

The Shorter Catechism

Question 1: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

1. Who are the parties of interest?

The catechism is not interested in our relationship with angels or animals. The primary relationship is between mankind and God.

By "man" we understand:

- men and women individually;
- the human family collectively.

By "God" we understand the Triune God who reveals himself in the Bible and through the incarnation of the Son of God.

2. Which way should I look?

The catechism opens with us and asks the question almost everyone asks at some time: "Why am I here? What is life about? What is my primary relationship?"

The options are:

- To look inwards To set my own goals, to live for myself.
- To look outwards To accept social and cultural norms, to live as a member of the group for the goals set by the group.
- To look downwards To identify with the whole of creation, to prioritize environmental considerations.
- To look upwards To seek and to do the will of God.

The catechism clearly teaches that I must look to God for my primary relationship and the meaning of life.

3. What does the phrase "chief end" mean?

"Chief end" means "main reason".

But that suggests that there are other, lesser reasons for living, and that we can prioritize these. E.g. I live first for God; then, when I have satisfied that goal I can also live for my family, and then I can live for my work, and then I can live for my hobbies, etc.

This can't be right, and it's not the way we live. We don't generally compartmentalise our lives, e.g. my family life and my work and my leisure activities tend to interact with one another.

So, to live for God as our “chief end” is to make God’s will the controlling factor in life. God is not the first on the list – he is the One who organises the list, and it is his interests which are served as I go about each and every activity on the list. So I live for God in my family life, and I live for God in my work, and I live for God in my leisure.

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

4. Is it selfish of God to put himself first?

God always puts himself first.

“I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols” (Isaiah 42:8).

But if it is wrong for me to put myself first (i.e. to make myself [or other people, or other things] the controlling and organising factor in life), then why is it not wrong for God to put himself first?

That is the wrong way to ask the question. Ask instead, *By whom and for whom do all things exist?* All things exist for God. “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

So it is right for God to be first, to be the chief end. Therefore:

- it is right for me to make God my “chief end”;
- and it is right for God to make God his “chief end”.

5. Will I lose out if I make God’s glory my chief end?

Definitely not. Those who glorify God also enjoy him...for ever.

“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:31-33).

If we aim at our own interests, we will miss them (because we are fallible and we live in a fallen world in which every falls apart).

But if we aim at God’s interests, we will achieve them (because God also aims at his interests and is jealous for his glory) AND we get the satisfaction of our own interests thrown in as well.

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matt. 16:25-26)

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

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

Question 3: What do the Scriptures principally teach?

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

1. Why is it important to know God?

To know God is life (John 17:3).

2. How do we know God?

As creatures we cannot but know our Creator (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:19-20).

God has also made himself known through “verbal revelation” (i.e. spoken words). In Eden he spoke to the man, both before and after the Fall.

Sin has perverted the use that we make of our ineffaceable knowledge of God as Creator. This unavoidable knowledge of God is now as pitiless as the rays of the Middle Eastern noonday sun (Psalm 19:6); it is a revelation of wrath (Romans 1:18). One way in which we try and avoid the knowledge of God is by burying it under layers of pagan religion or pagan philosophy or pagan decadence.

3. What is “the Word of God”?

After the Fall God graciously continued to make himself known through verbal communication. This verbal communication is the Word of God.

In the past the Word of God came in many forms: direct speech; dream; visions; encounters with angelic messengers; the “pressure” of the Holy Spirit. The climactic, fulfilling “speaking” of God was through the incarnation (Hebrews 1:1-3).

The Word of God is absolutely necessary for salvation – to know God is life. So the Word of God is “gospel”, i.e. good news, (Romans 1:16-17).

4. How does the Word of God relate to the Scriptures?

The catechism says that the Word of God is “contained” in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This does not mean that that it is contained in the way that water is contained by a sponge, i.e. the Scriptures are not a matrix which contains the Word of God but is itself distinct from the Word of God.

“Contained” means “recorded in”, e.g. in the way that a song is contained in an mp3 file. So “what Scripture says, God says” (J.I. Packer) – Scripture is the Word of God.

5. For what purpose has God given us his Word?

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:3-4).

God has given us his Word so that:

- We can know him (“what man is to believe concerning God”)

Since to know God is to live (John 17:3), the Word of God is a gift that aims at our salvation. In Biblical parlance to “know God” is not to have mere intellectual knowledge of him (though it necessarily includes this), but involves commitment of will and submission of heart.

- We will know how we are to obey him (“what duty God requires of man”)

Notice that even in Eden the man’s work was directed, and the man’s action was constrained, by the Word of God – the man was not absolutely free to do as he pleased. Neither are we free to do as we please:

- (a) Unbelievers are commanded to repent (Matthew 4:17; Acts 17:30-31).
- (b) The lives of believers are directed by the Word of God. The Sermon on the Mount was delivered to disciples who had believed and embraced the message of the kingdom of heaven. The epistles contain as much direction for holiness of life as they do doctrine about salvation.

6. What is the practical application of this?

- The Bible has unique authority – notice the word “only” in Answer 2.
- When we read the Bible we should look for the main things – knowledge of God (intellectual, volitional and existential) and knowledge of his will (including the enabling of the Holy Spirit to do it). This has the additional benefit of delivering us from fruitless speculation.
- When through the Bible we understand a truth concerning God, we are obliged to embrace that truth, and to reject every corresponding error. E.g. (a) since the Bible teaches that God is Trinity, we reject all forms of Unitarianism and polytheism. (b) Since the Bible reveals that God is gracious and forgives sin for Jesus’ sake, we are obliged to come to him confessing our sins and casting ourselves on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:1-4; 12:25-29).
- When through the Bible we understand a duty God requires of us, we are obliged to perform that duty. Not to do it, or to do other than it, is sin.
- Conscience is bound to the Word and God and is not to be coerced by men.

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Question 4: What is God?

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

(*Larger Cat.*: “God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.”)

1. Is this a definition of “God”?

No! To “define” something, you literally mark out its boundaries/limits/end. Since God is infinite, he defies definition. If not a definition, then what?

- A reflection on God’s self-revelation in Scripture.
- A confession of God’s excellence.

2. What does “God is a Spirit” mean?

It does NOT mean that God is like us or like the angelic beings. The indefinite article (i.e. God is a Spirit) might make us think that God is one spirit among many, i.e. a member of a class labelled “spirit”. That would be utterly wrong.

Greek does not have an indefinite article, so in John 4:24 Jesus says, “God is spirit”, not “God is a spirit”. This is not a metaphysical statement. Instead it sets God apart from men (who are “flesh”, John 3:6), and location (such as the Temple in Jerusalem, John 4:21); it is parallel to “truth” (John 4:23-24) which suggests the idea of “real”, i.e. that God is Himself and is of Himself and in Himself – unlike all creatures, which have their being from God.

Moreover, “commonly the ‘spirit’ in the Old Testament is renovative, creative, life-giving... ‘God is spirit’ means that God is invisible, divine as opposed to human..., life-giving and unknowable to human beings unless he chooses to reveal himself” (D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 225).

3. What are the “perfections” of God?

Theologians speak of God’s “attributes”, “perfections” or “glories”. These are “characteristics” of God, e.g. his infinity, eternity, immutability (unchangeableness), wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, truth.

Some caution is necessary in speaking of God’s perfections:

- We know God only because he has revealed himself. So our knowledge of his perfections is the result, not of abstract thought, but of meditation on the Word. It is not super-intelligent philosophers or theologians who know the infinite, eternal and unchangeable God, but humble, repentant, believing housewives and technicians who tremble at his Word.

- God's perfections are not merely part of him or separable from him. E.g. God is *good through and through*; God is *holy through and through*, etc. E.g. God's wisdom, justice and truth are not three fields set side-by-side, so that if God lost his justice he would lose only a portion of himself – rather God would cease to be God if (per impossible) he suffered a decrease in any perfection.
- The list of perfections given in Answer 4 is incomplete, e.g. where is "love"?

4. What are "communicable" and "incommunicable" perfections?

Because we are made in God's image, we share (in the fashion of creatures) the perfections of our Creator – God made us to "look" like him. However, theologians point out that God has perfections that creatures cannot share, e.g. infinity, eternity and immutability. These perfections they label "incommunicable". The other perfections are "communicable" because God shares them with us.

God transcends his creation in his communicable perfections as well as in his incommunicable perfections. God is immanent in his creation in his incommunicable perfections as well as his communicable perfections.

5. What are God's incommunicable perfections?

- Self-existence and unity of being
- Eternality and immutability
- Omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence

6. What are God's communicable perfections?

- Wisdom and knowledge
- Power
- Holiness
- Truth and faithfulness
- Justice and goodness
- Love, loyalty and mercy

7. What application does this have for me?

- God is not known through theology. God is known through Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh, who reveals the Father (John 1:18).
- So I must read the Bible with a thirst to know and worship God.
- But I should not dismiss theology. Theology is a useful way of recording and reflecting on what God has made known of himself through his Son. The best theologians have been men who could say, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Ps. 63:1).

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Question 5: Are there more Gods than one?

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

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

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

“The Good God” by Michael Reeves is a highly recommended and very readable text on the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Athanasian Creed

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith; which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit:

- *The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated.*
- *The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.*
- *The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.*

And yet they are not three eternals but one eternal.

As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet they are not three Lords but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, There are three Gods or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

1. We do not confess a generic “god”

The God glorified and enjoyed by the followers of Jesus is unique. No other “god” is remotely like the God who reveals himself through the incarnate Word as the Spirit illuminates our minds in the reading of the inscripturated Word. The living and true God is triune.

Imagine that you begin with the “idea of God”, e.g. God as Creator, or God as Mind, or God as Power, or God as Sovereign – will you ever arrive by reasoning at God as Trinity? No.

Therefore, to know the living and true God, you *must* know him as the triune God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Our knowledge of God starts with the Trinity, and it keeps coming back to the Trinity.

2. Not Unitarians, not Tri-theists, not Quadratarians

The Trinity we confess is God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. It is helpful to understand what this confession is not. The Athanasian Creed states, “The catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.”

(a) Not Unitarian

Unitarians “confound the persons”. They teach that God has changed his “mode of operation” – hence they are sometimes called “modalists”. They say that God revealed himself first as “Father” (through creation) and then as “Son” (through salvation) and then as “Spirit” (through sanctification).

Unitarianism is a contradiction of texts such as Matthew 3:16-17; 17:5; 27:46; 28:19; Luke 10:21; Acts 7:55; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; Revelation 22:1-2 (see John 7:37-39). Moreover, the Trinity is seen at work in the opening verses of Scripture (Genesis 1:1-3) and lies behind the unique first person plural pronouns spoken by God when he deliberates over the creation of Man (Genesis 1:26).

(b) Not Tri-theism

Tri-theism would “divide the substance”, i.e. it would teach that there are three gods. Imagine that the divine “substance” was a space and that the three Persons co-habit in that space – they are each “divine”, but only by dividing the “god-stuff” of which they are made. It’s then only a step to polytheism.

The Trinity, however, does not comprise three gods. Their divine substance is not a “thing” that can be divided.

“The Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit...For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, There are three Gods or three Lords.”

(c) Not Quadratarian

The divine “substance” and the “Godhead” are not a separate thing – a god to be worshipped beyond, below or above God. We do not confess a “quadrat-unity” of Father, Son, Spirit and substance/Godhead.

Why, then speak of substance? Because God is not “nothing”. God is – and in human language we denote his “is-ness” by speaking of “substance” or “essence”. The Greek word for substance (ἡ ὑπόστασις) is used in Hebrews 1:3, “[The Son] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

Why “Godhead”? The term “Godhead” appears three times in the AV, namely Acts 17:29 (το θεῖος); Romans 1:20 (ἡ θεϊότης); Colossians 2:9 (ἡ θεϊότης). It is used to translate words that mean “divine being” or “divinity”.

If we must talk about “substance” or “essence”, we must not entertain the impression that underneath God, more basic than the Father, the Son or the Spirit, is a fourth divine thing, out of which the three Persons are formed, and which we might (erroneously) label “God”. There is nothing below God or more basic than God. God is not formed of any thing. God is. That is one of the implications of the divine name Yahweh – “I AM”...fullstop.

Whenever we use the term “Godhead” we must not think that it refers to a fourth entity which the Father, the Son and the Spirit combine to form, like a divine council. There is no separate divinity formed by the three Persons. John was able to write, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

Prayer is an application. We don’t pray to the Godhead or the divine substance. We pray to God the Father, through God the Son, by God the Holy Spirit.

“Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit...So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet they are not three Lords but one Lord.”

3. We are Trinitarians

(a) We are Trinitarians because God reveals himself as Trinity in Scripture.

“Scripture sets forth a distinction of the Father from the Word, and of the Word from the Spirit...Indeed, the words ‘Father,’ ‘Son,’ and ‘Spirit’ imply a real distinction – let no one think that these titles, whereby God is variously designated from his works, are empty – but a distinction, not a division.” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.17)

(b) Our contemplation of the Trinity should not emphasise the Three at the expense of the One, or the One at the expense of the Three.

“Yet the greatness of the mystery warns us how much reverence and sobriety we ought to use in investigating this. And that passage in Gregory of Nazianzus vastly delights me: ‘I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendour of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one.’ Let us not, then, be led to imagine a trinity of persons that keeps our thoughts distracted and does not at once lead them back to that unity.” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.17)

(c) The Trinity is not a word game. It is how God is. Contemplating the Trinity leads us to understand better God’s relationship with us as creatures and as redeemed people.

“It is not fitting to suppress the distinction that we observe to be expressed in Scripture. It is this: to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity...[T]he observance of an order is not meaningless or superfluous, when the Father is thought of as first, then from him the Son, and finally from both the Spirit...This appears in many passages, but nowhere more clearly than in chapter 8 of Romans, where the same Spirit is indifferently called sometimes the Spirit of Christ [v. 9], sometimes the Spirit of him ‘who raised up Christ...from the dead’ [v. 11]...Peter also testifies that it was by the Spirit of Christ that the prophets prophesied [2 Peter 1:21; cf. 1 Peter 1:11], even though Scripture often teaches that it was the Spirit of God the Father.” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.18)

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

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

1. In what way do the three Persons differ?

We might ask in what way the three Persons of the Trinity differ. Since they are “the same in substance” then why, for instance, is the Father not the Son? What makes the Father to be “Father”?

Calvin writes, “It is not fitting to suppress the distinction that we observe to be expressed in Scripture. It is this: to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity” (Institutes 1.13.18).

The designations “Father”, “Son” and “Spirit” are neither empty “place holders” nor arbitrary. They denote real relationships between the three Persons. The Son is “Son” with respect to the Father; the Father is “Father” with respect to the Son. This cautions us against trying to speak, e.g., of the Father “in himself” – we know him as the Father in his relationship to the Son.

Now since there is no “before” and no “after” for God, the relationships among the three Persons of the Trinity do not refer to a chronological order. E.g. although the Father is “the beginning of activity” he is not therefore chronologically prior to the Son or the Spirit.

We know the relationships among the Father, the Son and the Spirit only because God has revealed them in Scripture. This revelation is true – the Trinity is not a “mask” which God wears for the purpose of speaking to us – God really is Father, Son and Spirit.

2. The Father and the Son

The word “Father” is very rarely applied to God in the Old Testament. In contrast, the New Testament is bursting at the seams with it – a total of over 240 instances:

- Jesus calls God “my Father” 42 times (and “my heavenly Father” once). 22 of these occasions are in the Gospel according to John. John also records another 9 occasions on which Jesus simply addresses God as “Father”; the synoptic Gospels report about 10 such occasions.
- In his letters Paul writes of “God the Father” 16 times and simply of “the Father” a further 6 times. God is Father first and foremost because he is “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Col. 1:3).

- The other letters speak of “God the Father” 4 times, and simply of “the Father” 18 times – 13 of these references are in 1 John.
- In Matthew’s gospel Jesus speaks to his disciple about “your Father” 12 times, and “your heavenly Father” 4 times.
- Paul states that creaturely fatherhood is patterned on the relationship between the Father and the Son: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father [pater], from whom every family [patria] in heaven and on earth is named...” (Eph. 3:14-15).

Clearly the full revelation of God the Father awaited the coming of God the Son. That is, in fact what Jesus said: “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt. 11:27). The Son has this power of revelation because “he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3).

It is not fruitful to ask, “Why ‘Father’ and ‘Son’?” A better question is, “In what way does the Father behave as ‘Father to the Son’ and in what way does the Son behave as ‘Son of the Father’?”

- *The Father gives the Son life* “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (John 5:26). “Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:5).
- *The Father gives the Son his inheritance* “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand” (John 3:35). “All that the Father gives me will come to me” (John 6:37). “All that the Father has is mine” (John 16:15). “All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them” (John 17:10).
- *The Son obeys the Father* “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak” (John 12:49). “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father” (John 14:31). Compare Revelation 5:1-10.
- *The Son makes the Father known* “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:18). “I [the Son] have manifested your name [the Father’s name] to the people whom you gave me out of the world” (John 17:6).
- *The Father and the Son enjoy fellowship in their working together* “The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing” (John 5:19-20). “...just as the Father knows me and I know the Father” (John 10:15).

3. The Father and the Son and the Spirit

Augustine asked a perceptive question: “Why the Holy Spirit is not also a son, since He, too, comes forth from the Father, as it is read in the Gospel.”

The answer is that the Spirit is not begotten, but he proceeds; and he proceeds not from the Father alone, but from both the Father and the Son: “The Father and the Son are a Beginning of the Holy Spirit, not two Beginnings; but as the Father and Son are one God, and one Creator, and one Lord relatively to the creature, so are they one Beginning relatively to the Holy Spirit.”

The terminology of “procession” comes from John 15:26, “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

To this we ought to add:

- the picture of the Spirit as “rivers of living water” (John 7:37-39) which could not well up within believers until after the glorification of Jesus;
- and the picture of the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1-2).

John Calvin writes, “The Son is said to come forth from the Father alone; the Spirit, from the Father and the Son at the same time. This appears in many passages, but nowhere more clearly than in chapter 8 of Romans, where the same Spirit is indifferently called sometimes the Spirit of Christ [v. 9], sometimes the Spirit of him ‘who raised up Christ...from the dead’ [v. 11]” (Institutes 1.13.18).

He also writes: “The Son is one God with the Father because he shares with the Father one and the same Spirit; and that the Spirit is not something other than the Father and different from the Son, because he is the Spirit of the Father and the Son” (Institutes 1.13.19).

It is not without reason that Paul writes about “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:14). The fellowship of the Holy Spirit has been the delight of the Trinity from all eternity and it is into this fellowship that we are brought by the Spirit.

“It is all deeply personal: the Spirit stirs up the delight of the Father in the Son and the delight of the Son in the Father, inflaming their love and so binding them together in the ‘fellowship of the Holy Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 13:14). He makes the Father’s love known to the Son, causing him to cry ‘Abba!’...And let’s be clear, that ‘Abba!’ is said with joy, for the Spirit so makes the Father known to the Son that the Son rejoices. ‘At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth”’ (Luke 10:21)” (M. Reeves, *The Good God*, p. 11).

4. What difference does the Trinity make to theology?

“If God has not a communicative, spreading goodness, he would never have created the world. The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost were happy in themselves, and enjoyed one another before the world was. Apart from the fact that God delights to communicate and spread his goodness, there had never been a creation or redemption” (Richard Sibbes).

The doctrine of creation

The doctrine of the Trinity brings sense to the doctrine of creation. If God were a pure unity, then why would he create? There are two possibilities:

- Because he needed the creation to fulfil some lack in himself – just like the gods of paganism which needed the service of their worshippers.
- For purely disinterested reasons – like the god of deism – which means love is not the foundation of the creation.

But the Trinity is able to create not out of need but out of love. The exuberant nature of the Triune God means that his pleasure is a pleasure in diffusing and communicating to his creatures, rather than in receiving from them.

The doctrine of redemption

“The triune God is...not a God who hoards his life, but one who gives it away, as he would show in that supreme moment of his self-revelation on the cross. The Father finds his very identity in giving his life and being to the Son; and the Son images his Father in sharing his life with us through the Spirit” (Reeves, p. 27).

5. What difference does the Trinity make to me?

- Through the Spirit, the Father allows us to share in his delight in the Son. Why did the Father send the Son? Because the Father so enjoyed loving the Son that he wanted his love to be in others: “O righteous Father...I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:25-26).
- Through the Spirit we come to delight in obeying the Father just as the Son does. The Spirit gives us “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:10-13) – he works in us the likeness of the Son (2 Cor. 3:17-18).
- Through the Spirit we are led into the same confidence in the goodness of the Father as the Son has – and he moves us to express this confidence in prayer (Romans 8:14-17,26-27).
- The Spirit performs the same re-creative role in us as he performed at the beginning (Romans 8:11; 2 Cor. 4:6; 5:4-5). The origin of the plan is the Father’s; the wisdom of the plan is the Son’s; the power of bringing the plan into effect is the Spirit’s.

The Shorter Catechism

Question 7: What are the decrees of God?

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

Question 8: How doth God execute his decrees?

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

1. What do we mean when we say, “God decreed”?

God is King. He speaks and it comes to pass (Gen. 1:1-3; John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:1-3).

There is no debate – the creature simply leaps into being and action at the command of the Creator (Isa. 46:9-11).

There are no independent actions or goals on the part of the creation – the creation has no purpose beyond the purpose given to it by the Creator. The sovereignty of the Creator comprehends every action of every creature, down to the finest detail.

Compare the way in which God is portrayed as active, commanding, ordering and executing in Revelation 4-5 with the passive-responsive-serving role of his creatures.

2. What do God's decrees concern?

God's decrees concern creation and providence, i.e. everything that is, and the history of everything that is. Nothing falls outside his plan (John 1:3; Rev. 5:1). This includes:

- The whole system in general (Eph. 1:11);
- “Fortuitous” events (Prov. 16:33; Matt. 10:29-30);
- The free actions of men (Prov. 21:1; Eph 2:10; Phil. 2:13);
- The sinful actions of men (Gen. 37:28; 45:7-8; Isa. 10:5; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).

“It must be remembered, however, that the purpose of God with respect to the sinful acts of men and wicked angels is in no degree to cause the evil, nor to approve it, but only to permit the wicked agent to perform it, and then to overrule it for his own most wise and holy ends...Gen. 50:20” (A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, pp. 64-5).

3. Whose counsel did God seek before decreeing his purpose?

None but his own: the decree of God is “according to the counsel of his will” (Isa. 40:13-14; Jer. 23:18; Eph. 1:11).

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:33-36).

Remember that God is Trinity. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit took counsel together (Prov. 8:22-31). This means that the decree of God is holy, wise and efficacious.

4. When did God decree his purpose?

In all eternity: “...according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11).

This means that God did not decree his purpose in response to anything his creation would do. The decree of God is not in any way contingent or conditional.

This also means that God’s decree is unchangeable. “Since he is an eternal and unchangeable Being, his plan must have existed in all its elements, perfect and unchangeable, from eternity...And since God’s intelligence is absolutely perfect and his plan is eternal, since his ultimate end is revealed to be the single one of his own glory, and the whole work of creation and providence is observed to form one system, it follows that his plan is also single – one all-comprehensive intention, providing for all the means and conditions as well as the ends selected” (Hodge, p. 64).

5. What is the ultimate goal of God’s decrees?

The ultimate goal of God’s decrees is God’s own glory. “I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made” (Isa. 43:6-7). “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Rev. 4:11).

6. What application does this have to me?

- I am reminded that I am a creature and that my life is in every way circumscribed by the decree of my Creator.
- I am encouraged to entrust myself to the will of God – he is holy, wise and powerful – he works all things for good to those who love him, for those who are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).
- I am impelled to give myself whole-heartedly to my Creator, out of desire to glorify him by my obedience rather than my disobedience (Rev. 4:11).
- I am directed to pray because my prayers are also comprehended in the decrees of God.

The Shorter Catechism

Question 9: What is the work of creation?

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

Question 10: How did God create man?

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

1. God is the exclusive source of everything

Positively, God made *all things*. "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3).

Negatively, God made all things *of nothing*. "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible" (Heb. 11:3).

Also God made all things *into* nothing, i.e. "before" creation there was literally nothing – no time, no space, no laws of physics – what Francis Schaeffer (I think) called "nothing nothing".

The Bible forestalls any possibility of dualism, i.e. there was nothing alongside God that either assisted or hindered his work of creation (Rom. 11:36).

2. Genesis 1 is a six day narrative

Genesis 1 is written in the idiom of Hebrew historical narrative. Its clear intention is to teach that God's work of creation covered six consecutive, literal days. For more detail, see the notes on "Genesis 1 is Historical Narrative" in the series "Understanding and Enjoying the Bible". The view that the earth is very, very old cannot be sustained from Genesis 1, but must be imported into Scripture.

Some people try and insert an indefinitely long period of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 – the so called "Gap Theory". This misunderstands how Hebrew narrative works: Gen. 1:2 acts like a parenthetical statement which provides important information about the circumstances of the main action.

3. Creation, being the work of the good God, is good

Six times Genesis 1 affirms that creation was good. The seventh affirmation says, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was *very good*" (Gen. 1:31). This should not surprise us – God's work necessarily reflects God's being (Rom. 1:20). God is good, and what he makes is also good (Ps. 119:68).

We need to remember that the world we know has been corrupted by sin – we do not see or experience the "very good" creation in its pristine condition.

4. Man is God's image-bearer

Man is God's masterpiece. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion...' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them..." (Gen. 1:26-28).

Man is unique – his origin, like that of the animals, is "dust from the ground" (Gen. 2:7,19), but comparison of Gen. 1:24-25 and 1:26-28 shows that God was personally active in the creation of Man in a qualitatively different way, and that he gave Man a unique relationship to all the other creatures (Psalm 8:5-8).

Man is both male and female – men and women both bear God's image, and the image of God is borne by the whole human family.

The image of God = the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). This includes, but is not exhausted by, knowledge, righteousness, holiness and dominion (cf. Isa. 11:2).

5. God is categorically not the author of evil

There were no flaws whatsoever in what God made. There is no evil intrinsic to created being. So God is not the author of evil.

Sin and death (including suffering and natural disasters) are the consequence of the free choice of Man (Gen. 6:11-12) – in particular, the first act of rebellion by the first man (Gen. 3:16-19).

6. Applications

- We affirm monergism (the view that God is the sole source of creation) and reject all forms of dualism (the view that someone or something other than God also played a role in creation).
- We affirm that the original creation was good, and that there is no evil intrinsic to created being. Our hope is in the resurrection of the body (transformed like Jesus' body: powerful, glorious, incorruptible and spiritual) and we therefore reject views that denigrate the body.
- We affirm a recent, six day creation and reject the Gap Theory, theistic evolution and all secular theories of evolution.
- We affirm that people bear the image of God, and are therefore of incalculable worth. We, therefore, also reject materialistic/naturalistic views that reduce people to mere "higher" animals whose value is finite and measurable.
- We affirm the equal dignity of men and women as bearers of the divine image, and reject anything that incites or encourages conflict between the sexes.
- We affirm the God-ordained distinctions between men and women, and reject anything that flattens, confuses or perverts them.

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

The section headings and all quotations in these notes are taken from Thomas Watson's *Body of Divinity*, Part 2, Section 14.

Reflecting on Q&A 7, Watson states that "providence is God's ordering all issues and events of things, after the counsel of his will, and to his own glory." Providence has the same source as creation: the counsel of God's will. And providence has the same purpose as creation: the glory of God. So "God is not like an artificer that builds a house, and then leaves it, but like a pilot he steers the ship of the whole creation."

Watson distinguishes between the decree of God and providence: "God's decree ordains all things that shall fall out, God's providence orders them." In other words, just as creation is the execution of God's decree in "being", so providence is the execution of God's decree in history.

1. God's providence reaches to all places, persons and occurrences.

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

This is an application of the affirmation we made in the previous study: "We affirm monergism...and reject all forms of dualism." In other words, God is the only source of history, and what people call fate, luck or chance have no originating role in history. Just as with respect to the decree of God regarding creation nothing novel can be, so also with respect to the decree of God regarding history, nothing novel can occur.

This does not mean that we are mere puppets. God has given every creature its nature, and he has chosen the physical laws of created being. Every created being behaves according to its nature – apples fall down not because God directly causes their motion, but because God created matter in its fine detail such that it generates gravitational fields.

The weather is determined by solar radiation, the tilt and rotation of the earth, the revolution of the earth about the Sun, etc. And yet God stores and sends the weather (Job 38:22-23; Ps. 147:8,15-18; Jer. 10:13).

The deer in the field give birth because they conceive, come full term, go into labour and deliver their young. But "the voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth" (Psalm 29:9). See also Job 38-39.

Disease and famine ravage nations because of the lifecycles of bacteria and insects; wars break out between kingdoms because of the policies of men. But God's decree is behind it all (Isa. 10:12-15; Lam. 1:20-22; Joel 2:11; Amos 3:6).

This does not mean that God is responsible for moral evil. The Confession of Faith 5.4 states, "The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends; yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God; who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin."

The evil of a thought or action arises from the evil in the heart of the person who thinks or acts – they are behaving according to their nature. The Confession of Faith 9.3 states, "Man, but his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability to will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto."

"A man may play upon a jarring instrument, but the jarring is from itself; so here the actions of men, so far as they are natural are from God; but so far as they are sinful, they are from men themselves."

2. Providences which are casual and accidental to us, are pre-determined by the Lord.

It appears that random things happen: a woman walks out into the fields outside a foreign town; an archer shoots at random; a king is unable to sleep. But Ruth comes into the company of Boaz (Ruth 2:3); the arrow finds a chink in the armour of Ahab (1 Kings 22:34); and Ahasuerus is reminded of Mordecai's unrewarded loyalty (Esther 6). Why? Because although the lot may be cast into the lap (the apparently random event), yet the decision is from the LORD (Prov. 16:33).

3. God's providence is greatly to be observed, but we are not to make it the rule of our action.

Sometimes Christians ground and justify their choices and actions by "providence" without sufficient consultation of Scripture (cf. Joshua 9) and the wisdom of older believers. However, providence, says Watson, is the Christian's diary, not his Bible. I.e. providence fills the events of life, but it does not have authority to tell us what to do. So an opportunity may open, e.g. for a new job or a change of house – but that does not mean that you ought to change your job or your house.

If our conscience is properly educated by Scripture, we will be delivered from lives that are blown to and fro by circumstances (cf. Eph. 4:14).

4. Divine providence is irresistible.

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

In Obadiah 3-4 Edom imagines that it can fly so high and make its nest so lofty that it will be impregnable to God's providential disposition of the nations. Little does Edom realize that God is so great that though it flies higher and higher it merely continues to fly within the sphere of his authority.

We may shake our fists at heaven (Psalm 2:1-3; 93:3) – God is not perturbed or denuded of authority (Psalm 2:4-6; 93:4).

5. God is to be trusted when his providences seem to run contrary to his promises.

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

God promised to make Abraham a nation (Gen 12:2) and to give him descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen 15:5). But years passed; no children were born; and Sarah went through the menopause. God's promise was to be trusted, even in the face of an apparently contrary providence.

God promised to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt (Ex. 4:31). But Pharaoh made their work heavier (Ex. 5:9). And the people found it hard to believe the promise of God when providence ran counter.

God promised David the throne of Israel (1 Sam. 16:13). But Saul's jealousy burned against David, and he hounded him out of the land (1 Samuel 27). David was obliged to believe the promise of God in the face of hard providence.

6. The providences of God are chequer-work, they are intermingled.

In hell all providence will be bitter. In heaven every providence will be sweet. But in this life the bitter and the sweet are mixed. Christians are not delivered from sorrow, suffering and death. "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10).

7. The same action, as it comes from God's providence, may be good, and as it comes from men may be evil.

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

God's goal in everything he does is his own glory and the good of his people. However, the instruments of his providence have their own goals. E.g.:

- Joseph's brothers wanted to be rid of him (Gen. 37:19-20).

- The Assyrians aimed at world domination (Isa. 10:5-15).
- Pilate was motivated by political expediency (Mark 15:15; John 19:12-13) and the Sanhedrin by envy (Mark 15:10) in the crucifixion of Jesus.
- The Judaizers wanted to control the faith of the Galatian Christians (Gal. 3:1).

Their goals were evil, but God's were good – the deliverance of many people from famine; the chastening of Israel; the salvation of the world; and the exposition of gospel liberty.

Applications

- “Admire God’s providence.” We are to stand in awe of God – were he to withdraw his Word, the whole creation would disintegrate (Heb. 1:3). His knowledge, wisdom, understanding and power are limitless.
- “Learn quietly to submit to divine providence.” Since God is King (Q&A 7), our duty is to humble ourselves under his mighty hand, remembering that God resists the proud but give grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5-7).
- “Believe that providence shall conspire for your good at last.” Remember that God’s goal is not just his own glory. In an act of condescension that beggars imagination, God in Christ bound together his glory and the good of his people. So “all things work together for good to those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.” And that purpose is that his Son might be “firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:28-20).
- “Let it be an antidote against immoderate fear, that nothing comes to pass but what is ordained by God’s decree, and ordered by his providence.” Fear is not necessarily bad. But fear may work in our imagination and make the power of circumstances greater than it is. And fear may distract us from our relationship of trust in God. Draw comfort from the knowledge that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:31-39).
- “Let the merciful providence of God cause thankfulness.” God feeds, clothes and houses us. He places us in families. He gives us aptitudes and employment. He put us in a time and a place where we enjoy significant liberties and where the gospel is preached without hindrance. These are causes of deep gratitude.

Providence remains deeply mysterious, and we ought to be cautious in all that we say about it. “Now we scarce know what to make of God’s providence, and are ready to censure what we do not understand; but in heaven we shall see how all his providences (sickness, losses, sufferings) contributed to our salvation. Here we see but some dark pieces of God’s providence, and it is impossible to judge of his works by pieces; but when we come to heaven, and see the full body and portrait of his providence drawn out into its lively colours, it will be glorious to behold. Then we shall see how all God’s providences helped to fulfil his promises. There is no providence but we shall see a wonder or a mercy in it.”

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

1. What is a covenant?

A covenant is an arrangement which defines and regulates the relationship between two (or more) parties. A covenant typically stipulates obligations, promises and sanctions. A covenant may be bilateral or unilateral. Marriage is a bilateral covenant in which husband and wife freely obligate themselves by making mutual promises of faithfulness, obedience and care; the sanction (divorce) may be enforced if the promises are seriously violated.

The covenant of God with Adam was a unilateral covenant – the Creator graciously and sovereignly imposed it on his creature. The obligation was perfect obedience; the promise was life; and the sanction was death (Genesis 2:16-17).

2. Why is this called a “covenant of life”?

It is called a “covenant of life” because God promised Adam life on the condition of obedience. The life promised comprised:

- physical life – well-being which extended to Adam’s body, psyche, social relationships (especially with his wife), and environment; and the same extended to Adam’s whole family;
- spiritual life – a relationship of peace and fellowship with God;
- eternal life – had Adam passed the period of probation set by God, he would have been granted access to the Tree of Life and gained not merely infinitely prolonged life but would have been transformed for and through fellowship with the Trinity (Genesis 3:22; Revelation 22:1-4).

3. How comprehensive was the sanction of death?

The sanction of death was as comprehensive as the promise of life. It comprised:

- physical death – if and when Adam violated the covenant by an act of disobedience he would admit physical corruption into his experience; the actual cessation of life might not occur for many years, but in the meantime he would experience physical and psychological illness, frustration, social alienation (Genesis 3:16-19); and all of this would be extended to his family;
- spiritual death – the fellowship between Adam and God would be broken, and Adam would be driven out of God’s presence (Genesis 3:23-24); this death took hold of Adam the moment he sinned (Genesis 3:7-8).

- eternal death – being deprived of fellowship with God, Adam would become more and more enslaved to sin, and therefore more and more estranged from God and more and more liable to punishment for sin; this is illustrated by the rapid and progressive corruption of mankind after the Fall and before the Flood (Genesis 6:5-12); hell is the horrific terminus of covenant breaking.

4. Why is the covenant of life a “special act of providence”?

The Confession of Faith states that “the distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.”

Notice that:

- we owe God obedience simply because he is our Creator; this is comprehended by God’s general works of providence (by which he preserves and governs all his creatures and all their actions);
- so God’s purpose in making a covenant with Adam was special, namely that Adam (and his descendants) would enjoy a fruitful and happy relationship with God, leading to eternal life;
- God did not exercise this special providence because he was under any obligation, but acted willingly and graciously for the good of mankind.

We can see the outlines of this special act of providence in the way that God treats Adam in Genesis 2:

- God’s creation of Adam marks him out from all the other creatures (v. 7);
- God’s preparation of Eden marks it out as special, distinct from all other places on the earth (v. 8);
- God’s conducting of Adam into Eden and there placing him under obligation marks out Adam’s relationship with God as unique (vv. 15-17).

This special providence bears the hallmarks of the kingdom: God’s people (Adam) in God’s land (Eden) and under God’s rule/blessing (the covenant of life).

5. What has this to do with me?

This has everything to do with us – but for the time being, let’s just note that God’s dealings with Adam help us to understand his work of salvation:

- the stakes – eternal life and eternal death;
- the means – the administration of a covenant;
- the goal – the establishment of the kingdom of God.

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

Question 14: What is sin?

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

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

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

1. What is “freedom of the will”?

“Freedom of the will” is the ability of the will to make un-coerced choices according to the will’s own nature. A free will may be:

- Free only to choose the good. In this sense the glorified saints have free will because the death of Christ set them free from bondage to sin, and their own deaths separated them from the sinful nature (what the apostle Paul calls “the flesh”).
- Free only to choose the evil. In this sense fallen, unregenerate people have free will – they cannot but sin – not because they are coerced, but because their nature has been perverted by sin.
- Free to choose either good or evil. This is the condition in which Adam was created – his natural inclination was only to the good, but it was also changeable and indeed through temptation was perverted to evil.

In the matter of obedience of the command of God, our first parents exercised a choice that was forced neither one way nor the other:

- God did not constrain them to choose to obey, except that he made clear to them the obedience he required and the punishment he would execute upon their disobedience.
- The serpent did not constrain them to choose to disobey, except that he tempted them to the disobedience he desired, lying to them about the advantages that would accrue to them upon their eating of the forbidden fruit. They were deceived, not forced (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14).

It must be remembered that the free actions of men are comprehended by the decree of God (Prov. 21:1; Eph 2:10; Phil. 2:13). So the WCoF says, “Our first parents being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. *This their sin, God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.*”

2. What is “the law of God”?

“The law of God” is the revealed will of God concerning the obedience which God, as Creator, King and Law-giver, requires of his creatures.

The law of God is written on the hearts of men (Rom. 2:15). Men know that there is a God and that they owe him obedience (Ps. 19:1-6). Men know that there is an order in human society (concerning matters such as: the relationships between superiors and inferiors; and the sanctity of marriage, life, property and reputation).

The law of God is published plainly and fully in the Word of God (Ps. 19:7-11). It is common to distinguish between (a) the judicial law which regulated the national life of Israel and which contains details which do not apply to other nations (e.g. concerning agricultural practices), and (b) the ceremonial law which was only for Israel and was fulfilled by Christ, and (c) the moral law which is summarised in the Ten Commandments and is applicable all people everywhere and all the time.

3. What is sin?

The Bible uses a variety of word groups for sin, of which three are prominent:

- Sin “Sin” is falling short of the standard or missing the mark (Rom. 3:23). In this sense, sin entails failure and frustration, and may even be unintentional.
- Transgression “Transgression” supplies the sense of intentionality which may occasionally be lacking in the word “sin”. So it entails rebellion – knowing where the boundary lines lie, and then deliberately stepping over them – knowing what God requires, and then deliberately rejecting his authority. It is a breach of faith, an act of treachery.
- Iniquity “Iniquity” entails the ideas of perversity and twistedness. When it functions in relationships among people, it is called “injustice”. In God’s eyes it is “wickedness”.

The most characteristic feature of sin is that it is directed against God; any idea of sin that does not accentuate the contradiction that it offers to God is defective.

4. What sin did Adam and Eve commit in eating the forbidden fruit?

- Violation of the Word of God Adam and Eve knew what God had said about the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. They did not need to work out God’s will from signs and clues in the created world; there was nothing obscure or uncertain about God’s will. Their sin violated God’s very words (Gen. 3:1-2).
- Distrust of the goodness of God The serpent insinuated that by forbidding the fruit, God was withholding something good, so good in fact that God was guarding it jealously, i.e. God-likeness (Gen. 3:5).
- Rebellion against the authority of God There was in their action a desire for wisdom independent of God (Gen. 3:6). It was a unilateral declaration of independence.

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

1. Remind me about “the covenant...made with Adam”.

Look back at the notes on Q&A 12. The “covenant” was the “covenant of life” which God made with Adam in the Garden of Eden. At stake was eternal life and eternal death. The goal was the establishment of the kingdom of God upon earth. The obligation imposed on Adam was perfect obedience.

2. Why did Adam's fall result in the fall of all mankind?

The Bible teaches that God created angels and mankind differently constituted. The angels were created each one separately – and each one separately stood or fell with respect to his own obedience. But mankind was created in just the man – and mankind would have stood if the first man had obeyed, but mankind actually fell because of the first sin of the first man.

One reason we have a problem with this teaching is that the modern West is highly individualistic. In effect, we think of people as so many “angels”, i.e. we consider each personal individually responsible for his or her own fall.

The Bible, however, regularly presents people as being represented in or by their fathers. For example:

- Abraham was the head of his whole household (including the children born to his slaves) and so when God made covenant with Abraham, God was also making covenant with Abraham's household, and all the males of the household over the age of 8 days received the sign of the covenant (Gen. 17).
- Moreover, with respect to covenant making and keeping, descendants are considered to have said, done or experienced what their ancestors said, did or experienced. So in Deuteronomy 4:9-14,32-40 and 5:1-5 Moses addresses a generation of Israelites who were no more than minors when God gave the Law at Sinai; and yet he addresses them as though they had been responsible adults at that time.

This, however, does not explain *why* Adam's fall resulted in the fall of all mankind. The cause is not just the *organic* union of the human family with Adam. The cause is rather the *federal* union of the human family with Adam – Adam was our representative head (like a head of state). With respect to his first sin he acted not as a private person but as the representative of his whole family. This is the “in Adam” relationship of which Paul writes in 1 Cor. 15:22, “As *in Adam* all die...”

In Romans 5 Paul traces the origin of the universal experience of sin and death back to Adam: "...just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned [in Adam]..." (Rom. 5:12). Because of our federal solidarity with Adam, God imputed to mankind both the guilt of Adam's first sin and Adam's subsequent corruption: "...one trespass led to condemnation for all men..." (Rom. 5:18).

3. Why the qualification "descending...by ordinary generation"?

The qualification "descending from him by ordinary generation" is important because it recognizes that Christ was excluded from the guilt of Adam's first sin. Adam was not Christ's representative – instead, Christ came as a new representative head of a new humanity.

Christ does not descend from Adam by "ordinary generation". The grammar of Matthew 1:16 is significant. The genealogy of Matthew 1 states "A begot B, and B begot C, etc." The pattern is unbroken until we come to verse 16, which says, "and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ." The omission of the name of a human father and the use of the passive voice ("was begotten" rather than "begot") highlights that Jesus was not born "by ordinary generation". See also Matthew 1:18,20,23.

Jesus' virgin conception sets him within the human family (he has a full human nature) but outside the race's federal relationship with Adam (he did not fall with Adam in his first transgression).

Thus Jesus was able to be a second federal representative – a second "Adam" who obeys where Adam disobeyed. We are saved when God transfers us from our "in Adam" relationship to an "in Christ" relationship: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). Christ not only suffered for us; he also obeyed for us: "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's [Adam's] disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's [Christ's] obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:18-19).

4. Applications

- This emphasises our inability to save ourselves. The mirror has already been cracked, the milk spilled, the damage done...by Adam. I cannot fix my broken human nature – I cannot get myself out of my "in Adam" relationship.
- It also reminds us that all mankind (that's you and me) is still in a covenant relationship with God. The Bible never suggests that, once Adam had broken the covenant, God set it aside. We are still under covenant obligation to obey – the problem is that "in Adam" we are all born covenant breakers.
- It also sheds light on how we are saved. We are saved by getting into a new covenant relationship with God through union with a new covenant head, the Lord Jesus Christ. What he did and experience, he did and experienced for us. His death becomes our death; his obedience becomes our obedience.

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

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

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

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

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

If Q&A 16 is concerned with the fact that we are all implicated in the fall of Adam, then Q&A 17-19 deal with the consequences of our fall in Adam. These consequences are twofold: sin and misery – “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned [in Adam]...” (Rom. 5:12).

1. Sin

There are two aspects to the sinfulness of the condition into which mankind fell in Adam: (a) original sin, and (b) actual sins.

(a) Original sin

Q&A 18 names three facets of original sin:

- The guilt of Adam's first sin. We considered this under Q&A 16. The guilt of Adam's first sin is imputed to every member of the human family (descending from him by ordinary generation ⇒ Christ is excluded) because God constituted Adam the federal (covenant) representative of the whole family. As a result we are born guilty (Ps. 51:5), and are therefore under the wrath of God: “...among whom we all...were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph. 2:3).
- The want of original righteousness. “Original righteousness” refers to the condition in which Adam was created – it included his open communion with God and his moral purity, and it was the grounds for his every act of obedience. The “want of original righteousness” is the loss of this positive foundation for a relationship of peace with God and any obedience.
- The corruption of our whole nature. This entails (i) total depravity, i.e. every part of our being (mind, will, emotions, affections, conscience and body) has been affected by sin (Gen. 6:5-6; Ps. 14:1-3; Eph. 4:17-19); and (ii) total inability, i.e. our inability to act in a way that is distinct from our corruption (Matt. 7:18; Rom. 8:7-8; 1 Cor. 2:14).

Notice that original sin is not merely negative (a privation of good) – it is also positive, i.e. it is an inherent positive disposition towards sin.

(b) Actual sins

The catechism says that, having become sinners “in Adam”, we proceed to give expression to our sinful nature through sinful acts. “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt. 15:19). “Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (Jam. 1:14-15).

The Bible bears sustained, painful testimony to the universal reality of sin, especially through its focus on the (sinful) lives of the people of God.

2. Misery

The answer to Q 19 focuses first on the basis of the sinner’s misery, and then on the outworking of his misery in experience.

(a) The basis of the sinner’s misery

The sinner’s misery comprises:

- The loss of communion with God. We were made to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. But in Adam we have fallen short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23). And when Adam sinned, God drove him from Eden (the verb translated “drove” in Gen. 3:24 is strong – like Pharaoh expelling the Hebrew people from Egypt).
- Abiding under God’s wrath and curse. The sinner lives moment by moment under the displeasure of God (Eph. 2:3).

(b) The sinner’s experience of misery

The sinner experiences the misery of his fallen condition:

- Throughout life (“made liable to all the miseries of this life”). Eve’s relationship with her husband was marred, and her experience of childbearing made hard (Gen. 3:16); and Adam was condemned to toil and frustration (Gen. 3:17-19).
- At death (“made liable...to death itself”). The word of God (“...in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die,” Gen. 2:17) was no idle threat (Rom. 6:23).
- In hell (“made liable...to the pains of hell forever”). See section 3 of the notes on Q&A 12. Hell is the horrific terminus of unrepentant sinners.

3. Application

The main lesson from this portion of the catechism is that sin is no minor issue. Sin has corrupted (a) our whole relationship with God, (b) our whole nature, and (c) our whole experience.

If God is to deal with sin, he must do something utterly earth-shattering – and that is what he has done by sending the Redeemer (Is. 7:10-14 and Q&A 20).

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

1. From what and to what?

From what are we delivered? We are delivered from the estate of sin and misery into which we fell by Adam's first sin (see Q&A 17-19). This estate of sin and misery entails the corruption of (a) our whole relationship with God, (b) our whole nature, and (c) our whole experience.

Into what are we delivered? We are delivered into an estate of salvation. This state of salvation must address the whole effects of sin:

- Our relationship with God is restored – reconciliation (Rom. 5:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:18).
- Our nature is healed – re-birth/re-creation (John 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:17).
- Our experience is filled with hope of eternal life (Rom. 8:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:1-5).

2. By whom and for whom?

This salvation has been achieved “by a Redeemer”. Jesus is only called a “redeemer” in Acts 7:35. However, the work of redemption is ascribed to him in Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:12. This redemption is something he purchased with his own blood, i.e. by his sin-bearing, wrath-bearing death on the Cross.

In the Old Testament:

- a redeemer was a close relative of the person who benefited from the act of redemption;
- redemption aimed at securing the liberty of a member of the family or the possession of family property when these had been lost through poverty.

Thus,

- it was necessary for the Son of God to become our relative, our “kinsman redeemer” (Heb. 2:10-18);
- his act of redemption aimed at securing our liberty – see point 1.

This was done for those whom Hebrews 2:10-18 calls sons, brothers, children, and the offspring of Abraham. In the context of Hebrews these are terms full of the connotation of election: Abraham was chosen by God, and the “sons-brothers-children” (the children of Israel) are the elect. Even in the family of Abraham God made a choice (Rom. 9:10-13).

3. When and how?

The saving work of the Redeemer has its roots in eternity past. God “chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4).

For all eternity it pleased God to enter into a “covenant of grace” for the deliverance of the elect. In the covenant of grace God “freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe” (WCoF 7.3).

The covenant of grace is “that gracious agreement between the offended God and the offending but elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience” (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 277).

“Reformed theology contemplates the covenant...primarily as the expression of blessings freely given, of privileges improved by the grace of God for spiritual ends, of promises accepted by a faith which is the gift of God, and of a good realised, at least in principle, through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart. And because in its estimation all this was included in the covenant idea, and the blessings of the covenant are realised only in those that are actually saved, it stressed the fact that the covenant of grace was established between God and the elect” (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 275).

There has only ever been one covenant of grace, though it has been differently administered in God’s historical covenants with Noah (Gen. 6:18; 9:8-17), Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 5:18; 17:7-14; 22:15-18), Israel (Ex. 19:5; 24:6-8) and David (2 Sam. 7:11-16), and in the New Covenant with Jesus Christ as the Mediator (Jer. 31:31-34; Luke 22:20; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-13; 9:15).

4. Why?

God did this “out of his mere good pleasure”. After the Exodus, Moses said, “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut. 7:7-8).

God loves us because he loves us because he loves us. We cannot find a foundation for our redemption deeper than the love of God.

5. What does this mean for me?

- Be humbled by the electing authority of the Sovereign God (Rom. 9:19-29).
- Stand amazed at the electing love of the Eternal Father (Rom. 11:33-36).
- Be astonished by the cost of our redemption (Rom. 8:32).
- Draw comfort from the security of work of the Redeemer (Rom. 8:35-39).

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

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

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

Q&A 20 ends with a word pregnant with significance: "a Redeemer". The next questions flesh out the "who?" and "how?" of the Redeemer and his work of redemption.

1. What is the Redeemer's name?

The Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. These titles ("Jesus" is a name) are each full of significance.

- The eternal Son of God Jesus did not become the Son of God – he is the Son from all eternity (Heb. 1:2-3). The Father had nothing better he could give for our redemption; he would give nothing less (Rom. 8:31-32).
- Jesus "Jesus" is the human name of the incarnate Son of God. It signifies the reason he came into the world: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). It is significant that the Letter to the Hebrews calls him "Jesus" – his human name – because it signifies his suffering and the reason for his suffering and his solidarity with us in suffering.
- Christ Literally "the anointed one", equivalent to Messiah. It designates the unique relationship between God and the Redeemer – God chooses, appoints and equips the Redeemer. The anointing signifies the enabling of the Holy Spirit, bestowed on Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan (Matt. 4:13-17).
- Lord The title "Lord" is the climax to the saving work of Jesus. "Therefore [i.e. because of his taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of man, and humbling himself by becoming obedient to death upon a cross] God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that...every tongue [should] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

2. What does “two natures...one person” mean?

“Nature” and “person” are technical terms.

- *Nature* denotes the sum total of all the essential qualities of a thing, i.e. the qualities that make a thing that which it is.
- *Person* denotes a complete substance endowed with reason, and consequently a responsible subject of its own actions.

The Shorter Catechism is alluding to the Chalcedonian definition (Fourth Ecumenical Council, AD 451). This “definition” summarises the Bible’s teaching about the nature of Christ. It states:

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has been handed down to us.

Positively, the Chalcedonian definition teaches that:

- Christ has two natures: a divine (“...who, being the eternal Son of God”) and a human (“...became man”) (John 1:1,14; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6; 1 John 5:20).
- The divine nature of Christ is exactly the same as that of the Father (“Christ, the Son of God...”) (John 1:1; Heb. 1:3).
- The human nature of Christ is exactly the same of ours (“...became man, by taking to himself true body, and a reasonable soul”), with the exception of sin (Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:14,16-17; 4:15).
- The two natures of Christ retain their respective attributes (“...and so was, and continueth to be, God and man”). The divine still has divine attributes and the human nature still has human attributes (Rom. 9:5; Col. 2:9; 1 Tim. 3:16).
- The two natures are united in the one person of Christ (“...in two distinct natures, and one person, forever”) (Matt. 16:16).

Negatively, the Chalcedonian definition warns us against FOUR common errors in how we might think about the person of the Redeemer.

- (i) "...the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body."

This is against Apollinarianism, i.e. the teaching that Christ had no human mind, that role being fulfilled by the divine mind. This resulted in a definition of Christ that limited his human nature of Christ and the divine nature – an "average" between God and man; neither wholly God nor wholly man.

- (ii) "...consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood."

This is against Arianism, i.e. the teaching that Christ is not God very God.

- (iii) "...to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably."

This contra Nestorianism, i.e. the teaching that there is a radical separation between the two natures of Christ. This teaching flies in the face of Biblical evidence. Christ is never portrayed as having a human nature that could make decisions independent of his divine nature – what we see is a single person capable of united experience, deliberation and action – one person is hungry and tired, stills the storm, delights to do the will of the Father.

- (iv) "...the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather *the property of each nature being preserved*, and concurring in *one Person and one Subsistence*, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is against mono-phsytism (a.k.a. Eutychianism), i.e. the teaching that collapses the two natures of Christ into one, a *tertium quid* (a third thing). This would entail that Christ was neither fully God nor fully man – whatever the third nature was, Christ could neither represent God nor redeem men.

We can sum up orthodox Christology thus: there are in Christ two natures and one person. Another term for *person* is "hypostasis". Thus the union of the two natures in Christ is sometimes referred to as the *hypostatic union*.

3. How did the *Hypostatic Union* come about?

The hypostatic union came about through the incarnation: "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."

The incarnation was prophesied by Isaiah: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). The Lord was willing to stop at nothing – "to move heaven and earth" (AJ Motyer) – to provide salvation.

"Immanuel" means "God is with us". This is the reality of the incarnation.

“The virgin” is Mary, the betrothed of Joseph of Nazareth (Luke 1:34-35).

In Matt. 1:16 Matthew uses a “divine passive” when he writes “Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ” – the passive tense (“was born”) is “pregnant” with the question “*who fathered the child?*” Matthew answers this question after a dramatic pause: “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20).

Whereas we were not until we were conceived, Christ was the Son of God before his conception. Thus his coming into the world was an action he accomplished – reflected in the words of the catechism, “by taking to himself”. This is true to Jesus’ own testimony especially in John’s Gospel (e.g. John 8:14,42; 16:28; 17:8).

4. Why was the *Hypostatic Union* necessary?

The hypostatic union was necessary for our salvation – “what the Son of God did not assume, he did not redeem”, i.e. he redeemed only those aspects of humanity into which he himself entered by incarnation. So by taking to himself a full human nature (“taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul”) he provided for the salvation of the whole person of each of the redeemed.

This was first promised by God when he spoke words of doom to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

Hebrews 2:14-18 announces that Christ has fulfilled this promise: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might 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.”

5. What has this to do with me?

- Does the terminology “hypostatic union” daunt you? Then remember what it means: that Jesus Christ is one Person with two natures (one divine, the other human), and that these natures are unmixed, unchanged and undivided.
- We must be mature in the confession of our faith. It is our privilege to live after the great ecumenical councils. We are obligated not to be childish in our understanding of who our Redeemer is (Hebrews 5:11-6:3).
- We can be comforted by the confession of our faith. The Person who redeems us is no one less than the Son of God, the Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth (Hebrews 1:2-3) – how can he possibly fail in his redemptive purpose? And the Person who redeems us has entered into nothing less than the full experience of our human nature – there are no hidden corners of who we are which remain untouched by Christ’s redemptive work. The Son of God, the Son of the virgin Mary, the God-Man, is “able to save us to the uttermost” (Hebrews 2:14-18; 7:25).

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. The Biblical pedigree of the offices of prophet, priest and king

The offices of prophet, priest and king go back to Adam in the Garden of Eden – not that they were explicitly worked out, but that they were there in principle because Adam possessed:

- a clear mind, the ability to “think God’s thoughts after him” (prophet);
- a pure heart, dedicated as a living sacrifice to God (priest);
- a right will, ruling in accordance with justice (king).

The Fall brought this to an end. God, however, reinstated the offices of prophet, priest and king, e.g.

- Enoch (Gen. 5:18; Jude 14) and Noah (2 Pet. 2:5) appear to have fulfilled a revelatory role as prophets. Abraham is the first man called a “prophet” (Gen. 20:7). Moses was the first man to fill the role of prophet proper, and in Deut. 18:15-20 God promises a succession of prophets who would follow, climaxing with one great prophet like Moses himself.
- Melchizedek is the first person called a “priest” (Gen. 14:18). Others fulfilled priestly functions, e.g. Abraham (Gen. 13:4), Isaac (Gen. 26:25) and Jacob (Gen. 33:20). The hereditary office of priest was properly organised after the Exodus, complete with anointing for inauguration (Ex. 29:29). God promised to provide a faithful priest who would minister before him forever (1 Sam. 2:35).
- Adam’s authority to rule was conferred on him before the Fall (Gen. 1:28). After the Fall Abraham was like a king inasmuch as he was regarded as the equal of kings (Gen 14:1-2,13,17-24); his wife Sarah was called a princess (Gen. 17:15); and a succession of kings was promised to her (Gen. 17:16).

Jacob prophesied a supreme ruler to come from Judah (Gen. 49:10). God promised David an abiding dynasty (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

Each of these three offices was an anointed office – the priest and the king were anointed with oil; the prophet was anointed by the Holy Spirit.

The three offices were united in Adam, after the Fall it pleased God to separate them (although, as we have seen, Abraham was in a sense prophet, priest and king). Only in the Anointed One (the Messiah, the Christ) would the three offices be properly reunited.

2. Christ and the office of prophet

As Prophet Christ reveals to us the will of God for our salvation (John 17:3,6). We could have no knowledge of God, and therefore no life, but for the revelatory role the Father gave the Son.

Christ reveals the will of God for our salvation by both Word and Spirit. This includes the revelatory ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament (1 Pet. 1:10-12), which has come to its completion in the Son (Heb. 1:1-2).

3. Christ and the office of priest

As Priest Christ offered up himself, once for all, a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God (Heb. 9:14,28; 10:12).

- The priests who ministered according to the Law offered sacrifices for their own sins as well as the people's. Christ was himself sinless.
- The priests appointed by the Law were hereditary. Christ was appointed priest by the oath of God (Ps. 110:4).
- The priests offered repeated sacrifices which could never take away sins, in token of which they always stood (Heb. 10:11). Christ offer one sacrifice which dealt finally with sins, in token of which he lay down (Heb. 10:12).

Christ continues to exercise his office as Priest by making continual intercession for us (Heb. 7:25; 9:24).

4. Christ and the office of king

As King Christ subdues us to himself (Ps. 110:3; John 17:2), i.e. his will towards us is prior to our will towards him.

Moreover, he rules and defends us (Matthew 28:18; Acts 5:31; Col. 1:13).

Moreover, as King Christ restrains and conquers all his and our enemies (Heb. 1:13; 10:13). This conquest was achieved on the cross (Col. 2:15). The last enemy to be conquered will be death (1 Cor. 15:53-56).

5. Our response to the threefold office of Christ

We respond to Christ as Prophet by learning, to Christ as Priest by worshipping, and to Christ as King by serving.

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

1. The role of “prophet” in the Old Testament

The word “prophet” derives from Greek and denotes, literally, “one who speaks for another”. This is close to the basic Old Testament idea of a prophet as “God’s spokesman” – see Exodus 6:28-30.

Moses was the great prophet of the Old Testament (Num. 12:1-9). It was through him that God gave the Law to Israel at Sinai. At that time Israel pleaded with Moses to act as their mediator (Exodus 20:18-21). Four decades later, when Israel was on the threshold of Canaan, and Moses was about to die, Moses reminded them of their desire for a prophetic mediator, and he promised that God would continue to provide prophets (Deut. 18:15-22). He gave authenticating tests for the true prophet of the LORD:

- he would be an Israelite (vv. 15,18);
- he would be raised up and directed by the LORD (v. 18);
- he would speak in the LORD’s name, i.e. by the LORD’s authority (v. 19);
- he would predict future events which would come to pass (vv. 21-22);
- his word would be in strict conformity with the Word of God (Deuteronomy 13).

Thus, the prophet is a member of the covenant community who, in the name of the LORD both “forth-tells” and “foretells”:

- Forth-telling ⇒ faithfully applying the Word of God, often calling the people to return to their covenant obligations of trust and obedience;
- Fore-telling ⇒ threatening the application of the covenant curses if the people remain unfaithful to the covenant obligations (Deuteronomy 28:15-68), but also promising a gracious restoration of a remnant to whom would be given the covenant blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

The succession of prophets spoke to both Israel and the nations.

The ministry of the prophets was empowered and directed by the Spirit of God (Num. 11:26-29; 1 Sam. 10:6; 1 Kings 19:16 c.f. 2 Kings 2:9-15; Ezek. 2:2; 3:12).

2. Jesus in the office of a prophet

Hebrews 1:1 characterizes the role of the prophets as being (i) “in the past”, (ii) “punctuated”, and (iii) “piecemeal”. In contrast, Jesus as *the* prophet speaks “in these last days”; and by implication his speaking is final and consummate.

Matthew represents Jesus as a new (and greater) “Moses”, e.g. the threat to his infant life from the king, his preparation for ministry in the wilderness, his authoritative teaching on the mountain.

Moses was the great prophet of the OT, but Jesus is greater than Moses (Heb. 3:1-6) – Moses was the mediator of the Law; Jesus the mediator of grace and truth (John 1:17). Jesus is the prophet whom Moses promised (John 1:45).

Jesus did not abolish Moses (Matt. 5:17-18), but he claimed divine authority to teach: “You have heard that it was said...But I say to you...” (Matt. 5:21-22). Indeed, Jesus is the Word (John 1:1, c.f. Heb 1:2-3). Moses could not see the face of God (Exodus 33:20-23), but Jesus (the Only One who is in the bosom of the Father) is able to make God known, i.e. “give a full account of, tell the whole story, interpret into human language” (John 1:18; 3:11-13; 17:3,6,8).

Jesus claimed that the words he spoke were from God (John 3:24; 6:63; 14:10).

3. The Word and the Spirit

Why does the catechism say that Jesus-as-prophet reveals God’s will “by his Word and Spirit”?

The Word (i.e. the Bible) has divine authority, but on its own it cannot penetrate our hearts and bring about the radical change that is necessary for salvation – that penetration requires the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3).

Thus, Jesus continues to exercise his prophetic office through the inspired Scriptures and the gifted teaching office of the Church (Matt. 28:18-19; Eph. 4:11). That is why he sent the Spirit of Truth (John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15).

It is a mistake to say you depend on the Bible alone without the Spirit; and it is a mistake to suppose you can depend on the Spirit alone without the Bible. Jesus exercises his teaching authority in our lives through Word and Spirit together.

4. Revealing the will of God for our salvation

Preaching is a prophetic role, i.e. the application of the Word of God to the lives of people. It is therefore striking to think of Jesus as a preacher. In Mark 1:14 Jesus is described as “preaching” the gospel. And like a preacher, he was applying the Word to the people, looking for a change in them: “Repent and believe.”

So the phrase “revealing to us...the will of God for our salvation” is not to be taken in a flat, passive or indifferent way. Jesus-as-prophet reveals the will of God for our salvation precisely because he wants us to repent and believe the gospel.

The Gospels paint a lively and appealing portrait of the preaching of Jesus-as-prophet – he spoke directly to the people, using many engaging illustrations. Like the OT prophets, he threatened many woes (covenant curses) on the unfaithful and disobedient, and promised salvation (covenant blessings) to those who would take up their cross and follow him. As such, Jesus’ revelation of the will of God for our salvation takes on a distinctly eschatological flavour.

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

1. What is the role of a priest?

The OT reports two types of priests: Aaronic and Levitical. The Aaronic priests were responsible for maintaining the worship (cult) in the Tabernacle/temple. The Levitical priests (a) assisted the Aaronic priests in their cultic functions, and (b) maintained a knowledge of the Law in Israel.

The focus of the priesthood was on the holiness of the LORD:

- enabling Israel (through various washings, sacrifices and hygiene practices) to maintain its sanctity, thus enabling Israel to approach the LORD;
- maintaining the “sacred space” between Israel and the LORD, preventing unclean and sinful Israel from breaking through into the presence of the Holy One, and thus incurring guilt leading to death.

The goal of the priesthood was to bring Israel and the LORD together. This is exemplified by the Aaronic blessing (Number 6:22-27).

At the heart of the role of the priesthood lay sacrifice and intercession.

2. What did Christ-as-priest do for us in his state of humiliation?

In his state of humiliation, Christ offered himself, once for all time, as a sacrifice which satisfied divine justice, reconciling us to God.

(a) What did Christ offer as sacrifice?

Christ offered himself (Eph. 5:2; Heb. 8:3; 9:26; 10:10-12).

The sacrifice he offered was his whole human nature (Heb. 10:5-7). It was in his human nature that he suffered on the Cross – the letter to the Hebrews signals this by repeatedly referring to him by his human name, *Jesus*.

(b) How often has he offered this sacrifice?

This sacrifice has been offered once for all time (Hab. 9:26-28; 10:12). Notice the startling expression in Heb. 9:26, “once for all at the end of the ages” – the sacrifice of Jesus was epoch-changing and cannot be repeated.

(c) What was the goal of his once for all sacrifice?

- The satisfaction of God’s justice. God has said that “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4,20). Sin is “a separator, a perennial, detrimental force disallowing a permanently right relationship between God and his people.” For

this separator to be removed, God's justice must be satisfied. Jesus achieved this by dying as the representative of his people, taking in his sinless nature the punishment deserved by the sins of the people (Isa. 53:4-6; 1 Pet. 2:24).

- The reconciliation of the people to God. The priest's goal was to bring Israel and the LORD together; so Christ's goal was to reconcile us to God (Eph. 2:15-16). He has achieved this by sanctifying us (Heb. 10:10,14,22), and by opening up for us a "new and living way" into God's presence (Heb. 10:19-22).

3. What does Christ-as-priest do for us in his state of exaltation?

In his state of exaltation, Christ lives to make continually intercession for us.

(a) What is Christ-as-priest doing for us in his state of exaltation?

He is praying for us (Isa. 53:12c; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1b). He prays for:

- the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church (John 14:16-17);
- the support of his people in their times of need (Heb. 4:14-16);
- the forgiveness of his people's sins (1 John 2:1b);
- the consummation of his work of redemption (John 17:24).

(b) Where is Christ-as-priest ministering for us?

He is praying for us in the presence of God the Father (Heb. 9:24). Having made purification for sins he was "exalted above the heavens" (Heb. 7:26) and sat down at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3,13; 10:13).

The exaltation, the presence and the place each emphasise that the intercession of Christ is absolutely effective: he is able to save us to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25).

(c) When is Christ-as-priest ministering for us?

He is praying for us now (9:24) and always (Heb. 7:25).

4. How does Christ as priest differ from the Aaronic priests?

- The Aaronic priests offered sacrifices for their own sins as well as the people's (Heb. 5:3). Christ was himself sinless (Heb. 7:26-27).
- The Aaronic priests held office because of their descent from Aaron. Christ was appointed priest by the oath of God (Heb. 7:11-22; Ps. 110:4).
- The priests offered repeated sacrifices which could never take away sins, in token of which they always stood (Heb. 10:1-4,11). Christ offer one sacrifice which dealt finally with sins, in token of which he lay down (Heb. 1:3; 10:12).

5. What does this mean for me?

This should be the greatest encouragement to me to draw near to God to worship with joy and confidence (Heb. 10:19-25). The priest's role was to bring Israel and the LORD together – my great high priest will fully achieve this goal (Rev. 21:3).

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

1. The promise of dominion and rule

The idea of Christ-as-king is bound up with the idea of the Kingdom of God (God's people, living in God's land/presence, under God's rule and blessing). Cardinal OT passages which develop the promise the Kingdom include:

- *Genesis 1-3* The first man and the first woman were God's people; Eden was God's place where they enjoyed God's presence; and in the Garden they were under God's rule. Notice that they exercised God-given dominion (Gen. 1:28).
- *Genesis 22:15-18* The Abraham cycle (Genesis 11:27-25:18) is about the beginning of the recovery of the Kingdom of God after the Fall, Flood and Babel incidents. Babel especially was about the building of the Kingdom of Man. Genesis 22 is the high water mark: because of Abraham's faith, his offspring will exercise dominion and bring blessing.
- *Exodus 19:1-20:21* Israel was God's special domain. This is made abundantly clear by the Exodus-Conquest. Especially in Exodus 19-20 God declares himself Israel's King, and constitutes Israel his "kingdom of priests".
- *2 Samuel 7* The Kingdom seems almost to come with the Davidic dynasty. Note the significant contrast between life during the period of the Judges (chaos because everyone did what was right in their own eyes) and the kingdom of Solomon (structured, peaceful and prosperous).
- *Micah 5:1-6* The Davidic dynasty was deeply flawed because of the radical corruption of human nature. The prophets pointed forward to the coming King who would truly establish the Kingdom of God. See also Psalms 2, 72, 110.

2. The present fulfilment of the promise

(a) The coming of Christ and the coming of the Kingdom

Jesus was descended from David (Matt. 1:1-17); the Kingdom was promised to him (Luke 1:32-33); he was born "king of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2) and he was crucified "king of the Jews" (Matt. 27:37).

After his baptism in the Jordan, and having been anointed ("christed") by the Holy Spirit and tested in the wilderness, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15).

A king's duty is to "defend his people by restraining and conquering his and their enemies". This Jesus did by his miracles: "kingdom signs" demonstrating that kingdom salvation and blessing were present in Jesus (Luke 11:20; 17:21).

The triumph of the miracles was based on the triumph of the Cross (Col. 2:15).

After his resurrection, Christ entered into his kingdom authority in a new way: God seated him at his right hand (Heb. 1:13; 10:13), bestowed on him the “name above all names” (Phil. 2:9-11), and made him head over all things (Eph. 1:20-22).

(b) *The coming of the Holy Spirit and the coming of the Kingdom*

Christ is presently bringing all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor. 15:25), i.e. he is bringing to completion his work of redemption by applying it to the lives of his people. This is what the catechism means by the phrase “in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies”. His people are willing on the day of his power (Ps. 110:3).

Christ performs this work through the Spirit-empowered Church. He has authorized the Church to extend the Kingdom throughout the earth (Matt. 28:18-20). This work, however, cannot be accomplished without the empowering of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8). Thus at Pentecost the Holy Spirit made the Church the agent of the Kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit applies the work of redemption and communicates the blessings of the Kingdom (Rom. 14:17; Heb. 6:4-5). In this way Christ-as-king rules:

- in the gifting of the members of the Church (Eph. 4:7-12);
- in the appointment of Church officers (Matt. 16:19), central to which is the Spirit-gifted ministry of the Word (Eph. 4:11-12);
- by writing his law on our hearts (Heb. 10:15-16).

3. The future fulfilment of the promise

“Christ must reign” (1 Cor. 15:25) ⇒ his Kingdom must extend everything has been brought under his feet. However, the Kingdom is not yet all-encompassing. “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (Heb. 2:8). The victory has been won (Col. 2:15), but Christ is “waiting...until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet” (Heb. 10:12-13; see also 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

But a day will come when the last enemy will be defeated (1 Cor. 15:26,50-57). Then Christ will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father and God will be all in all, i.e. “supreme in every quarter and in every way” (G. Fee) (1 Cor. 15:24,28). The Kingdom will be consummate and the purpose of creation will be accomplished.

4. What does the promise of the Kingdom mean for me?

I will welcome the ministry of the Holy Spirit to persuade and subdue me to the rule of Christ the King. I will walk in step with the Holy Spirit because he leads me in the lifestyle of the kingdom (Gal. 5:18-26; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Pet. 1:10-11).

I will behave graciously in my relationships because the kingdom is a gracious kingdom; its principles (righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit) are utterly different from the outward, coercive principles of the world (Rom. 14:17).

I will set my hope on the age to come and endure trials patiently because I am receiving an unshakable kingdom (Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9).

The Shorter Catechism

Question 27: Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

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

The words "humiliation" and "exaltation" (Q&A 28) comprehend everything the Son of God underwent to accomplish the work of redemption.

1. The incarnation began the "humbling" of the Son of God

"Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born..."

In Philippians 2 Paul calls on the believers at Philippi to love one another, to be of one mind, to set aside all rivalry and conceit, in humility to count others better than themselves and to put the interests of others before their own. This, he says, is the "mind of Christ", demonstrated by the incarnation: "though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

The incarnation began with the conception of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35). Luke 1:39-45 demonstrates that the unborn John at 6 months gestation was aware of the presence of the unborn incarnate Son of God at just a few weeks gestation.

The humiliation of the incarnation did not mean that the Son ceased in any sense to be God very God. Rather, the humiliation lay in the union of a full human nature to his divine nature. Gregory Nazianzen (4th century archbishop of Constantinople) said, "Remaining what he was, he became what he was not."

The purpose of the humiliation was to put our interests before his. He redeemed only those aspects of humanity into which he himself entered by incarnation. So by taking to himself a full human nature he provided for the salvation of the whole person of each of the redeemed.

2. The humiliation extended to the conditions of Jesus' life

"Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition...undergoing the miseries of this life."

Contrary to the expectations of the magi, Jesus, though he was "king of the Jews", was not born in a palace, but in the poorest of borrowed/rented accommodation, his parents being required by an imperial edict to be away from home. He then became a refugee in Egypt, and later returned to Nazareth in Galilee (an area despised by the Jerusalem elite) where he learned the trade of carpentry.

The gospel records demonstrate that Jesus was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3):

- his itinerant ministry deprived him of a place he could call home (Matt. 8:20);
- he experienced physical weariness, hunger and thirst (John 4:6-8);
- he knew the sorrow of bereavement (John 11:33-35);
- he faced temptation (Matt. 4:1-11);
- in the garden of Gethsemane his soul was deeply troubled (Matt. 26:37-38);
- he was denied by one friend (Luke 22:54-62) and betrayed by another (Luke 22:48);
- he was rejected by his own people (Matt. 13:54-57), misunderstood by his disciples (John 14:8-9), misrepresented by the religious leaders (Matt. 26:59-62) and unjustly condemned to death by the State (Matt. 27:18-19,24-26);
- in death he was laid in a borrowed tomb (Matt. 27:59-60).

3. The humiliation included Jesus’ subjection to the law

“Christ’s humiliation consisted in his being...made under the law.”

Jesus was “born under the law” (Gal. 4:4), i.e. he subjected himself to the demands of the law and fulfilled everything it required. This included his presentation at the Temple, the offerings for cleansing required by the law, and his being circumcised (Luke 2:22-24).

As a boy he honoured his father and mother (Luke 2:51).

When he was baptized by John, it was not for him a baptism for repentance (John recognized the incongruity of him baptizing Jesus, Matt. 3:14) but a fulfilment of righteousness (Matt. 3:15).

Even though he as the Son he paid the Temple tax (Matt. 17:24-27).

Jesus was able to ask a question no one in the right mind would ask, unless it was true: “Which one of you convicts me of sin?” (John 8:46).

4. Bearing sin’s penalty was the low point of Jesus’ humiliation

“Christ’s humiliation consisted in his...undergoing...the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.”

It was not enough for our salvation that the Lord Jesus Christ should actively fulfil all righteousness by his life of perfect obedience to the prescriptions of the law – he must also fulfil all righteousness by undergoing the penalty prescribed by the law for sin. In this his humiliation reached its low point.

(a) *The wrath of God*

The wrath of God against sinners is revealed in the cross of Christ. Jesus was separated from all human comfort; an unnatural noonday darkness covered him; and God poured out his wrath against sinners into the perfect human nature of his Son. So great was the ordeal that Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). It is to this that the Apostles' Creed refers when it says, "He descended into hell."

The Bible speaks of the sacrifice of Christ as a propitiation (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). A propitiation is a sacrifice which turns away wrath.

(b) *The cursed death of the cross*

Philippians 2:8 says, "...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Death is the penalty for sin. God said to Adam, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Jesus accepted this penalty, even though he had never sinned and was not personally subject to death. So he had previously declared, "...I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:10,17-18). That is why the gospels say that he "yielded up his spirit" (John 19:30).

Moreover, the law made it clear that "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them" (Gal. 3:10, citing Deuteronomy 27:26).

To make it abundantly clear that by his death he took this curse, Jesus submitted himself to "the cursed death *of the cross*", because the law also says, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (Gal. 3:13, citing Deuteronomy 21:23).

(c) *Being buried and continuing under the power of death for a time*

Jesus was dead. The centurion in charge of the execution recognised death when he saw it, and made doubly sure by thrusting a spear up into Jesus' chest cavity, puncturing his lung and probably also major blood vessels and heart; Joseph of Arimathea and those who assisted him were sure of it, as they removed the body from the cross and prepared it for burial; the women who came to the tomb on the morning of the first day of the week were sure of it, spending precious savings on the ointments and spices with which they planned to embalm the body.

The body was placed on a shelf in a tomb cut into rock, and a large, flat disc of stone was rolled over the entrance (Matt. 27:57-61). The tomb was sealed and a guard posted (Matt. 27:62-66).

Between 3 PM on the Friday afternoon until early on the Sunday morning (three days by Jewish inclusive reckoning) Jesus' soul and body experienced the same humiliation of separation experienced by all people after death.

5. Applications

In summary, between conception and death, there is no experience common to mankind (with the exception of sin) which Jesus did not endure in his state of humiliation. From this we draw four applications:

- Christ's humiliation equips him to be our great high priest. "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).
- Christ's humiliation assures us of our redemption: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).
- Christ's humbling of himself for our sakes, teaches us to humble ourselves in our relationships with one another. "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..." (Phil. 2:3-5).
- That Christ humbled himself to the point of death on the cross because of our sins demands that we also take up humble ourselves in our struggle against sin (as a matter of sanctification, not of justification). "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" (1 Pet. 4:1). "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:3-4).

The Shorter Catechism

Question 28: Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?

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

Philippians 2:9-11 connects Christ's exaltation to his humiliation: "Therefore [i.e. because he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross] 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."

1. Christ's exaltation commenced with his resurrection

"Christ's exaltation consisteth in his rising again from the dead on the third day..."

(a) *He has been vindicated by God the Father*

Christ's resurrection is first and foremost his vindication by God the Father. He who was publically humiliated by the cursed death of the cross was also "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

(b) *He is victorious over death*

Although death is the "last enemy to be destroy" (1 Cor. 15:26) it was also the first enemy to be conquered – it was not possible for Christ to be held by death (Acts 2:24). By his resurrection he "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). Jesus spoke of his authority not only to lay his life down, but also to take it up again (John 10:18) – this is his victory over death (1 Cor. 15:57).

(c) *He is the resurrection and the life*

Christ's exaltation includes the honour of being "the firstfruits" of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23), "firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:20). This bestows on him the power of his pre-eminence whereby he is able to "subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:21). He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

2. Christ's exaltation continued with his reception into heavenly glory and his investiture with universal dominion

"Christ's exaltation consisteth...in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father..."

(a) He ascended

Forty days after his resurrection, Christ ascended bodily and visibly into heaven (Acts 1:9). This was his great desire and his glorification (John 17:5). He went up in triumph and glory (Ps. 24:7-10; 68:18; c.f. Eph. 4:8-10).

(b) He sat down

Hebrews 1:3,13; 10:11-14 makes much of the fact that Christ sat down at the right hand of God the Father, i.e. he is in the place of absolute dominion – see part (c).

But his sitting down also signifies that his Cross work is finished – he has made the once-for-all-time sacrifice, and he has achieved the redemption he came to accomplish. He is now in the place of rest, i.e. sitting down. And his sitting down is testimony to us that nothing more needs to be done for our salvation – our sins have been atoned for.

(c) He reigns

The place where Christ sat down is of course significant – he is sitting on God's throne, and therefore he reigns (Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:25). All things have been put under his feet, and he has been made “head over all things” (Eph. 1:22).

The elevation of Christ is signified by the name bestowed upon him: “Lord” (Phil. 2:9-11). This is more than just a title signifying authority (though it is that) – it is also the recognition that Jesus (notice the use of the human name in Phil. 2:10), the unique God-Man, the “one Mediator between God and men” (1 Tim. 2:5) is none other than Yahweh (compare Isa. 45:22-25 with Phil. 2:9-11).

3. Christ's exaltation will be completed with his execution of final judgement and the inauguration of the new creation

“Christ's exaltation consisteth...in coming to judge the world at the last day.”

Being called “Lord” is the climax of Christ's exaltation. But it is not its completion. 1 Corinthians 15:25-28 and Hebrews 10:12-13 indicate that he is waiting for the day when all opposition will be put under his feet.

(a) He will come again with heavenly glory

Jesus spoke of his public, visible return in divine glory (Matt. 16:27; 24:30; 25:31).

The apostles taught the believers to look for and love for the coming again of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:8). The Aramaic expression *Maranatha* (*Our Lord, come!*) was so widely used and understood that Paul was able to use in his letter to the Greek-speaking believers in Corinth (1 Cor. 16:22). The desire for Christ's return is expressed in the penultimate verse of Scripture (Rev. 22:20).

(b) He will execute just judgement

Christ's return in glory will be followed by the execution of judgement (Matt. 16:27; 24:30-31; 25:31-46; 2 Pet. 3:9-10; Rev. 6:15-17).

- The dead, great and small will stand before his judgement seat (Rev. 20:12).
- Death and Hades will be destroyed (Rev. 20:14).

(c) *He will inaugurate the new creation*

Christ's return in glory will inaugurate the renewal of all things (Eph. 4:10; Col. 1:16-20; Rev. 21:5). This will entail:

- **Our resurrection** Paul describes the resurrection of the believer's body as a resurrection to imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual life (1 Cor. 15:42-44), but the pattern is found in the original resurrection, i.e. Christ's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45,49).
- **The renewal of the whole cosmos** God's redemptive plan is "to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). This plan began to take effect at Christ's resurrection. The "hope of life" is founded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3).

4. Christ's exaltation has consequences for us

Christ's exaltation is everything for the Christian – without it we would have nothing; with it we have everything (1 Cor. 15:13-14,20, 57).

- Christ's resurrection vindication is essential for our justification (Rom. 4:25).
- Christ's exaltation as Prophet ensures that the Holy Spirit has been sent into the Church to reveal the will of God for our salvation and to instruct us in righteousness (see Q&A 24).
- Christ's exaltation as Priest ensures our complete salvation because he is living and interceding on our behalf; he ensures our sanctification and the freedom of our access to God (see Q&A 25).
- Christ's exaltation as King ensures that we are delivered from our spiritual enemies and granted foretastes of the coming kingdom of God (see Q&A 26).
- Christ's resurrection is the pattern for our resurrection (1 Cor. 15:42-49); his coming again, his execution of judgement, and his renewal of all things are the essence of the New Testament hope – this is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27; 3:4).

So, because of Christ's exaltation, we will continue to strive to have the same mind as Christ – we will love one another, be of one mind, and set aside all rivalry and conceit; in humility we will count others better than ourselves and we will put the interests of others before our own (Phil. 2:2-4).

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

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

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

Question 31: What is effectual calling?

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

1. The application of redemption is the work of the Holy Spirit

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

The work of salvation must be not only planned (Q&A 20) but also accomplished (Q&A 21-28) and applied (Q&A 29-38). The planning belonged to God the Father, the accomplishing to God the Son, and the applying to God the Holy Spirit.

"...to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity" (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.18).

Our salvation is a Trinitarian salvation. God "saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5-6).

2. Why do some people believe while others do not?

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

(a) *Is there a problem with the gospel?*

No. In the gospel God himself addresses people: "[God] commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). The "whosoever" of the gospel are genuine (John 3:16; Rom. 10:13). Everyone who responds to the Word of God with faith in Jesus Christ will be saved (Acts 16:31). Q&A31 expresses the sincerity of the gospel by the phrase "Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel".

(b) Are some people more pre-disposed to believe than others?

No. The Bible teaches that all people are dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1). "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

This is convincingly illustrated by the Gospel records in which we see even the learned men in Judaism confused and misunderstanding Jesus (e.g. Jn. 3:9-10).

(c) So why do some people believe and others do not?

The redemption purchased by Christ must be applied to people. But we are not able to do this ourselves. Our understanding is blinded (2 Cor. 4:4) and our will is enslaved (2 Tim. 2:26). We need to be renovated (John 3:4,7; Eph. 2:5; Tit. 3:5).

The word which rings through Q&A 29-31 is the word "effectual". The Holy Spirit has a purpose: the application of the redemption planned by the Father and accomplished by the Son. And without fail, he achieves this purpose. Indeed, he is uniquely competent for this work: he lacks neither the authority nor the ability to make people partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ.

More specifically, the Holy Spirit's effectual application of redemption is by means of effectual calling and working faith in us.

3. What is effectual calling?

"Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by his Word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein" (Larger Catechism, Q&A 67).

(a) We are invited and drawn to Jesus Christ by the Word and the Spirit

The reading and the preaching of the Word of God, accompanied by the power of the Spirit, is God speaking and calling men to himself (2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1-2; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13; 2 Thess. 2:13-14). Lydia is an example of one whose heart the Lord opened (Acts 16:14; c.f. John 6:44-45).

(b) Our minds are enlightened and our wills renewed

The renovation effected by the Spirit transforms both our understanding (Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 2:10,12; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph 1:17-18) and will (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26-27).

(c) We are enabled freely to answer God's call

In this way the Holy Spirit persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:5; Phil. 2:13; Deut. 30:6), freely offered to us in the gospel (Isa. 45:22; Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17).

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

1. What benefits accrue to those who are effectually called?

“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 Spirit unites us “to Christ in our effectual calling” (Q&A 30).

The answer to Q32 concerns the benefits of which we partake through this union with Christ. More specifically, the answer concerns the benefits of which we partake *in this life*:

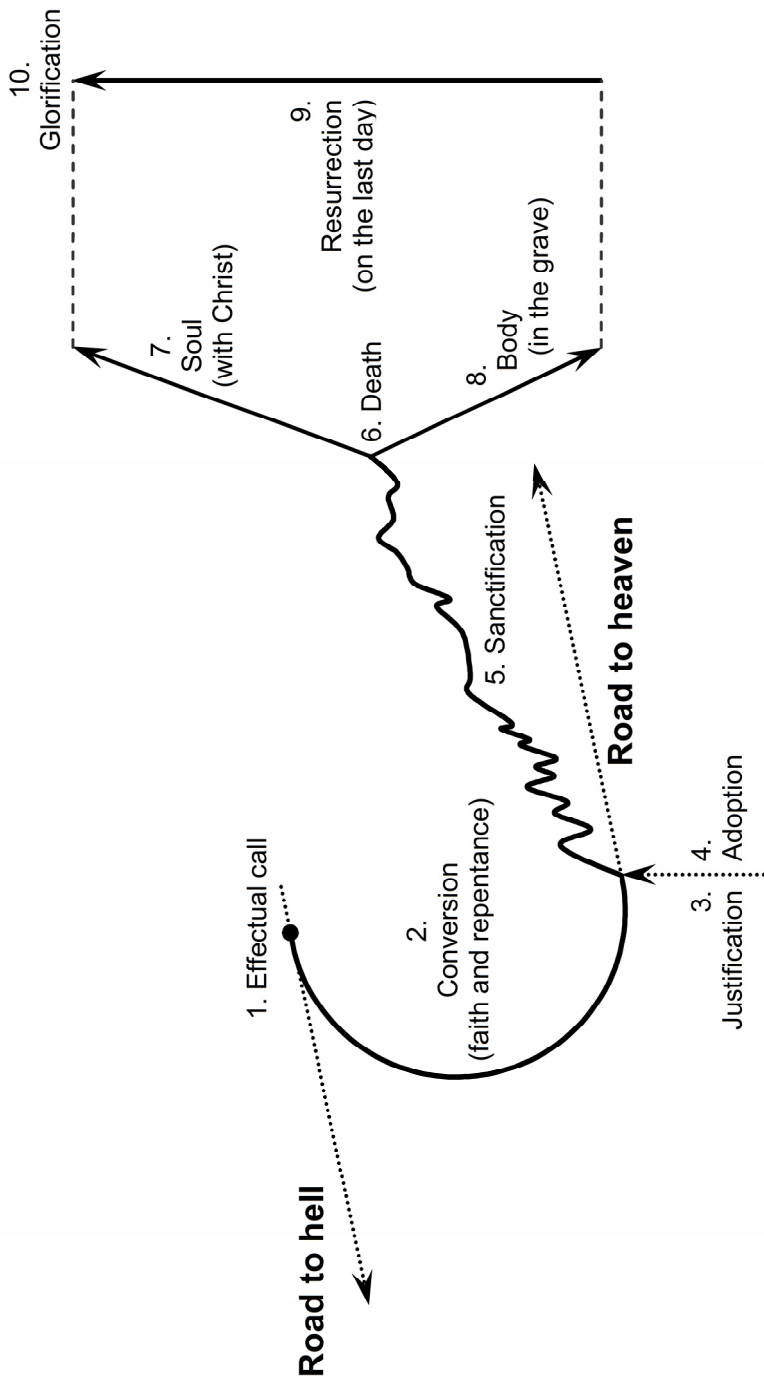
- Q&A 33-36 expand on this answer (“justification [Q&A 33], adoption [Q&A 34], and sanctification [Q&A 35], and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them [Q&A 36]”)
- Q&A 37-38 deal with the benefits we receive from Christ *at death* and *at the resurrection*.

2. The “Order of Salvation”

“Justification, adoption, and sanctification” is a reference to the “Order of Salvation”, i.e. the order in which we experience salvation. In Appendix B of his book “The Westminster Shorter Catechism, for study classes”, G.I. Williamson outlines the “order of salvation” as follows:

A man is walking down the road to hell.

1. He is effectually called (Q&A 29-31).
2. He is converted, by faith (Q&A 86) and repentance (Q&A 87).
- 3&4. He is instantly (3) justified (Q&A 33) and (4) adopted (Q&A 34).
5. He is gradually sanctified, during the rest of his life (Q&A 35-36).
6. He dies.
7. His soul goes to heaven (Q&A 37a).
8. His body enters the grave (Q&A 37b).
9. At the resurrection of the last day, body and soul are reunited...
10. ...and together enter into glory (Q&A 38).



The Order of Salvation
 (copied from G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*)

3. Biblical data concerning the “Order of Salvation”

The “order of salvation” is a very useful way of plotting the course of the believer’s experience of salvation. Our understanding of it is the result of reflection on the whole of Scripture’s testimony concerning salvation. There are passages which give it in outline, particularly Romans 8:28-30,

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he *foreknew* he also predestined *to be conformed to the image of his Son*, in order that he might be *the firstborn among many brothers*. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also *called*, and those whom he called he also *justified*, and those whom he justified he also *glorified*.

Verse 30 outlines the believer’s experience by specifying the three pivotal events in the application of the redemption purchased by Christ:

- *calling*, i.e. the beginning of the believer’s experience of salvation (steps 1 and 2 in Williamson’s scheme);
- *justification*, i.e. the beginning of the believer’s life in Christ, including adoption and progressive sanctification (steps 3, 4 and 5 in Williamson’s scheme);
- *glorification*, i.e. the climax of the believer’s experience (step 10 in Williamson’s scheme).

Verse 29 puts this in a bigger picture which views the purpose of God in salvation:

- *election*, i.e. God’s purpose which he determined according the counsel of his own will in eternity past;
- *sanctification*, i.e. the believer’s experience of the purpose of God in salvation, namely that the believer will be conformed to the image of the Son;
- *the glory of the Son*, i.e. the ultimate purpose of God in salvation is revealed to be the glory of his only begotten Son on into eternity future.

4. Biblical data concerning “union with Christ”

The “order of salvation” is very useful. But before Q&A 32 outlines the order in which we become partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, Q&A 30 reminds us that our partaking of redemption is the result of “union with Christ” (“The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by...uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling”).

It would be useful, therefore, to look at a little of the Biblical data concerning union with Christ. And you are invited to map this rich data onto the framework of the “order of salvation”. (Is this an easy task?)

We will consider some of the data in Paul’s letters concerning the living relationship between Christ and his people which Paul terms as being “in Christ”:

- God chose us *in Christ* (Eph. 1:4);
- Christ's people are alive and free *in Christ* (1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 8:2; Gal. 2:4; Col. 2:13);
- there is no condemnation for those who are *in Christ*, *in Christ* we are justified and our sins are forgiven (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 2:17; Eph. 1:7; 4:32; Col. 1:14), and we are circumcised *in Christ* (Col. 2:11);
- we become the righteousness of God *in Christ* (2 Cor. 5:21);
- we are created, brought near, seated, established and kept *in Christ* (Eph. 2:10; Eph. 2:14; Eph. 2:6; 2 Cor. 1:21; Phil. 4:7);
- we are approved and sanctified *in Christ* (Rom. 16:10; 1 Cor. 1:2);
- blessings, grace, faith and love abound to us *in Christ* so that we are enriched in him (Eph. 1:3 ; 1 Cor. 1:4; 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:13; 1 Cor. 1:5);
- being root and built up *in Christ*, we become both mature and wise *in him* (Col. 2:7; Col. 1:28; 1 Cor. 1:30);
- we are one body and all one *in Christ* (Rom. 12:5; Gal. 3:28) and we are built together *in him* (Eph. 2:21-22) so that *in him* we are complete (Col. 2:10);
- our inheritance is *in Christ* to which end we are sealed *in him* with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:10-11,12-14);
- when we die we are asleep *in Christ* and are called “the dead *in Christ*” (1 Cor. 15:18; 1 Thess. 4:16);
- above all we are simply *in Christ* (Rom. 16:7; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2).

To be “in Christ” is to be in a new condition, to belong to the new epoch, to participate already in the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

But the participation is also “not yet”. There is still an element of “hiddenness” about the new creation in Christ, and in expressing this “hiddenness” Paul reverses the “in Christ” relationship: “To [his saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

The Shorter Catechism

Question 33: What is justification?

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

The doctrine of justification takes us into the law court. It concerns the verdict of the judge. The verdict passed by the judge does not make the man in the dock guilty or innocent; the verdict is a declaration of the judge's finding: "I have found this man to be guilty/innocent of the charges."

But we know that we are sinners. Our consciences accuse us of breaking all of the Ten Commandments – not just once or twice, but repeatedly – and not just superficially, but from the depth of our being. We are by nature guilty before God. So the great question is, how can we be right with God? The answer is, through justification.

1. Justification is an act of God's free grace

When God justifies a sinner, he declares the sinner to be righteous. It is as though the sinner receives a certificate from "the Judge of all the earth" declaring his right standing in the court of heaven (c.f. Psalm 1:5; 101:6-7).

Justification does not make us personally righteous. It is an act not a work. It does not make us into people whose affections, will and actions are righteous: that is the work of sanctification.

Why does God justify sinners? Only because of his free grace: his mercy, compassion, faithfulness, goodness and steadfast love. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24). "Being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7).

2. Justification comprises both forgiveness and imputation

When God justifies a sinner, he (a) pardons all his sins and (b) accepts him as righteous because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to him.

There is a double transfer in justification which Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

(a) Our sins are imputed to Christ. When Jesus was dying on the Cross, God treated him as though he were guilty of our sins – he passed on Jesus the sentence of "guilty as charged" which really belonged to us. Jesus died as our Representative, and the punishment we deserved was meted out on the sinless incarnate Son of God.

Since our sins have been punished, no punishment remains, and God is able to say, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more" (Heb. 10:17).

(b) Christ's righteousness is imputed to us. Throughout his life, Jesus only ever rendered obedience to God. The reason we are told about his temptation in the wilderness is to testify to this fact: it shows us that Jesus wholly submitted to, trusted in and obeyed his Father. Of course this was necessary for his own relationship with God, but it also has reference to our relationship with God. As well as dying as our Representative, Jesus also lived as our Representative.

Notice the double reference to the Law in the work of Christ for our justification:

- The Law says, "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:20; Deut. 27:26). So Jesus bore the penalty of Law on our behalf. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).
- The Law promises life on condition of perfect obedience (Deut. 30:15-16). So Jesus obeyed perfectly the prescriptions of the Law for us. "For as by the one man's [Adam's] disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's [Jesus'] obedience the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

3. Justification is received by faith alone

Although Christ has done everything for our justification, we do not enter into the status of "justified persons" until we receive it by faith. "Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law" (Galatians 2:16).

Faith is only an *instrument* of our justification, not its grounds – it is the empty hand that contributes nothing but receives everything.

The Bible says we are justified "by faith" (Rom. 5:1), "through faith" (Gal 2:16), "upon faith" (Phil. 3:9) and "according to faith" (Heb. 11:7). But it never says that we are justified "because of faith" or "on account of faith". In other words, the act of faith is not the righteousness of justification. The righteousness of justification is Christ's righteousness alone; and it is brought to bear upon us by faith alone.

4. Summary of justification

- Justification is a judicial act on God's part in which he forgives all our sins and declares us righteous in his sight because of the imputed righteousness of Christ.
- The ground of our justification is the vicarious work of Christ for us (fulfilling the prescription and bearing the penalty of the law), not the gracious work of the Spirit in us (regeneration and sanctification).
- The Christian's righteousness before God is in heaven in Jesus Christ, not on earth in the believer. The faith-righteousness of justification is made ours by a judicial and legal act of God, not through an experience we have or mental state we enter. It is a gracious gift, not a reward.
- Justification is the "not guilty" verdict of the Judge on the Last Day, brought forward and made our possession today.

The Shorter Catechism

Question 34: What is adoption?

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

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1). Compare Mark 13:1, "Teacher, look, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" In Greek the exclamation of wide-eyed wonder and awe used by the disciple is exactly the same as the expression used by John. Just as the temple dominated the skyline of Jerusalem and drew every admiring eye, so our privilege as adopted children of God dominated the thoughts of the apostle John: "Look what wonderful love the Father has given to us!" John Murray has written of our adoption: "This is surely the apex of grace and privilege...It staggers imagination because of its amazing condescension and love...Eternity will not exhaust its marvel."

1. Adoption in the Old Testament

God first speaks of Israel as his "son" in Exodus 4:22; Paul also mentions this in Rom. 9:4 and lists the privileges of adoption as "the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises". The sonship of Israel is also mentioned in Isaiah 1:2 and Hosea 11:1.

2. Adoption in the New Testament

- In love God the Father predestined the believer's adoption in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-5).
- The Father sent the only begotten Son into the world to do all that was necessary for our redemption, so that we might receive the adoption as sons (Gal. 4:4-6).
- The Father sent forth the Spirit of his Son, who is also the Spirit of adoption, into the heart of the believer, to assure the believer that he is the Father's child and to enable the believer to cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6).
- The Spirit of adoption is also the firstfruits of the believer's adoption. In this way the Spirit guarantees the adoption at the very end, i.e. when his mortal body is redeemed from its corruption and brought into a state of glory like that of his Lord (Rom. 8:23).

3. Adoption is a legal action

"Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number...of the sons of God.", i.e. it is a legal action which changes our status, not our character. Consider a child who has been put up for adoption; perhaps the

child comes from a broken home, has ADHD or FAS. The adoption of the child is an act that gives him a new legal status, e.g. the right to call his adoptive parents “daddy” and “mummy”. But it does not cure him of his broken background: that is the work his new parents will engage in for years to come.

Adoption is the pinnacle of grace because, whereas justification addresses our relation to the law, adoption addresses our relation to God the Father.

Jesus said, “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt. 11:27). It is this intimate knowledge of the Father that the Son has brought into the world by his incarnation (see notes on Q&A 6). Salvation is communion with the Father mediated by the incarnate Son. Jesus prayed, “Father...you have given [the Son] authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:2-3). This is adoption into the family of God.

4. Adoption bestows privileges

“Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we...have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God.”

- We have the Father’s name placed upon us, which assures us of the Father’s protection and provision (Eph. 2:19; 3:14-15). We are subject to the loving discipline of the Father (Heb. 12:6-11).
- We receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit “seals” us, i.e. marks us off as belonging to God (Eph. 1:13). He is the Spirit of adoption, and he testifies to us that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16), and he leads us in prayer, crying out, “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6). The Holy Spirit is also the guarantee of our inheritance in Christ (Eph. 4:30; 2 Cor. 5:5).
- We become brothers of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). Therefore we share in the birthright of the only begotten Son of God (Rom. 8:17); we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:29).

5. Adoption also bestows responsibilities

- The adopted son is loved, and therefore is to walk in love (Eph. 5:1-2).
- The adopted son belongs to the light, and is therefore to walk in the light and expose the unfruitful deeds of darkness, i.e. confess and repent of them (Eph. 5:8-11).
- The adopted son must accept and work with the chastening of the Father (Heb. 12:6-11).
- The adopted son must recognize that he is a member of the household of God (Eph. 2:19), and therefore all other Christians are his brothers and sisters, to be cherished and encouraged in the faith (Rom. 15:14; 1 John 4:20-21).

The Shorter Catechism

Question 35: What is sanctification?

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

Sanctification is about being set apart. It is necessary because of the holiness of God. God says, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). The New Testament affirms this imperative: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3); "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

1. Definitive and progressive sanctification

Sanctification is often thought of as a process (progressive sanctification) – and it is. But the NT also represents the Christian as someone who has been sanctified (definitive sanctification). Notice Hebrews 10:10,14 – "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."

(a) Definitive sanctification

The ground of the believer's definitive sanctification is his union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:1-14; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

The result of definitive sanctification is that the believer is constituted holy by God with respect to the power and mastery of sin. The story is told that, some time after he had become a Christian, Augustine of Hippo was accosted on the street by a former mistress. When he saw her he turned and walked briskly the other way. Surprised, the woman called out, "Augustine, it is I." To which Augustine, still walking away, replied, "Yes, but it is not I." Sin's claim on Augustine was invalid. Augustine knew this fact, and he confessed it – "Yes, you are still sin. But, no, I am no longer your servant." Augustine's relationship with sin had been transformed by definitive sanctification.

(b) Progressive sanctification

Although the believer is "dead to sin" (definitive sanctification, Rom. 6:11), he is also commanded to engage in progressive sanctification, i.e. putting off the old nature and putting on the new nature:

- "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5).
- "...you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator...Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience" (Col. 3:9-12).

This is something the believer cannot do without the sanctifying power of the Word and Spirit. Neither is the work of sanctification perfected in this life.

2. The pattern of the sanctified life

(a) The holiness of God

We were made in the image of God. Our calling is to be holy for God is holy (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2). We are “to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24).

(b) The Word of God

We do not know God apart from his revelation. The Word is therefore essential for our sanctification. It is through the Word that God tells us what he is like and, therefore, how we are to live.

The moral law is summarized in the Ten Commandments. The law is the standard of the Christian life, and the motive power to keep the law is the new life in Christ, i.e. the life of the Spirit. Since the law is summed up in the two great commandments to love God and to love our neighbour, the new life in Christ is expressed as a life of obedience and love.

(c) The Lord Jesus

The Lord Jesus is the pattern of the Christian (i) in his attitude: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5); (ii) in his service: “Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:44-45; John 13:15); and (iii) in his willingness to suffer rather than sin: “...to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:20-21).

3. Help in the sanctified life

“Sanctification is the work of God’s grace” – but it is also a work in which the believer is to engage (the believer works because God is working, Phil. 2:13), using the helps (means of grace) God has provided:

- The reading and the preaching of the Word (John 17:17; Acts 20:32)
- Receiving and attending on the sacraments of the church (Rom. 6:3,11; 1 Cor. 11:24-25)
- Prayer (Phil. 4:6)
- The fellowship of the saints (Heb. 10:24-25)
- All the providences of life (Rom. 8:28-29)

4. The goal of sanctification

The goal of our sanctification is that we might enter into the full enjoyment of the glory of God (Jam. 1:2-4,12 ; 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 2 Pet. 1:3-11).

The Shorter Catechism

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

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

Justification, adoption and sanctification are fundamental to our salvation. But the Bible presents a rich picture of the Christian life as including accompanying blessings of salvation which we enjoy because of our justification, adoption and sanctification. The blessings are ours in this life (Q&A 36), at death (Q&A 37) and at the resurrection (Q&A 38).

The believer's experience of assurance, peace, joy and perseverance may ebb and flow, just as his sanctification also rises and falls. But just as his sanctification is based on the finished work of Christ, so is his assurance, peace, joy and perseverance. Consequently, he is never without a measure (though it be small) of assurance, peace, joy and perseverance.

The two major issues in Q&A 36 are perseverance and assurance.

1. The perseverance of the saints

"The benefits...in this life...are...increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end."

Perseverance is related to sanctification. The believer's responsibility is to persevere in faith, love and obedience, putting sin to death and living for righteousness. Sanctification is the result of perseverance.

There are two complementary aspects to perseverance: on the one hand it is required of us, and on the other it is given to us: believers are "by God's power being guarded [that is the gift of God] through faith [that is the work of God's people]" (1 Pet. 1:5).

The order is important: the preservation of the saints [God's work] is the basis for the perseverance of the saints [our work]. So, we are to "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13).

(a) Perseverance is commanded

Jesus said that the person who endures to the end will be saved (Matt. 10:22).

We are commanded to "be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if [we] practice these qualities [we] will never fall" (2 Pet. 1:10).

This means working at the virtues of the Christian life, i.e. faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love (2 Pet. 1:5-9).

There is no room for a lackadaisical attitude to the Christian life. Christians cannot sit at ease in sin. “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning” (1 John 3:9).

(b) *Perseverance is a benefit accompanying salvation*

Why does the person born of God not make a practice of sinning? Because “God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9). Perseverance is a blessing accompanying salvation.

When God begins a work, he also finishes it: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

2. Assurance of salvation

“The benefits...in this life...are, assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost...”

(a) *The experience of assurance*

When the preservation of the saints is attended by the perseverance of the saints, it is a grounds for assurance of salvation. “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:10-11).

“Assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Spirit” are three ways of saying that the believer who perseveres in the faith in dependence on God’s grace will (normally) enjoy assurance of salvation.

(b) *The grounds of assurance*

Assurance is not a psychological trick. The Bible promises assurance.

On the one hand, pastor who wrote *Hebrews* expresses his pastoral desire that through perseverance the believers would enjoy assurance: “We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end” (Heb. 6:11). On the other hand he makes it clear that assurance is based on the unchangeable nature, purpose and Word of God and the atoning sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 6:13-20). He writes, “We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain” (Heb. 6:19).

So we must seek the grounds of assurance not in ourselves (our obedience or progress in sanctification) but only in the goodness of God. The youngest believer has the same grounds of assurance as the oldest saint. And this grounds of assurance motivates him to holiness as much as it does the elderly saint.

Thomas Goodwin summarizes the relationship between sanctification and assurance of salvation by saying that the Holy Spirit writes “first of all graces in us, and then teacheth our consciences to read his handwriting.”

The Shorter Catechism

Question 37: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

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

1. Death remains a reality for the believer

Death was introduced into the experience of mankind as soon as Adam sinned his first sin: "...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12).

Death is also the last enemy to be destroyed: "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 20:14).

Between these two poles in human history, death is the experience of all people (with two striking exceptions, namely Enoch and Elijah). Even (and especially) the Lord Jesus suffered death. Death therefore remains a reality (just as sin does) for the believer in this life.

2. Death cannot break the believer's union with Christ

The believer is united with Christ. Through union with Christ we have already died and been raised to new life: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3; Rom. 6:5-6,11); Christ is now our life (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21).

This union can't be broken by death: "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:7-8).

3. The believer benefits from his union with Christ at death

We are both physical and spiritual. One part of us is not more important than the other. Our Saviour in his incarnation united a full human nature (both a body and a soul) to himself. He is therefore the Saviour of both our bodies and our souls.

Death separates body and soul. Thereafter body and soul experience the benefit of union with Christ differently, until the resurrection reunites them.

(a) *The souls of believers are made perfect in holiness and pass into glory*

Progressive sanctification is never perfected in this life (Rom. 7:21-24). It ebbs and flows because our struggle with sin is never without failure. But death puts this struggle to an end:

- The souls of believers at death are freed from the inclination to any sin, and will never again incur any of the pollution or stain of sinful actions.
- Their desire for righteousness is both perfected and fully satisfied. They experience the fulfilment of Ps 119:1-8, "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD..."

Not only so, but they immediately pass into glory. (Notice that the catechism rejects the notion of (i) purgatory and (ii) soul sleep.) Glory is a rich word:

- The souls of believers behold the face of God. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12).
- We shall see our Saviour in his glorified human nature (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23).
- We shall experience the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit without any frowning providences to test our faith. “Here the saints pray for his love, and they have a few drops; but there they shall have as much as their vessels can receive. To know the love that passes knowledge will cause a jubilation of spirit, and create such holy raptures of joy in the saints, as are superlative, and would soon overwhelm them, if God did make them able to bear it” (Thomas Watson).
- We shall enjoy the company of the holy angels and the glorified saints. Heb. 12:22-24 is already our experience now – how much more then!

(b) *The bodies of believers rest in their graves until the resurrection*

Christ is the Saviour of our bodies. Our bodies belong and are united to him: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” (1 Cor. 6:15). Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?” (1 Cor. 6:19).

Death does not bring his ownership of our bodies or interest in them to an end. Christ does not cease to be the Saviour of our bodies at death.

“Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Corinthians 15:18)

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

So at death we are said to “have fallen sleep in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:18) – this is the point of view of those still alive in this world; from the point of view of heaven, believers are alive and conscious.

Likewise, believers who have died are called “the dead in Christ” (1 Th. 4:16) – not that anyone can be dead who is united to the Living One, but only from the point of view of this world, their bodies are dead and waiting for the resurrection: “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (1 Th. 4:14).

4. The state of the believer after death is not final

The separation of body and soul at death introduces us to an *intermediate state*. This state is temporary, like time spent in a waiting room, or like the light of pre-dawn which is overtaken by the rising of the Sun (2 Cor. 5:1-5).

The Shorter Catechism

Question 38: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

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

Death (the separation of body and soul) introduces the *intermediate state*. Like the light of pre-dawn it will be overtaken by the rising of the Sun (2 Cor. 5:1-5).

1. Raised up in glory

“At the resurrection, believers, being raised up in glory...”

The resurrection will be accomplished by “the Resurrection Man”, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25); and he will “make all things new” (Rev. 21:5) by extending out from himself the living power of the resurrection (“...who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself,” Phil. 3:20-21).

So the Person who is the Creating Word (John 1:1-3) and the Sustaining Word (Heb. 1:3) will also be the Re-creating Word (2 Cor. 5:17).

At the resurrection the bodies and souls of believers will be reunited and transformed to become like Christ’s glorified human nature: the perishable will be made imperishable; we will be changed from dishonour to glory and from weakness to power; the natural will become the spiritual (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

Spiritual body sounds like a contradiction in terms. However, “It is ‘spiritual,’ not in the sense of ‘immaterial’ but of supernatural,’...because it will have been recreated by Christ, who himself through his resurrection came to be ‘a life-giving Spirit.’ The transformed body, therefore, is not composed of ‘spirit’; it is a *body* adapted to the eschatological existence that is under the ultimate domination of the Spirit. Thus for Paul, to be truly *pneumatikos* [*spiritual*] is to bear the likeness of Christ (v. 49) in a transformed body, fitted for the new age” (Gordon Fee, *NICNT, 1 Corinthians*, p. 786).

In 2 Cor. 5:4 Paul speaks of this as being “further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” Notice how Paul emphasises not our *life* now but our *mortality*. There is such fullness of life in the Son of God – true life – that at the resurrection our present “life” which is “mere mortality” will be swallowed up! “...what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

2. Openly acknowledged and acquitted

“At the resurrection, believers...shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment.” Jesus Christ will acknowledge his people before his Father. “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32).

All the prayers in Scripture for vindication against enemies will be fulfilled.

Believers shall be acquitted in the court of heaven as being justified in Christ. “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Rom. 8:33-34).

The King will welcome his people into his kingdom. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...’” (Matt. 25:34).

3. Made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God

God’s people must be raised in glory and acquitted since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:50) and “nothing unclean will ever enter [New Jerusalem]...but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27).

In the New Creation:

- the old order (tears, death, mourning and pain) will be no more (Rev. 21:1,4);
- the covenant relationship will attain to the depth and the fruitfulness it was ever meant to have (Rev. 21:2);
- we will enjoy God’s presence (Rev. 21:3);
- we will see the face of God (Rev. 22:4);
- and we will reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:5).

“And the things that happened after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them down. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world...had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”

4. Applications

The resurrection to glory and the participation in the new creation is the great Biblical hope (Acts 23:6). Because of it:

- we set our affections on the things above, not on the things that belong to this present evil age (Col. 3:1-4);
- we strive after godliness (2 Pet. 3:11-14; 1 John 3:2-3);
- we take heart, because we know that our labour in the Lord belongs to the age to come and so is never in vain (1 Cor. 3:13; 15:50-58)
- and we encourage one another with these things (1 Thess. 4:13-18).