

DEVOTIONAL AID FOR 17 AUGUST 2020 – 23 AUGUST 2020



**UPPER
HUNTER**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Dear church family,

This week, we have five questions from the Heidelberg Catechism all dealing with the meaning of Jesus's death on the cross. Jesus's death on the cross is a prominent and powerful theme of the whole New Testament, and it is something we must never forget. We read in various places in the New Testament these words:

- "but **we preach Christ crucified**, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23)
- "For I decided to **know** nothing among you except **Jesus Christ and him crucified.**" (1 Cor 2:2)
- "But far be it from me to **boast** except **in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Gal 6:14)

Knowing that Christ died on the cross is important, but it is not enough until we know the meaning of His death. So it's good to ask questions like the following:

- why did Christ have to die? (Q40)
- why was He crucified? (Q39 from last week)
- and even, if Christ died for us, why do we still have to die? (Q42)
- and others like these.

But when we ask these questions, we need to seek the answers from the bible above all else. (And sometimes we need to even adjust our questions so they are the right questions as far as the bible is concerned, but that's for another time.) It does no good to come up with an answer ourselves, no matter how satisfying that answer may be to our own minds, since the answer could simply be wrong and will not help us ultimately. The bible's answer to the above questions are summarised in the Catechism (and the Apostles' Creed, which the Catechism is explaining in questions and answers form). I hope this week's devotional aid helps you in being established in the faith and abounding in thanksgiving to God (Col 2:7).

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Lee

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THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM¹

Lord's Day 16

Q40) Why did Christ have to suffer death?

A) Because God's justice and truth demand it: only the death of God's Son could pay for our sin.

Q41) Why was he "buried"?

A) His burial testifies that he really died.

Q42) Since Christ has died for us, why do we still have to die?

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

Q43) What further advantage do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?

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

Q44) Why does the creed add, "He descended into hell"?

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

GENESIS 2:17

17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.

We can easily forget the justice of God. In a way, we are all so used to the injustice in the world that we have no idea how perfect God's justice is. So when we read about God's judgment upon sinners and evil in the world, we wince and squirm, thinking, 'now, how do I reconcile this with God who loves and forgives people?' A good and apt question, indeed. Unfortunately, many people throughout history and certainly in today's world try to come up with their own answers to this question. Some believe the Old Testament and the New Testament show different gods. Some believe that the bible is not a reliable or authoritative word of God because of these "judgment passages." Many would simply laugh at Genesis 2:17 where a death sentence is threatened for eating a forbidden fruit! But these are all wrong answers and attitudes. The bible's own answer is that God is perfectly just, and at the same time, perfectly merciful. Without one or the other, there is no gospel. Of course, we would be keen to keep the perfect mercy of God. Without God's mercy, we would have no hope of being forgiven of our sins and being saved. But the other side is just as essential. Without God being perfectly just, we are forever damned to live under the unjust God. How awful would that be? It sounds hellish to me. Christ's sacrificial death itself is the best demonstration of God's justice and mercy. If God's justice did not demand sin to be punished, Christ died in vain. If God's mercy did not demand sin to be forgiven, again, Christ died in vain. We cannot pick one of the two; both are true and both must be gladly embraced by all Christians. God is just and merciful. The cross of Christ is the proof.

GALATIANS 2:20

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The Christian life is never separated from Christ. Those who trust Christ and therefore belong to Him died with Christ when He died on the cross. This means we also live because of Christ since Christ rose again to life. So Paul explains in Galatians 2:20, and he confesses that his life is no longer his but Christ's and he lives by faith in Him. We all must do the same.

¹ The text of the Catechism is usually from <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism/>, but time to time, for the sake of clarity, I have also adopted the translation used in *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung.