

Heidelberg Catechism (Question 1 to 25)

Q1. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong — body and soul, in life and in death — to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to Him, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

Q2. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A. Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.

Q3. How do you come to know your misery?

A. The law of God tells me.

Q.4 What does God's law require of us?

A. Christ teaches us this in summary in Matthew 22:37-40: "‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. ‘And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ ‘On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’"

Q5. Can you live up to all this perfectly?

A. No. I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbour.

Q6. Did God create people so wicked and perverse?

A. No. God created them good and in His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness, so that they might truly know God their creator, love Him with all their heart, and live with God in eternal happiness, to praise and glorify Him.

Q7. Then where does this corrupt human nature come from?

A. The fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise. This fall has so poisoned our nature that we are all conceived and born in a sinful condition.

Q8. But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil?

A. Yes, unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.

Q9. But doesn't God do us an injustice by requiring in His law what we are unable to do?

A. No, God created human beings with the ability to keep the law. They, however, provoked by the devil, in wilful disobedience, robbed themselves and all their descendants of these gifts.

Q10. Does God permit such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?

A. Certainly not. God is terribly angry with the sin we are born with as well as the sins we personally commit. As a just judge, God will punish them both now and in eternity, having declared: "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law."

Q11. But isn't God also merciful?

A. God is certainly merciful, but also just. God's justice demands that sin, committed against His supreme majesty, be punished with the supreme penalty — eternal punishment of body and soul.

Q12. According to God's righteous judgment we deserve punishment both now and in eternity: how then can we escape this punishment and return to God's favour?

A. God requires that His justice be satisfied. Therefore the claims of this justice must be paid in full, either by ourselves or by another.

Q13. Can we make this payment ourselves?

A. Certainly not. Actually, we increase our debt every day.

Q14. Can another creature — any at all — pay this debt for us?

A. No. To begin with, God will not punish any other creature for what a human is guilty of. Furthermore, no mere creature can bear the weight of God's eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.

Q15. What kind of mediator and deliverer should we look for then?

A. One who is a true and righteous human, yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is also true God.

Q16. Why must the mediator be a true and righteous human?

A. God's justice demands that human nature, which has sinned, must pay for sin; but a sinful human could never pay for others.

Q17. Why must the mediator also be true God?

A. So that the mediator, by the power of His divinity, might bear the weight of God's wrath in His humanity and earn for us and restore to us righteousness and life.

Q18. Then who is this mediator — true God and at the same time a true and righteous human?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was given to us to completely deliver us and make us right with God.

Q19. How do you come to know this?

A. The holy gospel tells me. God began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise; later God proclaimed it by the holy patriarchs and prophets and foreshadowed it by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and finally God fulfilled it through His own beloved Son.

Q20. Are all people then saved through Christ just as they were lost through Adam?

A. No. Only those are saved who through true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all His benefits.

Q21. What is true faith?

A. True faith is not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in Scripture; it is also a wholehearted trust, which the Holy Spirit creates in me by the gospel, that God has freely granted, not only to others but to me also, forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and salvation. These are gifts of sheer grace, granted solely by Christ's merit.

Q22. What then must a Christian believe?

A. All that is promised us in the gospel, a summary of which is taught us in the articles of our universal and undisputed Christian faith.

Q23. What are these articles?

A. I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended to hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Q24. How are these articles divided?

A. Into three parts: God the Father and our creation; God the Son and our deliverance; and God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.

Q25. Since there is only one divine being, why do you speak of three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

A. Because that is how God has revealed Himself in His Word: these three distinct persons are one, true, eternal God.