

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 1

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

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

Q. 3. What do the scriptures principally teach?

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

What is the meaning of life? Some would say that it is beyond our ability to find the answer to this question; and yet it remains a question that every generation asks. What's it all about? Why are we here? This question lies in every heart, because the answer gives us meaning and purpose for life.

The message of God's word is that we do have purpose, there is meaning in this life. Ultimately, as the catechism teaches, our purpose, our "chief end" is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We were created for God's glory; that is, all of creation glorifies its creator by nature and by calling. By nature, creation glorifies God much as an artist's work brings the artist praise and glory. However, as beings created in the image of God, men and women have a special calling to bring glory to God.

Moreover, we were created to enjoy God. For some, this may seem like a strange idea. God is viewed as the ultimate killjoy, giving rules and regulations to keep people from having any fun. But God has created us for joy, to enjoy His presence and the good gifts of His creation.

How, then, do we do this, glorify God and find joy in His presence? The answer is found in God's word, His revelation to us of His will. The word of God is our only reliable and infallible guide as we seek to glorify and enjoy God. If we want to live up to this grand and glorious calling, we must turn to His word for us.

Prayer

Gracious God,

Thank you for creating us and giving us purpose in life. Help us to live our lives in a way that will bring you glory, and may we continue to find great joy in your presence. Teach us, by your word, how we are to live and believe, that we may walk according to your will. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1 Cor. 10:31; Rom 11:36; Ps 73:24-26; Gal 1:8-9; Isa 8:20; II Tim 3:15-17; Mic 6:8; John 3:16

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Lord's Day 2

Q. 4. What is God?

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

Q. 5. Are there more Gods than one?

A. There is but One only, the living and true God.

Q. 6. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

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

Answer #3 of the Shorter Catechism teaches us that the Scriptures principally teach what we are to believe concerning God, and what God requires of us. Answers 4, 5, and 6, summarize what the Scriptures reveal about God and what we are to believe.

As try to come to a better understanding of the nature and character of God, we are always confronted by the complexity and unsearchable nature of God. Someone once said that describing God is like trying to paint a bird in flight; you may have captured that moment, but the bird has moved on. With God, there is always more than what we can know, God is always bigger than our definition.

One of the hardest things to understand about God is His revelation as the Triune God. The word Trinity, while not appearing in the Bible, does not refer to a relationship of three gods, but rather it describes the relationship of one God who is three persons. On the one hand the Bible strongly affirms the unity of God (Deut 6:4). On the other hand the bible clearly affirms the full deity of the three persons of the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three persons are one in essence. At the same time, there is also a distinction in the work of each person of the Trinity. For example, the work of salvation is in one sense common to all three persons, yet in the manner of activity, there are differing operations assumed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity does not fully explain the character of God, rather, it sets the boundaries outside of which we must not step.

All that we need to know about God for our salvation has been revealed to us in Scripture, and we must be faithful to that revelation. We do not create our knowledge of God; we believe what God has revealed.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for showing yourself to us. Teach us to know you, and to know you as you have made yourself known. Break down all the idols and false gods that we have created, and enable us to worship you alone. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Lord's Day 3

Q. 7. What are the decrees of God?

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

Q. 8. How does God execute his decrees?

A. God executes his decrees in the works of creation and providence.

These devotions are written by a man. It's best that you know that know, because knowing that will help you understand some of my deficiencies. I am a guy; as such I do not multitask, I get distracted very easily, and most importantly, I have a hard time following directions. I remember once trying to assemble an entertainment unit with my Father-in-Law. We did the whole thing without ever looking at the plans; then we had to take it apart and put it back together again so the doors would fit. It would have been easier to follow the plan, but I am a guy, enough said.

Last week, our installment of the Catechism focused on what we may say of the nature of God. Now we turn to what could be called "God's Eternal Plan." The decrees of God are God's determination or will that a certain thing to be done. It is, then, comforting to know that God has had from the beginning of time a wise and intelligent plan for creation, and that every event that has or will transpire, because of His provident grace, will somehow fall within His plan.

Some may reject the notion of God foreordaining whatever comes to pass on the basis that it negates our free will or determination. However, the fundamental doctrine of the decree of God is God's sovereignty over all things. If God is before all, over all, in all and through all things, and if by him all things exist, then His absolute direction and control over all things must also be affirmed. This is all that is meant by foreordination, God has created all things, has given all things purpose, and will see that all things work together toward His plan.

And so what is God's eternal plan for creation? Look back to Question 1; the supreme end of the eternal plan or decree of God is the manifestation of God's glory. God is glorified in the works of creation, and in His providential care of His creation. Ultimately, however, the good of creation is always secondary to the glory of God, which is the chief end of all things.

Prayer

Almighty and Gracious God, we have great hope in your providential and sovereign plan for your creation. Help us to trust in you more each day, that we may walk according to your will and bring you glory in all that we do. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Eph. 1:11; Acts 4:27, 28; Ps. 33:11; Eph. 2:10; Rom. 9:22, 23; 11:33;

Rev. 4:11; Eph. 1:11

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Lord's Day 4

Q. 9. What is the work of creation?

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

Q. 10. How did God create man?

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

It is not socially acceptable today to say you believe that God created the universe, to claim that you accept the Genesis account of creation as true. Most would say the notion is archaic, mythical, and anti-intellectual.

Even within the church there is a wide variety of teachings on what is actually meant by "day" in the creation account of Genesis 1. Some assert that God created the world in six twenty-four hour days, others that the universe is millions of years old, necessitating that the events of Gen 1 took much longer. Still, others consider the creation story as a theological work rather than an actual account of creation.

It should be noted that the Hebrew word for day (yom) always stands for a twenty-four hour day when preceded by numbers, as is the case in Gen. 1. Moreover, God's pattern of work and rest could hardly serve as an example for our own if God took longer than a week to complete his work. These are but two reasons why the church has and continues teach a literal six day creation.

Most importantly, the Doctrine of Creation teaches us something about the God whom we worship. Primarily, creation teaches us that God exists, and that we cannot explain the universe without Him. Secondly, we learn that God is sovereign. God has created everything, and therefore has ultimate power over everything. Nothing is out of God's hands, nothing beyond His control, nothing that God cannot redeem.

We also find in this doctrine something about ourselves. Scripture teaches that we were created in the image of God, something that is never said about any else in creation. Being created in God's image, we are set apart, and are given the privilege of understanding God's revelation, to have fellowship with God, and to reflect God's attributes. This is the foundation for our human dignity, our self-worth. We were created special, in God's image.

Prayer

Almighty and Sovereign God, we thank you for your good work of creation, and for the blessing of being created in your image. By your grace may we live to reflect your image in a way that brings you honour and glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Gen 1:1-31; Heb 11:3; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; Rev 4:11

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Lord's Day 5

Q. 11. What are God's works of providence?

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

Q. 12. What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created?

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

When we affirm the Providence of God, we confess our belief that God provides for, or governs His creation. God is not, as the Deists taught, the great clockmaker who created the universe, set all things in motion, but has since been completely removed from creation. Our God is personally involved in the preservation and salvation of His creation. You need look no further than the incarnation of Christ to see this truth.

The word provision literally means to look (visio) ahead (pro). Stu Weber, in his book *Tender Warrior*, sees this attribute of God to be like that of a scout on the wagon train, always looking ahead, blazing the trail, watching for hidden dangers, and preparing the people for what is to come. The catechism teaches today that God's providence preserves and governs His creation. This is seen most notably in the fact that, after creating man, God entered into a covenant relationship with His creation, establishing the conditions and promises of the covenant. Through the covenant, God provided boundaries and blessings for all of humanity; that is, God R. C. Sproul writes, "The central point of the doctrine... is the stress on God's government of the universe. He rules His creation with absolute sovereignty and authority. He governs everything that comes to pass, from the greatest to the least. Nothing ever happens beyond the scope of his sovereign providential government. He makes the rain to fall and the sun to shine. He raises up kingdoms and brings them down. He numbers the hairs on our head and the days of our life." As beings created in the image of God we have a "will of our own. We make things happen. Yet the causal power we exert is secondary. God's sovereign providence stands over and above our actions. He works out His will through the actions of human wills, without violating the freedom of those human wills." Sproul, R.C. *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*. (Wheaton, Ill.; Tyndale, 1992).

Prayer

Almighty God, we praise you for your providential care and rule over all creation. Teach us, by your power, to trust and obey your provision. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ps 104:24; Heb 1:3; Ps 103:19; Matt 10:29-30; Job 38-41; Rom 5:12-14; 10:5. Lu 10:25-28. Gen 2:17

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Lord's Day 6

Q. 13. Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?

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

Q. 14. What is sin?

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

Q. 15. What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?

A. The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created, was their eating the forbidden fruit.

Things are not the way they should be. The Bible tells us that when God created man and woman, they were created good in a pristine condition; without sin, without conflict between us. Humanity was at peace with God, living in a covenant relationship with Him. We even read in Gen. 3 that God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden.

Today it is Paradise Lost. There is war, disease, broken relationships, broken lives. We feel separated from God, and we struggle to do the right we know we ought to do. Things are not the way they should be. How did things go so wrong?

The catechism summarizes Gen. 3 saying that, "Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the state wherein they were created, by sinning against God." God gave the commandment: "Do not eat of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil." But with the commandment came the choice; follow His commandment and live in the garden with Him, or break His commandment and face certain death. Our first parents were given the choice, and had the free will to choose to obey or disobey God's decree.

Our parents sinned, disobeying God's sovereign will. Sin is the willful act that goes against God's will, and it is also the passive inaction that leaves His will undone. Adam and Eve chose to eat from the forbidden tree, sinning against God's commandment. But our parents are not alone in their abuse of their free will. This week, let us honestly reflect on our lives and confess the many ways that we have sinned against God's will, by our action or inaction, that we may be made right with God.

Prayer

Almighty God, we are all too aware of our sins, they are always before us, ready to condemn us. But you promise that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Set us free from our sins, that we might enjoy true communion with you again. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Gen 3:6-8, 13; II Cor 11:3; I John 3:4; James 4:17; Rom 3:23

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Lord's Day 7

Q. 16. Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?

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

Q. 17. Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

A. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

B.B. Warfield, considered one of the last great theologians of Princeton Seminary, wrote the following in his statement of faith:

I believe that God created man after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, and entered into a covenant of life with him upon the sole condition of the obedience that was his due; so that it was by willfully sinning against God that man fell into the sin and misery in which I have been born.

I believe, that, being fallen in Adam, my first father, I am by nature a child of wrath, under the condemnation of God and corrupted in body and soul, prone to evil and liable to eternal death; from which dreadful state I cannot be delivered save through the unmerited grace of God my Savior.

Because of Adam's sin, we all have been plunged into an estate of sin and misery. That does not, however, relieve us of our own responsibility. God's righteous requirement still stands for each of us. While it is true that the sin of our first parents "led to the condemnation of all men" (Rom 5:18), it is equally true that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

Through the original sin of Adam, sin is no longer something we do; it is descriptive of our very nature. We aren't sinful because we sin; rather, we sin because we are sinful. Henry Van Dyke, in his prayer of confession, wrote "we are quick to do evil and slow to do good." How true is this? We are fallen and in need of a savior. No one will tell you this outside of the church, but the cries of our fallen race can be heard all about us. If our faith is realistic, we must hear these cries and look to our savior.

The apostle Paul states this perfectly. "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Prayer

Merciful God, we confess we have fallen short of your glory, we know our sins all too well; they always stand before us to condemn us. In your grace and mercy, forgive our sins. Give us new hearts that are filled with love for you and, by your Holy Spirit, make us holy, that we might bring you glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Acts 17:26; Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12 ; I Cor. 15:21-22; Gal 3:10

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Lord's Day 8

Q. 18. Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

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

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

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

In John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* we read of one occasion when, while Christian and Hopeful were on the Way to the Celestial City, they saw another path, on the other side of a fence, that was smoother and easier than the Way. When they came to the new path, they found it was very easy for their feet, and another traveller, named Vain-Confidence, who was ahead of them, told Christian and Hopeful that the path led to the Celestial Gate. So they decided to continue along the new path.

That night, however, they heard Vain-Confidence fall into a Pit, dashed into pieces, and they repented of ever having left the Way. As they tried to make their way back, Christian and Hopeful were captured by Giant Despair, and thrown into the dungeon of Doubting-Castle, where they were tortured and tormented, until Christian began to despair and cry out for death. "I do not know whether it is best to live like this, or to die out of hand. My soul chooses strangling rather than life, and the grave is easier for me than this dungeon!"

The catechism teaches that in our sin we lose communion with God, come under his wrath and curse, and become liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever. This is what Christian and Hopeful experienced when they tried to find an easier way to God's presence, this is what we experience when we stray from God's will.

*The pilgrims now, to gratify the flesh, will seek its ease; but, oh! How they afresh
Do thereby plunge themselves new griefs into! Who seek to please the flesh, themselves undo.*

Prayer

Gracious God, forgive us for wandering from your Way, and do not give us any comfort or hope until we find our comfort and hope in you. Restore us to your way and truth, that we might be found faithful. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Rom 3:10-20; Rom 5; Rom 6:23; Rom 8:7-8; 1 Cor 15:22; Eph 2:1-3; Jas 1:14-15

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Lord's Day 9

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

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

Up to now, the catechism has made it abundantly clear the nature of our relationship with God. Because of the fall we have incurred tremendous guilt, for which we could neither atone for bring about forgiveness. Moreover, we are, because of the fall, corrupt in our very nature, and are helpless to change. It does us no good to be a “good person,” for our goodness is riddled with sin. Our hope then rests in the goodness and grace of someone else; our hope is in the grace of God alone to deliver us.

At this point the catechism bursts forth with the good news of the gospel. Did God leave us to die in our sin and misery? No. God in his wonderful mercy has provided the perfect remedy for our sad, sinful condition. God has, by His grace, entered into a covenant relationship with us; we, who were separated from God because of our sin and guilt. He called us into covenant with Him, promising to be our God, to deliver us from our sin and guilt, and to bring salvation through our redeemer Jesus Christ.

The very essence of this covenant is that it is gracious. We did not deserve it, we could not earn it. We needed to be restored into a right relationship with God, but this was beyond our reach. Out of His good pleasure, God freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the required obedience and paid the price for our sins.

All that is required of us is that we place our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. We cease trusting in our own goodness; we trust in His life and death for our redemption. Christ, having fulfilled the legal conditions, has purchased life and salvation for all those who believe in him. When that life and salvation are passed on by faith to the believing sinner, it is offered and received as a gift of God's grace alone. Give thanks today for God's good and gracious gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Gracious Lord, we thank you for calling us into a covenant relationship with you, wherein our sins are forgiven and we receive the promise of eternal life. We know we could not do this on our own, so we place our hope and our faith in Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eph 1:4-7; Ti 1:2Ti 3:4-7; Gal 3:21; Rom 3:20-22

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Lord's Day 10

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

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

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

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

No other religion or faith makes the bold statement that Christianity makes: In His love for us, knowing that we were unable to save ourselves, God sent His only begotten Son, "so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Or, as Paul writes, "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself..." (2Cor 5:19). There is no other savior who could make this claim; neither, then, is there any other way to God. The apostle Peter says, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Furthermore, we are reminded again today that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, begotten, not made, and that He shares one essence with God the Father. R.C Sproul writes, "As the Word Incarnate, Christ is revealed as being not only preexistent to creation, but eternal. He is said to be in the beginning with God and also that He is God."

We also learn today that Christ was fully man, having a true body and soul, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. Early heresy in the Church denied that Jesus had a physical body, insisting that such a union of God and man was impossible. But the teaching of scripture is clear, Christ was fully man, like us in every way, yet he was without sin (Heb 4:15). One scholar wrote, "That which was not incarnate, was not reconciled."

Why did God become man, why was the incarnation of Christ necessary? One church father answered saying only an incarnate God/Man could adequately and fully repay the debt we owed to God. Elsewhere it has been said, God became one with man, so that man might become one with God.

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you, that in your love and mercy, you sent your Son to redeem and save us. As we dwell upon your incarnate Word, may we grow in faith and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*1 Tim 2:5; John 1:1, 14; John 10:30; Phil 2:5-11; Gal 4:4; Heb 2:14; Matt 26:38;
Luke 1:31, 35, 41, 42; Heb 7:26*

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Lord's Day 11

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

A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executes the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

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

A. Christ executes the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

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

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

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

A. Christ executes the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.

The role of the Prophet was to speak to the people on behalf of God. They spoke words of correction and rebuke, hope and deliverance, revealing God's will to Israel and the rest of the world. We believe that Jesus was not only the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy, He was also anointed by the Spirit of God to be the herald and witness of the Father's grace (Luke 4:18), revealing the perfect wisdom of God.

The role of the Priest, on the other hand, was to speak to God on behalf of the people. The priests offered sacrifices and prayers for the people, making a continual intercession before God. Scriptures teach that Christ acted as both the Priest and the Sacrifice, making the perfect atonement and intercession for our sins, passing His holiness and righteousness to us that we might stand in the presence of God.

The King was God's representative, leading, providing for, and protecting His people. Wielding great power and authority, the godly King was Lord over his people, ruling with grace and beneficence. In our Lord Jesus Christ we find our heavenly King who provides all things necessary for salvation and strengthens us to stand against the assaults of our spiritual enemies, filling us with the hope of His coming kingdom.

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for sending your Son Jesus Christ to be our prophet, revealing your will to us; our priest, making the perfect atonement for our salvation; and our King, who rules and reigns over us. Grant us your Spirit that we might always be ready to hear, to worship, and to follow faithfully our Prophet, Priest, and King. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Acts 3:22; Heb 5:5-6; Rev. 19:16; Isa 9:6-7; John 1:1-4; II Peter 1:21; Rom 3:26; Heb 2:17; Ps 110:3; I Cor 15:25

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Lord's Day 12

Q. 27. Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

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

Q. 28. Wherein consists Christ's exaltation?

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

How often do we consider the fact that it was Jesus' humiliation which led to our salvation. Theodore Beza, the 16th century theologian wrote, "From the moment of His conception until His resurrection, He bore the punishment of our sins in order to unburden us of them... He was captured in order to release us, condemned so that we might be acquitted, He suffered infinite reproach in order to place us beyond all shame. He was nailed to the cross for our sins to be nailed there. He died bearing the curse we deserved, so as to appease for ever the wrath of God through the accomplishment of His unique sacrifice." In His love for us, Christ descended to the very depths of hell itself to deliver us.

As Christ's humiliation brings him to the grave on our behalf, the exaltation of Christ raises Him to the Father's side on our behalf. The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians, "God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." In the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Christ we find the great promise that He now continually intercedes for us as our Mediator and Advocate. We are assured that because He has been raised for us, we are raised to new life in Christ, a life that is blessed and eternal (Rom 6:1-11).

The thought of Christ's humiliation on our behalf ought to produce in us such devotion and love that our lives are lived in honor of His name; His exaltation the hope to encourage and support us as we proclaim His name to all the world.

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for sending your Son for us, who in His humiliation, stooped so low as to lift us up; and in His exaltation, has raised us up with Him to the heavenly places. May we live lives worthy of such sacrifice and grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Phil 2:6-8; 2 Cor 8:9; Isa 53:3; Gal 3:13; 1 Cor 15:3-4; Acts 1:9; Eph 1:19-20; 2:4-7; Acts 17:31

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Lord's Day 13

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

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

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

A. The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

We have learned in the catechism so far that, 1) we are in desperate need of salvation, 2) we cannot save ourselves, and 3) only the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ can save us from sin and deliver us to eternal life. The next logical question must necessarily be, “how is the work of Christ, His atoning sacrifice, His righteousness, His redemption, applied to our lives?”

The Westminster Confession teaches that the Holy Spirit “is the only efficient agent in the application of redemption. He regenerates men by his grace, convicts them of sin, moves them to repentance, and persuades and enables them to embrace Jesus Christ by faith. He unites all believers to Christ, dwells in them as their Comforter and Sanctifier, gives to them the spirit of Adoption and Prayer, and performs all those gracious offices by which they are sanctified and sealed unto the day of election.”

Many Christians today have never contemplated the gracious process by which the Holy Spirit has applied the saving work of Jesus Christ. For most, salvation is a matter of “I chose Christ, and then He saved me.” The clear witness of scripture, on the other hand, teaches that when we were dead in our sins, unable to choose Christ, God sent His Holy Spirit to bring us to life, making us aware of our sinfulness and creating in us a desire to find forgiveness, and to then receive Christ as our Savior. God does not wait for us to seek Him out; by the power of His Spirit He comes to us and brings us home. As the old hymn goes, “I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew he moved my soul to seek him, seeking me; it was not I that found, O savior true; no, I was found of thee.”

Our salvation begins and ends with God. Even the faith that unites us to Christ is a gift of the Holy Spirit of God working in us. Because of this, our salvation is all the more assured. If God has chosen us for salvation, if God has sent His Son to make it possible, if God has given His Holy Spirit to make us alive together with Christ, then nothing could ever separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ which is our salvation.

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for your Holy Spirit, who brings us life and unites us with Christ in faith. To you alone is the glory for our salvation. In Jesus' name. Amen.

John 1:12-13, 3:5-6; Titus 3:6; Eph 2:1-10; John 15:5; I Cor 1:19, 6:17; I Peter 5:10

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 14

Q. 31. What is effectual calling?

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

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

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

The Westminster Confession subscribes the entirety of our salvation to the gracious and effective call of God, saying, "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life... he is pleased... effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ: enlightening their minds... taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace." (*Westminster Confession of Faith, 10.1*)

This succinctly describes the transforming and effectual work of the Holy Spirit. Our calling is transforming, in that when God calls us, God brings us to life, gives us a heart that is alive for Him, and assures us of His good and gracious plan for our lives (Jere 29:11). Apart from the Spirit's call, we are lifeless and cold to the movement of God; but when made alive by the Spirit, we are awakened to the things of God.

The Holy Spirit's work is also effective, for when God calls, we cannot help but answer. What God determines will come to pass, and God has determined to bring about the salvation of His elect. The fact that God has chosen us for salvation does not negate our free will. It is, rather, the liberation and renewal of our will; freedom from the bondage of sin; a new outlook toward God.

This is the heart of the gospel, that we are saved by God alone. Our salvation depends not on our efforts to generate some goodness from within, or our ability to satisfy God's righteous requirements. Instead, our salvation rests in the fact that while we were still sinners, God has called us in Christ and has sent His Holy Spirit to bring us to life.

Prayer

Almighty, gracious, and saving God, we praise you and thank you for calling us, in the grace and mercy of your Son, and for bringing us to life by the power of your Holy Spirit. Teach us to continue to rest and trust in your grace and mercy. In Jesus' name. Amen.

II Tim 1:8-9; Eph 1:18-20; Eph 2:5; Ezek 11:19, 36:26-27; John 6:44; Phil 2:13; Rom 8:30; I Cor 1:30

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Lord's Day 15

Q. 33. What is justification?

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

Justification is the act in which unjust sinners are made right with God. It is an instantaneous act in which God declares our sins are forgiven, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to us.

Charles Spurgeon illustrates our justification this way: The way whereby God saves a sinner is not, as some say, by passing over the penalty. No; the penalty has been all paid. It is the putting of another person in the rebel's place. The rebel must die. God says he must. Christ says, "I will be substitute for the rebel. The rebel shall take my place; I will take his." God consents to it. In his infinite mercy he consented to the arrangement. "Son of my love," said he, "you must stand in the sinner's place; you must suffer what he ought to have suffered, you must be accounted guilty, just as he was accounted guilty, and then I will look upon the sinner in another light. I will look at him as if he were Christ; I will accept him as if he were my only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth. I will give him a crown in heaven, and I will take him to my heart for ever and ever." This is the way we are saved. (From *Justification by Grace*, a Sermon Delivered on April 5, 1857)

By the gracious love of God in Jesus Christ, we are given full pardon for all our sins. To be pardoned, in the legal sense, is to be regarded as though the offence or crime never occurred. By faith, we are no longer sinners in God's eyes, but the redeemed in Christ, forgiven and righteous in His sight.

It is very important to note the use of the word "imputed" in the catechism. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not imparted. We are declared righteous by God. Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, or credited to us; it is not our own, it is not inherent to our nature. We do not possess Christ's righteousness, rather, we are deemed righteous because we are united to Christ in faith. Christ is our righteousness. This is the gift of God's grace to all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior; we are forgiven and at peace with God.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for sending your Son to fulfill all righteousness, and to die a death that would remove all our sins and become for us a perfect righteousness. May we be strengthened by your Holy Spirit to live to the praise of your glorious grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Acts 10:43; Rom 3:22-25, 4:5-8; 5:1, 17-19; II Cor 5:19-21; Gal 2:16; Eph 1:7; Phil 3:9

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Lord's Day 16

Q. 34. What is adoption?

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

Following the act of justification, wherein God declares us righteous in Christ Jesus, we are then also adopted by the grace of God as His children. J.P. Boyce defines our adoption as "that privilege, bestowed upon those who are united with Christ, and justified by faith, by which they are admitted into the family of God, adopted as his children, and made joint heirs with his own Son."

(Boyce, Abstract of Systematic Theology, wwwFOUNDERS.org/library/boyce1)

Through the doctrine of Adoption we are taught that those who are justified are taken, or received, as the very children of God. Much like an adoption today, where by judicial decree a legal relationship between parent and child is permanently established, our relationship as the children of God is effectively established by His decree. God's name is given to us, so that we are now members of the household of faith and of the family of God. In this new relationship, we receive the Holy Spirit, who is also called the spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15), and we are said to now have the spirit of the children of God (Rom 8:16).

As with any adoption, our adoption by God comes with many privileges and responsibilities. As the adopted children of God, we are privileged to call God, Father. Moreover, having been adopted by God, we have the benefit of being cared for by our heavenly Father, who constantly provides us with every good and perfect. We may even consider God's discipline as a privilege of being His adopted children, for in His fatherly love and care God corrects and chastises us for our sins, in order that we might grow in grace. Finally, by means of our adoption, we may be even more assured of our ultimate salvation. Scriptures teach that as the children of God we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption, we are heirs of God through Jesus Christ and heirs of all the promises of God, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.

Prayer

Almighty God, in Jesus Christ we are your adopted children. Now bless us, we pray. Bless and keep us and make your face to shine upon us and be gracious unto us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

John 1:12, 11:52; Rom 8:15-17; Gal 3:29; Eph 3:6; Phil 2:15; Titus 3:7; James 2:5; I John 3:1

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Lord's Day 17

Q. 35. What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

Sanctification, in the most straightforward sense, is the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in each believer, wherein we are being made holy. Whereas the act of justification and adoption are declarative and instantaneous events, sanctification is a lifelong development in which we grow into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29). This is the life of the Christian. Having once been made alive together with Christ, having been declared just and right with God, adopted as an heir of His Kingdom, we now proceed, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to leave behind the old life and grow in grace and truth. Paul describes the new life in Christ as putting "off the old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desire, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:22-24).

The Westminster Confession teaches that

by his Word and Spirit dwelling in [the Christian], the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and [the Christian] more and more quickened and strengthened, in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord... although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome: and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Sanctification is our cooperative work with the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit guides we learn to let go of the desires of the body, the things of this world, and we learn to live for that which is eternal, which is holy and pleasing before God. As Paul says in Galatians 5:24-25, "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

Prayer

Almighty and holy God, we thank you for the presence of your Spirit, who makes us alive in Christ, who teaches us to trust in Christ for our salvation, and who continues to work in us to make us into your saints. May we always continue to grow in holiness, that we may see you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

John 15:26; Rom 6:4-14, 8:4; 2 Cor 3:17-18; Eph 4:23-24; Phil 2:12-13; I Thess 2:13; I Peter 1:15-16

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Lord's Day 18

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

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

How do we benefit from the doctrines of justification, adoption, and sanctification? Sometimes as we study these lofty and heady topics of theology, we forget that these doctrines are intended for the encouragement and inspiration of those who believe. We are reminded today that justification, adoption, and sanctification speak to our hearts.

First we find that these doctrines provide unquestionable assurance of God's love. Ephesians 2:4 teaches us that it was because of God's great love for us that he made us alive together with Christ. God declared us just through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, who was given in love. We have been adopted by a loving Father, and as such, our heavenly father continues to provide, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, His guidance and nurture for His children.

Knowing that we have been made right with God, adopted by God, and growing in the grace of God, we also know that we now have a secured peace with God. John teaches that "whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything." Although we may have insecurities and doubts, we can rest assured because our salvation is secured by God, and God is greater than even our hearts.

Furthermore, we receive an abiding joy in the Holy Spirit. Joy, being one of the fruits of the Spirit, runs deeper than happiness, is more permanent than the temporary highs afforded by the successes of this life. Joy is an attitude of praise and thanksgiving regardless of the circumstances, which is the result of the knowledge that the sovereign God of the universe has called, renewed, saved, and established us in His love.

A final benefit of these doctrines is the comfort of knowing that if God has provided for our salvation, then God will also ensure that His saints will persevere unto the end. Our salvation is fixed, and there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for your wonderful gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, and for the resulting assurance of your love, the peace and joy which comfort us, the continuing growth in grace through your Spirit, and for our promised perseverance unto the end. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prv 4:18; Jer 32:40; Rom 5:1-5, 14:17; Col 1:10-11; Eph 3:16-18; II Pet 3:18; I John 2:19, 5:13; Rev. 14:12

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Lord's Day 19

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

A. The souls of believers are at their death made into perfect holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

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

A. At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God, to all eternity.

Sometimes, in order to comfort those who are grieving, or to answer the questions of children, we say things that may have little or no Biblical foundation. I heard one pastor, when asked by a child if her doggy would be in heaven, reply, "If you need your doggy there for it to be heaven, then, yes, your doggy will be there."

Staying within the teaching of scripture, we find several key truths regarding what happens upon death. Remembering that death is the consequence of sin, and is ultimately the separation from God, we know that, in Christ, death has lost its power and claim over us. Therefore, the souls of those who are in Christ, "immediately return to God who gave them." We see this best in Christ's words to the criminal on the cross, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." The catechism teaches that there is no "sleep of the soul," rather the soul "passes into glory," experiencing an immediate union with the Father.

The body, meanwhile, returns to the dust from which it came. One might say that the effects of death are seen in the body long before we die, as age and illness consume us. We are constantly reminded, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust..." Still, death cannot separate us from Christ, and even in death our bodies share a union with Christ, and by the power of His resurrection, our bodies will be raised up, with different qualities, and reunited with the soul forever in a glorified and perfected state.

What an amazing assurance! Death holds no power over us; it is merely the doorway to a more complete existence in the presence of God. On the day of resurrection, we who are in Christ will be received before God, hearing Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you, that in the death and resurrection of Christ your Son, you destroyed the power of death, and secured for us the promise of life everlasting. May we, by the power of your Holy Spirit, live in this truth for your glory and praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ps 16:11; Matt 10:32, 25:33; Lk 16:23, 23:43; Phil 1:23; I Cor 2:9, 15:42-43; II Cor 5:6-8; I Thes 4:14; Rom 8:23; I Thes 4:14-17

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Lord's Day 20

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

A. The duty which God requires of man, is obedience to his revealed will.

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

A. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law.

Q. 41. Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?

A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments.

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

A. The sum of the Ten Commandments is, To love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbour as ourselves.

The Shorter Catechism has, to this point, clearly demonstrated the tremendous grace of our God. God created humanity, called us into relationship with him, and in his sovereign care, provided for our every need. When we had fallen in sin and were unable to glorify God, even then God provided our salvation in Jesus Christ, and through faith in Him we have the blessed assurance of everlasting life.

Now the catechism takes a very practical turn by asking what is required of man. If our chief purpose in life is that we are to glorify God and enjoy him forever, how do we go about this? To put it quite simply, we glorify God by obeying His will as expressed in the Ten Commandments.

We may see these commandments in three ways. First, the law is given to demonstrate our sinfulness and to cause us to seek a redeemer. When we examine our lives in light of the law of God, we realize just how far we have fallen short of perfect obedience. Secondly, the law is used to restrain sin within society – that is it defines morality and protects the righteous.

The third use of the law is the revelation of what is pleasing to God. Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15). If we are made alive in Christ, our greatest joy is doing that which pleases our Father. Jesus summarized the commandments, saying to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all our soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourselves.” Through God’s law we find the clearest definition of how we can live for God’s glory.

Prayer

Almighty God, through your commandments you have revealed how we may live for your praise and glory. Strengthen us with your Holy Spirit that we may continue to grow in righteousness and truth. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Deut 29:29; Mic 6:8; I Sam 15:22; Mat 19:17-19, 22:37-40; Rom 2:14-15, 10:15

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Lord's Day 21

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

A. The preface to the Ten Commandments is in these words, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

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

A. The preface to the Ten Commandments teaches us, That because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union... We all memorized the preamble to the constitution when we were children, for it serves to summarize the purpose and principles of the foundational document of our nation.

Did you know, though, that there was a preamble to the Ten Commandments? So often our focus is on the commandments themselves that we overlook what the catechism calls the preface. However, the preface to the commandments remind us why these laws are essential to the Christian life.

The preface states, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" reminding us, when we come to hear God's will for our lives, that He is the God who delivered us. We, of course, were not physically delivered out of Egypt, but our deliverance is no less real. We were delivered from bondage to sin and slavery; we were delivered from Hell. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way, Jesus came to "destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death *were subject to lifelong slavery*" (Heb 2:14-15).

Because God has delivered us He has proven Himself to be our God and our Redeemer. If God, then God is to be obeyed. Obedience is the proof of faith and of the regenerate spirit that has been redeemed from slavery to sin and death. We have been redeemed for a purpose; we were redeemed for righteousness. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (I Peter 2:24). The only way to be righteous is to live by faith in Christ. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:2-3).

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for delivering us from captivity to sin and death, and for freeing us for true life in the love of your Son. Strengthen us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to follow your commandments, that we may live in righteousness, worthy of our calling. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ex 20:2-3; Psalm 34:19; Jer 32:38-40; Gal. 5:1; Phil. 1:27; Rev. 1:5-6

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Lord's Day 22

Q. 45. Which is the first commandment?

A. The first commandment is, “Thou shall have no other gods before me.”

Q. 46. What is required in the first commandment?

A. The first commandment requires us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God, and to worship and glorify him accordingly.

The first commandment teaches that there is only one God, and we are to have no other gods before the Lord. In addition to the prohibition of idolatry (which we will explore next week), this command also teaches that, because the God who is revealed in Scripture is the only true God, we are to know and acknowledge Him as such, and worship Him accordingly.

Perhaps you have never doubted the existence of God, have never needed to be convinced that the God of the Bible was real. Good for you! It is not enough, however, to acknowledge that God exists – even the demons will do that. We must also make every attempt to know God. Everything we need to know about God for our salvation is clearly revealed in Scripture. To know God, we must study His word.

We also know God through worship. In worshiping God, we ascribe praise and glory to him, encountering His presence in prayer and song, in receiving and offering forgiveness, in hearing and meditating upon God's word written and proclaimed, and in the sacraments we share.

However, the way we worship God is as important as worship itself. Worship must be guided by scripture, we worship God as he has told us. The Westminster Confession states, “The acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men... or any other way not prescribed in Scripture.” In other words, we can't just do what we please, we come to God as God would have us come. This does not mean that our worship must cling to ancient rites, forms and traditions. Rather, our worship must be guided by the principles of scripture; we must worship God in spirit and truth.

Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks and praise for revealing yourself to us, that we may know you and worship you as the one true God. May we continue to study your word to know you better, and may our worship bring you glory and draw us closer to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ex 20:3; Deut 26:17; I Chron 28:9; Ps 29:2, 32:11, 95:6; Isa 45:23; Mal 1:16, 3:16; Mat 4:10; Phil 4:6

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Lord's Day 23

Q. 47. What is forbidden in the first commandment?

A. The first commandment forbids the denying, or not worshipping and glorifying the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to him alone.

Q. 48. What are specially taught by these words [before me] in the first commandment?

A. These words [before me] in the first commandment teaches us, That God, who sees all things, takes notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other god.

The first commandment explicitly forbids worship and give glory to any other gods but the one true God. It was a necessary command, when you consider that while God was giving the commandments to Moses, Aaron and the rest of the Israelites were making themselves a golden calf, a false god to replace the God who had just delivered them.

We are prone to worshiping false gods even today. If you need proof, look no further than the culture that produces American Idol, where the pop-star life is celebrated, and the stars themselves are idolized. We adore, emulate, study, and follow after these pop sensations – but aren't these words that also describe the way we are supposed to live as Christians?

We find our false god's elsewhere too, usually within ourselves. We come up with misconceptions about God from a lack of honest study, or a refusal to deal with the harder truths of God. We create our false gods by imagining God to be what we want Him to be rather than what His word says He is. Consider the astonishing words of Oprah Winfrey, "God... is the essence of all consciousness... isn't something to believe. And God is a *feeling* experience, not a *believing* experience. And, in fact, if your religion is a believing experience... if God for you is still about a belief, then it's not truly God." This is the voice that influences millions of people every day!

When we abandon the Biblical revelation of the truths of God for the things we want God to be, we have created God in our own image. We are prone to idolatry and the first commandment is a reminder of the necessity to know God has He is revealed in scripture and to give our worship and glory to God alone. May we be continually guided by the first commandment to know God and to worship Him alone!

Prayer

Almighty God, forgive us, for we have sought after false gods who are not really gods at all. Draw us back to you, that we may know you as you have shown yourself in your Word, and may worship you in spirit and in truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ps 14:1, 44:20-21, 81:11; 1 Chron 28:9; Isa 44:6-8; Rom 1:20-25; I Cor 8:5-6

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Lord's Day 24

Q. 49. Which is the second commandment?

A. The second commandment is, "Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Q. 50. What is required in the second commandment?

A. The second commandment requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word.

Q. 51. What is forbidden in the second commandment?

A. The second commandment forbids the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word.

Q. 52. What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment?

A. The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God's sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath to his own worship.

Ancient cultures had a market on the crafting of graven images that represented the gods of their regions. In Isaiah 44 we find a scorching indictment of this practice. The prophet shows how a carpenter uses a piece of wood to cook his food and heat his house, and with the rest, he makes his god, and prays to it for deliverance.

We may not have a mantle full of idols that we worship today, but there are still a multitude of graven images in our lives, idols that rob our worship and affection. The graven images that compete for our attention may be more subtle, but they are just as pernicious. The buildings we have built, our denominational institutions, our respected leaders; the things which were meant to assist us our worship of God can easily become the objects of our affection and worship. We become more committed to that which enables us to worship rather than the one we are called to worship.

There are some who object to the idea of God being jealousy of our worship, but surely there are some occasions when jealousy is warranted. A husband or wife has the right to be jealous of their spouses' intimacy and devotion. When someone or something else gets the attention that a spouse deserves, the marriage becomes off balance and unhealthy. As the apostle teaches in Ephesians 5, marriage is a beautiful analogy of our relationship with God, and God's desire is that we would love Him before anything else in all creation

Prayer

Gracious God, we confess that we are prone to worship the idols that we have created with our own hands, the symbols of your love and grace quickly become the objects of our adoration. Teach us to cast down our idols and to worship you in Spirit and Truth. In Jesus' name, and for his sake, we pray. Amen.

Ex 20:4-6, 34:14 ; Deut 4:15-16, 12:30-32, 32:46; Ps. 45:11, 9:2-3; Matt 28:20; Acts 17:29

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Lord's Day 25

Q. 53. Which is the third commandment?

A. The third commandment is, “Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain.”

Q. 54. What is required in the third commandment?

A. The third commandment requires the holy and reverent use of God’s names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works.

The word “vanity” literally means emptiness or lack of worth. The Biblical opposite of this word is “glory,” which literally means “heavy” or “weighty.” For us, then, to take the name of the Lord God in vain would be to make the glorious name of God meaningless and empty. While it is impossible for us to diminish the actual glory of God’s holy name, it is possible that through our words and deeds we can diminish the perceived glory of God for others, thus rendering God meaningless or unattractive to those around us.

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches “that we must not profane or abuse the name of God by cursing, by perjury, or by unnecessary oaths.” This is readily understood in the commandment. We are not to throw God’s name around casually in our oaths, nor are we to lie or swear in the name of God. To do so would suggest to those around us that God’s name has little meaning or power over us.

However, the catechism goes on to say that we are not “to participate in such horrible sins by keeping quiet and thus giving silent consent.” This is an even greater requirement of the commandment. We carry the name of God wherever we go. When we are silent in the face of sin and suffering, if we fail to act when we see others in need, we are silently proclaiming that our God is silent and unconcerned about the needs and concerns of the people around us.

I tell my children every day, “Remember whose you are.” I want them to remember that they are my children, and they are God’s children as well. I want them to act in a way that would honor me as their father, but more importantly, in a way that would honor God as their heavenly father. What they say and do reflects on me as a father. Likewise, what we say and do is a reflection of our attitude toward our heavenly father.

Prayer

Almighty God, your name is glorious, and worthy of our praise. Forgive us for the times when we have made light of your name, either by the things we have said or done, or by the things we have left unsaid and undone. Bless us with your Holy Spirit, that we may bring glory to your name, through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Ex 20:7; I Chron 16:25; Ps 29:2, 107:21-22; 138:2; Mal 1:14; Matt 6:9; Rev 15:3-4

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 26

Q. 55. What is forbidden in the third commandment?

A. The third commandment forbids all profaning or abusing of any thing whereby God makes himself known.

Q. 56. What is the reason annexed to the third commandment?

A. The reason annexed to the third commandment is, That however the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment.

In our last study we considered how the third commandment teaches not taking the Lord's name in vain means living in a way that demonstrates the glory, or importance, of God's name. This week the catechism reinforces this idea of honoring God's name by forbidding the abuse of anything whereby God reveals Himself.

John Flavel's *Exposition of the Catechism* states that this prohibition "forbids and condemns all heedless, wandering, and drowsy performance of God's worship." After reading his study on the catechism, I was left wondering, "Does our worship truly honor God, or does it come about as a "heedless, wandering, and drowsy performance"? Considering the fact that those who profane God's name will not "escape his righteous judgment," it's a rather tremendous burden to plan, lead, and prepare for worship.

The church is at a crossroads as it tries to understand how to get worship right. The endless question is always, how do we maintain the biblical traditions of worship while staying relevant and connected to the world? What music do we sing; how do we present the message of scripture; do we wear robes, ties, flip-flops? How do we form a relevant, warm, and inviting form of worship without "cheapening the gospel?"

The third commandment reminds us that all that we do should be to the glory and honor of God. The condemnation of false worship by the Jesus and the OT prophets was that the people honored God with their lips, while their heart was far from God. Psalm 29:2 says, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness." The matter of integrity in worship comes down to the heart of the one in worshiping, and the desire to worship God well. It means we should come to worship well prepared, in our hearts and minds, to enter into the very presence of God, for the praise of His glorious name.

Prayer

Almighty God, we confess that we continually struggle to get things right. May our worship be truly pleasing before you, and we pray that you might teach us to worship you in spirit and in truth.

Deut 28:58-59; Isaiah 5:12; Mal 2:2; Matt 15:8

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Lord's Day 27

Q. 57. Which is the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment is, "Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy. Six days shall thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shall not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day and hallowed it."

Q. 58. What is required in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment requires the keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy sabbath to himself.

Believe it or not, the fourth commandment is the one which most people struggle to keep. Everyone does their best to keep the other commandments (no other gods, don't murder, don't lie, etc...). However, when it comes to keeping the Sabbath, most Christians see this as an optional suggestion rather than a command of God.

As a pastor I hear more excuses as to why this commandment should not be kept; "The crop won't wait 'til Monday," "I work all week and this is my only day to sleep in," or my favorite, "I can worship God and keep the Sabbath just fine on my fishing boat." If we were to treat the rest of the commandments so flippantly, could we really be called the people of God?

It is for good reason that God commands us to keep the Sabbath. First, God wants us to enjoy life, to find great pleasure in Him and in His creation, and we can't do this if we are constantly occupied by our occupation. We are not strong enough to go without rest, it's not how we were made; even God saw fit to rest after six days of creation. If we neglect our Sabbath day of rest and recreation, we are saying that we are stronger than God, and we miss the blessings God has given us. Instead, we become consumed by our work, and our earnings, our shelter, our work, become our god. Sabbath taking is a correction from the frantic workaholic tendencies we develop while trying to build our security somewhere outside of God.

This commandment also requires that we keep the Sabbath day holy, that is, set apart for God. It is a day when we are to corporately *and* individually, to pray for one another, and to serve one another. It is the Lord's day, we are to live it for God.

Prayer

Almighty God, forgive us for treating the Sabbath as if it were just another day. May we learn to rest in you, and to trust in your care and provision. By your Spirit, enable us to keep this day holy for the sake of Christ our Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Ex 20:8-11; Lev. 19:30; Deut 5:12; Isa 56:2-7; Mar 2:27; Heb 4:1-16, 10:23-25

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Lord's Day 28

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

A. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian sabbath.

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

A. The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.

I am often asked is why the Christian Church observes Sabbath on Sunday, the first day of the week, rather than on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. The Sabbath, according to the Old Covenant, remembered the creation of the material universe, and the fact that on the seventh day God rested. As Christians living under the New Covenant, we find our Sabbath rest on the Lord's Day, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Every Sunday is a reminder that because of Christ's death and resurrection, we now may rest from our efforts to be reconciled with God; that work is finished, we have only to trust in Christ and His atoning sacrifice to be at peace with God.

How are we, then, to keep the Lord's Day Holy? The one way to sanctify the Sabbath is to set the day apart for worship and communion with God. Charles Hodge, the 19th century theologian wrote, "It is the day in which He is to be worshiped, thanked, and praised; in which men are to be called upon to accept his offers of grace, and to rejoice in the hope of his salvation. It is therefore a day of joy. In the early church men were forbidden to pray on their knees on that day. They were to stand tall, exulting in the work of God's love."

Another way to keep the Sabbath holy is to follow Jesus' lead; how did He keep the Sabbath? Throughout the gospels we see that Jesus worshiped, healed, fed, and ministered to the lost on the Sabbath. For our Lord, the Sabbath was a day for acts of mercy and kindness. We can follow His lead by spending our Sabbath visiting shut-ins and the sick, sharing fellowship with one another, and finding ways to serve those in need. Our Lord is not as concerned about our practice of religion as much as He is concerned about our acts of mercy and kindness on behalf of those in need.

Prayer

Almighty God, may your Spirit teach us to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy, setting your day apart from the rest as a time of worship and service in the love of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Mat 12:1-12; Mar 1:21, 3:1-5, 6:2; Luk 13:10-16; John 7:21-23

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Lord's Day 29

Q. 61. What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment forbids the omission or careless performance of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.

Q. 62. What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment?

A. The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment are, God's allowing us six days of the week for our own employments, his challenging a special propriety in the seventh, his own example, and his blessing the sabbath-day.

God's righteous demands, in comparison, are very gracious. What other government or king, only requests of their people one day in seven and a mere ten per cent of their income? In medieval times, peasants were required to work for their land owners two to three days a week in addition to the work required for their own fields, and taxes were arbitrary and confiscatory, dependant upon the whim of the tax collectors. If we would stop to see how much of our time is taken up by the things we "have to do", as well as add up the withholdings of our own government, we would realize the superiority of God's plan for our lives.

Since we are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, it is refreshing to know that our salvation does not depend on our ability to keep the Sabbath. In this regard we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The failure of the world to understand and set aside the Lord's Day is but a indication of where their hearts lie. Still, the law provides for us a path for living in grace for the glory of God, and our keeping of the Sabbath is an is a spiritual gift, in which the Holy Spirit transforms our character so that we might better imitate Christ our Lord. The rest God offers we gladly celebrate for His glory and honor.

Rather than becoming consumed with a list of things we can and cannot do on the Sabbath, let us remember that this is the Lord's Day, it is His and we should use the day to glorify and bless His holy Name. The Sabbath is for us an opportunity to joyfully celebrate the God rich grace. This one day is our sign of grace which we can lay before a watching world.

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for your promised rest, and we pray that you might so transform us in the likeness of Christ that we would grow in our desire to keep your day holy, set apart for worshiping and praising your holy name. In Christ we pray. Amen.

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Lord's Day 30

Q. 63. Which is the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment is, “ Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God gives thee.”

Q. 64. What is required in the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment requires the preserving the honour, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.

From early on, each of us has been taught that we are to honor our mother and father, but have we every really studied what this commandment means? Is it simply, obey your parents and do what they tell you to do, or does the commandment suggest more than blind obedience. Notice the word used in the commandment is “Honor,” not “obey;” so what does this commandment really mean?

The word used here for honor in the Hebrew word is “kaved” which can be translated as “honor, make heavy, glorify, make glorious.” This is the same word that is used when the Bible speaks of the “glory of God.” Glory and honor mean to give weight or importance to something, to treat that which is honored with reverence and devotion. For us, then, to honor our parents would mean to take them seriously, to give them the respect and honor that is due their position, and to esteem them with great importance in our lives.

Traditionally, this commandment has been taught to include far more than your parents. We are to honor all those in authority over us, be it Civil, Spiritual, or Familial leaders. God has placed us in a variety of relationships, where some have authority over us, some are our peers, and we have authority over others. With a spirit of mutual love and respect, we are to honor and esteem all people.

We obey God’s commandment by showing regard and mutual esteem for one another, loving them dearly, thinking highly of them, listening to their advice and obeying their just commands, praying for those in authority, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. The apostle Paul sums it up well in Romans 12:10, “Outdo one another showing honor.” This is how God would have us honor and esteem our parents.

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for our mothers and fathers, and for all those in authority over us, for their guidance, protection, and spiritual care. Help us to live and serve one another in such a way as to bring honor to those in authority over us, as we seek to live for your glory and honor. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Gen 46:29; Lev 19:3; Prov 4:1; Eccl 8:2; Rom 12:10, 13:7; I Tim 2:1-2; Heb 13:17; I Pet 2:17

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Lord's Day 31

Q. 65. What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?

A. The fifth commandment forbids the neglecting of, or doing anything against, the honour and duty which belongs to every one in their several places and relations.

Q. 66. What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?

A. The reason annexed to the fifth commandment, is a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment.

We've all heard of the seven deadly sins (Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy, and Pride). There are even Biblical lists of sins depicting the life apart from God: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like" (Gal 5:19-21). Compared to these sins, dishonoring your mother and father, and those in authority over you, doesn't really seem all that bad.

However, in his letter to the Romans, Paul includes the neglect of the fifth commandment in his description of the fallenness of the gentile people. "They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (Rom 1:29-31).

God has placed our mothers and fathers and others in authority over us to teach us His laws and to guide us in the way of righteousness. If we cannot submit to their authority, how will we ever learn to submit to God's authority? Rebellious generations lead to further rebellion; those who do not honor their mothers and fathers usually fail to have their children honor them.

There is a blessing attached to the commandment to honor our fathers and mothers: "So that our days may be long in the land God has given us." When we submit and obey out of reverence for Christ, we live in peace with one another, we build each other up in faith and service, and we grow in grace and holiness, passing blessings from generation to generation. When we honor those who lead us and obey their just rule, we give glory to God on High who has placed them in authority over us.

Prayer

Gracious God, may we learn to honor one another that our lives may be lengthen and blessed in your promise, and may we build one another up in the likeness of Christ, that from generation to generation our children may learn to walk in your righteousness and truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Lord's Day 32

Q. 67. Which is the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment is, "Thou shall not kill."

Q. 68. What is required in the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment requires all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others.

Q. 69. What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment forbids the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tends thereunto.

The sixth commandment is a declaration of the sanctity of life. God forbids murder, and in doing so places great value on the gift of life that God has given to each of us. Positively, this command requires us to do all we can to preserve our lives and the lives of others; which includes such simple things as exercising and staying healthy, but it also extends to the way we treat one another, doing all we can to preserve and honor the lives of those around us; defending the defenceless, sheltering the homeless, feeding the hungry.

The sixth commandment raises difficult questions in regard to euthanasia, abortion, capital punishment, self-defence, and war. Sometimes there are cases when it would seem that the taking of another life is justifiable and necessary. But does necessity justify our actions?

In 1941, German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was involved in a plan to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Struggling with the implications of his actions and his obedience to God's commandments, Bonhoeffer said, "If I see a madman driving a car into a group of innocent bystanders, then I can't, as a Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe and then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver." There is no way to kill without entering into guilt. But sometimes it is worse to be evil than to do evil.

"The destruction of the life of another may be undertaken only on the basis of an unconditional necessity... if there is even the slightest responsible possibility of allowing others to remain alive, then the destruction of their lives would be arbitrary killing, murder. To fail to bear this in mind is to undo the work of the Creator and Preserver of life Himself."

Prayer

Almighty God, forgive us for our cavalier attitude toward life and death, and may we be committed to doing all we can to preserve and honor the sanctity of all life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Lord's Day 33

Q. 70. Which is the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment is, "Thou shall not commit adultery."

Q. 71. What is required in the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment requires the preservation of our own and our neighbour's chastity, in heart, speech, and behaviour.

Q. 72. What is forbidden in the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment forbids all unchaste thoughts, words, and actions.

The seventh commandment is concerned primarily with our personal and relational purity. Adultery, while primarily defined by a sexual intimacy outside the bounds of marriage, also applies to our desires and our speech. As Christians, we are united in covenant with God through Jesus Christ, and as such, we are to live, love, and talk in a way that brings God honor and exemplifies the purity and Lordship of Christ. To live unchaste, intemperate lives is to break faith and covenant with God and our fellowship with one another.

Francis Beattie's commentary on this commandment teaches that "this command requires the preserving of our own and our neighbor's chastity in heart, speech, and behavior. This implies chastity in body and mind, affections, words and conduct, and the preservation of it in others. It requires us to keep a watch over the eyes and senses, temperance and keeping chaste company, wearing modest apparel, marriage under proper conditions, conjugal love and fidelity, diligent labor in our callings, avoiding and resisting all temptations to the violation of this command. Such are some of the main things which this command requires to be observed."

Interestingly, chastity is word that is scorned in our popular culture as being "puritanical" and "outmoded." Our own denomination (PC(USA)) has debated the inclusion of chastity as a requirement in the ordination of its deacons, elders, and ministers of Word and Sacrament. I Thess. 4:3-4 says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know who to control his own body in holiness and honor..." The clear teaching of Scripture reveals that, living in faith by the very grace of God, we are called to set aside the old life of sin and disobedience, to leave behind the ways of the flesh, and to live modest, humble, pure, and holy lives in faithfulness to God.

Prayer

Gracious and Holy God, in an increasingly unchaste world, sanctify us by the power of your Holy Spirit, to live lives of purity and chastity, in thought, word, and deed, that we may bring you honor and glory in all that we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

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Lord's Day 34

Q. 73. Which is the eighth commandment?

A. The eighth commandment is, "Thou shall not steal."

Q. 74. What is required in the eighth commandment.

A. The eighth commandment requires the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.

Q. 75. What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?

A. The eighth commandment forbids whatsoever does or may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbour's wealth or outward estate.

Contrary to what many think, God is not against wealth and money is not the root of all evil. The bible teaches, rather, that the love of money is the root of all evil. When our greatest love and desire is the accumulation of wealth instead of glorifying God and enjoying His presence forever, then our perspective is skewed and our motives corrupt.

In 1987, the movie "Wall Street" introduced us to a new mantra, "Greed is Good." When your possessions and the accumulation of money are your highest priority, then anything is permissible in attaining your goals. In contrast, the eighth commandment teaches us not only not to steal, but to have nothing to do with any practice which brings us unjust gain at the expense of our neighbors.

Consider some of the news we hear today: people foreclosing on their homes, the victims of predatory lending; innocent people losing thousands due to identity theft or mail fraud; price gouging in the face of shortages; and inflationary rates. I discovered when working in retail that shoplifting has become so commonplace, the profit loss due to theft has been absorbed into the existing price. In other words, we pay extra to cover the loss of all the stolen property. Theft affects us all, and God requires His people to live by just and fair measures.

In Ephesians 4:28, Paul writes, "Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy." The life that is transformed by Christ is lived for His glory and honor. As such, those in Christ no longer live for themselves, but for Christ and for neighbor. As Christ gave generously and freely to us, so we are to give generously and freely, according to our ability and the necessity of others.

Prayer

Almighty God, all blessings come from your hand, and any dishonest gain is not only harms our neighbors, but it robs your glory and praise. May we be industrious and hard-working, and may you bless the work of our hands, that we may provide for the needs of others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Lord's Day 35

Q. 76. Which is the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment is, "Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour."

Q. 77. What is required in the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment requires the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbour's good name, especially in witness-bearing.

Q. 78. What is forbidden in the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment forbids whatsoever is prejudicial to the truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbour's good name.

The ninth commandment deals with watching what we say. James 3:5-8 says, "So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue-- a restless evil, full of deadly poison."

It is important for us to remember why our words are so important. Along with the fact that the words we say reveal our true character (Matt 12:34), we must also keep in mind the nature of the God whom we worship. It was the word of God which brought everything into being, the word of God which called us into relationship with Him, the word of God which brings us life, the Word of God incarnate (John 1:1-4) who brought us peace and salvation. Words have power, and the words we speak and listen to are very important. Thus the apostle writes, "but speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4:15).

So God's commandment calls us to speak and promote the truth. But this means more than just blatant honesty. It means working to protect our integrity, and to defend the integrity and respect our neighbors. It means avoiding, and also putting an end to gossip, slander, and the spreading of lies. It also means telling simply the truth, not becoming flatterers, exaggerating the goodness of others for our own gain. We should also consider that this commandment says something about what we listen to as well.

Prayer

Almighty God, by your word we have our life and our hope, in Jesus, your Word made flesh, we find your truth. Guide us by your Word, and may our words be pleasing before you, building one another up in the likeness of Christ, and, by the power of your Spirit, bring you glory and honor, now and forevermore. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Lord's Day 36

Q. 79. Which is the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment is, “Thou shall not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shall not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.”

Q. 80. What is required in the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment requires full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his.

Q. 81. What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment forbids all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to any thing that is his.

The 10th Commandment addresses the issue of coveting and envy. At the very core of covetousness is a heightened sense of self-importance; when we have placed ourselves at the center of the universe, and every desire is stained by self-promotion. What does envy say? I need more. God hasn’t provided enough, I must have what others have, or I will never be satisfied. I want more for my life than what God has planned.

We are called to be content in life with what we have received from God’s hand. We must trust in God to provide for all we need to be sustained and to carry out the calling God has given us. The Apostle Paul wrote, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Phil 4:11-13).

It is not easy to learn to be content. The Israelites struggled with discontentment during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. In all that time, they had food every day and their clothing and shoes did not wear out, but they always wanted more. They had to learn that God would provide their daily bread, and to ask for more would only bring them trouble.

I am reminded of a song by Amy Grant which says, “All I ever have to be is what you made me, any more or less would be a step out of your plan.” When God says “Thou shall not covet,” what we need to hear is God saying, “trust me, I have a wonderful plan for you, and I will provide your every need.”

Prayer

Gracious God, forgive our covetous hearts, for we have not been content with your blessings and providential care. Help us learn to trust in you, and to be content in every station of our lives. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

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Lord's Day 37

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

A. No mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but does daily break them in thought, word, and deed.

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

A. Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

Q. 84. What does every sin deserve?

A. Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come.

Having completed our study of the Ten Commandments, we turn now to the rightful use and application of the law; which is to convict us of our sin and to cause us to seek a savior. An honest evaluation of our lives in the light of God's law will lead us to see just how much we have missed the mark, how far we have fallen from God's righteous expectation of His creation. The Apostle Paul writes that "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good," "yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin" (Rom 7:12 & 7).

Note that the catechism teaches that not all sins are equal. The varying forms of sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people evidence this. According to the book of Leviticus, some sins required only a time of purification and the sacrifice of a bird, while more grievous sins demanded the sacrifice of a ram or bull, or even that the offender be put to death. However, every sin leads to the same end: death. Every sin is an offence to God and faces the His judgment and wrath.

By the power of the Holy Spirit the righteous law of God exposes sin for what it is, and show us who we truly are. We all have sinned and are guilty and accountable to God. Since the ultimate punishment for sin is death, we must either provide a sacrifice to make atonement with God, or the sacrifice must be made on our behalf. Because we are riddled with guilt, any sacrifice we make would be tainted. Our only hope then, in light of the law, is to find a holy, righteous, and good savior, namely, Jesus Christ.

The law brings hopelessness without the gospel, and the gospel is meaningless without the judgment of the law. Seen properly, the law of God drives us to the Gospel of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Almighty God, your law leads us to seek your mercy and grace, which you have offered in Christ our Savior. May we, by the power of your Holy Spirit, cling to Christ, who alone is our hope, our righteousness, our salvation. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Matt 5:17-20; Rom 3:21-27, 4:15, 7:1-25; Gal 3:19-29; Col 2:13-14

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lords' Day 38

Q. 85. What does God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin?

A. To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption.

Q. 86. What is faith in Jesus Christ?

A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.

What must we do in order to be reconciled to God unto eternal life, which, having previously studied God's law, we find to be our greatest need? The catechism offers three things in answer to this question: faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, and the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicates the benefits of redemption. Today, we shall briefly study what it means to have a saving faith in Jesus Christ, addressing the other two requirements next week.

The Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that saving faith consists of three things, 1) believing to be true that which is revealed in the Word, 2) acting obedience to the word of God, and 3) embracing the promises of God. Essential to a saving faith in Jesus is our doctrine. Jesus did say that unless we have the faith of a child we will never enter into the kingdom of heaven, but that did not mean that we are to have a childish faith. We are called to have a maturing understanding of God's Word, giving assent to the revelation of God's will and nature as found in scripture.

Moreover, our growing understanding of God's word should also lead to godly action. We are saved by faith alone, but not a faith that is alone. Scripture clearly shows that sincere faith is always accompanied by sincere action, and our response to the grace of God is a life of service and thanksgiving.

Ultimately, though, a saving faith is one that embraces the promises of God, trusting and resting in Jesus alone for salvation. Our doctrines, as important as they are, will not save us. Our good works, as crucial as they may be, cannot earn our way into heaven. Only Christ can save us; and a saving faith is one that has come to accept, receive, and rest upon Christ alone for salvation.

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you that you have provided for us a means of salvation. When we were dead in our sins, you gave us your Son to redeem and deliver us. Grant us, by the power of your Spirit, a saving faith, in which we believe your Word, live according to it, and trust in Christ alone for our salvation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 39

Q. 87. What is repentance unto life?

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.

Q. 88. What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?

A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Today we come to what the Catechism teaches are the second and third things we must do to escape the wrath and curse of God due to our sins, namely, repentance unto life and the diligent use of the outward things through which Christ communicates the blessings of new life in Him.

Repentance is a necessary fruit of a life with Christ. The word repent, in Greek, mean to turn around, and it is suggestive of the abandonment of the old way of life, and the beginning of the new. Scripture teaches clearly that regeneration precedes repentance; only when we have been made alive in Christ do we grow in hatred of our sin and turn from it to God. The New Hampshire Confession of Faith says, “repentance and faith are sacred duties... wrought in our souls by the Spirit of God; whereby being deeply convinced of our guilt... and of the way of salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest, and King, and relying on Him alone as the only and all sufficient Savior.”

Scripture is equally clear that repentance begets obedience. Once we have turned from our sins, we must turn to something else. Scripture teaches that we put off the old life and put on the new. Studying the word of God, partaking in the sacraments, coming to God in prayer; these are not works that merit our salvation, instead they each demonstrate our faith and dependence upon God alone for our salvation. These outward means are the visible signs given to us to assure us of our own salvation.

Prayer

Gracious God, you have given us new life in Jesus Christ, and in Him have called us to live as your holy people. Lead us daily to repent of the ways we have disobeyed you, and through your word, the sacraments, and continual prayer, strengthen us in your Spirit to be transformed into the likeness of your Son. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ps 19:7; Isa 55:10-11; Ezek 11:19; John 6:44; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:8

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

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Lord's Day 40

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

A. The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

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

A. That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practise it in our lives.

The book of Hebrews tells us the “word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Through the living word of God, God speaks to us anew, awakening us to His truth, convicting us of our sinfulness, redeeming us by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and leading us in the way of righteousness. The apostle Paul writes, “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

The catechism teaches that the Spirit speaks to us through the word, as we read it, but especially as it is preached. This places a much greater burden upon the preacher. The Second Helvetic Confession in fact teaches that “the preaching of the Word of God *is* the Word of God. When Word of God is preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches.” It is imperative, then, that the preacher prayerfully and carefully study God’s word and be sure to preach nothing but the Word. It is just as important, though, that we prepare ourselves to hear the Word of God preached. This means being sure to regularly attend worship where the word is faithfully proclaimed, preparing ourselves for the sermon through prayerfully attending to the text and the message, and a commitment to apply the word that is proclaimed to our lives.

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for your Word, through which you continue to speak to us and bring us life. May we be found faithful to your word, walking in righteousness and truth. For the sake of Jesus’ name. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 41

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

A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that does administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.

Q. 92. What is a sacrament?

A. A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ; wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.

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

A. The sacraments of the New Testament are, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

In question 88 of the catechism we learn that Christ imparts His blessings through the Word, the Sacraments, and through Prayer, all of which are effectual for our salvation. Last week we studied how the Word of God becomes effectual for salvation through the prayerful preaching, hearing, and application of the Word in our lives. Now we turn to a brief study of the Sacraments.

Augustine once wrote that the sacraments are visible signs of God's invisible grace. That is, what is happening outwardly in the elements represented in Baptism and Communion, convey what the Holy Spirit is doing inwardly; washing away our sins and feeding us spiritually. Calvin wrote, "as our faith is weak unless it is supported on every side and sustained by every means... our merciful Lord, so adjusts himself to our capacity that, since we are creatures who always cling to the earth and cleave to fleshly things, and do not think about or even conceive spiritual matters, he condescends to lead us to himself by just such earthly things, and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessings. The sacraments, in themselves do not save us, only God saves us. They are, however effectual unto salvation, bringing us to an encounter with the grace of God.

The reformed tradition recognizes only two sacraments to be authorized by Christ; Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are the only two ordinances of the church that were specifically authorized by the Lord; Baptism, in Matthew 28:19 when Jesus commanded, "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," and Communion in Luke 21:19, when Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

Prayer

Almighty God, you have shown your grace in ways we can clearly understand through the sacraments of Baptism and Communion. May the water and the meal teach us to trust in you alone for our salvation, and strengthen us to follow you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 42

Q. 94. What is baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, does signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's.

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

A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized.

When a branch is grafted into the vine, the life, health, and strength of the branch comes from the vine itself, and the branch can only bear fruit as long as it remains connected to the vine. So it is with our life in Christ. In Baptism, our lives are so identified with Christ's that he becomes the vine and we the branches. As we are submerged in the water, we die a death like Christ's; as we come up from the water, we are raised to new life in Christ. The life we now live we live in Christ, and, as the apostle Paul writes, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me."

United with Christ in Baptism, we receive the blessings of the covenant life, namely regeneration by the Spirit of Christ in us, the forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ, adoption as the heirs of God in Jesus Christ, and the sure and certain hope of resurrection unto everlasting life. Moreover, as members of the body of Christ, we are placed within the covenant community of the church, in which we are nurtured in our faith, equipped for ministry, and called to serve one another in the love of God.

Baptism is given to all who publicly profess their faith, as well as their children. Whereas circumcision, the sign of the old covenant, was given to the sons of Israel when they were 8 years old, baptism, the sign of the new covenant in Jesus Christ, is also given to our children as a sign of their inclusion (Acts 2:38-39; Gal 3:17-18). Matthew Henry has once wrote, "I cannot but take occasion to express my gratitude to God for my infant baptism; not only as it was an early admission into the visible body of Christ, but as it furnished my pious parents with a good argument for an early dedication of my own self to God in my childhood. If God has wrought any good work upon my soul, I desire with humble thankfulness, to acknowledge the moral influence of my infant baptism upon it."

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for giving us the sign of Baptism which teaches us to trust in Christ alone for our salvation, showing us how we are united with Him in faith, and sealing us with your Holy Spirit. Teach us to live and grow as your covenant family, raising our children to know and trust in you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 43

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

A. The Lord's supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is shown forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.

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

A. It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.

The Lord's Supper can be best understood by studying the various names given to it. We call it the *Lord's Supper*, remembering Christ's last meal with his disciples, in which he showed how he would be broken and poured out on our behalf. The apostle Paul says that as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. The sacrament is also called *Eucharist*, which literally means "a good grace" or, "thanksgiving." When we come to the table, we make a sacrifice of praise, thanking God and giving glory to Him for Jesus Christ, who came to save us from our sins. It is also called *Communion*, because in the meal we share, by faith, in the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and, though many, we become one body in communion with Him.

We believe that Christ is spiritually present as we gather around the table: a presence that is no less real than our physical presence. It is important to remember that Christ's physical body is not present at the table. Rather, His physical existence is in Heaven, at the right hand of God the Father, where He prays for us and intercedes on our behalf. As we partake in the Lord's Supper, He strengthens our spirits with His own. Just as food and water strengthen our bodies, the presence, or communion with Christ, strengthens our spirits, our faith, so that we may walk in righteousness before Him.

All who trust in Christ for their salvation; any who are tired of their sin and would be relieved of the burden of them; all who hope to live a holy life; are welcomed to this table. As we come, we are to examine ourselves, to ensure that we take the meal in a worthy, so that we do not come in a way that will dishonour the sacrifice of our Lord.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of the Lord's Supper, this meal that reminds us of your love for us in Christ, and unites us in faith with Him. May we live worthy of His sacrifice, united as the body of Christ, bringing you glory in all that we are. In Jesus name. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 44

Q. 98. What is prayer?

A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.

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

A. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called "The Lord's prayer."

Prayer is like children coming to their parents. They have the craziest requests, and we may be grieved by the meanness and selfishness of what they say, but we would be all the more grieved if they never came to us at all. We are simply glad they come, as mixed up as they may be. This is how it is with prayer. We will never be pure and right, but we must set these things aside and just pray. It is in the very act of praying – the intimate and ongoing interaction with God – that these matters are cared for in time.

Our heavenly Father wants to hear us pray. God is ready to respond in love and mercy toward His people, but first we must come to him. In Jeremiah 29:12-14 God says, "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you..."

The Greek and Hebrew words for prayer suggest themes of supplication, entreating, petitioning, intercession, and worship. The prayers found in older church worship books use words such as beseech, plead, even beg, expressing our greatest desires before the throne of God. Nothing in your life is too small for prayer, and nothing is too great for God to deal with. We are invited, in Scripture, not to worry about anything, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" Philip 4:6. Prayer is nothing more than offering our desires to God, and it is nothing less than communing in the very presence of God.

So how do we come to God in prayer? The Catechism teaches that all prayers must be offered in the name of Christ, for surely there is no other name by which we have been invited to come to the Father, remembering always to confess our sin and giving thanks for God's mercies. Thankfully, our Lord taught us how to pray, and His prayer will be the focus of our study over the next few weeks.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for inviting us to come to you in prayer, and thank you for sending your Son to teach us to pray and to intercede for us. Forgive us for not praying as fervently or as faithfully as we should, and grant us a greater desire to seek you in prayer. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 45

Q. 100. What does the preface of the Lord's Prayer teach us?

A. The preface of the Lord's prayer (which is, "Our Father which art in heaven") teaches us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others.

When you begin to pray, to whom do you address your prayers? To the Almighty God? The eternal one? To the creator of heaven and earth? These are all perfectly suitable ways in which one might address God. But Jesus, in teaching his disciples to pray, offers a more intimate and powerful relationship with God by calling upon Him as "Our Father which art in Heaven."

To call upon God as "our Father" does three things. First, it helps us to remember that prayer is a personal and powerful communication with a loving heavenly Father. Sometimes, we can be overwhelmed by the thought of going before the throne of the God of all creation with the cares and concerns of everyday life in our small corner of the universe. Knowing that we are praying to our Father reminds us that He is interested and listening. No prayer is too small.

Secondly, "our Father" reminds us that God is the Father of all who call on His name. Those who profess faith in Christ are counted as members of the family of God and heirs of the covenant. We are called to unity in the church, but in reality we know that we do not see eye to eye on all matters, sometimes we don't even get along with each other in the church. The Lord's Prayer reminds us, though, that while we are many and different, we have one Father. God is just as much my Father as He is yours; and if we are to truly honor Him as our Father, we are to live in forgiveness and love for one another.

Finally, calling upon God in prayer as "Father" identifies God as the author of our salvation and redemption. While one could argue that God is Father of all as their creator, the Jesus clearly demonstrated the great divide between unbelievers and the true children of God. Christ said that those who do not believe in Him are children of the devil and not God. Calling God "Father" is the privilege and assurance of those who have been made alive in Christ by the power of God working in them. "Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here'" John 8:42.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for calling us to pray, and for inviting us to pray to you as "our Father." Give us new passion for prayer, that we may be united with you and with one another as we pray, calling upon you alone for our salvation and for the redemption of the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 46

Q. 101. What do we pray for in the first petition?

A. In the first petition (which is, "Hallowed by thy name") we pray, That God would enable us and others to glorify him in all that whereby he makes himself known; and that he would dispose all things to his own glory.

The word "hallow" is not used often today, but every year we celebrate Halloween. This holiday was originally known as "All Hallows Eve," which is nothing more than the night before "All Saints Day." All Saints was the day set aside each year to honor and commemorate the faithful saints in Christ who have departed. The simple definition of hallow is to make holy or set apart for holy use.

When we pray, "hallowed be thy name," we are not asking that God would change his name to "Hallow." Rather, we are praying that God's name would be made holy or sanctified in our world and in our lives. Jesus is teaching us in prayer that our lives should reflect the holiness of God, that His name should be honored in all that we are.

How to we "Hallow" the name of God? We are taught at an early age not to call people names, to treat each other with respect and honor. To hallow God's name is essentially the same lesson. When we hallow the name of God we come before him with an attitude of reverence for His perfection, wisdom, power and love.

Unfortunately, the way the many people treat the name of God today does not reflect God's holiness. Exclamations such as "Oh my God," and curses in the name of God, trivialize and cheapen the name of God. People who call themselves Christians but then live a godless and profane lifestyle fail to sanctify the name of God.

We are to live, talk, and think in such a way that the world may know that God's name is holy and set apart for a special purpose. God's holiness is what sets him apart from us and the rest of creation. When we come before God in prayer, when the world waits to see how we act as disciples of Christ, we should never treat God's name casually or with indifference to His holiness.

The first petition in the Lord's prayer ought to be our greatest desire and passion; that the name of God should be honored and revered in our lives and in the world around us; that all may know Him and worship Him in holiness and truth.

Prayer

Almighty God, may your name be praised and honored this day and forever more. Forgive us for the times in which we failed to honor and praise your name, for the things we have done that have not reflected your holiness and grace. Teach us what it means to hallow your name, and may your name be hallowed in all that we are and all that we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 47

Q. 102. What do we pray for in the second petition?

A. In the second petition (which is, “Thy kingdom come”) we pray, That Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.

We live in a world of many nations, tribes, and languages, but in the bigger picture there are really only two kingdoms that ultimately matter: the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan (see Matthew 12:25-28).

Because of the sinfulness of the human heart, we are all natural born citizens of the Kingdom of Satan. In Ephesians 2 the apostle reminds us of our previous citizenship, saying, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the *prince of the power of the air*, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” We were all captives to the power and rule of sin in our lives, and Satan was our cruel and wicked master.

But thanks to the goodness of God in Jesus Christ, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” Col. 1:13-14. We are, even now, citizens of the Kingdom of God and live under his benevolent and gracious care.

The second petition of the Lord’s prayer, then, is that we may experience and recognize the reality of God’s kingdom in our lives, living lives worthy of our calling. We also pray that God’s kingdom may advance in the world around us; that through the ministry and outreach of the church all people may be brought into the kingdom. Immediately the prayer focuses our attention, not just on how our lives might reflect the glory of the Kingdom of God, but also on our responsibility of bringing others into the kingdom as well. We cannot pray “Thy Kingdom Come” unless we are willing to see God’s kingdom manifested in ourselves, and to share God’s kingdom with those around us.

There is also an “End Times” element to this petition. When we pray for the coming of God’s kingdom, we are also praying that Christ’s second coming may be hastened. We long for the day when the kingdom will be completed, the war will be over, and the peaceful kingdom of righteousness and glory may be known in full. Then, when Christ reigns in glory, we shall “see his face, and his name will be on [our] foreheads. And night will be no more. [We] will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be [our] light, and [we] will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:4-5). For this we pray, Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Prayer

Almighty God, may your kingdom come, and may it be seen in our lives, and shared with those who do not know it. Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly for your people. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 48

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

A. In the third petition (which is, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven") we pray, That God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven.

What is the will of God for my life? As a pastor I have been asked this question countless times, and every time I believe my answer is as frustrating as the question itself: "I don't know." If you're asking whether or not the person you're dating is the one you should marry, if it's God's will for you to turn left or turn right, or what God's plan is for your future, I will remind you that I am a pastor, not a fortune teller, and that quest for such knowledge is a fool's errand.

It is important for us to remember that there is what is known as *God's Hidden Will*. By His sovereign will, God rules and reigns over all things, His will can never be frustrated. What God, in His wisdom and goodness, has determined to happen will come to pass, and nothing can happen that is beyond God's control. His wisdom is beyond our wisdom, His understanding is beyond measure (Ps 147:5).

At the same times, Scripture does reveal to us God's Preceptive Will. As R.C. Sproul writes in *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, "God reveals his will through His holy law. For example, it is the will of God that we do not steal; that we love our enemies; that we repent; that we be holy. This aspect of God's will is revealed in His Word as well as in our conscience, by which God has written His moral law upon our heart." The will of God was clearly expressed when Jesus said to his disciples, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" John 15:12. A faithful and honest reading of Scripture will clearly reveal God's preceptive will for our lives.

The third petition of our Lord's Prayer teaches us not inquire into the hidden or secretive will of God, but that God would write His law upon our hearts. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that we are prone to rebel against God's word and will, and Christ teaches us to pray that God would remove our blind and wandering hearts, and make us, with humility and cheerfulness, willing to know, obey, and submit to His will in all things.

Prayer

Almighty God, we know that we are strong willed and stubborn, choosing the things of this world over the blessings of your kingdom. Still, you call to us, and you make us your own. By your Holy Spirit, wean us from the things of this world, and teach us your holy ways, that we might walk in humility and in joy before you, obeying you on earth as the angels do in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 49

Q. 104. What do we pray for in the fourth petition?

A. In the fourth petition (which is, "Give us this day our daily bread") we pray, That of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them.

Whereas the first three petitions of the Lord's prayer have focused our attention of the majesty and supremacy of God (hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom, thy will be done), the next three petitions turn to our personal needs in a community of faith. The fourth petition appeals to God for the disciples' daily bread, the necessities of life which include all of the believer's daily physical needs.

What do we need for daily survival? There are things that each of us need for our daily continuance: food, water, shelter, health, etc. The Israelites, during their sojourn in the wilderness, learned to depend upon God for their daily bread, the manna or bread of heaven which fed them daily. Never did they hunger or want for food during their 40 years of wandering. The psalms remind us that God provides for His creation, you "give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things" (Psalm 104:27-28). Everything we need for our physical existence is provided from the hand of our heavenly Father.

More importantly, God also daily provides for us our daily spiritual sustenance. Left to our own devices, we would fill our hearts and shape our spirits with the things of this world, following after lesser gods, chasing the desires of our hearts, never finding true satisfaction, eternal assurance, or spiritual fulfillment in this life. Knowing that, because of our sin, we have a God-shaped hole in our lives, our loving Father has provided for us the real Bread of Life, Jesus Christ our Lord. He is for us the strength and provision we need to go through this life with confidence and hope for the life to come. As we daily feed on the word of God, we are nourished strengthened as disciples who are growing in the likeness of Christ.

To pray for God to "give us this day our daily bread" is both a humble acknowledgement that everything we have comes from God, and a bold statement of faith, trusting that our God, who has provided so completely in the past, will continue to sustain and bless us in the future. We will never need anything more than what God will provide for He has blessed us in Christ Jesus with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3).

Prayer

Almighty God, from your hand we receive all that we need, physically and spiritually, for our daily living. May we learn to live from your hand, never wanting any more or less than you have chosen to give. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 50

Q. 105. What do we pray for in the fifth petition?

A. In the fifth petition (which is, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”) we pray, That God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.

There is a story often told of two small churches who decided to try to come together to share their resources and ministry, one a Methodist church, the other a Presbyterian. In a spirit of unity and graciousness the two congregations peaceably determined which property to keep, what missions to support, and even what color the new carpet in the sanctuary should be. On the first morning of their combined worship, everything went beautifully until they came to the Lord’s Prayer when the Methodists said “trespasses” and the Presbyterians said “debts”; no agreement could be made and the churches divided because of their sins.

Debts, trespasses, sins; every denomination seems to have their tradition regarding the Lord’s Prayer. The Greek word that is used in Matthew implies something that is owed, i.e. a debt or obligation. In Luke’s record of the prayer, he uses the Greek word for “sin,” which can also be translated as “wrongdoing.” The word “trespass,” while not used in the Lord’s Prayer, is synonymous with sin, suggesting a deviation from living according to what has been revealed as the right way to live.

Regardless of the word we use in the prayer, we have sinned, we have transgressed God’s law, we have trespassed the boundaries of right and wrong, and we stand before God with a debt of sinfulness greater than we could ever repay. However, as the Spirit teaches in Colossians 2:13-14 “And you, who were dead in your trespasses... God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

In Christ we are forgiven from our sins. The debt has been nailed to the cross. For all who call on the name of Jesus will be saved, our trespass forgiven, and we are made new. The fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer doesn’t teach us that we daily need to seek justification before God, we have been justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Rather, this is a prayer for the restoration of personal fellowship with God when that fellowship has been hindered by sin (Eph 4:30). Those who have received such forgiveness should be so moved with gratitude toward God that they also eagerly forgive those who have sinned against them.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for forgiving us our sins. May your grace abound in us that we may learn to forgive those who have sinned against us as well. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 51

Q. 106. What do we pray for in the sixth petition?

A. In the sixth petition (which is, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”) we pray, “That God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted.

It is important to remember that, as Christians, while the final victory over sin and death are assured in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we continual to wage a battle with sin in our lives. Indeed, the Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that our sanctification is “imperfect in this life: [for] there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh (see Gal 5:17)”. To this end, Christ teaches us to pray that God would lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.

How are you tempted? Many of us have matured to the point where we have overcome the temptations of our youth: sensual lusts, profanity, and the like. But does that mean that we are not still tempted? Certainly not. Our temptations are more subtle, but are still as deadly. Calvin suggests that we are tempted by “riches, power, honors, which often dull men’s keenness of sight... so that, captivated by such tricks and drunk with such sweetness, men forget their God.” On the other hand, when we face poverty, disgrace, contempt, afflictions and the like, we become despondent in mind and cast away our assurance and hope and are completely estranged from God. We are tempted both by our comfort and by our affliction, one leading us to believe we don’t need God, the other, that we don’t want God. So we pray that God would not lead us into temptation.

Are we tempted by God? James 1:13 says “God himself tempts no one.” Why then would we need to pray that God would not lead us into temptation? This is a difficult question, perhaps best answered by looking at the motives for our tests and trials. God tests us in one way. Satan in another. Satan temps us so that he may destroy us. God tests us that he may strengthen our faith, prove our sincerity, and help us to overcome sin in our lives. Satan attacks those who are unarmed and unprepared. “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Prayer

Gracious and everlasting God, you know our hearts, and how we are tempted by this world. You know the cure for our wayward hearts as well. Wean us, through the trials we face, from our stubborn self-reliance, into an ever-growing trust in you alone. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

A Devotional Meditation on our Confession of Faith

Lord's Day 52

Q. 107. What does the conclusion of the Lord's prayer teach us?

A. The conclusion of the Lord's Prayer (which is, "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen") teaches us to take our encouragement in prayer from God only, and in our prayers to praise him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to him. And, in testimony of our desire, and assurance to be heard, we say, "Amen."

The act of prayer is a humbling one. It finds us on our knees, if not physically, then spiritually, seeking all that we need from the hands of God. There can be no pride in prayer, no arrogance or self-determination. We simply come, submitting ourselves to the goodness and grace God provides as our daily bread. In doing so, we give glory and praise to God alone, for He hears and answers our prayer.

The conclusion of the Lord's prayer is an assurance of God's ability to provide for our needs. We pray that the kingdom, power, and glory, belong to God. Today, we could say the authority, the ability, and the honor of provision are in God alone. Eugene Peterson, in his paraphrase translation of the Bible *The Message* puts it this way, "You're in charge! You can do anything you want! You're ablaze in beauty!" Jesus teaches us to conclude our prayer this way so that we will learn to trust that the God who hears our prayers is able, and willing, to answer our prayers.

Ascribing to God the kingdom, power, and glory also serves as a great corrective measure for those who have communed with God in prayer. Without this ascription, we could conclude our prayers, and then assume that it was our strength, our ingenuity, and our ability which would see the prayers come to fulfillment, so that we would receive the glory and praise. We are reminded when we pray that this is God's kingdom, not ours, and it is by His power, not ours, and for His glory and praise, not ours, that we live and move and have our being.

The word Amen, with which the prayer closes, can be translated as "let it be" or "this is true." Amen expresses our fixed assurance that we greatly desire to be heard, as well as our willingness to submit to the divine will in the answer, whatever it may be, to our prayers.

Prayer

Gracious Lord, we thank you for teaching us to pray, and we ask that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, we may learn to trust in you, not ourselves, for all that we need, and give to you, not ourselves, the praise and glory for your provision and salvation. Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. In Jesus' name. Amen.