

The Heidelberg Catechism

Introduction

Question 1. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

Answer. That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. Christ has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Question 2. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

Answer. Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such redemption.

Question 3. How do you come to know your miserable condition?

Answer. The law of God tells me.

Question 4. What does God's law require of us?

Answer. Christ teaches us this in summary in Matthew 22: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your minds [and with all your strength].' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." ¹

Question 5. Can you live up to all this perfectly?

Answer. No. I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbor.

Question 6. Did God create people so wicked and perverse?

Answer. No. God created them good and in God's own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness, so that they might truly know God their creator, love God with all their heart, and live with God in eternal happiness for God's praise and glory.

Question 7. What is the source of this corruption of human nature?

Answer. The fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise. This fall has so poisoned our nature that we are all conceived and born in a sinful condition.

Question 8. But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil?

Answer. Yes, unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.

Question 9. But doesn't God do us an injustice by requiring in the law what we are unable to do?

Answer. No. God created human beings with the ability to keep the law. They, however, tempted by the devil, in deliberate disobedience, robbed themselves and all their descendants of these gifts.

Question 10. Will God permit such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?

Answer. Certainly not. God is terribly angry about the sin we are born with as well as the sins we personally commit. As a just judge God punishes them now and in eternity. God has declared: "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law." ²

Question 11. But isn't God merciful?

Answer. God is indeed merciful but also just. Divine justice demands that sin, committed against God's supreme majesty, be punished with the supreme penalty eternal punishment of body and soul.

Of Human Redemption

Question 12. According to God's righteous judgement we deserve punishment both in this world and forever after: how then can we escape this punishment and return to God's favor?

Answer. God requires that divine justice be satisfied. Therefore the claims of this justice must be paid in full, either by ourselves or by another.

Question 13. Can we pay this debt ourselves?

Answer. Certainly not. Actually, we increase our debt every day.

Question 14. Can another creature any at all pay this debt for us?

Answer. No. God will not punish any other creature for what a human being has committed. Besides, no mere creature can bear the weight of God's eternal wrath against sin and release others from it.

Question 15. What kind of mediator and redeemer should we look for then?

Answer. One who is truly human and perfectly righteous, yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is also truly God.

Question 16. Why must the mediator be truly human and perfectly righteous?

Answer. God's justice demands that a human being must pay for human sin; but a sinful human could never pay for others.

Question 17. Why must the mediator also be truly God?

Answer. So that the mediator, by the power of divinity, might bear the weight of God's wrath as a human being, and earn for us and restore to us righteousness and life.

Question 18. Who is this mediator true God and at the same time truly human and perfectly righteous?

Answer. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was given to redeem us completely and to make us right with God.

Question 19. How do you come to know this?

Answer. The holy gospel tells me. God began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise; later, God proclaimed it by the holy patriarchs and prophets and portrayed it by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law and, finally, fulfilled it through God's own dear Son.

Question 20. Will all people then be saved through Christ just as they were lost through Adam?

Answer. No. Only those are saved who by true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all his blessings.

Question 21. What is true faith?

Answer. It is not only a certain knowledge by which I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in the Word, but also a wholehearted trust which the Holy Spirit creates in me through the gospel, that, not only to others, but to me also God has given the forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, out of sheer grace, solely for the sake of Christ's saving work.

Question 22. What then must a Christian believe?

Answer. All that is promised us in the gospel, a summary of which is taught us in the articles of our universally acknowledged Christian faith.

Question 23. What are these articles?

Answer. I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Question 24. How are these articles divided?

Answer. Into three parts: The first concerns God the Father and our creation; the second, God the Son and our redemption; and the third, God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.

Question 25. Since there is only one divine Being, why do you speak of three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Answer. Because that is how God is revealed in God's own Word; these three distinct persons are one, true, eternal God.

Of God the Father

Question 26. What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth"?

Answer. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ, God's Son. I trust God so much that I do not doubt that God will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and will turn to my good whatever adversity God sends me in this sad world. God, being almighty God, is able to do this; God, being a faithful Father, desires to do this.

Question 27. What do you understand by the providence of God?

Answer. The almighty and ever present power by which God upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaves and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and everything else, come to us not by chance but from God's sustaining hand.

Question 28. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

Answer. We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from God's love. All creatures are so completely in God's hand that without the divine will they can neither move nor be moved.

Of God the Son

Question 29. Why is the Son of God called "Jesus," meaning Savior?

Answer. Because he saves us from our sins, and because salvation is not to be sought or found in any other.

Question 30. Do those who look for their salvation and security in saints, in themselves, or elsewhere really believe in the only Savior Jesus?

Answer. No. Although they boast of being his, by their deeds they deny the only Savior and Redeemer Jesus. Either Jesus is not a perfect Savior, or those who in true faith accept this Savior have in him all they need for their salvation.

Question 31. Why is he called "Christ," meaning anointed?

Answer. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our redemption; our only high priest who has redeemed us by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the redemption he has won for us.

Question 32. But why are you called a Christian?

Answer. Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity.

Question 33. Why is he called God's "only Son" when we also are God's children?

Answer. Because Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son of God. We, however, are adopted children of God adopted by grace through Christ.

Question 34. Why do you call him "our Lord"?

Answer. Because not with gold or silver, but with his precious blood he has redeemed us from sin and from the power of the devil, and has bought us, body and soul, to be his very own.

Question 35. What does it mean that he "was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary"?

Answer. That the eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God, took to himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit, from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, a truly human nature so that he might become David's true descendant, like his brothers and sisters in every way except for sin.

Question 36. How does the holy conception and birth of Christ benefit you?

Answer. He is our Mediator and, in God's sight, he covers with his innocence and holiness the sinfulness in which I was conceived.

Question 37. What do you understand by the word "suffered"?

Answer. That during his whole life on earth, and especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race. This he did in order that, by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice, he might redeem us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation, and gain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.

Question 38. Why did he suffer "under Pontius Pilate" as judge?

Answer. So that he, though innocent, might be condemned by an earthly judge, and so set us free from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us.

Question 39. Is there something more in his having been crucified than if he had died some other death?

Answer. Yes, for by this I am assured that he took upon himself the curse which lay upon me, because the death of the cross was cursed by God.

Question 40. Why did Christ have to suffer "death"?

Answer. Because the righteousness and truth of God are such that nothing else could pay for our sins except the death of the Son of God.

Question 41. Why was he "buried"?

Answer. His burial testifies that he really died.

Question 42. Since Christ has died for us, why do we still have to die?

Answer. Our death does not pay the debt of our sins. Rather, it puts an end to our sinning and is our entrance into eternal life.

Question 43. What further advantage do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?

Answer. Through Christ's death our old selves are crucified, put to death, and buried with him, so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer rule in us, but that instead we may dedicate ourselves as an offering of gratitude to him.

Question 44. Why does the creed add, "He descended to hell"?

Answer. To assure me in times of personal crisis and temptation that Christ my Lord, by suffering unspeakable anguish, pain, and terror of soul, especially on the cross but also earlier, has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell.

Question 45. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?

Answer. First, by his resurrection he has overcome death that he might make us share in the righteousness which he has obtained for us through his death. Second, we too are now raised by his power to a new life. Third, the resurrection of Christ

is a sure pledge to us of our blessed resurrection.

Question 46. What do you mean by saying, "He ascended to heaven"?

Answer. That Christ was taken up from the earth into heaven before the very eyes of his disciples and remains there on our behalf until he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

Question 47. But isn't Christ with us until the end of the world as he promised us?

Answer. Christ is truly human and truly god. In his human nature Christ is not now on earth; but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit he is never absent from us.

Question 48. If his humanity is not present wherever his divinity is, then aren't the two natures of Christ separated from each other?

Answer. Certainly not. Since divinity is incomprehensible and everywhere present, it must follow that the divinity is indeed beyond the bounds of the humanity which it has taken on, and is nonetheless ever in that humanity as well, and remains personally united to it.

Question 49. How does Christ's ascension to heaven benefit us?

Answer. First, he is our advocate in heaven in the presence of his Father. Second, we have our flesh as a full guarantee in heaven that Christ our head, will also take us, his members up to himself. Third, he sends us, as a guarantee on earth, his Spirit by whose power we seek what is above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God, and not things that are on earth.

Question 50. Why the next words: "and sits at the right hand of God"?

Answer. Christ ascended to heaven so that he might show there that he is head of his church, and that the Father rules all things through him.

Question 51. How does this glory of Christ our head benefit us?

Answer. First, through his Holy Spirit he pours out his gifts from heaven upon us his members. Second, by his power he defends us and keeps us safe from all enemies.

Question 52. How does Christ's return "to judge the living and the dead" comfort you?

Answer. In all my affliction and persecution I may await with head held high the very Judge from heaven who has already submitted himself to the judgment of God for me and has removed all the curse from me. He will cast all his enemies and mine into everlasting condemnation, but he will take me and all his chosen ones to himself into the joy and glory of heaven.

The Holy Spirit

Question 53. What do you believe concerning "the Holy Spirit"?

Answer. First, the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, is eternal God. Second, the Spirit has been given to me personally and, by true faith, makes me share in Christ and all his blessings, comforts me, and remains with me forever.

Question 54. What do you believe concerning "the holy catholic church"?

Answer. I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. Moreover, I believe that I am and forever will remain a living member of it.

Question 55. What do you understand by "the communion of saints"?

Answer. First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts. Second, that each member should consider it a duty to use these gifts readily and cheerfully for the service and enrichment of the other members.

Question 56. What do you believe concerning "the forgiveness of sins"?

Answer. I believe that God, because of Christ's atonement, will never hold against me any of my sins nor my sinful nature which I need to struggle against all my life. Rather, God by grace grants me the righteousness of Christ to free me forever from judgement.

Question 57. How does "the resurrection of the body" comfort you?

Answer. Not only will my soul be taken immediately after this life to Christ its head, but even my very flesh, raised by the power of Christ, will be reunited with my soul and made like Christ's glorious body.

Question 58. How does the article concerning "life everlasting" comfort you?

Answer. Even as I already now experience in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, so after this life I will have perfect blessedness such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no human heart has ever imagined: a blessedness in which to praise God forever.

Question 59. What good does it do you, however, to believe all this?

Answer. In Christ I am right with God and heir to life everlasting.

Question 60. How are you right with God?

Answer. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still ever inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift of God with a believing heart.

Question 61. Why do you say that you are right with God by faith alone?

Answer. It is not because of any value my faith has that God is pleased with me. Only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me right with God. And I can receive this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than by faith

Question 62. Why can't the good works we do make us right, or at least help make us right, with God?

Answer. Because the righteousness which can pass God's scrutiny must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to the divine law. Even the very best we do in this life is imperfect and stained with sin.

Question 63. Then don't our good works merit anything when God has promised to reward them in this life and the next?

Answer. This reward is not earned; it is a gift of grace.

Question 64. But doesn't this teaching make people careless and wicked?

Answer. No, for it is impossible for those who are grafted into Christ by true faith not to bring forth the fruit of gratitude.

The Sacraments

Question 65. Since, then, faith alone makes us share in Christ and all his blessings, where does that faith come from?

Answer. The Holy Spirit creates it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments.

Question 66. What are the sacraments?

Answer. They are visible, holy signs and seals instituted by God so that by their use God may make us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel, and put the divine seal on that promise; namely to grant us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, by grace alone, because of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.

Question 67. Are both the Word and the sacraments intended to focus our faith on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?

Answer. Right! In the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us, and through the holy sacraments assures us, that our entire salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.

Question 68. How many sacraments did Christ institute in the New Testament?

Answer. Two: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism

Question 69. How does baptism remind you and assure you that Christ's one sacrifice on the cross is for you personally?

Answer. In this way: Christ instituted this outward washing and with it gave the promise that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly his blood and his Spirit wash away my soul's impurity, in other words, all my sins.

Question 70. What does it mean to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?

Answer. It means to have forgiveness of sins from God, through grace, for the sake of Christ's blood which is shed for us in his sacrifice on the cross, and also to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified as members of Christ, so that we may more and more die unto sin and live in a consecrated and blameless way.

Question 71. Where does Christ promise that we are washed with his blood and Spirit as surely as we are washed with the water of baptism?

Answer. In the institution of baptism where he says: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." ³ "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned." ⁴ This promise is repeated when Scripture calls baptism the water of rebirth and the washing away of sins. ⁵

Question 72. Does the outward washing with water itself wash away sins?

Answer. No, only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.

Question 73. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism the washing of rebirth and the washing away of sins?

Answer. God has good reason for these words, intending to teach us that the blood and Spirit of Christ wash away our sins

just as water washes away dirt from our bodies. But more important, God intends to assure us, by this divine pledge and sign, that the washing away of our sins spiritually is as real as physical washing with water.

Question 74. Should infants, too, be baptized?

Answer. Yes. Infants as well as adults are in God's covenant and belong to God's people. They, no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sins through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who gives faith. Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the covenant, infants should be received into the Christian church and should be distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.

The Lord's Supper

Question 75. How does the Lord's Supper remind and assure you that you share in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross and in all his gifts?

Answer. In this way: Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread and to drink of this cup. He has thereby promised: First, as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup shared with me, so surely his body was offered and broken for me and his blood was shed for me. Second, as surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves and actually taste the bread and the cup of the Lord which are given me as sure signs of the body and blood of Christ, so surely he feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood.

Question 76. What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink his shed blood?

Answer. It means to accept with a believing heart the whole passion and death of Christ, and by it to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In addition, it means to be united more and more to his blessed body by the Holy Spirit dwelling both in Christ and in us that, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are nevertheless flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, always living and being governed by one Spirit, as the members of our bodies are governed by one soul.

Question 77. Where has Christ promised that he will feed and nourish believers with his body and blood just as surely as they eat of this broken bread and drink of this cup?

Answer. In the institution of the Lord's Supper which reads: "...that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."⁶

This promise is repeated by Paul in these words: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."⁷

Question 78. Are the bread and wine changed into the real body and blood of Christ?

Answer. No. Just as the water of baptism is not changed into Christ's blood and does not itself wash away sins but is simply God's sign and assurance, so too the bread of the Lord's Supper is not changed into the actual body of Christ even though it is called the body of Christ in keeping with the nature and language of sacraments.

Question 79. Why then does Christ call the bread his body and the cup his blood, or the new covenant in his blood? And why does the apostle Paul call the supper a participation in the body and blood of Christ?

Answer. Christ has good reason for these words. He intends to teach us that as bread and wine nourish this temporal life, so too his crucified body and shed blood truly nourish our souls for eternal life. But more important, he intends to assure us, by this visible sign and pledge, that we, through the work of the Holy Spirit, share in his true body and blood as surely as our mouths receive these holy signs in his remembrance. He also intends to assure us that all his suffering and obedience are as definitely ours as if we personally had suffered and paid for our sins.⁸

Question 81. Who ought to come to the table of the Lord?

Answer. Those who are displeased with themselves for their sins, and who nevertheless trust that these sins have been forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the passion and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and make their life whole. The unrepentant and hypocrites, however, eat and drink judgement to themselves.

Question 82. Should those be admitted to the Lord's Supper who show by what they say and do that they are unbelieving and ungodly?

Answer. No, that would dishonor God's covenant and bring down God's wrath upon the entire congregation. Therefore, according to the instruction of Christ and his apostles, the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such people, by the official use of the keys of the kingdom, until they reform their lives.

Question 83. What are the keys of the kingdom?

Answer. The preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline. Both preaching and discipline open the kingdom of heaven to believers and close it to unbelievers.

Question 84. How does preaching the gospel open and close the kingdom of heaven?

Answer. According to the command of Christ: The kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring to all believers, each and every one, that, as often as they accept the gospel promise in true faith, God, because of what Christ has done, truly forgives all their sins. The kingdom of heaven is closed, however, by proclaiming and publicly declaring to unbelievers and hypocrites that, as long as they do not repent, the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them. God's judgement, both in this life and in the life to come, is based on this gospel testimony.

Question 85. How is the kingdom of heaven closed and opened by Christian discipline?

Answer. According to the command of Christ: Those who, though called Christians, profess unchristian teachings or live unchristian lives, and after repeated and loving counsel refuse to abandon their errors and wickedness, and after being reported to the church, that is, to its officers, fail to respond also to their admonition such persons the officers exclude from the Christian fellowship by withholding the sacraments from them, and God excludes them from the kingdom of Christ. Such persons, when promising and demonstrating genuine reform, are received again as members of Christ and of his church.

Thankfulness

Question 86. Since then we are redeemed from our sin and misery by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why must we do good works?

Answer. Because just as Christ has redeemed us with his blood he also renews us through his Holy Spirit according to his own image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves grateful to God for his goodness and that he may be glorified through us; and further, so that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits and by our godly living may win our neighbors to Christ.

Question 87. Can those be saved who do not turn to God from their ungrateful and unrepentant ways?

Answer. Certainly not. Scripture says: "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers,...thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers none of these will inherit the kingdom of God."⁹

Question 88. What is involved in genuine repentance or conversion?

Answer. Two things: the dying of the old self, and the coming to life of the new.

Question 89. What is the dying of the old self?

Answer. It is to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it more and more, and to run away from it.

Question 90. What is the coming-to-life of the new self?

Answer. It is wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a strong desire to live according to the will of God in all good works.

Question 91. What are good works?

Answer. Only those which are done out of true faith, conform to God's law, and are done for God's glory, and not those based on our own opinion or human tradition.

The Ten Commandments

Question 92. What does the Lord say in his law?

Answer. God spoke all these words:

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me."

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

"You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments."

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

"You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses [the divine] name."

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

"Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it."

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

"Honor you father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving to you."

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not murder."

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not commit adultery."

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not steal."

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not bear false witness against you neighbor."

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; You shall not covet you neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to you neighbor."¹⁰

Question 93. How are these commandments divided?

Answer. Into two tables: the first has four commandments, teaching us what our relation to God should be. The second has six commandments, teaching us what we owe our neighbor.

Question 94. What does the Lord require in the first commandment?

Answer. That I, not wanting to endanger my own salvation, avoid and shun all idolatry, sorcery, superstitious rites, and prayer to saints or to other creatures. That I sincerely acknowledge the only true God, trust God alone, look to God for every good thing humbly and patiently, and love, fear, and honor God with all my heart. In short, that I give up anything rather than go against God's will in any way.

Question 95. What is idolatry?

Answer. Idolatry is having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of, or alongside of, the only true God who is self-revealed in the divine word.

Question 96. What is God's will for us in the second commandment?

Answer. That we should not represent or worship God in any other manner than God has commanded in the Word.

Question 97. May we not then make any image at all?

Answer. God cannot and may not be visible portrayed in any way. Although creatures may be portrayed, yet God forbids making or having such images if one's intention is to worship them or to serve God through them.

Question 98. May not images be permitted in the churches as teaching aids for the unlearned?

Answer. No. We should not try to be wiser than God. God wants us to be instructed by the living preaching of the Word not by idols that cannot even talk.

Question 99. What is God's will for us in the third commandment?

Answer. That we neither blaspheme nor misuse the name of God by cursing, perjury, or unnecessary oaths, nor share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders. In a word, it requires that we use the holy name of God only with reverence and awe, so that we may properly confess God, pray to God, and glorify God in all our words and works.

Question 100. Is blasphemy of God's holy name by swearing and cursing really such serious sin that God is angry also with those who do not do all they can to help prevent and forbid it?

Answer. Yes, indeed; for no sin is greater or provokes God's wrath more than the profaning of the divine name. That is why God commanded it to be punished with death.

Question 101. May we swear an oath in God's name if we do it reverently?

Answer. Yes, when the government demands it, or when necessity requires it, in order to maintain and promote truth and trustworthiness for God's glory and our neighbor's good. Such oaths are approved in God's Word and were rightly used by Old and New Testament believers.

Question 102. May we also swear by saints or other creatures?

Answer. No. A legitimate oath is calling upon God, as the only one who knows my heart, to witness my truthfulness and to punish me if I swear falsely. No creature deserves such honor.

Question 103. What is God's will for us in the fourth commandment?

Answer. First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained, and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I regularly attend the assembly of God's people to learn what God's Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through the Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

Question 104. What is God's will for us in the fifth commandment?

Answer. That I show honor, love, and loyalty to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; that I submit myself with proper obedience to all their good teaching and correction; and also that I be patient with their failings, for through them God chooses to rule us.

Question 105. What is God's will for us in the sixth commandment?

Answer. I am not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor not by my thoughts, my words, my look, or gesture and certainly not by actual deeds and I am not to be party to this in others; rather, I am to put away all desire for revenge. I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself either. Prevention of murder is also why government is armed with the sword.

Question 106. Does this commandment refer only to murder?

Answer. God's prohibition of murder teaches us that God hates the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness. In God's sight all such are hidden murder.

Question 107. Is it enough then that we not murder our neighbor in any such way?

Answer. No. By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God wants us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to show patience, peace, gentleness, mercy, and friendliness towards them, to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.

Question 108. What is God's will for us in the seventh commandment?

Answer. God condemns all unchastity. We should therefore thoroughly detest it and, married or single, live chaste and decent lives.

Question 109. Does God, in this commandment, forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?

Answer. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy. That is why God forbids everything which incites unchastity, whether it be actions, looks, talks, thoughts, or desires.

Question 110. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?

Answer. God forbids not only the theft and robbery which civil authorities punish, but God also labels as theft all wicked tricks and schemes by which we seek to get for ourselves our neighbor's goods, whether by force or under the pretext of right, such as false weights and measures, deceptive advertising or merchandising, counterfeit money, exorbitant interest, or any other means forbidden by God. In addition God forbids all greed and pointless squandering of his gifts.

Question 111. What does God require of us in this commandment?

Answer. That I do whatever I can for my neighbor's good, that I treat others as I would like them to treat me, and that I work faithfully so that I may share with those in need.

Question 112. What is God's will for us in the ninth commandment?

Answer. That I do not give false testimony against anyone, twist anyone's words, or gossip or slander, or join in condemning anyone without a hearing or without just cause. Rather, in court and everywhere else, I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind; these are devices the devil uses, and they would call down on me God's intense wrath. I should love the truth, speak it candidly, and openly acknowledge it. And I should do what I can to defend and advance my neighbor's good name.

Question 113. What is God's will for us in the tenth commandment?

Answer. That not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any one of God's commandments should ever arise in our hearts. Rather, with all our heart we should always hate sin and take pleasure in whatever is right.

Question 114. Can those converted to God obey these commandments perfectly?

Answer. No. In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience. Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose, they do begin to live according to all, not only some, of God's commandments.

Question 115. Why, then, does God have the Ten Commandments preached so strictly since no one can keep them in this life?

Answer. First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sinfulness and the more we may eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness. Second, so that, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.

Prayer

Question 116. Why do Christians need to pray?

Answer. Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us. And also because God gives divine grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who pray continually and groan inwardly, asking God for these gifts and thanking God for them.

Question 117. What is in a prayer which pleases and is heard by God?

Answer. First, that we sincerely call upon the one true God, who is self-revealed to us in the Word, for all that we are commanded to ask of God. Second, that we truly acknowledge our need and misery, and humble ourselves in God's majestic presence. Third, that we rest assured that, even though we don't deserve it, God will certainly hear our prayer because of

Christ our Lord, as God has promised in the Word.

Question 118. What has God commanded us to request?

Answer. All things necessary for soul and body which Christ the Lord has included in the prayer which he himself taught us.

Our Lord's Prayer

Question 119. What is this prayer?

Answer. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one." ["For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen."] ¹¹

Question 120. Why has Christ commanded us to address God: "Our Father"?

Answer. That at the very beginning of our prayer he may awaken in us the childlike reverence and trust toward God which should be basic to our prayer, which is that God has become our Father through Christ and will much less deny us what we ask in faith than our human fathers and mothers will refuse us earthly things.

Question 121. Why the words "in heaven"?

Answer. These words teach us not to think of God's heavenly majesty as something earthly, and to expect everything for body and soul from God's almighty power.

Question 122. What is the first petition?

Answer. "Hallowed be your name" means: Help us first of all really to know you, to bless, glorify, and praise you for all your works and for all that shines forth from them: your almighty power, wisdom, kindness, justice, mercy, and truth. And it means: Help us to direct all our living what we think, say, and do so that your name will never be blasphemed because of us but always honored and praised.

Question 123. What is the second petition?

Answer. "Your kingdom come" means: Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you. Keep your church strong, and add to it. Destroy the devil's work; destroy every force which revolts against you and every conspiracy against your Word. Do this until your kingdom is so complete and perfect that in it you are all in all.

Question 124. What is the third petition?

Answer. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" means: Help us and all people to reject our own wills and to obey your will without any back talk. Your will alone is good. Help us one and all to carry out the work we are called to, as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.

Question 125. What is the fourth petition?

Answer. "Give us this day our daily bread" means: Do take care of all our physical needs so that we come to acknowledge you as the only source of everything good, and that without your blessing neither our work and worry nor your gifts can do us any good.

Question 126. What is the fifth petition?

Answer. "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" means: Because of Christ's blood, do not hold against us, poor sinners that we are, any of the sins we do or the evil that constantly clings to us. Forgive us just as we are fully determined, as evidence of your grace in us, to forgive our neighbors.

Question 127. What is the sixth petition?

Answer. "And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one" means: By ourselves we are too weak to hold our own even for a moment. And our sworn enemies the devil, the world, and our own flesh never stop attacking us. And so, Lord, uphold us and make us strong with the strength of your Holy Spirit, so that we may not go down to defeat in this spiritual struggle, but may firmly resist our enemies until we finally win the complete victory.

Question 128. What does your conclusion to this prayer mean? ¹²

Answer. "For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever" means: We ask all this of you because, as our ruler, you are willing and able to give us all that is good since you have power over everything, and because, not we ourselves, but your holy name should be glorified forever.

Question 129. What is the meaning of the little word "Amen"?

Answer. "Amen" means: This shall truly and surely be. It is even more sure that God heard my prayer than that I really desire what I pray for.