

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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What It Means to Be A Christian

30. Lord's Day

Question 81. For whom is the Lord's supper instituted?

Answer: For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ; and that their remaining infirmities are covered by his passion and death; and who also earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened, and their lives more holy; but hypocrites, and such as turn not to God with sincere hearts, eat and drink judgment to themselves. (a)

(a) 1 Cor. 10:19 What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? 1 Cor. 10:20 But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. 1 Cor. 10:21 Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. 1 Cor. 10:22 Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? 1 Cor. 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 1 Cor. 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Question 82. Are they also to be admitted to this supper, who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly?

Answer: No; for by this, the covenant of God would be profaned, and this wrath kindled against the whole congregation; (a) therefore it is the duty of the christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and his apostles, to exclude such persons, by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, till they show amendment of life.

(a) 1 Cor.11:20 When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. 1 Cor.11:34 And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come. Isa.1:11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. Isa.1:12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Isa.1:13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Isa.1:14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. Isa.1:15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Isa.66:3 He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he

that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. Jer.7:21 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. Jer.7:22 For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: Jer.7:23 But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. Ps.50:16 But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?

The Christian's Reasonable Service is the title of the 17th century Dutch puritan Wilhelmus à Brakel's massive work. The substance of this four-volume work revolves around what it means to be a Christian. à Brakel summed it up in these words: "God is not only the cause of spiritual life, but also the object of its motions. God Himself is all the delight, pleasure, and joy of the regenerate man. He cannot be without God. He wishes for and must enjoy the light of God's countenance, peace with God, and love and communion with God. By virtue of union with God he wishes to be united with His will, and thus to hate and shun what He hates, and to find delight in and doing whatever God delights in and is pleasing to Him... Believers on earth love Jesus, their hearts go out after Him, and He is the focal point of the passions of their love. 'Therefore do the virgins love Thee' (Song of Sol. 1:3). The bride continually has the word Beloved in her mouth. Just consider how each believer mourns when Jesus is absent; how they long for His coming to them; and how delighted they are when they may sweetly enjoy His fellowship. All their asking, crying, and weeping is for Jesus. In Jesus only they find all their satisfaction."¹

I want to examine the Apostle Paul's conversion. This is the second place in Acts where Paul's conversion is narrated, and the first of two places where the account is given in the first person by Paul himself (the other being in 22:6-21). In Chapter 9, the account is historically described in the third person by Luke.² Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee (Philippians 3:5), was knocked to the ground on his way to Damascus by the glory of the risen Lord Jesus, to whose followers Saul was breathing out murderous threats (Acts 9:1). He has but two questions: "Who are you, Lord?" and "What shall I do, Lord?" In this last question we see the two essential elements of faith—surrender and consecration. "These are," observes Warfield, "the passive and active aspect of that faith which on the human side is the fundamental element of religion, as grace is on God's side, when dealing with sinful men."³ *Surrender* and *consecration* form the twin keynotes of the Christian life: "What shall I do, Lord?" —The one question that echoes through all the corridors of the Christian heart. What is involved in such an attitude? There are at least *three* things that come to mind.

I. HUMILITY

Note the *difference* in this regard between Saul the Pharisee and Paul the Apostle of Christ! Saul of Tarsus was extremely proud of his background and put great stock in it (Philippians 3:4-6); but the Apostle Paul considers such things as rubbish (Philippians 3:7). Rather, when he considers his past, he did so in a different light.

- A. Paul remembered his past sin (Ephesians 3:8; I Timothy 1:13). He also exhorted others to do this (Ephesians 2:11).
- B. Paul mourned over the sin that remained a part of him (Romans 7:14-25).
- C. Paul acknowledged God to be the author of all gifts and graces (I Corinthians 4:7; 15:10; II Corinthians 3:5; 11:1).

NOTE: The nature of true humility is something quite different from simply being the retiring or bashful type. “True humility,” wrote the Old Scot McCosh, “is a Christian grace, and one of the fruits of the Spirit, originating in a deep consciousness of sin, past and present, and leading us to discover our nothingness in the view of God, our insufficiency for anything that is good, and prompting us as we feel our infirmities, to strive after higher and yet higher attainments.”⁴ Biblical humility is always rooted in honesty and truth (Romans 12:3; Philippians 2:3).

II. DIGNITY

“Lowliness of mind,” as Warfield notes, “is far from being the same with lowness of mind.”⁵ This is an important point. Dignity should not be seen as a synonym for self-sufficiency. On the contrary, Paul’s words “What shall I do, Lord?” makes him out as a man under *orders*, and this brings with it a sense of proper self-respect, a sense of his true value, a consciousness of dignity and worth. Three biblical concepts shape this perspective:

A. New-self Versus Old-self (cf. Colossians 3:9, 10).

The Christian is in the on-going process of being renewed. On *this* redemptive basis, the believer’s self-image ought to be positive, not negative.

B. Life in the Spirit (cf. Romans 8:9).

Christians are not enslaved to the flesh, but rather, they are “in the Spirit” (that is, under the liberating regime of the Holy Spirit).⁶ So here again a positive self-image emerges.

C. The New Creature (cf. II Corinthians 5:17).

The Christian is a new creation. Not *totally* new, to be sure, but *genuinely* new and is part of a new era ushered in by Christ. This likewise fosters an attitude of dignity.⁷

NOTE: Words like “dignity” and “self-image” are subject to abuse. Robert Schuller’s book *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Word, 1982) is illustrative of this abuse. Schuller has a very shallow view of sin. He declares that to call sin “rebellion against God” is “shallow and insulting to the human being” (p. 65). As a result, Schuller’s understanding of grace is seriously defective. It is *only* when we see ourselves as the Bible does (guilty, vile, and helpless) that true humility can be cultivated. This realistic image of the word “dignity.” However, over the past two decades, the Biblical view has been almost totally eclipsed so much so that David Powlison could write, “By the late 1980s all evangelicalism has gone psychodynamic. Ideas that were once province of professionals now inundated popular Christian literature. Most significantly, psychological categories increasingly became the language of daily life in evangelical circles. Words such as *self-esteem*, *dysfunctional family*, *codependency*, *support*, *unconditional love*, *needs*, *damaged emotions*, and *victimization* suddenly seemed to capture the most significant things about life and God and the Bible. Pop psychology increasingly became the vernacular in which significant parts of daily life were transacted. Psychology increasingly has become the language for discussing personal problems and struggles, the causes and the curses of difficulties in living, and the source of help. Popular psychologies, inevitably ‘integrated’ with biblical language and proof texts, increasingly claimed the loyalty not only of Christian therapists, but now of evangelical parishioners and pastors.”⁸ Of particular significance is the use of terms of *self-esteem*. “‘Low self-esteem’ is one of those pieces of pop psychology jargon that has become street talk among Christians. The ‘self-esteem’ concept is the core of the explanatory system for many Christian psychologists. There is no doubt that ‘low self-esteem’ accurately describes a common syndrome. There are people who are dressed, lack self-confidence, deprecate themselves, feel hopeless, and the like. However, the term ‘low self-esteem’ explains nothing at all. It only restates one of the symptoms. It masquerades as significant knowledge, as a cause that can be addressed to bring about change. It is deceptive and unhelpful to the very people it targets: people who are desperately and hopelessly attempting to be or become something either in

their own eyes or in the eyes of others. It fails to wrestle with what really is going on with people who express self-loathing and a sense of failure. The words ‘low self-esteem’ are a tag, loaded with supposed explanatory power.”⁹

III. DIRECTION

Paul’s commission and mission were not of his own doing. Not only is he ‘under orders’ by he is also assured of specific direction—and will be *enabled* to fulfill his calling. “What was it,” asked Morgan, “that sustained this man through all [his life]? It was his conviction that God has willed and was planning, and that His way must be discovered and followed. That is the central motive of all true Christian work.”¹⁰ In summary then, we see expressed here the wants and desires of a renewed soul. Paul’s life is put on course, and as John Howe, another of the Puritan giants, has remarked, all may be stated as follows: “That the believer may know him more fully, or have clearer apprehension of Him; —that he may become like to Him, and framed more perfectly after His own holy image; —that he may be ascertained of His love and good will, that He hath those favourable inclinations toward the believer which shall certainly infer His doing all that for it which its real necessities (to be estimated by his infinite wisdom) can call for.”¹¹

CONCLUSION: Michael Horton recently made this helpful observation: “How many things do we in fact make ourselves do—even when we don’t feel like it—precisely out of duty and in the best interest of others as well as our selves? If we are successful at anything, we have to concede that it is at least in part because we have denied ourselves a little leisure or pleasure by forcing ourselves to exercise, to practice, to study, or to do whatever was necessary for reaching a goal beyond our immediate gratification. In the aftermath of 9/11, Americans are coming to appreciate again the duty of citizenship. We can only hope that we will not have to wait for disaster in our churches and families to awaken our sense of duty in these spheres. Without a sense of duty, we are left to our own whims. As the most superficial of reasons for doing or not doing this or that, decision-by-whim—spontaneity—leaves us forever in the shallow end of the pool. And as those who claim to believe that even Christians remain simultaneously both sinful and justified, we should need little convincing that if we are to wait for the spontaneous upwelling of desire for good works before we love God and our neighbors, we will live passively, surrendering to our selfishness. To be sure, the gospel’s indicative—what God has done in Christ to save us—drives all of its imperatives—all of the commands of the Christian life; nevertheless, just as duty to our athletic goals requires sustained effort, so we cannot expect to grow in our faith over our life-times if we refuse to act on duty. The difference for those who understand the gospel of God’s free grace is that we know that our salvation has already been objectively secured by Christ and subjectively applied by the Spirit. We know that fully our duty contributes not even in the slightest toward our redemption.”¹²

¹ Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* translated by Bartel Elshout (Soli Deo Gloria, 1992).

² cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Eerdmans, 1980), p. 440.

³ B. B. Warfield, *Faith and Life* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), p. 155. Allow me to once again pay tribute to Warfield. He has had a tremendous influence on my understanding of Scripture. I have drawn freely from His writings.

⁴ James McCosh, *Gospel Sermons* (Robert Carter & Bros., 1888), pp. 175-176.

⁵ Warfield, op. cit. p. 158.

⁶ cf. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Eerdmans, 1986), p. 109. I highly recommend Hoekema’s writings, especially this one.

⁷ A.W. Tozer put it this way: “Think as little of yourself as you want to, but always remember that our Lord Jesus Christ thought very highly of you—enough to give Himself for you in death and sacrifice.” *The Tozer Pulpit* VI, edited and compiled by G.B. Smith (Christian Publications, 1975), p. 138. This remark by Tozer is not meant to contradict or deny what the Bible tells us by God’s grace. Jay Adams writes, “It was not in spite of the fact that we were His ‘enemies’ (Romans 5:10), Christ died for us. To say that what moved God to send Christ was our great value is to deny everything that the Bible teaches about our utter unworthiness and the unmerited love of God.” *A Call to Discernment: Distinguishing Truth From Error in Today’s Church* (Harvest House, 1987), p. 16. Tozer would agree.

⁸ David Powlison, “Integration or Inundation?” in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church* ed. M.S. Horton, (Moody, 1992), p. 198.

⁹ Powlison, p. 208.

¹⁰ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Revell, 1924), p. 493.

¹¹ *The Works of the Reverend John Howe* (Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), pp. 482-283. I have amended Howe’s language in this quote for sake of clarity.

¹² M.S. Horton, “Reformation Piety” in *Modern Reformation* (Vol. I, No. 4 July/Aug., 2002), p. 16.