

The Comfort of the Believer

2 Cor. 1:3-4 – “Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

Ac. 9:31 – “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”

The Bible has a great deal to say about comfort. God comforts us, we are comforted in him, and we comfort one another in the faith. In everyday usage “comfort” is often considered in a physical sense, as a comfortable chair, temperature, or enjoying the benefits of reasonable prosperity. We consider ourselves usually to be living in comfortable circumstances. It is also used in an emotional sense, as in the consolations one attempts to give to someone bearing affliction, loss, or pain. Some people seek comfort in food, or the bottle, or drugs. More pleasantly it speaks of the comfort of being in a trusted relationship with a spouse or very good friend. The comfort of relationship is the most closely related to our spiritual comforts, which are the fruit of our relationship with God through Christ, and the presence of his Holy Spirit.

Recently I discovered an amazing statement on the comfort we enjoy as believers. I say amazing because it is from the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 which I had never read. What brought it to my attention was a reference in the June 2026 Banner of Truth magazine, to which I am subscribed. The Banner of Truth organization is located in Edinburgh, Scotland and is dedicated to publishing books by Puritans and other Reformed authors. I have greatly enjoyed their YouTube podcasts, even though I am not part of the “Reformed” churches, and we have some significant differences in theology. Printed materials are easily available online at banneroftruth.org.

This catechism was commissioned by the Prince-Elector Frederick III of Saxony to be produced in Heidelberg Germany, as a manual for instructing youth (and others) in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. There have been many catechisms through the centuries, both Protestant and Catholic, generally in a question and answer format. The subject of this message is taken from the very first question in the Heidelberg Catechism.

While the notes are being passed out, I would like each of you to ask yourselves what it is that you take comfort in. What is your comfort in life? Once you get your notes you will see that they go beyond that, to “what is your comfort in death?”.

Question: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

Answer: That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live unto Him.

Notice that it is asking what comforts us both in life and death. Most people’s conception of comfort concerns the things of this life. We can live a comfortable life, and we can give comfort to, and receive comfort from others. We can be comforted in body and mind by physical satisfactions, by the words and actions of others, and even take refuge in the promises of God’s Word for what we are facing in everyday life. But the physical and even mental comforts of this life do not extend to, or past, death. What does it mean by comfort in death, or in the contemplation of inevitable death?

For the unbeliever, the only comfort in death is the anticipation of release from pain, agony, turmoil, and life’s difficulties (and a vain hope that there will be no future punishment). When all is going well, people find no comfort in the prospect of death, because death is the end of all their hopes, dreams, pleasures, and goals.

But the believer does not live for this world only. We are citizens of another kingdom, pilgrims in a strange land. We are seeking a city that has foundations, the heavenly Mt. Zion. Our hopes and dreams in this life, even if worthy, are recognized as secondary, temporary, and ultimately meaningless unless they are somehow a means to an eternal goal and Christ’s glory. We long, not just for another breath, not just for more “stuff”, not more pleasure, not just

freedom from physical pain, but actually to see the face of our precious Lord, and to fall at his feet in holy worship, along with the saints of all the ages, to enter into the gates of our heavenly home.

The points listed in the catechism's answer show a much deeper concept of comfort than what we generally conceive of as encouragement and commiseration during times of affliction, sickness, death, etc. It doesn't even mention physical comfort, and it goes beyond emotional comfort. It is referring to the spiritual comfort that comes from the contemplation of what God has done for us, who we are in Christ, and an abiding trust in his all-wise sovereign and providential hand in all that affects us, both now and in eternity.

In fact the answer is a good and accurate description of the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as our "Comfort". Perhaps "Comforter" is not the best translation of "paraklete" (Jn. 14:26), but as the whole Trinity is involved in our redemption, we are most certainly comforted by taking all the points above into consideration, by meditating on them, and allowing them to produce a calm assurance in us, no matter the circumstances.

We usually speak in a very general sense of "getting saved", probably thinking mostly of the forgiveness of sins and being born again, but the Bible represents God's redemptive work in much more detail – much more than can be conveyed in one word or phrase. This is why there were so many different types in the OT – Christ is the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7), the "Lamb which taketh away the sins of the world" (Jn. 1:29), the scapegoat, the goat that is sacrificed on the Day of Atonement, the great Intercessor and High Priest of our confession, the one who justifies us (Isa. 53:11), the "kinsman-redeemer", etc.

So to really describe what God has done for us in "salvation", we see Biblical terms like redemption, election, calling, justification, regeneration, conversion, imputed righteousness, purchase, satisfaction, sanctification, adoption, atonement, cleansing, deliverance and protection, preservation, glorification, etc. All these and more were fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ on our behalf, and are included in what we so inadequately refer to as "getting saved".

It is interesting that the answer to the catechism's question so completely and concisely includes so many of these aspects of redemption. The catechism itself gives references from the Bible to support each portion of their answer.

I have put each phrase in a numbered list with references taken from the KJV and expanded them somewhat, and added a "subtitle" word or phrase to each that describes each portion of God's redemptive work in us. Everything in italics is taken directly from the catechism.

1. *"That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death"* **(Consecration, Sanctification)**

Rom. 14:7-8 – "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

By consecration and sanctification we mean that our lives are now to be set apart to the service and worship of God alone. We are to be holy, and wholly dedicated to God in every part of our being.

We are to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits now in this life, so we will be able to serve him effectively now, and when we die, and eventually in our resurrected bodies. We do not understand what our heavenly service will be like, apart from the pictures of worship in the book of Revelation, but if we are not serving him faithfully now, we will not be ready or accounted worthy to serve him in heaven. Remember the parables of the talents. We do not want to hear him say "Depart from me, I never knew you", or to be deemed unprofitable servants.

1 Cor. 1:30 – "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:"

2. *"am not my own"* **(Purchase)**

1 Cor. 6:19 – “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”

1 Cor. 6:20 – “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” (also 7:23)

We used to live as if we were masters of our own lives, doing what we want, when we want, with whom we want, and where we want. When we come to Christ in surrender and receive him as Savior, we are to receive him as LORD. Though we become sons of God, and not merely servants, yet we should recognize that we no longer have a right to live independently of him. We are to seek his guidance in the decisions of life precisely because we are no longer our own.

Jas. 4:13-15 – “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”

3. *“but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ” (Redemption)*

1 Cor. 3:23 – “And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.”

Since God delivered the firstborn in Israel from the plague in Egypt, he said they belonged to him. The firstborn of clean animals therefore had to be sacrificed. Since unclean animals were not allowed as sacrifice, they had to be redeemed, or “bought back”. Likewise with children – since God abhors human sacrifice, they had to be redeemed by a substitutionary sacrifice.

So we have been “redeemed” to God by the sacrifice of Christ, and are no longer our own. We properly and completely belong to God.

It is conceivable that a redeemed person could be delivered from slavery and just set free. When God redeems us, he does set us free from sin, and the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13, 4:5), but it is not an independent freedom – now we belong to him. Our redemption was a purchase. Yet it goes even further. We do not just belong to him, but he has adopted us as his sons by faith in Christ. He has redeemed us to a place of honor and blessing. We were his enemies but have now such a change of relationship that he now counts us sons of God by faith!

The result of this redemption is that we are no longer to live in sin and vain conversation.

Tit. 2:14 – “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

1 P. 1:18 – “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;”

4. *“who with His precious blood” (Atonement, Propitiation)*

1 P. 1:18-19 – “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:”

Our sins were a mighty offense against a holy and just God. His justice cried out for sin, our sin, to be punished. But in his great love for those he had chosen, the Father sent the Son into the world to bear the penalty for our sin. He took upon himself the punishment that was due us, and by that we can receive forgiveness.

God's holy wrath against sin has been appeased, propitiated, expiated by the blood of Christ. Our guilt is extinguished, expunged, erased. This is what is meant by the atonement, and propitiation

Rom. 3:25 – “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;”

5. *“has fully satisfied for all my sins”* **(Satisfaction, Cleansing)**

1 Jn. 2:2 – “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

1 Jn. 1:7 – “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

The truth and justice of God were totally satisfied by Christ’s holy and willing sacrifice. Christ is to us a Satisfaction of God’s justice, and the Propitiation of his wrath against sin.

While the idea of cleansing is not apparent in the catechism’s answer, it is contained in their 1 Jn. 1:7 scripture reference. Cleansing is a result of our redemption. Not only has Jesus satisfied the demands of God’s holiness and justice, but he has cleansed us from the filthiness and degradation of our sins. He doesn’t want to just forgive us, to “clear the slate”, he wants to clean us up so that we actually live lives of holiness that bring glory and honor to the Name of Christ.

This cleansing took place when we believed on Christ, but is also an ongoing necessity.

Eph. 5:25-27 – “... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

2 Cor. 7:1 – “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

6. *“and redeemed me from all the power of the devil;”* **(Deliverance)**

1 Jn. 3:8 – “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”

Jn. 10:10 – “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Col. 1:13-14 – “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:”

Even physical healing is seen as a deliverance from the activities of the devil.

Lk. 13:16 – “And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?”

Ac. 10:38 – “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.”

7. *“and so preserves me”* **(Preservation)**

Jn. 6:39 – “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”

Jn. 17:11 – “And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.”

1 Thess. 5:23 – “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 P. 1:3-5 – “... hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Jude 24 – “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, “

8. “*that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head*” **(Protection)**

Mt. 10:29-30 – “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

Lk. 21:18 – “But there shall not an hair of your head perish.”

The previous verse (21:17) says “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.” So though men will hate and persecute us, and even kill us, in reality not a hair of our head will perish.

Psalms 91 in its entirety speaks of God’s protection of his people. We are “under the shadow of his wings”.

9. “*indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation*” **(Sovereign activities to bring his will to pass)**

Rom. 8:28 – “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

God is always active in his creation, and in the lives of his people, to bring his will to pass, even though we do not understand it at the time. Such things can be seen as being part of God’s plan. e.g., Joseph in Egypt, Ruth leaving her own land, Jacob having to flee from Esau, ... Part of the faith life is trusting in God’s providential hand to work all things together for our good and for his glory. Some of that good will not be plain to us for years to come, and perhaps not even until we are “on the other side”. So what is wise providence on God’s side should lead to confidence and trust on our side. He is the God who always does right.

10. “*Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life*” **(Assurance, Earnest)**

2 Cor. 1:21-22 – “Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

Eph. 1:13-14 – “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

Rom. 8:16 – “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:”

1 Jn. 5:13 – “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. “

11. “*and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live unto Him*” **(Obedience)**

Rom. 8:1 – “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

Phl. 2:13 – “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Rom. 6:12-14 – “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: ...”

I believe this question and answer would be well-used as a frequent reminder and confession of what really matters in life, and would help us to keep the trials and distractions of life in their proper perspective.

My amazement at first reading of this catechism answer was of its completeness and conciseness, and I would not hesitate to recommend this question and answer as an instruction to children today or as something for a small Bible study group. While perhaps many have seen catechisms as merely exercises in memorization and indoctrination, the real benefit is in a deeper meditation and consideration of the scripture references.

The other lesson is that we should not reject everything someone else believes just we are not agreed on all issues. Some issues are more important than others and we can and do have differences of opinion on some things, but where we can agree, "Amen, and Amen".

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