human nature that the Son of God would take upon Himself in the fullness of time to save and redeem His people. In this *cloud*, that is, by His humanity, He would manifest and reveal

Himself to His true Israel, so that they would behold His glory in that cloud, “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14).

Paul, an apostle endowed with so much light, expresses it as follows: in Christ “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). John, having the incarnation of Christ in mind, testifies in Revelation 10:1 that he “saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud.” And lest I detain you with a detailed preface, Paul teaches the same in our text, where he testifies regarding the glorious and magnificent incarnation of Christ, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16a).

In the previous Lord's Day, we instructed you regarding this great and glorious mystery of the incarnation of Christ, and how in order to save His people and to deliver them from their sins, He took upon Himself the true human nature from the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, thereby becoming God and man in the unity of His person. This is a truth of extraordinary efficacy and benefit for all who believe in the Lord Jesus with their hearts. It is also a very suitable truth to persuade men, by the grace of God, to believe in the Lord Jesus. Therefore, we will consider and reflect in more detail upon the practical efficacy and benefit of this truth. May the Lord give direction by His Holy Spirit, and for His name's sake, may He apply this truth to our hearts and sanctify us through the truth. Amen.

We will first briefly expound the announced text and open up for you its objective content. Two matters are set before us:

1. The incarnation of the Lord Jesus, being expressed in these words: “God was manifest in the flesh.”
2. The apostle's testimony regarding this manifestation of God in the flesh, namely, “without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.”

Regarding the first, the apostle testifies and teaches that “God was manifest in the flesh.” He refers here to Christ Jesus, God's Son, who, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is true and eternal God, and who, from eternity to eternity, derives His divine life and existence from and by means of the Father. It is indeed true that among the children of the night and of darkness, whose faculties are so blinded by Satan that they openly militate against the true and eternal Godhead of the Lord Jesus, God's Son, there are those who dare to teach

that Christ Jesus is not God, but rather, a mere creature. Such men will certainly receive the wages of their iniquity if they do not repent of this wickedness.

The Holy Scriptures so clearly teach the divinity of the Lord Jesus that wisdom is here fully justified and adored by all her children. Consider only the testimony of 1 John 5:20, where John says “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” The Lord Jesus is therefore also referred to as “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), for it is through Him that God reveals and makes known the glory of His infinite being to us who are sanctified by the truth. There is no knowledge of God except in and through Christ, for He is the countenance of God, by whom we know Him. This the apostle emphatically teaches, saying, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

He who is God's image and God's countenance is God Himself, for in the simplicity of His being, God can be known only by Himself. We will not further elaborate here, but proceed to consider what Paul testifies regarding the Lord Jesus, namely, that *God was manifest in the flesh*.

By “the flesh,” we are simply to understand the lowly and humble human nature that Christ, the Son of God, assumed and united to His exalted divine nature. We considered this in great detail in our previous sermon. The Holy Scriptures frequently denominate the humanity of the Lord Jesus as *the flesh*. We find this in Romans 1:3, where Paul teaches that Christ, the Son of God, “was made of the seed of David according to the flesh”; that is, according to the humanity He had assumed. In John 1:14, we read that “the Word [that is, Christ, the personal Word of God] was made flesh.” In our text, Paul teaches regarding this flesh that God was manifested in it.

We will not consider in detail this blessed truth as such, having previously expounded it. We wish to say only that Paul, by using the expression that God was manifest in the flesh, primarily wishes to communicate two things:

First, the blessed incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; that is, how He who is the true and eternal God, coessential with the Father and the Holy Spirit, was manifest in the flesh, that is, became part of the human race. Being manifested in the flesh consisted of taking upon Himself a true human nature from the Virgin Mary by the operation of the Holy Spirit and, within His person, uniting it most intimately to His exalted divinity. Thus, we are speaking here of the

most high God in the flesh, that is, in our human nature; and in that nature He is pleased to dwell and reside to all eternity.

Second, the blessed majesty of God, by way of the second person of the Godhead, not only has come in the flesh, but was manifest in the same. By the Word and the Holy Spirit shedding light upon Him, He thereby became knowable and visible to us men, just as someone who previously has hidden and concealed himself reveals himself by making himself knowable and visible to others. As poor, sinful men, we lost all true knowledge of God in Adam, and we thus retained in our souls, by natural reason, nothing more than a slight glimmer of the knowledge of God. However, we can thereby never enter into fellowship with God or serve and fear Him as God. This is clearly confirmed among the heathen. Of the entire human race, it is true what Paul says in Ephesians 4:18, namely, men have “the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.”

Behold, however, this most high God in His infinite mercy is pleased to manifest Himself in the flesh unto us poor and sinful human beings. Through the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ, He again makes Himself known to us in all His divine glory. He makes known to us not only how great and glorious a God He is, but also how indescribably great is the measure of His most glorious attributes, perfections, blessedness, and all-sufficiency, so that as poor human beings, we are capable of comprehending a glimmer of it.

God thus manifests Himself in the flesh, that is, by way of Christ's humanity:

1. As a *supremely wise God*, who has devised such a wondrous way of salvation for us, who are nothing but poor sinners, by sending forth His own Son, who is a partaker of the glorious and divine being of God, to assume our flesh for our redemption. In this Lord Jesus Christ, who is Immanuel, God with us, “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

2. As an *almighty God*, for whom nothing is too great or too wonderful, and whose might and strength are unfathomable, for the power that was required to create the entire world out of nothing was less than that required to accomplish the union of the divine and human natures within the one person of Christ. This is likewise true for the act of uniting dead sinners to Christ by the Spirit of faith. In creation, God did indeed bring forth all creatures, including man as a rational creature, but He placed all of His creatures at an infinite distance from Himself. However, by way of the incarnation of Christ, the most high God intimately united Himself with His lowly creature, man, in the unity of

His person, and thereby Christ became the God-man. A union was thus forged between God and man, between the creator and the creature, and between the Spirit and the flesh. Oh, how wondrous and incomprehensible is the omnipotence of God!

Therefore, the angel appropriately said to the Virgin Mary that in order for the great work of the incarnation of Christ to be accomplished in her, “the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” (Luke 1:35) and that “with God nothing shall be impossible” (v. 37). Mary, being herself filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaimed in her doxology, magnifying the infinite and omnipotent God, “He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name” (v. 49).

3. As *the true God*, who is the embodiment of the truth. This is true not only because all God's promises from the beginning of the world concerning the incarnation—as well as all the ceremonies of the law, by which this great mystery of the incarnation of Christ had been made known to the church—had been fulfilled and had affirmed this, but also because all the promises regarding God's grace and mercy made since the beginning of the world were also grounded in the truth of this glorious incarnation of the Son of God. Therein God displays the truth of all that, in His boundless grace, He has ever proclaimed and promised in His Word to us, poor sinners. If the Son of God had not been manifested in the flesh in the fullness of the time, there would, reverently speaking, not be a drop of truth or faithfulness in God. However, God's truth now shines most gloriously and brilliantly in the incarnation of His Son. The Savior therefore says, “He that sent me is true” (John 8:26), and John the Baptist preached that “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).¹ This was all accomplished by His coming into the world, for without this event, there could not have been the least manifestation of grace and truth in God. However, in Christ, He is full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

4. As *a God of infinite holiness and justice*, who would rather execute this most magnificent and astonishing work of the incarnation of His Son—a work far more glorious than the creation of heaven and earth—than ever to grant an acquittal or forgiveness of a single sin without the satisfaction of His justice by the incarnate Christ. If God in wrath had cast the entire human race eternally into hell because of sin, such a rigid exercise of His justice would not have given us such a revelation and display of His holy justice as we now receive by the incarnation of His only begotten Son. The purpose for His taking our nature

1. In light of John 1:15, “John bare witness of him, and cried, saying...,” it is credible that these words were uttered by John the Baptist, rather than being the words of the Apostle John.

upon Himself was that He would become the accursed object of God's holy and severe wrath, God being provoked by our sins. This is the mirror in which we, by the light of the Holy Spirit, learn to behold the impeccable holiness and infinite justice of God.

Paul teaches this clearly in Romans 1:17, saying, "Therein [in the gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed." Apart from the gospel, this righteousness of God would have remained entirely concealed from us as to its true efficacy and glory. In Romans 3:25, he teaches that God sets Christ before us in the gospel "to declare his righteousness"; that is, by pardoning our sins in no way except through the blood and death of Christ.

5. *As a God of infinite love, mercy, and grace* for a sinful and hell-worthy world, He having devised such a wondrous way of salvation and redemption by giving His eternal and divine Son to assume the human nature for this world, so that for her sake He would become "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). As we behold this by the light of the Holy Spirit, who would not sink away in holy astonishment and admiration regarding this unfathomable love of God in the sending and giving of His Son for the salvation of the world, and exclaim, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16)?

In Christ, God preferred to become man by incorporating our lowly human nature into His infinite Godhead, and to unite divinity and humanity into one person, rather than to permit the elect and believing world to perish—a world that lay in bondage to the power of Satan by her ungodliness, and was condemned unto eternal death. Such a sea and infinite ocean of love and mercy is the Lord our God, and a blind world would never have known Him as such had He not manifested Himself in the flesh. Therefore, it is fitting what John writes in 1 John 4:9: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."

These few remarks confirm not only that *God is truly manifested in the flesh*, but they also confirm what the apostle wished to communicate by this expression.

If the Spirit of the Lord were to guide me into this, a much more in-depth explanation could be given pertaining to the manifestation of God in the flesh, that is, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is, however, not our objective, for we have other things in mind that will be of a more practical nature for us. We will yet consider briefly what else the apostle says in our text regarding this matter.

The apostle therefore proceeds to teach that this manifestation of God in the flesh, that is, the incarnation of the Son of God, is without controversy a great mystery of godliness. Paul presents this to us as *a great mystery*; that is, as a very deep, divine, holy, and spiritual truth that one can neither comprehend nor understand except by the internal illumination and revelation of the Holy Spirit. If we are to understand this correctly unto salvation, He must powerfully effect and engage our dark, carnal, and un sanctified understanding, and lead us into this inaccessible and deeply sealed truth.

It is certain that all divine truths, as to their spirit and efficacy, are deep and inaccessible mysteries for flesh and blood, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14), and “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant” (Ps. 25:14). Nevertheless, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, or the manifestation of God in the flesh, is without controversy a great mystery among the mysteries of God, for this truth alone is the inner and secret cabinet of the mysteries of God. This is the book that has been sealed with seven seals, which none other than the Lion of the tribe of Judah can open. In this book regarding the incarnation of Jesus Christ are recorded all the secrets of God, and all the mysteries of God originate and terminate here. Yes, beloved, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus is the fountain from which all true wisdom and all true knowledge of God proceed.

Take note what is here being said: *God manifests Himself in the flesh*. Thus, in and by means of the flesh, that is, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God makes Himself known to man and reveals His glory to us. Without this, no one would ever have seen God or have known anything of Him to all eternity, for through sin, men no longer bear the image of God. Since, however, the Lord Jesus, the Son of God who is the true God, has assumed our human nature as His own, uniting the Godhead and the human nature in one person, God has manifested Himself as such in the flesh; that is, He has made Himself known in His divine virtues to the world, “and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true” (1 John 5:20).

The incarnation of Jesus Christ, and His manifestation in the flesh, is thus the hidden mine or fountain from which all true knowledge of God and all the secrets regarding His infinite, blessed, and glorious being fully proceed and are, so to speak, extracted from them. This is indeed the mystery of all mysteries; this is the sealed treasury of all true wisdom; and here resides that eternal light

that is unapproachable and that no one can see and live. The earth was “without form, and void” (Gen. 1:2), and nothing but darkness was upon the deep of all living souls. However, when Jesus became man, God said, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). God, who is the eternal light, and in whom there is no darkness, has manifested Himself in the flesh, and this is therefore without controversy a great mystery—the unfathomable depth of mystery itself. Beloved, by the mercy and grace of God, I have been permitted to see more than I can either say or express in words, and yet I have only seen a glimmer of it. I have seen this much, however, that I can confess that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is a very exalted, divine, and inaccessible mystery. This mystery consists of such an infinite chain of spiritual mysteries that no one other than He Himself who is eternal light can permit you to see even the very least—and then only in a way of eternal and infinite mercy. Therefore, humble yourselves before the breath of the Almighty and permit yourselves to be illuminated and enlivened by Him so that you also exclaim with Paul, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.”

God, by way of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, reveals Himself to the world in His infinite greatness and glory, and thereby God causes the eternal light of His divine holiness, justice, wisdom, omnipotence, goodness, love, mercy, and grace to shine. In summary, God is manifest in the flesh!

However, this is all a mystery—a true, essential, and eternal mystery:

It is a mystery for all natural, unholy, and unregenerate men unto whom God has not yet manifested Himself in the flesh. They “walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:17–18).

It is a great and utmost mystery to the wise and prudent of this world. However much they speak of it, write or preach about it, and/or teach it, to them it is and remains a mystery. This is the hidden manna and the new name that they do not know, regardless of how they may boast of their scholarship to a blind world. The sons of God who do not look upon the daughters of men exclaim regarding them, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11:25).

It is a great and infinite mystery for God's children, and thus for true believers. With some clarity, they have already beheld Jehovah's greatness and glory

in the sanctuary, and they will eternally behold this in perfection when the curtains of flesh and blood will be fully pushed aside. They acknowledge this mystery of God, and it leads them to worship and exclaim with the apostle Paul, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness."

It is a mystery for the glorified spirits in heaven and for all the holy angels, for they are engaged in looking into these things, and even they have but a finite and limited knowledge of this mystery.

Finally, it is a mystery for all that exists and lives, God alone excepted, for He "is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Paul therefore appropriately exclaims and confesses that the revelation of God in the flesh is without controversy a great mystery.

Having thus taught that the manifestation of God in the flesh is a great mystery, Paul further describes this mystery as being the mystery of *godliness*. This means in essence that the mystery of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus and His manifestation in the flesh is the only source and fountain of all true virtue, holiness, and godliness. These entirely and exclusively proceed by means of faith, enabling us to know this great mystery spiritually and to embrace it unto salvation.

We are clearly taught here the following:

First, there can be no true holiness or godliness unless we receive it inwardly in our souls by the operation of the Holy Spirit. It must therefore proceed from a sanctified knowledge of the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, from a believing embrace of this mystery, and from its appropriation to our souls. Whatever men designate as godliness must be examined by way of this touchstone. Concerning this great mystery, if someone has no sanctified and spiritual knowledge thereof and is not exercised with it by a true faith, he does not possess a single iota of true godliness in his entire soul. However virtuous, strict, zealous, and religious he may be, and however sincere he may be in the performance of his religious obligations, it amounts to nothing more than a mere appearance of godliness while denying the power thereof (2 Tim. 3:5). Such a person is and remains utterly unholy before God, and he will certainly die in his sins if he does not repent.

Second, the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ truly renders us godly, for it is the mystery of godliness. No one can therefore lay claim to knowing, confessing, and embracing this mystery unless he necessarily leads a holy and godly life. However much someone may speak of Christ and of His manifestation in the flesh, and however much he may confess openly that he embraces

and believes this mystery with an upright heart, if it cannot be observed in him that he lives a truly godly life before the Lord, then in no wise should we believe his confession, but we rather should deem him to be a hypocrite, a liar, and a disingenuous lip confessor. It is absolutely impossible that someone can claim to know this divine and exalted mystery, and to embrace and believe it with an upright heart, without it truly sanctifying him, delivering and liberating him from sin, and causing him to live a consistently godly life in this present world.

Finally, the genuine means whereby God's children increasingly advance and increase in godliness and live a sanctified life is that they, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, become increasingly knowledgeable regarding this great mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ and all that pertains to it, and furthermore, that they embrace and appropriate it by faith. It is indeed a mystery of godliness, and the more this is known and believed, the more holy and godly such a person becomes. Therefore, he who truly desires to grow and increase in true godliness, let him endeavor, in dependence upon the Lord, to be further instructed by the grace of God regarding the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ and all that pertains to it. May you increasingly learn to appropriate and fully to acquiesce in it by faith, for if such may take place concerning yourselves, you may then be assured that you will greatly increase in true holiness of life and that this truth will increasingly set you free, fully renewing and transforming you within.

The apostle therefore correctly testifies and teaches that the incarnation of Jesus Christ and His manifestation in the flesh is indeed a mystery of godliness, and not merely a vain, fruitless, and useless reflection that leaves a man unrenewed. To the contrary, an unholy world may view it as such, but they who have been taught of God and have been instructed regarding this great mystery of the faith experience it differently. They become aware that virtue proceeds from this mystery whenever they but truly touch the hem of Christ's garment.

We have hereby sufficiently opened and expounded this text. Regarding ourselves, may we receive grace from the Lord to consider briefly for our personal benefit the matters we have here considered.

When we here consider all natural, unconverted, and unregenerate men, we find them utterly void of all true godliness and genuine holiness. We find that they live fully in sin and are devoid of fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Though most still have an appearance of godliness, it is void of

spirituality and vitality. The reason for this follows. The unconverted world neither has any knowledge of this great mystery of the manifestation of God in the flesh nor receives and embraces it with an upright heart, and therefore it is utterly alienated from the true fountain of living waters.

Many among these who externally make confession with their mouths and are Christians in name only are entirely ignorant and profoundly oblivious to the sacred truths of the faith, so that, in spite of all the means of instruction with which the Lord has repeatedly favored them, they do not even understand the basic meaning of these truths. They know and have heard that there is a God and a savior, Christ Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners. That, however, is all they are able to say. If you continued to question them regarding these matters, they would be silenced, for all that goes beyond this is utterly hidden from them.

There are others who have been instructed in the basic meaning of divine truths, and thus also regarding the truth concerning the incarnation of the Lord Jesus. They prove to be quite knowledgeable of the latter. They reflect upon these truths, consider them, and speak of them. They even receive and embrace them with historic faith as being genuinely true, and in their hearts, they do not have the least doubt as to their veracity. Nevertheless, the blessed incarnation of the Lord Jesus and all that it entails, as well as its blessedness and efficacy, remain a deeply sealed mystery for them, for they lack even a modicum of spiritual understanding, and they also do not believe it with their hearts unto salvation. Whatever they know regarding this truth by way of research, diligent study, and instruction is nothing more than a mere natural and unsanctified knowledge of the outward meaning of this truth. Such knowledge only fills their heads or brains and does not penetrate spiritually into the depth of their hearts, which would result in a true, essential, and believing embrace of the Lord Jesus and His manifestation in the flesh. Consequently, in terms of yielding holiness, godliness, or complete renewal and transformation, this mystery does not at all affect their hearts. Rather, though they have knowledge of this truth, they continue to live for themselves and in sin. This is indeed the clearest and most powerful proof that they neither understand this truth correctly and spiritually nor truly embrace it by faith unto salvation and wholeheartedly subscribe to it.

Beloved, I need to say even more than this. Oh, that by the grace of God one would only believe this! There are others. They live in an era in which divine truths are taught extensively; in a natural manner and by means of the

common gifts and illumination of the Holy Spirit, they acquire a very clear and astute knowledge regarding the outward truth of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, of all that it entails, and of the ultimate goal and objective of this doctrine. Intellectually, they can be deeply moved and stimulated by the revelation of this truth, so that they consider it precious. For a season, they also truly experience in some measure its power and influence in their hearts, so that they temporarily escape the pollution of this world and appear desirous to live holy and godly lives. Nevertheless, they have nothing more than a common or temporary faith, for they have never been truly acquainted spiritually with the truth of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus. This truth has therefore not made them truly free. They have never been fully led to cease from self. They have never been brought to the Lord Jesus as one who is utterly poor, blind, naked, lost, and impotent, and they have never been united to Him by a true faith. They still live entirely for themselves, and think that they are still able to help themselves with their own natural intellect, strength, and righteousness. They have no knowledge of what it means, by faith, to make a right use of the Lord Jesus and His blessed incarnation unto their essential justification and sanctification. This is and remains an utter and complete mystery for them—a mystery that is great indeed.

Such is the case with all unconverted people who are but nominal Christians and confess the truth merely with their lips. Some have little or no knowledge at all regarding the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Others merely understand this truth outwardly and believe this mystery with a historical faith. Again, there are others who have at times an unusually clear grasp and perception of this truth, and are occasionally greatly and passionately moved by it, so that thereby they put on a good display of godliness for themselves and for the world.

One as well as the other remains entirely bereft of the true, holy, and spiritual knowledge of this great mystery, and consequently, they do not embrace the incarnation of the Lord Jesus with a true faith. They neither appropriate it for themselves nor fully surrender to the Lord Jesus for their justification and sanctification. They fail to extract from this great and blessed mystery the least efficacy unto internal godliness and spiritual holiness, and so they remain in their sins. With this confession of the Christian truth, they will eternally perish.

Oh, how supremely wretched such individuals are! What little help can this great and blessed mystery of God's manifestation in the flesh afford them, given that they do not have a true and spiritual knowledge of it, having neither been

united to it by a genuine faith nor having been sanctified by it! Oh, that by the compassionate grace of God they would be led to have a proper view of their deficiency and their utterly wretched condition!

As to God's people, may the expounded truths, by God's grace, be subservient to the strengthening and edification of their faith. The great mystery of the incarnation and manifestation of Jesus Christ in the flesh especially benefits them, because God has taught them this truth spiritually and experientially. In principle, they already have been sanctified by this truth, and by faith they have been united to the Lord Jesus, and therefore the mystery of godliness is most precious to them according to the inner man. Oh, that this truth would become even more precious to them, and that they would increasingly be instructed therein by the Lord Himself, so that by a practical and lively faith, they would make use of this truth in a more spiritual, upright, and essential manner! It would be greatly subservient to the advancement and strengthening of their salvation in Christ Jesus their Lord, to whom they are united by faith.

This mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the manifestation of God in the flesh is the true fountain and source of their spiritual *wisdom*. It is the mirror by which they not only must increasingly become acquainted with their sins, misery, and damnable impotence, but also whereby God must increasingly reveal Himself to them in His glory. The entire salvation of the Lord's people therefore consists of growing and increasing, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, in the true knowledge of this great and most holy mystery of godliness.

This mystery is also the true origin and fountain of the *faith* of the Lord's people. All their unbelief that still so greatly besets them, with all their fears and doubts, issues forth solely from the fact that they have but little true and spiritual knowledge of the incarnation of Jesus Christ and of His manifestation in the flesh. If they were to be further taught and led by the Holy Spirit regarding this great mystery of godliness, they would cleave more by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. They would rest and trust in Him, and they would increasingly surrender themselves to Him with all their concerns and miseries. In all things, they would make more use of Him as being the willing redeemer and savior, who according to the counsel of God's grace, was manifested in the flesh unto their salvation—and thus manifested to justify and sanctify them, and to deliver them from their sins.

This mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ is also the true fountain and source of *the spiritual life* of the Lord's people. The more they become acquainted

spiritually with this mystery, the more they are led to God, praising and magnifying Him for His grace. They are increasingly encouraged and exhorted to approach Him freely in Christ, but also to interact with their precious savior freely and with familiarity, and thus enjoy close and intimate fellowship with Him while focusing upon His great humiliation, love, and willingness. They consider how, in having become man, He has come to them and has united Himself to them, so that they have the freedom from their side to come to Him by faith and to unite themselves most intimately with Him. In so doing, they continually engage in communion with God in Christ, and their spiritual lives increasingly are strengthened.

This mystery is also the true fountain and source of the *comfort and joy* of the Lord's people. By faith, they behold here continually the grace of God in Christ toward them, and they embrace this to the extraordinary support and comfort of their souls. Here they learn in all their troubles and concerns, pertaining to both body and soul, to look continually to the Lord Jesus as being truly man who can be touched by the feeling of all their infirmities (Heb. 4:15), having been tempted, as they are, in all things, sin excepted.

Furthermore, this mystery regarding the manifestation of Jesus Christ in the flesh is for all of God's children the fountain and source of *strength, hope, and confidence*. The more they increase in the spiritual knowledge and believing embrace of this mystery, the more they make sure, by free grace, of their salvation by leaning upon God in Christ. Whatever may befall them, this mystery teaches them that their salvation is immovably anchored in God's heart and in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus. That incarnation occurred so that they thereby would be delivered from their sins and be eternally united to God.

God's children thus increasingly are led rather to look outside of themselves than to look upon and to trust in something that is to be found in them, and thus they are led to trust solely in the Lord their God and in the counsel of His free grace in Christ. In this they find all their strength.

Finally, the mystery of the precious incarnation of the Lord Jesus is also, as we have already seen in this discourse, the true fountain and source of the *sanctification* of God's children and of the *godliness* that is to be found in them. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, the more they increase in the knowledge of, and faith in, this great mystery, the more intimately they are united with God in Christ and with His grace. Their hearts are thereby increasingly cleansed of sin, and they increasingly are rendered fit for the service of God. The fact that God was manifested in the flesh to sanctify them and deliver them from all

unrighteousness is the root from which they draw their strength to be holy and to live holily.

May this also be continually believed by God's children, and may they put all their trust therein, expecting their salvation and blessedness from this truth. This will surely cause them to increase greatly in true godliness, and they will experience that this indeed is the mystery of godliness.

From the foregoing, it has been made evident that God's children ultimately need not only to be taught and instructed by the Lord Himself regarding this great mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh, but also to have their faith in this truth established and strengthened. May the Lord to that end bestow His blessing and grace upon all of them, and may He multiply it for His holy name's sake. Amen.

Jesus's Suffering Under Pontius Pilate and His Death on the Cross

LORD'S DAY 15

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

—PHILIPPIANS 2:8

Question 37: What dost thou understand by the words, "He suffered"?

Answer: That He, all the time that He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, sustained in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind: that so by His passion, as the only propitiatory sacrifice, He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the favor of God, righteousness and eternal life.

Question 38: Why did He suffer under Pontius Pilate as judge?

Answer: That He, being innocent, and yet condemned by a temporal judge, might thereby free us from the severe judgment of God to which we were exposed.

Question 39: Is there anything more in His being crucified than if He had died some other death?

Answer: Yes [there is]; for thereby I am assured, that He took on Him the curse which lay upon me; for the death of the cross was accursed of God.

In Leviticus 14:2–7, we read of an unusual and peculiar ceremony that had to be performed under the Old Testament, namely, the cleansing of the leper in conformity to God's law. The person desiring to be cleansed of his leprosy had to present himself to the priest, bringing with him two live birds, as well as cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. The priest was then required to kill the one bird above a basin with running water. With the cedar wood, the scarlet, and

the hyssop, he would immerse the living bird in the blood of the bird that had been slain, and subsequently, he would sprinkle this blood seven times upon the one who was to be cleansed of his leprosy. Thereafter, he would release the living bird and permit it to fly freely into the open field.

All these actions had a spiritual meaning:

1. They who were to be cleansed of their leprosy represented elect believers, who, without exception, are all by nature leprous on account of sin. As soon as God's Word and Spirit expose their true condition, they must exclaim, "But we are all as an unclean thing" (Isa. 64:6a).

2. The priest to whom the lepers had to be brought for cleansing signified the Lord Jesus Christ, the great and true high priest, to whom, by faith, all leprous but elect sinners are to be brought in order to be cleansed by Him.

3. The two birds that were brought to the priest, being an essential component of this cleansing ceremony, also signified the Lord Jesus, howbeit in distinct ways. The live bird that had to be immersed in the blood of the slain bird and then released to fly freely in the open field signified the Lord Jesus in the state of His glorious exaltation. As the bird would fly away freely and unhindered, so Christ likewise arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is there exalted at the right hand of the Father. On the contrary, the bird that was slain signified the Lord Jesus in the state of His humiliation, consisting of His holy passion and death. Thereby He secured the redemption and cleansing of His leprous elect, sprinkling them all with His precious blood, so that they would thereby be cleansed of their sinful leprosy.

The third article of the Apostles' Creed, regarding the Savior's sinless conception and holy birth, being born of the Virgin Mary, is immediately followed by a declaration regarding His blessed *suffering under Pontius Pilate*, as well as *His death upon the cross*, by which He concluded the suffering He endured for His chosen, believing people. The instructor follows this order and expounds these matters in greater detail for us in this Lord's Day, and with the help of the Lord, we will now do so as well. To do this in its proper order, we will:

1. expound the truths regarding the Savior's precious suffering and dying on the cross; and
2. demonstrate how the faith of a Christian spiritually engages itself in this regard.

As to the exposition of these truths, we wish to adhere completely to the Catechism, for it explains them in a most fitting, succinct, simple, and spiritual

manner. Again, I cannot sufficiently admire the precious and accurate exposition given to us by the Catechism. We will therefore follow the very good and simple order set forth by the instructor, who:

- in Question 37, addresses the Savior's suffering in general terms;
- in Question 38, addresses the Savior's suffering as it relates specifically to Pontius Pilate, for He suffered under him; and
- in Question 39, addresses the Savior's death on the cross and explains its spiritual efficacy and mystery for all true believers.

Regarding Question 37, the Apostles' Creed teaches that the Lord Jesus *suffered*. This is in accord with Holy Scripture, which throughout makes mention of the suffering of the Lord Jesus unto the redemption of His believing people. It is recorded of the apostle Paul that in the synagogue of Thessalonica, he was in the presence of the Jews, "opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead" (Acts 17:3). Peter writes, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh" (1 Peter 3:18).

This suffering of the Lord Jesus is further expounded by the instructor, teaching that it consists in His sustaining "in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind."

This exposition of the instructor yields four significant matters for our consideration:

1. The person who suffered and the manner in which the Lord Jesus suffered: "in body and soul."
2. His suffering as such: He "sustained...the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind."
3. The time and place of His suffering, and the length of time that He sustained the wrath of God: "all the time that He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life."
4. The great goal and purpose of His most holy and precious suffering, namely, that "by His passion...He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the favor of God, righteousness and eternal life."

As to the person and the manner of His suffering, it was the Lord Jesus Christ, the great savior and redeemer of all His elect, believing people, who suffered. In previous discourses, we have considered His two natures, that is, that

He is God and man in the unity of His person, and that He is the only and true mediator between God and men. However, this great mediator, our precious Lord Jesus Christ, suffered—but not in both His divine and human natures, as was very erroneously taught in former times. Rather, He suffered in His human nature only, for His Godhead is most perfect and most blessed, and cannot be subjected to any kind of suffering. Since suffering by its very nature is an imperfection, it can in no wise intrude upon God's most perfect being. Therefore, the Lord Jesus, as the surety of His elect, suffered only in His humanity, and the instructor emphatically teaches this, saying that He sustained the wrath of God “in body and soul.” As is true for us, the human nature of the Lord Jesus also consists of body and soul, and He suffered in both of these aspects of His human nature, “the just for the unjust.”

The fact that He suffered in His body is confirmed by Peter, who testifies, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh...” (1 Peter 4:1a). He Himself teaches in Matthew 26:38 that He also suffered in His soul when He said to His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” This suffering in body and soul was necessitated by the fact that all the elect have sinned against God in both body and soul, rendering them utterly unholy. Therefore, the Lord Jesus, as their surety, mediator, and redeemer, had to sustain the wrath of God on their behalf in both body and soul.

Although it was only in His humanity that the Lord Jesus suffered for sin, we must not be of the opinion that His divine nature was neither engaged in regard to His suffering nor was entirely passive and inactive. On the contrary, regarding His suffering, the divine nature primarily accomplished two things, without which the human nature of the Lord Jesus would have been incapable of suffering fully and perfectly:

First, the divine nature sustained the human nature in its suffering, granting to it the necessary strength and stamina. We considered this in Lord's Day 6, Question 17. The answer to this question states that the mediator who is to redeem us from our misery must be not only true and righteous man, but also true God, so that “He might, by the power of his Godhead sustain in his human nature, the burden of God's wrath.” The measure of God's wrath against sin is so great and of such infinite magnitude that the mere finite human nature could not have borne it, and therefore, the Lord Jesus, by way of His infinite Godhead, certainly had to strengthen and sustain His finite human nature in

this suffering. To that end, He is “the mighty God” (Isa. 9:6), “who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God” (Heb. 9:14).

Second, by the intimate union of His two natures in one person, the divine nature of the Lord Jesus rendered the suffering of His human nature to be of infinite value, efficacy, merit, and glory. We know that the greater and more glorious the person who engages in a work, the more glorious and of greater value his work of suffering is. Would not the suffering of a king be held in much higher esteem and be considered of much greater worth than that of a vile and poor beggar? This is also true of the mediatorial suffering of the Lord Jesus, which is of infinite value, merit, and efficacy because He who suffered and endured the suffering is the true and everlasting God Himself, by whose suffering all the elect can therefore be saved and redeemed. Had the Lord Jesus not been very God, He would have had to suffer eternally for sin. However, His suffering is so efficacious, praiseworthy, and inexpressibly glorious that it infinitely exceeds the mere suffering of a man.

Therefore, in order that we would rightly know the worthiness and glory of the passion and death of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Scriptures repeatedly and emphatically point and direct us to His exalted Godhead, even as Paul teaches when he writes that the Lord Jesus has purchased the church “with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

Desiring to set before us the infinite efficacy and value of the utter depth of the humiliation, suffering, and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, Paul testifies of Him in Philippians 2:6–8 that He, “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” In 1 Corinthians 2:8, he testifies regarding the Jews that they “have crucified the Lord of glory.” We hereby perceive who the person is who has suffered for the sins of the world, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God and man in the unity of His person. However, we have also observed how He suffered in His human nature only, as well as the essence of the contribution that His Godhead made to this suffering.

We now proceed to consider the praiseworthy and precious suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ itself. The instructor teaches that the Lord Jesus “sustained in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind.” As did the instructor in Lord's Day 4, we also addressed the wrath of God. We observed there that He “is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins;

and will punish them in His just judgment temporally and eternally.” We then concluded that the essence of God’s wrath is His most holy and perfect hatred against sin, whereby He, by His infinite power and might, must fully oppose sin and the sinner, and consequently must cause the sinner eternally to perish according to body and soul. We will therefore at this time say nothing more regarding the fearful and holy wrath of God.

We do wish to remark, however, that the instructor here describes the wrath of God as being “against the sins of all mankind,” and that the Lord Jesus suffered this wrath in body and soul. At first glance, it appears as if the instructor, with the Arminians, is teaching here that the Lord Jesus suffered the wrath of God for all men, head for head, for he says that Christ suffered the wrath of God “against the sins of all mankind.” We must, however, understand correctly what the instructor is saying, for he describes the holy wrath of God as being manifested “against the sins of all mankind” in order to teach us that God is wrathful toward sin in the general sense of the word, and thus toward the sin of all mankind—a human race that by virtue of sin is, in totality, subject to His wrath. This grievous and comprehensive wrath of God, burning against all mankind by virtue of God’s infinite holiness, the Lord Jesus suffered and endured in both body and soul.

However, for whom did he do this? Was it for all mankind, who by their sins have provoked God to wrath? By no means, but rather, He did so for His elect, believing people, whose salvation and redemption He had eternally agreed to accomplish. If the Lord Jesus indeed were to have suffered God’s wrath on behalf of all humanity, then all humanity, by virtue of this suffering, would necessarily have been delivered from the wrath of God and from sin, for Paul testifies regarding God’s people, and thus all believers, that Jesus has delivered them from “the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10).

Now, if the Lord Jesus indeed were to have suffered God’s wrath on behalf of all humanity, then the precious suffering of the Lord Jesus would have been entirely ineffectual and in vain for the great majority of people who will not be saved, and Paul posits this, namely, Christ’s suffering on behalf of all humanity, as being an absolute impossibility and an utter absurdity, saying, “Then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21). It is therefore abundantly clear that in sustaining “the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind,” the Lord Jesus endured and suffered this only for the benefit of His elect believers, who by Him have in actuality been delivered from the wrath of God, and have thus been eternally saved by Him. Through sin, all of His elect “were by nature the children of

wrath,” even as all others who perish. And the wrath of God will abide on them as long as they persevere in their disobedience and unbelief (John 3:36).

However, the Lord Jesus, having engaged Himself from eternity to be their surety, mediator, and redeemer, fully took upon Himself all their sins, with the punishment, curse, and wrath due to them, and endured the grievous wrath, punishment, and curse of God on their behalf. Thereby was fulfilled what is written, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:4–5).

The Lord Jesus has thus sustained the wrath of God against all mankind on behalf of all His elect believers. The infinite wrath and grievous anger to which the Father had been so vehemently provoked by the sins of His elect, He poured out fully upon Him, taking vengeance upon Him, punishing Him, and subjecting Him to all that suffering and anguish in body and soul. Elect believers were deserving of such wrath, and they all would otherwise have had to endure and undergo it to all eternity.

Oh, how infinitely grievous and dreadful is the suffering of the Lord Jesus! In some measure, we must have a true knowledge of God in His infinite power, holiness, and justice if we truly are to understand something of it.

Having thus far considered in what the suffering of the Lord Jesus as surety consisted, we must now briefly address its time and place, and consider where and how long the Lord Jesus thus suffered, as well as what was the goal and objective of His suffering.

Regarding the first, the instructor teaches that He sustained the wrath of God “all the time that He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life.” The place where Jesus thus suffered was here on earth, having come from heaven to suffer in our midst. Sin had been committed on earth, and God therefore purposed that He would punish sin here upon earth in His Son, and that here on earth He would perfect His Son, as surety of all His elect, through suffering (Heb. 2:10). This prompted the Lord Jesus to say, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4), and thus it was here upon earth that the Savior sustained the wrath of God.

According to the instructor, He did so “all the time that He lived on earth.” We could very easily and extensively demonstrate from the Holy Scriptures that the Lord Jesus, as surety of His elect, lived a life entirely filled with suffering. He

was “a man of sorrows” (Isa. 53:3) who came to this earth for no other purpose than to suffer for the sins of God’s elect, and to serve and obey God in perfect holiness. He thus sustained the wrath of God against sin from the beginning of His incarnation. The clear evidences of this were His wretched and poor birth, His circumcision, His being persecuted by Herod, His flight into Egypt with His parents, etc.

However, it was especially at the end of His life that the Lord Jesus sustained the wrath of God against sin. It began with His exodus from Jerusalem after the celebration of the Last Supper and lasted until His death, when, hanging upon the cross, He cried out, “It is finished!” and then gave up the ghost. A detailed description of this suffering of the Savior and all the circumstances surrounding it may be found in each of the four Gospels. It was then that the Lord Jesus sustained in body and soul the grievous and infinite burden of God’s wrath for the sake of the sins of His elect, which He as surety had taken upon Himself to deliver them from their sins eternally. It was then that He drank the bitter cup of His Father’s great wrath and anger, being sustained by His eternal and divine Spirit. The drinking of this cup was so grievous that He not only felt compelled to ask His heavenly Father that, if possible, it could pass from Him, but that, while drinking it on the cross, He also had to exclaim, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Oh, dear reader, the entire world and all creatures together were unable to endure such grievous suffering as the Lord Jesus then suffered alone and by Himself, for He was subjected to the entire burden of the eternal and infinite wrath of God. He who understands but a little of this must greatly tremble and shudder, crying out, “Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath” (Ps. 90:11). We will speak no more regarding this, for the matter infinitely transcends our comprehension.

What was the purpose the Lord Jesus suffered all this? The instructor teaches this, saying that He thus suffered “that so by His passion, as the only propitiatory sacrifice, He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the favor of God, righteousness, and eternal life.” The instructor is here the mouthpiece of all true believers who sincerely and by faith have appropriated the Lord Jesus and His precious suffering as the only ground or foundation of their salvation. He says of them that the Lord Jesus suffered thus unto their redemption and salvation. The Lord Jesus neither had to suffer on His own behalf nor be subjected to the least measure of God’s disfavor and wrath, for He was entirely holy and without sin. Rather, He

suffered all this solely for His elect believers, for He had eternally purposed to redeem and save them from all their sins. This redemption of elect believers could not have been accomplished without there having been a sacrifice for their sins and without God's wrath having been sustained. God, being infinitely holy and just, had to punish sin, "which is committed against the most high majesty of God...with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul" (Lord's Day 4, Question 11). That this extreme and everlasting divine punishment would not be executed upon elect believers who were deserving of it, the Lord Jesus, as their surety, had to sustain and endure this punishment, the extreme wrath of God, in their place, so that "He might redeem both their body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the favor of God, righteousness, and eternal life."

This had to be the necessary consequence of the suffering of the Lord Jesus, for it was thus that He had to deliver them from the wrath of God and from eternal damnation, fully set them free, and secure for them God's favor, grace, righteousness, and eternal life. God could not punish the sins of the elect more than once, having done so once in His Son, Jesus Christ, and therefore, of necessity, He had to deliver elect believers eternally from all punishment and legal prosecution in Him, forgiving all their sins, receiving them again unto grace, sanctifying them, and uniting them to live eternally with Him. All elect believers therefore necessarily must have in Christ "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7).

Having sufficiently addressed the precious passion of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will, with the instructor, now proceed to consider briefly the worldly judge under whom the Lord Jesus thus suffered. The Apostles' Creed teaches that He suffered *under Pontius Pilate*. Who he was, and how the Lord Jesus suffered under him, is an event fully reported by the four Gospel writers, and we will therefore not address this as such. We only will briefly consider the inherent efficacy that the Lord Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. The instructor expounds this for us in Question 38, saying that the Lord Jesus thus suffered "that He, being innocent, and yet condemned by a temporal judge, might thereby free us from the severe judgment of God to which we were exposed."

The instructor here addresses two matters:

1. The innocent suffering of the Lord Jesus under Pontius Pilate, His worldly judge.
2. The efficacy and benefit thereof for His elect believers.

Regarding the first, the instructor again highlights two matters:

1. How the Lord Jesus was condemned *publicly* by the worldly judge.
2. How He was thus *innocently* condemned.

The Savior was slain neither quietly nor secretly. He was not slain in some obscure corner, but rather, as has to be noted, He was condemned by the worldly judge, Pontius Pilate, who had been appointed as regent of Judea by the Roman emperor, and there, he was thus the formal arbiter of justice. The Lord Jesus was summoned before Pilate as His lawful and qualified civil judge, and he held a formal court session regarding the Savior. It was in that role that he condemned Jesus judicially, so that what was written regarding Him by the prophet Isaiah would be fulfilled: "He was taken from prison and from judgment" (Isa. 53:8).

However, not only was the Lord Jesus condemned judicially by way of a civil court procedure, but He was also condemned *innocently*. The latter is very remarkable, and needs to be carefully noted and considered by us. In our society, the purpose of a civil court proceeding is to condemn and punish the guilty one for his transgression of the law. In the case of the Lord Jesus, however, the civil court proceeding transpired for the purpose of condemning Him innocently. This occurred publicly so that His innocence would be affirmed to all with utmost clarity.

This was indeed as it occurred, for Pilate, in his capacity as the Savior's judge, demonstrated before the entire world in these legal proceedings that he, as an impartial judge, deemed Jesus to be completely innocent of the crime of which He was being accused. He declared this publicly when he addressed the Jews and their leaders, saying, "Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him" (Luke 23:14–15). However, above and beyond this, Pilate, seeing that he made no progress with the Jewish people who desired the death of Jesus, before pronouncing sentence, "took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it" (Matt. 27:24).

Pilate, however, was not the only one who testified that the Lord Jesus was innocent. Rather, to reassure true believers, it has pleased the Lord to appoint an illustrious cloud of witnesses regarding this matter. These are:

1. the *great council* that condemned Him innocently upon His truthful confession;
2. the traitor *Judas*;
3. *Pilate's wife*;
4. *one of the murderers* who was crucified with Him;
5. *the Jewish women* who wept over Him as He departed Jerusalem;
6. *the centurion* at the cross;
7. *the heavens* that were darkened for three hours during His crucifixion;
8. *the earth* that quaked;
9. *the graves* that were opened;
10. *the dead* who arose from their graves;
11. *the rending of the veil of the temple*;
12. *the prophets* of the Old Testament; and
13. *the apostles* of the New Testament.

Behold, the truth is thus clearly affirmed according to the instructor that the Lord Jesus, “being innocent, [was] yet condemned by a temporal judge.”

As the reason for this, the instructor posits that the Lord Jesus would “thereby free us from the severe judgment of God to which we were exposed.” By virtue of sin and the transgression of God’s law, all men are exceedingly guilty of criminal conduct before God, and there will come a day when God will justly condemn the entire world. All flesh will have to appear before His holy and inflexible judgment seat, and one will then be held accountable for what he has done, “whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:14). The Holy Scriptures everywhere speak most powerfully and emphatically of this general, holy, and just judgment of God. Oh, would that men truly believed this! What a powerful effect it would have upon the hearts of hardened sinners who say, “Where is the God of judgment?” (Mal. 2:17).

However, all the elect must also appear before the severe, just, holy, and dreadful judgment seat of the most high God. Having sinned against God and naturally being utterly unholy and ungodly sinners, they will not at all be able to prevail when summoned before the holy and severe judgment seat of God. Rather, they will all have to be condemned by God and be justly condemned to endure eternal punishment in hell. This is the state and condition of all elect believers considered in and of themselves, and therefore they are “by nature the

children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3). However, in order that such guilty ones may eternally be delivered from this severe and just judgment of God and be restored into His favor, the Lord Jesus, as their substitute, took their place before the worldly judge, Pontius Pilate, so that He would judicially be declared innocent. This unjust condemnation of the Lord Jesus was thus for the sole benefit of absolving His believing people eternally from the just judgment of God that should have been executed upon them due to their sins.

We are to take the suffering of Christ under Pontius Pilate seriously and believe it wholeheartedly, so that we may derive much strength and comfort from it. The apostle Paul earnestly appeals to this, writing to Timothy, "I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13).

We will now proceed to consider the third or final matter that presents itself to us, and thus say a few words regarding the Savior's death on *the cross*. The Apostles' Creed focuses on this, and we embrace and confess it as a divine truth. This is also a matter that is recorded for us clearly and extensively in the Holy Scriptures, and we will therefore not consider the outward truth, but rather, will briefly consider only its efficacy and precious benefit.

The instructor addresses this in a few words, teaching that there is something "more in His being crucified, than if He had died some other death," so that we who with a true heart believe in Him may be "assured, that He took on Him the curse which lay upon me; for the death of the cross was accursed of God."

The efficacy and spiritual mystery of this matter consists briefly in this: God declared in the Old Testament that if anyone committed a crime worthy of death and the children of Israel hanged such a person on a tree, such a dead body could then not remain hanging on the tree overnight. It had to be buried the same day, "for he that is hanged is accursed of God" (Deut. 21:23). This had a hidden meaning, for it pointed to Christ, who, for the redemption of His people at the appointed time, would also be hanged and put to death upon the cross, and thus would die a death that was accursed. The Lord Jesus, as surety for His people, died such a shameful and accursed death on their behalf, and by so doing, He endured all the suffering they deserved to suffer eternally, having made themselves worthy thereof by their sins and wickedness. Therefore, all the elect are worthy of God's eternal curse, having so shamefully violated and transgressed God's holy law from their mother's womb. God had given His holy law to all men along with the severe threat that if they were to transgress it even

in the least, they would be utterly accursed and be condemned unto eternal punishment and condemnation in hell.

Paul clearly teaches and affirms this, saying, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). The curse of the law rests indiscriminately upon all men who are under the law and have transgressed it, and all believing elect can be delivered from that curse only in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, their surety and savior. He removed from them the curse that rested upon them, and, according to the instructor, took this curse fully upon Himself.

The Lord Jesus was thus accursed of God on behalf of His believing people, and therefore, as their surety, He had to be hanged on a tree and be crucified. Thereby He died a shameful and accursed death so that His believing and elect people would eternally be delivered and redeemed from the curse of God that rested upon them due to their sin. Paul again teaches this, saying, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

It thus becomes evident how great a mystery the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross is, and also how glorious its efficacy is for all who behold, embrace, and trust therein by a true saving faith.

With the Lord's gracious help, we have sufficiently expounded the three truths that have been set before us in this Lord's Day. All that now remains is to add a few words regarding the exercise of true faith in relation to these truths. The faith of a Christian will not focus on a mere external observation of these truths regarding the precious suffering of Christ under Pontius Pilate and of His accursed and shameful death on the cross. Not at all! If a soul does not proceed any further than this, she will derive no strength or comfort from them. Faith is engaged differently, however, for by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the soul receives by faith the Lord Jesus, along with His precious suffering and crucifixion, as the only rock of her salvation. She sincerely appropriates Him with all His merits. As a poor, lost, and impotent sinner, she casts herself fully upon Him, as well as His suffering and crucifixion, as being the only ground and foundation of her salvation. She fully forsakes everything that is not Christ, and will thus appear before God with Christ and with His holy suffering and crucifixion. She will hold this before God, while praying, supplicating, and persevering with Him, that He, in the name of His Son and for the sake of His

passion and death, would graciously forgive all her sins and eternally deliver her from all punishment, condemnation, and damnation, as well as from the curse she so righteously deserves. She will beseech Him to bestow upon her all grace, salvation, and eternal life. By faith this will continue to be her expectancy. She will trust in the Lord Jesus and His merits, being steadfastly determined in the strength of the Lord not to let go thereof, but eternally to cleave to and ceaselessly to take hold of Him until she, through Christ, has become the recipient of His complete salvation.

This is what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus as having suffered under Pontius Pilate, etc. To this we are to add nothing but the wish and prayer that God would stir up this precious faith in all His elect and that He would increasingly build up and strengthen it. Amen.

Jesus's Death, Burial, and Descent into Hell

LORD'S DAY 16

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried.

—1 CORINTHIANS 15:3–4a

Question 40: Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself even unto death?

Answer: Because with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise than by the death of the Son of God.

Question 41: Why was He also “buried”?

Answer: Thereby to prove that He was really dead.

Question 42: Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die?

Answer: Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life.

Question 43: What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?

Answer: That by virtue thereof our old man is crucified, dead and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us, but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Question 44: Why is there added, “He descended into hell”?

Answer: That in my greatest temptations, I may be assured, and wholly comfort myself in this, that my Lord Jesus Christ, by His inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies, in which He was plunged during all His sufferings, but especially on the cross, hath delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell.

With the gracious help and assistance of the Lord, we are called upon to consider a subject of such a comprehensive and broad nature that we must proceed immediately without any preface. In the previous Lord's Day, we considered the suffering and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, and we will continue by following the Apostles' Creed, addressing His *death*, His *burial*, and His *descent into hell*.

We will:

1. address these three truths in greater detail; and
2. consider the activity of true saving faith in regard to these truths.

Regarding these truths as such, we will expound them in the same order as they appear in the Catechism, where, in this Lord's Day, we first encounter the *death* of the Savior for the salvation of all His elect, believing people. It is abundantly known from the Holy Scriptures that the Lord Jesus, the great surety, savior, and redeemer of His people, not only was crucified for their sins, but also truly died on the cross. There was a genuine separation of soul and body, and thus He died as all men die. The four Gospel writers have recorded for us what the Savior exclaimed while hanging on the cross: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46). The apostles confirm this truth and speak throughout their epistles regarding the death of the Lord Jesus as the only ground of our salvation. They proclaimed this everywhere among Jews and Gentiles, a truth that cannot be disproven by anyone.

As to the nature of the Savior's death, He died a violent death, and yet He did so in a very human fashion. There was a true separation of soul and body, with a cessation of the breath of life, so that all who beheld Him observed that He had truly died. The soldiers therefore did not break His bones as they did those of the two thieves who were crucified beside Him, doing so while they were still alive. There is therefore not the least doubt regarding the death of the Savior, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may therefore confidently believe with the apostle Peter that the Lord Jesus was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

Concerning the death of the Lord Jesus, the instructor inquires as to the reason and necessity of His death, asking, "Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself even unto death?" The instructor, who in his Catechism extracts his words as much as possible from the Holy Scriptures, and always in conformity to these Scriptures, refers here to the death of the Savior as *a humbling of Himself even unto death*. In Philippians 2:8, Paul speaks of the death of

the Savior accordingly, saying, "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The instructor inquires regarding this great humiliation of the Savior even unto death, considering that the Lord Jesus did not humble Himself to this extent in vain, but that He had to suffer in this fashion as the surety and mediator of His people. Succinctly and objectively, He then gives the reason for the savior's death, saying that Christ died "because with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God."

The instructor deduces the necessity of the savior's death from God's *justice* and *truth*, which demanded of Him, as surety and redeemer of all His believing people, that by His atoning sacrifice, He would die to pay for their sins. The instructor already addressed this truth in Lord's Day 5, Question 12, when he dealt with the manner in which sinners are delivered from their misery. There He taught that this deliverance could not be accomplished in any way but in a way of holiness and justice, saying, "God will have His justice satisfied." As sinners who desire to be reconciled with God, we "therefore . . . must make this full satisfaction, either by ourselves," that is, we must fully suffer and accomplish what God's justice demands of us, "or by another." Upon this basis, sinners can again be eternally reconciled and united to the most high and holy God.

From our side, we must fully endure the full extent of the punishment, curse, and wrath of God, all of which we have righteously deserved and brought upon ourselves by our sins and our grievous disobedience toward God. Such was indeed the threat God made to Adam, namely, that in the day he transgressed God's commandment, he would "surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Since Adam subsequently transgressed God's commandment, he, and all of his descendants who sinned in him, immediately became subject to the death that had been threatened. The apostle teaches this, saying, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Thus, the entire human race, having sinned against God, was fully subjected to the bondage of sin, and Satan thus held "the power of death" against all men (Heb. 2:14). All souls are therefore by nature subjected to the power of Satan and are under the dominion of death.

This *spiritual death* consists both in a radical separation from God and His blessed communion, as well as in all the grievous and wretched consequences of that separation. It consists in the sinner being absolutely impotent of ever even remotely delivering himself from this spiritual death and being reunited

with God. All men by nature, and thus also the elect, have died this disastrous spiritual death because of sin, "for the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). The Holy Scriptures therefore generally speak of men as being "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), a truth that could be affirmed by many scriptural passages. As no sinner is capable either of sanctifying or quickening himself, all men are therefore under the dominion and power of *eternal death*. Due to sin, they have to remain eternally separated from God, and as sinners, will never be able to desist from sin. God will have to punish them eternally, for as sin will eternally be committed by them, it will eternally culminate in death and cause them to be and to remain eternally alienated "from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). Due to sin and the impotence of the flesh, all men, and thus also elect believers, are by nature entirely subject to the power and dominion of spiritual and eternal death.

However, sinners are subject not only to spiritual and eternal death. Through sin, they also are subject to the dominion and power of *temporal or corporal death*, consisting of all the evils, sorrows, miseries, and discomforts of the body to which the sinner is subject by God's just judgment. Man's sinful body therefore progressively grows weaker and frailer, until at last it is separated from the soul by death, and thus fully deprived of life. This corporal death came into the world through sin, and all men, due to sin and by virtue of having sinned in the body against God, deserve both corporal and spiritual death as a just punishment of God.

God can by no means absolve the sinner from the penalty of corporal and spiritual death, both temporally and eternally, without complete satisfaction being made to His holy justice. His justice and truth demand, in the absolute sense of the word, that the sinner die this death, and be thus punished eternally. God speaks accordingly in Ezekiel 18:20, saying, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And this threatened divine sentence is as true and immutable as the God who pronounced it. Paul testifies in Romans 1:32, saying, "Knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death."

Oh, that this truth would be believed by men! How deeply they would be affected in their hearts, not only upon considering themselves to be condemned criminals, but also by perceiving that the sentence of temporal and eternal death is pronounced and executed upon them due to their sins! However, the world does not believe this and ignores it. While God pronounces His curse upon them, sinners call themselves blessed, and they permit themselves to be led astray by the devil, who says to them, as he once said to the woman in

Paradise, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). Nevertheless, the matter remains as it is: God’s justice remains in full force, and He will not permit Himself to be mocked by ungodly sinners.

From what we have considered and expounded, we are to deduce the necessity of the death of the Lord Jesus in order to secure the salvation and redemption of His believing people. Having become their surety and mediator to deliver them from their misery and to redeem them eternally, He took upon Himself all their sins, with their curse and penalty. Therefore, to pay for the sins of His believing people, He had to die in their stead the death that they all deserved to die both temporally and eternally. God’s justice and truth required this, and apart from this the Lord Jesus would not have been able to save His believing people.

On behalf of His believing people:

1. He had to die a spiritual death, and thereby to endure not only the wrath, but also the withholding of the countenance of His Father. This He did, as we recently considered when addressing His suffering.

2. He also had to die a physical death as a punishment for their sins. He had to be removed from the land of the living, and before God’s countenance, He had to become as one who was broken. For His believing people, He had to pour out His soul unto death, and in so doing, He gave Himself on their behalf as an atoning sacrifice. Apart from this, God’s justice and truth could not have been satisfied, for as we saw earlier, God had threatened the sinner with death.

The death of the Lord Jesus was thus absolutely necessary unto the salvation and redemption of all His believing people. By His death, God had to be satisfied, peace had to be restored, and believers had to be eternally delivered from their sins and from the power of death as the wages of sin. Yes, by His death, the Lord Jesus robbed the devil of the power of death that he exercised toward believers, and thereby He broke and demolished it. Paul teaches this in Hebrews 2:14: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Christ] also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

The death of the Lord Jesus is therefore the only way through which His believing people can be delivered from death and become the recipients of eternal life. The Holy Scriptures therefore everywhere set before us this death as the only ground or foundation of the eternal salvation of all elect believers, so that they will continually and only put their trust in that death alone,

glorying in nothing but the cross and the death of Jesus Christ, who “died for our sins according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3).

The Apostles' Creed, and thus also the instructor, then proceeds to address the second truth, namely, that of the Savior's burial after His death, as well as its efficacy and benefit. Since this is a matter of such transparency, we will be brief in our consideration of it. Regarding the burial of the Lord Jesus after His death, we find extensive and detailed accounts in the Holy Scriptures by the four Gospel writers. Therefore, this truth as such does not require any further proof. The apostles proclaimed it as a known and irrefutable truth among Jews and Gentiles. Paul testifies in the same way of it in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, saying, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried... according to the scriptures.”

The instructor here inquires regarding the reason for the Savior's burial, teaching that thereby it was proven “that He was really dead.” Here we discern a great difference between the burial of the Lord Jesus and the burial of us men. We are buried so that according to the body, we will return to the dust of the earth and be consumed by decay, thereafter to be raised again. However, the Lord Jesus could not be buried for that reason, because David prophesied regarding the will of Christ's heavenly Father, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10). According to the instructor, a very important reason for the Savior's burial was to signify and confirm the truth of His death, for no one is buried who is alive. Rather, the dead are buried because they no longer belong to the living. As something useless, harmful, and corrupt, they are buried beneath the surface of the earth. Pilate therefore was not willing to yield the crucified body of the Savior to the counselor Joseph of Arimathea for burial until he heard from the mouth of the centurion who had crucified the Savior that the truth of His death had been certified and guaranteed (Mark 15:44–45). The truth of the Savior's death having thus been confirmed is a matter of the greatest importance for believers, for as we have observed, His death is the only and complete foundation of their salvation. This is most clearly affirmed by His burial, which, as the instructor teaches, occurred for this very purpose.

However, aside from the reason advanced by the instructor, there were other reasons for the Savior's burial. It also occurred so that:

1. What the prophets had prophesied and what the shadows of the Old Testament had prefigured regarding the burial of the Messiah would indeed be fulfilled and confirmed.

2. He would be humbled to the uttermost as the surety and mediator of His believing people, thereby securing their supreme and eternal exaltation. We cannot be humbled more deeply than by being entirely removed from among men and being buried in and covered by the earth. The deepest humiliation of a nation or a people is therefore represented by way of a burial (Ezek. 26:20).

3. The sins of and the curse upon His believing people would be fully removed from the earth, and would thus eternally be buried with Him and, as it were, be buried in and covered by the earth. In order to signify this during the Old Testament era, they who were hanged on a tree, and were thus accursed of God, had to be removed from the tree and buried before evening, so that the curse would not remain in Israel during the night, but, so to speak, would be buried along with the criminal (Deut. 21:23).

4. He thereby would pursue death in its most secret recesses, and thus remove for His believing people the terror and curse of the grave. By way of His burial, Christ cleansed and sanctified their graves, so that the grave would become a sweet and delightful resting place for their deceased bodies. It is thus testified of God's people that the righteous "shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness" (Isa. 57:2). A believing child of God may thus anticipate his burial with peace and joy, for by His burial, the Lord Jesus fully removed for them all the terror and curse of the grave.

We have thus observed the sweet efficacy and mystery of the burial of the Lord Jesus after His death, and how great the comfort is that His believing people may derive from it. The instructor then proceeds further and sets before us several matters pertaining to the death and burial of the Savior, all of which are essential for rendering these precious truths beneficial to us by faith.

The instructor continues by addressing an objection of the Socinians regarding the death of Jesus Christ. They maintain that His death is not an atoning sacrifice for the sins of believers, and it therefore cannot be either the ground or the means unto their salvation and redemption. You need to know that the Socinians, who are utterly hostile to the truth and are of the children of darkness, completely deny the efficacy of the death and merits of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of His believing people. They teach that Christ died as nothing more than a most eminent martyr or a great teacher, and that by His death He

affirmed the truth of what He taught. They thus deny that He died on behalf of His believing people in order to deliver them from their sins and eternal death. Arguing on the basis of the root of this error, they argue against us that if Christ truly had died as the surety of His believing people, having done so for them and on their behalf and in order to deliver them from sin and death, they themselves would not have to die. Instead, they would be as Enoch and Elijah, who were alive when they were taken into heaven. Since this does not occur, however, it then follows that Christ did not die for the sins of His believing people.

Listen, however, to the response of the instructor in Question 42, saying that “our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life.” According to Latin scholars, he who has the gift of discernment also teaches well. One and the same matter is often addressed from different vantage points, arises from different reasons, and has different objectives in view. This makes a great difference as to the nature of the matter itself, and therefore, if this distinction is not correctly discerned, it greatly obscures the matter at hand and spawns many errors with much misunderstanding. This is also applicable to the death of believers.

According to Solomon's testimony, “all things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean” (Eccl. 9:2). Although the ungodly and the godly die externally in the same manner, there is a great difference as to how the ungodly and the righteous die. The ungodly and unbelievers, for whom the Lord Jesus did not die, die as a punishment or retribution for their sins. However, such is not the case when believers and the righteous die. Not at all! As their surety, the Lord Jesus died for them and on their behalf, thereby receiving the wages of their sins. He endured and bore the punishment of death on their behalf, thereby fully and eternally delivering them from the penalty of death. When believers nevertheless also die the temporal death, the instructor teaches that this does not occur as payment or punishment for their sins, for by the death of the Lord Jesus, they have fully and eternally been delivered from the punishment of death. According to the instructor, “[their] death is not a satisfaction for [their] sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life.”

As long as believers live here on earth, sin will dwell in them. It will cleave inseparably to them, follow them everywhere, and contaminate the very best of their holy and spiritual deeds. Consequently, while here on earth, they will always be encompassed by their sinful flesh and be governed by the body of this death. They therefore will not enjoy a full salvation as long as they reside

here. When, however, their sinful bodies die, they will be fully rid of sin and will be transferred into the full enjoyment of salvation and eternal life, “for he that is dead is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:7). It is therefore said of them, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord” (Rev. 14:13).

Behold, the death of the righteous, and thus of all believers, is by no means an evil thing; neither is it a punishment or payment for their sins, but a most precious and glorious means whereby they become partakers of their complete salvation and redemption. This at times they most earnestly long for, because the death of righteous believers is actually not death when considered from a proper perspective. According to the instructor, it is rather “a passage into eternal life.” Although the Lord Jesus died for them, they must also die in order to be fully liberated from their sins and be ushered eternally into the enjoyment of a complete salvation.

Having dismantled and removed this Socinian objection, the instructor now proceeds in Question 43 to address what efficacy and benefit can be further derived by faith from the death of the Lord Jesus, as well as from His most precious sacrifice on the cross and from His burial. All true believers obtain this blessed advantage, “that by virtue thereof, our old man is crucified, dead and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us.” This is a very precious truth—one of extraordinary importance and applicability. As such, it deserves to be known and considered carefully by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for in light of all that we have said and considered thus far, this addresses the very efficacy and essence of this matter. Thus far, we have been, so to speak, only in the outer court of the sanctuary of the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Here, however, the instructor leads us into the sanctuary itself, instructing us as to how the passion and death of the great savior become efficacious in the hearts of all His believing people, who are spiritually united to Him by faith. His objective is that, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we might “know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means [we] might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil. 3:10–11).

By means of the common instruction of the Word, which displays all of these truths clearly before our eyes, we may have a good intellectual grasp of all that we have considered thus far. In this question, however, we are again addressing the mystery, efficacy, and genuine spirituality of this matter.

Dear reader, due to the expiration of time, we do not wish to address these spiritual and holy truths presently. Rather, we will do this separately in the

next sermon. With God's help, we will then consider in greater detail what the instructor deems to be the extraordinary efficacy and glorious benefit of the death of Christ for all true believers, resulting in the crucifixion, death, and burial of the old man.

As we will leave this matter to rest for now, we will finally proceed to focus on the third truth of the faith set before us by the instructor by way of the Apostles' Creed, namely, the Savior's *descent into hell*. Let me preface this by saying that the doctrine of the Savior's descent into hell is not a scriptural doctrine, albeit the truths one understands to be expressed by this phrase are scriptural truths.

Nowhere does God's Word teach us that Christ descended into hell. We do read, however, that the Savior "descended first into the lower parts of the earth" (Eph. 4:9) and that "his soul was not left in hell" (Acts 2:31). These are expressions that signify the burial of the Savior. In the Apostles' Creed, however, Christ's descent into hell is expressly distinguished from His burial as being an entirely different and unique matter.

To be truthful, it would have been better if the Apostles' Creed had neither mentioned nor addressed this matter, for the Holy Scriptures speak nowhere of the descent of Jesus Christ into hell as an event distinct from His burial. Prior to the fifth century, there was no mention of this at all in the Apostles' Creed. Only then was this phrase added for the first time. Though one may have desired to include something like this in this creed, one could at least have expressed himself more clearly, so that everyone would have a correct understanding as to what is to be understood in scriptural terms by the Lord Jesus having descended into hell. That not being the case, this doctrine regarding the Savior's descent into hell has not only given rise to various errors, but it has also led to differences of opinion within our own denomination.

The errors spawned by this phrase are primarily those of Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. Roman Catholicism interprets the Savior's descent into hell as meaning that Christ, after His death, descended to the porch of hell, where believers of the Old Testament were preserved and confined, and that in so doing, He set them free from this porch of hell and brought them into heaven. This ungodly heresy is completely refuted by the apostle Paul, teaching clearly in Hebrews 2:10 that God, already prior to Christ's death, had brought "many sons unto glory" (Heb. 2:10).

The Lutherans understand Christ's descent into hell to mean that after His death, Christ descended into hell itself to manifest Himself to the devils and the

damned as the triumphant champion and conqueror over all His enemies. This is also a very futile and irrational argument, for nowhere in the Holy Scriptures do we read that the Lord Jesus made such a triumphant journey to hell. We do read that upon the cross, He “spoiled principalities and powers, [and] made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15). This would mean that the article regarding the Savior's descent into hell belongs to the state of His exaltation, whereas the Apostles' Creed addresses it as part of His humiliation.

Even among us there are differences of opinion regarding this doctrine. Some understand the Savior's descent into hell to mean that following His death and burial, He subsequently descended into hell; that is, into the realm of the dead as the Greek word indicates—the place where souls and bodies are separated from one another. For a period of three days, He allegedly was subject to the bondage and slavery of sin, and was even subjected to its painful vehemence. This would be in accordance with Peter's testimony regarding the Lord Jesus, that “God... raised [Him] up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24). Such an interpretation would mean that the Savior's descent into hell was nothing other than His ultimate humiliation, to which He, as the surety of elect believers, was subjected during the period of three days in which His body rested in the grave. During that period, He allegedly was in subjection to the slavery, violence, and pains of death, and He was delivered and set free from this only at His resurrection.

Nevertheless, there are others who, with our instructor, understand that Christ's descent into hell simply means that prior to His death, and on behalf of His believing people, He endured inwardly in His soul and His body the punishment due to their sins, consisting in the hellish agonies and terrors inflicted upon Him by the fearful wrath of God. This conforms to the language of the Holy Scriptures, which frequently depict suffering and the experience of great fear and anxiety as a descent into hell. In 1 Samuel 2:6, Hannah says regarding the Lord God, “The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave,¹ and bringeth up.” Here a similar expression is used to describe the experience of extreme fear and anxiety. In Psalm 18:5, David testifies of his great anguish, saying, “The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.” This would then also be the meaning of the Apostles' Creed—that Christ was not only crucified, dead, and buried, but that He also descended into hell; that is, on behalf of His believing people, He suffered hellish terrors

1. The Dutch *Statenvertaling* reads, “Hij doet ter helle nederdalen”; that is, “He causes one to descend into hell.”

and agonies, so that they might eternally be delivered and set free from them. By God's grace, this truth would be of great comfort for all true believers who "in [their] greatest temptations," which God at times for wise and adorable reasons permits to come their way, especially in the hour of death, "may be assured, and wholly comfort [themselves] in this that [their] Lord Jesus Christ, by His inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies, in which He was plunged during all His sufferings, but especially on the cross, hath delivered [them] from the anguish and torments of hell."

Thus we have two very different sentiments regarding Christ's descent into hell, though they are both good and sound. The best way for us is that, with upright hearts, we embrace both as being according to truth, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit appropriate them by a true faith and derive full benefit from them. Furthermore, we should not dispute about this with anyone, for all vehement disputes generally yield more harm than benefit for our souls.

We have thus in some detail considered with you the three truths pertaining to the Savior's death, burial, and descent into hell. A mere intellectual reflection upon and consideration of these truths would be of very little benefit to our souls, and would absolutely yield nothing that would be of true and essential benefit.

Only a true faith genuinely embraces the truths we have considered, and by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, appropriates them with special application. A true and upright Christian considers Christ to have died, to have been buried, and to have descended into hell on his behalf, so that thereby he would be fully and eternally delivered from eternal death, the curse of the grave, the sorrows of death, and all the terrors and agonies of hell, all of which he was worthy of suffering, due to sin. He is thus eternally delivered and saved by grace.

A true Christian puts all his trust in this truth alone, and with all of his sins and miseries, casts himself upon the Lord Jesus Christ and, thus, upon His death, His burial, and His descent into hell as being the only ground and rock of redemption and salvation. With his soul, he clings to this, and through sovereign grace alone he waits for this salvation.

This is what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as having died, been buried, and descended into hell. May the Lord, by His Spirit, continue to work and to strengthen such faith in the hearts of all the elect, to the glory of His grace in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The Efficacy and Benefit of the Death of Jesus

LORD'S DAY 16

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

—ROMANS 6:6

Question 43: What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?

Answer: That by virtue thereof our old man is crucified, dead and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us; but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

In 2 Kings 13:20–21, we read of a remarkable event regarding the prophet Elisha. Considering its brevity, we shall read what has been recorded in the Holy Scriptures of this sacred history: “And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.”

Dear reader, three things are to be noted regarding this account:

1. how Elisha died;
2. how he was then buried; and
3. how, due to the hostile pursuit of the Moabites, the body of a certain deceased individual was cast into the grave of the prophet, and how, upon coming in contact with the prophet's remains, he became alive and was resurrected from the dead.

Elisha, an illustrious type of the Lord Jesus Christ, here foreshadows Him in this particular event. As was true for Elisha, the Lord Jesus also:

1. died and was slain by way of the cross for the sins of His believing people;
2. was immediately buried after His death; and
3. made others alive by way of His death, namely, all His elect, believing people, who by nature are dead in trespasses and sins, and are utter strangers of divine life. Due to the hostile pursuit by their sins and the hellish Moabites, they too are led to the Lord Jesus (that is, as to His death and grave) and by faith are so intimately united to Him that they come, so to speak, in contact with His mortal remains, and so they are buried with Him in His death. In the moment that this takes place, however, a spiritual efficacy proceeds from the mortal remains of the Lord Jesus, resulting in their being raised from the dead and being made alive. The old man of sin then, by the efficacy of the Lord Jesus and His death, is crucified, dead, and buried together with Him, so that in the Spirit they now live unto God and eternally live and rule with Christ their head.

The apostle Paul sets this truth before us in the words of our text, teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ, having been crucified and slain on behalf of His believing people, thereby has “crucified [our old man] with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed,” having also resurrected and made them alive “that henceforth we should not serve sin,” but walk in newness of life.

As you know, in the previous Lord's Day we dealt with the *death*, *burial*, and *descent into hell* of the Lord Jesus, all of which He endured and to which He submitted Himself as surety and redeemer of all His believing people. We then heard how the instructor addressed the efficacy and benefits that a believing Christian may derive by faith from the death of the Lord Jesus, teaching in Question 43 “that by virtue thereof, our old man is crucified, dead and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us; but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.”

Given the scope of this subject matter, there was neither time nor opportunity to consider these precious truths in greater detail. However, it is exceedingly essential that we acquire a proper knowledge regarding the internal, divine efficacy and benefit of Christ's death for the souls of all true believers. There are thousands in the church who believe and conclude that Christ died for them, and yet the death of Christ has neither had the least effect on nor yielded any benefit to their hearts, else sin and evil lusts would thereby be mortified in them, and there would be a transition to a truly holy and godly life. We need

sound instruction regarding this matter, for if we are to believe in truth that Christ died and was buried on our behalf, then our sinful flesh, that is, our evil and corrupt nature with its evil lusts and inclinations, must, with Christ, and by His Spirit and grace, be mortified and buried. By God's grace, we must be fully engaged in battling them until, at His time, we one day secure a complete victory. With the Lord's blessing, we wish to consider this matter in greater detail, hoping that the Lord will sustain us by His Spirit and by His grace, and that He will bless our words to all who hear or may read them—for His great name's sake. Amen.

We have selected our text only to serve as the foundation of our treatise, and therefore you should not expect a separate exposition of it. Rather, we will expound for you the answer of the instructor to Question 43, whereby everyone will readily be able to discern that his answer is entirely rooted in our text and is fully extracted from it. Therefore, in expounding this question and answer, we will simultaneously expound the content of the text for you.

In this question and answer, we encounter two matters:

1. the subject matter addressed by the instructor, being the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross; and
2. the glorious efficacy and benefit that all true believers derive from it.

The instructor defines the subject of our consideration as *Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross*. The Holy Scriptures abundantly teach us that the Lord Jesus, by His death, sacrificed Himself upon the cross for the sake of His believing people. This sacrifice was well pleasing to God and was an atonement for all their sins, so that they would be sanctified and be eternally reconciled with God.

Paul exhorts God's people accordingly, saying, "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" (Eph. 5:2). In Hebrews 10:14, he testifies regarding the Lord Jesus that "by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." This refers to the great and glorious sacrifice of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which in a very clear and vivid manner is set forth and foreshadowed to all believers by all the ceremonial sacrifices of the Old Testament. Sacrifices were made from the very beginning of the world, as, for example, the sacrifices of Cain and Abel. From the very beginning, believers were already called upon to look forward to this great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross as being the only way in which they could be saved and sanctified.

It is not our intention to address here in detail the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross, for we did so sufficiently in the previous Lord's Day. By our exposition

of the Catechism, we observed how by our sin and disobedience toward God, we are all justly deserving of and have subjected ourselves to corporal, spiritual, temporal, and eternal death—all being the wages of our sins. We also observed that there is no other way whereby we can be delivered and absolved of our sins than by the death of the Lord Jesus, the instructor having taught that “because with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God.” Therefore, the Lord Jesus necessarily had to die the physical and spiritual death on our behalf as sinners. He teaches furthermore that we all, by faith, must truly be partakers of His death, so that we might be delivered from our sins and from death, be reconciled with God, and be redeemed eternally.

Having previously addressed these matters sufficiently, we will now proceed to consider the second component of our treatise, namely, the glorious efficacy and benefit that accrue to all true believers from the sacrifice and death of the Lord Jesus on the cross. According to the instructor, it is by the power of Christ that our old man is “crucified, dead and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us; but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.” We again observe here:

1. the subject addressed by the instructor, namely, the *old man* of the believer; and
2. that of which he testifies, namely, that by virtue of the efficacy of Christ and His death, we are “crucified, dead and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us.”

By the *old man* of believers, we are simply to understand their natural state in which they live unto themselves, apart from the grace of God. In such a condition, they came forth from their parents by way of natural birth, “having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:18). Such is the state of all men by nature, and also of elect believers. They too have been born of sinful and corrupt flesh, and they are therefore also of the flesh (John 3:6). The Scriptures teach regarding all humanity, “They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:3).

By sin, all have become completely hostile toward God, and utterly have lost and squandered His image. Mankind now comes short of God's glory, and with all their powers and strength, they now fully and consistently oppose God

and His holy law. They neither want to subject themselves nor yield unto Him the least modicum of sincere obedience, “because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).

This natural state of sin, unholiness, and enmity toward God is generally designated in the Word of God as the *old man*. Paul does so in his epistle to the Ephesians when he admonishes believers to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22).

This is here designated the *old man* because this natural, corrupt, and unholy state not only encompasses the entire man and fully pollutes him in body and soul, but it causes him also to be utterly hostile toward God. The *entire man* by nature, as well as by physical birth, is utterly corrupt, unholy, wicked, and ungodly. His mind, judgment, conscience, will, affections, desires, senses, and all the members of his body are so completely and thoroughly polluted and corrupted by sin that there is not a shred of true spiritual good to be found in him. Paul testifies to this concerning himself, saying, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18).

The elect, by God's Spirit, no sooner are exposed as to who they really are than they at once begin truly to loathe themselves as to their state and person, exclaiming: “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it” (Isa. 1:5–6). The natural and corrupt state of believers is therefore designated in the Holy Scriptures as the *old man*.

This is designated as the *old man* in believers because:

1. thereby this state of their natural unholiness and corruption is distinguished from their spiritual state of grace, designated as the *new man*, which God renews within them by way of conversion and regeneration;
2. in and of itself, this natural state of corruption and unholiness is very old, having entered the world immediately by and through the fall of the first man, and since then has had dominion over all men (Rom. 5:12);
3. in each and every man, this natural corruption and unholiness is the oldest and original nature with which he was immediately and fully conceived and born, and therefore, “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5);

4. it is abominably vile in God's holy eyes, for the older that we and all things become, the more we become marred, so that before God we must be ashamed and abhor ourselves regarding the abominableness and the vileness of our old man (Jer. 31:19); and
5. in believers, this old man is near to its demise, disappearance, and death, for in principle it has already died in them by virtue of conversion and regeneration, and increasingly it dies by virtue of the progressive strength of faith and sanctification. It is ultimately destined to die fully at the death of the believer, and will then forever have been demolished and annihilated.

These are some of the reasons why our natural state and innate corruption are designated as the old man in the Holy Scriptures. This old man is simply who we are and how we live by nature prior to our conversion and prior to being "born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5).

The instructor here testifies and teaches regarding this old man that by the power of Christ and with Him it has been crucified, has died, and has been buried. The crucifixion, death, and burial of the old man simply refers to its mortification, its breaking down, and its destruction in believers—initially, continually, and ultimately completely at the hour of death. By nature, that is, prior to believers being united to the Lord Jesus by faith and prior to their being renewed and transformed in Him by the Holy Spirit, the old man of sin lives and reigns fully in them. However, as soon as believers are led to the Lord Jesus, are united to Him by faith, and become partakers of His holy passion and death, then by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Lord Jesus and who brings the sanctifying and saving grace of God in Christ into their hearts, a very great and glorious transformation occurs in them as to body and soul. By the efficacy and grace of the Lord Jesus, the old man is then initially subdued, and with Him will be crucified, dead, and buried. By way of regeneration, a new, holy, and spiritual man arises within.

All believers who are truly converted and have been united to the Lord Jesus by the Spirit experience this, and therefore they that have no experience of these matters continue to live in sin, being utterly divorced from Christ. This great and blessed transformation has to occur prior to one's death, otherwise he will undoubtedly perish eternally and die in his sins.

For us to understand better and grasp in what this crucifixion, death, and burial of the old man in the believer consists by virtue of the efficacy of Christ and His death, you should know that this transpires in believers in a twofold

fashion, namely, by *justification* and *sanctification*. The first mortifies the old man as to its *guilt* before God, and the other mortifies the old man as to its indwelling *corruption* and *uncleanness*. Both the guilt and the indwelling corruption and uncleanness constitute the virility of the old man in believers, and by way of both, the old man abuses them and by nature has complete dominion over them in soul and body. If, therefore, the old and sinful man is to be truly eliminated and be broken by the efficacy of Christ and His death, and therefore truly die, it must be mortified as to both its *guilt* and its *pollution*, and Christ, by His death, must annihilate them both—all of which truly transpires. Let us now briefly set before you how this takes place.

To consider in greater detail this divine mystery of the crucifixion and mortification of the old man by the efficacy of Christ’s death, we must first consider how, by means of gracious and divine justification, the old man is crucified, put to death, and buried as to its prevailing guilt of sin.

Beloved, it is certain that by virtue of sin, the entire world is “guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). As sinners, we are all by nature subject to the disastrous curse and wrath of God, and are worthy of all the temporal and eternal punishments God has threatened to execute upon sin. By nature, we are therefore all “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). This wretched guilt is inseparably linked to our old man. It is linked to ourselves. By nature, we are subject to this guilt, and we live and function as guilty sinners. All the ungodly, all the unconverted, and all who are reprobate will eternally be subject to their wretched guilt without any hope either of salvation or redemption.

As soon as we are led to the Lord Jesus with a true heart and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and we sincerely believe in Him, taking hold of His strength and His all-sufficient righteousness in the complete forsaking of ourselves, the old man or the corrupt nature immediately and by the full and free grace of God in Christ is crucified, dead, and buried as to its prevailing guilt and its worthiness of condemnation, death, and punishment. No sooner are our hearts united with the Lord Jesus by a true faith and incorporated into Him by the operation of the Holy Spirit, behold, by the Spirit of faith and by this personal relationship with Christ, we immediately become partakers of His person as well as of all His grace and merits. By grace and by means of faith, His perfect holiness and righteousness are immediately credited and imputed to us as being our own. Immediately our souls are clothed by God with the mantle of His righteousness (Isa. 61:10). God graciously, through the instrumentality of faith, imputes and grants unto us Christ’s death, His passion, and His burial,

and it then is not only as if we ourselves in person had suffered and paid for all our sins, but also as if we ourselves had completely and entirely fulfilled all the righteousness of the law. No longer does God then see us as the sinners that we are in and of ourselves. On the contrary, He beholds us entirely in Christ, His Son, and views us as being of one Spirit with Him by faith (1 Cor. 6:17); as being one with Christ our head, who died for our sins; and as having been buried by baptism into His death (Rom. 6:4).

In this way, God fully justifies us in Christ, and for His sake graciously grants us the pardon of all our sins, eternally reconciles us to Himself, adopts us to be His children, and makes us heirs of eternal life. He removes His wrath, His curse, and punishment from us, and speaks peace to our souls. Oh, how we then taste and savor that the Lord is good and that His mercy endures forever! They indeed are blessed who may experience these matters in their hearts!

By virtue of the death and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross, the believer's old man of sin, as to its guilt, is fully crucified, dead, and buried with Him. The Holy Ghost, in Christ's name, then brings into their hearts the glad tidings and the affirmation thereof, causing them to exclaim with Paul, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

However, it is not only by means of justification that the old man of believers, by the efficacy of Christ and His death, is crucified, dead, and buried with Him as to its guilt. Rather, the old man, by virtue of the death of the Lord Jesus, is further mortified as to its pollution and its dominion over the souls and bodies of believers. All this transpires by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and without exception, all who believe in the Lord Jesus with a true heart are partakers of this. There is an essential and unbreakable connection between justification and sanctification, so that where the one is found, the other is found as well—similarly as with twins who follow one another into the world and remain most intimately united. The Holy Scriptures therefore commonly join together these two matters. Paul accordingly writes to believers in 1 Corinthians 6:11, saying, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," and in 1 Corinthians 1:30, he writes, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

Believers experience and become conscious that from the Lord Jesus, as well as from His grace and death, with which they now have fellowship by a true faith, there proceeds a soul-sanctifying, renewing, life-giving, and

heart-transforming efficacy that penetrates their innermost recesses. It is an efficacy that most sweetly and delightfully encompasses them, and it gently moves and stirs up their hearts, filling them with an unfeigned love for God, for His blessed service, and for His communion.

The intellect of believers is illuminated by a holy and divine light, by which the triune God now unveils Himself to them in His illustrious beauty and glory. They now behold so much preciousness, infinite beauty, and sweetness in God and in His service. Simultaneously, they see so much that is repulsive and abhorrent, abominable, shameful, and dreadful in sin and in the service of the world, so that they wholeheartedly fall in love with the service of God, and are filled with a most intense and sincere hatred toward sin. Their hearts are powerfully moved and inclined to know, love, serve, and glorify God rightly in Christ, and this is accompanied by a willing forsaking of self and of all men. There is then a wholehearted inclination to delight one's self wholly and exclusively in the triune, eternal, and living God, and to walk eternally before His countenance in newness of life and genuine humility.

The divine power that thus proceeds toward believers from the Lord Jesus and from His grace and death, of which they feel that it penetrates their innermost recesses, is God the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. The breath of the Almighty, His eternal Spirit, now blows upon them, and they inwardly receive this unto their sanctification and renewal, as well as to the mortification of their innate corruption and their old man of sin. John 20:22 records that the Lord Jesus did so in regard to His believing disciples: "And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Believers presently also receive this Holy Spirit from God and their savior, Jesus Christ. This divine Breath of the Almighty resurrects them from their sinful state of death and makes them alive with Christ, so that not only what is written in Job 33:4 is fulfilled, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life," but it is also fulfilled regarding believers that they experience and become partakers of what Paul writes, saying, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

Believers hereby experience and understand a most precious, blessed, and glorious transformation in soul and body, of which an unconverted world neither understands nor experiences anything! The Holy Spirit inwardly fully renews, regenerates, re-creates, converts, and sanctifies them. They experience

within themselves this blessed and spiritual renewal of which unholy and carnal men, with their mere intellect, speak so erroneously. By virtue of this new birth by water and the Spirit, their renewal is neither an illusion nor mere imagination, but rather, it is a true and essential renewal by which they are conformed to God's image. By this new birth, they receive and acquire a new spiritual understanding and discernment, a new will, new affections, new desires and inner stirrings, new interests, and new capacities. They are all inclined toward the service of God, and in principle they have been sanctified. Yes, it becomes for them a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. In a word, in Christ Jesus, to whom they are united by faith, they become entirely new creatures. This is expressed in Scripture: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

By this spiritual new birth, renewal, and sanctification of believers in Christ Jesus, and by faith, the old man and its innate sinful nature and corruption are crucified, dead, and buried with Christ. Consequently, a new man that is completely holy and alive unto God in the Spirit is raised up in them, whereby, in union with the Lord Jesus, they not only "have been planted together in the likeness of his death," but they shall also be planted together with Him "in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:5). According to the instructor, this has as its result "that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us."

By these "corrupt inclinations of the flesh," the instructor is simply referring to the evil inclinations and desires of the old man, and thus of the body of sin, which are utterly opposed to God and to His holy law. They consist in nothing but rebellion, disobedience, and enmity toward God. By way of these corrupt lusts and hostile inclinations toward God, the old man exercises its vital power and thereby has dominion over our nature in both soul and body. However, no sooner is the old man in the believer subdued, as well as crucified, dead, and buried with Christ, than these evil lusts and desires cease to *reign* in the believer. This does not mean, however, that the old man no longer stirs up in them evil lusts and corrupt, hostile inclinations toward God. No, it does and will continue to do this, because this nature has been mortified and subdued in the believer only in principle, but not yet completely or entirely.

However powerful, strong, and overwhelming these corrupt inclinations may be that the old man still stirs up in them, and however much these inclinations may at times oppress and trouble them and appear to have the upper hand for a period of time, they will never again reign and have dominion over

believers. Prior to the old man having been crucified and mortified, that is, prior to believers having been born again and having been united to Christ by faith, these inclinations had dominion over them. At that time, they were utterly alienated from God and from divine life, and as other Gentiles, they lived according to the vanity of their hearts. Though dwelling in the midst of Christianity, they were completely dead in trespasses and sins, serving such as by nature were no gods. Willingly they bowed to such idols, and they honored and worshiped them. The old man, with its corrupt inclinations and evil desires, had complete dominion over them, and in soul and body, Satan held them captive in his snare, dragging them as bounty behind him.

However, believers having now been set free from the snare of the devil, having been united to the Lord Jesus, and their old man in Him having been mortified in principle by regeneration and conversion, these evil lusts and unholy and hostile inclinations and desires no longer have dominion over them. Instead, a new man has been raised up in them, and by the efficacious, holy, and gracious influence of heaven, this new man continues to be preserved, sustained, and increasingly fortified. Being born of God and being rooted in the Holy Spirit as to its efficacy, life, and growth, this new man is now a radical and mortal enemy of the old man of sin. It relentlessly opposes this old man and its corrupt inclinations, and this causes in the believer a perpetual battle against sin and the corrupt inclinations of the flesh. As a result, these corrupt inclinations now meet with heavy resistance, and they are so suppressed, pursued, and mortified that it is no longer possible for them to have any dominion over God's children. They mortify their members "which are upon earth" (Col. 3:5) and "which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11), and in so doing, by God's grace, they increasingly subdue the evil lusts and inclinations of the flesh, thereby fighting "the good fight of faith, [and laying] hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12).

The old man increasingly is mortified in them by the power and grace of Christ, by whom God's children can do all things, and the body of sin in them is put to naught. They increasingly offer themselves as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1) by increasingly entering into fellowship with God in Christ and dying increasingly to sin while surrendering themselves increasingly with soul and body to Him, to His holy service, and to His glory. They increasingly die to sin to live unto God, doing so in proportion to the measure of grace and holiness they receive of the Lord. This increases progressively, and God's believing children are increasingly sanctified and renewed in Christ, thereby continually putting "off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt

according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:11). The objective of this is that they increasingly reign with Christ in this life until at last, at the hour of death, the old man will completely and eternally be crucified, dead, and buried in them. They may then fully depart unto God for the perfect enjoyment of that eternal life of bliss and glory unto which they were apprehended by Christ.

Behold, beloved, we have set before you in detail how our old man and also the believer's old man are crucified, dead, and buried with Christ by virtue of His efficacy and that of His death. This is therefore the glorious and blessed benefit that all true believers may obtain from the Lord Jesus by virtue of His death and sacrifice on the cross. It is all and entirely the fruit and efficacy of the precious death of the Savior on the cross.

We will conclude with a brief summary of these matters:

The Lord Jesus, by His death and sacrifice on the cross, has fully destroyed sin for His believing people, and has rendered sin powerless by stripping it of its efficacy and inherent strength. What is the inherent strength and efficacy of sin? Paul says that "the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56b), for the law accuses the sinner and indicts him before God, demanding vengeance and wrath. The law reveals sin and renders it lively in the sinner, "for without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom. 7:8-9).

The law causes sin to be active and to break forth all the more strongly in the sinner, thereby increasing the guilt of sin all the more. This is not because the law as such is unholy. On the contrary, the law is only good and holy. On the one hand, this occurs because the sinner, by virtue of his corruption, makes a wrong use of the law and then endeavors to keep and obey it carnally. This results in what Paul teaches in Romans 7:8, saying, "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence."

On the other hand, this sinner is always opposed to the law by virtue of his unholy and corrupt nature. He is particularly opposed to its spirituality, for he cannot tolerate anything that opposes his evil and unholy lusts. He therefore hates the law, so that when the law enters, the offense abounds (Rom. 5:20a). The law then truly is the strength of sin. By His death and sacrifice on the cross, the Lord Jesus rendered this strength of sin completely impotent for His believing people, doing this in the sense that He passively and actively satisfied the law's holy demands, and completely kept it on their behalf. When believers are united to the Lord Jesus by faith, they are in Christ fully delivered and set

free from the law, and, according to Paul's testimony, they are "become dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Rom. 7:4). Therefore, because believers are free from the law, sin dies in them, and to all eternity the law can no longer have any dominion over them. The same apostle writes regarding believers, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

Behold the great efficacy and benefit of the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross unto the mortification and abolishing of the body of sin in all true believers! Christ thereby fully and eternally delivers all believers from the law and subjects them to the easy yoke of His sovereign grace, for "the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners" (1 Tim. 1:9). Being free from the law, believers also no longer have any transgression. Instead, sin dies, and one may live as he desires; that is, completely holy and perfect before God in Christ and by the Holy Spirit. He upon whom grace has been bestowed has no other desire than to live such a life.

The crucifixion and mortification of the old man of sin in the believer is a genuine fruit and benefit of the death and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross. This is also very evident in that the Lord Jesus, by His death, secured and merited redemption, purification from sin, and the Spirit of life for all of His believing people. To that end, He died for them, for Paul teaches that Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). If, however, believers would not truly receive the Holy Spirit, and by Him be delivered from sin and be sanctified (as we have seen), the Lord Jesus would have died in vain for them, and He would not have achieved the objective of His death, rendering His death utterly inefficacious. Since this cannot be, it must necessarily follow that it is as certain that believers are fully delivered from sin and perfected for ever (Heb. 10:14) as it is certain that Christ once died for their sins, "the just for the unjust" (1 Peter 3:18).

Furthermore, the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross is also the true and proper motive whereby believers are most powerfully stirred up and stimulated to mortify and crucify their old man of death continually by the Holy Spirit. When by the illumination of the Holy Spirit they behold the eternal and incomprehensible love of the Lord Jesus for them, how He humbled Himself unto death on their behalf, yes, even unto the death of the cross, and how their old man of sin was responsible for His shameful and grievous death on the cross, they thereby are filled with a strong and intense hatred against their old

man. They are moved and stirred up to exercise vengeance upon the old man, seeking to mortify it once more by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thereby they fully subdue it with all its evil and carnal lusts, showing it not the least measure of mercy, but manfully battling against it until the end.

Behold, such is the conduct of believers through the efficacy of Christ's death and sacrifice on the cross. Peter therefore so earnestly teaches and admonishes believers, saying, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind [that is, by the crucifixion and mortification of the flesh or the old man], for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1).

We can presently neither speak of nor demonstrate how the death and sacrifice of Christ on the cross also exemplifies to believers how their old man must continually be mortified and crucified, to the end that they might be "made conformable unto his death; if by any means [they] might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:10b-11).

Summing up all that we have addressed in this sermon, it is fully evident that we who believe in the Lord Jesus with a true heart, according to the instructor, receive this "benefit... from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross, that by virtue thereof, our old man is crucified, dead and buried with Him."

We herewith conclude our treatment of this important subject matter, and with the Savior, I must say of this, "The words that I speak unto you [and have addressed to you in this hour], they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). None of the wise men of this world have ever known anything of what they testify, though they may have sat upon the seat of Moses. Rather, the wretched, the foolish, the ignorant, the children, and they who are despised by the world do know and understand these things. They have learned them from the Lord by true and spiritual experience, and they continue to be instructed daily therein. Such is indeed the Father's good pleasure regarding His Son!

In conclusion, it is my wish, and I will pray with the holy apostle Paul, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you [that is, as many as He has ordained to be conformed to the image of His Son] the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:17-18)! Amen.

The Resurrection of Jesus from the Dead

LORD'S DAY 17

Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel.

—2 TIMOTHY 2:8

Question 45: What doth the resurrection of Christ profit us?

Answer: First, by His resurrection He has overcome death, that He might make us partakers of that righteousness which He had purchased for us by His death; secondly, we are also by His power raised up to a new life; and lastly, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection.

In Daniel 6:17–28, we read of a noteworthy and well-known incident regarding the prophet. Since Daniel remained steadfast in worshiping and serving the Lord his God, King Darius, at the instigation of Daniel's enemies, cast him into the lions' den. To prevent anyone from removing him from this den, its opening or door was blocked by a heavy stone and sealed with the king's ring. However, God preserved Daniel in this den by closing the mouths of the lions, thereby preventing them from harming him even in the least. Thereafter, He delivered him from this lions' den and exalted him to a position of honor that was higher than what he held previously.

Within the context of this event, we may rightly consider Daniel as exemplifying the Lord Jesus Christ, the great redeemer and savior of an elect and believing world. As Daniel was cast into the lions' den at the instigation of his enemies, and as the entrance to that den was completely blocked by a heavy stone and sealed with the king's ring, thereby vouchsafing that no one would remove him and that he would be devoured by the lions, likewise the Lord Jesus, after having been slain, was also cast into a grave chamber. Not only was the opening of this grave blocked by a heavy stone and sealed by His enemies,

but a detachment of soldiers was then appointed to make certain that His disciples would not be able to come and remove Him from the grave.

As Daniel was delivered by God Himself from the lions' den, emerging from it alive and unharmed so that he would be exalted to a position of greater honor, God Himself likewise, after a short period of time, delivered the Lord Jesus from the pit of His grave without death having harmed Him in any way. Freely and unhindered, Jesus left the grave and rose from the dead so that God could exalt Him to a position of greater honor.

With God's help, we wish to open up and expound this truth in greater detail. After having considered the Savior's state of humiliation in the previous Lord's Days, we will proceed to follow our instructor and the order of the Apostles' Creed by considering the state of His glorious exaltation, the first step thereof being His resurrection from the dead.

We will do so by:

1. expounding this precious truth in greater detail; and
2. considering how the faith of a Christian is exercised regarding this truth.

As to the truth regarding the Savior's resurrection from the dead, by the grace of God we wish to consider:

1. that truth as such; and then,
2. from the answer of the instructor, the precious advantages and comforting benefits that a believing Christian may derive from it.

As to this truth itself, there are three specific matters that come to the fore:

1. the resurrection of the Lord Jesus;
2. the moving cause of His resurrection; and
3. the chronology of His resurrection.

The person whose precious and blessed resurrection from the dead we will now address is the Lord Jesus Christ, the great savior and redeemer of His people. In the previous Lord's Days, we considered His birth, His suffering under Pontius Pilate, etc. It is He who died for His believing people, having been put to death in the flesh, having been made alive in the Spirit, and having risen from the dead upon the third day (i.e., the first day of the week).

As we consider this resurrection in greater detail, take note of the state in which the deceased Savior was on behalf of His believing people. Prior to His resurrection, He was in the state of death. His soul and body had been

separated. His soul was in heaven in the hands of God, being preserved there as a precious and costly jewel by His Father. As His body lay in the grave, it was dead and void of His soul. Behold, such was the state of the Lord Jesus after His death and prior to His resurrection. If, therefore, we are to understand in what manner He rose from the dead, we are to consider three things:

1. the reviving of the Savior's dead body;
2. the reunion of His soul and His resurrected body; and
3. His departure from the grave.

The body of the Lord Jesus lay dead in the grave and without His soul, for He had truly died, as we considered in our previous treatise. His body lay completely stiff and cold, being in the identical condition to that of our bodies upon death. However, when the Lord Jesus determined that He would rise from the dead, the breath of life reentered His body by the almighty and powerful operation of God. Consequently, the fluids and vitality of His body became as it were thawed, stirred up, and rendered viable. This, in turn, reengaged the circulation of His blood, so that it again began to flow to His heart through the veins and arteries of His body. This rekindled the natural warmth in the cold body of the Savior in all the individual components of His body. Also, the external senses of the body were reignited and revived, so that they were refurnished with their previous strength and usefulness. The dead and deceased body of the Savior was revived in this fashion and restored to its previous level of functionality, which had ceased at death.

Once this occurred, the immortal soul of the Savior that had been separated from the body by death immediately descended from heaven, that is, from the hands of the Father, into His resurrected body. They were then reunited so that His soul and body again interacted and mutually influenced each other as they had done formerly. Thereby the Lord Jesus was "raised up, [God] having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24).

Having been raised from the dead, the Savior could no longer remain in that grave in which He had been buried upon His decease. Since graves are not dwelling places for the living, but rather for the dead, the Lord Jesus immediately had to leave the grave in which He had lain to reestablish His residency among the living. He did so immediately, for the grave was opened for Him by an angel from heaven. Once it was opened, He departed from it, and when His disciples came looking for Him early upon the first day of the week, they did

not find Him there. Instead, they found His grave open and empty. All of this is recorded in great detail by the writers of the holy Gospels.

The Lord Jesus arose from the dead in the manner that we have set before you, and regarding His resurrection, He could be joyful in spirit, jubilating as He did in Revelation 1:18, saying, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." It needs to be duly noted here that the Lord Jesus arose with His own body. For the benefit of His believing people, He had taken this body upon Himself from the Virgin Mary by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and in this body He also had suffered and died upon the cross. This is clearly confirmed by the fact that after His resurrection, the scars of His crucifixion and the scar of His pierced side were still visible in His body, as we can read in John 20:25ff., where He directed His unbelieving disciple Thomas to feel and to touch them.

When it is said of Him that He indeed arose from the dead, the Greek word translated as "resurrection" means as much as the restoration of a thing that was broken or ruined and is subsequently restored to its original condition. It was therefore absolutely essential that the Lord Jesus should rise again with His own body. Had He risen with a new body, other than that in which He had died, He would not have truly conquered death, for His body would then have died in bondage to the power and violence of death. He would then have been incapable of eternally delivering His believing people from death. He arose with the very same body and the very same flesh that He had taken upon Himself, and in which He was slain at the cross.

And yet, Jesus's body after His resurrection was decidedly different from what it was prior to His death, for it was now gifted with various glorious properties that it previously did not possess.

First, previously it had been a *natural* body, which, like ours, had to be preserved, strengthened, and sustained by way of the natural activities of eating, drinking, sleeping, etc. However, subsequent to the resurrection, Jesus's body became a *spiritual* body that functions purely by way of an internal and spiritual working that differs completely from the natural manner of working. Regarding the resurrection of believers on the last day, Paul teaches that "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. 15:44).

Second, prior to His death, the body of the Lord Jesus, just like our bodies, was weak and full of dishonor. It was subject to all the weaknesses, maladies, and discomforts to which our bodies are subject, such as hunger, thirst, cold,

nakedness, illness, etc., for the Savior's humanity was like unto us in all things, sin excepted. He arose from the dead with a *glorified* and *incorruptible* body that had fully and eternally been set free from all weaknesses and discomforts, and was now utterly insusceptible to such things. Paul teaches this same truth in regard to the resurrection of the body of believers, saying, "It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power" (1 Cor. 15:43).

Finally, prior to His death, the Lord Jesus had a *mortal* body, but upon arising from the dead, His body "put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). Paul testifies that this will likewise be true at the resurrection of believers, saying: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:42). Therefore, upon His resurrection, the Lord Jesus obtained an immortal body, over which death no longer could have dominion to all eternity. As the surety and redeemer of His believing people, it was appointed unto Him once to die (Heb. 9:27–28). However, upon rising from the dead, He is "alive for evermore," as we heard from Him in Revelation 1:18. The holy apostle Paul affirms this with clear and dynamic words, saying, "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). In Acts 13:34, we hear the same apostle preaching in like manner, saying that God "raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption."

This immortality and incorruptibleness of the Lord Jesus subsequent to His resurrection from the dead is of very great comfort and benefit for His believing people. By this they know that they shall also eternally live with Christ, their redeemer and savior, for He "is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 7:16–17). Furthermore, it is declared that "he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

Behold, beloved, we have addressed this to give you a clearer understanding regarding the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead.

Now we must briefly say something regarding the cause or author of this resurrection. Concerning the resurrection, the Apostles' Creed teaches only that the Lord Jesus "rose from the dead" and does not say by whose power and operation He did so. However, the Holy Scriptures teach that Christ was raised from the dead by the operation of the almighty power of the triune God, and that all three exalted and adorable divine persons cooperated in this matter.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is set before us as the work of God the Father, of whom the Holy Scriptures testify that He raised up Christ, His Son, from the dead. Paul testifies of this, speaking of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, as exercising the “exceeding greatness of his power... which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1:19–20). Peter taught the Jews in Jerusalem that “God hath raised [Him] up, having loosed the pains of death” (Acts 2:24).

This needs to be noted, for this proves that the Lord Jesus completely and perfectly satisfied the holy justice of His Father as the surety and mediator of His believing people, and that He fully presented to the Father the required ransom in payment for all their debts. Had the Lord Jesus in any measure been deficient in making full satisfaction for His believing people, and had He been deficient in satisfying the claims of God's justice and truth, the Father could neither have raised Him nor loosed Him from the pains of death. Instead, since Jesus would be His debtor, the Father would have kept Him in bondage to the slavery of death until He would have paid the very last penny. Since, however, as a righteous judge, the Father had to justify Him publicly, the Lord Jesus, as the surety and redeemer of His believing people, fully suffered all things on their behalf and satisfied the holy justice of God the Father. Thereby the Father declared that He no longer could demand anything from Him as the surety of all His elect believers, but rather, that through Him He had fully cancelled all their debts. The Father therefore Himself raised His Son from the dead, and “hath made that same Jesus... both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). In this way, God the Father justified Him in the presence of friends and foes, and Paul therefore testifies regarding the Lord Jesus that He was “justified in the Spirit” (1 Tim. 3:16).

The resurrection by the Father of our surety and head, Christ Jesus, served as a public receipt of His complete satisfaction of divine justice for all the sins and debts of His believing people.

However, the resurrection of the Savior from the dead was not only the work of the Father. It was also the very work of the Son to raise Himself from the dead, for He testified regarding Himself, “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:18). In John 2:19, we hear Him say, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” and John then added, “But he spake of the temple of his body” (v. 21). It is therefore commonly stated that the Savior arose from the dead; that is, by His own power and ability. Thereby we can conclude not only His complete satisfaction of divine justice

for the sins of His believing people—without which satisfaction He never could have arisen or have delivered Himself from the bonds of death—but also His divine omnipotence and infinite ability, whereby, in the Spirit, and therefore by His divine nature (1 Peter 3:8), He resurrected His flesh that had been slain as to its humanity.

The foregoing confirms therefore that the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was a work of the Father and of Himself as the true, eternal, and living God.

However, the Father and the Son, in their extrinsic works, generally work by way of the third person, the Holy Spirit, who is therefore set forth in the Holy Scriptures as the power of God. God the Holy Spirit is therefore also the moving cause of the Savior's resurrection, and Paul confirms this in Romans 8:11, where he writes to believers, "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." By way of logical deduction, Paul teaches that God raised up Christ from the dead *by His Spirit*, making it very evident that the triune God is the moving cause of the Lord Jesus being raised from the dead. This is the second matter we were called upon to consider.

Before we proceed to consider from the Catechism the glorious efficacy and benefit of the Savior's blessed resurrection, we first must consider something very precious, namely, the chronology regarding His resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15:4, Paul testifies how he first delivered unto the Corinthians "that Christ...was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." And it did indeed occur in this fashion, for He was buried on Friday evening and arose from the dead early on the first day of the week, being resurrected on the third day after His burial. Though the Savior did not lie in the grave any more than thirty-three to thirty-five hours, this period of time is reckoned as three days and three nights according to the reckoning of the Jews, for they reckon part of a day as a whole day.

The reasons why the Savior arose from the dead precisely on the third day, and neither earlier nor later, are as follows:

First, He did not wish to arise any earlier than the third day so that the truth regarding His death would thereby be affirmed before the entire world, for when someone remains in the grave, that is, in the earth, until the third day, he must then truly be deemed as having died.

Second, He did not wish to arise any later than the third day, so that on the one hand the faith of His disciples would not be further weakened, since already on the third day they had begun to have great doubts regarding His resurrection, as we observe in the two disciples who went to Emmaus (Luke 24:21); and so that on the other hand, His body, by remaining longer in the grave and in the power of death, would not begin to putrefy—and thus He would not “see corruption” (Ps. 16:10). Furthermore, His three-day stay in the grave, or in the heart of the earth, had already been typified by the prophet Jonah, who had been in the heart of the sea for that duration (Matt. 12:40).

For these reasons, the Lord Jesus truly arose from the dead on the third day, and thereby we have sufficiently addressed the general truth regarding His resurrection.

We will therefore now proceed to consider the blessed, precious, and comforting benefit that is encompassed in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus for all believers. The instructor inquires regarding this by asking, “What doth the resurrection of Christ profit us?” He responds by setting before us three most precious and comforting advantages we may derive by faith from and through His blessed resurrection; that is, if we believe in the Lord Jesus with a true and upright heart.

The first of these delightful and precious advantages is that the Lord Jesus “by His resurrection...has overcome death, that He might make us partakers of that righteousness which He has purchased for us by His death.” The truth that the Lord Jesus, by His resurrection, has overcome death for His believing people is clearly taught by Paul when he testifies that Christ “through death... might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14).

The Lord Jesus having died, the devil used all his power and resources to keep Him in the bands and snares of death. Had he succeeded, he would have rendered null and void the entire work of the salvation and redemption of the elect by Christ. Had the Lord Jesus remained dead, He would have been able neither to apply the blessed fruits of His death to His believing people nor to resurrect them from sin's state of death. Had He been unable to deliver Himself from the power of death, He could not possibly have been the resurrection and the life for others. With Him, everything would then eternally have been mired in death.

However, Satan was unable to achieve his accursed objective regarding the Lord Jesus, because Jesus, as the Mighty One, not only utterly demolished and annihilated both Satan and his power over death, but also regained the life that He had surrendered unto death in order that it would eternally be preserved. Therefore, He now lives forevermore and has the keys of hell and death (Rev. 1:18).

The consequence of this precious victory of the Savior is that He has thereby become the living Goel and the Prince of Life, so “that He might make [all His believing people] partakers of that righteousness which He had purchased for us by His death.” By no means would He have been able to do this had He remained in the power of death. His righteousness and all His merits would then have been utterly null and void, and His believing people would collectively have remained in sin. They would have remained in bondage to the power of eternal death, from which no one in either heaven or earth would ever have been able to deliver them. Paul therefore teaches so emphatically, “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Cor. 15:14).

However, having truly overcome death by His resurrection, the Lord Jesus, in the manner set before you, was delivered for the offenses of His believing people and “was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). By His resurrection, He has brought life and immortality to light, and is become unto them a fountain of life by uniting them all to Himself through faith, thereby quickening them and making them “partakers of that righteousness which He had purchased for us by His death.” God has therefore freely justified His believing people, and, out of free grace, has embraced them to be the heirs of eternal life.

The instructor explains this in greater detail by finding a second and most precious benefit for believers in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead. That benefit is that “we are also by His power raised up to a new life.” All believers are by nature spiritually dead in sins and trespasses, being entirely “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:18). Paul teaches this in Romans 5:12, saying, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” We considered all these matters in detail in our previous treatise.

However, in the same manner as all believers died in the first man, Adam, they are resurrected from the dead and made alive in the second man, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul provides clear instruction regarding this mystery,

saying: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21–22). Having been raised from the dead, Christ has become unto them "a quickening spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). At the appointed time, He infuses, bestows, and sheds forth upon them His power, so that, according to the instructor, they are with Him "raised up to a new life." This life is bestowed upon them and renewed when, by faith, they are spiritually and internally united to the Lord Jesus and His grace, for no sooner are they grafted into Him by faith than they immediately become in Him new creatures, who, by God's abundant mercy, have been "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

Beloved, if you desire to know how believers are "raised up to a new life" by the power of the Lord Jesus and His resurrection, consider the following four matters:

First, God imputes the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead to His believing people in such a manner as if it were their own resurrection. The Lord Jesus did everything for His believing people. He not only was dead and buried on their behalf, but for their sake He also rose from the dead. When by faith they are united with the Lord Jesus, their head, they truly become partakers of His resurrection, and God reckons them as having died in and with Christ, but also as having risen from the dead in and with Him. The life of the Lord Jesus that He, by His resurrection from the dead, again took upon Himself unto all eternity then becomes the life of His believing people by the gracious imputation of faith. With Christ, they not only "have been planted together in the likeness of his death," but "also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:5).

Second, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is also the moving cause of believers being raised from being dead in sin and of their transition into the new life of salvation and grace. The Lord Jesus, as we have seen, has become a life-giving Spirit unto His believing people by His resurrection from the dead. By His divine grace and power, He spiritually resurrects them at the moment of God's good pleasure, making alive those who were dead in sin and uniting them unto Himself by faith. In so doing, He becomes unto them the resurrection and the life, and infuses His divine life into their souls—a life that is "made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:11). Then the Lord Jesus, having united Himself spiritually to His elect as their living head, proceeds to quicken, sanctify, illuminate, renew, and regenerate them, and He initially and continually restores in their souls the image of God they lost through sin. Thereby He

implants into their hearts the fundamental principle of a new and spiritual life, and by His grace, inwardly leads them more and more outside of themselves. He works in them not only a holy and spiritual knowledge and love, but also an embracing of and an obedience unto God in Him. Death thereby is swallowed up into victory, and they increasingly become partakers of spiritual and eternal life in Christ their beloved head and savior, so that they confess with Paul, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

This is therefore the blessed and precious efficacy and functioning of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. By His Spirit and grace, He lives in the hearts of His believing people, so they may also live with, by, and in Him as He has promised to all believers: "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19).

Third, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead is also a powerful motive for the growth and continual strengthening of the inward spiritual life of believers. When they behold with the spiritual and renewed eye of faith the glorious resurrection of Christ from the dead on their behalf, a soul-sanctifying and invigorating efficacy proceeds from that resurrection and settles in their hearts. This leads them entirely outside of themselves and brings them to the Lord Jesus, the fountain of their life, to embrace Him, to depend fully upon Him, to live for His service and to His honor, and to die more and more to sin. In Romans 6:9ff., Paul sets before us with clarity this blessed efficacy and benefit of the Savior's resurrection.

Finally, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus also exemplifies for believers how they are to arise from the death of sin, and how, by grace, they are to order and increasingly stimulate their spiritual and renewed lives so that they may increasingly be conformed to the Lord Jesus, their head.

The apostle Paul teaches this clearly when he says to believers, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

Behold, according to the instructor, it is in this manner that believers, by the power of the Lord Jesus, are "raised up to a new life."

The instructor then addresses a third and very precious and comforting benefit that issues forth from the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, consisting in "that the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection." It is certain that all men, both believers and unbelievers, will arise from the dead on the last day—albeit not all in the same manner. Believers will arise "to everlasting life,"

but unbelievers and the ungodly “to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). This difference at the resurrection is rooted in the fact that unbelievers here on earth are not in any way partakers of the resurrection of Christ, referred to as “the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:6). Since they are not united to Christ, they remain dead in sins. However, as we have seen earlier, as believers have part in the first resurrection of Christ, having been resurrected by Him from the death of sin and made alive, the second or eternal death and damnation will therefore absolutely have no power over them. According to the instructor, the resurrection of Christ is “a sure pledge of their blessed resurrection”; that is, by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, they are fully comforted and assured not only of the fact that once after their death and upon the last day they will arise from the dead, but also that they will arise unto eternal life and, in the words of the instructor, their resurrection shall be a blessed resurrection. The resurrection of their head and king assures them of this most powerfully, for:

First, the Lord Jesus has risen from the dead as “the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20). Since Christ in His resurrection is the firstfruits of all deceased believers, then it must necessarily follow that these firstfruits will be followed by the complete harvest of believers. Following Him, their head and firstfruits, they will also arise from the dead, so that Christ in all things shall be the first, and that believers shall in all things be conformed to Him, their head.

Second, the Lord Jesus did not merely arise for His own sake, but also and primarily for the sake of His believing people, for He “died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). As we have seen earlier, He thereby conquered death and destroyed him who had the power of death. It is therefore impossible for believers to remain dead after they have died, for then Christ’s resurrection and victory on their behalf, in spite of their having fully trusted in it, would nevertheless be utterly vain and useless. Instead, at His time, they will be fully freed and released from the power of death, and with Christ they will also eternally conquer death. Being Christ’s in both death and life, they must exclaim with Paul, saying: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:55–57).

Third, the Lord Jesus also arose from the dead as the living head of His believing people, for they are His body and His members in particular. This must necessarily and certainly culminate in the blessed resurrection of believers in the last day, for believers, as members, must be conformed to Christ their

head in all things, also regarding life, salvation, and glory, else Christ would be the living head of dead members, and this cannot possibly be the case. He “who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil. 3:21), must of necessity therefore raise His believing people eternally from the dead.

Finally, the Lord Jesus also rose from the dead as the Lord and king of all His believing people in order to reign eternally over them in soul and body. The apostle Paul teaches this, saying, “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living” (Rom. 14:9). If, however, believers will not rise from the dead, how will Christ then be able to reign over their dead bodies? How will they then with their bodies eternally be able to praise, serve, and magnify Him as their king and redeemer? And where there is no remembrance of Him in the grave, who will then praise Him in the dust? Only the living, the living, will praise the Lord (Isa. 38:19). Christ therefore must necessarily raise His believing people from the dead in order to reign over them eternally in body and soul.

From what we have considered, it is evident how all true believers have, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a most certain pledge of their blessed resurrection on the last day. Therefore, they may now enter into death with complete peace, joy, and confidence, saying with Job, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25).

Behold, dear reader, we have set before you the glorious efficacy and benefit of the blessed and precious resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Was it not the apostle Paul who therefore greatly desired to “know him, and the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10)? This is most certainly the desire of every true believer who genuinely believes in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and who, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, receives and embraces this truth with an upright heart. In so doing, they fully appropriate for themselves this blessed resurrection of the Lord Jesus in like manner as we observed earlier with regard to His passion and death. They sincerely trust in His resurrection in order to derive from it, both actually and essentially, its full efficacy and benefit, as we have expounded this most blessed doctrine of the resurrection for you, for this is the fruit and efficacy of true faith.

We will now conclude our treatise with the sweet and precious words of the Lord Jesus: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25–26). Amen! May the Lord grant us the grace to believe it. Amen.

The Ascension of Christ

LORD'S DAY 18

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.

—EPHESIANS 4:10

Question 46: How dost thou understand these words, "He ascended into heaven"?

Answer: That Christ, in sight of His disciples, was taken up from earth into heaven; and that He continues there for our interest until He comes again to judge the quick and the dead.

Question 47: Is not Christ then with us even to the end of the world, as He hath promised?

Answer: Christ is very man and very God; with respect to His human nature, He is no more on earth; but with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace and spirit, He is at no time absent from us.

Question 48: But if His human nature is not present, wherever His Godhead is, are not then these two natures in Christ separated from one another?

Answer: Not at all, for since the Godhead is illimitable and omnipresent, it must necessarily follow that the same is beyond the limits of the human nature He assumed, and yet is nevertheless in this human nature, and remains personally united to it.

Question 49: Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension into heaven?

Answer: First, that He is our advocate in the presence of His Father in heaven; secondly, that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, as the head, will also take up to Himself, us, His members; thirdly, that He sends us His Spirit as an earnest, by whose power we "seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not things on earth."

We read in Numbers 17 that the staff of Aaron, with the staves of all the other tribes of Israel, had to be laid aside in the tabernacle of the congregation in a location that could not be seen by anyone. The next day, however, it was removed from the tabernacle and shown to the nation as a staff that flowered, having both blossoms and almonds. Thereafter, the Lord commanded that this staff was to be laid aside in the Most Holy Place and kept in the ark of the covenant as a testimony and a memorial to all succeeding ages that the Lord had called Aaron and his house to the priesthood.

This staff of Aaron typified the great and only high priest Christ Jesus, which is affirmed by the following similarities:

1. Aaron's staff was a barren rod that was in all things identical to the staves of the other tribes of Israel. Likewise, the Lord Jesus was a despised and barren staff, rod, or shoot, who, according to His humble and lowly humanity, grew up before the countenance of God "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isa. 53:2). In that sense, He was identical to the other staves, that is, to His brethren and believing people, the only exception being that He was without sin. Particularly in His death, the Lord Jesus was such a staff.

2. As Aaron's staff was laid aside in the tabernacle of the congregation in a location invisible to others, likewise the Lord Jesus, as to His dead and barren body, was, after His death, laid in the grave and removed from everyone's sight, whereas His soul had been committed into the hands of His Father.

3. As the rod of Aaron was brought forth again on the following day as a living and flowering rod and was displayed to the people with its blossoms and almonds, likewise the Lord Jesus, after having been a barren rod and after having been laid in the grave, was brought forth again as a living and green tree by way of His resurrection from the dead. He came forth bearing the blossoms and almonds of an eternal righteousness and salvation for all His believing people who have been grafted into Him and have thus been planted together with Him in His likeness.

4. Finally, the fruit-bearing and blossoming rod of Aaron, after having been displayed to the nation, was, upon God's command, brought into the Holy of Holies to be placed there as a testimony and affirmation of the priesthood of Aaron and his house. Likewise, by His blessed resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus became the tree of life and a fruit-bearing and blossoming rod for all His believing people. After having manifested Himself to His own here on earth yet forty days more, He was, on that fortieth day, brought into and placed in the true sanctuary of heaven. There He is set before the countenance of

His Father in order to administer the priesthood eternally on behalf of all His believing people, transforming those who are His spiritual dwelling place into holy and spiritual priests unto God His Father.

With the help and grace of God, and following the order of the Apostles' Creed and of our Catechism, we will consider in greater detail this truth regarding the ascension into heaven and sitting down of the Lord Jesus, the true and antitypical sanctuary, after His resurrection from the dead. We will thereby particularly open up for you the second step of the Savior's glorious exaltation, beseeching the Lord that He would be pleased graciously to bless our sermon unto the conviction and conversion of sinners who are yet alienated from Him, and unto the comfort and strengthening of His true, believing people. Amen.

We will consider:

1. this truth or doctrine as such; and
2. how a true Christian exercises his faith regarding this truth by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Regarding this truth or doctrine itself, in our exposition, we will completely follow the instructor, who deals with it in the questions that follow:

- In Question 46, he briefly opens up for us the truth regarding the Savior's ascension.
- In Questions 47 and 48, he further expounds and defends this truth in connection with the error of the Lutherans, who teach the ubiquity of Christ's body following His ascension.
- In Question 49, he opens up for us the precious efficacy with the blessed benefits of the Savior's ascension that accrue to all true believers.

Therefore, in the first place, we must consider the truth of the ascension of Jesus Christ, God's Son, as such, doing so as briefly as possible by addressing the following four matters in particular. We will consider:

1. the person who is being discussed;
2. His majestic ascent into heaven;
3. the chronology of His ascension; and
4. the author or moving cause of His ascension.

The person of whom we are presently speaking is the great Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the beloved redeemer and savior of His elect and believing people. In previous treatises, we considered His precious names, His divinely wrought birth, His incarnation, His passion and death, His burial, His descent into hell, and His resurrection from the dead. All of this occurred for and unto the salvation and redemption of His believing people. In this Lord's Day, this precious redeemer and savior is set before us as He who, subsequent to His resurrection from the dead, after forty days, departed from this earth by way of His ascension and returned into heaven.

Given that He is the God-man, that is, both God and man in the unity of His person, it is legitimate to ask first of all in which nature He ascended into heaven, whether He did so according to His divine nature or according to His human nature. We respond that the Savior ascended into heaven only according to His human nature, for the divine nature that is united to His human nature is, by virtue of being both infinite and spiritual, everywhere present. Therefore, in the literal and unambiguous sense of the word, this divine nature can neither be said to change locations nor to either ascend or descend.

Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus is set before us in the Holy Scriptures as one who, taking upon Himself the human nature, according to His Godhead descended upon earth and thereafter returned to heaven by way of His ascension. Paul testifies of Him in Ephesians 4:10, saying, "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens." In Psalm 47:5, we read, "God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet." However, this must be understood as referring to the actual, essential, and hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ, and by that hypostatic union, the glory of the Godhead of Christ was manifested in an extraordinary manner here upon earth at His incarnation. This manifestation ceased at His ascension, for from that moment and forward, His Godhead specifically manifested itself in His humanity in the very heavens to which His human nature had ascended. In His humanity, Christ now steadfastly dwells and abides in heaven until the time of the restitution of all things.

In the Holy Scriptures, only in that sense is Jesus said to have ascended into heaven according to His Godhead after having first descended upon earth. This already had been revealed in a clear and lively vision to the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 10:4, 18). However, having said that, in the actual and absolute sense of the word, the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven only in His human nature,

whereas with His Godhead, He remained here on earth. We will subsequently see that He will remain there forever.

Having considered the person, we shall now consider what is being said regarding Him, namely, that *He ascended into heaven*. We need to know that there is a threefold heaven. There is the atmospheric heaven, the astronomical heaven, and that which is referred to as the heaven of heavens. When therefore the Lord Jesus is said to have ascended into heaven, we are to understand this as a very explicit reference to the heaven of heavens—the place where God, in an extraordinary manner, has the throne of His glory, and where the holy angels and the glorified spirits of just men made perfect reside, as well as those bodies that have already been transported into glory.

The fact that the Lord Jesus ascended into the heaven of heavens is affirmed by the goal or objective of His ascension, namely, that He would take His place at the right hand of His Father, so that with Him, Christ would have dominion over all things and fulfill all things. The Gospel writer Mark therefore conjoins the ascension of the Savior and His session at the right hand of God, testifying, “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19). However, God’s right hand is located neither in the atmospheric heaven nor in the astronomical heaven, but rather in the uppermost heaven or the heaven of heavens. Clearly, then, it follows that the Savior ascended into the uppermost or third heaven. It is therefore said regarding Christ that “He...ascended up far above all heavens” (Eph. 4:10) and that “we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens” (Heb. 4:14). He thus traversed the two lower heavens in order to arrive in the third or in the heaven of heavens, as we read: “For such an high priest became us, who is...made higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26).

Jesus is thus said to have ascended to this supreme heaven of heavens, and the Apostles’ Creed speaks accordingly, saying, “He ascended into heaven.” The language used is derived from the Holy Scriptures, for we have heard the apostle Paul say that Christ “ascended up far above all heavens” (Eph. 4:10). The Savior also speaks of this regarding Himself, saying, “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). The ascension of the Savior into heaven is also denominated in the Holy Scriptures as His going to His Father, as His departure from this world, and as His being taken into heaven, etc. All these various expressions communicate what the instructor

is teaching, namely, "that Christ, in sight of His disciples, was taken up from earth into heaven."

Until the time He ascended, the Savior was physically present in this world and dwelled among men. However, as He ascended into heaven, He was "in sight of His disciples" bodily "taken up from earth," that is, taken into heaven. Luke gives a clear account of this, saying regarding the Savior, "And when he had spoken these things, while they [the apostles and disciples] beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9).

The Lord Jesus, as He ascended into heaven, truly left this earth physically and established His residence in the third heaven or the heaven of heavens, doing so without in any way being present physically here below on earth. He teaches this plainly and transparently, saying to His disciples, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (John 16:28). He did not refer with these words to His divine presence in the world, but rather, to His physical presence. According to His Godhead, He did not leave this world, but as we will soon consider, He is and remains eternally the same. Regarding His humanity or physical presence, the Savior said, "I am no more in the world" (John 17:11). And this is not without reason, for the apostle Paul teaches that "if he were on earth, he should not be a priest" (Heb. 8:4), for He cannot physically engage in His priestly office on behalf of His believing people in any other way but there above in heaven.

There are all the attending circumstances relative to the Savior's ascension that teach us clearly and transparently that there was a change of location in regard to His body, and that in this body He completely left the earth and established His residence in the heaven of heavens. Hereby we have addressed this matter sufficiently.

Let us now proceed to say a few words regarding the chronology of the Savior's ascension. He did not immediately ascend into heaven following His resurrection, but rather, forty days thereafter (Acts 1:8). After His resurrection, Jesus remained on earth for a full forty days, and, as Luke tells us, He spent that time in the company of His disciples, teaching them by "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

The primary reason for His remaining on earth for such a long period of time was, on the one hand, to convince His disciples all the more of the truth of His resurrection. For them, there was so much at stake, for, as we observed in our previous treatise, His resurrection was the sole foundation of their salvation.

On the other hand, Christ's objective was to speak to them and instruct them verbally regarding the things of God's kingdom. As Moses was instructed by God Himself on the mount for a period of forty days regarding the things of God's kingdom as they functioned in the Old Testament, likewise the apostles and disciples were also instructed by the Son of God, and thus by God Himself, for a period of forty days regarding the things of God's kingdom as they functioned in the New Testament. When the forty days transpired, the Savior ceased to instruct His own verbally, and He left this earth bodily and ascended into heaven.

Furthermore, we need to consider once more that there can be no effect without a cause, and thus the Savior's ascension must also have had a moving cause, for this too had to occur by the exercise of omnipotent power. Without the exercise of such omnipotent power, a body cannot possibly arise from this earth. The Holy Scriptures teach that the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven by His own power, as well as by the divine power of His Father.

On the one hand, Christ ascended into heaven by the power and operation of His Father. The Holy Scriptures teach regarding Christ that He was passively taken up into the heavens (Acts 1:9). Paul affirms this regarding the Lord Jesus in 1 Timothy 3:16, saying that He was "...received up into glory," and Peter plainly declares that Christ was "by the right hand of God exalted" (Acts 2:33). All these passages affirm plainly that the Lord Jesus, by the power and operation of His Father, was taken from this earth into heaven. The Father received Him back into His glory after having sent Him to this earth only shortly before to accomplish and to execute the work of saving and redeeming the elect. And as the Father did prior to Christ's resurrection from the dead, so He acted again as a righteous judge who justified His Son before the entire world by taking Him into heaven as the surety and head of His elect. Thereby He declared that Christ had fully suffered and accomplished all things on behalf of His elect, believing people. By so doing, Christ completely satisfied the claims of His holy justice, and therefore the Father could no longer require anything more from His Son. Consequently, His Son, the Lord Jesus, is now a complete surety and savior of all His elect, whom He had secured as His property by His blood. Having become their Lord in the fullest sense of the word, He also was given the power to unite them all to Himself by faith and to deliver and save them eternally. Peter testifies of this, saying, "God hath made that same Jesus [by His resurrection from the dead and by His ascension into heaven], whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

On the other hand, the ascension of the Savior is also ascribed to Him as a work or deed that He accomplished by His own divine power and ability. The Lord Jesus testifies of this in several places: "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17); "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2); and, "Again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (John 16:28).

Not only does this teach once more the complete execution and accomplishment of Christ's office of surety and mediator on behalf of His elect here on earth—without which He neither could have ascended into heaven nor been received by His Father in heaven—it also teaches the divine power and glory of the Savior, rendering Him infinitely greater than Enoch and Elijah, who had ascended into heaven before Him in order to exemplify His illustrious ascension. These holy men were taken into heaven exclusively by God's power, and thus without any contribution on their part. The Lord Jesus, however, ascended into heaven also by His own divine power, and in the prophetic word it was therefore already said of Him, "God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet" (Ps. 47:5).

In this manner, the Lord Jesus, "in sight of His disciples, was taken up from earth into heaven"; and according to our instructor, and as we will soon consider, "He continues there for our interest." In the following Lord's Day, we will learn that He will remain there "until He comes again to judge the quick and the dead."

Having thus considered the truth of the ascension of the redeemer and savior, Jesus, we must now, with the instructor, briefly proceed to consider the erroneous sentiment of the Lutherans, who are our brethren and fellow believers. Martin Luther, though we know he was a great man of God, was yet fallible, and thus, as all others, prone to error. He had an erroneous conception regarding the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, believing that Christ is bodily present at that sacrament, albeit in an entirely invisible and intangible manner. To garner support for this erroneous sentiment, he was compelled to expound the truth regarding the ascension of Christ in a peculiar and strange manner. If Luther, in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, had simply believed with us regarding the ascension that the Savior departed bodily from this earth and established His residence in the heaven of heavens, and will reside there until the Day of Judgment, his sentiment regarding the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper would immediately have been disqualified.

However, in order strenuously to sustain his view regarding the Lord's Supper, being fueled by human passion and a proud spirit, Luther refused to retract what he had begun to teach. Consequently, he erroneously and irrationally expounded the truth regarding the ascension of Christ, positing that Christ did not leave the earth bodily, but rather, that His body became omnipresent throughout creation. He therefore believed that there was no single location where the Lord Jesus was not truly and bodily present, albeit in an entirely invisible and intangible manner.

However irrational and erroneous the sentiment of this great and godly man was, his followers have embraced it unanimously, and presently they are still defending it with the utmost passion and zeal. Time will not permit us to refute this erroneous sentiment in great detail, but both rationally and by way of the Holy Scriptures, we could very readily do so. Our theologians have done so extensively, and yet, it has borne little fruit. For wise and adorable reasons, it has not yet pleased the Lord to enlighten the eyes of the understanding of our brethren, the Lutherans, in this regard—although this will certainly take place when the appointed time shall arrive.

We will therefore say only that the Lutheran explanation of the truth regarding Christ's ascension collides with the simple truth of the Holy Scriptures which plainly teach that the Savior left this earth, that is, this world, at His ascension; that He went to His Father and was taken up and ascended into heaven. The Holy Scriptures throughout speak clearly and simply regarding the ascension, thereby teaching us that subsequent to Christ's ascension, we are not to seek Him in His bodily presence here on earth, but rather and only above in the heavens. The Lord Jesus therefore expressly said to His disciples, "Me ye have not always" (Matt. 26:11), saying this in reference to His humanity, for according to His Godhead, He is always near to His believing people and will never depart from them. Peter taught this regarding Christ: "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21); that is, He will remain bodily in heaven until the Day of Judgment, and only then will He return bodily to this earth.

Do you wish to hear briefly what our fellow believers, the Lutherans, use as proof in support of their view? Our instructor asks in Question 47, "Is not Christ then with us even to the end of the world, as He hath promised?" We will respond simply and briefly that Christ does indeed abide with us and all His believing people unto the end of this world. His Word and His promises declare this, saying, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"

(Matt. 28:20). Also He says, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

We must, however, have a correct understanding regarding Christ's presence with His believing people, for the instructor here teaches that "Christ is very man and very God; with respect to His human nature, He is no more on earth; but with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace and spirit, He is at no time absent from us." Therefore, the difference between us and the Lutherans is not so much as to whether Christ presently still abides with His congregation and His believing people, for with them we conclude that such is the case. However, the specific difference of opinion has to do with whether Christ still dwells among us *bodily*. They teach that He still dwells among us bodily, but we deny it, teaching that Christ now abides with His congregation in a spiritual manner, residing in the hearts of His believing people by His divine grace, His Spirit, and His power. He accomplishes this by His all-encompassing divine providence, for all of Christ's believing people continually experience this presence of Christ, and in proportion to the grace they receive from the Lord, the one experiences more of it than the other.

If, therefore, our brothers, the Lutherans, wish to prove their view to be correct, they will have to show us those texts in the Holy Scriptures wherein the Lord Jesus promised that He would be bodily present with us after His ascension. That is the matter regarding which we have a difference of opinion. However, no such text is to be found in the entire Bible supporting Luther's viewpoint, and thus the objection that the Savior is physically in, with, and among His believing people cannot be proven in the only manner in which it should be proven.

In Question 48, the instructor addresses an additional objection of the Lutherans, saying, "But if His human nature is not present, wherever His Godhead is, are not then these two natures in Christ separated from one another?" The proof of the Lutheran view regarding the bodily ubiquity of Christ is rooted in this: in His Godhead, Christ is omnipresent throughout creation. No one will challenge this truth. The Lutherans then argue that the human nature of Christ is intimately united to His divine nature by way of a hypostatic union, and with this we fully concur. However, they then conclude that the humanity of Christ must necessarily also be present wherever His divine nature is present, for if His Godhead were to be at a location other than where His humanity is, union with His Godhead would thereby be precluded. They then argue that

such a conclusion is utterly absurd, for the Godhead of Christ is always and everywhere united to His humanity.

However, we refute such logic and respond with the instructor that even though Christ is omnipresent as to His Godhead, He is not omnipresent as to His humanity. This in no wise implies a separation of His two natures, “for since the Godhead is illimitable and omnipresent, it must necessarily follow that the same is beyond the limits of the human nature He assumed, and yet is nevertheless in this human nature, and remains personally united to it.”

The Lutherans have an entirely wrong conception of the union of the two natures of the Lord Jesus. They posit that this union consists of the reciprocal communication of the attributes of these two natures. This would mean that by virtue of this union, the Godhead has obtained the attributes of humanity, and vice versa, humanity the attributes of divinity. This, however, is most certainly unbiblical, for the two natures of Christ have indeed been united within one person. However, each nature fully retains its own unique attributes within that union. This is similar to the union of our souls and our bodies. Though the soul and the body are most intimately united, yet each retains its own unique attributes without there being any reciprocal communication of these attributes. Such a reciprocal communication of attributes is impossible, for each essence has its own distinctive attributes by which it is distinguished from another essence. If two distinct essences were indeed to obtain the identical attributes by way of such reciprocal communication of attributes, they would no longer continue to be two distinct essences, for any essence can have and retain its unique distinctives only by the one essence being distinguished from the other.

This proves clearly that though the Lord Jesus is omnipresent as to His divine nature, He can by no means also be omnipresent as to His humanity, for omnipresence is an attribute of His Godhead and can in no wise be attributed to His humanity. His humanity, by the essence of its nature, has as an attribute that bodily it can be at only one place at one time. Consequently, the Godhead of the Lord Jesus, by its incomprehensibility and omnipresence, can, according to the instructor, function beyond the boundaries of where Jesus's humanity is locally at any given moment. Nevertheless, in heaven, where Jesus's human nature resides, this nature will always be united with the divine. The objection made to this has thereby been disqualified, and it is thus evident that after His ascension, the Lord Jesus is no longer bodily here upon earth, but as such is present only in heaven.

Given the fact that the instructor deliberately addressed this issue, we were compelled to refute and counter the Lutheran sentiment regarding Christ's ascension. Apart from this, we would have hardly ever addressed this issue, for we are fully opposed to polemical disputations in the pulpit, and there is nothing we do with greater aversion. However, the instructor had his reasons why he took such strong issue with this sentiment, for during the period when the catechism was composed, this matter caused a great disturbance in the Protestant church.

We will now again follow the instructor, briefly addressing a doctrine that is far more essential and beneficial than our disputation with the Lutherans, namely, the precious and comforting benefit that all true believers, by faith, derive from the ascension of the Lord Jesus. In Question 49, the instructor speaks of a threefold benefit:

“First, that He is our advocate in the presence of His Father in heaven.” This was the great goal and objective of the Savior's ascension, namely, that He might be the patron, spokesman, or advocate with the Father on behalf of all His believing people. It is on their behalf that He, as high priest, there transacts all of their business before God, continually securing for them, upon their prayer and exercise of faith, the gracious pardon of all their sins, as well as all the graces and blessings they continually need. Without such an intercessor or high priest, believers, due to being sinners, would be able neither to have any dealings with God, who is infinitely holy and just, nor to secure the least measure of grace from Him. However, through Christ, they obtain continually what they ask of the Father in true faith, for He transacts all of their business with the Father, being seated at His right hand, “seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). For God's people, and thus for believers, it is true what the apostle John teaches, saying, “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1–2).

Oh, how precious is the salvation and bliss of all true believers! Who shall be able to comprehend or assess with words its true value? How can God's children ever lack anything? They have such a great and mighty intercessor in heaven, to whom they may go freely, frequently, and as often as they wish, with all their needs, difficulties, and deficiencies of soul and body. They make them all known to Him, expecting from Him always and in all things certain and immediate help, for the Lord Jesus will never even remotely turn them away.

On the contrary, in heaven, He is always prepared and ready to help all who are poor, wretched, and needy. He will in no wise cast out those who come to Him, and He will never tire of helping them and showing them compassion. His heart will always be inclined toward poor and needy sinners, and His inclination toward them will not change in the least. The sole purpose of His session at the Father's right hand is to hear and to help them continually. In order that no one will ever doubt it, He therefore, prior to His ascension into heaven, assured all of His believing people once and for all of His generous and gracious help, saying, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). He then immediately repeated this, saying, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14).

There should also be no reason for believers to doubt the Father's commitment, for the Lord Jesus has assured us that the Father always hears Him (John 11:42) and will never deny Him anything, the reason being that He has an infinite and perfect merit with His Father as the mediator of His believing people. He can therefore achieve everything on their behalf with His Father, and ask of Him all that He desires. The Father thus does whatever the Son desires of Him, for they are completely one. The Lord Jesus has therefore assured His believing people once and for all "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16).

Beloved, what do you think of this? Is it not altogether profitable and advantageous that Christ ascended into heaven on behalf of God's believing children? Is there the least deficiency in the salvation they may have in Him? Therefore, ought they not continually to exhort one another as the apostle does in Hebrews 4:16, saying, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"?

The instructor continues by adding a second most glorious and precious benefit regarding the ascension of the Savior on behalf of His believing people, saying, "that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, as the head, will also take up to Himself, us, His members." This is the certain and unfailing expectation of all true believers. That which distinguishes them greatly from all the ungodly and all unbelievers is that Christ, their head and king, will once take them as His members to Himself into heaven and into glory, and then, in body and soul, they will be permanently together with Him. The Lord Jesus gave them this certain promise prior to His departure, saying, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).

This is the blessed and purifying hope (1 John 3:3) that God's children may have regarding His ascension, whereby they may greatly comfort and encourage themselves in this life, greatly longing with all patience and in faith for the fulfillment of this promise. This hope is wonderfully affirmed by the Savior's ascension, for according to the instructor, He is there in heaven for them "as a sure pledge" that fully assures them of their heavenly possession after this life. God has thus "made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). The Lord Jesus has gone there ahead of them only to prepare a place for them, and therefore, by His ascension, He paved and fully opened the way to heaven for all His believing people. In heaven, the Lord Jesus is a sure pledge for His believing people, not only of their being partakers of heaven, but also that they will once be eternally taken up to be with Him.

The Lord Jesus is indeed fully their flesh and their head, for by faith they are intimately united to Him. Hear what Paul testifies in Ephesians 5:30, where he speaks of the most intimate spiritual union between believers and Christ, saying, "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." It should be obvious that the Lord Jesus cannot be divorced from His own flesh, His bones, or His members. Therefore, wherever He will be eternally, His members must also be eternally. Consequently, all believers will once be brought and gathered into heaven to be with Christ, their flesh and their head, and then they shall be eternally and most intimately united to Him.

The instructor then sets before us a third benefit accruing to all believers by virtue of the Savior's ascension, consisting in this: that Christ, from heaven, "sends us His Spirit as an earnest, by whose power we 'seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not things on earth.'" The Lord Jesus had to leave this earth and ascend to heaven, and thus depart bodily from His believing people, in order to grant His Spirit unto them. Christ sends Him forth into their hearts so that thereby they are most intimately united to Him. He Himself taught this to them, saying, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7).

The Lord Jesus is still doing this. As the Amen, the true and faithful Witness, He fulfills this promise to all His believing and elect people, and from heaven He sends them His Holy Spirit as a pledge whereby they, as an epistle of Christ, are inwardly sealed and receive the full warranty of their future, eternal, and heavenly inheritance. Paul instructs believers accordingly, saying, "In whom [that is, in Christ] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of

your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13–14).

All believers, without exception, receive the Holy Spirit as a pledge of the Lord Jesus to dwell in them on His behalf. That Spirit unites them with the Lord Jesus, and in His name, He will abide with them forever (John 14:16). He stamps the seal of the Lord Jesus upon the souls of believers, and He renews and transforms them to be increasingly conformed to Christ, thus causing the Lord Jesus to dwell in their hearts by faith (Eph. 3:17).

According to the instructor, it is by the power of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus that believers “seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not things on earth.” The Holy Spirit increasingly illuminates God’s children, teaching them, leading them into the truth, uniting them to God in Christ, and causing them to increase in the blessed knowledge of and fellowship with Him. The hearts of believers are therefore increasingly weaned from all vanity and ungodliness, and are led heavenward to “seek the things which are above.” Their conversation is increasingly in heaven (Phil. 3:20), and they are changed from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18), becoming conformed to Christ Jesus their heavenly head.

These are all the delightful, blessed, glorious, and precious benefits that accrue to God’s children by the ascension of their beloved head and savior, Jesus Christ.

They become partakers of all this by faith, and thereby, by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, they embrace, receive, and fully appropriate these benefits with all the affection of their hearts, believing that the Lord Jesus thus ascended into heaven on their behalf, and that He resides in heaven as their mediator, redeemer, head, and king, in whom they fully and exclusively put all their trust, and from whom, by faith, they continually expect all their salvation.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit, the faith of the Lord’s people, and thus of true Christianity, is continually exercised in such a fashion regarding the blessed ascension of their head and savior, Jesus Christ, and it pleases the Lord to cause this precious faith increasingly to grow and to be strengthened, to the praise and glory of His grace as it is in Christ Jesus, His Son. Amen.

Christ's Session at God's Right Hand

LORD'S DAY 19

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

—PSALM 110:1

Question 50: Why is it added, "and sitteth at the right hand of God"?

Answer: Because Christ is ascended into heaven for this end, that He might appear as head of His church, by whom the Father governs all things.

Question 51: What profit is this glory of Christ, our head, unto us?

Answer: First, that by His Holy Spirit He pours out heavenly graces upon us His members; and then that by His power He defends and preserves us against all enemies.

Question 52: What comfort is it to thee that "Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead"?

Answer: That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven; who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory.

The incident of the wise King Solomon issuing his first judicial sentence after he had ascended the throne of his father, David, is one of the most peculiar incidents in the history of the kings of Israel. I would therefore encourage you to read 1 Kings 3:16–28 attentively. Two prostitutes came to King Solomon, each having given birth to an illegitimate child. The child of the one woman had died, and since they lived in the same house, the one whose child had

died had taken the living child of the other woman and replaced it with her dead child. The mother of the living child discovered this and insisted that her child be returned to her. Since the other woman refused to do so, they became embroiled in an intense argument. When they brought this matter before King Solomon, he demanded both the living child and the dead child to be brought before him, and he rendered his judgment regarding this convoluted matter with extraordinary wisdom and insight by seeing to it that each mother received her own child.

Solomon was a glorious type of Christ, the Son of God. He is greater than Solomon, and also in this incident, Solomon vividly typified Him, for:

1. As Solomon ascended the throne of his father, David, and sat upon it to rule as king, so the Lord Jesus did likewise, for His Father also gave “unto him the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:32). After His resurrection from the dead, He ascended into heaven, and having been victorious, He sat down with His Father on His throne and at His right hand in order to rule over His people and over all of creation.

2. Solomon was seated upon his father's throne not only to rule as king, but also as judge to issue judgment and sentence regarding disputes that would be brought before him. Likewise, Christ is also seated upon the throne and at the right hand of His Father to be the judge of all men—a function He will fulfill on the last day, when He shall return to this earth to be the judge of all flesh.

3. Solomon, as judge, pronounced a sentence regarding two special children: one that was alive and one that was dead. On the last day, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the great and majestic judge, will also execute His judgment regarding two categories of the children of men, for both the living and the dead will be judged by Him.

We will now follow the instructor in addressing these truths and matters in more detail. The instructor again remains in step with the Apostles' Creed and, having addressed in the two previous Lord's Days the first two steps of the glorious exaltation of the Savior, His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven, he now addresses in this Lord's Day the third and fourth steps of this glorious exaltation. We will thus consider in greater detail the session of the Lord Jesus in heaven at the right hand of His Father, as well as His second coming on the last day to judge the living and the dead.

In order to consider with you these two very precious, delightful, and comforting truths, may the Lord enable us to do so by the grace of His Holy Spirit,

and may He therefore lead us into these truths and thereby sanctify them to our souls. Amen.

As we are accustomed to do, we will:

1. address and expound in detail both of these doctrines; and
2. consider how the faith of a Christian is exercised regarding these truths.

Regarding these truths as such, we will follow the instructor as he expounds the session of the savior, the Lord Jesus, at the right hand of God (Questions 50 and 51); and His second coming to execute judgment (Question 52).

To consider further the session of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God, we will consider, with the instructor:

1. this precious truth as such; and
2. the blessed and glorious benefit believers may derive from this truth.

Regarding this truth, we will consider:

- a. the person who is spoken of and being considered; and
- b. what is testified regarding Him, namely, that He is seated at the right hand of God.

The person to be considered is the great savior and precious redeemer, Christ Jesus, whom all true believers embrace as their only head and king, and into whose hands they have fully and eternally committed themselves and their salvation in order that they might be delivered and saved in no way but by Him. Therefore, that He might accomplish this for them, He was born in the fullness of time, and on their behalf He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, was buried, and descended into hell. For their sake, He also arose from the dead on the third day and ascended into heaven. We already have addressed and expounded these precious truths in detail. This beloved savior, as the king and head of His believing people, has ascended into heaven and has taken His place “at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”

To address this truth in greater detail, we will now briefly address three matters for you:

1. Who is “God the Father Almighty”?
2. What are we to understand by His “right hand”?
3. What does it mean that the Lord Jesus is seated at His right hand?

“God the Father Almighty” is to be understood here as referring to the first person of the supremely glorious and triune divine being, which is the eternal and adorable fountain of the Godhead, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom. 11:36). This first person is always denominated in the Holy Scriptures as *Father*. This is so not only because He is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom He generates from eternity to eternity, but also (and this is the primary focus) because He is the Father of all believers, whom He has made His children and heirs of eternal life by gracious adoption and a holy and spiritual birth. These truths have been sufficiently addressed and expounded elsewhere in the Catechism. Therefore, God says regarding His people, “If then I be a father, where is mine honour?” (Mal. 1:6). Consequently, He wants to be addressed as *our Father* in the prayers of His people, not only to stir up within their hearts a childlike fear and trust for and in Him, but also thereby that they would be powerfully assured regarding His tenderness and compassion toward them, so that He might convince them that “like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him” (Ps. 103:13).

The Apostles' Creed then describes Him more specifically as “the almighty Father;” whose power is so great, infinite, and all-encompassing that He is able to do whatever pleases Him in both heaven and earth. He is therefore not only fully and eternally capable of protecting His children against all the violence and power of their enemies, but He is also fully and eternally capable of supplying them with all that they lack in themselves. All things will therefore most certainly work together for their good, and they can safely and confidently entrust themselves to their almighty heavenly Father with all their needs and troubles. This is truly an incomprehensibly glorious comfort and encouragement for all God's true and believing people.

This God and almighty Father is here said to have a *right hand*, and it is here specifically referred to as *His* right hand. We all should recognize that Jehovah God is a pure, simple, infinite, and absolutely perfect Spirit, and is therefore a non-dimensional and non-physical being. Nevertheless, there is nothing more common throughout the entire Holy Scriptures than that human and physical body parts are ascribed to Him. In His infinite goodness and mercy, God thereby condescends to us, the weak children of men, so that unto our salvation we might understand and comprehend in some measure and with increasing clarity His divine glory and illustrious virtues and perfections. When using such expressions, we are to keep in mind that though they refer to God in

human terms, they are to be understood and interpreted in a manner that is worthy of God.

Therefore, in order to ascertain what the Holy Scriptures mean when they refer to *God's hand*, and specifically when they refer to His *right hand*, we must take note and consider how men use their right hand. The use of the right hand is twofold:

1. Our right hand is commonly the hand of our primary and preeminent strength, with which we do almost all our work, whereas we use our left hand, so to speak, to assist our right hand in all things.

2. Our right hand is esteemed and valued more highly than our left hand, and therefore it has always been the custom among civilized nations to place those whom one wished to honor on the right hand.

As we consider this twofold use of the right hand among us, it becomes evident what the Holy Scriptures mean when they speak of *God's right hand*.

To the extent that our greatest and most preeminent strength is exercised by our right hand, God's right hand is likewise a symbol of His infinite power and strength, which He displays in all His works. The right hand therefore symbolizes God's dominion and supremacy whereby He continually preserves and governs His entire creation. Consequently, Psalm 17:7 speaks of such as rise up against God's right hand as being those who rebel against God's power and dominion.

When we attribute more glory and worthiness to the right hand than we do to the left hand, this means, in regard to God's right hand, that we are referring to the exalted majesty and illustrious glory whereby He is infinitely exalted above all creatures and that He is the one who alone is worthy of all honor. Paul refers to God's right hand as such when he speaks of "the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). It is thus evident that God's right hand has a twofold meaning: it refers to His divine power and dominion over all things, as well as to His divine majesty and glory.

Regarding this right hand of God, it is stated here that Christ sits at that right hand, for the Apostles' Creed speaks of Him as "sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." Regarding the Savior's session at God's right hand, we will consider more specifically:

1. the straightforward meaning of His being *at God's right hand*;
2. the special meaning of *His sitting* at that right hand; and
3. the moving cause of this step of *His exaltation*.

Regarding the first, we will not spend any time dealing with the heretical views of others, such as those of the Socinians, who take issue with the divine glory of the Lord Jesus, and thereby so completely obscure and distort His session at God's right hand by their lies, whereby they fully strip this truth of all its true efficacy and meaning. We will not be distracted in the least by such vain and heretical views, but will expound this truth for you with brevity and simplicity.

You should know that this manner of speaking regarding Christ *being* or *sitting at the right hand of God* is derived from the custom of ancient eastern kings. As is still to be observed in oriental nations, such kings would sit upon very wide thrones, upon which others could sit beside them. Thereby they would display their power and glory to the people. When a king therefore wished to honor someone as greatly and supremely as he possibly could, he would cause such a person, as, for instance, his eldest son or a member of the royal family, to ascend his throne and to sit down next to him at his right hand. The king himself, as the person of the highest rank, would then sit down in the center of his throne. This was an indication that the one thus seated upon the throne at the right hand of the king was, next to the king, the most exalted, powerful, and prominent person of his kingdom, to whom the people, after the king, had to yield all honor and allegiance.

We read that King Solomon treated his mother, Bathsheba, in such a fashion (1 Kings 2:19). He arose, walked toward his mother, bowed before her, and only thereafter, he again sat down on his throne, causing a chair for his mother to be placed at his right hand, upon which she was then seated. In so doing, Solomon honored his mother as highly as possible.

Ancient kings would place someone besides themselves on their thrones and at their right hands not only to bestow upon them the highest possible honor, but occasionally they would do so also to signify thereby that they endorsed someone to participate in the exercise of their royal power and dominion, and thus to govern their kingdoms with them and at their side. The mother of the sons of Zebedee had this in mind when she carnally requested of the Savior, "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom" (Matt. 20:21); that is, that they would rule and govern with and beside Him. By the answer He gave her, the Savior affirmed that this was indeed her objective, and consequently the expression "to sit at one's right hand" means as much as governing and reigning at the side of another.

The figure of speech regarding the Savior's sitting at the right hand of God has therefore been derived from this custom of the kings of antiquity, and the following two matters are therefore signified thereby:

First, Christ, upon having accomplished the work of redeeming His elect, believing people, upon having ascended into heaven as their head and king, having been exalted most gloriously by His Father, and having been seated next to Him in supreme divine glory, is now, with and besides the Father, worshiped, magnified, and exalted as the eternally living God. He is therefore the king of heaven and earth, who is simultaneously the redeemer and king of His people. Paul teaches this clearly, saying, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9–11).

The Lord Jesus was thus exalted by the Father so "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him" (John 5:23). This had been foretold prophetically, for in Isaiah 52:13, God the Father testifies regarding His Son, "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." This occurred and was thus fulfilled when He was seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and neither this divine honor nor this divine glory has ever been attributed to or been bestowed upon any creature, no matter how highly and prominently they were exalted by God.

Second, we are to understand this session of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God not only as a supreme manifestation of divine honor and glory, of which He became an eternal partaker subsequent to His ascension into heaven, but also, as we have seen, His session at the right hand of God signifies that royal power, dominion, and authority have been bequeathed upon Him. Therefore, this session of the Savior at the right hand of God also signifies that, along with the Father, all power and dominion in heaven and on earth have been vested in Him. This is particularly true in regard to His elect, believing people, for together with the Father and by the Holy Ghost, He will eternally reign over them as king. By His session at God's right hand, Christ has thus been exalted to be their "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16). The apostle Paul therefore explains the words of Psalm 110:1, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool," by saying with regard to Christ, "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25).

The Lord Himself also declares this to be so in Psalm 110:1–3, for after the Father says to His Son, “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool,” He then expounds this further by saying, “The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.” The immediate consequence of this would be, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.”

Upon His return into heaven, the head and savior of believers, the Lord Jesus Christ, was thus appointed by His Father with Him to be Lord and king over all things. In so doing, the Father glorified Him with His own self with the glory that He had with Him before the world was (John 17:5), and “made that same Jesus... both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). He thereby “set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:20–23).

The Lord Jesus, being the true head of His believing people, has thus overcome and has sat down with His Father on His throne (Rev. 3:21). Therefore, the throne of divine honor, power, and dominion now belongs both to the Father and to the Son, and They both will sit there eternally to rule as king. This throne is therefore specifically referred to as “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1).

This is what is meant by the expression that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. However, we must now also briefly give some attention to the efficacy proceeding from this session at the Father's right hand.

Having considered in general terms how the Lord Jesus is seated at the Father's right hand in heaven, we must now also consider briefly in what manner He is seated at His right hand, and then particularly what is meant by His *sitting* there. The Holy Scriptures clearly teach us throughout that the Savior is seated, or sits, on God's right hand—as, for instance, in our text, where we read, “Sit thou at my right hand,” and in Hebrews 1:3, where Paul testifies of Him that He “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

This session of the Lord Jesus signifies four things:

First, it signifies His blessed rest in heaven in the house of His Father after having finished His work of redeeming the elect here on earth. The Holy Scriptures frequently speak of such sitting as a dwelling in a safe, peaceful, and most

blessed place. In Micah 4:4, it is prophesied regarding the Gentiles that “they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree.” Likewise, the Lord Jesus, after having finished the weighty labor of His soul in order to redeem His people, rested again in heaven and sat down at the right hand of His Father. We read of this blessed rest in Isaiah 11:10: “And his rest shall be glorious.”

The Lord Jesus enjoys this rest in heaven as the head of His believing people, and in principle, He already bestows this rest upon all His people, doing so according to His promise: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29). After they have enjoyed this rest in principle here on earth, believers will eternally enjoy this rest with Him in heaven, and with Christ they will then have entered into their rest and will have ceased from their own works, “as God did from His” (Heb. 4:10).

Second, the session of the Lord Jesus also signifies the exalted royal dignity He may enjoy there alongside His Father, for this *sitting* depicts royal majesty and glory. Kings are seated upon their thrones, whereas their servants and assistants *stand* before them as a symbol of their readiness to serve. We read regarding the servants of Solomon that they stood continually before him (1 Kings 10:8). Therefore, it is said regarding God that “the LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever” (Ps. 29:10).

While the Lord Jesus was here upon earth to secure the salvation of His elect, He *stood* before His Father as His servant. However, upon having completed His work as a servant and having returned to heaven, He laid aside the form of a servant, and as the king and lord of heaven and earth, He sat down at the right hand of His Father, where “thousand thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand [stand] before him” (Dan. 7:10), ready to obey Him. Thereby was fulfilled what had been prophesied regarding the Savior: “He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne” (Zech. 6:13).

Third, His session further signifies His office as the supreme judge—an office He exercises in heaven and will exercise upon the last day. Very commonly, judges are said to *sit* in order to judge and to issue sentence. It is therefore written “that Moses sat to judge the people” (Ex. 18:13). In ancient times, the judges would sit in the gates, and the Savior alludes to this when He says to His disciples and believing people, “Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt.

19:28). David alludes to this as well, saying, "For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right" (Ps. 9:4), and the Lord Himself says, "There will I sit to judge all the heathen round about" (Joel 3:12).

The savior, the Lord Jesus, is thus also seated as judge at the right hand of His Father to judge His people with righteousness and to "judge the poor of the people, . . . [to] save the children of the needy, and . . . [to] break in pieces the oppressor" (Ps. 72:2-4). All believers acknowledge Him as such, knowing that "the Father . . . hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22), and therefore they exclaim regarding Him, "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king" (Isa. 33:22).

Finally, the session of the Lord Jesus also signifies the durability and stability of His supreme office of judge and of His royal dominion in heaven, for it is very common for the Holy Scriptures to use the term *to sit* to express steadfast endurance. It is therefore recorded of Shimei, "And Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days" (1 Kings 2:38). The original text actually states that Shimei *sat* in Jerusalem many days. The psalmist alludes to this in Psalm 9:7, saying, "But the LORD shall endure for ever:¹ he hath prepared his throne for judgment." In Lamentations 5:19, we read, "Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever:² thy throne from generation to generation."

The Lord Jesus also sits in this manner at the right hand of God, and thus in heaven as His permanent abode. He will eternally reign there as judge, lawgiver, and king, for His throne "is for ever and ever" (Ps. 45:6), and "of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom" (Isa. 9:7). However much His enemies may rage against Him, His kingdom shall be "a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" (Dan. 2:44). All of this is comprehended in the session of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God.

If, however, He is thus seated at the right hand of God, how then could Stephen testify that he saw "Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55)? This can easily be reconciled, for both expressions are but figures of speech. The fact that Stephen saw the Savior *standing* at the right hand of God was a manifestation of His desire and readiness to take the soul of this godly martyr unto

1. The Dutch translation reads, "Maar de HEERE zal in eeuwigheid zitten"; that is, "The LORD shall *sit* forever (or eternally)."

2. The Dutch translation reads, "Gij, o HEERE, zit in eeuwigheid"; that is, "Thou, O LORD, *sittest* for ever."

Himself into glory. However, to depict His joint and everlasting royal dominion with the Father, He is said to be seated at the Father's right hand.

But how does the Lord Jesus secure the great and infinite glory of sitting at the Father's right hand? He derives this on the one hand from the Father, and on the other hand from Himself.

He derives this from the Father, who "set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:20). As we considered earlier, the Father did so after first having resurrected Christ from the dead, and thereafter taking Him into heaven. Thereby the Father fulfilled the demands of the eternal covenant of redemption, that is, the counsel of peace between Him and "the man whose name is The BRANCH" (Zech. 6:12–13). In this counsel, He promised the Son that He would glorify Him when He would "make his soul an offering for sin" for His chosen seed (Isa. 53:10). However, the Father thereby again publicly justified the Son, making a public and most glorious declaration regarding Him as to His perfect satisfaction, as well as the fulfillment of His mediatorial office on behalf of His elect and believing people. All true believers derive great comfort and joy from the Father having crowned their head and savior with honor and glory, and from beholding that He has made Him to be both Lord and Christ.

This glory is also intrinsic to the Lord Jesus Himself, for just as He raised Himself from the dead and ascended into heaven, as we observed earlier, He also appropriated this great honor for Himself, and as Paul testifies of Him, He "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). This demonstrates again most clearly that He fully executed His mediatorial office here upon earth according to the eternal counsel of peace, and hereby also His exalted and adorable divinity can again be most clearly ascertained.

This is what we wanted to communicate to you regarding this precious and profound truth regarding Christ's session at the right hand of God. He ascended into heaven to take possession of this adorable majesty and glory. The instructor teaches this by saying that "Christ is ascended into heaven for this end, that He might appear as head of His church, by whom the Father governs all things." This needs no further explanation, for we have already sufficiently expounded these truths.

We must now proceed to the precious and glorious benefits accruing to all true believers from the illustrious exaltation of their beloved king and savior, and by the efficacy and exercise of their faith. According to the instructor, these comforting benefits are the following:

“By His Holy Spirit He pours out heavenly graces upon us His members.” In the next Lord’s Day, the instructor will specifically address the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, whereas in the previous Lord’s Day, he taught how the ascended Christ sends His Holy Spirit as a pledge to His believing people. The instructor has already explicitly taught in Lord’s Day 12, Question 32, that believers are truly members of Christ, having shown there that God’s children are called Christians by virtue of being members of Christ by faith. Therefore, we must now only consider how the Savior, being seated at the right hand of God, pours out His heavenly gifts by His Holy Spirit upon believers and thus upon His members.

The instructor understands the heavenly gifts that Christ thus pours out upon His believing people here on earth to be all those spiritual blessings and benefits that believers here on earth continually receive from Christ their head. By these gifts, they are increasingly illuminated, justified, and sanctified, thereby making them “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12). All these gifts or benefits are heavenly, not only because they proceed from heaven, but also because heaven is embodied in them. Consequently, believers who receive these gifts become increasingly heavenly minded and set their “affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2). It is therefore with the Lord’s people as Paul describes, saying, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

According to the instructor, the Lord Jesus, as head and by His Holy Spirit, pours out all of these heavenly gifts and graces upon His members, and thus upon believers. This is no different from the natural head continually communicating with the body and all of its members by the nervous system, thereby rendering the body operational. Likewise, believers, as members of the body of Christ, uninterruptedly receive their spiritual life from Him who is their head and the fountain of life, and by faith they continually extract from His fullness “grace for grace” (John 1:16). In and of themselves, they do not have the least measure of light, life, or strength, and therefore all the heavenly gifts of life must uninterruptedly be communicated and administered by Christ, who is their living head in heaven.

This is the fruit and blessed benefit of the Savior’s session at God’s right hand, for He sits there as the king and head of His believing people so that He may fully govern them by His Holy Spirit and continually provide for them in all that they need in soul and body. He thereby continually waters His vineyard by His heavenly graces and by His Spirit, just as a king from his throne

continually attends to and looks out for the well-being and prosperity of his beloved subjects.

This was prophesied regarding the Messiah in the Old Testament, for in anticipation of Christ's exaltation into heaven, it is sung of Him in the Spirit in Psalm 68:18, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them." Again, in anticipation of His glorious exaltation into heaven, the Messiah gives this precious promise to His beloved and believing people, saying, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring" (Isa. 44:3).

Nothing is therefore lacking in the complete salvation of believers, for they may patiently and in faith expect all their light, righteousness, strength, and salvation to proceed from their glorified head and savior, Christ, and therefore they should "be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let [their] requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6).

The other benefit extracted by the instructor from the Savior's session at God's right hand consists in this: "that by His power He defends and preserves us against all enemies." Our exposition has sufficiently shown that the Lord Jesus, seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, has received "all power...in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). With the Father, He governs and reigns not only over His redeemed and believing people as their head, Lord, and king, but, in a general sense, over all creatures, both in heaven and on earth. With infinite power and authority, He therefore governs all His and His people's enemies, including Satan, the world, and sin. He so completely controls and governs them by His hand that, apart from His divine power and will, they cannot make even a single move, for no sooner had the Father said to Him, "Sit at my right hand," than He immediately added this promise: "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).

Believers have such an infinitely great and almighty king, who sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven, and apart from whom no one will dare to raise his hand or foot against them, either within or outside of the entire Egypt of this world. All true believers, as members of their head, are most intimately and eternally united to this exalted and mighty king and ruler. According to the instructor, He therefore fully engages His divine power and dominion to defend and preserve them against all enemies. Just as a king uses all his

power and might to protect his kingdom and his subjects against all internal and external enemies, likewise the Lord Jesus, the supreme King of kings and Lord of lords, also preserves, protects, and defends His beloved subjects here on earth against all their spiritual and physical enemies who assault them from within and without. Therefore, all true believers, who are His subjects, need not be fearful of anything, but they should completely trust their heavenly king and head, Jesus, fully surrendering themselves to Him in soul and body. They should fully keep in mind that no matter what adversities and difficulties they may encounter as to either soul or body, His eye always rests in favor upon them, He is always at their right hand, and He never lacks either the power or the willingness to help them.

Since the salvation and redemption of His people are as vital to the honor and joy of Christ as these benefits are to them, and given that He is intimately and inseparably united to them by the Spirit of faith, the Lord's people, by virtue of Christ being at God's right hand, will therefore by Him be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"—a salvation "wherein [they] greatly rejoice" (1 Peter 1:5–6). The instructor addressed this comforting truth in Lord's Day 1, teaching there that Christ so preserves His believing people "that without the will of [their] heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from [their] head; yea, that all things must be subservient to [their] salvation." In Lord's Day 12, Question 31, he taught that Christ, as king, "defends and preserves [them] in (the enjoyment of) that salvation, He has purchased for [them]."

We therefore need not consider these matters in greater detail. We wish to add only that the entire Word of God is filled with the most precious and comforting promises made by the Lord Jesus to His people, assuring them that from heaven He will always help them in all things, and that He will preserve, defend, and protect them against their enemies. Therefore, they can neither perish to all eternity nor be plucked out of His hands, and the gates of hell will not prevail against them (Matt. 16:18). There is not the least reason to doubt the unailing fulfillment and affirmation of all these promises. Such are the great, blessed, and precious benefits the believing children of God may derive from the session of the Lord Jesus at God's right hand.

As the instructor continues to remain in step with the Apostles' Creed, he proceeds to address another and no less important, sweet, and precious truth, namely, the Savior's second coming on the last day, when, as the supreme judge, He will "judge the quick and the dead" here on earth. Since, however,

this doctrine is of such an extensive nature, we are compelled to divide this Lord's Day into two sections, and we will thus expound for you in a subsequent sermon this great doctrine of Christ's return unto judgment.

All that now remains for me is to set before you in a few words the manner in which faith is exercised regarding the Savior's session at God's right hand. Faith interacts with this truth as it interacts with all the other truths we have considered. Faith does not merely embrace this session of the Lord Jesus at God's right hand as a historical truth; it thus does not consider this truth merely intellectually. Rather, a Christian, being taught by the Lord Himself through His Spirit, embraces this precious truth in an entirely spiritual manner and applies it specifically to himself, trusting by the Spirit of faith that the Lord Jesus is also seated at the right hand of God on his behalf as his redeemer, head, and king. With all his deficiency, guilt, and misery, he thus turns to Him and surrenders himself fully with soul and body to Him and to His free grace. He follows Him, cleaves to Him, expects all of his salvation by grace from and by Him, and is thus governed and ruled by Him as king.

This is what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus as being seated at God's right hand. Whoever may have this faith, by this faith overcomes both the world and all of Christ's enemies. We will therefore conclude with the promise in which the Lord Jesus addresses believers, saying, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21). Amen! May the Lord grant that with much patience and with a lively faith His people would anticipate the fulfillment of this His promise. Amen.

Jesus Coming as Judge

LORD'S DAY 19

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom.

—2 TIMOTHY 4:1

Question 52: What comfort is it to thee that “Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead”?

Answer: That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven; who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory.

In Genesis 40, we find the well-known account regarding the chief butler and chief baker of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Both men had transgressed against their king, and both men had therefore been cast into prison. Matters transpired as Joseph foretold, and on Pharaoh's birthday, he caused both men, albeit each in an entirely different manner, to be released from prison. He permitted the butler to live, lifted up his head among his courtiers, and restored him to his former status and glory. However, when the chief baker was removed from prison, Pharaoh caused him to be hanged on the gallows, thereby punishing him with a shameful death.

This history is a vivid illustration of the universal court proceedings that shall transpire upon this earth at the end of this world, known to us as “the last judgment.” Pharaoh here exemplifies the Lord God, or the Lord Jesus, the adorable king and judge of all the earth, whereas the chief butler and chief baker are symbolic of all men as they will be judged by God, being believers and unbelievers, godly and ungodly.

First, as the butler and baker had both sinned and transgressed against their lord and king, likewise all men have sinned against God and are therefore worthy of death.

Second, as Pharaoh cast the butler and baker into prison, all men have been cast by God into the prison of death on account of their sins. Death, to which both godly and ungodly are subject, is the wages of sin. However, there is this distinction: the ungodly are subject to death as a punishment, whereas for the godly, death is only the consequence of sin—except for those who will be alive on the Day of Judgment.

Third, as the butler and baker, upon Pharaoh's command, were released from prison on the same day, so it shall be on the last day, when, upon the command of the great King Jesus, all men who have died, both godly and ungodly, shall be released from the prison of death. All men will then arise from the dead and leave the graves that held them captive and incarcerated until that moment.

Finally, Pharaoh's butler remained alive by virtue of the king's goodness and grace, and he was restored to a status of great glory. The baker, on the contrary, was put to death in a most shameful manner for his crime by being hanged on the gallows. On the great Day of Judgment, so it shall be in regard to all men. Pharaoh's butler was set free, and so likewise will godly believers be eternally set free from death by God, the great king of heaven and earth. They will be ushered into the courts of heaven with the greatest measure of glory and splendor, so that there they might eternally serve God.

On the contrary, the ungodly, just as Pharaoh's baker, will be condemned to endure a most dreadful and shameful punishment and to be punished with eternal death. The prophet Daniel spoke of this, saying, "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2).

Today we must address this great judgment of God that shall be executed upon the last day. We have arrived at Lord's Day 19 in the exposition of our Catechism, and in addition to addressing Christ's session at God's right hand, this Lord's Day also addresses His glorious return as judge on the last day. It is of the greatest importance and urgency that we all would be rightly acquainted with the subject of Christ's return as judge, as well as that we would take it to heart and ever be mindful of it. When God's children are truly exercised with this by faith, they find in this truth on the one hand inexpressible comfort and on the other hand a strong exhortation and admonition to be godly and to walk before the Lord with holy fear and trembling. For the unconverted, however,

the doctrine of the last judgment, by the grace of God, can be the best means to awaken them from their carnal security and careless slumber of death. When the seriousness of the dreadful judgment of God truly is bound upon their hearts, they can be spurred on earnestly to seek Christ and His salvation. It is therefore our intention to address this subject matter in greater detail and to preach on this subject for an entire sermon. May the Lord in His unfathomable grace and mercy be pleased to add His holy blessing, so that these words would truly bear fruit in some souls, and also be blessed to our own hearts.

We will again follow our accustomed order, addressing and fully expounding for you:

1. the doctrine of the Savior's coming as judge; and
2. how the true saving faith of a Christian is exercised regarding this doctrine, and what the comforting benefit is that he may derive from this doctrine to the strengthening of his faith.

Regarding the doctrine itself, we must consider three matters:

1. the judge who executes this final and universal judgment, as well as His majestic appearance in order to accomplish it;
2. the defendants who will be summoned to appear before this judge to be judged by Him, and in what this judgment will consist; and
3. the judgment or judicial transaction itself, with all the attending circumstances that, according to the Holy Scriptures, will be associated with this transaction.

Regarding the first, when the period of time allotted by God from eternity to the existence of human society has come to an end, that is, at the end of the world, there will most certainly be a judicial transaction whereby all men who ever have lived upon this earth will be judged. This truth is taught throughout the Holy Scriptures, and this can be ascertained also by the dim light of natural reason.

As proof, we will consider only two passages from the Holy Scriptures. The first is taken from the words of Paul that we have read as our text, where he writes to his son Timothy, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1), and the same apostle also testifies that God "hath

appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:31).

We can best describe this judgment as follows: it will be a holy and universal judicial transaction that will transpire at the end of the world. With a great display of majesty and glory, the Son of God will then appear as judge upon the clouds of heaven and will summon all men, together with the devils or evil angels, to appear before Him in order painstakingly to examine all their deeds as they have been committed in this life. He will then, in accordance with truth, pronounce a judicial sentence of either eternal acquittal or eternal condemnation.

Upon considering this illustrious judicial transaction, we first encounter the judge who will appear here on earth to execute this great judgment. According to the Holy Scriptures, God, the Lord and creator of heaven and earth, is this judge. Generally speaking, we may say that the triune God, that is, all three divine persons, executes this judgment, for all three persons are coequal as to majesty and dignity, having the same authority over all creatures. God is therefore denominated "the Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25), and Paul calls Him "God the Judge of all" (Heb. 12:23).

This office of judge rightfully belongs to God, for He created all men upon the face of the earth and gave to them His holy law to judge them in accordance therewith as His dependent creatures and subjects. Consequently, as the supreme Lord, creator, and lawgiver, God is fully entitled to judge all men as well as all their deeds and transactions. This judgment is therefore called "the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5).

More specifically, however, this universal judgment of the last day will be executed by Christ Jesus, the Son of God. Several passages in God's Word teach this, for the Savior declares that "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). Furthermore, the Father "hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man" (John 5:27). Paul therefore also writes that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10). This had already been pointed out in the prophetic word, for the believing people of the Messiah said regarding Him, "The LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king" (Isa. 33:22). In Psalm 72:1, we also observe how the believing church worships God the Father as such, praying that He will yield the office of judge to Christ His Son so that men will be judged by Him, saying, "Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son."

This universal judgment will neither be executed by the Father nor by the Holy Spirit, but by the Son. It must necessarily be so, for it pleases God that the world would be judged to the comfort of believers and as a dreadful terror for the ungodly by a visible judge who can be seen and beheld by all flesh. No one among the three divine persons other than Christ, the Son, could do this visibly, for as He is both God and man in one person, He can also judge the world in a manner that will be visible unto all. Paul teaches this clearly in the passage we have already quoted, saying that God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained.” This Man is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, who is here denominated as such in accordance with His human nature and because He is the Son of Man. However, as the savior, king, and head of His people, it is also appropriate for Him on the last day that He would judicially bestow upon them that salvation that He has merited for them, as well as eternally bar unbelievers and the ungodly from that salvation.

The Apostles' Creed therefore attributes this judgment to Christ, teaching that “from thence [from the right hand of the Father] He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” However, as He judges the world, the Lord Jesus will do so neither for Himself nor for His name's sake, but rather, He will do so in the name of and on behalf of the triune God, having been chosen and appointed by God to engage in this work. Therefore, the judgment that He shall execute shall be none other than the judgment of the triune God, to which all flesh must be subject. It is true that we read in 1 Corinthians 6:2 “that the saints [that is, the holy angels and believers] shall judge the world.” This should be understood, however, as a judgment of approbation, whereby they, being spiritually united to Christ and being thus of the same mind as Him, will praise and approve of Christ's judgment while also exalting and magnifying His justice.

Therefore, the great judge before whom we, together with all the inhabitants of the earth, must appear is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, the savior and king of His people. He will come from the right hand of God “to judge the quick and the dead.” According to the Holy Scriptures, at the end of the world, the Lord Jesus will arise from the right hand of His Father and will physically descend upon this earth to judge all flesh—that is, to judge those who are good and those who are evil.

Many passages in God's Word attest to this physical coming or appearance of the Lord Jesus. In his letters to believers, Paul speaks frequently of the future coming and appearance of the Lord Jesus. The angels who were present at the

ascension of the Savior foretold this event to the disciples, saying, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). And when Peter speaks of Christ's residing in heaven until the Day of Judgment, he testifies regarding Him that "the heaven must receive [Him] until the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21).

In what manner will Christ come to execute this judgment? Will He appear here on earth with such humility as when He became man and walked here on earth? No, He will not, for the Holy Scriptures teach us throughout that the Savior will come to execute this judgment in a most illustrious manner and with indescribable heavenly glory, majesty, and splendor. Consider only what He Himself said regarding His coming, testifying that He "shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26).

This glory of the Son of Man shall consist in:

First, His external, glorious, and illustrious appearance, with which He will appear on the clouds of heaven. When the Lord Jesus manifested His glory to His disciples on the mount, we read of Him that He "was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matt. 17:2). Consider therefore with what inexpressible glory and awe-inspiring majesty the Savior will be clothed at His majestic and splendid appearance, for at that time He will at once, so to speak, display all of His divine glory to the entire world. His body in all its glory and splendor will then obscure the light of the sun.

Second, His illustrious throne, which He shall place upon the clouds and upon which He will be seated to judge the world. Daniel once saw something of the Lord's throne in a vision, and he gives us an awe-inspiring description of this throne, saying: "His throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (Dan. 7:9-10). The Savior Himself testified of this, saying, "Then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory" (Matt. 25:31). This should not be interpreted in a carnal manner, as if there will be an actual and visible throne that Christ will erect upon the clouds and upon which He will sit. Rather, we must understand this in a figurative manner as referring to Christ's throne, and thus as a throne of His divine omnipotence, majesty, glory, grace, and justice. When He will come to judge the world, He will be clothed with all of these attributes, and before this

throne all creatures will have to appear, either willingly or unwillingly, to fully prostrate themselves.

Third, that this glory of the Savior will further be enhanced when, at His majestic return, He will be accompanied by an innumerable multitude of holy angels. They will in all probability appear on earth in visible bodies to gather men together, to separate them from one another, and to lead believers heavenward. Enoch prophesied regarding this, for we read of him, "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14–15). The Savior Himself testified that "the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him" (Matt. 25:31).

Fourth, that this splendor and awe-inspiring glory of the Lord Jesus shall also be further enhanced by the powerful sound of the last trumpet, for Paul foretold that "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God" (1 Thess. 4:16).

It is very obscure and uncertain as to what we exactly are to understand regarding these matters, for the Holy Scriptures do not provide a more detailed description. However, we can ascertain in general terms that the signs accompanying the coming of Christ unto judgment will be very majestic and glorious, so that the ungodly will be terrified by them and the godly will be comforted by and rejoice in them. It is in such an indescribable, illustrious, and glorious manner that the Lord Jesus will descend from heaven and come to this earth to judge it. Oh, that we would all rightly believe this!

We have hereby addressed the first matter to be considered: the judge Jesus Christ and His majestic appearance or coming as judge.

We will now proceed to address the second matter to be considered: the persons who must appear before this exalted and awe-inspiring judge to be judged by Him. These will be:

1. The devils or the evil and fallen angels, for the apostle Peter clearly writes of this, saying that "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4). Christ will then pronounce the sentence of condemnation upon them, and they will all be condemned for having fully departed from God and having radically opposed Him. They will therefore be eternally banished

from God's most blessed communion and be cast into hell in order to be eternally subjected to the infinite burden of God's wrath and His dreadful curse. There will never be any deliverance for them.

2. All men without distinction who have lived from the very beginning until the end of the world—and thus, without any exception, both young and old, rich and poor, godly and ungodly. In accordance with God's Word, they are denominated in the Apostles' Creed as "the quick and the dead," as Paul writes in our text: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom." There are those who interpret this as a reference to believers and unbelievers, for the first are spiritually alive, whereas the second are spiritually dead. We are of the opinion, however, that Paul uses the expression "the quick and the dead" in the literal sense of the words, and he therefore understands "the dead" to refer to all the inhabitants of the world who have lived prior to the Day of Judgment and have died the physical death. They will be raised from the dead to enable them to appear before God to be judged. The term "the quick" refers to those men or inhabitants of the earth who remain alive and who will experience the coming of this great and glorious Day of Judgment. They will not die as other men die, but rather, as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 15:51–53, they will be transformed "in the twinkling of an eye" and "this mortal must put on immortality." Therefore, all men, the living and the dead, will appear before Christ for this universal judgment to be judged by Him. Paul writes, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

Having considered both the judge and the defendants, that is, those who are to be judged, we must now consider in more detail that judgment as such, and this will be the third point of this sermon.

To consider in greater detail this final and universal judgment as it will be executed here on earth by Christ, you need to know that when the Savior appears as judge upon the clouds of heaven with indescribable splendor and glory, He shall cause the innumerable multitude of all the inhabitants of the earth, both the quick and the dead, to appear before Him. He will summon them to appear before His judgment seat by the trumpet of God and the voice of the archangel, who will cry throughout the earth, "Arise ye dead, and come to judgment." Thereupon, all who are dead will become alive again and will rise from their graves. Believers will be the first to arise, for Paul teaches this

clearly, saying, “The dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16b). Thereafter also unbelievers and the ungodly will be resurrected.

Consequently, there will be two groups of people: godly and ungodly, believers and unbelievers. The Lord Jesus will separate these two groups, one from the other, placing the believers or the sheep on His right hand and the goats or unbelievers on His left hand (Matt. 25:32–33). Whether this separation shall occur prior to, during, or following this judgment cannot be determined with certainty, for this the Holy Scriptures do not reveal to us. However, regardless of how this will transpire, it is certain that all the people of this world without exception will have to appear before Christ as judge as He will be seated upon the clouds of heaven. No one will be able to withdraw himself or go into hiding. No one will be forgotten or overlooked. Instead, the omniscient and omnipotent Savior will cause all people to appear before Him, and the angels will gather them from everywhere and bring them before the throne and the judgment seat.

A very orderly examination or investigation regarding everyone’s deeds will then follow, and thus, “according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). As the omniscient judge, Christ will reveal and bring to light in an orderly manner all the sins that every man has committed during this life, for His judgment will pertain to:

1. *All the thoughts anyone has ever thought*, all the secret deliberations of the heart that are known to none other than to God and that person himself, but also the innermost disposition of the soul. The Word of God teaches this clearly, for Paul testifies that in that day “God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:16). And in 1 Corinthians 4:5, he writes that God “both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.”

2. *All words that men have spoken here upon earth*. Again, the Holy Scriptures teach this clearly, and we hear it from the mouth of the Savior Himself, saying to the Jews: “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:36–37). Enoch prophesied that God would “execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (Jude 15).

3. *All the deeds, works, and transactions of men*, irrespective of whether they were committed publicly or secretly, or whether they were committed alone or together with others. This will pertain to everything they have done with and to their bodies and how they have used every individual member of their bodies—and thus, what they have done with their eyes, their ears, their mouths, their tongues, their hands, and their feet. This judgment will pertain to the manner in which they acquired their goods and how they used them. It will pertain to how they did eat and drink, and how they clothed themselves. It will pertain to how they performed in their temporal professions and how they used the means of grace. It will pertain to every sermon they heard, to every catechism lesson they received, to every prayer that has been uttered, and to every instance of the Word of God having been read in their homes. In short, this judgment of Christ will pertain to all that men did with both soul and body in this world and throughout their entire lives—and thus, from early youth until old age and the hour of their death. According to the testimony of Solomon, every deed will be specifically and carefully examined and judged, for he writes that “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:14).

Oh, how an unconverted person ought to fear and tremble upon hearing that all his sinful deeds will be exposed by the Lord Jesus in the presence of angels and men, including the most secret ones that here upon earth he sought so carefully to conceal from men!

If someone were to ask how it will transpire that the judgment of Christ will pertain to the thoughts, words, and deeds of every person, you need to know, dear reader, that the books of judgment in which everything has been recorded shall be opened. John testifies thereof, saying, “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev. 20:12).

There will actually be four books that shall be opened. There will be:

1. *The book of God's omniscience*, in which all that men have thought, said, or done has been meticulously recorded. That is the “book of remembrance [that] was written before him” (Mal. 3:16).

2. *The book of nature*, or that of *man's conscience*, by which everyone will be able to read with utmost clarity all that he has done here upon earth, whether it be good or evil.

3. *The book of God's decrees*, or the book of life, in which one will be able to read who from eternity has been elected unto salvation and who will be reprobate.

4. *The book of the gospel or the Holy Scriptures*, in which God has been pleased to reveal and make known to men both His law and the good pleasure of His grace and salvation in Christ. According to Romans 2:16, God will judge men according to this word of the gospel. God will carefully examine and analyze all of men's thoughts, words, and deeds in accordance with the law as it has been revealed in His Word, and will then determine which have been good and which have been evil. However, according to Paul's doctrine, there will be this distinction: "For as many as have sinned without law [that is, as it has been recorded] shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law" (Rom. 2:12). Therefore, all nominal Christians and all who have lived under the ministry of the gospel will be subjected to the severest judgment possible, for "it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you" (Matt. 11:22).

This ought to enable us to comprehend how Christ's judgment will transpire in an orderly fashion regarding all of men's deeds and transactions, irrespective of whether they be of an external or internal nature. The four books will be opened and immediately will reveal and expose with utmost clarity all that man has done here on earth, and therefore nothing will remain concealed before the Lord. People now hide thousands of matters about which no one knows but they and God alone. Prostitution, fornication, uncleanness, theft, and other evil works are committed secretly here on earth, and one will see to it that no one will have any knowledge thereof. However, on that great Day of Judgment, it will be discovered that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). All that man has done will then be fully displayed and weighed in the scales of God's sanctuary.

Oh, my dear reader, if only we would all believe this in truth and with impression! What concern and perplexity there would then arise in everyone's soul!

We also want to address the question of whether the sins of believers will be examined and exposed by God in this judgment. Not all Christians are of the same mind regarding this. Some believe that this will be the case, whereas others deny it. Our opinion would align with the first group, for we believe that also all the sins of believers will be exposed on the Day of Judgment. We believe

that this is not an obscure matter, for the Word of God teaches that this will be so. Paul writes to believers, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). Solomon teaches this clearly and makes no distinction between the sins of believers and unbelievers, writing, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:14). There are additional arguments in support of our view, but due to time constraints, we will refrain from considering them.

We must take note, however, that there will be a great distinction between the examination and exposure of the sins of believers and those of unbelievers, for in the final judgment, Christ will not confront His believing people with their sins as not yet atoned for, and thus unto their condemnation and perdition. Rather, they will be held before them as already atoned for, blotted out, and forgiven in the blood of the mediator—all of which has been embraced by them in faith.

Furthermore, their sins will not be held before them to shame and grieve them, but as proof and a lively declaration of God's sovereign grace and Christ's all-sufficiency. In the Day of Judgment, believers shall indeed be willing to recognize, acknowledge, and confess that they have been hell-worthy sinners and have committed so many millions of sins. This will then be subservient to the glorification of God's mercy and justice, as well as of the satisfaction Christ made on their behalf. As ungodly ones in themselves, they will then desire to receive salvation and eternal glory purely out of sovereign grace and for Christ's sake.

However, it will not be only the evil and sinful things committed here on earth by believers that will be brought to light on the last day, but also the good and holy deeds they have done by the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is evident from Matthew 25:35–36, for there we read what Christ will declare to His believing people at the judgment: "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." This will not transpire, however, so that believers will be acquitted on account of the worthiness of these good deeds, as if they merited something thereby. Rather, their good deeds will then be brought to light only as clear and lively evidences of their state of grace in Christ. It will also be a demonstration to the entire world that with them, justification and sanctification were conjoined, and that their hearts, being purified by faith (1 John 3:3), have yielded the fruits of faith and repentance. It is therefore written regarding

them, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord...and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

Such shall be the judicial investigation on this universal Day of Judgment regarding both believers and unbelievers when their works shall be brought to light. However, as we have seen, there will be a great distinction regarding the manner in which this will occur.

Beloved, we have thus expounded this subject matter for you today. However, a few matters remain for us to consider in connection therewith that pertain primarily to the precious and comforting profit that all true believers, by the efficacy and exercise of their faith, may derive in this life from Christ's impending judgment. Given, however, that so much time has already expired, we will, if it may please the Lord, reserve our consideration of this for our next sermon, and we will then also explicitly press upon you some of its practical applications.

We wish to conclude by addressing a few more matters:

There is no truth more clearly and transparently taught than the future return of Christ unto judgment on the last day, and thus, that the entire world will then be justly judged by Him. Everyone will have to give an account of himself before God. Nevertheless, there is in reality no truth that is less believed and heeded than this truth. Daily experience teaches us that this great day of final universal judgment is a matter of no concern for most people. Instead, they live as if there is no resurrection of the dead, no final judgment, no eternal salvation, and no perdition.

Who among us is there that always has a lively impression in his heart regarding this great matter and is accustomed to conduct his daily life with a deep impression of this? People of the world, examine your consciences for once—unless your consciences have already been fully seared by your habitual sinning against God. With God's assistance and by His grace, earnestly examine yourselves regarding this matter. Is it not true that days, weeks, months, and even years transpire without you thinking even once with a true stirring of your heart about the final Day of Judgment?

Since the majority of men give so little thought—and never with genuine earnestness—about the future coming of Christ unto judgment, and since it does not burden the hearts of such people, there is so little discussion among them regarding this great, dreadful, and glorious Day of the Lord, as well as of His universal judgment. Where do we hear men continually admonishing one another at all times and at every occasion that one ought to be concerned about death and eternity, as well as the great Day of Judgment? We can say with

certainty that the people of the world seldom, if ever, speak of this in true earnestness. Instead, in all their conversations and in all their gatherings, vanity and world conformity come to the foreground. Everyone ought to examine his own conscience, for in so doing, your wickedness will have to become evident to you—that is, if you are not entirely blind and walking in a darkness that fully envelops you.

The fact that people so rarely think and speak in all seriousness about the great Day of Judgment proceeds from their unbelief, for in their hearts, people do not believe that there will be such a Day of Judgment for the entire world and that all flesh will thus be judged in such a holy and solemn manner. People neither believe this nor accept the truth of these matters with an upright heart. Rather, they think of this day as being evil and very distant, and they remove it as far from their thoughts as possible. Any thoughts they may have regarding it are erased by their continued and persistent sinning, and thus they no longer are affected by any fear regarding God's future judgment. They say within their hearts, "Where is this God of judgment?" If one would truly and earnestly believe in the great future coming of Christ unto judgment, and if we would all truly be convinced that we will once have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ, then:

1. Would you who live in ignorance and have not the least desire regarding the knowledge of God's ways still persevere so stubbornly in your ignorance? Would you refuse to be instructed and educated in the way of salvation, neglect so many sermons and so much catechetical instruction, and cast so many of the serious admonitions of your minister to the wind, knowing nevertheless that you are threatened with this judgment that God "in flaming fire [will take] vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:8)?

2. Would you who are careless continue any longer in your deep slumber of sin without awakening and, in all earnestness, being filled with fear and contrition in your heart?

3. Would you, stubborn and hardened sinners, continue to live with such insensitivity toward your sins? Would you not rather begin to shudder and tremble for the dreadful judgment that is approaching for you if you do not repent?

4. Would you who are worldly and carnally minded be able to serve this world any longer as you are presently doing? Would you not rather, in all

earnestness and by God's grace, seek to escape "the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4b) and separate yourselves fully from this world?

5. Yes, if you would truly and earnestly believe in the future coming of Christ unto judgment, would you who are now so addicted to sin and finding all your pleasure in a life without God any longer pursue the lusts and pleasures of the flesh daily and continue to traverse such a dangerous pathway without true and sincere repentance toward God?

6. Especially you who above others have been illuminated by God, have been convicted of your sins, and have already put your hand to the plow to flee from the corruption of this world, would you then be able to return fully to the world and to join the company of worldly people and all manner of sinners? Would you then separate yourselves from the godly and commit thousands of sins against light and against your conscience, and then stubbornly persevere in doing so? Would you not rather shudder and tremble before God and acknowledge and confess your utter wretchedness and ungodliness, knowing that no one will receive greater judgment and condemnation than will be your portion if you do not repent and be reconciled with God?

7. And you, deceived sinners, would you stubbornly persevere in your life of falsehood and deceit, and would you not relinquish your erroneous notions regarding the way of salvation and your blind prejudices, no matter what is continually held before you in the way of instruction and admonition? Oh, if in your heart and with impression you would truly believe that there will be a future Day of Judgment, would you then so comfortably persevere in your deceit and in the error of your way? Would it not rather prompt you to engage in serious reflection, and would you not rather engage in serious self-examination whether you are upon the true and right way? You would most certainly take the Lord's people more seriously and would not oppose them so foolishly.

8. And what shall I say regarding you who, though not entirely at peace, are nevertheless not fully troubled and concerned regarding your eternal salvation, and who are still living rather casually and are halting between two opinions, not knowing whether you will both choose and cleave to God or mammon? If the future Day of Judgment would weigh upon your heart, one would soon detect in you more zeal, more seriousness, more concern, and more perplexity. There would be a greater urge in you to be reconciled with God in Christ, and you would no longer continue to postpone this.

9. Generally speaking, all of you who are unrepentant unbelievers and are not united to God in Christ, if you would truly believe the future return of

Christ unto judgment, you would no longer be able to continue to live in sin so comfortably, nor would you persevere in your refusal to repent. Instead, you would earnestly seek true faith and repentance, so that the great and dreadful Day of the Lord would not unexpectedly overtake you.

10. And you who are children of God, if you were to live with a more lively impression of Christ's impending return unto judgment, you would have more zeal and be more tender, more conscientious, more thoughtful, more careful, and more godly in your entire walk. By God's grace, you would give more heed to your ways, you would more often redeem the time, and you would more intimately unite yourself spiritually to God and your savior, Jesus Christ. You would be more watchful, and you would keep your candle burning, anticipating the coming of your Lord.

Oh, that the Lord would bless our words and, with divine power, impress them upon our hearts, so that everyone in a timely fashion would learn to give heed to his ways and to examine and scrutinize himself painstakingly, "for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5:8)! Amen.

The Last Judgment

LORD'S DAY 19

He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

—ACTS 17:31

Question 52: What comfort is it to thee that “Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead”?

Answer: That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven; who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory.

Paul uses remarkable language when he writes, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”¹ (2 Cor. 5:11). In the previous verse, he speaks of the great and awe-inspiring judicial transaction that will be executed at the end of the world by Christ, the great judge. All men must then appear before His judgment seat to be sentenced according to what they have done. Paul knew how dreadful this judicial transaction will be for all the ungodly and all unbelievers who here on earth have not been delivered from their sins in the way of faith and repentance. He knew they will eternally be banished from the blessed communion with God and be cast into hell. Since he knew this, he sought to deal faithfully and uprightly with all men, admonishing and persuading them

1. The Dutch translation reads, “Wij bewegen de mensen tot het geloof”; that is, “We persuade men to believe.”

to the utmost of his power to believe in Christ as the only way in which they could escape God's dreadful judgment and be eternally saved.

If it pleases the Lord to bless it, this terror of the Lord is indeed a very powerful means whereby sinners may be persuaded to be truly sorry for their sins and to believe and repent. There is nothing Satan opposes so much as such preaching, and therefore he seeks to hide this terror of the Lord from sinful men. He knows all too well how he can continue to mislead a nominal Christianity with his devices, or, to use a common expression, by pulling the wool over their eyes. He does this so that men remain unaware of the impending and dreadful judgment of the last day, lest they would thereby be awakened to the reality of his snare. He flatters them:

1. with an imaginary Christianity, imaginary virtue, imaginary faith and repentance, an imaginary heaven, and an imaginary salvation;
2. with a delusional perception of the great grace of God and an erroneous perception of His mercy;
3. with various injurious prejudices against the doctrine and ministry of Christ's gospel messengers;
4. with the notion of a long life and of having sufficient time to repent and to have serious thoughts regarding salvation; and
5. by filling their hearts with worldly mindedness.

Hereby he guarantees that a nominal Christianity remains wholly at peace while remaining careless, and he sees to it that men who dwell in the midst of Christianity are and will remain much harder than even the heathen who know not God. When Felix heard Paul "reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" (Acts 24:25), he became very fearful and no longer could bear listening to Paul. Sadly, must we not observe that the hearts of our hearers are much harder and unrepentant?

We may presently also avail ourselves of these words of the apostle, for we have in God's Holy Word the revelation of the dreadful judgment that shall be executed by Christ upon the last day here on this earth. We and all the inhabitants of the earth will then have to appear before Him. With this in mind, and in dependence upon God's gracious blessing, we shall also seek to persuade men to believe and to set before them the necessity of this faith unto salvation.

Since an in-depth and clear exposition of the last judgment could be a blessed means to this end, we have devoted this entire Lord's Day to considering

this. In the previous sermon, we considered a significant and prominent segment of this remarkable subject matter, namely, how:

1. on the last day, the Lord Jesus Christ will appear as judge on this earth with indescribable splendor, majesty, and glory;
2. all the children of men, both the living and the dead, will have to appear before Him and be judged at His dreadful judgment seat; and
3. Christ, as judge, will engage in an orderly and painstaking investigation regarding all that every man has done in this life, whether it be good or evil, and will then pronounce a righteous sentence regarding them.

We shall now continue with our exposition of this remarkable subject matter, for there are yet many things taught in the Word with lesser or greater clarity to consider regarding this last and universal judgment. Oh, that it would please the Lord to give us a right impression of all these things and to bind them upon our hearts by His Spirit, so that each of us would receive a blessing suited to our circumstances! Amen.

In our previous sermon, we last considered the last judgment and that Christ as judge will painstakingly investigate all that man has done in this life in thought, word, and deed, both good and evil, and how all things will be brought to light and revealed. Once this painstaking examination of each individual will have been concluded, Christ will then publicly pronounce a judicial sentence. This will be similar to what transpires in a worldly court when a sentence is pronounced immediately following the investigation of the defendant's conduct. The person who has been examined is either acquitted or condemned. As judge, Christ will then also pronounce a just sentence regarding every man, and this sentence will be one of either acquittal or condemnation.

All the godly will be acquitted; that is, all believers who here on earth have embraced by faith the offered grace and righteousness of Christ, and have submitted themselves to being washed and purified in His blood. Before the angels and all men, they will all be publicly acquitted by Christ as judge, and He will declare them to be heirs of eternal salvation. The basis for this acquittal will be that, during their lives, they by a true faith took hold of Christ's righteousness and merits as the only horn of their salvation.

The Lord Jesus will then place all the godly at His right hand and address them from the clouds in a most friendly and loving manner with these

comforting words: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). How the souls of God's believing people will be overcome with an overwhelming and inexpressible joy upon hearing these delightful words of the Lord Jesus! Among themselves, they will then leap for joy and immediately begin to sing, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (Rev. 5:13).

As soon as this has transpired, the sentence unto condemnation will follow, which the Lord Jesus will pronounce upon all sinners, and thus upon all the ungodly and all unbelievers whose works will then have been brought to light by Him. He will turn to them in His grievous wrath and indignation, and will condemn them to be eternally banished from His blessed communion and to be eternally subjected to God's infinite curse and wrath. They will thus be sentenced according to all they have committed, either against the light of nature, against God's revealed law, or against the gospel, in which Christ was set forth and offered, whereby they were most tenderly invited to come to Him. Consequently, they will be subjected to the dreadful judgment of hell and everlasting perdition, from which they will never be delivered throughout all eternity.

Do you wish to hear the sentence that shall be pronounced upon all sinners, and thus upon all the ungodly and all unbelievers? This is expressed in the Holy Scriptures, for the Savior Himself teaches that the Son of Man will say to all who are on His left hand, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Oh, what a grievous and dreadful sentence this is, and how painful and distressing it will be when all who are condemned and accursed will have to depart from before the countenance and blessed presence of Christ to be consigned to eternal hellfire with the devil and his angels, where they will eternally undergo and be subjected to indescribable pain.

Oh, beloved, what shall that be! If men would only believe this! Then its terror would cause the hearts of sinners to melt as wax, and their hairs would stand on end. Oh, that many who live in peace and are at ease in Zion would, by this terror of the Lord, yet be awakened from the deep slumber of sin and carelessness, and make haste to take refuge in the Rock of Salvation against such a grievous and dreadful judgment!

Having considered the sentences that shall be pronounced by Christ as judge regarding all men, we must now briefly address the execution of this judgment,

for when the sentence has been pronounced by the judge in an earthly court, its judicial execution immediately follows, and thus it shall also be when this stupendous judgment is executed on the last day. No sooner will Christ as judge have pronounced His sentence upon the world than it will also immediately be executed. The Savior Himself teaches this, saying, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt. 25:46).

How great and infinite will this difference be! Acquitted believers, and thus the righteous, will immediately be taken from this earth into glory and unto Christ, their head and king. By His angels, they will then be led into the heaven of heavens, the Paradise of God and the place of blissful glory, to enjoy in His "presence...fulness of joy" and "pleasures for evermore" at His right hand (Ps. 16:11). The apostle clearly teaches this, saying, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

However, this no sooner will have transpired when condemned sinners, and thus all unbelievers, having beheld with their eyes the ascent of believers together with Christ and His angels into heaven, will immediately be confiscated by the devil and his hellish servants, and by them they will be dragged to the abyss and to the pool that burns with fire and brimstone—and thus to the place of eternal torment. Oh, how dreadfully they all will wail and cry and lament! How the air will then be filled with the distressful groaning and weeping of all the damned! How the earth will then be saturated by their cold sweat and salty tears! Alas, it will then, however, be eternally too late, for the sentence of condemnation pronounced by Christ shall be an immutable and irreversible sentence without any possibility of appeal. No amount of prayer or wailing or anything else will be able to commute this sentence in the least. However much "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him" (Rev. 1:7) and no matter how much they may clamor, it will all be to no avail. While the devils will be binding the condemned and unbelieving with chains of everlasting darkness and dragging them to the fires of hell, Christ will immediately ascend into heaven with His angels and believing people in splendid glory while singing and rejoicing. They will do so without casting even so much as a glance at the damned, and the world below them will vanish from their sight.

Beloved, this is a factual description of the manner in which this final and universal judgment will be executed by Christ on the last day here on this earth. Regarding the attending circumstances, there are a few particulars that still need to be considered:

The first of these pertains to the moment in history when this universal judgment shall be executed, and thus either how little or much time must yet transpire before this great, majestic, and notable Day of the Lord shall come. Already dating from ancient times, the Jews have held to tradition that the world shall exist for exactly sixty centuries, or six thousand years; that is, two thousand years prior to the law, two thousand years under the law, and two thousand years after the law. According to that calculation, this universal judgment would then have to occur three hundred years hence.²

We must consider this matter only in light of the Holy Scriptures and not in light of human tradition, for nowhere in these Scriptures is there any indication regarding the exact time when this judgment will occur. This has deliberately been concealed from the children of men. The Savior teaches this plainly, saying, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son [that is, as the Son of man here on earth], but the Father" (Mark 13:32). God's Word declares in general terms that this day of universal judgment will transpire at the end of the world, when all the elect will have been born—all whose names have eternally been recorded in the Book of Life. It shall transpire when the Lord God will have made all things beautiful in His time (Eccl. 3:11) and when He will have carried out all that He has yet decreed to do in His church and in the world.

Though it has pleased the Lord for wise reasons to hide from us the exact hour of the final judgment, He has nevertheless given numerous signs in His Word that must necessarily precede this coming of Christ unto judgment. Some of those signs already have been fulfilled, and the remainder have yet to be fulfilled. Those things that, according to Holy Scripture, must yet transpire prior to the Savior's coming unto judgment consist primarily in this: the Anti-christ must yet fall and his empire must be fully undone, and the city of Rome, the throne of the beast, must be demolished. Also, the Jewish nation must yet be turned unto Christ, and the fullness of the Gentiles must be brought in. Once this has transpired, a most glorious time is yet to come for the church, during which believers, with Christ as king, will reign here on earth. During a period of one thousand years, the devil shall be chained in hell so that he will then not be able to deceive the nations (Revelation 20).

Following these one thousand years, a period of very grievous persecution must yet come upon the church. This persecution will be initiated by Gog and Magog, who will surround the dwelling place of the saints and greatly oppress

2. More than three hundred years have transpired since VanderGroe wrote this.

the church of Christ. After this grievous persecution, which shall be but of short duration, Gog and Magog will be consumed by fire from heaven, and when all these great and extraordinary matters will have transpired, the end of the world will be near. Then Christ shall shortly come unto judgment.

All of this proves from God's Word that the Day of Judgment is not yet that near, but that at least another one thousand years must transpire. However, the tarrying of this judgment will yield not the least benefit to all those who are presently alive and whose day of death is approaching. The Day of Judgment shall find a man in the condition in which death has left him, and it therefore should suffice that sooner or later such a universal judgment as we have considered will surely come upon all men. When it comes, according to the Holy Scriptures, it will not come gradually, but very suddenly and unexpectedly. The inhabitants of this world who will be living at that time will suddenly and unexpectedly be overtaken by this day, for the Lord Jesus has revealed to us that it is most unbecoming to be unconcerned, saying that this day will "come upon you unawares. As a snare it will overtake all who dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Luke 21:34–35). Paul and Peter both foretold that the Day of Judgment will come upon earth very unexpectedly, as "a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).

We hereby have communicated to you what God's Word has to say regarding this matter. We should neither be too curious nor too bold in probing too deeply into this mystery (as do some who have curious and nimble minds), but rather, we are to remember what the Savior said to His disciples: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:7).

Another specific detail regarding this awe-inspiring judgment pertains to the location where it shall be conducted. Some believe they can prove from Joel 3:2 that its location will be the valley of Jehoshaphat. However, according to the Holy Scriptures, the location of this judgment shall be on earth, as well as in the air and upon the clouds. Christ, as judge, will be seated upon the clouds of heaven, and all men will together stand here on this earth. The Word of God does not permit us to say anything more about this.

Nothing can be determined with certainty regarding the length and duration of this great and awe-inspiring judgment, and although the Holy Scriptures generally refer to it as a day, one may not therefore absolutely conclude that the final judgment will last for only a day. On several occasions, the Word of God uses the word *day* to refer to a very lengthy period of time. Therefore, the

expression *the day of the New Testament* refers to the entire period that encompasses the economy of the New Testament. This is also true for the Day of Judgment. That this judgment will last longer than a day, no one should doubt, for each individual human being will have to appear before Christ to give an account of all his deeds. This will certainly require a great deal of time.

It is of little concern whether this great and awe-inspiring day will last even a thousand years or more, for there will be more than sufficient time at hand. It will not be to the detriment of believers, for already here on earth they will enjoy blessedness and glory near Christ, their head and king. The ungodly and unbelievers, on the contrary, will then already be filled with unbearable anxiety, apprehension, and fear. Their wish will then be that they could depart from Christ's presence, for they will not be able to endure His wrath, and while trembling and shuddering, they will cry out "to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16-17).

These were the matters that we had to lay before you regarding this universal judgment. On the last day and at the end of the world, the Lord Jesus shall descend from the right hand of His Father to "judge the quick and the dead." This truth is also the object of a Christian's faith, of which he says and confesses, "I believe in Jesus Christ... [who] shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

Having dealt extensively with the first doctrine pertaining to the last and universal judgment, it follows that we will now address how the faith of a Christian is exercised in regard to this doctrine.

A Christian confesses to embrace and fully to endorse this doctrine as a truth of incontrovertible veracity, and he has no desire to doubt it in the least. Rather, he desires always to retain a deep impression of this truth in his heart. And truly, my friends, however much the devil may be stirring to sow atheistic seeds of unbelief in the souls of men, to nourish these seeds, and to cast manifold stumbling blocks and doubts into their hearts regarding this universal judgment, Christ, by His Word and Spirit, will destroy all the works of the devil within the hearts of His believing people.

For the strengthening of his faith, a believer is supplied with the most incontrovertible grounds to ascertain the truth that there shall be such a universal judgment involving the entire world, since:

1. It is taught in all of Scripture, as we have already abundantly affirmed. The apostle Paul therefore posits that the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment belongs to the foundational truths of Christianity (Heb. 6:2).

2. It can also easily be deduced from the justice of God, for the essence of this attribute is that He must reward that which is good and must punish that which is evil. The ungodly often prosper in this world, and the godly, on the contrary, often do not fare well. Consequently, there must come a time of righteous retribution after this life. Paul teaches this, saying, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels" (2 Thess. 1:6–7). Even wise men among the heathen have easily acknowledged and recognized this by the obscure light of reason.

3. It is affirmed by man's conscience, which accuses and condemns men regarding that which is evil, whereas it encourages and comforts them regarding that which is good. Why would there be either such accusations or encouragements in the consciences of all men if such a judgment were not truly and assuredly in their future?

For a believing Christian, these are the most solid grounds upon which he can ascertain as an incontrovertible truth that Christ shall once come on the last day to judge the quick and the dead.

However, the Christian not only believes this doctrine to be true, but he also embraces it as an essential and foundational truth of Christianity, recognizing that without the correct knowledge, a believing acquiescence, and a godly observance of it, he cannot look forward to any salvation or redemption. If Christ were not to return unto judgment, there would also be no resurrection of the dead. A believer would then have no expectation at all regarding eternal life in glory in the life hereafter. Consequently, he would be deprived of any hope regarding his salvation and redemption. However, he now can, will, and must believe that Christ will appear unto judgment at the end of the world. Such faith yields him the blessed and glorious benefits enumerated by the instructor in Question 52, where he asks, "What comfort is it to thee that Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead?," to which he replies, "That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered Himself for my sake, to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven: who shall

cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory.”

The doctrine of the last judgment has a twofold effect—one effect upon the hearts of the ungodly and another entirely different effect upon the hearts of God's believing children. In the heart of the ungodly, it produces fear, anxiety, and terror. Such was true of Felix, of whom it is recorded that upon hearing Paul speak of the coming judgment, he trembled so much that he no longer dared to listen to Paul, telling him, “Go thy way for this time” (Acts 24:25).

For the godly, this final judgment of the quick and the dead will be their day of relief and of eternal redemption. It will be their coronation day, upon which they, as conquerors, will be crowned by Christ with the crown of eternal glory. Already here on earth, their meditation on this awe-inspiring judgment yields them great comfort in all their afflictions and tribulations to which they are subjected, for “many are the afflictions of the righteous” (Ps. 34:19), and at times they are “chastened every morning” (Ps. 73:14b).

In the midst of all these afflictions, they may courageously, with uplifted heads and with intense desire, anticipate the coming of their great king and judge, Christ Jesus, from heaven unto judgment. The Lord Jesus Himself encourages them in this regard, saying, “And when these things [that is, the signs of His coming unto judgment] begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). They will thus be “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:12), and no wonder, for behold what great salvation shall be bestowed upon believers, considering that “the very same person, who before offered Himself for my sake, to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, [will] come as judge from heaven.”

Christ shall then appear to engage in this judgment neither as their enemy nor as their adversary, but as their beloved savior, redeemer, intercessor, and deliverer. Already here on earth, He has cleansed them from all their sins in His precious blood, has delivered them from the power and dominion of Satan, has reconciled them unto God, and has bestowed upon them so many tokens of His love and grace. They, in return, have received and embraced this Jesus with the arms of true faith as their Lord, head, and redeemer, whose redeemed and purchased people they have been here on earth and in whose blessed fellowship they not only have lived, but also have died. They look forward to His appearance on the last day as judge, when He will appear, not to condemn them, but to absolve them publicly, before God, the angels, and men, from all

guilt and punishment of sin. Out of free and sovereign grace, He will then judicially bestow upon them the eternal salvation He has merited for them.

This is not all, however, for believers also look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus as judge to “cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation.” Here on earth, God’s children must continually do battle with many mighty enemies who curse, persecute, abuse, and suppress them in all sorts of ways. But even more, it grieves them that their enemies are also the enemies of their Lord and king, Jesus, for they bitterly hate, slander, and resist Him, and therefore do violence to His name, His honor, His cause, and His people. However, on that awe-inspiring Day of Judgment, they will joyfully behold how vengeance will be executed upon these enemies of all Christians. Christ shall then perfectly and eternally deliver His people from them, and cast all His and their enemies into everlasting condemnation.

How can this not cause extraordinary joy in the souls of believers? Then the cause of Christ and that of His people—a people who were so greatly oppressed here upon earth by a multitude of enemies—will be publicly vindicated. Then the power of Satan and of darkness will eternally and fully be broken, for “death and hell were cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14). Redeemed believers will then be able to sing as this judgment unfolds: “I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence” (Ps. 9:2–3).

Finally, the instructor teaches that on the last day, Christ “shall translate [His believing people] with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory.” The Savior also gave this promise to all His believing people, saying, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

God’s children may look forward to receiving this blessed salvation from Christ on the last day. What a wondrous thing it is, therefore, that whereas sinners and unbelievers fear Christ’s coming unto judgment as the greatest evil that could befall them, God’s children, on the contrary, may greatly yearn and long for it. Especially when they encounter sorrow and affliction, they cry out, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20). We thus observe that the doctrine regarding Jesus’s coming unto judgment is a comforting doctrine for God’s believing people.

Let us now endeavor, with the Lord’s gracious blessing, to make some use of this subject for ourselves. Everyone among us professes to believe that Christ will come unto judgment and that all men who have ever lived shall be judged

by Him according to their works. Everyone therefore, in accordance with this profession, believes that in this judgment, he will also have to appear before the Son of God, “for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10a). You and I together will all be judged according to our works. All that we have done, whether it be good or evil, shall then be brought to light by Him and be displayed before angels and men. From the mouth of Christ, the supreme judge, we shall then all hear our sentence—either a sentence of acquittal and blessing, or a sentence of condemnation and cursing.

Dear reader, as a rational human being, judge whether this is a matter of extraordinary gravity and whether we should all earnestly and painstakingly examine ourselves as to how we have the courage to anticipate this great, awe-inspiring, just, and dreadful judgment, looking forward to it every day and every moment. Unless we are willfully blind to all this, we will not be able to deny that God has taught and revealed to us in His Word that on the Day of Judgment, by far the great majority of men will be condemned by Christ to perdition and to the punishment of hell itself, and that there shall be only few who, upon having believed, shall be saved.

Who are these happy ones who shall be saved? Read but the Holy Scriptures in their entirety, and you will repeatedly learn that they are those:

1. Who have truly become acquainted with their sinful and damnable state by nature.

2. Who are truly and sincerely concerned about, grieve over, are ashamed of, and are perplexed because of their sinful and damnable state, and no longer can find life in their own hand (Isa. 57:10).

3. Who by faith have taken refuge to Jesus, taken hold of His strength and righteousness, and thus been reconciled with God through Him. They have forsaken all of their own power, strength, and righteousness and have taken and put on the mantle of Christ's perfect righteousness to cover their shameful nakedness.

4. Who have drawn near unto God through Jesus, and who in humility and faith have earnestly and persistently besought Him to be gracious to them.

5. Who have received from Christ the Spirit of sanctification, whereby they have been delivered from the power of Satan and the dominion of sin, and in their spirits have truly been renewed, transformed, regenerated, and converted. They have therefore already here on earth walked in newness of life, bringing forth the fruits of righteousness that are “meet for repentance” (Matt. 3:8).

The entire Word of God teaches that only such people shall be acquitted by Christ in the Day of Judgment and be taken up into blessed glory. Is it not therefore obvious that we ought to be such people in truth before God? And if that be not so, but rather that our faith is in appearance only or in our imagination, we will be unable to stand before Christ in His great court of justice.

Oh, if only this would be rightly seen and believed! In the great Day of Judgment, how miserable and exceedingly wretched will be:

1. All those who, as mockers, have utterly ignored God and have considered and deemed the last judgment merely as a charade to make people fearful and afraid, saying, "Where is the God of judgment?" (Mal. 2:17). How dreadful it shall be for such when, in this judgment so greatly ridiculed by them here upon earth, they must appear before Christ! How Christ will then laugh at their calamity and mock when their fear will come (Prov. 1:26)!

2. All those who openly and brazenly have been ungodly in this world, who have engaged in all manner of abomination, and have closed their eyes and hardened their hearts in spite of all callings and admonitions. Oh, how grievous will be their end, for in this world they have passionately committed so much wickedness and so many abominations. After their hardness and impenitent hearts, they have treasured up unto themselves "wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5).

3. All sinners who are careless and carnally secure, putting away this evil day far from them. They refuse to be awakened by the terror of the Lord from their deep slumber of sin, and they also refuse to be persuaded to believe. Instead, they imagine that they will enjoy peace, even though they walk "after the imagination of their own heart" (Jer. 9:14). Regarding them, it will be confirmed what Paul writes, saying, "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3).

4. All worldly people. They are no less wretched, for in this world they have daily indulged in luxury and in pleasure, and they have had their portion in this life. There are those who have been so addicted and attached to the things of this life that they have consequently failed and neglected to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness. Their only concern has been to engage in their temporal calling and what they should daily eat and drink and where-withal they should be clothed (Matt. 6:31). How wretched these people shall be in the Day of Judgment! Then they shall see that they have sought to gratify

themselves with vanity, having fixed their eyes on that which is of no value and thereby having neglected to be concerned about their eternal salvation.

5. All those who have despised and belittled God, His Word, His servants, and His children. Oh, how Christ will then despise them all, and what eternal shame and disgrace will then cover them!

6. All those who here in this world, as hypocrites and charlatans, have covered their secret transgressions with the cloak of a counterfeit holiness, and who have thus only had the appearance of godliness while being enemies of true godliness. Oh, how naked they will stand on the Day of Judgment when Christ will abruptly remove their mask of hypocrisy and reveal to the world what they truly are. Then shall be fulfilled regarding them what is written: "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isa. 33:14).

7. All unconverted people in general, however civil and suitably they may have lived in this world, but who have lived and died in their natural state and have not been inwardly renewed and transformed by regeneration, faith, and repentance. Whatever the false foundations may have been upon which they rested, if they meandered through life without Christ and without being united to Him by faith, they will be indicted before the judgment seat of Christ and they will certainly eternally perish in the Day of Judgment. While here on earth, they, with the Laodiceans, may have imagined themselves to be rich, increased with goods, having need of nothing. Alas, to their eternal condemnation, it shall then be discovered that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

Whoever you may be, if you are yet unconverted and without Christ, consider these matters and take them to heart. Young and old, give heed and consider that this dreadful Day of Judgment will most certainly come upon you, and that, with all the inhabitants of the world, you will have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged according to what you have done in this life. What shall this be for an unconverted sinner! You will stand in judgment before Christ as an apprehended criminal, and you will be bereft of all friends, comfort, intercession, and support.

Presently you do not see God, and He appears to be at such a distance from you. Then, however, you shall see Christ before you, sitting bodily upon His judgment seat. You will be summoned before Him and will be addressed and

cross-examined by Him regarding all that you have thought, said, and done in this life. How dreadful shall this imposing presence of Christ be for you! Christ will then ask you how you lived upon this earth, from your youth until your old age, and whether you kept all of His commandments. The investigation of all your deeds and transactions will then proceed in a most painstaking manner, and the books shall be opened. The book of God's omniscience shall reveal and bring to light all your sins that you so carefully concealed before men here on earth. The book of your conscience will also be opened, and very vividly it will bring to mind and set before you all the sins you ever committed. You will then see your sins more clearly than you have ever seen them here in this life. Writing that has been recorded upon paper with orange juice cannot be read unless it is held near a fire. Likewise, you cannot presently read the bloody handwriting of your charges against your conscience. However, on the last day, you will once stand before God, who is a consuming fire, and you will then be able to read this handwriting. What infinitely grievous charges will then be filed against you regarding your sins! There will be millions of sins that you neither could nor would see here on earth. However, you will then see them in a most lively manner, and you will exclaim: "Oh, these are indeed my sins that I committed here on earth. I cherished these vile and evil thoughts in my heart, and I uttered these vain and sinful words. I am guilty of these lies, I committed these thefts, and have committed this fornication and adultery. I lived without Christ, and in my blindness, I trusted in my own works and righteousness. I made no attempt to repent and believe. Instead, I lived carelessly, serving myself and the world and having neither known nor feared God." Behold, your sins will then tower before you as mountains that reach to the heavens, and you will be unable to look beyond them.

If then you were to confess and acknowledge Christ, and to supplicate for grace and pardon, it would be of no avail to you—no more than an utterly guilty criminal can help himself in a worldly court by crying and weeping while pleading with the judge for mercy. Christ will not sit upon the clouds of heaven to be gracious to unconverted sinners and to save them. Rather, as a righteous judge, He will judge all flesh according to truth. The law must then be upheld fully, and whatever it says, so it shall be. The law will then say regarding you and all unbelieving sinners that "they which commit such things are worthy of death" (Rom. 1:32). Christ shall then act in accordance with the testimony of the law and declare you to be worthy of eternal death. That sentence can neither be reduced in the least nor be altered to all eternity, and any supplication

will no longer be of any avail. As the sentence has gone forth from the mouth of Christ, so shall it also be executed.

Behold, dear reader, we beseech you “as though God did beseech you by us” (2 Cor. 5:20), look ahead to your future as to what is coming, and believe all these things. Let this be subservient:

1. to become concerned, disturbed, and truly perplexed, so that you would awake from the sleep of carnal security and carelessness;
2. to consider in time what your account is before God, beholding and considering most earnestly the multitude and gravity of your sins and debt, as well as your impotency to make any payment in this regard (and thus you would see how you are missing the righteousness of Jesus, which alone is valid and acceptable to God);
3. to move you to yearn for the salvation that is to be found with the surety and mediator Christ Jesus, so that in true contrition, you would receive Him by faith, thereby securing the payment and satisfaction of all your debts; and
4. to use diligently all the means of grace, so that thereby and with God's blessing, you might be wrought upon to believe and repent.

Behold, dear friends, the eternal salvation of your soul hinges on the performance of these things. If you continue to neglect them, and if you continue on, allowing the devil, sin, and your deceitful heart to rock you to sleep in false security, be it known, O sinners, you will die an eternal death, and upon that day you will be held accountable by Christ the supreme judge. I therefore wish to be free of your blood and your condemnation. Therefore, from among this congregation, as many as will eternally perish shall perish because of their carelessness and unbelief.

Now we have a short word for you, children of God, who truly have received grace. You already have been justified and acquitted of all your sins in God's judicial court by the merits of Christ, and for you “there is therefore now no condemnation” to all eternity.

First, do not fear the future coming unto judgment of your Lord and savior. On the contrary, yearn and crave for it, for you have heard what great and blessed privileges are awaiting you. Therefore, anticipate the coming of Jesus with joy. Delight yourself in it, and cry out frequently, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!”

There is certainly much reason to rebuke and to indict the majority of God's children for so little rejoicing in, anticipating, and truly longing for the impending coming of Jesus unto judgment, and that in their sorrow they find so little comfort in His coming. This evil is often caused by:

1. Not only their unbelief, but so many of God's children also remain so doubtful as to their state of grace and of Christ's willingness to save them. They continually fear that they might deceive themselves, fearing that they might build upon false foundations and lack true saving faith. Seeing themselves so sinful, unproductive, and unspiritual, they continue to be fearful of Christ's coming unto judgment, and they consequently neither long for this day nor are able to rejoice in and comfort themselves with it. How desirable it would be if such weak Christians would fully believe in Christ's grace, His all-sufficiency, and His willingness, and to their eternal salvation would fully entrust themselves to Him, reassuring themselves and resting upon Christ's own presentation and offer of grace sincerely and unconditionally, and willingly taking hold of it.

2. A weakness of their historical faith. They do indeed believe that Christ will truly come to judgment, but if their historical faith were stronger, livelier, and more vibrant, many of God's children would be much more exercised with this great Day of Judgment, and they would have a much livelier sense of it.

3. Too much carelessness and worldly mindedness still found with most of God's children, by which they are too much occupied and involved with the vain things of this temporal life. The cares of this earthly life occupy their hearts too much. This causes them to be excessively attached to this world, which quenches the lively reflections and exercises of the soul regarding the life to come, and thus these matters, so to speak, become foreign to them. God's children then in the end are little exercised with eternal truths. For good reasons, the Savior has therefore commanded His believing people that they should not encumber their hearts with the "cares of this life, and so that day come upon [them] unawares" (Luke 21:34). Oh, children of God, hide under the wings of Christ and endeavor to be healed of all these sinful deficiencies. Consider how unbecoming such conduct is, and henceforward seek to become wiser.

Second, given that Christ your Lord shall come unto judgment, see to it that your accounts are settled in a timely fashion. Consider your debts and place the atonement of Christ over against them. By faith seek to acquire a receipt for your account, written by the Father with the blood of Christ.

Third, prepare yourselves for the awe-inspiring coming and appearance of your Lord and savior. Adorn yourselves with the garments of salvation, thereby

permitting yourselves to be clothed with the robe of His righteousness, so that with liberty you may yearn for His coming and lift up your heads in anticipation of it.

Finally, wait upon Christ, your king and Lord, who shall come as judge to execute judgment, and so, “pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Peter 1:17). With tender consideration, abide in the Lord, and be mindful of all your activities. Be abundantly active in the exercise of all your holy virtues, and with the wise virgins, supply your lamps with oil. “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning” (Luke 12:35). “Be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58), for “blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing” (Matt. 24:46).

We conclude with the admonition of Christ, the great God and savior: “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” (Luke 21:36). Amen.

The Holy Spirit (1)

LORD'S DAY 20

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

—JOHN 14:16-17

Question 53: What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?

Answer: First, that He is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that He is also given me, to make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits, that He may comfort me and abide with me for ever.

In Isaiah 6, the prophet Isaiah describes for us a most precious and glorious vision, testifying that “in the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and . . . above it stood the seraphims” (vv. 1–2). He then writes, “Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth [that is, the mouth of the prophet], and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged” (vv. 6–7).

In the days of the Old Testament, God frequently and in a variety of ways revealed to the fathers the holy mysteries of His gracious counsel regarding the work of redemption in His Son, Jesus Christ. He spoke to them regarding these mysteries by means of the prophets, doing so, among other things, by way of internal visions, as well as by visual and symbolic displays, thereby depicting and displaying in a lively manner to them the spiritual mysteries of His grace.

Such was also the nature of Isaiah's vision. Clearly and vividly, it symbolizes particularly how, during the New Testament era, all believers are inwardly united to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, for:

1. The Lord, whom Isaiah saw “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,” symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, after having executed and accomplished the work of redemption here on earth, sitting as king and redeemer of His people upon the throne at the right hand of His Father. This is confirmed by John’s testimony, when he writes, “These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him” (John 12:41).

2. The glowing coal with which one of the seraphim touched the mouth of the prophet is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, here set before us by the metaphor of a *glowing coal*. This exemplifies His powerful operation in the hearts of all believers, whereby He illuminates and irradiates their darkened understandings with knowledge, and ignites and sets aflame the hearts of all His believing people with love toward God and Christ their savior.

3. This glowing coal was taken from the altar, and this depicts, so to speak, the Holy Spirit issuing forth from the true altar of atonement, Christ Jesus, to all believers. All true believers are partakers of this, for they “have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle” (Heb. 13:10).

4. The touching of Isaiah’s lips with a coal and it being said that “thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged” signify that God’s people, particularly during the New Testament era, would similarly be touched by the Holy Spirit when they would internally receive both Him as well as His grace, His power, and His sweet comforts. This Spirit, who would unite their souls to Christ, would not only acquaint them with the gracious pardon of all their sins, but He also would make known to them that by the blood of Christ, they have peace with and are reconciled to God.

5. As this took place in the life of the prophet after he had seen “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,” likewise this rich communication of the Holy Spirit and the abundance of His inner consolations, as well as the assurance of salvation and the forgiveness of sins, would especially and powerfully be applied to God’s believing people upon Christ’s exaltation at the right hand of His Father and His being seated upon the throne of His glory. It would thus occur after Christ’s actual execution and accomplishment of the work of redemption here on earth.

Why am I addressing this in such detail? These are the precious, glorious, and comforting truths we will be addressing in this sermon, for in the nineteenth Lord’s Day of our Catechism, we observed the Lord Jesus Christ sitting upon His lofty and exalted throne in heaven at the right hand of His Father, and how from there He will come again to judge the quick and the dead.

Immediately following, and thus in this Lord's Day, the fiery coal of the Holy Spirit proceeds from Christ, the true altar, and the mouths and lips of all true believers are touched by it. Consequently, they are inwardly united to Christ, and to their comfort and joy, they are also assured of the forgiveness of their sins and their reconciliation with God.

This marks the beginning of the third and final segment of the Apostles' Creed, for the first segment dealt with God the Father and the work of creation, the second segment dealt with God the Son and the work of redemption, and the third segment deals with God the Holy Spirit and the work of sanctification. May He whose Spirit this is and who has this Spirit without measure equip us by His Holy Spirit to address, in a sound and spiritual manner, the truth regarding His power and blessed operation in the hearts of all true believers. Amen.

To proceed in a sound and orderly manner, we shall:

1. address the truth regarding the Holy Spirit and His sanctifying operation; and
2. consider how a Christian with a true heart believes in the Holy Spirit and His operation.

Regarding the first, we will fully follow the instructor, who, upon asking, "What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?" responds first of all "that He is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son." With the instructor, we will consider here:

1. the person of the Holy Spirit; and
2. His union with and His blessed operation in all true believers.

Regarding the person of the Holy Spirit, it is beyond all doubt that by the name of *Holy Spirit*, He is explicitly and specifically set before us and made known to us in the Holy Scriptures as the third person in the most exalted divine Trinity. Nevertheless, this designation is also applicable to the Father and the Son, for they also are spirits, and therefore also *holy* spirits. However, in distinction from the Father and the Son, this designation is always given to the third person, and thus to the Holy Spirit, as we find expressed in Matthew 28:19, where the Savior stipulates that all nations are to be baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." We find this to be so throughout the entire Holy Scriptures, for wherever we find this simple

designation of Holy Spirit, we must understand this as being a specific reference to the third person of the exalted Godhead.

We will now address the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in some detail, and according to the measure of grace bestowed upon us, we will expound for you who He is and in what manner He works.

Due to our great darkness, as well as our ignorance regarding this matter, our rational faculties will be most deficient here, for we know little regarding this matter and will be able only to observe the fringes of God's ways. In fact, we know even less than can be expressed here, for Paul writes that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). The reason for this is that the natural man is entirely carnal and void of light, and therefore he is utterly unfit and incapable of having any right understanding of all that pertains to the realm of spiritual illumination. We must deal here with matters that are entirely contradictory and cannot be reconciled to all eternity.

Nevertheless, natural and carnal men have the notion that they are able to discern that which pertains to the Spirit Himself, as well as to the things of the Spirit. Merely when mention is made of these things in God's revealed Word, darkness presumes that it can speak of and opine regarding the light. Sooner or later, such notions are the source of all the erroneous ideas and carnal sentiments of men regarding the Holy Spirit and His spiritual and divine extrinsic operations—ideas and sentiments that still manifest themselves daily among us. This, in turn, engenders the many vain and false doctrines regarding God and His Holy Spirit, such as the teachings of the Arians, Socinians, and others, who posit that the Holy Spirit is either a mere creature of God or a virtue, a power, or an attribute of God. This is the source of the numerous vile ways in which the Holy Spirit and His work in the hearts of God's children is slandered and mocked when these things are spouted in our days by a multitude of carnal, ungodly, and unholy men among us, both ministers and others. In their wickedness and hardness of heart, they do not cease to revile and slander that of which they have no knowledge and of which, by divine decree, they ought not to know.

Do not expect from us that we will waste time in addressing this abomination of unrighteousness, as well as the carnal and vain illusions of these unholy men of the world. They are the works of darkness, and we will therefore leave them in the realm of darkness. We would rather briefly expound for you the plain truth regarding the Spirit as we find it revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

The Holy Scriptures teach two things regarding the Holy Spirit:

1. As to His being, He is an independent person, and the order and manner of His operation is distinguished from that of the Father and of the Son.
2. He is a divine person, who is co-essential with the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit is an eternal and independent person, distinguished from the Father and the Son in that He proceeds from both the Father and the Son in an infinitely glorious and most perfect manner. We will now consider this in greater detail.

The Holy Spirit is truly an independent person, and this is affirmed as follows:

1. The two essential components that define personhood, namely, having an intellect and having a will, are expressly attributed to Him in the Holy Scriptures. Paul speaks clearly regarding the mind of the Spirit, saying: "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.... The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:10–11). Searching and knowing are both activities of the mind. The same apostle also speaks of the Spirit's will, saying, "All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12:11).

2. The same relationship and worthiness attributed to the Father and the Son are also attributed to the Holy Spirit, as is to be observed in the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19).

3. At the baptism of the Savior, the Holy Spirit personally and in the visible form of a dove descended here on earth from heaven (Matt. 3:16).

4. He is truly affirmed to be an independent person by the works that He does in and for believers, for according to the Holy Scriptures, "the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26b), He comforts and teaches them (John 14:16), and He guides them into all truth (John 16:13). These all constitute the personal activities of the Holy Spirit and clearly affirm that the Holy Spirit, with the Father and with the Son, is a true and independent person.

The Holy Scriptures also reveal that the Holy Spirit, as a divine person, is co-essential with the Father and the Son. This is affirmed by the fact that divine names, divine attributes, divine works, and divine glory and honor are attributed to the Holy Spirit throughout the Holy Scriptures.

This is affirmed by:

First, the *divine names* given Him in the Holy Scriptures. He bears the lofty and essential memorial name of God, namely, *Jehovah*, and this name never is nor can be attributed to anyone other than to God Himself. Psalm 95:7–9 affirms that the Holy Spirit bears this name, for there we encounter Jehovah, the most high God, complaining regarding the ancient nation of Israel and her rebellions against Him in the wilderness. In this passage, their descendants are admonished that they should in no wise follow the example of their ancestors, but rather, that they should heed His voice and not harden their hearts. This is, however, a reference to the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, it is affirmed that He who thus speaks and admonishes is the Holy Spirit, for we read in Isaiah 63:10 regarding ancient Israel in the wilderness that “they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit.” This is affirmed, on the other hand, by Paul who attributes Jehovah’s rebuke and admonition in Psalm 95 to the Holy Spirit, testifying, “As the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness” (Heb. 3:7–8).

Furthermore, the name *God* is also attributed to the Holy Spirit, for Peter addresses Ananias the deceiver, saying: “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:3–4).

He is also denominated as *Lord*, and throughout the Scriptures of the New Testament, this name is attributed to God. Paul speaks accordingly, saying, “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17).

Second, the *divine virtues and perfections* attributed to Him in the Scriptures, by which He is distinguished from all creatures. *Omniscience* is attributed to Him, “for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). It was the Spirit who revealed and made known unto the prophets before the times they occurred so many things concerning the future.

Eternity is also attributed to the Holy Spirit, for when Moses recounts the creation of the heavens and the earth, he writes that “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2b). *Omnipresence* is also attributed to Him, for one of the Lord’s beloved favorites says, “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” (Ps. 139:7). Finally, *divine*

power and strength are attributed to Him, for He is also denominated as “the spirit of counsel and might” (Isa. 11:2).

Third, the *divine works* that are attributed to the Holy Spirit, such as the work of creation, for Psalm 33:6 testifies, “by the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.”¹ When speaking of God’s preservation of all that He has created, the psalmist declares, “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth” (Ps. 104:30).

Miracles that can be performed by none other than God alone are also attributed to the Holy Spirit. The Savior declares this by testifying, “I cast out devils by the Spirit of God” (Matt. 12:28).

However, throughout Scripture, the work of grace in the redemption of the elect is especially attributed to the Holy Spirit, such as regeneration, union with Christ, sanctification, and glorification, which we would be able to affirm with a large multitude of passages from the Word of God.

Finally, the *divine honor* that is rendered to the Holy Spirit in Scripture, for we are baptized in His name, as well as in the name of the Father and of the Son (Matt. 28:19). Just as he does with regard to the Father and the Son, Paul acknowledges the Holy Spirit to be the God of all grace and salvation by worshiping Him with the Father and the Son, writing, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14), and John does likewise in Revelation 1:4. Furthermore, believers are referred to as *His temple*, in which He dwells as the God of glory (1 Cor. 6:19), and the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is designated as being unforgiveable, for “it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matt. 12:32).

Not only is it evident that the Holy Spirit is an independent person, but He is also a divine person, co-essential with the Father and with the Son, and is therefore the true, eternal, and most high God.

The name by which He is distinguished from the Father and from the Son is *Holy Spirit*. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word *Spirit* refers to the blowing of wind, and the designation “Spirit” is therefore most appropriate for the third person of the Godhead. This name gives expression to His divine nature and character, as well as to His eternal, adorable, incomprehensible, and glorious

1. The Dutch *Statenvertaling* reads: “...en door den Geest Zijnsmonds,” that is, “...by the Spirit of His mouth.”

procession from the Father and the Son, from whose heart He proceeds and comes forth—just as the breath of man proceeds from his mouth.

By this metaphor, God has been pleased to set before us in the Holy Scriptures the exalted and unsearchable mystery of the adorable union of the Holy Spirit with the Father and with the Son, and thereby has accommodated Himself in some measure to our weak and finite minds. The Holy Scriptures therefore refer to the third person of the Godhead as “the breath of His mouth” (Ps. 33:6), “the breath of the Almighty” (Job 33:4), and “the breath of his lips” (Isa. 11:4). To illustrate this great mystery, the Savior blew upon His disciples when He bestowed the Holy Spirit upon them, for we read in John 20:22, “And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.”

All true believers presently receive experiential instruction regarding the adorable mystery of the Holy Spirit's procession from the Father and from the Son, for God still breathes His Holy Spirit in a spiritual manner upon the souls of all true believers. They all experience this in a true and essential manner, although they do not all have the discernment to observe, comprehend, and acknowledge what has been experienced. No sooner does a soul approach unto God in Christ, and by faith engage in communion with Him who is eternal and invisible, then spiritual power proceeds from Him and descends into the heart, illuminating a man's darkened understanding, uniting him to God in Christ, and causing him in tender love, humility, and faith to come unto God and to forsake all the works of the flesh.

The power that thus proceeds to the soul from God in Christ, and which engages and affects the soul in a most lovely manner, is God the Holy Ghost, who is sent forth in believers by the Father and the Son. Believers are thus breathed upon in order that they might be spiritually resurrected from their state of death, and so be raised up with Christ. God's children can therefore say with Elihu, “The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life” (Job 33:4).

Furthermore, the third person of the divine being is also designated as “Spirit” (signifying spiration or the blowing of wind) by virtue of His divine operation in the hearts of elect believers. We could demonstrate to you at length what similarities there are with the effects of wind in the natural realm. The Savior refers to this, saying, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). However, this

third person of the exalted divine being is not merely referred to as “Spirit” or “God’s Spirit,” but He is emphatically denominated the *Holy Spirit*. We shall now briefly expound this for you.

Not only is God’s Spirit emphatically denominated the *Holy Spirit* by virtue of His being infinitely holy and perfect in Himself, but rather, primarily by virtue of His sanctifying operation in and regarding all elect believers. According to God’s eternal counsel of peace, the Father has taken upon Himself the begetting and the preservation of all the elect; the Son has taken upon Himself their salvation and redemption; and the Holy Spirit has taken upon Himself the work of their sanctification.

All that is therefore requisite for the sanctification, salvation, and redemption of the elect, and for the application and bestowal of all the gracious benefits that Christ has merited for them, belongs to the office and work of the Holy Spirit. The entire ministration of grace as it will be wrought, continued, and completed in the soul of every elect believer is thus a ministration of the Spirit. “All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Cor. 12:11). This is the “sanctification of the Spirit,” and all believers are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” to be the beneficiaries of this sanctification (1 Peter 1:2), and by virtue of this sanctification of all true believers, the Holy Spirit is emphatically denominated as “the Spirit of holiness”² (Rom. 1:4).

Before we proceed to consider the work of the Holy Spirit, we first will address briefly what constitutes the difference between Him and the Father and the Son. As to Their essence, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are most perfectly one. However, as to Their personality, They are distinct, the one from the other, and thus the Father differs from the Son, the Son differs from the Spirit, and the Spirit differs from both the Father and the Son. We addressed this when we dealt with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Spirit is distinguished from the Father and the Son in three ways:

1. He is the third person in the order of His subsistence within the divine being. When the three persons are mentioned together in the Holy Scriptures, He is therefore always mentioned as the third or the last of these persons.

2. The Dutch *Statenvertaling* reads, “de Geest der heiligmaking,” that is, “the Spirit of sanctification.”

2. He is the third person in the order and manner of His operation. Although He works out of and by means of Himself, yet He does so always as proceeding from the Father and the Son.

3. He proceeds from the Father and the Son in an infinitely glorious manner by a spiration that is incomprehensible for us human beings. He proceeds not *only* from the Father, as some anciently believed in former days, but He proceeds from both the Father and the Son as the Holy Scriptures clearly teach. This is clearly observed in Scripture not only where the Holy Spirit is frequently denominated as *the Spirit of Christ* or as *the Spirit of the Son*, but also as it is mentioned that both the Father and the Son send forth and pour out the Spirit into the hearts of believers.

This procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and from the Son is and remains for us a very lofty and adorable mystery, and by virtue of the imperfection and limitations of our finite understandings, we cannot correctly understand:

1. wherein this procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son actually and essentially consists;
2. how this procession of the Holy Spirit is distinguished from the eternal generation of the Son by and from the Father; and
3. how this procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son does not diminish in the least His most perfect independence and eternal Godhead.

Thus, we sufficiently have addressed the person of the Holy Spirit.

Let us now briefly consider His blessed and glorious work in the hearts of all believers, for this is the second doctrine the instructor addresses, testifying regarding the Holy Spirit “that He is also given me, to make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits, that He may comfort me and abide with me for ever.”

The Holy Scriptures teach throughout that the Holy Spirit is *given* to all elect believers. The Savior therefore promised His disciples, “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16–17a). Regarding believers, it is said that they “have received...the spirit which is of God” (1 Cor. 2:12). To understand this correctly, we need to know that God’s children aforesaid are “they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 19). By nature,

they are all utterly dead in trespasses and sins, and live in complete and utter separation from God and His blessed communion. They then live entirely unto themselves, “having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). In that state, they neither have the least right and proper perception regarding their sins and miseries, nor are they in any way troubled by them. They lack any true knowledge of God or of the way of salvation, and instead, have their “conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph. 2:3). Like the Gentiles, they serve by nature those that are no gods. They have a form of godliness in which they rest, hating the internal light, grace, and Spirit of God.

At the moment of God's good pleasure, when He purposes to be merciful unto them, He comes to them in Christ, and by His Holy Spirit, He takes possession of them and works in them, sending “forth the Spirit of his Son into [their] hearts” (Gal. 4:6). Consequently, the elect receive the Holy Spirit of God through Christ not merely as to His internal power, gifts, and benefits, but they also receive the Holy Spirit Himself. This has to be noted, for many of our generation do not correctly understand this truth regarding the Holy Spirit. God gives the very person of the Holy Spirit to all true believers, and thus the Spirit comes personally to them to resurrect them from being dead in sin and to work in them unto their salvation.

The Holy Scriptures teach this clearly, for Paul testifies that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5). Take note that Paul is speaking here of the person of the Holy Spirit, who in His person takes possession of believers in a very gracious, glorious, and incomprehensible manner, coming to them in the name of the Father and of the Son to abide in them as His dwelling place and temple. Paul testifies regarding true believers, saying, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16) and “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God?” (1 Cor. 6:19).

Behold, Paul is not speaking here of the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, but rather, of His very person, who, according to the instructor, has been given to all believers. How exceedingly precious, glorious, and blessed is this gracious gift of the Father and the Son to the elect! How exceedingly great is the blessedness of those who may receive this gift of the Holy Spirit!

However, to what end is the Holy Spirit then given to the Lord's elect people? The instructor teaches this, saying that He is given to them for the following three purposes:

1. to make them, by a true faith, partakers of Christ and all His benefits;
2. to comfort them; and
3. to abide with them for ever.

We shall address each of these matters briefly.

Concerning the first purpose, God in Christ graciously gives the Holy Spirit to all His elect so that, by a true faith, He may "make them partakers of Christ and all His benefits." The salvation of all believers consists in their being partakers of Christ and of all the benefits of grace and redemption that He has merited for them. However, they can become partakers of Christ and all His benefits only "by a true faith" that unites them internally to Christ and to His benefits.

We considered this faith in Lord's Day 7, and therefore presently we wish to say only that this faith is entirely a fruit and benefit granted by the Holy Spirit, who works this faith in the hearts of the elect, enabling them thereby to embrace and to receive Christ and all His benefits. He is therefore also called the "Spirit of faith" (2 Cor. 4:13). The Spirit commonly works this faith in the elect as follows: in the hour of God's good pleasure, He descends into their hearts, and by means of the Word and the proclamation thereof, powerfully and internally illuminates and opens their darkened understandings so that the elect begin to see their sins, as well as the wretched misery to which they are subject by nature. They then become cognizant of the error of their way; of their manifold transgressions against God and of His holy law; of their wickedness, unholiness, ungodliness, and the loathsome pollution of their hearts; of their being before God utterly worthy of damnation; of His curse and punishment; and of His wrath fully abiding upon them.

By such powerful conviction, the Holy Spirit awakens the careless and unconcerned from their deep slumber of sin. They become troubled and perplexed regarding the great spiritual danger in which they find themselves and which places them in danger of perishing eternally. Such men engage themselves most earnestly by taking their salvation to heart, beseeching God to be gracious, and taking to hand whatever could be subservient to their salvation.

As the Holy Spirit proceeds with His powerful operation, He also causes them clearly to see that God is a God who is holy and just, and cannot have the least communion with ungodly sinners. Therefore, in accordance with His

holy law, He must punish their sins both temporally and eternally. This causes the elect inwardly to become very perplexed and greatly distraught, for they no longer see or find for themselves any way of escape or deliverance. They now descend deeper into their lost state and their wretched misery, and they become aware that they are utterly wretched and impotent. No matter where they turn, they lose their grip on everything and no longer find any comfort, counsel, help, or deliverance either within or by themselves—or by anything under the sun. Having thus become utterly helpless in themselves and being at their wit's end, finding neither hope nor deliverance with themselves, causes them to cry out that they must perish and that all is beyond hope.

At that moment, the Holy Spirit, by means of the Word, teaches such perplexed and elect sinners the necessity of a mighty surety, savior, mediator, and redeemer who is both able and willing to reconcile them with God, make payment for their sins, fully satisfy God's holy justice, fulfill the law on their behalf, and thereby merit salvation and eternal life for them. He then shows with specificity that God Himself has appointed such a surety and redeemer for ungodly, hell worthy, lost, and impotent sinners, and that He has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world for such as they are.

By the Word, the Holy Spirit further acquaints the elect with this mediator and redeemer, Jesus Christ, as to His preciousness, loveliness, all-sufficiency, and willingness to save sinners. He sets Him before their eyes, He unveils Christ as the only rock of Salvation and of complete redemption, who proclaims to them and to all perplexed sinners, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. 45:22). The Lord Jesus Christ offers and freely gives and bestows Himself to them with all His grace, salvation, and all-sufficient redemption, adding the promise that for their salvation and redemption, they need to be but willing to come to Him. He shall then in no wise either reject or cast them out, but He will surely receive them in grace, reconcile them with God, deliver them from all their sins, sanctify them, and save them eternally out of free grace.

The Holy Spirit then stirs and engages the hearts of the elect, inclining and predisposing their hearts toward Christ and His grace that they no longer are able to turn away from and to resist such an all-sufficient, merciful, loving, and willing savior. Instead, their hearts are opened for the Lord Jesus and for His free grace and redemption. They then begin to delight themselves in Jesus and His delightful beauty, and their hearts inwardly are enamored with Him and with the way of His grace. They delight in this way and fully approve of it. In

forsaking and turning away from any other object, they turn to the Lord Jesus and to His grace as the only horn and rock of their salvation, desiring to be most intimately united to Him and to His grace.

Initially, there is often much darkness and opposition found in them from their flesh and blood. This hinders them in exercising with suitable clarity a believing, steadfast, and comforting confidence regarding Christ and His grace. It hinders them in leaning and relying upon Him with delight in all their needs and concerns. Nevertheless, as to the root of the matter, they are completely united to the Lord Jesus and to His grace. They do hunger and thirst after Him, and are desirous to be saved fully and freely in no other way but through Christ and His grace. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, they continue to yearn for Christ, to desire Christ, and to be exercised regarding Christ, so that they might find all their light, righteousness, and strength in Him alone. This continues until, by the operation of the Spirit, they are convicted more thoroughly, experientially, and spiritually of their utter impotence and misery. As the way of God's grace is unveiled to them by means of the Word, they learn by faith to be exercised with Christ more clearly and more steadfastly, embracing Him upon His own conditions as they are set forth in the Word "unto...wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). Their faith and trust in Christ are then increasingly strengthened, and upon the grace of God through Him, become increasingly steadfast and unencumbered. With spiritual simplicity and fortitude, they increasingly rely upon Christ, patiently and by faith expecting all their salvation and redemption from Him.

This is the manner in which the Holy Spirit commonly works faith in the hearts of the elect, thereby uniting them to Christ, for the first time or by renewal, making them partakers of all His benefits. By this faith, Christ dwells in the hearts of His elect (Eph. 3:17), and by this faith they are "joined unto the Lord" and become "one spirit" with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). By this faith and its continued exercise, Christ increasingly is formed within His believing people, and as a consequence, the mind and image of Christ increasingly become manifest in them. Increasingly, they are united to Christ and to all His benefits. The Holy Spirit continually works all of this in them by means of faith, so that they are completely led by the Holy Spirit, and by Him they live and walk in blessed communion with God and their savior, Christ Jesus.

We have thus considered not only the first aspect of the operation of the Holy Spirit, but also the reason why God in Christ has graciously given Him to all elect believers.

According to the instructor, the Holy Spirit has also been given to believers *to comfort them*. Although we have observed that believers are united to God and Christ, and therefore already in this life they begin to enjoy the firstfruits of eternal bliss, they, according to the flesh and by virtue of their lack of self-denial here on earth, are nevertheless subject to many sorrows and adversities in soul and body—all of which God sends to them for the advancement of their salvation. In addition to their bodily adversities, which at times can be manifold and intense, God's children also encounter and are surrounded by many spiritual adversities, sorrows, struggles, and miseries, and no one truly knows of them other than their omniscient God. How evil and corrupt is the flesh they carry with them at all times—flesh in which “dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18)! How grievous and unrelenting is their warfare against the power of indwelling corruption and much darkness within, as well as against unbelief, doubt, lack of self-denial, hardness of heart, and the devices and assaults of Satan! They also encounter spiritual desertion, the hiding of God's countenance, and a sinful and evil world. Who of the Lord's children is not acquainted with and conscious of these matters by daily experience?

God's children do not have the least ability to comfort themselves in the midst of these adversities and sorrows. It is God the Holy Spirit who is always secretly at work in them, and who in manifold ways and by His sweet comforts inwardly strengthens and comforts them:

1. By showing to them the insignificance and triviality of the cross they are carrying, as well as the great glory that will follow, so that with Paul they may boldly say, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

2. By causing them to see that the short duration of their cross, the imminence of their eternal redemption, and “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

3. By setting before them the profitableness and benefit of their cross. He shows them how entirely necessary and subservient their cross is to facilitate the exercise of self-denial, faith, patience, experience, and hope; how it cures them of the love of this world and of sin; how it more intimately unites them to their God and savior; and how it causes them increasingly to depend upon, cleave to, and trust in Him. God's children are thereby made willing to carry their cross with courage, patience, and a believing confidence.

4. By causing them to acknowledge, in all their crosses and adversities, God's free, sovereign, and adorable will regarding them, as well as His love and faithfulness, with the promise of His gracious help and support, etc. Thereby the Holy Spirit works in their hearts self-denial, quiet submission, and surrender to God, their sovereign and gracious king.

5. Finally, by sweetly assuring them of their spiritual adoption and of having God in Christ as their blessed portion, by increasingly shedding forth God's love in their hearts, and by strengthening their faith and confidence *in God through Christ* and His gracious promises. This enables them believingly to acknowledge the Lord in all their ways and with quiet patience to look for His grace, mercy, and redemption.

The Holy Spirit is thus also given to believers to comfort them continually in this earthly vale of tears in which they still dwell while absent from the Lord. He is therefore sent to them as the Comforter (John 14:16). When the Lord's people may frequently experience His comforts, they are said to walk "in the comfort of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 9:31).

The Holy Spirit is also given to all true believers in order *to abide with them forever*. The sanctification of God's children is an abiding work of the Holy Spirit, which, though initiated at the new birth, must be continued daily and incrementally. Therefore, the Lord's people are ceaselessly in need of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, for not only must "we live in the Spirit," but we must "also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). Apart from Him, they cannot perform anything that is good, and they cannot even think of or desire anything that is good. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is also the pledge of the complete salvation and eternal redemption of believers, for Paul testifies saying, "after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession" (Eph. 1:13-14). Therefore, once the Holy Spirit has been given to believers and has made His abode in them, He will never to all eternity leave or forsake them, but on the contrary, by virtue of Christ's promise, He will abide with them forever (John 14:16). This is also affirmed in Isaiah 59:21: "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever."

How this confirms the incomprehensible steadfastness of the eternal salvation of all believers when the Holy Spirit has once established and sealed them

and when the triune God has declared Himself to be the earnest and warranty of His people's salvation! It is therefore most certain that God's children cannot go lost to all eternity, and no one will ever succeed in plucking them out of the hands of Jesus. Instead, they will all be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

We have thus sought to expound for you in some detail the power and operation of the Holy Spirit in all true, elect believers. Oh, that you would all be spiritually acquainted with the truth we have set before you!

We publicly confess that we believe in this God, the Holy Spirit. Our confession of this doctrine is in truth and sincerity when it consists of the following four things:

1. We consider and acknowledge the Holy Spirit to be the exalted and omnipotent God by whose gracious power and operation we have been raised from being dead in sin, have been united with God in Christ, and will and must be purified from all our sins.

2. We fully believe and obey the Holy Spirit in accordance with the Holy Scriptures He has inspired, receiving and embracing in our hearts His testimony as being truthful and divine.

3. We embrace and receive, with a loving and willing heart, this Holy Spirit Himself as having been graciously given and offered to us by God in Christ, and, as dead and impotent sinners, we fully surrender ourselves to Him and to His gracious operation, being wholly desirous to be illuminated and governed by Him and to be wrought upon unto salvation.

4. We consider and acknowledge Him, with both the Father and the Son, to be the sole Author of our salvation, and will always magnify, praise, and glorify Him as such in our hearts.

Behold, when these matters are genuinely true in one's life, we can then be said to "believe in the Holy Ghost."

Finally, the practical use of the doctrine we have just considered, as well as the continual use we are to make of it, will be set before you, if it may so please the Lord, in our next sermon. We will presently conclude with the prayer and supplication of Paul: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen" (2 Cor. 13:14).

The Holy Spirit (2)

LORD'S DAY 20

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?

—ACTS 19:2

Question 53: What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?

Answer: First, that He is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that He is also given me, to make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits, that He may comfort me and abide with me for ever.

A peculiar scene is depicted in Ezekiel 37, where there is set before us a valley of barren or dead and lifeless bones that are strewn upon the ground and are thus void of any trace of life. However, by God's efficacious omnipotence, the Spirit interacts with these bones, and they immediately become alive.

This is a most suitable depiction of the wretched natural state of the elect and of their effectual conversion and renewal by God's Word and Spirit. All men, and thus also the elect, are by nature nothing more than a valley of barren, dead, and lifeless bones. They are utterly "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). They are entirely void of all spiritual life, and consequently, they are "sensual, having not the Spirit" (Jude 19). However, when God, in the hour of His good pleasure, efficaciously exercises His grace in His elect, a very great and glorious transformation transpires in them. God then sends forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts (Gal. 4:6), and by that Spirit, He manifests His power in making them alive from being dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). By so doing, He causes them to repent, and He unites them by faith to Christ. Consequently, they who at one time were barren and dead bones become entirely new and living creatures in Christ Jesus, being translated from death to life.

It ought to be a matter of the greatest importance for us to know and rightly determine whether we are also the recipients of God's quickening Spirit, and whether, by this Spirit, we too have been eternally resurrected and made alive with Christ. We wish to address this matter in some detail so that, by God's grace, we may be enabled to examine ourselves regarding this matter.

By means of the Catechism, we already have expounded for you who the Holy Spirit is, how He is given to all the elect in the hour of God's good pleasure, as well as the nature of His blessed and glorious ministry within them. With God's help and gracious assistance, we wish to consider more specifically how by faith we are all partakers of this Holy Spirit and of His life-giving operation and grace within us, resulting in our renewal and union with God in Christ. To do so will be most beneficial and necessary, for this is a matter of the utmost importance for all of us.

To do this appropriately, we will lay the foundation by further considering our text. We can do this with few words, for the matters to be considered are simple and straightforward.

In the preceding verse, Luke makes the observation "that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus." There he found "certain disciples, [and] he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" (Acts 19:1–2). Here we encounter the matter to be considered:

1. the Holy Spirit; and
2. the apostle's investigation by asking the disciples at Ephesus whether they had already received the Holy Spirit.

Paul speaks here of *the Holy Spirit*. By means of the Catechism, we have already sufficiently addressed the person of the Holy Spirit and have expounded for you how He is graciously given to believers and what His internal operation is in our hearts. We will therefore not address this matter any further. We wish to note only that the reference here to the Holy Spirit is not to be understood as simply a reference to the person of the Holy Spirit and His common operation in believers, whereby He regenerates them, unites them to Christ, and works a full salvation within them. Rather, Paul especially has in view the visible and extraordinary gifts and operations of the Holy Spirit. You can read this yourself in the marginal notes of the Bible.¹

1. The marginal notes of the *Statenvertaling* regarding Acts 19:2: "That is, the extraordinary visible gifts of the Holy Spirit, consisting of speaking in various tongues, prophesying, healing all manner of diseases, etc. (Acts 19:6; John 7:39; Acts 10:44, 47)."

Beloved, you need to know that during the apostolic era, the Holy Spirit was poured out by God in an extraordinary manner upon all who were called to proclaim the gospel in the world. He thereby enabled them immediately to prophesy, speak foreign languages, heal all manner of diseases and infirmities, and discern the spirits. Such an extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit was necessary during that period for the advancement of the gospel and the establishment of the church of Christ among Jews and Gentiles.

Paul has in mind here not only the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit, but also His extraordinary gifts and operation in the first messengers of the gospel. This is affirmed by the fact that Paul is here dealing with believing Christians and disciples in the Christian congregation of Ephesus who have been baptized with the baptism of John and of whom Paul has concluded that they have *believed*. Consequently, if they truly have believed in the Lord Jesus and are His disciples, they necessarily also have the Spirit of faith, else they could not believe in the Lord Jesus with a true heart, for “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 12:3). In that sense, Paul therefore cannot ask them whether they have received the Holy Ghost, for it is self-evident that whoever believes has also received the Holy Spirit.

Their response to Paul also affirms this, for they say, “We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost” (Acts 19:2b). This cannot simply refer to the Holy Spirit and His common saving operation in all believers, for how would these disciples have been able to believe truly in the Lord Jesus and be His disciples without knowing or ever having heard that there is a Holy Spirit? The one cannot possibly be consistent with the other.

Finally, verse 6 also clearly affirms that this cannot simply be viewed as referring to the common saving operation of the Holy Spirit in believers, for there it is written that “when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied” (Acts 19:6). This occurs because they receive the Holy Spirit in an extraordinary manner for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel. We can thus readily conclude that the apostle Paul has in view only the extraordinary effusion and ministry of the Holy Spirit, as well as His extraordinary gifts and operations. These functioned in the disciples who proclaimed the gospel, and during that era they received the Holy Spirit upon the prayer of the apostles and by the laying on of hands.

Within this context, Paul asks these disciples at Ephesus, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” Thus, he asks them whether, upon transitioning to the Christian faith and upon being baptized with the baptism of

repentance (or with the baptism of John), they also had received the Holy Spirit, along with His extraordinary gifts and operations, and whether they are consequently equipped to proclaim the gospel. Paul does not ask this to ascertain the genuineness of their faith in the Lord Jesus. He is convinced that they have truly believed with their hearts, and we cannot conclude that he doubts this in any way. Rather, he wishes to ascertain their proficiency in the doctrine of the gospel and their skill in proclaiming it—a skill that, during that era, was acquired by means of the extraordinary gifts and operations of the Holy Spirit. When Paul recognizes that they are still lacking this, he exercises the apostolic authority he has received of the Lord and lays his hands upon them. Thereby they become the recipients of the extraordinary ministry of the Holy Spirit, and this equips them to proclaim the holy gospel in a manner that is demanded by the need of the hour—a time when God by His Spirit wrought in an extraordinary manner in the apostles and disciples.

Such is the brief and actual meaning of the words of our text, and we will now apply them specifically to ourselves for our benefit, so that we may be stirred up, instructed, and admonished.

It would not be fitting if I were to inquire as Paul inquired of these disciples, whether you are partakers of the Holy Spirit and of His gifts and operations, for it no longer pleases God to pour out upon us His Holy Spirit in such an extraordinary fashion. Nevertheless, all true believers do receive the same Spirit, as well as His saving gifts and operations, doing so, albeit, in a common manner by means of the gospel and its proclamation. Even ministers do not receive this Spirit in any other way than it is received by all true believers. The Lord thereby equips them for their holy ministry. This is to be understood, of course, as referring to ministers who have received grace, for they who are void of such grace are and remain in themselves completely dead and unspiritual, even though they have the name and appearance that they live and are spiritual men, and that the ministry in which they are engaged is spiritual.

Therefore, as we expound and apply our text, it will be necessary that we make an alteration, for this text as such refers only to the extraordinary ministry and operation of the Holy Spirit. However, in regard to our state or calling, we will focus upon the ordinary ministry and operation of the Spirit, such as all true believers commonly receive of the Lord only.

It is in this vein that we will ask all who are reading these sermons, doing so as Paul did in all earnestness before the Lord, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye [in your opinion] believed?” You all profess publicly that you believe

in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the name of the triune God, and you are hopeful that this faith will save you. You have all been baptized in God's name, most of you are partakers of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and all of you wish to be viewed and deemed as good, believing Christians.

It is therefore a fair question when we ask you for the seal of your faith, that seal being the Holy Spirit, and of your true Christianity. Have you truly received this Spirit from God and are you being renewed inwardly by this Spirit? Have you been resurrected from being dead in sin? Have you by faith been united to God in Christ? How do you all respond to these questions? How can you demonstrate and prove from God's Word that you are spiritual people who, upon believing, received God's indwelling Spirit and now serve God in this Spirit? If you would all respond truthfully to these questions, it would be certain and as obvious as the midday sun that by far the majority among us are still completely carnal and natural men who do not have the Spirit.

To address this in greater detail, we will set before you some prominent marks of a truly spiritual person. These marks must be found without distinction in all who, in harmony with God's Word and according to the essential nature of the matter, have truly received the Holy Spirit. Oh, that the Spirit of the Lord would cause us to pause and consider, so that we would examine ourselves earnestly in light of all that has been said thus far.

It would be most beneficial for us if, by God's grace and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we would arrive at a true knowledge regarding ourselves.

First, they who have received the Holy Spirit in truth have, by this Spirit, been fully renewed, transformed, and regenerated both inwardly and outwardly. The Spirit works this in all to whom He has been sent and upon whom He has been bestowed to renew and to transform them according to God's image. Consequently, we become completely new creatures in Christ, and "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). He illuminates our minds with new spiritual light, our will has a new bent and inclination, there is a new disposition in all of our affections, and there is a radical reversal and transformation of our outward walk. In short, upon receiving the Holy Spirit, we become entirely new men, and we are radically different from what we were before. We are then "born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5).

Consider how clearly the apostle Paul teaches this when he says, regarding God's children, and thus regarding all true believers, that "according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy

Ghost" (Titus 3:5). Therefore, he who has not been truly renewed and transformed in such a fashion, and who has not yet experienced within himself this great change and transformation, has by no means yet received the Holy Spirit. Such a person is still completely dead and still lives a carnal life.

Second, they who have received the Holy Spirit in truth have been united by Him to the Lord Jesus by a true faith, for He is the "Spirit of faith" (2 Cor. 4:13) who works this faith in all to whom He has been given. We should therefore all examine ourselves whether we be in the faith; whether the Spirit has convicted you of your sins and wretched misery (John 16:8), and whether He has brought you to the point of holy despair and perplexity, so that you could not find the least help or comfort either within yourself or with any other creature under the sun. We need to examine ourselves whether the Lord Jesus, by the Word, has been revealed to our souls in His precious grace, fullness, all-sufficiency, and willingness. Has the Spirit led your soul to behold the Lord Jesus so that you truly began to desire Him in His precious beauty and grace? Have you become heartily inclined to unite yourself eternally with the Lord Jesus and to commit and surrender yourself eternally to Him? In so doing, have you completely and willingly forsaken all that is of yourself and all other things outside of the Lord Jesus, desiring with Paul to be found entirely and solely in Him alone (Phil. 3:9)? If all these things have not truly been wrought in you, it clearly proves that you have not yet received the Holy Spirit, but rather, that you are still entirely a natural man void of the Spirit.

Third, they who have received the Holy Spirit in truth inherently have become spiritual men. Whatever was but natural in them has now in principle become spiritual. They now have a true and internal desire to be spiritual and to live spiritually in whatever they do. It is their desire to walk spiritually and to live in fellowship with God in Christ. It is good for them to draw near to God (Ps. 73:28). Their inclination is toward spiritual meditation, and all that they seek and pursue is spiritual in nature. Paul teaches this, saying, "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5). They are inclined to perform their duties spiritually, for the external performance of their duties can by no means satisfy them. Not at all! Only the spiritual inclination of the heart in the performance of their duties gives them satisfaction and delight. Since He is a pure and holy Spirit, they also desire to worship Him in no other way but "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). All that is external is of no value to them, for they find delight only when they are engaged inwardly, heartily, and spiritually. Consider Paul's

testimony when he says, “We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). Furthermore, they who are thus minded are greatly inclined to pray much and to pray spiritually, for the Holy Spirit whom they have received is also “the spirit of grace and of supplications” (Zech. 12:10). They also find great delight in spiritual fellowship and spiritual conversation wherever they are, and also in spiritual exercises and gatherings. Hereby they radically distinguish themselves from the men of this world, who are sinful and worldly. Again, in whomever this is not to be found in truth, he has not yet received the Holy Spirit, but rather, is still entirely ungodly and carnal, and thus void of life and the Spirit.

Fourth, they who have received the Holy Spirit in truth are also a holy people, and in principle they live as such. Inwardly they delight in all true holiness and godliness, for the Spirit whom they have received is a *holy* Spirit, “the Spirit of holiness” (Rom. 1:4), who increasingly sanctifies them and renews them after God’s image. He works in them an internal aversion and true hatred for sin, resulting in a continual battle and struggle with sin, so that only in weakness do they commit sin, and do so with much strife and aversion. Paul testifies regarding himself, “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19). The Spirit always works in them a genuine inclination and desire for all true holiness, whereby they fully “delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22). By the grace of God, they also try to demonstrate this in practice by a godly and exemplary walk, separating themselves from the people of this world and endeavoring to “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1b). How evident this is to all who truly know the nature of a spiritual man!

Finally, they who have received the Holy Spirit in truth greatly yearn for and cleave to Him. To a greater or lesser degree, they have acquired some self-knowledge, and they know themselves to be wholly incapable of doing any true and spiritual good. They know that apart from the Lord, they cannot accomplish anything, and they are continually in need of the Lord’s prevenient, cooperating, and pursuing grace in all their motions, considerations, actions, and deeds. They also recognize that the Lord must continually work spiritually in them “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Consequently, they are inclined continually to turn away from themselves, and as utterly bankrupt, impotent, and unfit persons, they continually yield to the influence and operation of the Spirit. Frequently this causes them patiently to wait upon the Spirit of the Lord, doing so while groaning and supplicating in faith. They

do not engage in any spiritual activity until they actually receive the grace and influence of the Spirit to that end. They would rather remain in their wretched condition and wait upon prevenient grace than continually to run ahead of the Lord's Spirit, acting in their own strength, effort, and wisdom. They have experienced, and do so continually and increasingly, that to run ahead of the Lord, is an entirely erroneous way of engaging themselves—at least this is how it is with Christians who have made some progress in the way of the Lord. Consequently, they who have received the Holy Spirit are in themselves a very poor and needy people. Therefore, in order to obtain anything, they are continually in need of trusting “in the name of the Lord” (Zeph. 3:12). This is in contrast with unconverted and worldly men, who in their own eyes are always “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17).

The matters we have addressed with you are the true and essential marks of a spiritual person who has received of God His Holy Spirit. Oh, that we would truly take this to heart and engage in serious self-examination! The majority among us would then immediately be convinced, and would have to acknowledge and believe that nothing of all these matters is to be truly found within them. They would have to conclude that they are utterly void of the Spirit and are thus completely dead in sins. They are without any hope of salvation if they continue in that condition. The majority of us indeed do have a spirit by which we are governed, but it is not the Holy Spirit, who alone can redeem and save us.

First, many are overcome by a spirit of deep sleep, which the Lord, as a righteous judgment, has poured out upon them (Isa. 29:10), and consequently, they continue to live in an utterly careless and hardened condition, having no serious concern regarding their eternal salvation.

Second, many are indwelt by the spirit of Satan and walk “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2).

Third, many have the spirit of this world, of which Paul writes, saying, “We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God” (1 Cor. 2:12). They manifest in all things that they are utterly worldly and carnally minded people, who spend their time pursuing this vain life on earth as their portion and highest good.

Fourth, of many among us, it must be said, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of” (Luke 9:55). They have not even a modicum of true and right knowledge regarding themselves. Instead, they continue to live on carelessly,

having no concern as to what manner of spirit it is that guides, directs, and moves them.

Finally, the majority among us live according to their own spirit; that is, according to their own minds, desires, and pleasures. In all things, they fulfill “the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph. 2:3), neither knowing nor taking to heart that they, who thus fulfill the desires of the flesh and walk as it pleases them, will most certainly perish eternally if they continue to walk upon this pathway.

Dear reader, whoever you may be, still belonging to the number of such wretched souls that continue to live in sin and are thus void of any spirituality and repentance, pause for just a moment to give heed to yourself as to what your state is. Give heed to the admonitions of the living God being addressed to you today unto your eternal salvation, so that you who are sound asleep would truly awaken by God's grace and arise from this wretched state of death to which you are now subject. Oh, that the Lord's Spirit Himself would awaken and quicken you!

Do you have any idea how indescribably wretched are all people who have not yet received the Holy Spirit? Oh, that upon this your day you would know that they who have not yet received the Holy Spirit:

1. Are and live yet entirely without God and without Christ in the world. Whatever they may dream and imagine regarding a redeemer or savior, it is all vanity and deceit by which they nourish and sustain themselves. The Scriptures teach plainly that “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9); and that “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 12:3b).

2. Are men who still are completely dead, carnal, ungodly, unholy, and unregenerate, for, as we saw earlier, it is the Holy Spirit alone who must come to transform, renew, regenerate, and sanctify them. They are thus utterly void of life. They wallow in the filth of their unrighteousness and are subject to God's dreadful wrath, eternal curse, and eternal condemnation. What an indescribably wretched state this is!

3. Are utterly unbelieving men who scornfully continue to reject Christ and His offered grace and salvation, and remain unwilling to be saved by Him. As we have seen, it is the Holy Spirit who must work faith in us, albeit that “without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb. 11:6a). Thus, His wrath will abide on them who do not believe His Son (John 3:36b).

4. Have an entirely darkened understanding. Yes, they are darkness itself. Their souls are still in bondage to the black chains of hellish darkness. They are completely blind and void of any true knowledge of God and of the things of God's Spirit, for all saving knowledge and illumination proceed only from the Holy Spirit.

5. Are still living in complete enmity toward God, hate God, and in turn are supremely hated by God. They are not God's children, and they neither are able, nor may, nor are willing to call God their Father. To call God their Father can occur only by means of "the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15b), for Scripture testifies that "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

6. Are (for who would be able to analyze every aspect of it?) they who lack all righteousness, peace, and joy, which can be experienced only by those who have the Holy Spirit. Such men (they that have not the Holy Spirit) are still completely enslaved to sin and to the devil, for they lack the Spirit of liberty by which Christ redeems and liberates His own from this wretched bondage. They are utterly unfit truly to serve and fear God in any capacity, for they lack "the spirit...of the fear of the LORD" (Isa. 11:2). They cannot even utter a single good prayer before God. Instead, all their prayers are nothing but sin, for they are utterly void of the Spirit of grace and of supplication. They cannot enjoy a single drop of true comfort in their hearts, for they still lack the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and therefore they cannot walk upon the pathway of His consolations. In a word, they have not even one grain of true hope in their hearts regarding an eternal salvation or redemption after this life, for the Scriptures teach that it is only the Holy Spirit by whom God's children "are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

My friends, may you receive eyes from the Lord to see how inexpressibly wretched and utterly miserable is the state of all men who are void of the Spirit, and what shall necessarily come upon them who continue to live carelessly and without any concern about this their most wretched condition. Unless they soon become aware of their misery, are awakened in a timely manner, and turn unto the Lord in truth, they most certainly are approaching their eternal perdition with rapid strides. Oh, you who are unspiritual, whoever you may be, may you hear the Word of the Lord and no longer harden your hearts in response to that Word! Will the weightiness of your eternal salvation yet have any effect upon you? Is there yet in you any modicum of esteem and love for your eternal

salvation, you who are in such great danger? Then, “as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you” (2 Cor. 5:20) that you would set your hearts upon those things of which we speak to you in the name of the Lord.

We will conclude by showing you the way you must go if you are to be saved and if you are to receive the Holy Spirit. Oh, that a merciful God in His great compassion would impress this upon your hearts!

First, allow yourself to be convinced and persuaded of the unspiritual and wretched condition in which you presently are, and learn to take it to heart with great earnestness. There is no counsel for you as long as you refuse to do so, continuing to flatter yourself by fostering good thoughts regarding your state, thinking in this way that you will be saved, when instead, you will eternally perish by virtue of your ungodliness and lack of spirituality. However, should you be willing to allow yourself to be persuaded regarding your unholy, wretched, and unspiritual state and conversation, there would yet be hope that you might be saved.

Second, may you also learn rightly to see and acknowledge your need of the Holy Spirit in order to be saved. Oh, that by God's grace you would truly believe for once that unless you receive the Holy Spirit, you will remain an utterly ungodly, unbelieving, and damnable man, and all that awaits you is a most wretched perdition from which you cannot possibly escape.

Third, learn to see and acknowledge, by God's grace, that there is a way and means for you by which you may receive and obtain the Holy Spirit. By God's grace, learn that the Lord Jesus is the overflowing origin and fountain of the Spirit, that He has received this Spirit from His Father in an abundant measure, that He is wholeheartedly willing and inclined to bestow His Spirit upon you, that He freely offers this precious gift of His grace to you, and that He sweetly calls and invites you to come to Him, earnestly counseling and exhorting you to come to Him for His Spirit, and to buy and receive Him without money and without price.

Fourth, if only you would decide to avail yourself of this goodness and grace of the Lord Jesus! Turn away from yourself and turn to Him. Bring your empty and unspiritual soul to Him, earnestly supplicating Him for His Spirit, beseeching that He would graciously bestow His Spirit upon you. Remind Him of His promises, saying to Him: “Great Lord Jesus, give Thy Spirit to me, a poor and wretched sinner. Thou art counseling me to buy of Thee eye salve that I may see (Rev. 3:18). Thou hast promised that Thy ‘heavenly Father [will] give

the Holy Spirit to them that ask him” (Luke 11:13b). Persistently and patiently wait at Jesus’s door until He helps you and is gracious unto you.

Fifth, with all diligence, you should frequent the preaching of His Word, remembering what is written, that “the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44). Do not neglect to avail yourself of any sermon or catechism lesson that you would be able to attend. In your homes, read God’s Word frequently, and diligently search and examine it. Avail yourself of all the means of grace, always looking for and anticipating the Holy Spirit.

Sixth, seek to fellowship and interact with spiritual people. Be present when they interact together in their holy assemblies, and endeavor to hear of them how they became partakers of the Holy Spirit. Permit yourself to be instructed regarding the things of the Spirit.

Finally, when there are moments that you may perceive some good stirrings within you on hearing the Word or making use of any other means of grace, give heed to them. Such stirrings may sometimes mark the beginning of the Spirit’s work. Take advantage of them and ask God that He would further stimulate and sustain such good stirrings within you. Beware of deliberately resisting them and then quenching them.

Beloved, in this way, unspiritual sinners may obtain and receive the Holy Spirit unto their eternal salvation. May the Lord enable all His people to pursue this by His Holy Spirit and according to His good pleasure. Amen.

The Holy Universal Church of Christ

LORD'S DAY 21

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

—1 JOHN 1:6-7

Question 54: What believest thou concerning the “holy catholic church” of Christ?

Answer: That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.

Question 55: What do you understand by “the communion of saints”?

Answer: First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are in common, partakers of Him, and of all His riches and gifts; secondly, that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members.

Question 56: What believest thou concerning “the forgiveness of sins”?

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

“By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free” (1 Cor. 12:13). These words communicate that all who have received the Holy Spirit into their hearts and have been designated

and wrought upon as the property of Christ are, by that same Spirit, mutually and most intimately united one to another into a body of which Christ is the head—and this, notwithstanding the fact that, by worldly standards, they may differ greatly in rank. By God's grace, in this sermon we will further expound this truth by explaining the Catechism.

In the previous Lord's Day, we considered God the Holy Spirit and His blessed operation in the hearts of all true, elect believers. In conformity to the Apostles' Creed, the instructor will now proceed to set before us how the Spirit unites all elect believers into one body, that is, into one holy catholic (universal) church. We will consider how they both have and engage in very intimate fellowship with one another, and how, for Christ's sake, God graciously forgives all their sins.

In this Lord's Day, the instructor addresses three prominent and precious truths of the Christian faith: the one holy catholic (universal) church, the communion of saints, and the forgiveness of sins. Looking to the Lord for His gracious blessing and help, we will:

1. open these truths with brevity and simplicity; and
2. demonstrate how the faith of a Christian is spiritually exercised regarding these truths.

We will consider these truths in the order in which they appear and are articulated in the Catechism, and begin by considering the *holy catholic Christian¹ church*. To address this in an orderly fashion, we will:

1. speak of the matter itself; and then
2. consider her threefold designation in the Apostles' Creed.

Regarding the matter itself, we will dispense with any comments regarding the literal and original meaning of the word *church*, this being of little significance, and simply expound in some detail for you the simple and substantive description of the instructor.

The subject of our consideration is *the church*, that is, the congregation of Christ here on earth. Simply stated, this is the holy and true spiritual body of the Lord Jesus, consisting of the community of truly converted, believing, and regenerate men who were chosen by God unto salvation before the foundation of the world. Delivering them from the kingdom of Satan and of sin, He

1. In the Dutch rendering of the Apostles' Creed, the adjective *Christian* is also inserted. In Dutch, the article reads as follows: "I believe an holy catholic *Christian* church."

gave them to Christ to be His redeemed property, and to that end Christ also died for them. At God's appointed time, they are effectually called by Him, and by His Word and Spirit He brings them into blessed fellowship with Himself. Consequently, believers forsake sin and the world, deny themselves, and, by a true faith, fully consecrate themselves with soul and body to God in Christ. They join themselves to the true people of God, confess publicly with them the Lord's name and His truth, and always gather themselves to the preaching of God's Word and their mutual partaking of the holy sacraments. They dwell together in brotherly love and unity, willingly submitting themselves to all the discipline and commandments of the Lord Jesus.

These and none other constitute the true church of Christ here on earth. Only they, truly converted and elect believers, belong to this church. By the blood and Spirit of Christ, they have been washed and cleansed from their sins, in very deed have forsaken the world and sin, willingly have committed themselves to the service of God's kingdom, seek their entire salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus, and live according to all the commandments of God.

In the Holy Scriptures, the church is therefore given glorious names, such as the city of God, the house and temple of God, the congregation of the living God, the wife and bride of the Lamb, the body of Christ, the general assembly, the congregation of the firstborn, and they whose names are written in heaven. These precious names are applicable only to truly converted and elect believers.

Albeit that this plain and simple truth is taught in the Word of God, one nevertheless finds ministers in the church with different views regarding this matter. They divide the church of Christ into a *visible* and *invisible* church. They understand the *invisible* church to consist only of true and elect believers. However, they understand the *visible* church to consist of the entire multitude of confessing members, both converted and unconverted, the upright and the hypocrite. As a church or congregation, they assemble together for the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and public worship.

Ultimately, such sentiments do not conflict with the essential or fundamental truth of Christian doctrine, for all who posit the existence of such a *visible* church confess that they consider this to be the church in a wider sense, and that one cannot be saved by merely belonging to the visible church. Rather, unto salvation, one must necessarily be a member of the *invisible* church, and this one can become only by an upright faith and a genuine conversion.

However, irrespective of how suitable and orthodox one's explanations of these sentiments may be, we can neither approve of them nor harmonize

them with the teaching of God's Word. There are too many weighty objections regarding such views, but for lack of time, we cannot address all of them here. A seasoned reader may inquire more regarding this controversy by reading what that blessed man of God, Wilhelmus à Brakel, has written in his chapter entitled "Concerning the Church."² There he clearly addresses the absurdity and fallacy of these sentiments. Let it here suffice to say that to posit such a *visible* and *invisible* church means in essence that there are two distinct Christian churches. Both in their nature and essence, these churches are entirely distinct, the one consisting of only converted believers and the other of a mixture of true believers and hypocrites.

However, God's Word teaches that there is but one church, the true church of Christ, and all of her members are true, elect believers who will all be saved. The Holy Scriptures make no mention of any other *true* church. It is also our Reformed doctrine that there is only one true Christian church that consists only of converted believers. In the twelve articles of faith, we confess to believe that there is but one holy catholic Christian church. We will observe subsequently that our Catechism also speaks of but one church that consists solely of true and elect believers.

In articles 27, 28, and 29 of our Belgic Confession of Faith, our Reformed doctrine regarding the *true* church is articulated with exceptional clarity, saying, "We believe and profess, one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost."

Behold, our Reformed persuasion regarding the church of Christ is that there is but one true church, consisting solely of true saints and believers. Therefore, we ought not to teach anything that is different regarding the church among us, for we then depart from the sound Reformed truth.

However, someone might ask, "How are we to consider all unconverted professing members among us who have been received as members of our church and admitted to the holy sacraments?" We readily reply that all who make a profession of true faith in Christ are, by virtue of that profession, joining themselves externally to the true Christian church, and thereby declare themselves to be genuine members of the church. If their profession is sincere, and if their faith is good, pure, and of divine origin, and thus without any deceit and inner hypocrisy, then, by virtue of this upright faith, they are and shall forever remain members of the true church of Christ, and they shall most certainly be saved.

2. *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2:3–8.

If, however, their external professions are not genuine and their faith is neither sound nor of divine origin, they are then not true members of the Christian church, but rather, they are merely counterfeit members, lip confessors, nominal Christians, and hypocrites. Thus, however much they may confess verbally, they do not belong to the true church of Christ. They rather deceive themselves and others with a false profession, and if they are not converted, they will perish forever in that state.

Every professing member should therefore earnestly examine his heart whether his profession is genuine, whether his faith is heartfelt and sound, and whether he is a true member of the Christian church. Neither an external profession nor external religion, but rather, an upright profession accompanied by a pure and upright faith, qualifies us as true members of the true church of Christ. The apostle teaches this very clearly when he writes, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19).

At some point, such individuals joined themselves to the true church of Christ by way of an external profession and an external religion, as well as by their use of the sacraments. Nevertheless, their subsequent apostasy confirmed that they had merely been lip professors and hypocrites, and they never as members had belonged to the true church of Christ. It is no different today with all whose professions are only verbal, external, and feigned. By way of their profession, they affiliate themselves with the church, but they neither belong to the true church nor are members of it.

For more reasons than one, we deemed it necessary to make some preliminary remarks about this weighty matter. We will now proceed to consider the true church of Christ, and in our exposition, we will fully align ourselves with the formulation of the Catechism.

Regarding this holy and true church, the instructor believes and teaches the following: "That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof."

We will consider the teaching of the instructor in some detail by explaining the following four matters:

- the head of the true church
- the church herself

- the manner in which this church is gathered, preserved, and protected
- the manner in which every believer is a true member of this church

Regarding the first, the instructor teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the head of the true church. All elect believers are His property in the fullest sense of the word, because He is the mediator and redeemer of them all, having “purchased [them] with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). God gave all the elect to His Son, Jesus Christ, that He might be their mediator, having committed them fully into His hands so that He might deliver them from the power of Satan and translate them into His kingdom. By virtue of this gracious and efficacious redemption, believers are frequently set before us in the Holy Scriptures as they who are Christ's. The Lord Jesus Himself testifies regarding all His believing people that “Thine [the Father's] they were, and thou [the Father] gavest them me” (John 17:6).

Consequently, believers, by the Spirit of faith, willingly surrender themselves to Christ to be His property, and with soul and body they eternally commit themselves to Him. We addressed this truth in considerable detail in our exposition of Lord's Day 1, Question 1, where we are taught that the comfort of the Lord's people consists in the fact “that I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” Christ, the Son of God, is therefore rightfully set before us as the only king, Lord, and head of His church or congregation, and it is upon Him, as upon the only Petra, foundation, and rock, that His church is built (Matt. 16:18). Therefore, all who posit that in addition to Christ there is yet another visible head of the church here upon earth, or who introduce in the church some additional human authority in addition to the authority of Christ, however attractive the appearance of this may be, are guilty of fully departing from the truth. By no means do they belong to the true church of Christ (Eph. 1:22–23).

Given that Christ is the only true head of the church, and that all members must sincerely embrace and acknowledge Him as such, He alone has the right, as head and king, to gather and build His true church. The instructor will instruct us regarding this in what follows.

Second, “the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life.” The instructor here refers to the true church of Christ as:

1. A *congregation*,³ that is, a united gathering of people who, with true hearts, believe in Christ and sincerely cleave to Him and serve Him as their head and king. In the Holy Scriptures, the church is generally designated as such, for Paul testifies that Christ has purchased His church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). In Ephesians 1:22–23, he teaches that God the Father “hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.”

2. “A church [congregation] *chosen to everlasting life*.” From eternity, before the foundation of the world, God chose a specific multitude of mankind out of sinful and fallen humanity whom He would deliver from their sins by Christ and by His Holy Spirit, and cause them to inherit eternal salvation and glory. This precious truth is taught most abundantly throughout the Word of God. Paul writes, “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Tim. 2:19). It must therefore necessarily be that all these elect souls must at a given point in time be gathered to the church of Christ in faith and repentance, and thus be added to this church as living stones to the building up of a spiritual house. This again confirms that the true church of Christ consists only of the elect who, of God, have been chosen in Christ unto eternal life and whose names have been written in the book of life. Therefore, all they that have not been chosen by God do not belong to the true church of Christ. Consequently, they will never be transplanted into this church. The church is thus denominated “the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Heb. 12:23b), as well as “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5b). Throughout the Holy Scriptures, the members of the true church are referred to as *the elect* or *the elect of God*.

How is this church, this congregation of the elect, gathered and built up by Christ as head? The instructor continues his instruction by saying that Christ “gathers...out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life.” We are to consider:

1. the manner in which Christ gathers His church, namely, *by His Spirit and Word*;
2. from whence He gathers her, namely, *out of the whole human race*;
and

3. The Dutch rendering of the answer to question 54 reads as follows: “That the Son of God...gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself...a *congregation* chosen to everlasting life.”

3. the time frame in which He accomplishes this, namely, *from the beginning to the end of the world.*

a. Regarding the first, at the time appointed by Christ, all the elect are called powerfully out of the world and out of a life of sin unto His church and kingdom. Paul clearly teaches this, saying, "Whom he did predestinate [that is, unto eternal life], them he also called" (Rom. 8:30a). That which Paul here refers to as *calling*, our instructor refers to as *gathering*, and Scripture speaks in like manner, for Paul teaches that "he hath purposed in himself that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him" (Eph. 1:9b–10).

Christ accomplishes this, for at the appointed time, and in the way of true faith and repentance, He gathers all His elect unto Himself as His congregation and as His kingdom. As we have considered, His church is therefore also denominated as "the general assembly and church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23a). According to the instructor, Christ achieves this *by His Word and Spirit in the unity of true faith*. That is to say, at the appointed time, He works in all of His own, by His Word and Spirit, one and the same most holy and most precious faith, whereby they all fully and eternally forsake the world and sin. They surrender themselves willingly to Christ as their only head and redeemer, entrusting themselves to Him with soul and body. All the elect, therefore, at the appointed time are translated into Christ, and in Him as their head, they are then gathered into a body, a congregation, and spiritually and believingly they are and remain mutually and most intimately united in Christ, their common head.

To understand better this gathering of all the elect by Christ by means of His Word and Spirit, etc., we need only to refresh and clarify in your memories what we preached this past Lord's Day regarding the operation of the Holy Spirit in all true and elect believers, for at that time, we set before you in detail how initially and continually the Holy Spirit evokes the elect to believe, and thereby makes them partakers of Christ and of all His benefits. This He accomplishes by means of His Word and the proclamation of that Word. At that time, we considered how Christ, by His Word, gathers all of His own unto His church. Consequently, none but true and upright believers belong to the church of Christ, and to that church they are called and gathered by Him. They all come and are gathered by His Word and Spirit, "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God," and thereby they are all "one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:13, 4–5).

b. According to the instructor, the elect are called and gathered unto the church and congregation of Christ *from the entire human race*. God has His elect people scattered everywhere across the globe. This is particularly true during the New Testament dispensation, and Christ must therefore gather His congregation or church from the entire human race, calling His own from all languages, peoples, and nations. The church of Christ is described in Revelation 7:9 as “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.” Christ causes His Word or gospel to be proclaimed throughout the entire earth, and He therefore commanded His apostles: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15–16). Christ's church, His believing congregation, is therefore to be found throughout the entire earth and throughout the entire human race, and from this human race, He gathers His church.

c. The instructor declares that Christ, at the very beginning of the world, began to gather to Himself His elect church and congregation by His Word and Spirit—a church “agreeing in true faith.” Adam, Eve, and Abel were the first to be gathered in. The Son of God has been engaged in this work until this day, and has done so throughout all the ages of the world. He always has had His elect, though there were times when His true church upon earth was very small numerically.

He continues to gather His elect into His kingdom daily. As many sinners as are truly converted and are united to God in Christ by faith, so many members are gathered and added to the true church and congregation of Christ, who will continue to engage in this work until the end of the world. This He will do according to the promise He made to His church, saying, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20). The number of the elect must necessarily be complete so that not one of them will be missing.

Christ not only gathers His church or congregation, but, according to the instructor, He also *protects and preserves* her. Considering the great multitude and the violence of all the spiritual and physical enemies of the church of Christ, she would in no wise be able to exist upon earth without that protection and preservation. There is therefore nothing to which Christ is so committed as the preservation and protection of His church in all ages and at all places. He declares in His Word, “I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day” (Isa. 27:3). The church of Christ may therefore have complete confidence in Him, her head and king, and she may be

assured that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18b). This truth is addressed in greater detail elsewhere in the Catechism.

The instructor adds the following words to the description of the true church, the congregation of Christ here upon earth, saying, “...and that I am and forever shall remain, a living member thereof.” He speaks here of a truly converted believer. Every believer is a true and living member of the church of Christ, and he can know this, by the grace of God, from his unfeigned faith and genuine repentance, for whoever lacks these things remains completely dead in trespasses and sins. Consequently, he is completely outside of the true church and congregation of Christ, for we have seen that this church consists only of true and upright believers who have become spiritually alive unto God in Christ by faith, having been raised with Christ unto a new life.

He who is a living member of the true church is not merely a member temporarily, but rather, as the instructor posits, remains a member eternally. By God's grace, he may confidently believe and rely upon this, doing so on the basis of God's immutability and His eternal purpose of grace that cannot be annulled. The Lord Jesus Himself testifies of this, saying, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27–28).

Oh, how infinitely blessed are such souls who, by God in Christ, are called to so great a salvation and glory! It is fitting that we would exclaim here, “Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts” (Ps. 65:4).

We must now say a few words regarding the Apostles' Creed's threefold designation of this true church of believers.

This true church is called the *holy* church because she is holy, is made up of holy people, and is gathered by a holy head. It is true that unholy, unbelieving, and unconverted people also confess to be true members of the church of Christ, albeit that they deceive themselves and others, for the church of Christ is that holy city, the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven, “and there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth” (Rev. 21:27), “for without are dogs” (Rev. 22:15). The apostle Paul therefore describes the true church as “the church of saints” (1 Cor. 14:33), and even as a church “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27).

This church is also called the *catholic* or *universal* church for the following reasons:

1. As we have already seen, she is comprised of and is established universally and throughout all humanity.

2. During the New Testament dispensation, she is universally spread throughout the entire earth.

3. When it comes to the foundational doctrines of the faith, the true church is universally orthodox, and her members unanimously confess one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. It is in this sense that some of the apostolic epistles are referred to as the *catholic* or *universal* epistles, for they are universally orthodox and sound regarding the foundational doctrines of the faith.

The true church is also called the *Christian* church, named after Christ, who is her head and king. The church fully cleaves to Christ by a true faith, and she is solely and completely grounded in Him. Her members are therefore also called *Christians* in order to distinguish them from unbelievers.

Finally, we wish to say something regarding the manner in which one commonly defines and subdivides the true church of Christ, namely, as *visible* and *invisible*.

The true church is designated as *visible* inasmuch as all true believers publicly confess the name and truth of Christ in their walk. They gather for public worship, for prayer, and for the use of the sacraments. Thus, they also adorn their confession outwardly by way of a holy and godly life. In that sense, the church of Christ is *visible* here on earth and is viewed and observed by us as such. However, in a different sense, the church is designated as being *invisible*; that is, in light of the inner and hidden man of the heart that is to be found in all true believers by virtue of the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. By way of this grace, they are most intimately united to a triune God. They wear the garment of His heavenly image and, in principle, they may already have a foretaste of eternal life, and may delight themselves in the Lord. This is referred to as God’s internal grace in the hearts of believers, and is alluded to when we read in Psalm 45:13 that “the king’s daughter is all glorious within.” In this sense, the true church of Christ is deemed to be *invisible*, for all the internal grace, holiness, and glory of God’s people are not to be observed with the physical eye.

Regarding the church of Christ, we also distinguish between the *church militant* and the *church triumphant*. As long as she remains here on earth, she will be *militant*, for here below, until the end, every true believer must fight the good fight of faith against his evil flesh, Satan, and the world. In heaven above, however, the church will have *triumphed* over all her enemies, etc.

Hereby we have sufficiently addressed and expounded the doctrine of the true church of Christ, and we will therefore proceed at present to address the subsequent doctrine of *the communion of saints*. There is much to be said about this precious truth, but as so much of our time has already transpired, we shall briefly address for you only the most important components of it.

The saints whose communion is here addressed are all God's true and believing children, and thus members of the church of Christ, who are designated throughout Scripture as *saints* or *holy ones*. Consider only Ephesians 1:1, where Paul writes "to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." All true believers are designated as such because they are completely and perfectly holy in Christ, having been renewed according to the image of God. He has made them to be a holy people unto Himself, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, He has delivered them from all their sins and will also fully deliver them at the end of their lives. Paul therefore testifies regarding all true believers, "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

To these saints is here attributed *communion*. This communion is uniquely theirs, and it is therefore emphatically referred to as the *communion of saints*. On several occasions, God's Word makes mention of this communion of saints, as, for instance, in Galatians 2:9, where Paul testifies regarding James, Cephas, and John that they gave the right hand of fellowship to him. In 1 John 1:3, we read, "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."

Let us now consider the essential nature of this mutual communion between believing saints. The instructor gives us a short and concise description of this, saying that it consists of two things: "First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are in common, partakers of Him, and of all His riches and gifts; and second, that everyone must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members."

Regarding the first, we are referred to the holy, internal, and spiritual communion of the saints that they have collectively and individually with Christ as His members. In Lord's Day 12, Question 32, we considered in detail with you that every believer is a true member of Christ and that, by faith, they are partakers of His grace and Spirit. We then observed that believers are called

Christians because they are members of Christ by faith, and thus are partakers of His anointing. We will therefore not address this any further. Suffice it to say that true faith has a spiritual and inner efficacy whereby the soul looks entirely away from self and surrenders itself fully to Christ. Thereby she is truly and essentially united to Him, as well as to His grace and salvation. Christ then so interacts with the soul by His Spirit and grace that He takes complete possession of the soul and subjects her to the blessed dominion of His grace. The soul, in turn, engages in communion with Christ so that she may solely live in Him, out of Him, through Him, and unto Him. This reciprocal spiritual communion of faith between the soul and Christ, and between Christ and the soul, is what constitutes the communion all true believers have with Christ and with “all His riches and gifts.”

Only in this way do all saints and believers, by faith, have individual communion with the person of Christ and, in and through Him, also with the Father. The Holy Scriptures also testify of this, for John writes, “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” (1 John 1:3). By this fellowship, all true believers acknowledge the Lord Jesus as their only head, redeemer, deliverer, and savior, and they surrender themselves unreservedly, fully, and eternally to Him, so that through Him and out of free grace alone, they may be justified of all their sins, be sanctified, and be fully saved and redeemed. They do this collectively, and there is thus no exception.

In forsaking everything that is not Christ, they all boast solely in Christ and in His sovereign grace. They all receive Christ into their hearts, cherish Him, deem Him precious, rejoice in Him, and despise and forsake everything outside of Him. They all embrace Christ in the totality of who He is, and they also embrace all who follow Him. They desire to suffer with Him and to be glorified with Him. They all hunger and thirst for Christ, and they cleave to Him as their overflowing fountain of life and their all-sufficient head and savior. They all follow Him, trust in Him, and wait for Him. Consequently, they are also all gathered together in Christ, and in the unity of true faith, they are all equally governed and wrought upon unto salvation by Christ their living head.

However, not only do all saints and believers enjoy such true fellowship with the precious person of Christ, but, according to the instructor, they are also partakers of all His riches and gifts. These riches and gifts of Christ consist of the perfect and all-sufficient salvation and redemption that are at His disposal as mediator and head, and according to His good pleasure and will, He

grants and communicates this to all who believe in Him, and who, as members, are united to Him as their head. To be more specific, Christ's riches and gifts consist in these four things: "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). As to the root of the matter, all believers, both individually and collectively, are equally partakers of all the riches and gifts of the Lord Jesus. By the continual exercise of their faith, they all receive, out of the fullness of Christ, grace for grace (John 1:16). Collectively, they are all illuminated, justified, sanctified, and redeemed by Christ, and the distribution of His grace and salvation is not partial. One believer has no greater claim than another to Christ and to His grace, as they all have in common that Christ is their possession, treasure, inheritance, head, husband, and bridegroom. Thus, they collectively constitute the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5), and they "have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13).

Oh, how intimate, internal, and glorious is the fellowship between Christ and all believers! Such glorious, essential, and most perfect fellowship as exists between Christ and true believers is not to be found anywhere else under the sun. No matter what we would say about it, we would by no means be able to do justice to the spirituality of the matter as it is known and experienced by the soul when God is pleased to lead her graciously into this sanctuary.

By what has been said and addressed, the other doctrine highlighted by the instructor follows naturally, namely, that this holy communion also consists in everyone knowing "it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members." Given that all believers are members of the body of Christ, it follows that, with soul and body, they must use all their individual gifts and all their skills for one another's mutual benefit. God's grace requires this, and their mutual love and spiritual communion in Christ demand it.

God's way with His people in the spiritual and natural realms is by no means identical as to both manner and circumstances, and the gifts He bestows on each individually are also not the same. He so directs and orders all things according to His omnipotent and adorable wisdom whereby all the members of the body of Christ are very much dependent one upon the other, so that collectively, as a body, they may grow to perfection in Him who is their head.

First, the Lord gives to each believer His special spiritual gifts and graces, "for to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another

prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Cor. 12:8–11).

Why does the Lord deal with His people this way? He does so in order, “that everyone must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members,” and in this regard, we are to give heed to the express apostolic admonitions. Paul says concerning this, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom. 12:6–8). Peter gives the following admonition: “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

Second, God’s temporal or bodily gifts to His children also vary greatly, and this applies to earthly goods, wealth, and talents. They upon whom such gifts have been bestowed are to assist needy members to the utmost of their ability, and thus “the members should have the same care one for another” (1 Cor. 12:25). This constitutes the mutual communion of saints, and the more this communion is practiced and observed with love, faith, simplicity, and joy, the more spiritual the Lord’s people will be and the more grace they will possess.

However, the Lord has shown regarding this matter that there is a great decline in present-day Christianity. Matters were entirely different during the apostolic era, for we read that believers “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

We will now consider the third and final doctrine, that is, the *forgiveness of sins*. Beloved, this is a very weighty, beneficial, and essential matter of the utmost importance for us to have a proper knowledge. Nevertheless, we will not address this here in detail, since this same truth will be addressed on two other occasions in the Catechism. First, it will be addressed in Lord’s Day 23, which expounds the doctrine of the gracious justification of the sinner through faith in Christ, and then secondly, in Lord’s Day 51, in which the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer will be considered, namely, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

If it may please the Lord, we shall on both occasions expound and address in greater detail the truth regarding the forgiveness of sins. We will presently address this truth only by way of the precious and simple words of the instructor. These words are worthy of being digested by us, so that, by God's grace, we may continually experience their internal efficacy in our hearts.

The forgiveness of sins consists in this: "that God, for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God." Behold, this is God's adorable and wondrous way eternally to redeem and save ungodly, accursed, lost, and impotent sinners. All the elect, by a true faith wrought in them by the Holy Spirit, embrace Christ and His all-sufficient righteousness and grace as they are offered in the gospel to all sinners unto redemption and eternal salvation. By this faith, they fully forsake all that is of themselves and turn fully to Christ. In Christ, they then find an all-sufficient and perfect righteousness by which their poor and naked souls are fully clothed and adorned. With that righteousness, they then come before God, and for Christ's sake they receive from Him the gracious pardon of all their sins, as well as of their sinful corruption and unholiness. This means that by the works of the law no man shall be justified (Gal. 2:16), and they therefore are saved by grace alone and through faith alone. They thus obtain redemption solely in Christ, and through His blood they obtain "the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7).

Oh, how this way ought to be adored eternally—a way of grace and salvation! "O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so" (Ps. 107:1–2).

Having thus considered these three doctrines, we will now conclude by addressing how the faith of a Christian is exercised in regard to these doctrines. A child of God professes to believe these truths, doing so not merely by acquiescing in them intellectually and historically, but rather, with a holy, spiritual, and inner persuasion of the heart. A truly believing and regenerate Christian is spiritually and experientially instructed regarding these truths by the Lord Himself. Not only has he found these truths externally in the Word, but he has also experienced them as divine truths within his heart. He belongs to the church of Christ and is a living member of the same. Together with the elect and believing people of Christ, he has, he exercises, and by faith he maintains inward communion

with Christ and with all His riches and gifts. He deems this to be his only and ultimate salvation, and he desires to increase and be established in that salvation. He knows by spiritual and holy experience what it means to forsake all that is of himself and to put on Christ fully and exclusively, and then to go unto God through Him. Experientially, he knows what it means to obtain a gracious and complete pardon of all his sins from God for Christ's sake, and consequently to rejoice in the God of his salvation. From this inner and spiritual experience of the heart proceeds this upright faith of the Christian, by which he acquiesces in the three doctrines of the faith that have been addressed.

If it may please the Lord, on a future occasion we shall also address the practical outworking of these truths, and now conclude with the prayer that the Lord would bless our words. Amen.

The Resurrection of the Body and Eternal Life

LORD'S DAY 22

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

—JOHN 5:28–29

Question 57: What comfort doth the “resurrection of the body” afford thee?

Answer: That not only my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head; but also, that this my body, being raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ.

Question 58: What comfort takest thou from the article of “life everlasting”?

Answer: That since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, after this life I shall inherit perfect salvation, which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man” to conceive, and that, to praise God therein forever.

The words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:19 are worthy of consideration: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” The apostle here is reasoning with the people of God, who, by faith, are hoping upon Christ and His grace, expecting all their salvation and redemption exclusively from Him. It was the apostle’s desire to affirm their faith of their blessed resurrection at the last day, as well as of the blessedness and glory that would follow. He uses the powerful argument that if there will be no resurrection from the dead, there will also be neither future blessedness nor eternal glory for the people of God. Thus, if in this earthly and temporal life only they have hope in Christ and His salvation, they, of all men on earth, are the most miserable and pitiable.

On the one hand, this is because of the great loss they will necessarily have to endure in being deprived of the glorious and eternal salvation upon which they hope in this life, for which they long so intensely, and of which they have already tasted the firstfruits by faith. On the other hand, this means that all the grievous and manifold afflictions they endure in this world in soul and body for the sake of Christ and His salvation are utterly in vain.

In both instances, it makes them to be the most miserable and wretched of all men if they are deceived in their hope for a complete redemption of their bodies and a complete glorification of their souls after this life. Since, however, this cannot possibly be, and since this hope of God's children will not be put to shame, it necessarily follows that the blessed resurrection of believers on the last day, and their subsequent eternal glorification in both soul and body, is an absolute certainty.

By God's grace, we will now consider these truths regarding the resurrection of the dead, and thus of the body, and the eternal life and complete salvation and glorification in heaven that will follow. These are the two concluding truths of the Apostles' Creed, and as we have customarily done, we will:

1. consider these truths with utmost simplicity; and
2. ascertain how the faith of a Christian is exercised with them unto salvation.

Regarding these truths themselves, we will consider:

1. the resurrection of the body; and
2. eternal life.

With regard to the first truth, the resurrection of the body, the instructor asks the believing Christian, "What comfort doth the 'resurrection of the body'" afford thee?" and prompts him to answer, "That not only my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head; but also, that this my body, being raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ." The instructor presupposes that this article regarding the resurrection of the body encompasses the truth that the soul remains immortal and continues to live after the death of the body. Had there been any doubt or false doctrine among the first Christians regarding this truth, the immortality of the soul, they would have codified and defended it in their confessional statement on the resurrection of the body. Since, however, they made no mention of it at all, they clearly affirmed in simplicity and

without any doubt that they all believed the truth of the Holy Scriptures regarding the immortality of the soul upon the death of the body.

As time progressed, however, there were certain vain persons in the church of Christ who taught erroneous and vain notions regarding the immortality of the soul— notions that were primarily rooted in the carnal philosophy of paganism. However, considering the vanity and foolishness of such notions, we do not consider it worthwhile spending our time to refute them. We also will not consider the heretical teachings of the Socinians, of some Mennonites and Anabaptists, and of like-minded natural and carnal men who are children of darkness. By their corrupt intellects, they teach things regarding the state of the soul after death, teaching that when the soul separates itself from the body, it falls asleep, entering into a state of inactivity and insensitivity in which it remains until the last day. Or they posit that the soul is entirely extinguished and annihilated, and that, on the last day, God will bring them forth again by means of a new creation.

Such and similar sentiments are deceitful, vain, and absurd, and are utterly contradictory, not only in regard to the nature of the manner of the resurrection, but also in regard to the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures clearly teach that the soul retains its essential nature upon the death of the body, and will thus never be either annihilated or cease to exist. The savior admonishes us accordingly, saying, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul” (Matt. 10:28a), for the nature of the soul is such that it is immortal. In Ecclesiastes 12:7, Solomon teaches regarding man’s body, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” Consequently, the savior promised to the penitent thief on the cross, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man clearly teaches this truth regarding the immortality of the soul, for both men are set before us after their deaths as having gone to a specific place (Luke 16:22–23), and although it is a parable, a literal or spiritual truth is always set before us in each parable. This parable sets before us the immortality of the souls of the godly and of the ungodly after this life, as well as the blessedness of the one and the perdition of the other. In like manner, the Holy Scriptures consistently speak of the immortality of the soul upon its separation from the body.

Upon this foundation rests the pronouncement of our instructor that we shall consider in greater detail. In expounding for us the comfort we derive from the resurrection of the body, he addresses:

1. the state of the soul upon the death of the body; and
2. the resurrection of the body on the last day.

Regarding the state of the soul, the instructor teaches and believes that the souls of all true believers, the souls of all who have served and feared the Lord in uprightness of heart, “after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ [their] head.” Two matters are here to be considered and reflected upon:

1. How at death, the soul of a believing child of God is taken into glory unto Christ her head.
2. How this takes place immediately when the soul separates itself from the body.

Regarding the first, every believer here on earth has this blessed hope and expectation, and in proportion to the grace bestowed upon him, can comfort himself to a greater or lesser degree with the fact that upon the death of his body, his soul “shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head.” Christ is the head of all His believing people, for God has given “him to be the head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22).

Already here on earth, believers are, by faith and by the Spirit of faith, most intimately united to Christ their savior. They have fully entered into Him, and as members with their head, they now live in holy and spiritual communion with Christ. By their faith, they continually derive all their light, righteousness, life, strength, comfort, peace, and joy from Him, so that their life is fully hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).

Albeit believers are thus most intimately united with Christ as members with their head, the functioning of this union is nevertheless not completely perfect in this life, but rather, is very deficient in reference to the matter and circumstances of it. This union of believers functions with Christ in no way but by faith, and in the majority of believers, their faith is still very weak, and in the best of them, it is very imperfect. Although God's children, while on earth, are truly, essentially, and as to the root of the matter united with Christ their head and by faith continually maintain fellowship with Him, they nevertheless know and enjoy very little of Christ. They are thus as in a strange land and far removed from Him, similar to a woman who is truly united to her husband in the bond of marriage, who truly loves him and cleaves to him, and is yet at a great distance from him, because her husband has had to remove himself far from her by going to a foreign land to conduct his business. Consequently, she can neither speak to him face to face nor see him for a long period of time.

In that sense, believers also live, so to speak, in a strange land and are at a great distance from Christ, their husband and head, and only by faith can they commune with Him. While they are at home in the body, they are absent from the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6), and cannot yet enjoy His immediate presence while in the body. This at times is grievous to the Lord's people by virtue of their inward yearning and desiring after Christ their head. However, here it is also applicable what is written in Isaiah 28:16b: "He that believeth shall not make haste." Here below, the Lord's people are strengthened in their faith, and, with holy patience and submission, they are exercised with God's promises as they are set before them and administered to them in the Word given to them by the Lord for their instruction, admonition, and comfort. In this Word, Christ, as their head and savior, assures and promises that while they are fighting the good fight of faith, it is but for a short time while in the body that they shall yet be absent from Him, and thereby be deprived of His immediate fellowship and blessed presence. He promises them that, upon death, they shall be taken up to heaven to be with Him, their head, and they shall then eternally be delivered from being absent from Him while in the body (2 Cor. 5:6–8).

Consider only these two noteworthy promises. In John 14:3, Christ promises His elect, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." As to their souls, this promise is fulfilled for believers the moment they die. And in John 12:26b, Christ promises, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be." These are the promises believers lay hold of and trust in, and they are thereby assured in their hearts that when their souls are separated from their bodies, they will be taken up to glory to be with Christ their head. They will then perfectly enjoy Him in His immediate presence, and no longer will they have to walk with Him by faith, but rather, by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). All God's children may have this glorious hope, and they all may boast of it, albeit that the one does so with a greater measure of peace and fortitude in believing, and the other with less.

The pious man of God, Asaph, trusted and expected that God would guide him with His counsel and afterward receive him to glory (Ps. 73:24). Paul testifies regarding God's people, saying, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). In speaking of this house or tabernacle of God, the apostle is simply describing the perfect, immediate, and eternal union of believers with God and with their savior, Jesus Christ, for they

will fully dwell in Him the moment they fully part with their flesh, that is, when they fully part with the body of this death.

We would have you especially notice how the instructor teaches that this taking of the souls of believers to be with Christ their head occurs “immediately”; that is, the moment believers die and their souls are separated from their bodies. The moment their bodies are broken by death, at that very same moment, their souls are transported immediately to be with Christ their head in perfect and eternal glory, and they are immediately and most intimately united to Him in heaven above.

The instructor posits this to counter and to refute the vile and deceitful doctrine of the Papists regarding purgatory, the portal of hell, or what other similar vain and foolish concoctions there may be whereby the Devil so grievously deceives and misleads the blind people of Roman Catholicism.

The Papists teach that there is a purgatory where, after the death of their bodies, the souls of believers must reside for a shorter or longer period in order to be purified. They also teach that there was a portal of hell where believers of the Old Testament were confined until the death of the Savior, and that there is yet another portal for unbaptized Roman Catholic children. We deem all of this to be but “profane and old wives’ fables” (1 Tim. 4:7), and Paul exhorts us that we are to refuse them without giving them any consideration. Suffice it to say that there is not the least foundation for these notions in God’s Word. Therefore, those passages used by the Papists as proof for their vain teachings, their spurious dreams, and their fantasies are corrupted and distorted by them in a vile and deceitful manner. In His sovereign wisdom, God has sent “them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” (2 Thess. 2:11).

There is no truth taught more plainly and simply in God’s Word than that the moment the Lord’s children die, their souls are taken into glory to be with Christ their head. We already have considered (1) the testimony of Solomon that at death our dust returns to the earth and our soul or spirit returns unto God who gave it; (2) the history of the converted thief on the cross; and (3) the parable regarding Lazarus and the rich man. Also consider how Paul longed for his death and for his future glory, expressing that desire by saying that he had a “desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phil. 1:23). The apostle does not add anything in between the departing of the soul and its being with Christ, for he knew that the one immediately would follow upon the other. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, he teaches that believers should be “confident ...and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the

Lord.” Therefore, no sooner are believers absent from the body from which they depart at death than they are immediately present with the Lord. It is therefore testified regarding the Lord’s believing people that upon their death, they “enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds” (Isa. 57:2). This entering into peace is that blessedness whereby the soul is taken up to be with Christ her head in glory at the moment of death. In Revelation 14:13, we read that all who die in the Lord are pronounced blessed “from henceforth,” that is, from the moment they die. The godly martyr, Stephen, upon being stoned by the Jews, had no other expectation than that upon his death, he would immediately be taken up to be with Christ his head in glory, prompting him to cry out at the end of his life, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59).

Still today, it is the certain hope and expectation of God’s children, which they may receive in their hearts when they die, and oftentimes in a lively manner, that the moment their souls depart from their bodies, their souls shall eternally be taken up into glory to be with Christ their beloved head and savior. Many of God’s children depart into eternity having in their souls this full assurance and steadfast confidence of faith, although all do not receive this grace in the same manner.

The instructor then proceeds to consider the future state of the body. As to what will take place with the bodies of God’s children after death, the instructor says the following: “This my body, being raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ.”

It is a known fact that our bodies differ completely from our souls. The soul is eternal and immortal, whereas the body, or our flesh, is subject to death and corruption by virtue of what God said to Adam, and in him to all humanity: “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:19). “All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked” (Eccl. 9:2), for they both perish and die according to the flesh and return unto the earth from which they were taken. We all have this in common. We die the moment there is the cessation of the inward circulation and movement of blood and the functions of life, at the moment the soul departs from the body. Upon the cessation of all physical activity, the internal warmth and life depart from the body, and it becomes completely cold, stiff, and motionless. In that state, our bodies are then committed to the earth, and by virtue of the decaying effects of the soil, all the remaining fluids and organs of the body begin to putrefy and decay. Thus, the body gradually deteriorates and at last is transformed into thin and dry dust, which, in turn, intermingles with the dust of the earth.

Behold, such is the manner in which our bodies return to the earth from which they were taken and proceeded, and decompose as dust in the earth. It can therefore rightly be said of us that we “dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust” (Job 4:19). This is the breaking down of the “earthly house of this tabernacle,” as is mentioned by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:1.

Will our bodies eternally remain in this state of decay? By no means! Concerning the bodies of God's children, the instructor teaches two things:

1. Being raised by the power of Christ, they shall be reunited with their souls.
2. They shall be made like unto the glorious body of Christ.

Regarding the first, it is certain that the bodies of the ungodly as well as those of believers and the just shall be resurrected by the power of God on the last day and be reunited with their souls. This is taught clearly throughout the Holy Scriptures. Consider only what Daniel, the man of God, prophesied regarding this, saying, “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). There is also the express testimony of the Savior, who said, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28–29).

In this Lord's Day, however, the instructor is dealing only and specifically with the resurrection of believers, that is, of the just, on the last day, teaching that their bodies “being raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with [their] souls, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ.” This resurrection of our bodies shall transpire on the last day, or at the end of the world, when God shall send forth Christ from heaven to earth in all His glory to judge the living and the dead. The bodies of believers or of the just shall first be raised to life from the dust of the earth, and thus prior to the resurrection of the ungodly or the unbelievers, as the Scriptures teach us, saying, “...and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16c).

Regarding the manner in which the just shall be resurrected, the instructor teaches that their bodies shall be raised by the power of Christ, they shall be reunited with their souls, and they shall be made like unto the glorious body of Christ. This is based on the Holy Scriptures, for the Savior testifies, saying,

“And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John 6:39). Paul testifies of this, saying, “that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:14). And so it must be, for believers are the redeemed property of Christ as to both soul and body, and because they are His property, He must redeem them fully. On the last day, He must therefore also deliver their bodies from the bondage of death by raising them unto life, so that to all eternity, all honor and glory shall be to Him as their king and redeemer.

Christ will accomplish the resurrection of the bodies of believers *by His power*; that is, by His Holy Spirit, by whom He exercises His power and His divine omnipotence unto the salvation of His people. The Holy Scriptures teach us accordingly, saying, “He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11). The bodies of believers are resurrected by the power of Christ since no inferior power or ability would do, for all power and might proceed from God rather than from us. All creatures combined do not have the least power or ability to resurrect one single body that has died, except that they first receive that power from God, and He thus exercises His power in and through them. All of this is clear to the reader who is spiritually minded.

Our own bodies that we have here on earth will be resurrected on the last day by the power of Christ, and they will thus be neither new nor different bodies. This is true regarding the ungodly as well as the just, the believers.

1. Concerning *the ungodly*, according to God’s justice, they must be eternally punished in the very bodies in which they sinned here on earth.

2. Concerning *the just or believers*, the same justice of God demands that they be eternally glorified in the very bodies in which they served Him here on earth. Furthermore, Christ must resurrect those bodies that He redeemed here on earth by His blood and in which He dwelt by His Holy Spirit.

The resurrection of our identical bodies is therefore taught throughout Scripture. Job testified regarding himself, “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself” (Job 19:26–27). Read also what Paul teaches regarding this in 1 Corinthians 15.

The instructor testifies regarding this resurrected body that upon its resurrection it shall be reunited with its soul, and thus they will be united as they were on earth so that the Lord’s children shall fully enjoy salvation, both in body and soul, eternally to serve and glorify God.

Regarding the second, we must now inquire what will be the condition of the bodies of believers after their resurrection on the last day. The instructor teaches that their bodies shall be conformed to the holy body of Christ. He means that each body, having many members or parts, shall possess, to a certain defined measure and degree, the same holiness and glory as Christ's body already possesses in heaven. There will be complete conformity between the glorified body of the Lord Jesus and the bodies of His believing people. However, this conformity will not be a matter of degree, for the glory of the body of Christ shall always exceed that of believers—as much as the glory of the sun exceeds the luster and glory of the stars, and as the glory of the head excels that of all other members of the body.

That the bodies of believers will truly be conformed to the body of Christ in holiness and in glory on the last day is taught clearly in the Holy Scriptures. John testifies thereof, saying, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Paul testifies regarding God's believing people that Christ shall change their vile body, “that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).

As to the state of Christ's glorified body after His resurrection from the dead, we already have expounded to you when recently we addressed the resurrection of Christ by way of the Catechism. We then observed that the body of the Savior after His resurrection had become:

1. a purely *spiritual body* that no longer functioned by natural processes alone, but functioned by internal and spiritual motions;
2. a completely *strong and incorruptible body*, fully set free from all natural weaknesses, frailties, and ailments to which bodies here on earth are so frequently subjected; and
3. an *immortal body* that can never again be overtaken or broken by death, but rather, is alive and shall live to all eternity.

These are the three ways in which the bodies of believers will be conformed to the glorified body of Christ on the last day, all of which are taught by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Furthermore, the bodies of believers shall be conformed to the glorified body of Christ with regard to holiness. By death, and by the power of the blood and Spirit of Christ, they will be completely purified and cleansed from all sinful inclinations and evil lusts, so that in their bodies, there will be no trace either of sin or sinful corruption. Their bodies, with all

their members and capacities, shall instead be fully engaged as instruments of righteousness. The Holy Spirit will then completely pervade and possess these bodies, govern them, and cause them to be eternally in subjection to God and to the Lamb in perfect obedience.

Now follows the last, the twelfth article of the Creed, which pertains to *eternal life*. This is a doctrine of extraordinary dimensions, and we have therefore already addressed it explicitly and in great detail in four sermons. We will now address it only briefly, and will focus your attention only on the most important matters that should be considered.

By the term *eternal life*, as we find it in the Apostles' Creed and in many passages of the Holy Scriptures, we understand the most blessed union and fellowship of all true believers with the most high triune God, as it initially begins to function in regeneration and at the moment when Christ, by faith, establishes His dwelling place in the heart (Eph. 3:17). By the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and by means of increase in faith, this blessed union gradually increases, and in the hour of death and at the day of the resurrection, this union will be complete and perfect in all true children of God by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in their hearts.

By virtue of Adam's fall into sin, it is man's natural state to be completely dead in trespasses and sins, and consequently he is as completely divorced from communion with God as a dead body is divorced from a living soul. By nature, there is a complete and radical separation between God and an unconverted sinner. The sinner is without God and is alienated from the life of God (Eph. 4:18). He lives and does everything without God, and he neither knows God nor the Lord Jesus Christ, for "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). The heart of the sinner is utterly void of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of life. Externally, he may manifest a measure of religious activity, and to others he may therefore have a name that he lives. However, in the core of his heart, he is truly spiritually dead and utterly separated from the living God. Reprobates and unbelievers will eternally remain in this most wretched state. They will never be delivered from this spiritual death, for with hardened and unbelieving hearts, they will continue to reject Christ, who truly is the resurrection and the life.

The case is different, however, with all elect believers. In the hour of His good pleasure, the Lord God deals with them by His Holy Spirit, whom He

sends forth into their hearts. The Spirit then works a true faith in them, thereby uniting them to the Lord Jesus, who is the fountain of life. Through Christ, He then leads them into fellowship with God the Father, working in them the boldness of faith and the filial disposition that causes them to cry out to Him, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15).

This, in principle, is how eternal life enters the hearts of believers, consisting in a true, spiritual, and eternally enduring union with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, God begins to live in them, and they in God. The apostle testifies of this, saying, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20). There is an analogy here with natural life, for we know that this consists of an intimate union between the soul and the body, as well as their internal communion one with the other. Likewise, spiritual and eternal life consists in a true, holy, and internal union of the soul with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit. This comes about in a way of free and adorable grace, whereby the soul is completely cut loose from and emptied of self, as well as from every creature under the sun. On the basis of sovereign grace, such a soul fully surrenders to God in Christ, eternally to be His property. She desires to be fully subject to Him, to cleave to Him, to depend upon Him, and to find all her light, righteousness, strength, life, and salvation solely in the triune God. She does so without either cleaving to or desiring anything in heaven or earth apart from Him.

When the soul thus fully and completely commits and surrenders herself to the triune God to be His eternal property, God, in return, gives Himself to the soul as her eternal and all-sufficient portion and possession. He occupies and fills this soul with His blessed light, love, grace, and image—yes, with the totality of His divine fullness and all-sufficiency. This, in turn, results in mutual and most intimate fellowship, as well as an internal, holy, spiritual union between God and the soul. In forsaking all that is of self, the soul then continually communes with the triune God in order to embrace, serve, cherish, and glorify Him, as well as to delight in Him. God also continually comes into the soul by His grace and Spirit, thereby filling, strengthening, comforting, and sanctifying her, and in so doing, He increasingly draws her to Himself, unites her to Himself, and, as the God of life, continually brings and sustains life in her—He in whom all the life of the soul is fully encompassed and hid in Christ (Col. 3:3).

This reciprocal union and communion between the triune God and the soul is the true spiritual life of all elect believers, and he who is lacking this still is entirely dead in trespasses and sins, “having the understanding darkened,

being alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). This is the life denominated as *eternal life*, and the Savior expresses it as follows: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). In John 3:36, we read, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” The reason it is denominated as *eternal* life is rooted in the fact that when this inner spiritual life, consisting in union and communion with the triune God, once has begun to function in one’s soul by way of regeneration and faith, it will not cease to be viable to all eternity. Christ teaches this, saying, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25–26).

God Himself is the life of all believers, for He lives and dwells in them. This life can therefore not cease to all eternity, for God is the eternally living one who alone possesses immortality. In proportion to this eternally living God uniting Himself with the soul, in that measure the soul increasingly is stirred up, made lively, and delivered from sin and death. Consequently, such a soul dies to everything outside of God in order to live and have dominion with Him. Since God’s children all have this hope within them that the triune God will once, after this life, fully and eternally unite Himself to them, we may posit that their eternal life in heaven will consist in this full union of the triune God with them.

The instructor also explains in what the eternal life of God’s children consists when he speaks of this in the person of a believer, saying, “That since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, after this life, I shall inherit perfect salvation, which ‘eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man’ to conceive, and that, to praise God therein forever.” By the phrase “eternal joy,” the instructor is simply expressing what we have said pertaining to this internal union of believers with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit. For them, this is the source of all their comfort, joy, strength, peace, and salvation, for there is for God’s children no other joy than the joy they find in their blessed nearness to and communion with the triune God. Since this shall endure forever, it shall also be to the eternal joy of them all. According to the instructor, they already feel in their hearts the beginning of this blessed and eternal joy, for, as we have seen, by faith they may already here have and maintain true communion with the triune God. Every believer experiences this in a manner consistent with the measure of grace bestowed upon him by God. Paul refers to this as the firstfruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23). However, as eminent and inexpressibly glorious as are these firstfruits, compared to the full

enjoyment of eternal blessedness after this life, they are but lowly, small, and insignificant things, and are but feeble foretastes of what shall follow.

The body of this death always remains as a barrier between God and the soul. How this impedes the soul in her precious communion with the God of her salvation, who is the God of her life! How this body causes her to be at home in the body and to be absent from the Lord! The time is coming, however, and is already near, when God's children will be fully and eternally delivered and set free from the body of this death, and be transported into heaven and unto their covenant God. Then, according to the instructor, they "shall inherit perfect salvation, which 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man' to conceive, and that, to praise God therein forever."

This perfect salvation of God's children will consist in the perfect, immediate, and eternal union with the triune God, as well as in the complete forsaking and abandoning of self. Thereby they will be fully emptied of self and be entirely filled with God, and they will be satisfied with His likeness. They will thus be fully and eternally stripped of all that is of themselves, and they will unchangeably be clothed upon with God Himself, who is their eternal dwelling place. According to the instructor, they will then do nothing but "praise God therein forever"; that is, they will eternally and most perfectly know, cherish, enjoy, serve, and glorify Him in spirit and in truth.

The perfect salvation and eternal life of God's children in heaven consists in all these matters, but due to the expiration of time, we are unable to address them any further. Even if there were an abundance of time, how would a poor and ignorant wretch like me be able to say much about it? I will readily confess before all that among the Lord's people, there is no one less capable to do it than I am, for I deem myself before the Lord to be the least and most insignificant among all who belong to the kingdom of heaven.

Having said this, according to the language of the apostle, it is a salvation of which it is true that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). This is so because we no longer have a right understanding regarding God and the blessedness of enjoying Him and having communion with Him, nor what the full denial of self will entail. We are thus unable to comprehend what we shall actually, essentially, and spiritually experience and enjoy there. Our knowledge here below proceeds entirely from our experience, and in proportion to whether our experience is either extensive or minimal, so our knowledge is either extensive or minimal. Here below, all believers are

partakers of only a partial salvation and have only a small beginning of this eternal life, and therefore they know only in part (1 Cor. 13:12)—a knowledge that is but small in beginning.

However, as to the perfect enjoyment, embracing, and glorification of God, as well as the complete forsaking of self, we shall possess and enjoy this only after this life in heavenly glory, and not until then shall the people of the Lord rightly know and be able to see with their eyes and to hear with their ears. By faith, they must therefore continually and patiently wait for this salvation. They are neither to make haste nor in any way to run ahead of the Lord, but rather, they are to submit to His way and to wait for Him with spiritual quietness and longsuffering. They are to surrender themselves into the hands of the Lord continually so that He, in Christ and by His Spirit, may increasingly win them over, mold them, and make them meet “to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12).

We will now again consider how the faith of a Christian is exercised regarding these two truths. Everyone confesses with their mouths that they believe the truths we have addressed. However, only the Lord's people, and thus sincere, regenerate, and converted believers, do so in truth. By His Word and Spirit, the Lord has inwardly taught and instructed them regarding their blessed resurrection that shall take place on the last day, as well as the eternal life of blessedness and glory that is to follow. The Lord Himself, by the indwelling ministry of His Spirit in their hearts, will, to a greater or lesser degree, comfort and assure all of His children by way of spiritual experience. Therefore, by the grace of God, they presently believe and embrace these precious truths with uprightness of heart, and with love, comfort, desire, and confidence, they are exercised therewith. It is the Holy Spirit who, by means of the Holy Scriptures, continually and increasingly assures them of these blessed truths, so that thereby their souls are sanctified, set free from sin, and increasingly united with God in Christ.

It is our prayer that the Lord, for Christ's sake, would increasingly bestow this precious grace and salvation upon His people. It is therefore our desire to conclude this treatise with Peter's prayer and supplication: “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Justification by Faith

LORD'S DAY 23

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

—ROMANS 5:1

Question 59: But what doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this?

Answer: That I am righteous in Christ, before God, and an heir of eternal life.

Question 60: How art thou righteous before God?

Answer: Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me, the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.

Question 61: Why sayest thou, that thou art righteous by faith only?

Answer: Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only.

For a poor, lost sinner, who in himself is fully mired in the midst of eternal death and damnation, nothing is so precious, delightful, glorious, and beneficial as is true saving faith, which the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of all the

elect by means of the preaching of the holy gospel—a faith that He continually increases and strengthens by means of this same gospel.

This faith is God's wonderful and inestimable gift (Eph. 2:8) and the pearl of great price. No sooner do we in truth possess such faith in our hearts than we immediately enter into blessed communion with the exalted Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are then betrothed to Him forever (Hos. 2:19). He who excels all beauty then immediately and eternally is our true bridegroom and husband, and we become His most beloved bride and wife. By faith, He immediately establishes His residence in us with His heavenly Spirit and grace, and dwells in our hearts (Eph. 3:17). We no longer live unto ourselves, but we live together with Christ, for He lives within us (Gal. 2:20). Wherever we may be in the world and in whatever locality we may find ourselves, our beloved bridegroom, Christ, is always and everywhere with us and in us. We shall never be a moment without Him, for our "life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

But, beloved, how can it be that, by God's grace, we should truly believe and have such intimate communion with the most high Son of the living God, and that He should be our husband and we should be His wife? Are we not all, in and of ourselves, unclean and hell-worthy sinners? By virtue of our sins, have we not become utterly despicable, abominable, and corrupt before God? And have we therefore not become completely intolerable in the holy sight of Him who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13)? This is indeed so, for we read that "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:4a).

However, this blessed faith that God, in His great mercy, has bestowed upon the souls of us, His children, has an efficacy and usefulness that is most glorious, for by it our hearts have been purified from sin (Acts 15:9). From this most precious faith issues forth the delightful fruit of our gracious justification in Christ, by which God, on the basis of the merits of Jesus Christ, His Son, fully and graciously pardons all our sins, as well as our sinful nature, in which we wretched sinners have all been conceived and born (Ps. 51:5). Consequently, He beholds and declares us to be completely holy and righteous in Christ, being fully and eternally clothed upon and covered with all the merits and righteousness of His Son.

This is the wondrous, gracious, and beneficent act of God from which our salvation ceaselessly issues forth as from an overflowing fountain, and it is this truth our Christian instructor addresses in this Lord's Day. After having addressed faith itself in detail, as well as the foundational articles of this faith

that a Christian must believe unto salvation, he now proceeds to consider the immediate fruit and the most blessed benefit of this most holy faith, namely, our justification. This truth is so precious and glorious, and it is absolutely essential for us that we know and understand this truth rightly and spiritually, for without such knowledge, we will be incapable of understanding the entire body of Christian doctrine. However, whatever we may imagine about ourselves, without such knowledge, we have not even a trace of true grace or salvation.

May the Lord be pleased to bless our exposition of this most weighty truth among us, leading us by His own divine illumination into this divine and most holy foundational truth of our faith, so that together we may all rightly understand and know it unto our salvation.

The instructor addresses this great doctrine of the justification of a believing sinner in the following order:

- He sets this truth before us in general terms (Question 59).
- He explains how the elect, believing sinner is justified by faith—a faith that unites the sinner to Christ by faith (Question 60).
- He further expounds this truth as to the role that must be attributed to faith in this justification (Question 61).

We shall follow in the footsteps of the instructor, endeavoring to expound these matters with brevity, clarity, and simplicity.

Regarding the first, that is, the justification of the sinner, the instructor, in general terms, asks his pupil, “But what doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this?” Here the instructor inquires what blessed fruit and benefit a true faith yields to the poor, elect sinner by God’s grace in Christ. There is a difference between true faith and counterfeit faith. The latter is a vain and dead faith, and when a man has such faith, he remains an unrighteous and damnable sinner before God. With such faith, he continues to live in sin, and daily he provokes God more and more, although he wears the garment of an external religion and has the appearance of godliness.

Consider, however, how very much this differs from true faith. The instructor teaches that each and every Christian is thereby “righteous...before God, and an heir of eternal life.” The pupil mentions here the two specific fruits or consequences of a true saving faith that all believing sinners derive from it, and though these benefits are distinct in nature, they are nevertheless always inseparably connected. These benefits are:

1. that in Christ, they are righteous before God; and
2. that they are heirs of eternal life.

How precious and glorious are these two benefits!

To be righteous before God in Christ means that God, by virtue of one's union with Christ, deems and views such a person as completely holy, righteous, and perfect, as the law requires and commands one to be—that is, being free from the least sin or sinful desire, as never having sinned against God, as being free of all evil, and as possessing all holiness and obedience—the same as was true for righteous man before the fall. This constitutes being righteous before God in Christ.

The second benefit, inseparably united to the first, is that in Christ, one is also *an heir of eternal life*; that is, one is accepted of God in Christ to be His child and to be appointed as a certain heir of eternal salvation and immortality. This cannot fail to be our portion, but shall most certainly be granted us by God's grace and for the sake of Christ's merits immediately upon the conclusion of our lives here on earth, and thereafter upon the day of resurrection.

The justification of believers consists in these two most precious and most glorious benefits. These two blessed benefits accrue to us by God's grace from the twofold obedience or satisfaction of our savior, Christ: His passive and active obedience. In His *passive obedience*, the Lord Jesus suffered and endured all that the elect and believing sinner, by virtue of the guilt of his sin, deserved to suffer in accordance with God's inflexible holiness and justice. In His *active obedience*, the Lord Jesus, on behalf of the elect and believing sinner, perfectly satisfied the demands of God's holy and divine law.

From this follows that all that Christ suffered and did is considered and reckoned by God as though the elect and believing sinner had suffered and done this personally. Consequently, for the sake of the passive obedience of Christ and out of grace, God justifies the believing sinner and fully absolves him from all guilt and punishment, the extent of which is that it is as though he had never committed even the least sin. Furthermore, God judicially bestows eternal life upon him for the sake of the active obedience of Christ, doing so as if the sinner had perfectly kept the entire law and had thereby merited eternal life in accordance with the divine promise, "That the man which doeth those things shall live by them" (Rom. 10:5).

From what has been posited, it is evident how correctly the instructor reduces the gracious justification of the sinner to these two truths or benefits: to be righteous before God and to be an heir of eternal life. He posits furthermore

that these benefits of justification are the fruits and consequences of a true saving faith, for he testifies that faith yields these benefits to the believer. And this is correct, for everything hinges solely and exclusively on true saving faith, which God, by His Spirit and out of grace, works in the souls of the elect. By faith, while willingly forsaking all his own strength and righteousness, the sinner embraces the Lord Jesus and His perfect righteousness as being his own, and he is most intimately united with this righteousness. Being then clothed with this righteousness, he is consequently justified by God.

This parallels how all men are reckoned in Adam as fallen and as having sinned, and are therefore condemned before God. In like manner, elect believers, who are united to Christ by faith, are consequently reckoned in Him as righteous before God and are thereupon declared to be heirs of eternal life (Rom. 5:12).

It is thus evident that all who are not truly ingrafted into Christ by faith and are therefore not united to Him cannot possibly be justified by God and become heirs of eternal life. Having no inherent righteousness with which they can stand before God, and not being partakers by faith of the perfect righteousness and obedience of Christ, they are and remain hell-worthy sinners before God and subject to His just curse and wrath. They are and remain utterly ungodly, and as a righteous judge, God cannot justify the ungodly as they are in themselves, for he who does these things is an “abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 17:15).

It then follows that being righteous before God and being an heir of eternal life in Christ are, as the instructor teaches, the two essential fruits or benefits of true saving and justifying faith. We thus observe what a most eminent, precious, and glorious gift of grace this faith is, and how a poor, wretched, hell-worthy, and ungodly sinner can be delivered, redeemed, and saved only in this way. “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8). The Holy Scriptures therefore compare this faith to precious gold, gold that is “tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich” (Rev. 3:18), for by means of this faith, a poor, lost sinner receives from God all spiritual riches for the sake of the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is written that God has “chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him” (James 2:5).

This doctrine of the justification of the sinner by faith will now be further explained and expounded, for the instructor asks his pupil in Question 60, “How art thou righteous before God?” We must therefore address:

1. the word *justification* itself; and
2. the matter expressed by it.

As to the word *justification*, we need to note that in the Dutch language it is a mysterious and misleading expression (not so, however, in the English language) that was introduced early into the church as a description of this doctrine.¹ It would have been better had this term never been used, and if, instead, one had retained the thrust and meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words, which simply mean that in justification, one is *declared* just rather than *being made* just. As a result, the Papists, in adhering to the literal meaning of this word, namely, the *making* just of the sinner, consider justification to be a divine benefit by which God actually makes the unrighteous and corrupt sinner both righteous and holy, infusing into him by way of baptism the principle of holiness and righteousness. This, in turn, renders the justified sinner capable of doing good works by which he is enabled to merit salvation and eternal life.

In so doing, the Papists confuse and blend together justification and sanctification, which are, however, two specific and distinct benefits of the covenant of grace, for justification occurs first and is then followed and accompanied by sanctification. God imputes to the elect and believing sinner the perfect righteousness of Christ and makes him a partaker thereof. Consequently, He acquits the guilty sinner and makes him an heir of eternal life. This is the essence of justification. Thereupon, the justified sinner receives the Holy Spirit of Christ, whereby he is then actually delivered from the power and dominion of sin, is born again, is transformed, and is renewed according to the image of God. This is the essence of sanctification, which is always the inseparable companion of justification. Paul teaches this, saying, "Ye are washed...ye are sanctified...ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

As to their nature, however, justification and sanctification are two specific benefits of the covenant of grace that are to be distinguished from one another. Therefore, when we consider the justification of the sinner, we are not to confuse it with his sanctification, but rather, we are to consider it as a special and unique benefit.

1. VanderGroe is here addressing an issue that does not exist in the English language. The Dutch word for "justification" is *rechtvaardigmaking*. The literal rendering of this word would be "to make one just." VanderGroe then goes on to explain that when God justifies a sinner, He does not *make* the sinner just, but rather, He *declares* him to be just.

The Hebrew and Greek words that describe this benefit in the Holy Scriptures simply signify that someone is acquitted of his crime and guilt by way of a judicial sentence, and he is thereby *declared* to be just. These words are derived from the judicial transactions of the human courtroom, when a judge justifies and acquits a defendant after a careful investigation of all the documentation pertaining to the charges filed against him. We find the Hebrew word in Proverbs 17:15, where we read, “He that justifieth the wicked...,” that is, he that *declares* the wicked to be just and pure. This is also true for the Greek word, as we find it in Romans 8:33–34: “It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” That is to say, God declares the believing sinner to be just, and who shall therefore be able either to sentence or to condemn him? These words, as they occur in the original languages of the Word of God, never have any other meaning than this.

From the term and its meaning, we will now proceed to consider the matter of *justification* itself. To describe justification as briefly and succinctly as possible, we posit that it is the holy, just, and immutable sentence of God, the almighty judge of heaven and earth, whereby He immediately, graciously, fully, and eternally pardons all the sins and the sinful nature of all elect and believing sinners. He thus justifies all whom He finds to be truly united by faith to His Son, Jesus Christ, with a genuine bond of fellowship that manifests itself in genuine contrition and a heartfelt sorrow over all their sins. Consequently, God *declares* them to be completely holy, just, and free from all sin, and He therefore owns them as His children and as certain heirs of eternal life.

God does so without any worthiness or merit on their part, but solely because of the perfect merits and righteousness of His Son, Christ Jesus. Through the instrumentality of faith, He bestows these upon them as being fully and eternally their own. They, in turn, sincerely embrace and receive them by faith, doing so by completely and willingly forsaking all else.

Behold, this is the essence of God's sovereign and gracious justification of all elect and believing sinners in the moment the Holy Spirit, by the gospel, works faith in their hearts, whereby they are truly united to the Lord Jesus and eternally grafted into Him as His members.

Thus, the most high God immediately pronounces, regarding their person and their state, a true, gracious, and righteous sentence that can never be annulled or altered, but rather, will remain in effect eternally. Therefore, from that moment forward, believers, in accordance with this true and righteous sentence of God, must be viewed and acknowledged in no other way than

being truly holy and righteous in Christ. They are to be esteemed as God's children, as certain heirs of eternal life, and as the bride and wife of the Lamb, whose sins in their totality have been pardoned through the blood of Christ. Satan no longer has the least claim upon them, and God no longer retains any anger or displeasure toward them.

This is whom they are *declared* to be by a sentence that has not been pronounced by either a man or an angel, but rather, by the holy and almighty God, the supreme judge of heaven and earth, whose sentence is irrevocable and according to truth. All who dwell in heaven or on earth must always acknowledge them as righteous ones, for they would otherwise be challenging God's holy and righteous sentence pronounced upon them. To all eternity, no one may ever condemn them, for thereby they would declare those who are in Christ to be sinful and guilty, and thus they would vehemently oppose the Supreme Court of Almighty God. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:33–34). What a most essential and glorious divine benefit is justification indeed!

However, to consider this in some greater detail, let us briefly address:

1. the *persons* whom we encounter in this lofty and divine courtroom of heaven; and
2. the *judicial transaction* itself, as it is executed toward them by God.

The persons whom we encounter here are the following: (a) the judge, (b) the defendant, (c) the prosecutors, and (d) the advocate.

Regarding the judge, He is none other than the most high God, the judge of all the earth, for "it is God that justifieth" (Rom. 8:33). Against God alone the sinner has sinned, for so we read in Psalm 51:4: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." It then follows that God alone is the lawgiver and judge who must judge the sinner and pardon the guilt of his sins. God therefore claims this right for Himself, saying to His believing people, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isa. 43:25).

More specifically, however, it is God the Father who comes to the foreground as judge in the justification of the sinner, for according to the eternal counsel of peace, it is He who holds the office of supreme judge. He exercises this office of supreme judge preeminently when the sinner is to be justified and

declared an heir of eternal life. It is therefore God the Father whom we are to view as the supreme judge in this gracious work of justification, who has set forth His Son “to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past” (Rom. 3:25). It is God the Father who is seated upon His judgment seat—not only to manifest His justice, but also to manifest His grace and mercy in Christ, His Son, toward sinners in forgiving all their sins.

All elect believers are summoned to appear before this great God and judge of heaven and earth to be judged by Him in a just manner. According to the instructor, they appear before God as those who “have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and [are] still inclined to all evil.” Elect believers appear here before the Lord as sinners and ungodly ones who have most dreadfully offended and affronted His holy and supreme majesty with countless sins. They have neither ever done any good nor are capable of doing any good. Instead, they are utterly sinful, corrupt, and unclean, and therefore worthy of death and eternal condemnation. They are unable to present anything before God that would excuse them, but rather, they must put their hand upon their mouths and cry out, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps. 130:3) and “Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Ps. 143:2).

Behold, the elect appear before the judgment seat of God as such ungodly and utterly damnable, guilty, and accursed sinners—as hell-worthy sinners who are evil and corrupt, and who have forfeited everything. God is a God *who justifies the ungodly* (Rom. 4:5). They all gather before His judgment seat with the sentence of death and condemnation written upon their foreheads and within their hearts. They can neither open their mouths nor dare to look upon a holy and righteous God due to the abomination of their transgressions and their shameful nakedness.

In short, in all things, they are like unto the reprobates—with these exceptions, however, that they are distinguished from them:

1. In that they have been chosen unto eternal life out of free grace and for Christ’s sake. They are therefore emphatically referred to as *God’s elect* in connection with justification, for we read in Romans 8:33: “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.”

2. In that they inwardly in their hearts are called efficaciously by God through His Spirit to appear before the throne of His justice and grace in Christ in order to be justified by Him, and to hear this judicial sentence proceed from

out of God's own mouth: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2). Paul teaches this also in Romans 8:30, saying, "Whom he called, them he also justified."

3. In that they are wrought upon by the saving conviction of the Holy Spirit to be contrite and humble before the Lord. They feel the burden of their sins and see themselves as being subject to the wrath of God, to the curse of the law, and to death and eternal condemnation. They know their utter helplessness to deliver themselves, and nevertheless it is their fervent and heartfelt desire to be delivered from such a wretched state and so great a death without any further delay.

4. In that there is found in them, by virtue of the root of faith having been wrought in their souls by the Holy Spirit, a genuine hunger and thirst after the perfect and all-sufficient righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom alone they desire to be found, "not having [their] own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:9). Therefore, as lost sinners, they repent and flee unto Christ, and for their salvation and redemption they take hold of and embrace Him by a true faith in His strength and righteousness as He is graciously offered to them by God in the promises of the holy gospel.

Behold, such is the manner in which all sinners who are justified and acquitted by God appear before Him in the divine courtroom. However, in order that the mercy of God toward such most condemnable and guilty sinners would make an even greater impression upon their hearts, their accusers and prosecutors also appear before the divine bar in order to demand their conviction and condemnation. These include:

1. The *truth* and *justice* of God the judge. These are irreconcilable enemies and accusers of the sinner, who demand that the sinner who has offended the most high majesty be committed eternally to supreme perdition.

2. *Sin* and *the law*. Sin robs the law entirely of its strength, so that the elect can in no wise be justified by the law. Sin demands that the sinner should be eternally subject to death, for death is the dominion and wages of sin, and "the sting of death is sin" (1 Cor. 15:56).

The law, being the strength of sin, joins sin in accusing the elect sinner before the judgment seat of God. It demonstrates how shamefully it has been transgressed by the sinner in all of its parts and components, and thereupon pronounces a just curse upon him. The law silences the sinner and condemns him to eternal death and condemnation, doing so with the highest measure

of fairness and justice, and in harmony with God’s own threat that “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10).

3. *Satan*, who joins divine justice, sin, and the law. He also presents himself in this court as a prosecutor, an accuser of the elect sinner, seeking greatly to aggravate the guilt of the sinner before God, and to keep the sinner away from the grace and mercy of God by the greatness and abominableness of his sins. He is, after all, “the accuser of our brethren... which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10). He positions himself at the right hand of the elect in order to resist them as he did the high priest Joshua (Zech. 3:1). He makes every effort to prevent the justification of the elect and to have them depart from God’s judgment seat as guilty. His accusation against the elect is of itself entirely just and fair, for he has an undeniable claim upon them, not only because they have willingly surrendered themselves to him by sinning, but also because God has appointed Satan himself to be a minister of His justice to execute the judgment of condemnation indiscriminately upon all sinners. Satan is therefore emphatically referred to in the Word as a just one: “Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?” (Isa. 49:24).² Thus, there are in this courtroom many mighty and just accusers and prosecutors that arise against the elect. And if that were not enough, there also appears yet another and no less compelling accuser—the human conscience.

4. *The conscience of the sinner*. The conscience acquiesces in all the accusations brought by divine justice, sin, the law, and Satan, and endorse them as being entirely fair and just. The *conscience* possesses a transparent knowledge of man’s ungodliness and his guilty and damnable condition. It brings much terror, anxiety, fear, and apprehension, for it knows nothing that could absolve or excuse the sinner. On the contrary, the conscience, illuminated by God’s Spirit, accuses the poor sinner before God and sentences him to eternal death and condemnation. This causes the sinner to cry out openly in this courtroom, “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens” (Ezra 9:6). Therefore, the accusers and prosecutors of the elect need neither any proof nor any witness in this courtroom other than the consciences

2. This statement can be rightly understood only in connection with the rendering of the Dutch *Statenvertaling*, and this rendering differs significantly from the rendering of the KJV. The Dutch rendering of this text is as follows: “Zou ook een machtige de vangst ontnomen worden, of zouden de gevangenen eens rechtvaardigen ontkomen?” Translation: “Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or should the prisoners of the just one escape?”

of the elect, prompting them to acknowledge and confess everything before this great judge.

How fearful and dreadful it would be for all elect sinners in this divine courtroom if they had to defend and be accountable themselves! How they would be covered with eternal shame, how their mouths would be stopped, and how guilty and condemnable they would be! Oh, there is not one that would be able to escape the severe and righteous sentence of eternal condemnation. However, over against this entire group of mighty accusers and prosecutors, there is in the courtroom the advocate to intercede for the elect, namely, the great mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. According to 1 John 2:1, He is their advocate, who has the power and resources to protect them against all their accusers and relentless prosecutors—also to enter a countersuit on behalf of His people and to secure a gracious acquittal from the Father for them against all their accusations. He is their advocate to be a shield for them, to provide a covering for them in reference to God's justice and against all the fiery darts of their enemies, and thus to bring their case to a good end—their being fully justified before the judgment seat of God.

We have hereby considered the four different types of persons who appear in this illustrious and divine court.

It being necessary for us to understand who these persons are that congregate in this holy and awe-inspiring court of heaven, we will now proceed to consider the judicial transaction itself.

It is the Lord God, the supreme judge of heaven and earth, who conducts this court session in heaven regarding poor, elect, and believing sinners when He proceeds to justify them graciously in Christ. He is, so to speak, seated upon His awe-inspiring judgment seat, and from there He proceeds to pronounce His sentence in harmony not only with truth and righteousness, but also in harmony with infinite grace and mercy.

He investigates the state of poor, elect sinners as they are in themselves, and as they appear before Him, He finds them to be entirely guilty, ungodly, abominable, hostile, despicable, damnable, and exceedingly worthy of punishment. By virtue of His truth and holiness, He cannot judge them to be anything other than this.

He also concludes that as such, they have been lawfully charged and accused before Him by sin, Satan, the law, and their own consciences, and that by virtue

of His own holiness, justice, and truth, He must necessarily damn and punish them eternally and cause His wrath to bear down upon them.

It is at this point, however, that the Lord, the righteous judge, so to speak turns the page, and according to their true state, by virtue of their being united to His Son, Jesus Christ, by a true faith, He beholds these poor, elect, and believing sinners. He now views them fully in Christ, His Son, with whom they, by faith, have become one plant, one body, and one in spirit. Christ now appears before Him as the head, husband, patron, and advocate of all His believing people, who in no wise will be divorced from them, and therefore He now sets before His Father all His holy merits, as well as the manner in which He committed Himself to be their surety and redeemer. He testifies how He once endured His Father's curse and wrath for all their sins, how He died on their behalf, how He fulfilled all the righteousness of the law on their behalf, and how He thereby merited and secured for them the pardon of their sins and eternal life. Hereby Christ fully cancels and blots out all the charges and demands of God's justice, of sin, of the law, and of Satan, and He demands of His heavenly Father, the righteous judge, the acquittal and redemption of all the elect, saying, "Deliver [them] from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" (Job 33:24).

Hereupon the Lord God, as the supreme and exalted judge of heaven and earth, renders a judgment regarding the state of these poor believing sinners that is according to truth and righteousness. He pronounces an eternal, irrevocable, and gracious sentence regarding them in the courtroom of heaven. He does so by means of His Holy Word, and also in the hearts and consciences of believers, by the efficacious operation of His Spirit.

In this most holy and blessed divine sentence, the following two matters converge:

1. The Lord God imputes to elect believers all the holy merits and the entire satisfaction of Christ, His Son, as having been accomplished for them alone. He credits this fully to their account, and He declares and rules the entire satisfaction of Christ to be the satisfaction of believers, and that it shall eternally remain theirs. Furthermore, He declares that they are eternally covered and clothed with it, and nevermore will He view or consider them in any other way but as such. They must therefore be acknowledged as such by all creatures and always be esteemed in light of what the instructor teaches, saying, "God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I

never had had, nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me.”

2. However, being not yet satisfied with this, the Lord, as the supreme judge, now proceeds in pronouncing His holy and gracious sentence by declaring poor, sinful believers, as they are in His Son, Jesus Christ, and for the sake of His perfect satisfaction, to be fully justified, holy, perfect, and without any trace of sin or sinful corruption. He rules that in His Son, Jesus Christ, they are precisely such as the law, in the most spiritual and holy sense, requires them to be before God. In His Son, Jesus Christ, He rules and declares them to be His beloved children and certain heirs of eternal life, and that in conformity to what Christ has merited and secured on their behalf, they shall most certainly be redeemed and saved eternally.

Behold, this is the sentence of almighty God regarding all believers, and this is what Paul has in mind when he writes, “Being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7).

It is thus evident that in the justification of the sinner, all human merit, in whatever form or manner one would consider it, is utterly and radically excluded. The only foundation upon which the justification of the sinner rests is to be exclusively found in the sovereign grace and mercy of the Father, and in the perfect mediatorial obedience and righteousness of the Son, embraced by the sinner by faith and imputed by God to him as being his own. Paul teaches this clearly, saying, “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

We must here be watchful and on guard against the thought that the act of faith, as it is exercised by the sinner by virtue of the efficacy and operation of the Spirit, yields any worthiness or merit to the sinner, so that God would justify him on the basis of it. This is an error taught by all Pelagians, Papists, Arminians, and some Anabaptists, each doing so in their own way and according to their own presuppositions.

The instructor teaches differently and in harmony with God's Word as he asks his pupil in Question 61, “Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only?” and he causes him to answer, “Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only.”

That the sinner is justified by faith alone is taught throughout the Holy Scriptures (Rom. 5:1; 3:28). However, it is by no means taught that this faith, as an act of human obedience, renders the sinner worthy before God and enables him to merit justification from sin, either fully or partially. On the contrary, this faith, by its very nature, fully excludes any activity or merit of man, and prompts man entirely to deny himself and to seek his salvation and redemption outside of himself fully and solely in Christ. Faith functions here only as a means. It is the hand of the soul whereby Christ is received by the sinner as a gift, and whereby he puts on His righteousness as one puts on a garment. Just as the reception of alms or the putting on of a garment does not contribute anything meritorious to such an act, so the act of faith is of no consideration with God in the matter of justification. In the Holy Scriptures, justification is therefore always clearly placed over against the merits and works of man.

We therefore conclude that the sentence of acquittal, and thus the justification of the sinner, as pronounced by God, rests solely and exclusively on the sovereign grace of God and the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ. The sinner embraces this by faith, and the Father imputes it to him as being his own obedience and righteousness.

As to the moment when God graciously justifies the elect and believing sinner, it is certain that this cannot occur until the elect sinner actually receives Christ and His righteousness by faith and is united to Him. In essence, until that transpires, the elect sinner remains entirely void of the righteousness of Christ, for this righteousness neither can be imputed to him nor can he be a partaker of it in any way but upon the actual exercise of faith. He is then still entirely estranged from Christ and still lives for his own account, and is thus considered as being outside of Christ, truly subject to God's wrath and utterly unrighteous before God. Therefore, he cannot actually and personally be justified by God until he, being convinced of his guilt by an efficacious and inward calling, is summoned to appear before God's throne of grace. Thus, he is not justified until he appears there and embraces by faith the surety and mediator, Christ, and His righteousness. Only then is he personally brought into fellowship with Christ, and, as we have seen, justified as one who is united to Christ by faith. Therefore, throughout the Word, the justification of the sinner is always affiliated with faith and issues forth from faith as a necessary fruit.

The moment the elect sinner embraces Christ and believes in Him, the gracious sentence of justification is pronounced upon him. This takes place immediately upon the very first extrinsic act of faith, even when that faith is

but very feeble and weak. Thus, it takes place immediately when the poor sinner, by the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit, bows with his whole heart before Christ and embraces Christ as He offers Himself as his all-sufficient savior. Without any reluctance or restraint, and fully relying upon sovereign grace alone, he surrenders himself to Him for salvation. Immediately and at that very moment, God pronounces His righteous sentence upon this poor, believing sinner in the manner as we already have considered.

When, however, the Lord God pronounces this blessed sentence, this occurs neither outside of the believing sinner nor entirely without his knowledge. On the contrary, such a weighty and most glorious matter, which is foundational for the entire work of salvation and yields such great and blessed results for us, cannot possibly remain entirely unknown to us. The very nature of this great work of God does not allow such a thing. Therefore, regarding God's justification of the sinner, we are to view it from two vantage points:

1. as an *actual* event wrought and accomplished by God; and
2. as a *passive* event wrought in the believing sinner by the operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby the believing sinner, by faith, receives it within his heart, and there feels, tastes, and enjoys it along with all of its blessed fruits.

In summary, the moment the Lord God justifies the poor, believing sinner:

First, He grants him Christ with all His merits, and the sinner embraces Christ and all His merits by a true faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit. He appropriates this for himself, and with his heart, he fully trusts in and relies upon Christ.

Second, God immediately removes from the believing sinner the entire guilt of sin that hitherto oppressed and grieved him, and He proclaims to him peace, atonement, and the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ's atonement (Rom. 5:1).

Third, God reveals Himself in Christ to the poor, believing sinner with a measure of true, spiritual, and heavenly light as being an infinitely gracious, merciful, and reconciled God and Father in Christ. He sends forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, "crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15).

Fourth, He immediately fills the heart of this poor sinner with a sweet, heavenly joy and comfort, so that the sinner must here exclaim (even if it is but for a few moments), "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath

covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isa. 61:10).

Fifth, God immediately sanctifies the believing sinner and, by faith, purifies his heart from sin. He becomes a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), and God immediately gives him a new heart and puts a new spirit within him (Ezek. 36:26; Jer. 31:33).

Sixth, God immediately seals and establishes the heart of the believing sinner with His Holy Spirit. Paul teaches this in Ephesians 1:13–14, saying, "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

Behold, all of these divine and spiritual graces always immediately accompany justification and are inseparably connected to it, albeit that all believers do not experience this with the same measure of light and efficacy, but rather, in proportion to the measure of one's faith. Nevertheless, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the least and weakest among believers truly enjoys all of this as to the root of the matter, that is, as much as is needed to regenerate and renew him, and thereby make him a child of God in Christ Jesus.

If faith and God's justification of the sinner did not truly yield such fruits in our souls, such faith would not be divine faith and such justification would not be divine justification. Rather, they would be a dead faith and a dead justification, for Scripture links all of these heavenly graces to true faith and God's justification of the sinner, and thus attributes them to all believers. They must therefore certainly and actually be found in them, or else the Holy Scriptures would not be teaching us truth.

This does not contradict the fact that a true believer must afterward frequently cope with manifold seasons of darkness, doubts, fears, inner turmoil, and strife regarding his salvation. These all issue forth from unbelief that yet remains in them, but, as we have seen, this does not prevent him from being truly justified by God through faith.

It remains to address one more thing, namely, that when the sinner has once been justified by God, he will always and unalterably remain so as to the essence of the matter, for he will never be condemned who has once been truly united to Christ. God remains faithful, and He cannot deny Himself. However, as far as justification being pronounced, applied, and made known to the believer, this must continually be renewed and repeated by God upon renewed exercises of faith. This is not a new justification, but the same justification that

occurred upon the first act of faith, and which must be repeated by God and be applied by renewal, by Word and Spirit, to the souls of believers. If it may please the Lord, we will expound this in greater detail in our exposition of the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, which deals with the daily forgiveness of our sins or debts.

And so, dear reader, we have addressed and expounded this great and glorious doctrine of the faith. Here you behold the wondrous way of salvation in which poor, miserable, accursed, and damnable sinners may be saved. How unsearchable are the height, length, depth, and breadth of divine wisdom, power, and goodness in regard to this wondrous way of salvation!

Let me conclude by saying a few words, for we have already demonstrated that we must truly, personally, and essentially be justified by God through faith, without which we shall perish eternally and continue to be under condemnation, no matter what civil honesty and external religion may have characterized us while we lived here upon earth. By God's Word and Spirit, we must be convicted of our guilt and condemnation, and by way of a powerful calling, we must in our hearts be summoned before God's throne. There we must appear as condemned and ungodly sinners, who, due to our wickedness and corruption, are utterly incapable of any good. There, completely denying ourselves, we must by faith uprightly and essentially take refuge in Christ and His strength and righteousness as the only proposed means unto salvation. And thus, we who are damnable sinners in ourselves must be declared righteous before God in Christ, and by free and sovereign grace, we must be acquitted by Him and be adopted as His children.

If, however, this does not truly and essentially transpire in our lives, we will, by virtue of the guilt of our sins, remain subject to the wrath of God and to the curse of the law, and for time and eternity, we will remain deprived of all salvation and grace.

Therefore, my beloved friends, whoever you may be, we admonish you in the name of God and of Christ that you take these weighty matters to heart and that you painstakingly examine yourselves in this regard, for your supreme and eternal welfare is at stake. There is no middle road here that you can traverse. On the contrary, at this very moment, already you ought to have been truly and essentially justified in God's courtroom, and thus be a child of God and an heir of eternal life. Else you will still be an ungodly one, and you will thus be subject to death and damnation. However, you are still here, and you are still

being summoned by God in His Word to appear before His throne of grace, so that there you might be justified in Christ and be the recipient of a gracious acquittal and salvation.

See to it that you do not neglect this time and day of grace by being indifferent, inattentive, careless, and carnally secure, for I declare and proclaim in the name of God that hereafter and to all eternity there shall no longer be any time for this. You are presently in this world, and you have not been acquitted of your sins. Hereafter, there shall be no justification for you. Instead, you will most certainly and eternally be damned, and on the last day, you will not be able to stand before the judgment seat of God.

And you who are justified believers, permit me to admonish you with a few words on the Lord's behalf. You must:

1. give all honor and thanksgiving to the triune God for this great and gracious benefit bestowed upon you;
2. consider this benefit as the only ground of your salvation, and build and secure your salvation on that foundation;
3. always greatly esteem Christ and His righteousness, and strive by faith to be more and more intimately united to Him;
4. endeavor to walk as truly justified children of God and heirs of eternal life;
5. seek to attain to be increasingly and more powerfully assured of your justification; and
6. endeavor daily, by way of renewed exercises of faith, to have the gracious acquittal of your guilt repeated and applied to your souls unto your comfort, your peace, your joy, and your sanctification.

To this end, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ desires powerfully to apply all His promises to you, and by His Son, to make them yea and amen in you. May the Lord do so indeed. Amen.

The Doctrine of Justification Defended

LORD'S DAY 24

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

—ROMANS 3:27–28

Question 62: But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?

Answer: Because that the righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.

Question 63: What! Do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?

Answer: This reward is not of merit, but of grace.

Question 64: But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?

Answer: By no means: for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

Among all spiritual truths, there is no one single truth in God's Word taught more plainly and transparently than the gracious justification of the elect sinner solely and exclusively for the sake of the satisfaction and righteousness of the Lord Jesus—all of which is embraced by the sinner by faith and graciously bestowed upon and imputed to him by God. There is, however, also no truth that is embraced more reluctantly and believed with less clarity than this doctrine.

This truth is articulated with utmost clarity throughout Scripture, which teaches clearly and plainly that the elect are saved as sinners who in themselves are utterly “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17). In justification, God grants to them, as ungodly, impotent, and lost sinners in themselves, His Son, Jesus Christ, with a complete and all-sufficient righteousness, whereby their naked souls, as with a garment, are completely and eternally covered. By way of an upright faith worked in their hearts, the elect embrace Christ and His all-sufficient righteousness out of the hand of God, and in so doing, they are truly united to Christ. For Christ's sake, God then absolves them purely out of free and unconditional grace from all their sins, as well as from the guilt and punishment due to their sins, and He embraces them as heirs of eternal life.

Albeit that God reveals this truth and this way of the sinner's salvation most clearly throughout His Word, it is believed and embraced unto salvation by an inexpressibly small number of people. Our profound ignorance and prevailing darkness regarding the things of the Spirit of God are generally so great that unless the Lord Himself, by His Word and Spirit, powerfully opens and illuminates the understanding, and thereby cures us for the first time or by renewal of our innate and erroneous legalistic conceptions, we shall to all eternity be incapable of understanding correctly this truth regarding the gracious justification of the sinner by believing in Christ Jesus. This is true no matter how soundly we may speak of it in accordance with the Word of God and however zealously we may defend this truth against all who oppose it.

There are abundant reasons for me to limit myself to our Reformed Church in expounding how little this truth regarding the gracious justification of the sinner before God is believed by those who openly confess and promote it. By nature, the only essential difference between us and the Papists, Socinians, Arminians, and others is that they openly propagate, confess, and defend their error. We hide it in our hearts, and we confess with our mouths that which differs from what we inwardly believe with our hearts.

Presently I am, however, specifically called upon to defend God's truth toward such public opponents outside of the pale of our church. Let me preface this by saying that we will not merely rebut their sentiments. Rather, we will also address all unconverted, nominal Reformed Christians and lip confessors, for as to the root of the matter, they are inwardly of the same mind as the opponents of this truth outside of our church, regardless of how much they may outwardly and verbally contradict this and distance themselves from it.

Martin Luther, the renowned man of God, said in his day that there is a pope in everyone's bosom. This is certainly true, and whoever does not believe this has never acquired any true self-knowledge. We will never be truly Reformed until we are converted and spiritually reborn, and by faith are truly united with God in Christ. Only then will we be taught to understand our Reformed doctrine correctly and will be completely convinced that it is the only true doctrine unto salvation revealed to us in the Word of God.

With the Lord's gracious help and assistance, and in dependence upon His holy blessing, we will now further vindicate the doctrine of the gracious justification of the elect sinner by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as we expounded it for you this past Lord's Day, and we will do so by the rebuttal of opponents and detractors. However, for the benefit of our unpretentious readers, we will do so more didactically than polemically, adhering as much as possible to the clear language of our Catechism.

In addressing this matter, the instructor observes the following order:

1. He briefly formulates the essential difference between us and the opponents of this truth, confirming our doctrine more explicitly in Question 62.
2. He defends our doctrine in Questions 63 and 64 against the objections advanced by these parties.

The instructor begins by articulating the exact nature of the difference between us and the enemies of this truth, asking, "But why cannot our good works be the whole, or part of our righteousness before God?" The essential difference briefly consists of this: Is the elect sinner justified by God and received unto salvation truly and only without any of his own merits and purely out of sovereign grace because of the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of the Lord Jesus? Furthermore, does the elect sinner embrace all of the aforementioned with a true faith that is bestowed upon and imputed to him by God as being his own? Or are the sinner's own works entirely or partially the meritorious cause of his salvation and of his justification before God?

We posit and confess the former propositions, and the external enemies and opponents of this truth posit the latter. They are commonly designated as full or semi-Pelagians, deriving their name from their leader, Pelagius. This pernicious heretic and corrupter of the true doctrine according to godliness lived at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth centuries following the birth of the Savior. They who are considered full-blooded Pelagians are so designated

because they completely follow the heretic Pelagius, positing and teaching that God justifies man solely because of his own merits and good works, and that man has no need of any other righteousness before God unto salvation. Semi-Pelagians are they who follow the heretic Pelagius only partially, teaching that man is not fully justified before God by his good works, but rather, partially, and that Christ, by way of His righteousness, also adds His part. The instructor has this two-pronged error in mind when he asks, "But why cannot our good works be the whole, or part of our righteousness before God?"

However, in order that you might be better informed as to what the principal errors are in the world regarding the doctrine of salvation, and that you would better understand the grounds of all other false religions, we will therefore address this briefly and transparently so that you may hear:

1. how little knowledge there is among the people of the world regarding the true way of salvation as it is revealed to us in God's Word;
2. how great a grace and privilege it is that the true doctrine of salvation is preached so soundly to us; and
3. what this should bring forth in us.

Among the Pelagians, we will primarily distinguish between four different religions: Paganism, Islam, Judaism, and Socinianism.

Regarding the *Pagans* of the past, as well as the large multitude of them who are present in the world today, we understand them to be a people living entirely without any knowledge of Christ, and thus without knowledge of the true God, for there is no proclamation of the Word or the gospel among them. These wretched people—though, in a sense, they are more blessed than thousands of our nominal Christians—know of no other salvation than that which they must acquire by their imaginary good works and virtues. Among them, they who have any interest in their eternal well-being seek to secure it solely by their own efforts, be it by sorrow over their sins, as well as by prayers, purifications, sacrifices, virtuous lives, countless external religious ceremonies, the torturing of their bodies, and doing penance. They know of no other way of salvation than this.

The *Muslims*, who follow the vile deceiver Mohammed and his teaching, rest upon the same foundation as the Pagans. They know only of a way of salvation that consists of their own works, the merits of the flesh, the performance of external duties, natural virtues, and self-willed religious ceremonies. These

all conform to the teaching and precepts of their false prophet, Mohammed, whose book, the *Koran*, is as divine to them as is the Word of the Lord unto us.

The *Jews* are the descendants of the old and beloved people of God, and presently they are, in a certain sense, still the beloved of God for the fathers' sake. Prior to the end of the world, the Lord shall yet bring them to conversion, "and he shall turn... the heart of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6). Though they received of God the purest and clearest revelation of the true way of salvation in His Word, God having favored them above all the nations of the earth by showing "his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel" (Ps. 147:19), they nevertheless did not avail themselves of this advantage. By a secret judgment of God, they departed early on from the doctrine of their fathers, and having become ignorant of the true way of salvation and the service of God, they have become completely carnal and have established their own righteousness before God. They no longer seek their salvation and justification purely and solely by faith in the Seed of the woman, the Messiah, but rather seek to be saved and justified by a mere external observation of the law and the shadows of its institutions, relying solely upon their natural propensities. Such was their practice during the time of the apostles.

Paul therefore wrote all of his epistles purposefully having them in mind, so that they might thereby be persuaded. He says regarding them: "But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law" (Rom. 9:31–32). Therefore, he testifies regarding their entire religion "that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:2). As being in a pit without water, the Jews are still mired in the quagmire of their own works and meritoriousness with regard to the law. They are therefore concerned only with natural virtues and with external adherence to God's commandments and the antiquated precepts of the law, seeking to be justified before God by such adherence. Additionally, they foster the vain hope and expectation regarding the coming of a Messiah into the world—an expectation that is purely carnal, and therefore nothing other than the deceit of the devil, who blinds their minds.

Though the *Socinians* present their views somewhat differently, according to the deceitful inventions of their darkened and cunning hearts that have become utterly vain, they build on the same foundation as do the Jews and other unbelievers. Their sentiments regarding the way of salvation are as follows: they view God not only as an omnipotent and supreme God who is able

and willing to forgive sins without having His holy justice in any way satisfied, but also as a God who bestows salvation and eternal life upon men purely by virtue of His sovereign and omnipotent good pleasure on the grounds of man's natural virtuousness and his self-willed obedience of God's commandments. However deficient and imperfect this may be, they believe that God will view such virtuousness and obedience as perfect and complete if it is but sincere. The Socinian therefore has no need for Christ's intercession, righteousness, and salvation whatsoever, and he instead believes that God will justify and save him apart from any of the merits of Christ.

As to the *Semi-Pelagians*, we specifically have the *Remonstrants* or *Arminians* in mind, with all others who, in essence, subscribe to their view. The Arminian sentiment regarding the justification of the sinner before God and the way of salvation consists in this: they subscribe to a mediate position between full-blooded Pelagians and the orthodox, and in some measure yield to each side. They credit the way of salvation to both Christ and man, considering that each party contributes to the whole. Christ is then the primary cause of salvation, and man the secondary cause. They teach that Christ, by the merits of His death, has placed His Father into the position to bestow reconciliation, the forgiveness of sins, and salvation upon all sinners who believe. Regarding man, they teach that he himself must negotiate with God and thereby secure and merit the forgiveness of sins and salvation by his own faith and obedience. Christ would then have rendered God only *ready to be reconciled*, but man must settle this matter with God on his own, and thus apart from Christ. Man must thereby seek to secure reconciliation with God by a faith and obedience that proceed from his own strength and will, and thus apart from the efficacious operation and influence of the Holy Spirit.

This is the Arminian doctrine regarding the way of salvation, and insofar as it speaks of Christ and His grace, it appears outwardly attractive to man's darkened and corrupted understanding. However, in essence, it is nothing more than a convoluted mixture of the soul-damning errors of previously identified heresies.

As to the teaching of the *Mennonites* or *Anabaptists*, we cannot address any particulars, for though they all bear the same name and agree in some particulars, yet in regard to the doctrine of the justification of the sinner, they differ significantly among themselves. Some agree in essence with the Socinians, others with the Arminians, and some even with us who are Reformed.

However, there are others outside of our church who need to be considered, namely, the *Papists* or *Roman Catholics*, for their false and abominable doctrine grievously misleads and corrupts a very significant portion of this world. Their view regarding the way of salvation or the justification of the sinner is that God justifies a man in a twofold manner: in one respect, he is justified without his own works and merits, and in another respect, by his own works and merits. They posit that, by virtue of external baptism, administered shortly after birth, God at that moment bestows upon the baptized individual the internal or foundational principles of righteousness and holiness, thereby completely washing away hereditary sin. They consider this to be the first act of justification. They posit that man is thereby equipped to obey God's law and to perform all good works by the exercise of his own will, being able to do so even more abundantly than God requires of him in His law. They then teach that by virtue of these good works and this obedience, God proceeds to justify man fully and bestows salvation upon him as a reward upon His own work. They consider this to be the second act of justification, whereby man is eternally saved if he remains obedient unto the end.

We have thus briefly informed you as to what is being taught beyond the pale of our church regarding the justification of the sinner. We have done so to give you a better understanding regarding all heretical religions, as well as the primary arguments upon which they are founded. You know that we are not accustomed to devote much time to this, considering it to be neither necessary nor profitable.

From what we have set before you, you may conclude that all other religions fully depart from the true and only way of salvation, having this in common, that they build upon the foundation of one's own righteousness and of a legalistic covenant of works, thereby despising the Lord Jesus Christ and His grace, salvation, and all-sufficient redemption. The only exception is the old and orthodox *Lutheran* religion. With us, the Lutherans have remained steadfast regarding the doctrinal truth of the gracious justification of the sinner by faith in Christ. Therefore, anyone who dies while believing the teaching of the previously identified heretical religions cannot be saved, for Christ has become of no effect unto them, for they seek in some way yet to be justified by the law, and they are therefore fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). This is so absolutely certain that a truly spiritual person does not entertain the least doubt regarding it.

In addition to the aforementioned heretical inclinations and religions, there is another that is least recognized and yet is, for us, the most dangerous and

harmful of them all. This is the sentiment of people who are sound in their confession of the true Reformed doctrine of salvation and who openly promote and defend it. Since they are born under a broken covenant of works, they embrace in their hearts no other way of salvation than by their works and merits, seeking by them alone to be justified before God. Tenaciously, they cling to this way, although they confess Christ with their lips to be the only cause and author of their salvation, pretending that they are “all as an unclean thing” and that all their “righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

Should you ask me who such hypocritical and erring people are, I would respond that they are all of the unconverted and unregenerate lip confessors of the Reformed faith. Most of our congregations here in the Netherlands, to a very large extent, consist of such lip confessors. However orthodox they may be in their confession, they are nevertheless utterly heretical at heart, for in their hearts they do not embrace the gracious justification of the sinner before God by faith. Regardless of the fact that the majority do not believe what I am saying here, I know that before the Lord I am speaking the truth, and that at His time, He will reveal it to be so.

Having been taught this by the Lord, we must therefore consider that, as to the essence and foundation of the doctrine of salvation, no one throughout the world is truly orthodox and saved except they who are truly converted and regenerated, and who are thus true believers in Christ Jesus. According to the election of grace, the Lord has yet left such a remnant among us, and they are known to Him, for “the Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Tim. 2:19).

Outside of this small remnant of truly regenerate believers, we must say, regarding the innumerable multitude of people residing throughout the world, that of them it is true what is written in Isaiah 53:6: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.” Happy is that people whom the Lord has separated from this heretical multitude and whom He “hath called... out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Having addressed in some measure the false religions and heresies of the world, we wish to follow the instructor by affirming briefly and in some greater detail the true doctrine of salvation and of the gracious justification of elect sinners by faith in Christ Jesus.

Being desirous to affirm even more fully the doctrine of the gracious justification of the sinner by showing that our own works, or a portion thereof, cannot possibly be our righteousness before God, the instructor posits that “the

righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law.”

This matter is so transparent to all who, in simplicity, behold this truth with a spiritual eye. God, so to speak, places us and all men before the choice of appearing before Him in His tribunal with either our own righteousness or solely with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. By choosing the one, we must necessarily reject the other, for we neither can nor may appear before God simultaneously with both. On the contrary, he who prefers his own righteousness either partially or fully sets aside the all-sufficient righteousness of Christ, whereas he who prefers the righteousness of Christ sets aside all his own righteousness.

Let us assume that we choose our own righteousness, be it partial or full, and that we wish to establish this before God and present it to Him at His tribunal in order to be judged accordingly. We may do this, but we must then recognize from the outset that to be justified by God and to become an heir of eternal life, the righteousness we then wish to present before God in His tribunal must necessarily be, according to the instructor, “absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law.” This means that, both internally and externally, we must be completely holy and perfect, and thus without the least trace of sin or sinful corruption, for God’s law requires such obedience, holiness, and righteousness from us. We demonstrated and proved this extensively in Lord’s Day 2, Question 4, for there we observed what the law requires from us: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and the great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:37–39).

God’s law rigidly requires this perfect love and holiness from us. On the one hand, it assuredly promises us eternal life upon our complete and comprehensive obedience, saying, “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them” (Lev. 18:5). On the other hand, it completely curses and condemns us unto eternal perdition if we either deviate from it even in the very least or transgress it in our hearts. The apostle teaches this clearly, saying, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10).

This holy law of God cannot be altered to all eternity, for it has, so to speak, proceeded from God’s heart and is an expression of His essential and immutable holiness. It is therefore very evident that if we wish merely to be justified

before God out of the law and by our own righteousness, it must necessarily then be in conformity to the law that we must also inwardly and externally be as completely holy and as perfectly righteous as was Adam, prior to the fall.

According to the instructor, there is no other righteousness that can be approved before the tribunal of God. This truth is both plain and simple. However, what is our true condition? Are we capable of presenting to God such a perfect and complete righteousness?

By no means, for the instructor teaches, in conformity with God's Word, that "our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin." There is no need to expound and affirm this truth in greater detail, for we did so extensively and deliberately when we addressed man's natural state of misery in the first segment of our Catechism. We did so particularly by way of Questions 5 and 8, where we were instructed that we are prone by nature to hate God and our neighbor, and that "we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness... except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God."

It is then self-evident that we never will be able, to all eternity, to appear before God's tribunal with a personal righteousness that is both perfect and complete. Consequently, the way to be justified by our own righteousness, whether partially or fully, is eternally cut off for all mankind. Since, however, we must appear before God with an absolutely perfect righteousness if we are to be justified by Him and be eternally received unto salvation, then if we shall be saved, there remains no other option but to fully deny and forsake all our own righteousness and, as hell-worthy, ungodly, and impotent sinners, to turn to the Lord Jesus by a true and upright faith. Our only option is, by way of the gospel covenant of omnipotent and sovereign grace, to surrender ourselves fully and eternally to Him, taking hold of and appropriating His strength and righteousness, and permitting ourselves to be clothed with this righteousness alone, so that God might thereby justify us freely "by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

This is indeed the true and only way of life and salvation, and he who does not enter and walk upon that way uprightly can neither be saved nor reconciled with God to all eternity—regardless of what ways he may seek and pursue to that end. Salvation is to be found in Christ Jesus alone, and in no other, for "neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

We will now briefly consider the objections that are advanced by opponents of the truth against this doctrine of the gracious justification of the sinner by faith in Christ Jesus, and how they are dismantled by the instructor. The instructor sets before us the two that are most prominent.

In Question 63, he asks, “Do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?” You should know that the Holy Scriptures are filled with gracious promises of God, in which He promises His believing people that He will temporally and eternally reward their service of love and their obedience, and bless them eternally “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Consider also Matthew 5:12, in which Christ says to His believing people, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.” In Psalm 19:11, David declares regarding God’s commandments that “in keeping of them there is great reward,” and there are many similar passages.

The opponents of the truth, due to their darkened and legalistic mind-set, conclude from the fact that God will both temporally and eternally reward man’s good works that God necessarily views and rewards them as being meritorious, and upon this it thus follows, they say, that man can be either partially or fully justified by God by his own righteousness. We ought not to be surprised at all that such men (due to their darkened and legalistic mind-set) reason in this fashion, for we know that they do not have the spirit of discernment, and consequently they have no knowledge at all of the gospel covenant of grace as to its nature and its promises. Rather, they interpret God’s Word accordingly, and thus in an entirely carnal fashion.

With the spirit of discernment, the instructor fully removes this objection, saying, “This reward is not of merit, but of grace.” This crucial distinction must be correctly understood by us, for there is an immense difference between a *meritorious* reward and a *gracious* reward.

Regarding a meritorious reward, four matters are to be considered:

1. He who works to secure such a reward must do all of his work in his own strength and by his own initiative.
2. He must do his work voluntarily, and thus without there being the least obligation or compulsion.
3. His work must yield some benefit and advantage to the one for whom he is doing the work and who will reward him.
4. The reward that is given must be proportionate to the work that is done.

It should be crystal clear that God can never deal with us sinners by rewarding us according to our merits, for:

- a. Whatever work we do that is spiritually good, we can do only by the grace, Spirit, and power of God within us, “for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).
- b. All that we do in this manner we are obligated to do as creatures and dependent subjects of God in conformity to His law. The Savior teaches this, saying, “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10).
- c. With our work, we cannot yield the least advantage to God, who is most blessed and most perfect, “for who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?” (Rom. 11:35). In Job 22:2–3, the question is asked: “Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?”
- d. Our work is not in the least proportionate to God's reward. Our work is minimal and deficient, and God's reward is an eternal life that is supremely glorious and blessed. Paul affirms this when he writes, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

The aforementioned makes it crystal clear to all who have a correct knowledge regarding this matter that God never can, in any fashion, have any dealings with man by rewarding him on the basis of merit. Consequently, every reward that God promises His people upon their love and obedience must be attributed entirely to the gospel covenant of grace, by which God will reward all His people purely upon the basis of grace alone, and will bless them with all spiritual and heavenly blessings in Christ Jesus, doing so for the sake of His merits and righteousness. In this covenant, God so generously promises and sets before them such rewards in order to revive, strengthen, and comfort them thereby, so that they would be “stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as [they] know that [their] labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). The Holy Scriptures therefore expressly refer to salvation and eternal life

as “the gift of God” (Rom. 6:23), and throughout these Scriptures it is affirmed that “by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8); also, that we are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). By way of necessary consequence, these passages render this objection null and void.

There is yet another objection, or rather, a vile accusation and a slanderous assertion that is made by opposing parties regarding the holy doctrine that is according to godliness. The instructor addresses this in Question 64, saying, “But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?” None of those who understand the truth as it is in Jesus should be all too surprised by such an objection. It necessarily proceeds from the darkened and legalistic minds of men, for flesh and blood cannot grasp it. All our children have to be taught by the Lord Himself through His Spirit; otherwise, they will neither be able to be at peace with this nor able truly to embrace the truth that is of God.

Early on, the legalistic Jews confronted the apostle Paul with this objection when he set before them the doctrine of the gracious justification of the elect sinner before God purely by faith alone. We observe this in Romans 3:8, where we read that they were of the opinion that if man is justified before God purely by grace through faith in Christ, without God giving the least consideration to their own works or merits, this necessarily opens the door widely to all to be careless and ungodly, for in justifying sinners, God does not regard the work of man, but rather the work of Christ alone.

The enemies of the truth outside of the Reformed Church speak and judge in like fashion, for along with the Jews, they are resting upon the same legalistic foundation, and their sole objective is therefore to resurrect a broken covenant of works.

When one teaches the truth as it is in Christ Jesus correctly, spiritually, soundly, and in simplicity; and when one teaches that in all things one must submissively wait upon the Lord Jesus by faith, trusting alone in His righteousness and depending upon His sovereign, efficacious grace and Spirit, and that one should consequently but wait and believe, it can then even take place within the confines of our church that we must, as mighty men, tread down our enemies in the mire of the streets (Zech. 10:5), for we will then be ridiculed with the slanderous accusation that such a doctrine is damning to the soul and causes men to be profane and careless.

What shall I say of this? Beloved, I must confess that our Reformed doctrine is a book that is sealed with seven strong seals, and that no one but the Lion of

the tribe of Judah can open this book to His own people, on whose behalf He has been victorious. With the instructor, we respond to all that the doctrine of the gracious justification of the sinner before God by faith alone, as to its essence and nature, by no means causes men to be profane and careless, for "it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness."

A great deal more could be said regarding this precious and divine truth. However, aside from the fact that the expiration of time will not permit us to address this in greater detail, the instructor will specifically address this truth in Lord's Day 32, and, with God's help, we will then consider this more extensively. Suffice it now to say that the slanderous allegation that the true doctrine of salvation causes men to be profane and careless proceeds from a profound ignorance regarding the efficacy and nature of true justifying faith, as well as regarding the essence of this passive waiting and a believing and spiritual trusting in the Lord Jesus and His sovereign grace.

If one were to be spiritually and experientially acquainted with the power of this truth, one would not at all hold to the opinion that the doctrine of the gracious justification by faith and a waiting upon and trusting in all things in the Lord Jesus and upon His righteousness and grace causes men to be profane and careless. On the contrary, one would be fully persuaded in his heart that this doctrine, when applied spiritually, is the only and true way to render us truly holy and godly, and causes us to be increasingly united to God in Christ and to be transformed and renewed after God's image.

We read in Habakkuk 2:4 that "the just shall live by his faith." Very few understand these words correctly. Hereby is stated that the life of the just flows forth entirely from faith and yields a complete denial of self. The more purely and the more simply one relies upon the Lord Jesus, trusting alone in His grace, strength, and righteousness, the more spiritual life and true holiness manifest themselves. The Lord Jesus is the essence and fountain of spiritual life, for, by faith, we are grafted into Christ, and it unites us spiritually and truly to Him as our vine, root, and living head. Faith causes us to be partakers of Christ and His precious righteousness, as well as of His light, grace, Spirit, and image. This therefore continually causes us to be alive in Christ, and this results in our being washed and cleansed from our sins, progressively increasing in true godliness, and walking in newness of life. Christ teaches this, saying, "I am the

vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Beloved, this is, however, something the Lord Himself must teach all His people. And they must learn this continually and increasingly by true internal and spiritual experience, and by making a believing use of the Lord Jesus.

Let us pray to the Lord that He would yet be pleased to be gracious and merciful to this blind and erring world, and that He would establish His people increasingly in their faith and sanctify them through the truth (John 17:17). So be it for the Lord's sake. Amen.

The Work of the Holy Spirit and the Strengthening of Faith

LORD'S DAY 25

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

—ROMANS 10:17

Question 65: Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?

Answer: From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.

Question 66: What are the sacraments?

Answer: The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof, He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, viz., that He grants us freely the remission of sin, and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross.

Question 67: Are both word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, as the only ground of our salvation?

Answer: Yes, indeed: for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross.

Question 68: How many sacraments has Christ instituted in the new covenant, or testament?

Answer: Two: namely, holy baptism, and the holy supper.

How precious, comforting, and encouraging are the words that the apostle Paul wrote to the believing Philippians, saying, "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)! In speaking of that "good work" in the Philippians, Paul referred to their upright faith and their "fellowship in the gospel," as he called it in the preceding verse. By this faith, they had embraced and received, with true and upright hearts, the precious gospel regarding the grace and salvation of the Lord Jesus, and, by virtue of being in the covenant of grace, they had surrendered themselves fully and eternally to God in Christ unto salvation, so that they might solely live by faith in Christ. The apostle here testified that God had begun this good work of faith in the Philippians, for by the power of His Holy Spirit, He had so wrought in them that they had obeyed, embraced, and heartily approved of the gospel of salvation as it is in Christ Jesus.

God having begun this good work of faith in them, Paul was also confident that God would finish it in them in "the day of Jesus Christ" by increasingly establishing, expanding, and strengthening this good work of faith by His Word and Spirit, and that He would bring it finally to its complete fruition and perfection in the day of Jesus Christ. And so it is indeed, for God will never forsake the work of His own hands, but rather, in all His believing people, He will be the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending" (Rev. 1:8).

The good work of faith and repentance solely originates in, proceeds from, and will be completely finished and perfected by God, and no other author is to be acknowledged in regard to this good work. Our Christian instructor desires to expound this truth in greater detail in this Lord's Day.

In the previous Lord's Days, beginning with Lord's Day 7, he addressed:

1. the nature of true saving faith;
2. the objective truths toward which this faith is exercised, namely, the spiritual truths of the gospel as they are articulated in the Apostles' Creed; and
3. the glorious efficacy and blessed benefit of faith, being God's gracious justification of the sinner in Christ.

He now proceeds to consider the origin of faith, as well as how it is affirmed and strengthened by means of the Word and by the holy sacraments. This is a very glorious and beneficial subject for consideration, worthy of being known by all of us unto salvation. May the Lord, by His Holy Spirit, graciously equip us to preach and to hear, and may He bless His Word to our souls. Amen.

The instructor observes the following order in his exposition:

1. In Question 65, he first sets before us Him who works and strengthens faith in the hearts of God’s elect, namely, God the Holy Spirit, and then the means by which He accomplishes this.
2. He proceeds to address each of these means individually, doing so in Questions 66–68.

Regarding the first, the instructor asks, “Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?” This is a very useful and essential question. It is in one’s interest rightly to know not only how to obtain this true faith in his heart, but, if one may perceive within himself the beginning of this faith, also to know how that good work within him may be built up, established, and strengthened unto his salvation.

People in general rely too much upon themselves in this regard. Since God commands them to believe and it is their duty to believe, they are always endeavoring in their own strength to stir themselves up to exercise faith. They are ignorant of their radical spiritual impotence in this regard, failing to recognize that faith must be wrought within them from on high by the gracious power of God. That work they must expectantly desire, and, as needy souls, they must long for it.

The instructor now proceeds to expound and explain this in greater detail, teaching with regard to the exercise of faith that the Holy Spirit “works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and He confirms it by the use of the sacraments.”

As to the Holy Spirit’s saving operation in the hearts of the elect, and specifically as to the common way in which He initially and continually works faith, we recently addressed this in detail in our exposition of Lord’s Day 20. We will therefore not repeat what we said there. We wish only to note that faith is here set before us as the special work of the Holy Spirit.

We need to recognize that all of the extrinsic works of God, both in grace and in nature, proceed entirely from the triune God. They proceed equally from all three of the exalted and divine persons. The reason for this is to be sought and found in the most perfect unity and simplicity of the adorable and one divine being, so that one of the divine persons neither does nor works anything without the engagement of the other persons. Since the gracious benefit of faith also belongs to the extrinsic works of God, we must consider faith as a

work of the triune God, who works all things and in all. In the Holy Scriptures, this work is therefore commonly attributed to all three divine persons.

1. Faith is attributed to God the Father, for Paul calls faith “the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Of the Father, Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44). This drawing is the efficacious translation of the soul into Christ by faith.

2. God the Son is also designated as the author of faith, for Paul calls Him “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). The disciples therefore worshiped the Lord Jesus as such and besought of Him, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5b).

3. Though faith is attributed to the Father and the Son, it is and remains the special and primary work of the Holy Spirit, and, by Him, the Father and the Son execute the work of salvation and redemption in the elect.

According to the eternal counsel of peace, it is the personal work of the Father to ordain the salvation of the elect and to choose them to that end. It is the personal work of the Son to accomplish and merit this preordained salvation for the elect. It is the personal work of the Holy Spirit to apply this preordained and accomplished salvation to the elect, enabling them also to possess and enjoy this salvation initially, progressively, and, finally, perfectly and completely. Therefore, all that belongs to the work of applying salvation to the elect is the essential, special, and efficacious work of the Holy Spirit.

Faith belongs in its entirety to the application of salvation, for thereby the elect are truly and internally united to Christ, the fountain of salvation, and thereby they internally receive Him with His accomplished salvation and merited benefits of grace. Consequently, faith belongs to the essential and special ministry, office, or work of the Holy Spirit. In the Word of God, faith is also specifically attributed to the Holy Spirit as being its author, who works and strengthens faith in the hearts of the elect. Paul testifies of this, saying, “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom...to another faith by the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:8–9). In 2 Corinthians 4:13, he expressly calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of faith,” and in Galatians 5:22, he identifies faith as one of the fruits of the Spirit.

In the meantime, take note, beloved—and may the Lord further teach this to you by His Spirit—that in order for faith to be worked and strengthened in our souls, nothing less than the initiative of a triune God is required. This is required because we ourselves are absolutely unsuitable and unfit unto faith, for we live entirely unto ourselves, fully cleave to ourselves, function from within

ourselves, and end in ourselves. We cannot do otherwise, because we are utterly carnal and darkness itself. To enable us to believe by completely turning away from self and turning unto Christ, and to seek all our light, life, comfort, peace, and salvation only with Him, God must prevail over us by His all-conquering power and grace. He must strip us of all that is of self in order to lead us out of ourselves and to bring Christ, with His grace and all-sufficiency, to our souls, that He might unite us to Him by the effectual inclination of our wills toward Christ and toward His salvation and grace. He does so in order that our only desire is to seek our life entirely outside of ourselves in Christ and fully to deny ourselves in all that pertains to us.

Therefore, all who desire to have this faith wrought in their hearts, or to have it strengthened, must enter upon this pathway in all simplicity. Being convinced of the total and absolute necessity of true faith unto salvation, and acknowledging their utter and complete impotence to give themselves this faith, as well as God's all-conquering omnipotence and gracious inclination to work and strengthen this faith in them by His Word and Spirit, they must come before the Lord in all uprightness and simplicity, and surrender themselves to the Lord and to the gracious operation of His Spirit. Using the means faithfully and diligently, they must wait with submission, surrendering themselves unto the Lord and His light, grace, and power until it pleases Him to look upon them in sovereign mercy and to help them in the day of His good pleasure.

This is the proper way to have the Lord work and strengthen faith in the heart. Having said this, how does the Holy Spirit accomplish His work in the hearts of the elect? The instructor says that He “works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.” The instructor sets two matters before us:

1. How the Holy Spirit works faith.
2. How the Holy Spirit strengthens faith.

Regarding the first, the instructor teaches that the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of the elect “by the preaching of the gospel.” The Spirit of the Lord by no means works faith immediately, as some enthusiasts insist upon; that is, by way of extraordinary and powerful influences or stirrings apart from the Word. The Lord does not work faith in this manner, for although He would certainly be able to do so, this is not His common way. Rather, He works mediately by way of the presentation or preaching of the gospel.

By the *gospel*, we must simply understand God's adorable counsel and purpose regarding the salvation of the elect in and by way of their surety and mediator, Christ Jesus, as has been so clearly and transparently revealed by God in the Holy Scriptures. Paul summarizes the preeminent content of this gospel, saying, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19). This gospel has eternally been couched in the heart of God, and it is therefore also called "a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (1 Cor. 2:7). If God, in His adorable counsel and according to His gracious will, had purposed to keep this concealed and hidden in His heart, no one would ever have known or imagined anything like this apart from God Himself. However, for the Lord to execute His secret counsel regarding the salvation and redemption of His people, He necessarily had to make known to them this counsel or this gospel, and to present it to them so that they might receive and embrace it.

Having been pleased to do this from the very beginning of the world, the Lord continues to do so until this day, and He will continue to do so until the end of the world. He has revealed and expounded this precious and blessed gospel most extensively in His Holy Word. This He entrusts to His servants and ambassadors, whom He has explicitly called, appointed, and equipped for the task of proclaiming His gospel throughout the world among the children of men and of instructing them accordingly. Consider, therefore, Christ's express command to His apostles and disciples: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15–16).

In this manner, God causes His holy gospel to be proclaimed everywhere among men by His servants and ambassadors, thereby making known to men that as truly as He lives, He has no pleasure in the death of the ungodly and of sinners, but rather, that it is His heartfelt will, inclination, and desire to redeem and save them eternally. He furthermore causes it to be proclaimed that He gives them Christ, His Son, to be a suitable and all-sufficient surety and mediator, setting Him before them as having been made unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption from all their sins (1 Cor. 1:30). He exhorts all and everyone to whom this gospel of salvation is made known to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ to be such an all-sufficient surety and mediator, and upon dispensing fully and willingly with all their own wisdom, righteousness, and strength, to turn to Him and receive Him with a true and upright faith. He exhorts them to do so in order that they may be taught and

instructed by Him as prophet in the way of salvation, be justified before God by Him as high priest, and be sanctified and delivered by Him as king—and all of this purely out of free and sovereign grace and without any of their own worthiness, merits, or strength.

Behold, God causes such a gospel or counsel of salvation and redemption to be proclaimed throughout the world, and, by means of the preaching of this gospel, the Holy Spirit, according to the instructor, works faith in our hearts, that is, in the hearts of the elect.

The Holy Scriptures clearly teach this, as, for example, in our text: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?... So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:14, 17). The same apostle says in 1 Corinthians 1:21 that “it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

When we focus on the initial establishment of the church of Christ, we observe that the apostles, and all who with them were called to the ministry, proclaimed the gospel in all places, and the Lord, by means of their preaching of the Word, worked with them (Mark 16:20). As a result, in a short period of time, many thousands among the Jews and Gentiles were saved upon their repentance and belief of the gospel. There are multiple examples of this in the Holy Word of God, for we read of Cornelius and his house, that “the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44). Such was true for almost all who were converted at that time. They were converted and received faith by means of the Word or the gospel being preached to them. Paul therefore asked the Galatians, “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal. 3:2); that is, by hearing the preaching of the gospel, whereby the sinner is exhorted and called to believe in Christ as the only way and means of deliverance. The gospel sets Christ before sinners as the only object of faith, and it depicts this object as being exceedingly beautiful, precious, and delightful, so that the hearts of sinners are set aflame and stimulated to receive and embrace Christ by faith. The gospel is therefore also called “the glorious gospel of Christ,” whereby God causes “the light to shine out of darkness...in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4a, 6). This truth has therefore been sufficiently affirmed, namely, that the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of the elect by means of the preaching of the gospel.

The mere external presentation of the gospel is by no means efficacious, for of itself and apart from the efficacious operations of the Spirit, it cannot bring forth faith. However, the Pelagians teach otherwise. Beloved, were it possible to hear this precious gospel of God's grace and salvation proclaimed to us most clearly and powerfully for a thousand years, and were we able, with our natural intellect, to understand and comprehend its verbal presentation, we nevertheless would not embrace this gospel by faith unto salvation unless we were wrought upon inwardly by the Holy Spirit and, in an efficacious manner, enabled to do so. Without this, we would merely hear and intellectually understand the gospel as a general truth, but by no means would we believe it with our hearts unto salvation. The Holy Spirit alone must work this in us, for, according to the gospel, "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12:3b). The apostle therefore writes: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6-7). In Ephesians 1:19-20, he speaks of "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places."

Other than this truth being set before us with such clarity in the Word of God, it is taught daily with no less clarity by the experiential operation of the Lord's Spirit in the hearts of all true believers. We must therefore affirm the following two doctrines as eternally abiding truths:

1. It is the Spirit of the Lord alone who works faith in the hearts of the elect.
2. The Spirit generally works this faith mediately by means of the preaching of the gospel.

It is therefore the inescapable and compelling obligation of all who desire to have this faith wrought in their hearts that they diligently frequent the preaching of the Word of God and avail themselves of all other means of grace, and, in their use, look expectantly to the Lord until He may also be gracious to them.

Having thus far endeavored to set before you how the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of the elect by means of the preaching of the gospel, we only wish to add this remark: the faith that the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the elect

is identical in all believers as to its essence; however, the manner and circumstances of the operation of the Spirit vary greatly.

The essence of the matter is that the Holy Spirit convinces the elect of their sins, their misery, their hell-worthiness, and their impotence. He brings them to the point of holy despair and perplexity in themselves, so that they no longer are able to find any help or comfort in any creature under the sun. He opens for them the gospel of Christ's salvation, His all-sufficiency, and His sovereign grace. He brings Christ into their hearts, causes them to turn away completely from themselves, and unites them to Christ, so that they truly come to Him with a hunger and thirst for Him. In forsaking everything outside of Him, they desire nothing less than to be found in Him and to be fully and freely redeemed by Him purely out of free and sovereign grace and in harmony with the contents of the gospel.

The Holy Spirit works the essence of this faith without distinction in all the elect. However, the manner in which He works faith is not the same in all, but varies greatly, for He works sooner in the one than in the other. One He leads in a more legal and severe manner, and the other in a more evangelical fashion. One He keeps longer in the way of conviction, and for the other, He sooner brings the Lord Jesus and His grace into focus and to their hearts. We must therefore look more to the outcome of the matter rather than to the unique manner and circumstances of the Spirit's operation in the elect when faith is in exercise.

Having considered how the Holy Spirit works faith, we will now proceed to consider how the same Spirit also strengthens this faith, for the instructor continues by teaching that He "confirms it by the use of the sacraments." When faith is initially exercised in the elect, it is by no means immediately as complete in its various stages as it is complete with respect to its essence and components, for as all things are initially very deficient, weak, and tender, and only gradually increase in strength and come to full fruition, so is it also with the gracious work of faith. They who have newly been wrought upon are also initially very feeble, weak, and tender. It cannot be expressed in words how feeble grace is when initially it begins to function! The Lord Jesus compares faith in its initial exercises to "a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth" (Mark 4:31).

Grace, time, and exercise cause that small beginning of faith to grow increasingly, and it gradually increases in strength, steadfastness, and perfection. It is analogous to a small child who, by partaking of essential nourishment,

imperceptibly increases in size and strength, and matures as the years progress. We therefore read in the Holy Scriptures of a faith that “groweth exceedingly” (2 Thess. 1:3), of the increase of faith (Luke 17:5), and of being “stablished in the faith” (Col. 2:7). A distinction is made throughout the Holy Scriptures between a weak and a strong faith, and the Scriptures also teach that “God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3).

We need to consider carefully that this does not imply the least variation in the essence of faith, for that is always and in all believers the same. The only difference is in the measure in which faith is exercised, and thus the Holy Scriptures teach that there are some who are children and babes, others young men, and others men and fathers in the faith (1 John 2:12–14). However, in the natural realm, children, young men, men, and fathers all have the principle of life within them in identical fashion, and likewise, all true believers, both weak and strong, have also the identical principle of life within them: they are internally and spiritually united by faith to the Lord Jesus. Proceeding from that principle, they continually grow in grace and are strengthened in their faith by the Holy Spirit, who is always at work in them in a greater or lesser measure.

The manner in which the Holy Spirit commonly strengthens the weak faith of God's children is diverse. The Spirit strengthens the faith of God's children:

1. Primarily by means of the Word, increasingly illuminating the understanding of God's children and gradually leading them spiritually and experientially more deeply into the reality of their misery, utter bankruptcy, and impotence, but also into the reality of the complete all-sufficiency, willingness, and evangelical grace of the Lord Jesus. Paul prayed for such illumination of the Spirit for the believing Ephesians, praying “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened” (Eph. 1:17–18a). Thereby God's children increasingly are led to look away from themselves, they are inwardly united to the Lord Jesus, and their faith is thus strengthened and built up.

2. By gradually and increasingly assuring God's children inwardly of divine truths as they are revealed in the Word of God, so that, in all their activity, they more fully rely upon and trust in them. As these truths are impressed ever more deeply upon their hearts, they learn all the more purely to believe the Lord on the basis of His Holy Word, without so readily and continually doubting them through unbelief, for “it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6b).

3. By continually exercising the internal principle and propensity of faith within their souls, thereby gradually increasing its measure, steadfastness, and strength. Consequently, faith is exercised by God’s children with increased facility and ease, and with less resistance and instability. The more that faith is exercised in a lively and active manner, the more it gradually functions as it should and is more functional and steadfast in the soul. This inherent principle of faith then functions more fully within us, and God’s children consequently are increasingly “rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith” (Col. 2:7). This affirms what is written in Isaiah 7:9: “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.”

4. By communicating many lively manifestations of God’s love and grace to their souls, much communion with God in Christ, and much assurance of their gracious state, all of which issue forth from faith. The Holy Spirit fills them with more knowledge of God’s glory and causes them to be more discerning regarding all things that detract from His glory. Hereby He teaches them to become more acquainted with the Lord, to cleave to Him in all their difficulties, and to follow Him in His way, having a quiet confidence in Him, in His truth, wisdom, goodness, faithfulness, and power.

Hereby the Spirit leads the Lord’s children increasingly “into the land of uprightness” (Ps. 143:10) and causes them to proceed on the way of life more steadfastly, calmly, and unwaveringly, so that in submissive humility and with patient faith, they follow the Lord in all things and for all things, commending their way and the outcome of all their affairs continually to the Lord and to the word of His grace (Acts 20:32), saying with Hezekiah, the man of God, “I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul” (Isa. 38:15).

In this manner, God’s children increasingly surrender themselves to the gracious and fatherly leadings of the Lord and remain at peace, being content, irrespective of how He may deal with them, knowing and having learned by extensive experience that He is the only wise God and that “His work is honourable and glorious” (Ps. 111:3).

This is the most steadfast, secure, and profitable state of faith. However, such is not the initial state of God’s children, but they rather arrive at this point in the way of much strife and exercise of faith, for this state is the manly state of a Christian, and presently, there are but few who attain to it.

The Holy Spirit thus incrementally strengthens the faith He Himself has wrought, and gradually He causes it to become more steadfast and perfect in

the Lord's people. However, He by no means does this immediately, but He rather does it mediately:

1. by the preaching of God's Word, and therefore it has the pre-eminence as the "sincere milk of the word" whereby newborn babes must grow and which they must also greatly desire (1 Peter 2:2).
2. by other means, which, according to the instructor, are "the use of the sacraments."

The instructor now proceeds to address this further as he gives a clear and concise description, saying, "The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof, He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel." There is nothing that is of greater benefit to God's children than a believing, receiving, and embracing of the promises of God's grace in Christ Jesus that are made to them and set before them in the gospel. Hereby God communicates that, for the sake of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, He will always graciously pardon all their sins and bestow upon them eternal life and whatever else they may need unto salvation, all of which He will grant freely in Christ and by way of faith. This constitutes the vitality of their inward spiritual life, namely, the heartfelt embracing of, believing in, and appropriation of these gracious promises of the gospel. They may fully trust in these promises unto their comfort, as well as to the strengthening of their faith and their growth in sanctification.

Since, however, these gracious promises of the gospel are matters that are entirely spiritual and invisible, and therefore cannot be known, embraced, and enjoyed by us in any way but by faith, and since there is nothing more difficult for us than to maintain an active exercise of faith due to our ignorance, as well as to the legal mindset to which God's children continue to be so greatly inclined, it has pleased the Lord to accommodate the weak faith of His children in an extraordinary manner by way of external means. To that end, He has ordained and instituted the holy sacraments in His Word, external and visible signs and seals whereby it pleases Him to give His believing children a lively and visible display of His internal grace and redemption as they are in Christ Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit, it also pleases Him thereby to seal this to their hearts to their comfort, their sanctification, and the strengthening of their faith.

Therefore, in the sacrament of baptism, by the external and visible sprinkling of water, symbolizing the washing and cleansing of the pollution of the body, it is internally signified and sealed to the hearts of all believers by the

power of the Holy Spirit that all their sins are washed away by the blood and Spirit of Christ, unto their salvation and their eternal redemption.

In a similar manner, in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, by the bread and the wine that is eaten and drunk externally, it is clearly signified and sealed internally in the hearts of believers that they, by faith truly have fellowship with Christ and His broken body and shed blood—all to their justification, sanctification, and redemption. Furthermore, it is signified and sealed that they are as surely nourished and refreshed with spiritual food and drink unto eternal life as they see the visible signs before their eyes and eat and drink them with their mouths.

These are the holy sacraments that the instructor will subsequently consider in greater detail, for by means of the spiritual and believing use of them, the Holy Spirit inwardly strengthens the faith of God's children. These sacraments, when merely partaken of externally, by no means have any inherent power to stimulate and strengthen the faith of God's children. It is the Holy Spirit who must work in the hearts of God's children during and by means of the use of the sacraments. By the visible signs and seals, the Holy Spirit spiritually sets before their eyes Christ and the promises of the gospel. He internally illuminates their darkened understandings and causes their hearts to go out to Christ and His grace to embrace and enjoy them. In so doing, the Holy Spirit, by a spiritual and holy use of the sacraments, continually stimulates and strengthens the faith of God's children.

That the nature and propensity of both Word and sacraments are such that they are suitable means to that end is taught more explicitly by the instructor in Question 67, where the pupil poses the question, "Are both word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, as the only ground of our salvation?" The instructor replies, "Yes, indeed: for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross."

The entire foundation upon which the salvation of God's children rests, securely and immovably, is the Lord Jesus and His holy sacrifice on the cross; that is, His passive and active obedience, whereby He, as their surety, endured in the flesh the punishment due to their sins and met the requirements of the law on their behalf, thereby meriting for them the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life. This confirms that God's children, in fully forsaking all things, must continually take refuge to this sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and to His all-sufficient righteousness. They must completely and solely cast themselves upon

Christ Jesus and His righteousness as their only foundation of salvation, always adhering thereto by a true faith while immovably resting upon and trusting therein as the immovable rock of their salvation.

In order for them to do so continually, both Word and sacraments are efficient and suitable means, for by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, the two sacraments point the children of God to the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ on the cross and His perfect righteousness, for these continually stir up God's children to embrace them by a true faith, adhere to them, and trust solely in them in forsaking all that is of themselves. And thus the nature and propensity of both Word and sacraments are such that, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, they are very precious and suitable means that continually stir up and strengthen the faith of God's children.

In Question 68, the instructor posits that there are two sacraments: holy baptism and the Lord's Supper. Holy baptism was instituted by the Lord Jesus in the place of circumcision, and the Lord's Supper was instituted in the place of the Passover, both of which were the stated and common sacraments of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus did not institute any other sacraments in His Word besides baptism and the Lord's Supper, and there is no need for any additional sacraments. The instructor will now proceed in several additional Lord's Days to consider both of these sacraments. We will pray to the Lord that His Spirit may still have much work among us, and that His work may prosper to the glory of God and to the salvation of the elect as it is in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

LORD'S DAY 26

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

—MATTHEW 28:19

Question 69: How art thou admonished and assured by holy baptism, that the one sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is of real advantage to thee?

Answer: Thus: That Christ appointed this external washing with water, adding thereto this promise, that I am as certainly washed by His blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water, by which the filthiness of the body is commonly washed away.

Question 70: What is it to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?

Answer: It is to receive of God the remission of sins, freely, for the sake of Christ's blood, which He shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross; and also to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin, and lead holy and unblameable lives.

Question 71: Where has Christ promised us, that He will as certainly wash us by His blood and Spirit, as we are washed with the water of baptism?

Answer: In the institution of baptism, which is thus expressed: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," "he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." This promise is also repeated, where the scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration, and the washing away of sins.

God's command to Moses in Exodus 30:17–21 is noteworthy: "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: when they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: so they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations."

Moses was here commanded to make a laver of brass and its foot of brass, to place it in the court of the Tabernacle, and to keep it filled with water. Before entering the Tabernacle of the Congregation and engaging in the holy service of the Lord, the high priest Aaron, as well as his sons and all priests after him, had always first to wash their hands and their feet at this laver, for the transgression of this command of the Lord was punishable with death.

There is an abundance of holy and spiritual mysteries foreshadowed by way of this laver:

1. The court of the Tabernacle wherein the laver had to be placed signified the visible church of God here on earth, and then specifically the church of the New Testament, in which believers and unbelievers are both to be found.

2. The laver of brass signified the savior, Christ Jesus, who, as to His cleansing grace, His fullness, and His all-sufficiency, is therefore "a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1).

3. The water in the laver signified the cleansing blood and Spirit of Christ unto the washing away of the sins of believers.

4. The fact that Aaron and his sons, with all the priests, had first to wash their hands and their feet in that water, prior to serving the Lord in the Tabernacle of the Congregation, signified that believers, if they are to serve the Lord in spirit and in truth, are continually in need of being washed and cleansed of their sins in the fountain, that is, Christ—and thus by way of His blood and Spirit. In this way, initially and continually, they are admitted into the holy service of the Lord, as well as into His nearness and His fellowship.

If anyone is desirous to examine this truth somewhat more closely and to reflect upon it, let him seek for the Lord's prevenient light, grace, and Spirit, so that, with holy and animated attention, you may consider our exposition of

the sacrament of holy baptism as ordained and instituted by the Lord. By way of this sacrament, the Lord signifies and seals to the hearts of all true believers the spiritual washing away of sin by the blood and Spirit of Christ unto their comfort and the strengthening of their faith.

In the previous Lord’s Day, the instructor considered the sacraments in general terms as the holy means ordained and instituted by the Lord to the upbuilding and strengthening of the precious faith of His children. He now proceeds to consider each of these sacraments individually. In this Lord’s Day, he first addresses the sacrament of holy baptism in terms of its true nature and purpose, and in the following Lord’s Day, he will further establish this doctrine by addressing the errors of those who oppose the pure doctrine of holy baptism.

Oh, that it would please the Lord by His Holy Spirit to quicken the minds of my readers and to illuminate their darkened understandings, for thereby, they would acquire a good and sound knowledge of the doctrine of holy baptism. They would then see what a great and glorious obligation they have toward this sacrament of baptism as administered in their youth, and that they must truly experience the reality of this holy sacrament if they are to be saved. May it therefore please the Lord graciously to bless our exposition. Amen.

Concerning holy baptism, we will endeavor to set before you:

1. its true nature and character, and, by God’s grace, we will do so with utmost brevity, clarity, and simplicity; and
2. the external rituals that must accompany the administration of this holy sacrament in conformity to Christ’s institution.

Regarding the true nature and character of holy baptism, we wish to consider:

1. the name of the sacrament; and
2. the sacrament itself.

As to its name, this sacrament is designated as *baptism*, and the Greek word means as much as “immersion” in and under water, for in ancient times, baptism was administered in this fashion to Gentiles who were to be incorporated into the fellowship of the Jewish church. According to the law, they were first circumcised, and thereafter they were baptized by immersion in water. John, the forerunner of the Savior, used this mode of baptism, immersing all whom he baptized in the Jordan. John even baptized the Savior in the Jordan by way of immersion. The sacrament is therefore designated in Greek with a word that signifies *immersion* in and under water. Christ derived His baptism from this

Jewish baptism, and He instituted and ordained it to be a holy sacrament, a sign and seal of the covenant of grace in His church and congregation, and for all His true, believing people. However, rather than using the mode of immersion, baptism is administered among us more conveniently by way of sprinkling. Subsequently, we will see that this mode has the same efficacy and significance as immersion.

In the Holy Scriptures, we read of other baptisms, such as *a baptism of blood, being baptized with the Holy Spirit, a baptism of fire, and being baptized for the dead*. We will not discuss these special baptisms, for this would not be subservient to the objective of this exposition.

Having considered the name, we will proceed to consider the matter itself. Generally speaking, there are three things belonging to a sacrament of the covenant of grace: There are:

1. an external sign and seal that is suitable and fitting to depict and seal to believers Christ's grace and His benefits;
2. an internal, hidden, and spiritual truth that is signified and sealed by that external element or substance; and
3. a divine institution of this sacrament recorded in the Holy Word of God.

These three matters are also required for the sacrament of holy baptism, and we shall address them in greater detail.

Regarding the external sign and seal, the water with which one is baptized is the sign and seal of baptism, and it is administered by way of immersion, as was done in antiquity, or it can be accomplished by sprinkling, as is the present practice. The Holy Spirit teaches most clearly in His Word that baptism is to be administered with common water. We cannot find any instance of the apostles baptizing with anything other than common water. We read of John the Baptist, "John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there" (John 3:23). He therefore generally baptized the people in the Jordan, and as it was a major river, it was full of water. The Savior was also baptized there, for we read clearly, "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water" (Matt. 3:16). John himself preached that "He...sent me to baptize with water" (John 1:33). Regarding the Ethiopian eunuch, we read that when he desired to be baptized by Philip, he said to him as they went their way, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (Acts 8:36).

These passages clearly prove that baptism should never be administered with anything other than common and pure water. This is rooted in the fact that the internal and spiritual mystery of this sacrament is comprehended in the essential and natural efficacy of water, namely, that one of its purposes is the washing and cleansing of the pollution of the body. This cannot be accomplished more suitably than with water. The Lord Jesus therefore instituted or ordained in baptism the immersion in or the sprinkling with water, as the external sign and seal of His grace. Therefore, all who baptize with anything other than common and pure water, as is done in the Church of Rome, deviate completely from Christ’s institution and the common practice of the apostles, and thus seek to be wise above what is written.

From the external and visible sign and seal of baptism, we will now proceed to consider its holy and spiritual mystery—that is, the matter that is internally signified and sealed. This consists in the true internal union and fellowship all believers have with the Lord Jesus by faith, as well as with His grace and benefits, yielding for them justification, sanctification, and redemption.

The Holy Spirit presents this mystery of baptism in a twofold manner:

1. As a spiritual burial of all true believers in Christ’s death and a resurrection or being made alive with Him.
2. As a spiritual washing away and pardoning of their sins by the blood and Spirit of Christ.

The first is clearly articulated by the apostle Paul, who says to believers, “We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). He furthermore says to believers that they are “buried with him [i.e. Christ] in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:12).

In both these passages, the apostle teaches that external water baptism signifies and seals to the believer that spiritually and by faith he is buried with Christ into His death, and is raised up with Him unto a new life. The other aspect of baptism, namely, the washing away or pardoning of sins, is set before us in the Holy Scriptures as an internal and spiritual mystery of the sacrament of baptism. Paul tells us that Ananias said to him: “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16). In Acts 2:38, we hear Peter exhorting the Jews on the day of Pentecost, saying, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”

We are thus taught that baptism has as its purpose the inward signifying and sealing to the hearts of all true believers the washing away and the pardoning of their sins by the blood and Spirit of Christ in both justification and sanctification. It is therefore evident from the aforementioned how the spiritual mystery of holy baptism is set before us in the Holy Scriptures in a twofold manner:

1. As the burial of believers with Christ in His death and being made alive with Him unto a new life.
2. As the washing away or pardoning of the sins of believers by way of the blood and Spirit of Christ.

Even though this matter is referred to and presented to us in the Holy Scriptures in a twofold manner, it is one and the same as to its essence and efficacy, for both signify and communicate the believer's true and internal union by faith with the Lord Jesus, as well as with His grace and His benefits unto justification, sanctification, and redemption from sin. Since the instructor sets before us the mystery of baptism as the washing away of sin, we will now have a better understanding of it, and therefore we will expound in more detail what the instructor is saying.

In Question 69, it is asked, "How art thou admonished and assured by holy baptism, that the one sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is of real advantage to thee?" He replies, "Thus: that Christ appointed this external washing with water, adding thereto this promise, that I am as certainly washed by His blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water, by which the filthiness of the body is commonly washed away."

It is a well-known truth taught repeatedly and throughout the Holy Scriptures, that elect believers are by nature like all men, and thus, through sin, they are utterly abominable, unclean, and hell-worthy before God, polluted in the blood of their uncleanness and "cast out in the open field" (Ezek. 16:5–6). Therefore, the moment they are truly made acquainted with themselves by God's Word and Spirit, they all have to exclaim, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6a). Prior to their conversion and being united to the Lord Jesus, they are all "a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12).

This internal, spiritual, and natural uncleanness of believers consists of two specific matters:

1. the guilt of their sins, and
2. the pollution of their sins and their ungodliness

They are utterly abominable and unclean before God due to the guilt of their sins, having transgressed God's holy law in a most detestable manner, and thereby they have brought upon themselves God's curse, wrath, and condemnation. They cannot truly see and acknowledge this vile guilt due to their sins without being overwhelmed with a sense of holy shame and sorrow, as well as a loathing of themselves, causing them to cry out with Ezra, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for [my] iniquities are increased over [my] head, and [my] trespass is grown up unto the heavens" (Ezra 9:6).

Furthermore, elect believers are also by nature utterly loathsome and unclean in God's holy eyes by virtue of the pollution of sin. They are utterly unholy, wicked, ungodly, and hostile to God and to His law. They are both externally and internally completely leprous, from their heads to the soles of their feet, and nothing good is to be found in them. No one is capable either rightly to understand the true nature of this abominable and putrid uncleanness of the souls of the elect or to articulate it to others. Even the best among them know but little of this. However, that which they have learned to know has caused them to loathe and abhor themselves, for the Lord has promised His people, "Then shall ye...lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations" (Ezek. 36:31).

How, then, do elect believers deal with this? Can they in any way deliver themselves from the abominable uncleanness of their souls? Can they cleanse themselves from the detestable filth of their sins and ungodliness? Not at all, for they are not in the least capable thereof. In regard to this spiritual uncleanness, the elect are utterly dead and impotent in themselves to contribute even the very least to their spiritual cleansing, as Jeremiah 2:22 affirms, "For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD." Under the sun, there is no single creature from which they can expect any help in this regard. Regarding this uncleanness, everything is utterly vain and useless to remove the abominable and detestable spiritual uncleanness of the elect and to render them acceptable and pleasing before the holy eyes of God. If the elect were left to themselves, that is, if the Lord were not to look upon them in His infinite and compassionate grace, they would have to wallow eternally in the blood of their abominable uncleanness. Never would there be any deliverance for them.

There is a way, however, by which elect believers are delivered from the abominable uncleanness of their souls! The instructor teaches how this is accomplished by the blood and Spirit of Christ, and we shall now proceed to expound this for you.

The elect are washed or delivered from the uncleanness of their souls in a twofold manner: by the *blood* of Christ and by the *Spirit* of Christ.

By the *blood of Christ*, we are to understand His all-sufficient righteousness and obedience whereby, as surety on behalf of His elect, He endured in His flesh all the curse and guilt due to their sins, and completely obeyed God's law on their behalf. Thereby He merited and secured for them the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life. This holy and precious blood of the Lord Jesus completely washes away the guilt of the sins and the spiritual uncleanness of all elect believers. By faith, wrought in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, they deny themselves and all their self-righteousness, and they turn fully to the Lord Jesus and His precious blood. They hunger and thirst for it as the only means unto their salvation, and embrace that blood in response to the gracious presentation and offer of Christ in the gospel. They appropriate this blood for themselves and cast their polluted and ungodly souls into the overflowing fountain of His blood, so that, by grace, they may there be fully washed from all their uncleanness.

Hereupon the precious blood of Christ immediately manifests its efficacy to elect believers, for that blood is sprinkled upon them as clean water by God the Father, and by this blood He cleanses and purifies them from all their uncleanness by graciously justifying them. Being thus found in Christ and in His blood, they no longer retain even the least sin or sinful uncleanness, but they are reckoned perfectly holy and "complete in him, which is the head of all" (Col. 2:10).

This is the spiritual cleansing of believers in Christ's blood of which the Holy Scriptures speak so highly: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7b). Revelation 1:5 testifies also regarding Christ that He has "washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father."

Not only are believers washed from the guilt of their sins and the uncleanness of their souls by the blood of Christ in justification, but, by the Spirit of Christ, they are, according to the instructor, also further cleansed in sanctification from the uncleanness of their souls and of its prevailing pollution. The blood and the Spirit of the Lord Jesus are two benefits that are always conjoined,

and they are equally operative in believers, for where the one is, there is always the other.

As we saw in previous Lord’s Days, the Holy Spirit works faith in the elect and increasingly strengthens it. The Holy Spirit unites them to Christ, renews and transforms them, and initially and progressively purifies them from all their sins. Increasingly, by ongoing sanctification¹ in Christ’s blood, they are washed and purified from their uncleanness and the pollution of their sins. They are renewed after the image of God and of Christ.

This is the spiritual washing and cleansing from sin by the blood and Spirit of Christ of which we read so clearly in the Holy Scriptures: “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). David, the man after God’s own heart, prayed that the Lord would grant him this precious and glorious benefit, saying, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Ps. 51:7).

The instructor then proceeds to address this internal purification and washing away of sins in very clear and simple terms in Question 70: “What is it to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?” He replies, “It is to receive of God the remission of sins, freely, for the sake of Christ’s blood, which He shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross; and also to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin, and lead holy and unblameable lives.”

According to the instructor, the washing away of the guilt of sin by the blood of Christ simply consists in this: “It is to receive of God the remission of sins, freely, for the sake of Christ’s blood, which He shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross.” God forgives elect believers all their sins, their sinful wickedness, and their ungodliness purely out of free and sovereign grace when He justifies them. He does so the moment when, upon forsaking all that is of self, by a true faith, they flee to Christ and to His precious blood and righteousness as their only Refuge, desiring of God that He would pardon their sins purely out of free and sovereign grace and solely for the sake of the blood of Christ, His Son, and thus receive them graciously unto salvation.

1. The original reads as follows: “...zodat zij hier, hoe langer hoe meer door gedurige *rechtvaardiging* in Christus bloed, van de onreinheid, en de besmetting der zonden, worden gewassen en gereinigd en naar Gods en Christus beeld vernieuwd.” The use of the word *rechtvaardiging*, that is, justification, is evidently an error, for the context clearly indicates that rather than describing ongoing justification, VanderGroe is speaking here of ongoing *sanctification*.

Immediately, and in the moment believers sincerely, fully, and unreservedly engage themselves as such, God manifests His infinite grace and unfathomable mercy toward them, and He pardons their sins—all their sins, great and small, as well as all their sinful inclinations and corruptions—“freely, for the sake of Christ’s blood, which He shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross.” It is as though they never either had or had committed any sin, but as if they themselves truly had fully accomplished the obedience and righteousness of the law accomplished by Christ on their behalf. It is affirmed for them what is written in Psalm 32:1–2: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” This is what it means to be washed with the blood of Christ.

The other benefit, the washing away of sins by the Spirit of Christ, consists of believers being “renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin, and lead holy and unblameable lives.” The Holy Spirit unites all true believers to the Lord Jesus, and, in a mysterious manner, causes them to be in Christ, and Christ to be in them, so that they become true members of Christ. In Him, they are renewed after His image and are sanctified, for “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Consequently, believers who are thus in Christ by virtue of being united to Him by faith, have in principle been truly renewed, transformed, and sanctified by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, and therefore, according to the instructor, they “more and more die unto sin, and lead holy and unblameable lives.”

The sanctification of God’s children is not immediately perfect and complete in all aspects the moment they are united to Christ. The contrary is true, for their sanctification is initially still very deficient. Since, however, the Holy Spirit uninterruptedly dwells and ceaselessly works in believers, their faith and sanctification increase daily. The more they are united to God in Christ by faith, the more they die to sin and to self, and the more they “lead holy and unblameable lives.” They are cleansed increasingly from the prevailing pollution and the indwelling corruption of their sins, and they are renewed after the image of God and of Christ, being “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). This is the essence of being washed with the Spirit of Christ.

It is therefore evident that the washing away of sins by the blood and Spirit of Christ is in essence their gracious justification and sanctification in Christ

Jesus. These are the two most glorious benefits of God’s covenant, and they constitute the totality of salvation and redemption, both temporally and eternally.

We have thus considered the internal and spiritual mystery of the sacrament of holy baptism. Baptism signifies and seals these benefits to all true believers. Or, to use the language of the instructor in Question and Answer 69, they are “as certainly washed by His blood and Spirit from all the pollution of [their] soul, that is, from all [their] sins, as [they are] washed externally with water.”

Upon a closer examination of this matter, we find here a most intimate relationship between the external sign and seal of baptism and the matter that is signified and sealed internally, for:

1. the *water* in baptism is a lively sign and seal of the precious blood and Holy Spirit of Christ, and the Holy Scriptures commonly speak of them by using the metaphor of water;
2. the *sprinkling* of water, as it is practiced today, having replaced the ancient practice of immersion, signifies and seals this true and internal union of all true believers by faith with both Christ and His precious blood and Spirit; and
3. the external purification or cleansing of the body, as it either occurs or is depicted by the sprinkling of water, signifies and seals the washing away of sins by the blood and Spirit of Christ in reference both to justification and sanctification. We have already addressed this great and spiritual mystery.

What a most precious and glorious sacrament the sacrament of holy baptism is! Every true believer thereby receives from the Lord Jesus the most powerful signification and affirmation of his true and internal union by faith with both Him and His blood and Spirit, signifying their justification and sanctification unto salvation and eternal redemption. How exceedingly precious this most worthy sacrament ought therefore to be to all the people of the Lord, and how it ought to be esteemed by them! How they ought to be continually admonished, comforted, and strengthened in their faith by this sacrament, for the Lord Jesus, our beloved Savior, has expressly instituted and ordained it for all His truly believing people!

The instructor will now demonstrate and expound this further in Question 71, when he asks, “Where has Christ promised us, that He will as certainly wash us by His blood and Spirit, as we are washed with the water of baptism?” This

is a very important question, for the entire efficacy of holy baptism is contingent upon Christ's express command and institution. If baptism was merely a manmade ceremony or ritual observed by us only by human authority, and if it was to be administered to us only as such, we would not be able to derive the least comfort, efficacy, or strength from it for our souls. This, however, is by no means the case, for the Lord Jesus Himself ordained and instituted this sacrament, and to affirm this, the instructor gives us Christ's own words as they are recorded in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:16.

From this institution of Christ, the sacrament of holy baptism derives its entire efficacy to assure the hearts of true believers inwardly by the operation of the Holy Spirit, not only of their true union and communion with Him and with His blood and Spirit, but also of their justification and sanctification. This all issues forth from the Holy Spirit to their eternal salvation. Having instituted this sacrament, Christ assures His believing people of these precious and glorious benefits, so that they might be increasingly strengthened in their faith in Him, and that, in all their trials and tribulations, they might be all the more comforted, having such a precious pledge and unmistakable sign and seal of having received the grace of Christ. They are thereby most certainly assured and convinced by Him that they are partakers of both Him and of His blood and Spirit.

This is Christ's premier objective in having instituted the sacrament of holy baptism. However, this objective can be achieved in believers only by the operation of the Holy Spirit, who, by baptism, inwardly certifies and seals the grace of Christ to their hearts. The experience of God's children affirms that they derive little or no benefit from their baptism unless the Holy Spirit powerfully works during its administration unto the enlivening, comforting, and strengthening of their souls and the exercise of a more intimate union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

If, however, the Holy Spirit does indeed so work, their baptism is then a powerful means unto the strengthening of their faith to lead them further in following the Lord and in cleaving all the more steadfastly to Him and His grace.

We still wish to say a few words about the external dignity with which the sacrament of baptism must be administered. Holy baptism must be administered with great simplicity and in harmony with the command and institution of Christ. No other external rituals should be permitted other than those that are necessarily required for the presentation and depiction of the internal mystery of holy baptism.

For the external administration of this sacrament, only the following matters are essential:

First, it must be administered by a lawfully ordained minister of the church, for the fact that none may baptize except ministers of the gospel is because Christ issued the command to baptize only to His apostles and His twelve disciples, and ministers have come in their place.

Second, there must be suitable subjects to whom the sacrament of holy baptism must be administered. They must be adult persons, whose baptism was neglected in their youth. According to Christ’s command, they must first be instructed in the truths of the holy gospel until they publicly confess their sins and miseries, and acknowledge that they sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus and are desirous to repent of their sins by His grace. They must also be desirous to receive the sacrament of holy baptism in conformity to Christ’s command and institution, and as a seal of the righteousness of their faith.

Also, little children of believing parents must receive the sacrament of baptism; that is, the little children of external members of the Christian church who have made a public confession of their Christian faith. We must then view and consider such children as true members of Christ until they subsequently clearly manifest the opposite to be true. If it may please the Lord, we will address this in greater detail as we consider the next Lord’s Day.

Third, baptism itself must be administered among us in all simplicity by the sprinkling of water, sprinkling being used in place of immersion as baptism was formerly administered either in or under water. However, such sprinkling is of the same efficacy and has the same meaning as immersion. We conveniently make use of sprinkling, following the example of the Jews of former days, who administered baptism both by sprinkling and immersion.² Without baptism by sprinkling, we could not comprehend how the apostles were able to baptize a multitude of three thousand Jews on the first Christian observance of Pentecost, considering one-half of the day already had expired by the time they began to administer the sacrament of baptism. Furthermore, how were they able either to baptize the sick, the bed-ridden, or entire families within their homes?

Fourth, we must administer baptism by using the formula instituted and commanded by Christ, and thus “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and

2. Though VanderGroe stated earlier that the Jews baptized proselytes by immersion, here he is undoubtedly also referring to the baptisms prescribed by the ceremonial law—baptisms that were administered by either pouring or sprinkling.

of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). This indicates that they who are baptized are thereby solemnly surrendered and consecrated unto the triune God to be His eternal property in His gracious covenant.

Fifth, the location where holy baptism is to be administered is most suitably the church in which the congregation of the Lord is assembled for the purpose of hearing the preaching of God's Word. Thus, everyone may be edified by the administration of holy baptism, and the entire congregation may be witness to its administration, lest there be a doubt in anyone's mind.

There is nothing else belonging to the external administration of the sacrament of baptism except these five matters that we have articulated, and whatever else is performed in addition to these matters is merely a vain, needless, and erroneous practice and ritual of men in which the Lord finds no delight.

It now remains to consider in particular the efficacy and necessity of holy baptism, and also that it must be administered to the young children of believers, thereby refuting the errors of Roman Catholicism and the Anabaptists. The instructor will deal with this in the next Lord's Day. Also, the Lord willing, it is our desire to devote a special message to the practical application of the doctrine of baptism. We therefore now conclude by commending you and ourselves "to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:22), and that unto life eternal. Amen.

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