

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	34		Gary L.W. Johnson
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Our Glorious Lord

19. Lord's Day

Question 50. Why is it added, “and sitteth at the right hand of God”?

Answer: Because Christ is ascended into heaven for this end, that he might appear as head of his church, (a) by whom the Father governs all things. (b)

(a) Eph. 1:20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Eph. 1:21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: Eph. 1:23 Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. Col. 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (b) Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and earth. John 5:22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.

Western culture, especially in America, is rapidly declining and doing it at almost breakneck speed. Evangelical Christians, in particular, often display the most concern about this dilapidating state of affairs. In some circles this has produced an enormous amount of political activism. Some of this is commendable but most of it, sad to say, is terribly misguided. Well-meaning Christians are engaged in what is referred to as a “Culture War” and are desperately trying to reclaim America’s soul as a “Christian nation.”¹ It surprises some people to hear this, but America was *never* a *Christian nation*. “No nation is ever that,” writes James Boice. “Only individuals are Christians. But at one time the country was at least permeated by a Christian ethos so that religion was encouraged, moral values were affirmed, families were intact, authority was respected, schools had wholesome environments, cities were safe, local communities flourished and people were proud to be Americans.”² H.L. Mencken, the noted essayist and literary critic of a past generation (and not even a professing Christian), made this observation: “There was a time, two or three centuries ago, when the overwhelming majority of educated men were believers, but that is apparently true no longer. Indeed, it is my impression that at least two-thirds of them are now frank sceptics.”³ If this were true in 1937, it is all the more so in 1997. Listen carefully again to the words of James Boice: “We live in bad days for the evangelical church, despite the false sense of security caused by increasing numbers of church members and escalating budgets. In the last few years writers such as David F. Wells (*No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* and *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*), Os Guinness (*Dining with the Devil*), John MacArthur (*Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* and *Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern*), Michael Scott Horton (*Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?*) and others have pointed out how evangelicals are being swallowed up by today’s secular culture, all because they have abandoned confidence in the power of God through the Bible to convert sinful, secular people and to train, establish and strengthen believers in godliness. They seek to grow worldly programs by worldly methods instead. To put it another way,

evangelicals have abandoned a proper commitment to revealed truth and have become mere pragmatists. Instead of proclaiming and teaching God's Word, the Bible, they are resorting to sermonettes of pop psychology, entertainment-style services and technological approaches to church growth, which is a formula not for the increase of true religion but for the end of it. Evangelical churches are growing, but they no longer have anything distinct to offer. They are popular in many places, but the prophetic, challenging voice of the Christian preacher and teacher, which has been the glory and strength of the church in all past ages, has been lost."⁴ Evangelicalism has, in large measure, capitulated to this culture. The church's agenda is being set by marketing techniques, entertainment enterprises, power politics, and celebrity-conscious personalities. In other words, she is being conformed to the pattern of this world. The late G.C. Berkouwer observed, "A church may even – in times of spiritual inertia – be well-nigh exclusively oriented toward the present and have no eye for either the historical or the eschatological. That is the condition when she is secularized, when she thinks that she has here an abiding city, notwithstanding the emphatic apostolic teaching to the contrary (Heb. 13:14; cf. 11:10, 14-16). She has then lost sight of the motivating principles by which alone she can live. She no longer looks for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10), but substitutes her own "now" for the "now" of Scripture which preaches God's salvation. Her redemptive-historic consciousness has then succumbed to the temptation, and her expectation has faded. She loses her orientation toward the *parousia* as well as the *sessio*, and grieves the Holy Spirit. Because the message concerning Christ in *heaven* no longer penetrates its heart, the true "Maranatha" is no longer heard. Then, since the interrelations of salvation are inseparable, the secularized church finds that its Lord's Supper, too, inevitably deteriorates into nothing but a traditional institution, and the prayer in the *didache*, in which the "Marantha" is connected with the Lord's Supper, becomes incomprehensible.

"The questions which arise in connection with the above-mentioned dilemma are far-reaching. It is very important for the Church to understand that her life can never be understood on the basis of this dilemma. The impossibility of this dilemma becomes manifest in the inseparable connection between *sessio* and *parousia*."⁵

We looked last week at two of the threefold offices of Christ: Prophet and Priest. Today we will examine the third: King. The Lord Jesus reigns and His reign extends throughout *His* creation and in every culture. He sits at the Father's right hand as Prophet, Priest and King. He possesses all those abilities, all those royal and glorious endowments necessary as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I. THE ENSIGNS OF HIS KINGLY POWER

"It is undeniable that the expectation of the Church is unique. This is because the message concerning Christ's coming links the past with the future, as is shown in the doctrine of the *sessio*, which both refers back to the redemptive-historic past and points to the future. Scripture never depreciates the past when it deals with the future. In the Revelation of John the apocalyptic visions are replete with references to him who is the first begotten of the dead (Rev. 1:5) and who washed us from our sins in his own blood (Rev. 1:5). Christ is in the midst of the seven candlesticks as one like unto the Son of man (Rev. 1:13). He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5) who is worthy to open and to read the book of history, the Lamb who receives the adoration: "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood" (5:9, KJV; cf. 5:8, 12, 13, 7:10, 14, 17; cf. also 11:8; 12:11; 13:8). The eschatological imagery is replete with holy memories of the past, and everything is presented in the light of that which took place – the battle which was crowned with victory (12:5, 7ff.; 17:14), the following of the Lamb (14:4), the testimony of Jesus Christ (12:17), the song of the Lamb (15:3), the faith of Jesus (14:12), the marriage of the Lamb (19:7), the bride of the Lamb (21:9), the apostles of the Lamb (21:14), and the Lamb's book of life (21:27). Here the expectation of a glorious future is permanently safeguarded against the threat of a vague ahistoric longing for a better world. This expectation is deeply rooted in history and derives its strength from what became historic reality in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ."⁶

We read in Revelation 5:9 and 12 that the Lamb is *worthy* to receive adoration and praise. The grounds for this is His death and the blessings this has brought His people. He possesses

power and wisdom to accomplish salvation. This echoes Isaiah 52:13 where we are told that the suffering Servant of the LORD “will act wisely.”

- A. Worthy to Receive Authority. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus declares, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Note that this was said *prior* to His ascension.
- B. Worthy of Riches. Wealth is associated with royalty. He has obtained an inheritance because He is heir of all things (Hebrews 1:1-4).⁷
- C. Worthy to Receive Strength. He not only has the authority, He has the power to rule as King. This is demonstrated in a number of ways, but notice how this is connected in Acts 2:33 with the outpourings of the Holy Spirit.
- D. Worthy of Honor and Glory. Honor is due Him. Glory was His before the foundation of the world (John 17:1-5).

CONCLUSION: Christ reigns not only in His church by His Word and Spirit, He reigns in the world. It is true that all fallen human beings (and their cultures) are in rebellion against God’s anointed One (Psalm 2), but this does not prevent Him from ruling and carrying out His purposes. Christians are called into His service. Our vocation is to serve King Jesus in His church and in the world.

I close by once again quoting Berkouwer, “Here we have the real touchstone of all Christian expectation. This expectation derives its content from the act of God in Jesus Christ and is, in the holy dynamics of God’s activity, its historic and final-historic consequence. The holy remembrance in the Lord’s supper (‘ye proclaim the Lord’s death till he come,’ I Cor. 11:26; ‘this do in remembrance of me,’ Luke 22:19) is connected with the expectation of the marriage feast of the Lamb (Luke 22:16); and the admonition to remember that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead is connected with the testimony of the Lord from heaven: ‘These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again’ (Rev. 2:8; cf. 1:17, 18).”⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ The conviction that American is (or was) a Christian nation is traceable, in many cases, to the role the pilgrims played in our nation’s history and to the impact their descendants had over the next three centuries, particularly in the last century. “Evangelicals have not always been a beleaguered minority in American society. In fact, their attempt to Christianize American society in the nineteenth century is a remarkable success story. In contrast to their declining fortunes in the Revolutionary era, Christians after 1800 accomplished so much that historians are led to describe that period of American history as an “Evangelical Empire.” *The Gospel in America: Themes in the Story of America’s Evangelicals*, eds. J.D. Woodbridge, M.A. Noll, N.O. Hatch (Zondervan, 1979), p. 216.

² J.M. Boice, *Two Cities, Two Loves: Christian Responsibility in a Crumbling Culture* (IVP, 1996), pp. 7, 8.

³ H.L. Mencken’s Obituary of J. Gresham Machen: “Dr. Fundamentalism,” *The Baltimore Evening Sun* (Jan. 18, 1937).

⁴ Boice, op. cit., p. 28.

⁵ G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Work of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 246.

⁶ Berkouwer, p. 247.

⁷ The Bible does not allow wealth and riches to be monopolized by the type of crass materialism that permeates our society. Listen to this summary by Moulton: “*Ploutos* comes from the same root as the Greek verb *pimplemi*, I fill, and is connected etymologically with the Latin word from which ‘plenty’ comes, with the Sanskrit *purnam*, and with the English ‘fill.’ And it is true that we are made far more rich, full, complete (another word from the same root) on the spiritual level than we can ever be on the material. The New Testament therefore uses our series of words for riches thirty times in a spiritual sense.” H.K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance* (Bagster, 1977), p. 202.

⁸ Berkouwer, p. 247.