

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	18		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	John 3:31-36		
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He That Cometh From Above

12. Lord's Day

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

Answer: Because he is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost, (a) to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, (b) who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; (c) and to be our only High Priest, (d) who by the one sacrifice of his body, has redeemed us, (e) and makes continual intercession with the Father for us; (f) and also to be our eternal King, who governs us by his word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in that salvation, he has purchased for us. (g)

(a) Ps. 45:8 All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. Heb. 1:9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. Isa. 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because me hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, (b) Deut. 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; Acts 3:22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. Acts 7:37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. Isa. 55:4 Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. (c) John 1:18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. John 15:15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (d) Ps. 110:4 The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. (e) Heb. 10:12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; Heb. 10:14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Heb. 9:12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Heb. 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? Heb. 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (f) Rom. 8:34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Heb. 9:24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but

into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: 1 John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: Rom. 5:9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. Rom. 5:10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (g) Ps. 2:6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. Zech. 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass. Matt. 21:5 Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. Luke 1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. John 10:28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. Rev. 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. Rev. 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

The question Jesus posed to His disciples “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15), has been revamped in our day. Due to the hermeneutic of self-centeredness, our narcissistic culture has been seduced into believing the lie that God is some cosmic bell hop eager to do our bidding, so we effectively put Jesus’ question this way, “Who would you like me to be?” Because our hearts are, in Calvin’s words, “idol factories,”¹ we should recognize that this tendency is not restricted to theological liberals and the like. My friend David Wells has noted that, “The shape which our Christology assumes is determined by the presupposition and operating assumptions with which we start.”² If we begin, for instance, with the assumption that Jesus’ first concern is my personal happiness (as I define happiness), then this will serve as a filter in how I read the Bible. Due to the widespread influence of the Health and Wealth preachers that crowd the airwaves of so-called “Christian television,” this is exactly how Jesus is portrayed. People treat the Bible like a road map to personal fulfillment or like a manual for fixing life’s problems. In fact, given the therapeutic mindset that has gained ascendancy in our culture, even our evangelical churches can find themselves culturally conditioned to read the Bible through a paradigm that is quite foreign to historic Christianity. This helps to explain how people today can defend decidedly unbiblical notions (i.e., homosexuality is simply an alternative lifestyle) by selectively appealing to the Bible and the re-interpreting everything through that particular grid. In order to properly answer Jesus’ question in Matthew 16:15, we must first ask the *right* question. Interpretations of Jesus are fraught with bias. He’s a powerful figure whom people want on their sides – and they’re willing to re-create him in their image to enlist his support. Animal-rights activists imagine a vegetarian Jesus. New Agers make him an example of finding the god within. And radical feminists strip him of divinity so that Christianity doesn’t appear sexist. “Frankly, it’s hard to escape the feeling that our culture has taken Jesus’ question ‘Who do you say that I am?’ and changed it to ‘Who do you want me to be?’”³

I. THE TESTIMONY TO THE SON

A. The character of the Son (John 3:31). Once again it is difficult to determine the exact identification of the speaker of the words of verses thirty-one through thirty-six. It is the opinion of some that the speaker is our Lord, and others affirm that John the Apostle is the author of them.⁴ Many commentators hold that the words from here to the end of the chapter cannot have been spoken by the Baptist. They regard especially the contents of 3:34, 35, too advanced to be ascribed to him. But it is not at all clear that one who had seen and heard what is recorded in 1:32; Mark 1:9-11 (cf. Luke 3:21, 22) would not have been able to utter that is found in 3:34, 35.⁵

Leon Morris concurs, “There is also the difficulty of seeing how the Baptist could say, ‘no man receiveth his witness’ (v. 32) in the very speech in which he is answering the affirmation that ‘all men come to him’ (v. 26).”⁶ But then, two pages later he says, “‘No man’ is not to be taken literally as the very next verse shows.”⁷ Perhaps it is best to take the words of the paragraph to be the continuation of the testimony of John the Baptist. At any rate, whatever view is taken, the words constitute a magnificent affirmation of the Son’s preeminent glory, as the repeated use of the phrase “above all” shows. It is impressive in its impact on the reader. The application of the expression, “He who comes from above,” to Christ is also impressive. Since John’s purpose in writing the gospel is to show that Jesus is Christ, the use of the expression, “He who comes from above,” underlines the heavenly origin of the Son of God and thus, His qualifications for Messiahship. The twofold repetition of the idea emphasizes the unique origin of the Son. “He is absolutely preeminent,” Morris says.⁸ Is it not interesting to reflect upon the fact that the Baptist must have often recited the *Shema Israel*, the fundamental text on the unity of God, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4)? And yet he found no difficulty in saying that the Lord Jesus was one who came “from above,” having a heavenly origin. The emergence of the completed doctrine of the Trinity was no problem for the Baptist. He thought of Jesus as celestial and of himself as terrestrial.⁹

B. The character of the testimony (John 4:32). The Baptist, if this is his comment, now turns to speak concerning the testimony of the Son. He writes, “What he has seen and heard, of that He bears witness; and no man receives His witness.” In the first place, he says that the Lord Jesus testifies to what He has seen and heard. In other words, His teaching is not like that of the philosophers, put forward for the sake of reflection and discussion. He speaks out of the knowledge of the Father and of His divine revelation. In the thirty-fourth verse it is said that He speaks “the words of God.” The response of men underlines the doctrine of the depravity of man, for “no man receives His witness.” It is unlikely that the clause is to be taken absolutely. It simply says that it is the natural tendency of the unsaved to not receive the Word of God. Of course some do, but only if they are objects of the sovereign grace of God. One is reminded of the statement of the apostle in John 1:11-13, and especially of the words of our Lord in 14:17, where He says that the world cannot receive the Spirit. Of course, the world can receive the Spirit, if there is a response to the Word through the effectual working of that same Spirit of God.

II. THE PERSONAL RECEPTION OF THE TESTIMONY

A. The results: attestation (John 4:33). The one who has received (the verb tense points, not to a continuous receiving, but to an event, a decisive act, in which the testimony is received, such as that which occurs at conversion. The context, of course, is the important pointer to the sense of action, and in this case, a decisive act seems the most like sense) the testimony of the Lord sets His seal to, or certifies, the veracity of God. Morris comments, “when a man accepts Christ, he is not merely entering into a relationship with a fellow-man (as he would be doing, for example, if he attached himself to John the Baptist). He is accepting what God has said. He is recognizing the heavenly origin of Jesus. He is acknowledging the truth of God’s revelation in Christ. He is proclaiming to all his deep conviction that God is true.”¹⁰

B. The reason for His veracity (John 4:34-35). Several reasons are given for the veracity of the Son:

1. He speaks God’s words. The One who comes “from above” is now said to be the One whom God has sent. His words are not human words, but divine words. To receive His words is to agree that God is true (cf. 8:26; 12:49-50). There are several ways to take the last clause of the thirty-fourth verse, “for He gives the Spirit without measure” (NASB). *First*, the clause may

refer to a constant endowment of the Spirit by the Father to the Son, and this is one of the guarantees of the truthfulness of the words of the Son. They arise from the perfect communion of the Father with the Son. *Second*, it is possible to take the verse to be a reference to the Son's giving of the Spirit without measure to believers (cf. 16:14). But in what sense could it be said that the Spirit is given to believers "without measure"? There is a rabbinical statement saying, "The Holy Spirit which abides on the prophets does not abide except by measure," although, of course, we are not bound by rabbinical theology! Finally, the text can refer to the giving of the utterance of God by the Spirit constantly. The first view, namely, that the Father constantly endows the Son with the Spirit, seems best. He speaks the words of God, for God constantly endows Him with the Spirit, who guarantees utterance in accord with the divine mind.

2. The *second* reason for the veracity of the Son is that He possesses all things, which gives Him plenipotentiary powers. "Men may trust the Son in all things," Morris points out, "for the Father 'hath given all things into his hand.'"¹¹ One is reminded of the great text in Matthew 11:27, the "bolt from the Johannine blue," as it has been called, in which the Son claims that He alone is the dispenser of the knowledge of God, for He alone knows the Father. In that text also it is said that the Father has given over all things to the Son. Paul's words are that in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily fashion (cf. Colossians 2:9-10). It is as if John the Baptist were saying, "Grieve over my being despoiled by Him! Nay, He has the right to everything, and can take everything without encroaching."¹² Notice the progression in the thought, for it is important. The Father has loved the Son and given Him plenipotentiary powers, power over all things; therefore, the sons, men, may trust in the Son (cf. Psalms 31:15).

III. THE LOGICAL CONCLUSION

A. For the believer: life (John 3:36a). The one who believes in the Son (notice the absolute sense of the term. Men are sons, but He is the Son) has eternal life. "Eternal life" said Tenney, "is a present possession, not a reward bestowed at the gates of death."¹³

B. For the disobeyer: wrath (John 3:36b-c). One might have expected John to say, "but he who does not believe the Son," but instead he says, "But he who does not obey the Son." Bishop Ryle made this observation: "The Greek word here rendered 'believeth not,' is quite different from the one translated 'believeth,' at the beginning of the verse. It means something much stronger than 'not trusting.' It would be more literally rendered, 'He that does not obey or is disobedient to.' It is the same word so rendered in Rom. ii. 8; x. 21; 1 Pet. ii. 8; iii. 1-20."¹⁴ The man who believes does exercise the obedience of faith, while the one who does not believe does not in fact obey with the obedience of faith. Those who believe obey; those who do not disobey (cf. Romans 1:5; 16:26; 10:16 [see the AV]). Faith for John, as for the apostles and the others, is a faith that issues action. Faith and conduct are necessarily linked in biblical teaching, but it must be emphasized that they are linked in God's thought and purpose. It is possible that we, men, may not see the evidence of faith in a true believer. It is not in men to discern the difference between the truth and the false in the same way that God can and does. And yet, it is the responsibility of elders to act on the basis of evidence in the disciplining of the saints. It is well to remember, however, that they are not infallible in their judgments. Why should the unbeliever look forward to wrath? An answer given in 1 John 5:10 (cf. John 5:23; 15:23). He has made God a liar. The subject of the wrath of God is very uncongenial to moderns, but it is found in the Word of God. The refusal to heed the truth leads inevitably to a mutilated Bible, as well as to a concept of God that is immoral, for we then have a God who does not feel it necessary to do anything about moral evil. Further, why should anyone be concerned about salvation? "Unless we are saved from peril there is no meaning in salvation," Morris contends.¹⁵

CONCLUSION: One should, as S. Lewis Johnson points out, take note of the three-fold aspect of the testimony of John the Baptist. He testifies to our Lord as the Sin-bearer (cf. 1:29). He testifies to our Lord as the Son of God (cf. 1:34). And now he has given testimony to Him as the Divider of Men. For some who believe in Him there is eternal life. But for others who do not, life is for them life lived under the Sword of Damocles, a sword of the impending wrath of God. John has certainly given every opportunity for men to be saved, and he has certainly emphasized the fact that the proper term of approach to God is the term of *believe*. The Old Testament counterpart, set out so beautifully by David, is “kiss the Son” (cf. Psalm 2:12). To “kiss” Him is to trust Him, to believe Him, to rest one’s being upon Him for time and eternity.¹⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Bk. 1, Ch. V., sec. 19.

² D.F. Wells, *The Person of Christ* (IVP, 1984), p. 21.

³ R.M. Bowman, Jr. & J.E. Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus In His Place: The Case For The Deity of Christ* (Kregel, 2007), p. 17.

⁴ Cf. W. Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Baker, 1988), p. 149.

⁵ L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 243.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ F. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (rpt. Zondervan, 1964), p. 90.

¹⁰ Morris, p. 245.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹² Godet, p. 94.

¹³ M.C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Eerdmans, 1948), p. 91.

¹⁴ J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts On The Gospels: John 1:1-10:9* (rpt. Zondervan, 1952), p. 190.

¹⁵ Morris, p. 250.

¹⁶ S. Lewis Johnson, *The Gospel of John* (Dallas: Believer’s Bible Bulletin, 1982) – I owe the framework and structure of this message to Dr. Johnson.