

Heidelberg Catechism (Question 51 to 75)

Q51. How does this glory of Christ our head benefit us?

A. First, through His Holy Spirit He pours out gifts from heaven upon us His members. Second, by His power He defends us and keeps us safe from all enemies.

Q52. How does Christ's return "to judge the living and the dead" comfort you?

A. In all distress and persecution, with uplifted head, I confidently await the very judge who has already offered Himself to the judgment of God in my place and removed the whole curse from me. Christ will cast all His enemies and mine into everlasting condemnation, but will take me and all His chosen ones to Himself into the joy and glory of heaven.

Q53. What do you believe concerning "the Holy Spirit"?

A. First, that the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, is eternal God. Second, that the Spirit is given also to me, so that, through true faith, He makes me share in Christ and all His benefits, comforts me, and will remain with me forever.

Q54. What do you believe concerning "the holy catholic church"?

A. I believe that the Son of God through His Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for Himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. And of this community I am and always will be a living member.

Q55. What do you understand by "the communion of saints"?

A. First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all His treasures and gifts. Second, that each member should consider it a duty to use these gifts readily and joyfully for the service and enrichment of the other members.

Q56. What do you believe concerning "the forgiveness of sins"?

A. I believe that God, because of Christ's satisfaction, will no longer remember any of my sins or my sinful nature which I need to struggle against all my life. Rather, by grace God grants me the righteousness of Christ to free me forever from judgment.

Q57. How does “the resurrection of the body” comfort you?

A. Not only will my soul be taken immediately after this life to Christ its head, but also my very flesh will be raised by the power of Christ, reunited with my soul, and made like Christ’s glorious body.

Q58. How does the article concerning “life everlasting” comfort you?

A. Even as I already now experience in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, so after this life I will have perfect blessedness such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no human heart has ever imagined: a blessedness in which to praise God forever.

Q59. What good does it do you, however, to believe all this?

A. In Christ I am righteous before God and heir to life everlasting.

Q60. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God’s commandments, of never having kept any of them, and of still being inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift with a believing heart.

Q61. Why do you say that through faith alone you are righteous?

A. Not because I please God by the worthiness of my faith. It is because only Christ’s satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me righteous before God, and because I can accept this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than through faith.

Q62. Why can’t our good works be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of our righteousness?

A. Because the righteousness which can pass God’s judgment must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to the divine law. But even our best works in this life are imperfect and stained with sin.

Q63. How can our good works be said to merit nothing when God promises to reward them in this life and the next?

A. This reward is not earned; it is a gift of grace.

Q64. But doesn't this teaching make people indifferent and wicked?

A. No. It is impossible for those grafted into Christ through true faith not to produce fruits of gratitude.

Q65. It is through faith alone that we share in Christ and all His benefits: where then does that faith come from?

A. The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments.

Q66. What are sacraments?

A. Sacraments are visible, holy signs and seals. They were instituted by God so that by our use of them He might make us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel, and seal that promise. And this is God's gospel promise: to grant us forgiveness of sins and eternal life by grace because of Christ's one sacrifice accomplished on the cross.

Q67. Are both the word and the sacraments then intended to focus our faith on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?

A. Yes! In the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us and by the holy sacraments confirms that our entire salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.

Q68. How many sacraments did Christ institute in the New Testament?

A. Two: holy baptism and the holy supper.

Q69. How does holy baptism remind and assure you that Christ's one sacrifice on the cross benefits you personally?

A. In this way: Christ instituted this outward washing and with it promised that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly His blood and His Spirit wash away my soul's impurity, that is, all my sins.

Q70. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?

A. To be washed with Christ's blood means that God, by grace, has forgiven our sins because of Christ's blood poured out for us in His sacrifice on the cross. To be washed with Christ's Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has renewed and sanctified us to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and live holy and blameless lives.

Q71. Where does Christ promise that we are washed with His blood and Spirit as surely as we are washed with the water of baptism?

A. In the institution of baptism, where He says: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned." This promise is repeated when Scripture calls baptism "the water of rebirth" and the washing away of sins.

Q72. Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins?

A. No, only Jesus Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.

Q73. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism the water of rebirth and the washing away of sins?

A. God has good reason for these words. To begin with, God wants to teach us that the blood and Spirit of Christ take away our sins just as water removes dirt from the body. But more important, God wants to assure us, by this divine pledge and sign, that we are as truly washed of our sins spiritually as our bodies are washed with water physically.

Q74. Should infants also be baptized?

A. Yes. Infants as well as adults are included in God's covenant and people, and they, no less than adults, are promised deliverance from sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the covenant, they too should be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.

Q75. How does the holy supper remind and assure you that you share in Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and in all His benefits?

A. In this way: Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat this broken bread and to drink this cup in remembrance of Him. With this command come these promises: First, as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup shared with me, so surely His body was offered and broken for me and His blood poured out for me on the cross. Second, as surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, given me as sure signs of Christ's body and blood, so surely He nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with His crucified body and poured-out blood.