

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	51		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	I Corinthians 6:11; Colossians 1:21-23		
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Baptism (Part III)

26. Lord's Day

Question 71. Where has Christ promised us, that he will as certainly wash us by his blood and Spirit, as we are washed with the water of baptism?

Answer: In the institution of baptism, which is thus expressed: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," Matt. 28:19. And "he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.", Mark 16:16. This promise is also repeated, where the scripture calls baptism "the washing of regenerations" and the washing away of sins. Tit. 3:5, Acts 22:16. (a)

(a) Tit. 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Acts 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

27. Lord's Day

Question 72. Is then the external baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?

Answer: Not at all: (a) for the blood of Jesus Christ only, and the Holy Ghost cleanse us from all sin. (b)

(a) Matt. 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: 1 Pet. 3:21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Eph. 5:26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, Eph. 5:27 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. (b) 1 John 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. 1 Cor. 6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Question 73. Why then does the Holy Ghost call baptism "the washing of regeneration," and "the washing away of sins"?

Answer: God speaks thus not without great cause, to-wit, not only thereby to teach us, that as the filth of the body is purged away by water, so our sins are removed by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ; (a) but especially that by this divine pledge and sign he may assure us, that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really, as we are externally washed with water. (b)

(a) Rev. 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, Rev. 7:14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 1 Cor. 6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. (b) Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. Gal. 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

“Gratitude for redemption and the resultant love for God, is the principal motivation for a believer’s striving for holiness. If the satisfaction of his own ‘felt needs’ remains the primary goal, he needs to follow the Apostle Paul’s instruction to test himself to see if he is in the faith (II Corinthians 13:5). If felt needs are the only focus, the person has probably never faced his real need – his need for salvation – and thus, sanctification will not occur.”¹ Believers are motivated to strive and press on toward sanctification by remembering their rescue from God’s wrath. True believers have gone to God “as sinners with no plea but that of utter need, and cast our souls on Him by faith for peace and reconciliation with God.” As such, “we must press on and be ever making fresh applications to Christ... to live the life of daily faith in the Son of God, and to be daily drawing out of His fullness the promised grace and strength which He has laid up for His people – this is the grand secret of progressive sanctification.”² Many evangelical churches, and the people who populate them, however, substitute dominantly horizontal human connections for vertical relationships with God. In these instances, the literature of psychology and sociology that advocates emotional wellness or social justice can replace the Bible as the sacred text of the group. This may be explicit in some mainline churches, but evangelical churches are not immune to this phenomenon. “Helping people to feel loved and worthwhile has become the central mission of the church... Recovery from pain is absorbing an increasing share of the church’s energy. And that,” wrote Larry Crabb, “is alarming.” Cultural critics describe North American society as a “therapeutic culture,” and this cultural ethos easily subdues Christians to use spiritual resources for achieving emotional ends.³ Evangelicals are embarking down a slippery slope when they turn their focus away from theology and become fascinated with the latest psychological fads. We will not find in those “broken cisterns” (ver. 2:13) what we really need. These man-made sources do not constitute any form of special revelation – only the Scripture (SOLA SCRIPTURA) is God’s direct revelation to us. DEUS ABSCONDITUS is the Latin expression used in theology to refer to *the hidden or concealed God*. Luther speaks often of God as the DEUS ABSCONDITUS. “There is,” wrote the Reformer, “no faith in, no knowledge and no understanding of, God, insofar as He is not revealed.”⁴ God is transcendent because He goes beyond us and our temporal existence. Does this mean that God is “up there” beyond our reach? Is He distant and remote, too far away to be troubled by our cries? No! God has made Himself known in creation (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19-20). This knowledge of God, however, is incomplete; it is not redemptive. General revelation renders all inexcusable. Mankind possesses a knowledge of God which they willfully suppress and so leave themselves without excuse (cf. Acts 14:16, 17; 17:27). General revelation is not salvific. Martin Chemnitz, therefore, very properly says that “without the knowledge of Christ and the Trinity, man’s knowledge of God is in reality IGNORANTIA DEI as far as the practical result, viz., the worship of God, is concerned.”⁵ It is only in the Gospel that we know of God’s love for sinners. “The supreme truth which Christianity proclaims is not that God will punish the impenitent. Conscience and the Mosaic Law had already proclaimed that, and Christianity simply reaffirms it. Its proper message is that man may be saved from sin and its

consequences.”⁶ We noted last week in Isaiah 6:7, the connection between God’s forgiveness and His atonement. Sin must be dealt with in the eyes of God. “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22). The cross is at the center of the Gospel. Note this stress on the cross of Christ in Paul’s opening salutation. Paul is not only concerned about the defense of his authority as an Apostle, he is deeply burdened over his Gospel of Grace, and so he immediately directs the Galatians to the cross. The Judaizers have attacked his apostleship and his Gospel of Grace. Now the battle is joined and Paul begins his demolition of the false teaching by focusing on the atonement.

I. THE ACT OF ATONEMENT

The opening words of verse 4 underscore this facet, “who gave himself for our sins.” The verb translated “gave” is DONTOS (the compound verb, PARADONTOS, appears in Galatians 2:20). “The idea involved is a delivering up of oneself for a special purpose, and his conception of Christ’s mission was not only fundamental to Paul’s message, but was basic to his notion of apostleship. The One who had commissioned him was One who Himself knew the meaning of sacrifice.”⁷ The words “for our sins” indicate that the sacrificial death of Christ was *penal* (our English word comes from the Latin POENA, meaning punishment. We speak of a *penalty*, a prescribed punishment for an offense.) Our sins, before the presence of a holy and righteous God, demand the penalty of death – thus the death of Christ constitutes a *satisfaction* (another term that is drawn from Latin: SATISFACTIO, a making amends or reparations) required by God for forgiveness to take place (cf. Romans 3:21-31; 6:23; Galatians 3:13). The preposition translated “for” (NIV) is HUPER, and points to *substitution* (cf. II Corinthians 5:14-15; John 11:50). The death of Christ delivers us, not only from the condemnation under which we stand as sinners, but also from the power of sin over our lives (cf. Romans 6:1-11).

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE ATONEMENT

This is stated in the words “to rescue us from the present evil age.” The verb “rescue” (NIV) or “deliver” (NASB, KJV) is EXAIREO. A number of important things are involved:

- A. The Greek subjunctive expresses purpose.
- B. The verb is in the emphatic position in the Greek text, and this, notes S. Lewis Johnson, “underlines its force and strikes the keynote of the letter, freedom”⁸ (cf. 5:1).
- C. The verb carries the idea of rescuing from danger; it connotes deliverance from the power of something or someone (cf. Matthew 5:29, 18:9; Acts 7:10, 34; 12:11; 23:27; 26:17).
- D. The tense of the verb stresses the definiteness and completeness of the deliverance. The final words of the clause are “from the present evil age.” Note that Christians are not taken out of this world (John 17:15), but are rescued from this present evil age.

III. THE SOURCE OF THE ATONEMENT

- A. Paul concludes by adding “according to the will of our God and Father.” The death of Christ was according to “God’s set purpose and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23). The Father sent the Son into the world in order to accomplish the Father’s redemptive will. What does this tell us?
 - 1. The death of Christ was not a tragic accident. It was planned by God.
 - 2. The Cross of Christ and its design and intent are traceable to the sovereign will of God.
 - 3. The Cross of Christ accomplished all that God purposed for it to accomplish. It does not merely make people savable – it *actually* saves those for whom it was intended.

B. Paul concludes with a doxology, ascribing glory to the Father. This addition of a doxology to the end of an introductory salutation is unparalleled in Paul's epistles. Why does the apostle place one here? There are two possible reasons:

1. Paul's gospel summary prompted it. He could not speak of the work of the Savior without giving glory to God.
2. Note that Galatians does not have a thanksgiving at the beginning. This also is unparalleled in Paul's epistles. He has nothing to recommend in the Galatian churches; on the contrary, he will only express surprise and disappointment.

CONCLUSION: The massive popularity of pop-psychology in our churches, and especially among so many evangelicals, is due to the decline of theology. As Almy acutely observes, "Christian psychology's problem is primarily a theological problem. Though the doctrine of psychotherapy is heretical, we cloak it in 'Jesus-words' with an appearance of compassion, add a few tears, and accept it as 'Christian.' Jesus is increasingly presented as a cosmic therapist with supernatural powers. The scriptural presentation of the Son as the 'heir of all things,' through whom God 'made the universe,' and who is the 'radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word' and providing 'purification for sins' (Hebrews 1:2-3) has disappeared in today's church under the determination to meet felt needs. The biblical Jesus just doesn't suit our felt needs, so we will make a Jesus in our own image."⁹ But this "new and improved" Jesus bears an uncanny resemblance to the kind of Jesus being promoted by the Judaizers. He is, in fact, *another* Jesus (II Corinthians 11:4). "The Gospel is a rescue," writes Lightfoot, "an emancipation from a state of bondage."¹⁰ The Judaizers, however, construed the death of Christ as simply another incentive to keep the law. In Paul's thought, the cross of Christ delivers us from all condemnation and does so without any assistance from us. Christ gave Himself freely for us and His cross work was (please note these words) a *voluntary, penal, substitutionary* (vicarious)¹¹ *sacrifice* to *satisfy* the claims of a righteous God against us. Aside from the gospel, God is very much DEUS ABSCONDITUS. But in the gospel, He is DEUS REVELATUS. He has revealed Himself in Christ and *this* sight of God is one that should cause us to sing "Amazing Grace." Calvin put it best, "So glorious is this redemption that it should ravish us with wonder."¹²

¹ Gary L. Almy, *How Christian is Christian Counseling?* (Crossway, 2000), p. 61.

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Zondervan, 1994), p. 30, as cited by Almy, op. cit.

³ David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Crossway, 2003), p. 248.

⁴ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, translated by J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston (Revell, 1957), p. 55.

⁵ Cited by Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics I* (Concordia, 1950), p. 427.

⁶ G.T. Purves, *The Sinless Christ* (Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1902), p. 130.

⁷ Donald Guthrie, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Galatians* (Eerdmans, 1973), p. 59.

⁸ S.L. Johnson, *Galatians: The Believers Bible Bulletin* (Believers Chapel, 1978), p. 6.

⁹ Almy, op. cit., p. 204.

¹⁰ J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (MacMillan & Co., 1869), p. 73.

¹¹ *Vicarious* is the English form of the Latin VICARIA, performed on behalf of, or in place of. It is used of Christ who stands in the place of sinners to make satisfaction that otherwise would have been required by God from sinners in return for free forgiveness. Christ bears the full wrath of God in their place.

¹² *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* Vol. 11, translated by T.H.L. Parker (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 11.